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ABSTRACT

This survey was conducted in 1984 of current and former members of Bread for the World (BFW) in order to further understanding of the characteristics, attitudes, level of participation, and needs of people involved with hunger issues and the needs of hungry people. A questionnaire was mailed to 1,296 current and 738 former members. This final report presents the findings of that survey. The demographic characteristics, religious and political beliefs and attitudes, and commitment to and participation in Bread for the World are analyzed for both current and former members. Few differences were found between the two groups in this area, although former members may be more politically conservative. Bivariate analyses were conducted of the characteristics of activists, of low income and minority members, of changes in the characteristics of BFW members over time, and of why people do not renew their memberships. Activists were considerably more liberal than nonactivists and were less alienated from the political process than nonactivists. The total number of minority group members in the sample was too small to analyze. Low income members were strikingly similar to the remainder of BFW members in every way except income. There were only slight differences between earlier and more recent members. There were no sizable and consistent differences between people giving different reasons for not renewing their memberships. The report concludes with a discussion of possible areas for future research. (JB)

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FINAL REPORT

BREAD FOR THE WORLD MEMBERSHIP SURVEY AND ANALYSIS PROJECT

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BREAD FOR THE WORLD MEMBERSHIP SURVEY AND ANALYSIS PROJECT

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I. Background

In March 1984, the Bread For the World Educational Fund, Inc. (BFWEF) entered into an agreement with professors William Whitaker, Steven Barkan, and Steven Cohn of the University of Maine at Orono Department of Sociology and Social Work ("the Maine Group") to develop, distribute and analyze the findings of a survey of current and former members of Bread For the World. The purpose of the survey project is to obtain statistically reliable information, principally in the form of a final report, that furthers understanding of the characteristics, attitudes, level of participation, and needs of people involved with hunger issues and the needs of hungry people.

The Maine Group agreed to seek a minimum of 500 returns from current members and 250 returns from former members. It provided its expertise and labor at no charge as its contribution to the work of Bread For the World (BFW). The BFWEF allocated \$5,000 to cover the costs of printing, postage, follow-up, typing, copying the final report, and two consulting trips between Orono, Maine and Washington, D.C. by one of the Maine Group.

Preliminary findings were reported to BFW staff in August 1985 and to the BFW board in November 1985. The preliminary report provided (a) an initial comparison of the demographic characteristics and political and religious attitudes of current BFW members with those of the general population of the United States and a review of current member participation in and commitment to BFW; (2) a similar comparison of former members emphasizing similarities to and differences from current members; (3) selected cross-tabulations and a description of the range of additional comparisons and analyses available from the Maine Group;

and (4) an appendix consisting of the detailed comparison of frequencies of responses by current and former members.

The Maine Group also provided a verbatim copy of comments made by current members on the survey. Several factors combined to delay the delivery of the final report. Most important, the Maine Group secured a faculty research grant of \$4,000 which made it possible to expand the sample sizes. Second, an unprecedented response rate by current members of BFW greatly lengthened the time required for coding. Third, the scope of the report has been expanded to include several additional analyses requested by BFW staff. This report includes and expands upon the information presented in the preliminary report with particular emphasis on the new analyses requested by BFW.

II. Methodology

One of the greatest difficulties in survey research is reducing the number of questions to an amount that an acceptable proportion of respondents will be willing to answer. The dilemma is that investigators invariably would like more information than can reasonably be sought with one questionnaire. If the questionnaire is too long, the reduced number of responses generated may not be representative of the population surveyed. Conventional survey wisdom suggests that questions should occupy no more than five full pages of print. Very well prepared mail surveys of this length combined with appropriate follow-up to non-respondents may be expected to generate a 70-75 percent response rate.

After consultation with BFW staff and working in close cooperation with Bob Wilson, BFW Director, a draft questionnaire was constructed which consisted of twenty mimeographed pages of questions. The draft questionnaire was distributed to 138 participants who

attended the June 1984 BFW Leadership Gathering in Washington, D.C. Usable responses to this exceptionally long, complicated draft questionnaire were received from 89 persons for a return rate of 64 percent. The high response rate reflects, we believe, the unusually high level of commitment to BFW by the respondents.

The draft questionnaire was, of course, far too long to use in a survey of the general membership. After we had eliminated "every" expendable question, there still remained thirteen pages of typeset questions--nearly three times the maximum recommended length for mailed questionnaire surveys. According to conventional survey wisdom, such a long questionnaire would be highly unlikely to generate an adequate response rate. Before we "bit the bullet" and cut out two-thirds of the questions to be asked, we decided to send a sample mailing to 100 current members. Based on the high rate of response to that initial mailing, we decided to mail the full thirteen pages of questions to the rest of our sample of 1,296 current members. A reminder post card was mailed one week later followed by second and third copies of the questionnaire four and eight weeks respectively after the initial mailing. A response of 82 percent was generated (N=1,067). The questionnaire was distributed also to current BFW staff and board members and was returned by 64 and 52 percent respectively after distribution of a second copy (N=64, 24).

Believing that former members would be less committed to BFW than current members, the questionnaire was further reduced to nine pages of questions and mailed to 738 former members. After subtracting those questionnaires which could not be delivered because of expired addresses and deaths, a response of 57 percent (N=294) was generated.

Thus, data were collected from twice as many current members and 18 percent more former members than were projected in the initial

agreement between BFWF and the Maine Group; data were also collected from an additional sample of Leadership Gathering participants, and from BFW staff and board members. We now will discuss our findings for current members and former members and comment briefly on leadership gathering participants, staff members, and board members.

III. Current Members

This section summarizes the more interesting and important findings on current members. Since the response rate for the current member survey was so high, we can conclude that the findings accurately represent the entire membership. When possible, appropriate comparisons will be made to the general U.S. population, relying on national surveys of adult Americans conducted in recent years by various organizations. We will first report on demographic findings, then on religious and political attitudes, and finally on measures of commitment to BFW and participation in its various activities.

A. Demographic Characteristics

When compared with the general population, BFW members are strikingly white, well-educated, and relatively wealthy. Ninety-eight percent of the members are white, compared with 81 percent of the general population. More than half (54 percent) have obtained a graduate degree, and another 31 percent a college degree, compared with respective figures of 5 percent and 11 percent in the general population. Looking at income, 47 percent of the members report family incomes greater than \$30,000, compared with 24 percent of the general population (in 1980) reporting incomes greater than \$25,000.

In other demographic areas, the membership is sometimes more similar to the general population, and sometimes not. Forty-seven percent of the members are male, and 53 percent female, roughly the same

proportions as the general population. Looking at marital status, 60 percent of the members are currently married, compared with 61 percent of the general population; 27 percent have never been married, compared with 16 percent of the general population. Forty-nine percent of the members have never had any children, compared with 26 percent of the general population. Thirty-six percent of BFW members live in or outside of cities with populations greater than 250,000 compared with 43 percent of the general population; on the other hand, 18 percent of BFW members live in small towns (less than 10,000 population) or rural areas, compared with 28 percent of the general population. Looking at employment status, 67 percent of BFW members are employed full- or part-time, compared with 59 percent of the general population in 1980; 2 percent are unemployed, compared with 7-8 percent of the general population; 15 percent are retired, compared with 10 percent; 9 percent are homemakers, compared with 24 percent; and 5 percent are students, compared with 3 percent of the general population.

The picture of BFW members that emerges, then, especially when compared with the general population, is a membership that is overwhelmingly white, highly educated, and middle- and upper-middle class. The proportion of women and men in BFW is similar to that in the general population, as is the proportion of members currently married and employed. BFW members have had fewer children than the general population, and are slightly less likely to live in or near the largest cities, or in small towns and rural areas.

B. Religious and Political Beliefs and Attitudes

The religious faiths represented by BFW members are similar to, though not identical with, those found among Americans who identify with a religious faith or denomination. Thirty-seven percent of BFW members are Catholic, compared with 25 percent of the faith population;

13 percent Lutheran, compared with 6 percent; 13 percent Presbyterian, compared with 5 percent; 7 percent Methodist, compared with 12 percent; 5 percent Episcopalian, compared with 3 percent; and 4 percent Baptist, compared with 21 percent.

BFW members are very religious according to the various measures in the survey. Eighty-nine percent say that religious is "very important" in their lives, compared with 55 percent of the general population. Eighty-six percent pray once or twice a day; 45 percent read the Bible daily; 89 percent attend religious services at least once or twice a week (with 18 percent attending daily). In contrast, only 30-40 percent of the general population attend religious services at least once a week. In other measures of religious belief, the membership is more similar to the general population (1968 survey data, however). Seventy-five percent of BFW members believe that God "really exists," compared with 74 percent of the general population; 72 percent believe that Jesus "is the divine son of God," compared with 74 percent; 56 percent believe that Biblical miracles "actually happened," compared with 63 percent; and 47 percent say that the Devil "actually exists," compared with 48 percent. In one contrast, however, only 22 percent of the members believe that the Bible is the actual word of God, compared with 37 percent of the general population.

Regarding political beliefs and attitudes, BFW members are much more liberal than the general population. Forty-eight percent of the members report that they are either liberal or extremely liberal, compared with 11 percent of the general population; conversely, only 13 percent of BFW members report that they are at all conservative, compared with 34 percent of the general population.

Similarly, BFW members report more liberal attitudes regarding specific political and social issues than are found in the general

population. Only 16 percent of the members agree that "any American with ability and ambition can earn a good income," compared with 65 percent of the general population responding to a similar question. More than half (54 percent) of the members agree that "we are spending too little on welfare," compared to only 14 percent of the general population. Only 20 percent of the members agree that "there are too many people receiving welfare money who could work if they were willing." In other areas, 63 percent of BFW members are opposed to the death penalty, compared with only 28 percent of the general population.

In assessing the reasons for hunger in underdeveloped nations, BFW members again report liberal attitudes. Seventy-six percent say that "Diversion of resources from basic needs to military spending" is a "very important" reason; 85 percent say that control by indigenous economic elites is "very important"; and 62 percent say that "control of production and resources by multinational corporations is "very important."

Finally, on measures of political "efficacy" and alienation, BFW members report greater feelings of efficacy and less alienation than is true of the general population. For example, only 6 percent agree that public officials "aren't really interested in problems of the average person," compared with 73 percent of the general population. Similarly, only 25 percent of BFW members agree that public officials don't "care much what people like me think," compared to 50 percent of the general population responding to a similar question. Only 8 percent of BFW members agree that "people like me don't have any say about what the government does," though 42 percent of BFW members agree that "a person like me can't really understand" politics and government.

C. Commitment and Participation in BFW

BFW members report high levels of commitment to the organization. Eighty-one percent say that they "feel a sense of pride in being a member of BFW," and 95 percent feel that BFW "would deserve my support even if I were unable to participate." Only 2 percent agree with the statement that "I don't care what BFW says or does," and only 6 percent agree that "I am indifferent about being a member of BFW." Fifty-five percent report feeling either "very strongly committed" or "strongly committed" to BFW. When asked how much effort they'd spend if BFW were in danger of going out of existence, 17 percent report a "great deal of effort," and another 60 percent report "some effort." Forty-six percent of the current members reported financial contributions to BFW in the year preceding the survey in addition to their membership fees. Thirty-two percent supported BFW by speaking about the organization to a church group in the year preceding the survey. When asked how important BFW is to them when compared to all organizations other than church to which they belong, 3 percent of the members rated BFW "the most important" and another 43 percent rated it "among the most important." The membership reported high levels of agreement with BFW stands on hunger issues, with 83 percent reporting that they disagree only rarely or never with BFW positions.

Members also reported relatively high levels of participation (in the past year) in the activities promoted by BFW. Sixty-five percent of the members reported writing an elected official about hunger in the past year at least once or twice, and 28 percent reported writing three or more times. Twenty-eight percent reported phoning an official at least once or twice while 72 percent never phoned an official. Twenty-six percent took part in a BFW quickline and 10 percent reported doing so three or more times. Eight percent reported

writing a letter to the editor about hunger during the past year and 21 percent reported writing an article about hunger for a church or secular publication.

Bread For the World publications appear to play an important role among the members with 81 percent having read the monthly newsletter at least three or four times in the past year, while 63 percent had read background papers at least three or four times in that same period. On the other hand, only 24 percent reported having read Contact and 19 percent having read Leaven.

A relatively small proportion of the BFW membership was found to participate in BFW local groups. Twelve percent of the members reported being current members of local groups, 11 percent were formerly members of local groups, 33 percent were aware of a nearby local group but did not participate, and 42 percent were unaware of local groups in their vicinity. As we shall see later, local group membership is closely related to the frequency of participation in BFW lobbying activities.

IV. Former Members

The return rate for former members was only 57 percent, so we cannot be sure that our data for former members accurately reflect the entire population of former members. For example, perhaps only those former members with the greatest affinity for BFW returned their questionnaires, while the most hostile former members failed to do so.

With this caveat in mind, we were still startled by the similarity of virtually all the data for former members to those for current members. Since the two groups were so similar, we will report here only selected characteristics as examples and will highlight the few differences which did emerge between the groups. A complete

comparison of frequencies of responses by former and current members is found in Appendix A.

A. Demographic Characteristics

Demographically the two groups were nearly identical. Fifty-three percent of the former members in our sample were women, the same proportion as for current members. Ninety-seven percent were white, compared with 98 percent of current members. Sixty-one percent are married, compared with 60 percent. Twenty-four percent live in the largest cities, compared with 22 percent. Forty-nine percent have graduate degrees, compared with 54 percent, a statistically insignificant difference. Sixty-nine percent are currently employed, compared with 67 percent. Sixteen percent have incomes of \$50,000 or more, compared with 17 percent. As was the case with current members, former members who responded were overwhelmingly white, very well educated and middle to upper income.

B. Religious and Political Beliefs and Attitudes

The similarity of the demographic data for the two samples carries over to a large degree into measures of political and religious attitudes. However, it does seem that former members are slightly more conservative politically, although the differences are usually small. For example, 20 percent of the former members report being conservative, compared with 13 percent of the current members; 37 percent of former members, and 48 percent of current members report being either extremely liberal or liberal. Thirty-six percent of former members (compared with 20 percent of current members) agree that too many people receive welfare who could work. Twenty-seven percent of former members (compared with 16 percent of current members) agree that any individual in the U.S. can earn a good income. Fifty-one percent of former members (compared with 63 percent) oppose the death penalty.

The two samples differ only very slightly in assessing the relative importance of reasons for world hunger, with the former members again displaying more conservative attitudes.

In the area of religion and religious attitudes, former members are virtually identical with current members. The distribution of religious affiliations among the two samples is remarkably the same, as are their responses to the questions about God, Jesus, and the Bible.

C. Commitment and Participation in BFW

The two groups are also similar in their levels of participation. Although we did not have exactly comparable measures of participation for the two groups, no real differences emerged. Former members, however, seem to have been somewhat less committed to BFW during their period of membership. Only 53 percent report feeling a "sense of pride" in BFW, compared with 81 percent of the current members. Only 62 percent report that their membership enabled them to carry out their religious beliefs, compared with 83 percent of current members. Only 69 percent (still a high figure) report that their membership deepened their understanding of hunger issues, compared with 86 percent of current members. Finally, former members report somewhat higher levels of disagreement with BFW stands: 31 percent say that they disagreed at least sometimes, compared with only 18 percent of current members.

These comparisons suggest that a perception that BFW is too radical/liberal may be one reason for terminating membership. This speculation is not supported, however, by the series of questions directly asking why former members allowed their membership to end, as only 11 percent report that such a perception was at all important. They may well be the former members accounting for the small differences in political attitudes described earlier. For the vast majority of former members, though, it would seem that political ideology does

not play a role in membership termination, although we are not entirely convinced of this. For example, 75 percent of former members report that insufficient time for BFW was at least somewhat important in terminating. How much credence should be given this response? If we found, say, that those reporting time problems are also more conservative than those former members not reporting time problems, we might conclude that the time factor is, consciously or subconsciously, being used as an excuse or pretext for not identifying underlying value differences.

V. Leadership Gathering Participants, Staff and Board Members

An extraordinarily long and complex mimeographed draft questionnaire (20 pages of closely typed questions) was distributed to 138 BFW leaders who participated in the June 1984 Leadership Gathering in Washington, D.C. In the absence of individual follow-up usable responses were received from 65 percent of those surveyed, our first indicator of the exceptional level of commitment to BFW by its membership. The draft questionnaire, was revised and shortened for distribution to current members, staff and board. As a result of two distributions of the questionnaire usable responses were received from 64 percent of the staff (N=64) and 52 percent of the board (N=24).

Because the response rates from leadership gathering participants, staff and board members are low enough that we cannot be sure that the data accurately reflect the entire populations of those groups, analysis of those data has been given a low priority. The data have been coded and summary information will be provided at a later date.

VI. Bivariate Analysis

In the previous sections we have described the general characteristics of BFW's members and former members. In the following sections we present a number of analyses in which we contrast different segments of BFW members. In these sections we will also contrast current members with former members. For the sake of clarity and brevity, the analysis is presented for the most part, in a narrative format; we will be happy to provide any bivariate tables on request.

Each of these sections is a response to requests for information by BFW staff. The initial letter authorizing this study stated that the study was to obtain statistically reliable information that furthers understanding of the characteristics, attitudes, level of participation, and needs of people involved with hunger issues and the needs of hungry people. After the presentation of our preliminary report, Bob Wilson wrote us that the following areas had been identified by BFW as areas for continued analysis:

- A. Characteristics of activists and why people become activists;
- B. Characteristics of minority and low income members in various states and regions and the relationship between the number of minority members in an area and the activism of that area;
- C. A longitudinal analysis of changes in the characteristics of BFW members over time; and
- D. Why people do not renew membership.

In conducting the analyses, we have followed three methodological safeguards. First, we have avoided reporting results that are based upon a small number of respondents. If the number of respondents is small, it is hazardous to assume that characteristics of the

respondents adequately reflect, or can be generalized to, characteristics of the total membership. Second, we have not reported differences between different segments of the sample, e.g., between activists and non-activists, if the differences are small and either unlikely to be generalizable to the total membership or to have any significance for BFW planning. Third, when we have explored the data to find differences between segments, we have reported only those differences that are part of a coherent pattern. This procedure allows us to avoid giving undue weight to findings that are likely to be the result of chance variations in the data.

We now turn to the analyses.

A. Characteristics of Activists

In our preliminary report we indicated that only a minority of BFW members could be considered to be active members of the organization and actively involved in its lobbying activities. This finding led to considerable discussion with BFW staff. Three questions emerged from this discussion: (1) what are the characteristics of activists and how do they differ from less active members; (2) why do members become activists; and (3) in what ways do activists' perceptions of, and desires for, BFW differ from the perceptions and desires of less active members.

There is no hard and fast boundary line that separates activists from non-activists. Rather, there is a continuum of participation in BFW activities, and the decision as to where one will draw a line defining activists and separating them from non-activists is somewhat arbitrary. In our preliminary discussions we tentatively defined activists as members who were both members of local groups and who had written an elected official about hunger more than twice in the previous year. We now believe this definition was unduly restrictive

as it excludes people who, no matter how involved they were in other respects, were unable to join a local group. Forty-two percent of the respondents reported that they were not aware of a nearby local group and 33 percent were aware of a local group but did not participate in its activities. Thus, under the initial definition at least three-fourths of all BFW members could not be classified as activists, regardless of their possibly high levels of activity in other respects.

In this report we have defined activists as those members who wrote an elected official about hunger more than twice in the previous year. By this definition 28 percent of the current members are classified as activists.

In order to answer the questions set by BFW, we examined the differences between activists and non-activists on a wide range of variables. We found that activists were very similar to non-activists in their backgrounds but differed quite markedly in their attitudes. Thus activists, as a group, were similar to non-activists in income, education, age, gender, race and whether or not they were employed. Activists were, however, in the aggregate considerably more liberal than non-activists. They classify themselves as more liberal on the liberalism-conservatism scale (question 35; see Table 1), are more likely to support government welfare spending, and are more likely to see political elites and multinational corporations as bearing a significant responsibility for world hunger. Activists are also less alienated from the political process than non-activists. Activists are more likely than non-activists to disagree with such statements as, "People like me don't have any say about what the government does." This finding for BFW members is consistent with studies of political participation which frequently report a relationship between activism and the belief that one can affect the political process.

Table 1

Activism and Political Liberalism

	<u>Activists</u>	<u>Non-Activists</u>
Extremely liberal	13	6
Liberal	46	38
Slightly liberal	21	25
Moderate	12	16
Slightly conservative	4	9
Conservative or extremely conservative	3	5
(Number of cases)	(274)	(725)

One issue BFW asked us to address was why some members become activists and what BFW could do to encourage more extensive activism. The results suggest that attitudinal differences are the principal determinants of activism, particularly political liberalism and a sense that one can affect the political process. Neither of these factors can easily be affected by BFW. To some extent BFW publications can affect members' attitudes in these areas; but, as we indicate below, there is indirect evidence suggesting that these effects are rather limited.¹

Communication studies consistently show that personal contacts are much more powerful than publications in affecting attitudes and behaviors. This finding is echoed in our study where we find that

¹In section VI-C, "Changes in the Characteristics of BFW Members Over Time," we show that more recent BFW members are only slightly less liberal than earlier members. These data suggest that, if BFW publications have an impact upon members' attitudes, the impact is slight. This, again, is a rather frequent finding. Studies of communication effects show that organizational publications can be important in affecting membership knowledge and in mobilizing members to undertake specific actions but that their effects on attitudes are often limited.

whether members are, or have been, members of a local group is one of the most powerful predictors of activism.

Table 2

Local Group Membership and Activism

	Current Member	Former Member	Never a Member	Unaware of Local Group
% Activists	58	39	21	23
(Number of cases)	(117)	(101)	(321)	(403)

These data combine with the fact that forty-two percent of the members report that they are not aware of a nearby local group to suggest a possible focus for additional BFW effort. If participation in a local BFW group is a determinant of activism, then anything that can be done to expand the network of local groups and to increase member awareness of and participation in local groups may generate increased member activism. Outreach efforts by existing local groups to welcome new BFW members into a support system would be one possibility.

The next issue BFW asked us to address was the ways in which activist perceptions of, and desires for, BFW differ from the desires and perceptions of less active members. In order to determine differences, we compared the responses of activists and non-activists on their goals for BFW (question 12), their perceptions of BFW leadership (question 23), and on the perceived utility of BFW information sources (questions 14 and 15).

We found that activist and non-activist goals for BFW were quite similar with the only consistent differences being the greater desire of BFW activists to see minorities and the poor more involved in BFW. Non-activists generally rated these goals as somewhat important while activists were more likely to rate them as very important.

Activists were also more opposed to BFW distributing food directly to the hungry and were more favorable to hiring paid staff organizers for an area or state.

Interestingly, activists were not more favorable toward encouraging marches, picketing, and demonstrations to dramatize hunger issues. Both activists and non-activists rated this goal as only somewhat desirable or not desirable. This result suggests that the greater liberalism of activists does not extend to support for norm-violating activities such as protests. Since the survey was taken before the advent of activities such as the various "aid" concerts and Hands Across America, we have no data on activist/non-activist attitudes toward non-norm-violating forms of public demonstrations.

Perceptions of BFW leadership are, again, rather similar between activists and non-activists. Activists are more likely to believe that BFW leaders listen to members and that BFW leaders can be trusted to make good decisions but are similar to non-activists in their willingness to question BFW leadership, feelings of obligations to support this leadership when they disagree with it, and in attitudes toward whether the membership should have greater control over what BFW does. The picture that emerges, therefore, is one of greater activist confidence in BFW leadership but not of unthinking support.

Where there is a major difference between activists and non-activists is in the extent to which they find that the various publications of BFW provide useful information. Activists rated the utility of information gained from each of the publications listed in question 14 as considerably greater than did the non-activists. In response to question 15, activists and non-activists are similar to each other in their ratings of the relative importance of the information sources.

However, as question 14 indicates, each of these sources was regarded as absolutely more useful by activists.

One BFW staff member suggested that, instead of dividing the BFW membership into two categories of activist and non-activist, we divide the membership into three categories. The most active category would consist of local group members, the intermediate category of those who were not local group members but who wrote an elected official at least once about hunger during the past year, and the least active category would consist of members who were not local group members and who did not write to an official. When we repeated the above data analysis using this three-fold measure of activism, the results were consistent with those using the two-fold measure.

B. Characteristics of Low Income and Minority Members

We were asked to address two issues in this area: (1) whether there is any correlation between the number of minority members in a state or geographical area and the activism of that area; and (2) to prepare profiles of the characteristics of minority and low income members from several states or geographical areas. We found that the numbers of both minority group and low income members in our sample from each state and from each of the geographical areas (combinations of states) identified were too small to allow adequate generalization. Thus, we cannot address the specified issues. In addition, the total number of minority group members within our sample is too small to allow us to prepare a generalizable profile of minority group members of BFW. The total number of low income members within our sample is, however, large enough. Thus, a profile of low income members within our sample is likely to reflect the characteristics of the total low income membership of BFW.

Our analysis of low income members indicates that, except for their low incomes, they are strikingly similar to the remainder of BFW members. Like the BFW membership as a whole, they are almost all white. Levels of educational attainments, liberalism-conservatism and frequencies of writing elected officials about hunger issues (our measure of activism) are almost identical between the two groups. Low income members are rather similar to the BFW membership as a whole in gender and in local group memberships, though not almost identical, as low income members are slightly more likely to be males and slightly less likely to be local group members.

C. Changes in the Characteristics of BFW Members Over Time

BFW asked us to analyze the characteristics of BFW members who joined at different times in order to see if BFW is attracting and retaining different types of people over time. BFW also specified the set of characteristics that were to be the focus of the analysis.

In principle the analysis of changes over time cannot be performed adequately with survey data that is gathered at a single point in time. It is possible to use such data to analyze the characteristics of members who have joined in each of the years since BFW's founding. If differences are found, however, it is not possible to say what the cause of the changes might be. If, for example, it were found that recent members were more conservative than earlier members, there would be two possible causes of this difference: (1) being a member of BFW might cause people to become more liberal, thus making older members more liberal than more recent members; or (2) when BFW was formed, very liberal people might have joined immediately and more conservative

people in later years. The only adequate way to disentangle these possible causes is to study people both when they join and at a later point to see if being a member of BFW changes members' attitudes.²

In the case of this survey, however, this objection is less pertinent as the data show only slight differences between earlier and more recent members. Earlier members are similar to more recent members in income and gender. Recent members tend to be less well educated and older than earlier members but these differences are slight. Earlier members tend also to be more liberal than recent members, more likely to be activists in BFW and more likely to be members of local groups, but again these differences are slight.

These data are consistent either with the hypothesis that the same types of people have joined BFW over time and that being a member of BFW has a slight effect upon their attitudes and activism, or with the hypothesis that the initial joiners of BFW were slightly more liberal and activist than later joiners. Either hypothesis would be consistent with studies of other social movement organizations.

There is a third possibility that seems to us remote but that is consistent with our data. It is possible that the early members of BFW were considerably more conservative than later members and that being members of BFW has made them considerably more liberal and activist. If so, then BFW would have had a major effect on its members' attitudes and activism. Longitudinal research would be necessary to test the effects over time of membership in BFW on changes in members' beliefs, attitudes, and activism.

²It is possible in a survey done at a single time to ask people if their attitudes have changed. However, people's memories have been shown to be quite unreliable on issues of this sort.

D. Why People Do Not Renew Their Memberships

Finally, we were asked by BFW to investigate why people do not renew their memberships. We investigated this topic in two ways: first by comparing current members with former members; and second, by comparing the different reasons people gave for not renewing their membership.

As our earlier summary of the responses of the former members indicates, in most respects the former members' responses are very similar to those of current members. While it is possible that this similarity is, in part, due to former members who were more hostile to BFW not returning their questionnaires, it is clear that there is at least a substantial segment of former members who are quite similar to current members.

While this finding may seem surprising, it is in accord with an emerging body of sociological theory. This theory, modeled on Darwin's theory of evolution, views organizations as competing for resources with similar organizations within a particular environmental niche. Because the organizations are similar, small differences between them can markedly affect their success in acquiring resources. For social movement organizations crucial resources are members and member commitment-activism. When applied to social movement organizations this theory suggests that there are a limited set of Americans among whom BFW can hope to recruit members (BFW's environmental niche) and that within this niche BFW is competing with other liberal-activist organizations for membership and commitment. The theory further suggests that, since both current members and former members are likely to be drawn from the same limited set of Americans, there should be considerable similarities between them. Our data are consistent with this prediction.

Finally, the theory suggests that relatively minor differences between organizations could have a marked effect on which organizations people join and remain affiliated with. If this were the case, then analyses of the reasons why people did not renew their memberships would not be expected to yield striking results as relatively minor and idiosyncratic factors, e.g., one organization having more convenient meeting times than another, could have a sizeable effect on decisions to join or renew.

Our analysis of the reasons members and former members gave for deciding not to renew are consistent with this expectation. Following BFW's suggestions, we divided those who had at some point not renewed their membership (question 11 on the members' questionnaire and question 8 on the former members' questionnaire) into four categories: those who answered very important to not having enough money to pay the fee; those who answered very important to not having enough time to devote to BFW activities; those who answered very important to just not getting around to renewing their memberships; and those who did not answer very important to any of these three reasons. The responses of these members to a range of other questions were then compared in order to see if there were consistent differences between people who did not renew for different reasons.

The reasons listed above for not renewing one's membership seem clear and conceptually distinct, but in fact they probably are not. It is likely that, for most respondents, each of these reasons reflect giving BFW a lower priority than other activities in which they engage. While it is likely that some BFW members cannot afford the renewal fee, the data on the incomes of members and former members suggest that most could afford the fee if they gave membership a high priority. Similarly, while some members are undoubtedly strapped for time because of

imperative personal and occupational commitments, it is likely that most members have a number of activities that are not imperative.

If the above is correct and if we are correct in believing that in many cases decisions about which organizations to join are made on the basis of relatively minor differences, then we would expect to see few differences between people who did not renew their memberships for different reasons. In fact this is the case. We compared the responses of members and former members giving different reasons for not renewing their memberships to most of the questions discussed in the "Characteristics of Activists" section of this report. We found few sizeable differences and those that we did find did not form a coherent pattern, suggesting that they are the result of chance variations in the data.

As a final piece of the puzzle, we report below the percent of members and former members answering "very important" to each of the reasons for not renewing one's membership.

Table 3

Reasons for Allowing Membership to End
(% saying the reason was "very important")

	<u>Current Members</u>	<u>Former Members</u>
A. Not enough money to pay membership fee.	31	17
B. Not enough time to devote to BFW.	31	40
C. Just didn't get around to renewing membership.	33	20
D. No longer interested in hunger problem.	1	2
E. Felt that BFW was too radical.	1	2
F. Felt that BFW was too conservative.	1	0
G. Didn't like BFW members/organizers I met.	0	0
H. Wanted to be more active in other organizations.	10	16
I. Did not believe BFW was doing important work.	0	5
J. Moved from the area where I was a member.	15	10

Note: the percentages within each column add up to more than 100% because respondents could give a response of "very important" to more than one reason.

Each of the responses that indicate an explicit rejection of BFW policies or personnel (D, E, F, G, I) receives a relatively small percentage. This evidence, combined with the evidence on the similarity of members and former members and the absence of sizeable and consistent differences between people giving different reasons for not renewing their membership, suggests that for many non-renewers, non-renewal does not constitute as explicit rejection of BFW. Indeed, 53 percent of former members still feel a sense of pride in BFW. Rather than constituting explicit rejection, non-renewal seems to indicate that members are faced with a choice of a number of organizations and activities, each of which are attractive and that the decision to support particular activities or organizations is often made on the basis of relatively minor differences between them.

VII. Possible Areas for Future Research

Our conversations with BFW staff members have identified several potential areas of research which could benefit the work of BFW. These are projects which are also of theoretical and practical interest to the Maine Group as sociologists and social workers. The purpose, format and cost of several possibilities are described briefly below. We would welcome the opportunity to explore further these or other projects which would be useful to BFW.

A. Longitudinal Panel Study of Newly Recruited Members

Many questions raised by BFW staff in relation to our preliminary report involve chicken/egg issues of causation and cannot be answered very well by a cross-sectional (one point in time) study. Issues of causality in fostering member retention, activism, and attitude change are best addressed by a study which surveys the same respondents at several points in time. Such a study would involve

developing a series of questionnaires to be mailed to new members upon their joining BFW and to as many as possible of the same persons after one year and two or three years of membership. A three-stage survey designed to generate an initial 1,000 responses would cost \$14-15,000.

B. Survey of Local Groups

Given the positive association between local group membership and activism identified in our survey of current and former members, and the many comments about local groups by respondents to that survey, it seems important to understand systematically what is happening within the local groups. This information could be secured with a questionnaire developed for mailing to local group contacts. A one-time, cross-sectional survey of 500 local group contact persons could be carried out for about \$3,500. Local group development and change could be studied through a two or three stage survey at roughly two or three times that cost.

C. Survey of Covenant Churches

Substantial resources of BFW have been invested in the development of covenant churches. These churches at a minimum contribute \$250 per year to BFW. The covenant churches are believed to vary extensively in level of activism and in generation of individual memberships. A questionnaire could be developed and mailed to covenant church contact persons to identify more systematically what contributions these churches make to the struggle against hunger. Such information would be useful when choices are being made about how to allocate scarce BFW resources. A one-time survey of 500 covenant churches could be carried out for about \$3,500. Covenant church development and change could be investigated through a two or three stage survey at roughly two or three times that cost.

D. Evaluation of the St. Louis Canvassing Project

The canvassing project in St. Louis provides an opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of this method of increasing membership. Data collected by a mailed questionnaire to canvass recruits could be compared with data already available from the survey of current members and the longitudinal survey if it were undertaken. A cross-sectional survey of 500 St. Louis recruits could be carried out for about \$4,000. The project would include interviews with St. Louis staff persons and canvassers. A two or three point longitudinal study would produce additional useful information at two or three times the cost.

E. Survey of BFW members of Color and Low Income: Broadening The Movement

If members who are people of color or of low income can be identified, and since numbers are relatively small at present, a survey of all such members could be conducted which would permit comparison with key characteristics of the general membership, assess commitment to and concern about the work of BFW, and elicit suggestions for further broadening of the movement. Re-contact over a period of time would reveal progress being made. Cost would depend upon the number of respondents.

The costs projected for each of the five studies briefly outlined above are rough estimates which would need to be refined based on exact sample sizes, questionnaire length, postal rates, etc. They assume the contribution of the time of the investigators (although if National Science Foundation funding were secured, we would probably request money with which to purchase our release from other university responsibilities), the availability of work-study labor, and current costs of travel between Bangor, Maine and Washington, D.C. in order to

consult with BFW staff about questionnaire development and for reporting findings. If a combination of surveys were undertaken, it might be possible to reduce the number of trips and to achieve other modest economies of scale. We believe that especially the longitudinal research projects would be of interest to the National Science Foundation. The interest in various aspects of the research by foundations with which BFW has relationships would need to be investigated also.