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AUTHOR Rouner, Donna; Camden, Carl
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ABSTRACT

To assess the communication practices of not-for-profit (NFP) agencies, a study conducted a local survey of 105 NFP organizations in Cleveland, Ohio, in the spring of 1987, specifically examining their public relations activities and campaigns which manage and diffuse information about NFPs to the larger community. First, a focus group sample of 16 communication directors at the NFPs generated survey questions. Then, a second sample of directors at each organization responded to a 20-minute telephone interview. Respondents answered questions covering general aspects of the agency's public relations operations, the agency's largest promotional effort of 1987, and the evaluation methods used in their campaigns. Findings revealed that the majority of NFPs did not use community resources. Results also revealed a lack of knowledge on communication concepts, campaigns, and campaign evaluation. (Four tables of data are appended.) (MM)

The Communication Needs of a Local Not-For-Profit in Relation to Local Community Resources

by

Donna Rouner
Department of Technical Journalism
Colorado State University
Fort Collins, Colorado
80523
303/4915556
and

Carl Camden
Department of Communication
Cleveland State University
Cleveland, Ohio
44115
216/6874630

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United States not-for-profit (NFP) organizations have begun to increasingly manifest characteristics of the corporate world relative to their principal function--social responsibility. Private industry currently helps the not-for-profits develop expertise in areas where business excels: marketing, advertising, and public relations. Concomitantly, businesses have become more business-like in dealing with NFPs; traditionally philanthropic and unidirectional relationships are now more interactive and mutually beneficial.[1]

The acquisition of these business communication competencies has become a matter of survival. With recent decreases in public funding for NFPs, competition for foundation, corporate, and private donor dollars has become increasingly robust. This study assesses the current communication practices of the NFP community, by studying a local not-for-profit sector, i.e., tax-exempt human assistance organizations that have as their principal raison d'etre providing social service(s), not profit. The major focus here is NFP public relations activities and campaigns, critical processes in the managing and diffusing of information about NFPs to the larger community. Often this communication determines the NFP's existence, as it solely publicizes money and volunteer needs. The demise of NFPs unable to effectively communicate these needs has been documented.[2]

In this paper, a distinction will be made between communication promotional activities and campaigns. Public relations is a process that "involves planned efforts to influence public opinion through good character and responsible performance, based on mutually satisfactory, two-way communication."[3] Activities are pieces of these efforts. A campaign is defined as a planned, goal-oriented effort

by an organization to facilitate measurable results relative to the organization's image of well-being and purposes. Effective communication campaigns have been found to assess needs and the capabilities of the target audiences, and involve planning, production, continuous evaluation, and joint mass media-interpersonal strategies.[4]

Historical Overview.

As recent as 20 years ago, charitable organizations associated many business activities such as public relations and marketing with deception, dishonesty, greed.[5] Marketing consultants, however, assisted NFPs that were threatened with demise by applying marketing problem-solving strategies.[6] Accordingly, for many years successful marketing techniques once considered the exclusive domain of profit-motivated business enterprises became effectively used by NFP communication managers. In addition, NFPs now employ social marketing--promoting ideas or causes, and audience segmentation.

By the mid 1970s, NFPs were seriously increasing in number and size, but problems with decreasing funds limited operations.[7] Public funding cutbacks in the 1980s led to more serious competition for private and corporate assistance. Recently, business has become an important target audience for public interest groups, which have recognized corporate leaders as key community figures. Joint promotional programs between not-for-profits and business are on the rise, with business now as much an idea generator as it is a money giver.[8] In his overview of this relationship, Rodney noted that the National Child Labor Committee targeted small businesses, marketing educational materials to aid in hiring young people through the assistance of big business.[9] Corporations now increasingly sponsor fine arts, sports, and other endeavors.[10] This has resulted in

some NFPs' adopting more contemporary, dramatic promotional efforts. Whereas quality in such communication of the not-for-profit had been considered unimportant, with service as the top priority, today's emphasis leans toward quality and style of information giving. Greater education of those served by the not-for-profit sector and more elaborate methods of communicating the necessary messages provide explanations for the more polished appeals today. In addition, organizations like the American Red Cross, United Way, Boys Clubs, Girl Scouts, Family Services Association, Campfire, United Neighborhood Centers, and National Mental Health Association, have demonstrated the value of a common identity for effective fund raising, given the mobility of today's Americans.[11]

Problems that exist within NFP public relations often concern limited resources for accomplishing regular duties, such as publicizing news and feature material; maintaining media relations; dealing with public affairs; planning special events; recruiting clients, members and volunteers; and producing an annual report.

Few public relations practitioners in general use formal research methodologies and many fail to evaluate campaigns.[12] While large national NFPs have begun to adapt by using contemporary research tools, the extent that smaller NFPs conduct research is relatively unknown. The present study examines PR activities and campaigns of local NFP agencies--what they do, who does it, how it is conducted and funded, and the likelihood of change or improvement.

Methodology.

A survey of N=105 not-for-profits in metropolitan Cleveland was conducted in the spring of 1987, using a systematic random sample from the population of approximately 1200 NFPs. First, a focus

group sample of 16 communication directors at the NFPs generated questions. Then a second sample of these directors at each organization responded to a 20-minute telephone interview.

Type of agency was ascertained open-endedly, with publics and funding sources ranked in importance. Respondents were asked how many individuals conducted PR and advertising as a primary function of their job, the organization's largest promotional effort of 1987, the position of the person most responsible for that effort, and where any production portion occurred. The respondents reported on the communication campaigns and broke down the amount of using volunteers, community clubs and organizations, board members, print shops, photographers, advertising and PR firms (using a five-point Likert-type scale that ranged for "always" to "never"). Respondents ranked their most frequently used evaluation methods in campaigning, and responded open-endedly to a specific advertising or public relations goal they wished to achieve. Finally, the number of full and parttime employes, and volunteers was established, plus the annual budget.

Results.

The major organizational function of each not-for-profit led to the following breakdown of concerns:

Type of Agency	Percentage of Organizations
Health and Welfare	46%
Culture and the Arts	13%
Education	10%
Neighborhood/Civic	10%
Crisis Information	5%
Consumerism	3%
Other (Religion, Libraries Environment)	13%
Total	100%

Regarding the NFP's primary publics, (see Table 1), 30% indicated the general public was the primary audience, with 23% members and contributors, 5% mass media, 5% community leaders, and the rest spread among the board of directors, employes, volunteers, schools, doctors, public officials and professional organizations.

However, when reporting the organization's second most important public, media jumped to the top, with 19%. Volunteers moved up substantially in importance, with 10% indicating this audience.

In reporting sources of funding (see Table 2), 32% of the respondents indicated private individuals, with 22% reporting private grants, 17% the United Way agency, 6% corporations, and 5% the government. This basic pattern reflects national money-giving in all areas of philanthropy.[13] The remaining categories, for which the distribution was under 1% each, included churches, tuition fees, and group donations. Grants replaced private individuals (28% and 23%, respectively), as the second most important funding source. A similar pattern was manifested for the third ranking.

Fifty-four percent of the agencies reported one PR practitioner, although five had more than 25, skewing the average upward. Nationally, a majority of not-for-profits have 1 individual responsible for public relations functions.[14]

Organizations tended to cite isolated public relations projects as their principal promotional effort of the year. Twenty-one percent reported publicity efforts, e.g., press release writing and public service announcement production, followed closely by fundraising (20%), brochures (18%), general publicity (12%) membership drives (5%). Other efforts included producing annual reports, lobbying, holding conferences, institutes, and annual meetings.

The organizational position of the persons responsible for this major 1987 effort was staff member for 69% of the agencies, with 9% indicating a member of the board of directors, 8% a volunteer, with the remaining a PR agency, advertising agency, committees within the organizations or someone hired outside. Sixty-four percent of the respondents indicated a staff member within their organization accomplished the major project's production, followed by 7% who noted a board member, 6% a volunteer, 4% a public relations agency, 3% an advertising agency, with the remainder reporting a consultant, student intern, design agency, and internal committee.

The use of public relations or advertising agencies showed 64% having never done this, 11% almost never, 9% on a monthly basis, 7% quarterly, 7% annually, and only 1% each weekly and monthly.

About 75% of the organizational spokespersons said their agency engaged in public relations campaigns, with the principal reason to raise money (23%). Several of the communication directors were uncertain about the reasons for campaigns. When respondents broke down the amount of using various resources in their campaigns (see Table 3), community clubs and organizations were used by 9% always, followed by 20% most of the time, 32% occasionally, 22% rarely and 16% never. Greater use of board members was found, with 35% indicating always, 20 most of the time, 28% occasionally, 9% rarely and 8% never. Twenty-five percent indicated volunteers were used always, 28 percent most of the time, 28% occasionally, 8% rarely and 11% never. Regarding the use of friends, 7% reported they used friends always, 17% most of the time, 43% occasionally, 18% rarely, and 16% never. Although 8% claimed they used students always, and 9% said most of the time, 29% indicated occasionally, 26% said rarely and 28%

never. The use of advertising agencies was the lowest resource reported thus far. Only 1% reported using advertising agencies always, 5% said most of the time, 18% occasionally, 24% rarely and 53% never. As far as public relations agencies, a similar distribution resulted. Only 1% each reported always and most of the time, with 23% indicating occasionally, 17% rarely and 58% never. Local photographers were used a little more; 7 percent said always, 10% most of the time, 33% occasionally, 21% rarely, and 29% never. Local print shop use showed 29% at always, 33% at most of the time, 27% at occasionally, 6% at rarely and 5% at never.

The most frequently used method of evaluation (see Table 4) was measuring the volume of incoming contributions, reported by 37% of the respondents. Following this, 34% indicated an increase use of their services, 11% the volume of incoming telephone calls, 8% the volume of incoming mail, 2% formal research methods, and the remainder such evidences as an increase in volunteers, greater attendance at lectures, and counting media representatives at an event. About 20% reported they did not use evaluations methods.

The public relations and advertising goals of the respondents showed 28% sought more quality of publicity, with the following other increases sought: 12% funding support, 12% services, 8% clients, 7% membership. None mentioned communication campaigns specifically.

About 44% of the agencies reportedly did not have organizational goals they could not achieve due to a lack of communication resources. Twelve percent, however, indicated they had a need for more funding; 8% cited a need for more volunteers, 6% said more public relations, and 4% said greater news coverage, with the rest greater health support, more services, and uncertainty.

The number of fulltime employes ranged from 1, as reported by 10% of the agencies, to over 100, reported by 9%. Fifteen percent of the organizations reported no parttime workers. Although 11% indicated they did not use volunteers, the mean use number across all organizations was 42.

Annual budgets were reported in categories, with 12% indicating under $50,000, 9% ranged from that level up to $100,000, 23% ranged from that level up to $250,000, 19% ranged on up to $500,000, 17% reporting it went beyond that up to $1 million, and 19% reporting over $1 million. (Two percent did not know; 7% refused to disclose this.) This budget information fairly closely matches national data on the not-for-profit sector.[15]

In investigating relationships between types of agency, size, budget, and individual principally responsible for public relations and advertising, a few patterns were found. The top source of funding across most types ot agencies was private individuals; however, the United Way and private grants were much more important for health and welfare organizations, compared to other types. Health and Welfare agencies rated the United Way highest, with 34%, followed by private individuals at 25% and private grants at 19%.

The most variety in how frequently campaigns were conducted by PR and advertising agencies occurred in health and welfare agencies, but only about 25% of the agencies claimed to use such agencies.

Most organizations showed a staff member as nearly always responsible for planning of the principal public relations and advertising effort of 1987. This was the case, however, for only about 56% of the health and welfare agencies, with board members, volunteers advertising agencies also active. Only culture and art agencies

and neighborhood groups also demonstrated the use of board members for such planning.

Although, again, a staff member was most responsible in nearly every type of agency in this study, health and welfare organizations used members of their board of directors for producing the major 1987 effort. Again, this pattern was not prevalent in the other types of organizations; indeed, only culture and artistic groups reported using their board members at all for such a purpose.

Although health and welfare agencies appeared the most likely to use community clubs and organizations as promotional resources, with 16% indicating they always did this, they also were found the least likely, with 24% reporting rarely and 11% never.

Health and welfare organizations, crisis centers and neighborhood agencies, and educational groups were found to use student interns less than other types.

The only relationship found between type of agency and the most important public served was for crisis intervention groups, with 75% saying their clients were their number one public.

Health and welfare agencies showed the largest budgets, with about 25% over $1 million per year. Only 1 consumer group reported such a budget, although a culture and the arts agency fell into the $500,000 to $1 million category. It should be noted that Cleveland historically has been an active center for culture, theatre, dance, music and art. While 15% of the health and welfare organizations had this size of budget, 40% of the culture and arts groups did.

Health and welfare agencies, and to some extent culture and arts organizations, dominated in size, based on number of fulltime

employes. These groups were less likely than others to employ under 6 persons and more likely to have over 25 fulltime employes.

This organizational size measure also was found to be related to the number of persons responsible for public relations or advertising as the principal function of their job. The more full-time employes, the less the following were reported as the major promotional venture of 1987: fundraising; newsletter, brochure, press releases and public service announcement production. Larger agencies, with greater than 25 fulltime employes, were more likely to indicate the publishing of an annual report, member drive or lobbying as the major activity.

Larger agencies were found more likely to use clubs and community organizations as resources in advertising and public relations only in moderation, i.e., occasionally, while smaller and medium-sized organizations demonstrated much more variance in usage.

Larger organizations were also much less likely to indicate they never used volunteers in PR and advertising projects, with only 4% reporting such absolute lack of usage. This compared to 15% of the smaller agencies and 14% of the medium-sized groups that indicated they never used volunteers.

Similarly, the use of public relations and advertising agencies, and local photographers, was much more frequent for larger agencies.

The evaluation of public relations and advertising campaigns differed across sizes of organizations. Those employing more fulltime people were less likely to use the volume of incoming contributions and more likely to use the increased use of services for measurement. Two middle-sized agencies were the only, out of 76 using evaluation, that indicated their main method was formal research.

Agencies with more employes have larger budgets. When size is measured by the number of volunteers, those NFPs with the highest amount, i.e., greater than 24 volunteers, were much more likely to receive money from the United Way as their major source of funding.

Of those organizations that engaged in a main public relations or advertising undertaking in 1987, a relationship was detected between the type of undertaking and organizational budget. Seeking money and recruiting for volunteers or clients was more common for agencies with larger budgets, while publishing brochures, press releases and newsletters was greater for those with smaller budgets.

Board members were more likely responsible for the primary public relations or advertising undertaking of the year among agencies with lower budgets, while public relations and advertising agencies were more used by those with higher budgets. A higher budget was associated with greater use of local photographers, as well.

In addition, the use of incoming telephone calls as a method of evaluating public relations and advertising campaigns was used more among agencies with higher budgets than those with lower budgets. Organizations with bigger budgets were more likely to indicate they would utilize marketing research, if it were available. Agencies with a budget under $25,000 have been found not to engage in marketing, nor produce annual reports, but as budgets increase, marketing, audiovisual and annual report production do also.[16]

Summary and Discussion.

Here, some interpretation of these findings will occur, along with implications for studying NFPs in their relationship to other community groups and organizations.

How the NFPs in this study perceive themselves relative to the larger community, use its resources, and consider establishing new relationships and mutual satisfactions are areas where the findings suggest a gap exists between what is and what could be accomplished. Some current community resources are not used much, if at all. Volunteers--a major potential resource for NFPs--are underutilized, with 11% of the agencies reporting never using them.

In the case of NFPs other than health and welfare agencies, the nature of the organization may prohibit extensive use of either students or interns. First, crisis centers with in-depth training procedures may not be interested in uncommitted or temporary individuals. Educational groups may not feel students are qualified, particularly undergraduate students, in areas of advanced education. Neighborhood groups simply may not know how to tap student volunteers, or interns. It never may have occurred to neighborhood groups that a student intern may be a most valuable volunteer, particularly if the student's area of study is promotional communication. But if properly matched with interested volunteers, NFPs could yield enormous benefits from short and longer lasting relationships with volunteers. Students could be placed within neighborhoods close to where they live, work or go to school. As recommended by Shasho, university students enrolled in communication and business (e.g., marketing) programs are not only capable assistants in PR but would be abreast of current communication theories and methodologies.[17] Students of art, graphic design, film and music could build impressive dossiers by contracting client work with NFPs in creative endeavors.

Presumably, printing is still a necessity for certain types of production that can only be done by professionals. Printers in the

Cleveland area may donate more services than photographers and artists for the not-for-profit sector. NFPs may not think about or spend time making contacts for requesting donations or sponsorship from some commercial resources in the community, or presume such services are too expensive and never offered. The lack of using area public relations and advertising firms is astounding in this large market.

Reliance on such groups as one's board of directors, reported by the smaller agencies in this study, may not be in the best interest of the NFP or its board. Trained volunteers and local professionals can assist in ways in which staff members of a not-for-profit and many board members may not even be aware, relative to new technology, innovations in graphics, design, theory, and research. In addition, an outside "agent" can be more critical, perhaps "objective," applying scientific inquiry with more facility if the individual is not linked as closely as board members. This distance can aid research planning, conduction and interpretation of findings.

A second gap is also apparent between what exists and what could be improved in Cleveland-area NFP "campaigns." Most agencies report conducting a major campaign effort regularly, yet most of the types of campaigns reported do not fall into existing agreed upon definitions in the field of information (or advertising) campaigning, and the principal campaign efforts are seldom directly campaign-related. Most of the self-reported campaigning is publicity production, generally directed at media coverage of an event, and not in any way planned, with a theme that is carried out over time to identified and targeted publics and evaluated as to success. The data on the NFP goals concern activities like improving media publicity, not campaign-related objectives and efforts. Also, the reported

paucity of unmet goals demonstrates contentment with the status quo, and to some extent a lack of campaign effort and knowledge.

These organizations need to identify and study key communication concepts and use more sophisticated evaluation methods. This study's finding that incoming telephone calls were used as a major measurement of campaign evaluation, and then by organizations with higher budgets, suggests problems with relying on mere artifactual evidence rather than measures of awareness, knowledge, and possible behavior directly related to the campaign. The use of incoming phone calls for organizations with more money is likely a result of advanced technology housed in those agencies, thus greater capability to record telephone responses to campaigns. In other words, it is not evident that the NFPs with more money were engaging in better communication campaign evaluation; rather, that they had tools to do any type of evaluation at all. Regardless, interaction between practitioners and the community is considered imperative in effective PR.

As Grunig argues, organizations can be typologized as more open in problem recognition and dealing with change or more closed and fatalistic about external influences.[18] Those more fatalistic are more concerned with simply sending out information, and not necessarily receiving feedback from the larger community. But most contemporary public relations practitioners now strongly value the process of seeking and receiving information from the outside. More inwardly focused NFP organizations, even if granted large sums of money that could be used in public relations campaigning, might still direct their efforts toward merely shipping out more volumes of information. Corporate and private monies might be better utilized if directed toward organized communication campaign efforts that involve community

interaction processes. Further, a more complex web of community interaction, even iteration, among private business, education and the NFP sector, might be an ideal catalyst for system's level social responsibility.

Before assisting local NFPs in the wide array of potential opportunities available to them at fairly low costs in conducting successful fundraising and other types of campaigns, the NFP communication directors and staffs need to become aware of the possibilities and accomplishments of campaigning. Merely providing NFPs with bodies to assist in what they already do would be useful, perhaps quite welcome in the short run. But marked improvements, even in money savings and eventual increases in services and outreach, could exist with some innovative assistance and campaigning. Contemporary evidence in campaigning suggests communication variables of cognition (awareness, information intake and integration), affect (attitude crystallization and possible change) and behavior are all important measures in conducting and evaluating successful campaign efforts.

Although a great amount of research on successful public relations campaigning has not been conducted, specific types of PR activities have been studied. Research on public service announcements, and some PSA campaigns, tends to be lower in quality and amount, compared to studies in advertising, especially political advertising. Often, the problems with studying the effect of public service announcements is that their influence may be buried within a larger, more general campaign context.[19] Awareness is frequently a more common result of campaigns, not compliance to message content. Longer, more involved communication campaigns that occur in a strongly controlled context, such as the Stanford heart disease studies, have shown

more concrete success. In a review of public service campaigns, O'Keefe and Reid-Nash found that, increasingly, more sophisticated methods used in research and evaluation have detected success in campaigning. Mental health, highway safety, smoking cessation, crime prevention and heart disease preventative strategies are areas in which such efforts have succeeded to some extent. They also concluded that campaigns have been found more likely to succeed if they incorporate theoretical models of communication or persuasion into their development.[20] Clearly, theoretical models and sound research methodologies are necessary in order to develop a public service announcement campaign, and any type of PR campaign that is within budgetary constraints of the NFP, in order to expect, measure and find successful results.

Overall in this study, lack of knowledge on communication concepts, campaigns and campaign evaluation demonstrated a need for educating NFP personnel and volunteers. Community resources, activated in a system's-wide goal of mutual benefit, can lead to such education and communication sophistication.

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TABLE 1
Frequency of NFPs' Ranking Top Three Publics

Type	Ranking: Public #1	Public #2	Public #3
General Public	28 (30%)	15 (17%)	16 (19%)
Members/Contributors	21 (23%)	12 (13%)	10 (12%)
Clients	18 (20%)	5 (6%)	5 (6%)
Community Leaders	5 (5%)	7 (8%)	17 (20%)
Mass Media	5 (5%)	17 (19%)	12 (14%)
Board Members	4 (4%)	7 (8%)	6 (7%)
Management	2 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Employes	2 (2%)	1 (1%)	2 (2%)
Professionals in Field	2 (2%)	2 (2%)	0 (0%)
Volunteers	1 (1%)	9 (10%)	7 (8%)
Professional Orgs	1 (1%)	6 (7%)	3 (4%)
Government	1 (1%)	4 (4%)	5 (6%)
Family	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)
Schools	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Other (Business, Buyers)	0 (0%)	5 (4%)	5 (6%)
Total	91 (100%)	91 (100%)	86 (100%)

TABLE 2
Frequency of NFP's Ranking Top Three Sources of Funding

Type of Source	Number of Organizations Ranking in Each Case: Source #1	Source #2	Source #3
Private Individuals	26 (32%)	17 (23%)	16 (23%)
Corporations	5 (6%)	17 (23%)	14 (20%)
Grants	18 (22%)	21 (28%)	19 (28%)
United Way	14 (17%)	11 (15%)	3 (4%)
Government	5 (6%)	2 (3%)	3 (4%)
Income From Programs	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)
Other Public Sources	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)
Churches	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)
Membership	2 (2%)	2 (2%)	0 (0%)
Other Donations	10 (12%)	5 (6%)	11 (16%)
Total	82 (100%)	75 (100%)	69 (100%)

TABLE 3
Frequency of the Amount of Using Various Community Resources in Public Relations and Advertising Campaigns

Type of Community Resource Used	Frequency of Use				
	Always	Mostly	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
Clubs/Orgs	9 (9%)	20 (20%)	32 (32%)	22 (22%)	16 (16%)
Board Members	36 (35%)	20 (20%)	28 (28%)	9 (9%)	8 (8%)
Volunteers	26 (25%)	29 (28%)	29 (28%)	8 (8%)	11 (11%)
Friends	7 (7%)	17 (17%)	44 (43%)	18 (18%)	16 (16%)
Students	8 (8%)	9 (9%)	30 (29%)	26 (26%)	29 (28%)
Ad Agencies	1 (1%)	5 (5%)	18 (18%)	24 (24%)	54 (53%)
PR Agencies	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	24 (23%)	17 (17%)	60 (58%)
Photog-graphers	7 (7%)	10 (10%)	34 (33%)	22 (21%)	30 (29%)
Print Shops	30 (29%)	34 (33%)	27 (27%)	6 (6%)	5 (5%)

(N ranges here from 102-103)

TABLE 4
Frequency of Ranking Top Three Means of Evaluating The Success of Public Relations and Advertising Campaigns

Type of Evaluation	Ranking		
	#1 Means	#2 Means	#3 Means
Volume of Incoming Contributions	31 (37%)	14 (18%)	5 (7%)
Volume of Incoming Mail	7 (8%)	13 (17%)	12 (17%)
Volume of Incoming Phone Calls	9 (11%)	15 (20%)	18 (25%)
Increase Use of Services	28 (34%)	16 (21%)	12 (17%)
Increased Volunteering	1 (1%)	12 (16%)	16 (22%)
Formal Research Methods	2 (2%)	4 (5%)	7 (10%)
Other Methods	5 (7%)	3 (4%)	2 (3%)
Total	83 (100%)	77 (100%)	72 (100%)