

## DIVERSITY AND EQUITY IN CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: TWO NEW CIRCLE WORKING PAPERS

BY J. FOSTER-BEY, JAMES B. HYMAN, AND PETER LEVINE

Following is a summary of the two new reports written by J. Foster-Bey, James B. Hyman and Peter Levine

In order to support efforts to reach groups that are underrepresented in volunteer and service programs, we present two new background papers that examine rates of voluntary service and other forms of civic engagement among various subgroups of Americans. These papers were commissioned by the Corporation for National and Community Service. The papers are: CIRCLE Working Paper #62 “Do Race, Ethnicity, Citizenship and Socio-economic Status Determine Civic-Engagement” and CIRCLE Working Paper #63 “Civic Engagement and the Disadvantaged: Challenges, Opportunities and Recommendations” and can be downloaded from the CIRCLE Web site at <http://www.civicyouth.org/?p=326>.

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As shown in these papers, volunteering and other forms of civic engagement benefit those who participate as well as those whom they serve. We should therefore be concerned when any groups of Americans may not be accessing these benefits. But we should be particularly concerned where any group whom we believe to be disadvantaged by reason of income, education, class, race or gender are underrepresented in these programs. These are the groups whom we believe stand to gain the greatest individual and community benefits from their engagement and service.

The papers we have prepared draw upon and summarize current empirical evidence. By examining recent data and reviewing the literature, we provide explanations for why volunteering rates may differ. We explore two hypotheses:

Hypothesis #1: When activities such as volunteering in formal organizations, participation in national service projects and membership in civic organizations are used to measure “civic participation,” there are substantial differences in measures of civic engagement between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged individuals.

Hypothesis #2: But there is little difference in civic engagement between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged people when other civic activities such as “working on community problems” and “social protest” are examined.

Interestingly, there is no conflict between these hypotheses and therefore both could be true. If true, the first hypothesis could suggest that disadvantaged persons may be less interested in volunteering and similar forms of civic participation. This implies that there may be a need for greater education and outreach. That is, we may need to show disadvantaged Americans why these more formal modes of civic engagement create value for them and their communities. But it might also mean that disadvantaged persons may have fewer opportunities or face more barriers to participating in volunteer programs and similar forms of civic participation. This suggests an additional need to examine possible barriers to participation and to pursue strategies aimed at removing these barriers.

The second hypothesis, if true, suggests that funders, policy-makers and program managers should expand their thinking about what constitutes legitimate civic participation and begin exploring more creative approaches to support and recognize these alternative forms of civic participation.

The two papers provide empirical data to inform discussion of these issues. The first paper, by J. Foster-Bey, uses the single most reliable and current dataset to estimate rates of volunteering and civic engagement by race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (defined in terms of family income and educational background). Foster-Bey’s source is the Current Population Survey (CPS) Annual Volunteering Supplement for 2005-7. The CPS Volunteering Supplement was sponsored by the Corporation for National and Community Service. Sixty-thousand households were surveyed: a very large and high-quality sample, compared to any other survey of voluntary participation in America. The CPS asks about several forms of civic engagement, not only volunteering but also attending community meetings and working on community problems. There are questions, too, about the venue of volunteering and whether and how volunteers were recruited. The CPS offers rich information about respondents’ backgrounds.

Foster-Bey uses this dataset to show that race and ethnicity and socioeconomic status are each predictors of voluntary participation. Whites and people of higher socioeconomic status are more likely to say that they “volunteer” and are somewhat more likely to say they engage in the other civic activities measured in the CPS.

## CIRCLE IN THE NEWS

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Megan Greenwell, "Applicants Flock to Teacher Corps for Needy Areas," Washington Post, December 06, 2008

"Student Voting Efforts Appaled" by Jeannie M. Nuss The Boston Globe 12/3/2008

"Be the Change Inaugural Ball" Will Celebrate Community Service" by Suzanne Perry The Chronicle of Philanthropy 11/26/2008

"At Least 52% of Young Americans Voted This Year, New Data Show" by Sara Hebel The Chronicle of Higher Education 11/24/2008

"Obama's Millennial Marketers: Young Voters Helped Sell Obama To The Nation -- And Now He Hopes To Hold On To Them" Mary Gilbert The National Journal 11/21/2008

"The 2012 Landscape" by Carrie Dann MSNBC 11/20/2008

"Blacks, Youths Turn Out; Vote Record Holds" by Valerie Richardson The Washington Times 11/6/2008

"Young Voters Have Some Clout, and They Used It." AP Martha Irvine, November 4, 2008

"Obama Plans to Use Young Voters" by Sara Murray The Wall Street Journal 8/28/2008

"Getting Out the Vote, Keeping Up with the Youth" by Brookes Barnes The New York Times 8/13/2008

"Voter Rolls Trend Younger" by Associated Press The Washington Post 8/13/2008

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But for all of its strengths, the CPS does not measure many activities that have also been defined in the literature as "civic engagement." These activities—voluntary contributions of money and/or time—include voting, protesting, contacting the news media, participating in religious congregations, and working for political candidates, among others. The CPS Volunteering Supplement has two other limitations: it began recently and it does not ask questions about volunteers' motives or opinions.

Therefore, a second paper by James B. Hyman and Peter Levine draws on a wide variety of surveys and published studies to set a broader context. Their paper summarizes historical trends since the 1970s and provides hypotheses about why we may see different rates of participation in various specific forms of civic engagement by race, ethnicity, gender, age, and socioeconomic status. This paper concludes with recommendations for the Corporation to consider as it refines its strategy for inclusion.