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**Sign me up!**

**A model and field experiment on  
volunteering**

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# Our goal

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- Design a failsafe reward-based approach that creates *positive interest* in volunteering.

# Why “failsafe”?

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- Volunteering frequency is substantially lower than exercise.
  - **80%** of adults volunteered less than 15 hrs in 2012
- When regular volunteering is rewarded, people may fail to comply.

# Why “failsafe”?

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- People may infer preferences (positive or negative) from previous action (Festinger and Carlsmith, 1959; Benabou and Tirole, 2011)
- Failure to comply with a reward may decrease intrinsic interest in the *rewarded* task.

## Consistency theory



# Behavioral Approach to Attitude Change

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- Consistency theory is also the foundation of our approach.



# Two-stage Mechanism

(e.g. Charness & Gneezy, 2009)

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## Stage 1

Target task (once)  
(C&G: exercising)



## Stage 2

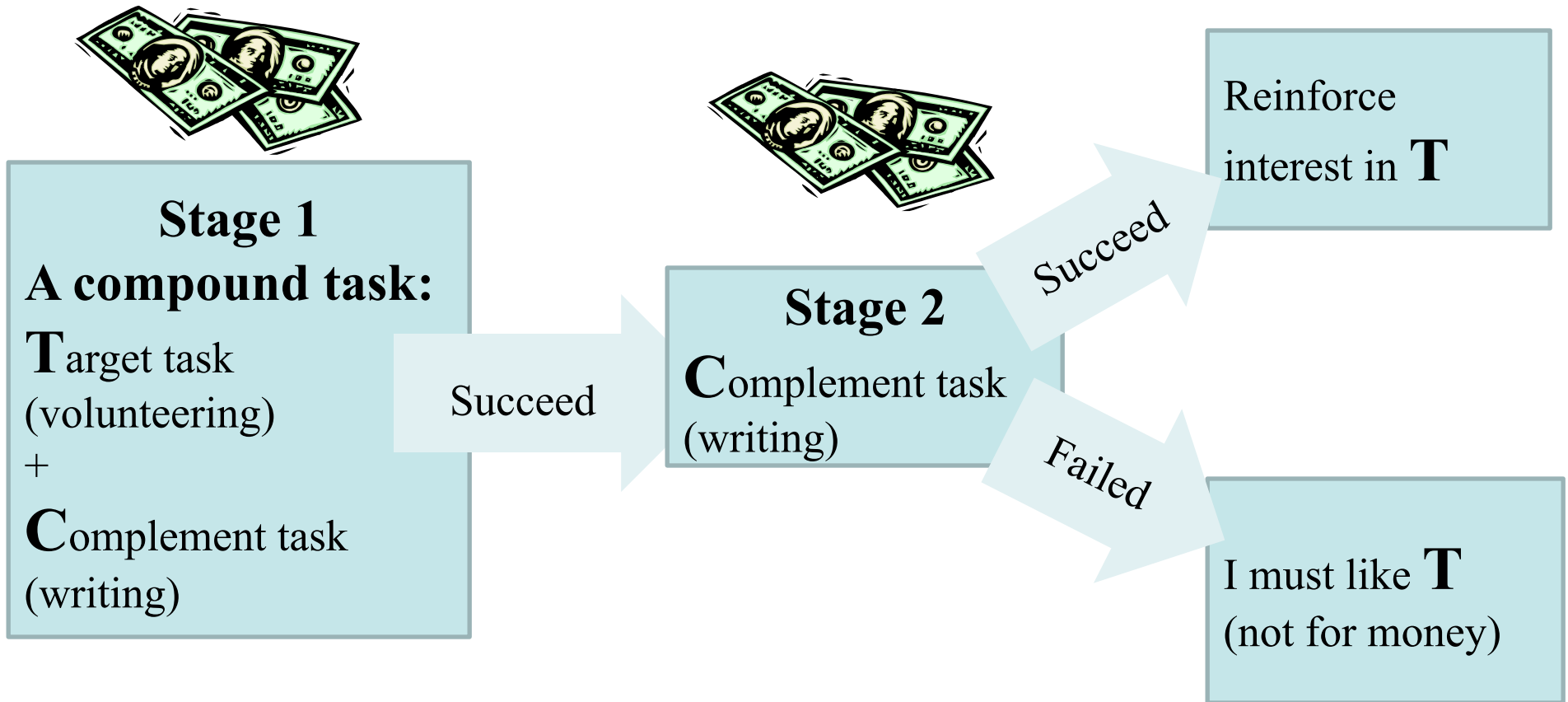
Target task (repeated)

(C&G: high compliance with exercising)



- Mechanisms that incentivize **only** the target activity may be ineffective in environments with low compliance (we test this)
- Our approach: the target activity is **not** rewarded in the second stage. This feature makes it “*failsafe*”

# Proposed Compound Task Approach



**Failsafe mechanism:** Regardless of compliance in the Stage 2 complement task, people adopt a positive attitude toward **T**

# Signup rates measure intrinsic interest

The screenshot shows the VolunteerMatch website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the VolunteerMatch logo (five hands in purple, orange, blue, green, and red) and the text "VolunteerMatch". To the right of the logo are links for "sign in", "register", "Log In" (with a Facebook icon), and "help". Below the logo are two main navigation buttons: "find OPPORTUNITIES" and "recruit VOLUNTEERS". Further right are links for "CORPORATIONS", "LEARNING CENTER", and "BLOGS".

A yellow horizontal bar contains the text "Opportunities Organizations Learn About Volunteering". Below this bar, the "Newsletter" section is visible. It features a headline "Should you put volunteering on your resume?" and a featured article titled "Volunteers: Making a Difference" with a photo of Ellie Roozdar and several links including "Should You Put Volunteering on Your Resume?".

On the right side of the page, there is a sidebar with a list of links: "Tips & Tricks", "FAQ", and "Research". Below these links is a date selector set to "March, 2013" with a "Go" button. A "Previous | March, 2013 | Next" navigation is also present.

The "Sign Up for Our Newsletter" section is circled in red. It contains the following text: "If you are interested in receiving the latest news about volunteering, as well as new trends and upcoming events in the nonprofit world, become a member of VolunteerMatch. All accounts include complimentary subscriptions to our newsletters and a suite of tools to make getting involved in your local community easier than ever." Below this text is a "Register" link.



# Volunteering

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# Experiment

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- Baseline: no reward
- Four reward mechanisms
  - Stage 1 only (Volunteering + Writing): **VW1**
  - Three two-stage mechanisms that require repeated Stage 2 activities:
    - Writing only (**W**)
    - Volunteering only (**V**)
    - Volunteering + Writing (**VW**)

# VW1 Treatment

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- Stage 1 one time compound task:  
\$25 for volunteering & email two messages about any benefit of volunteering in one week.

# **W, V and VW treatments**

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Following the \$25 week, participants were rewarded by \$50 to

**W:** write (email) three times a week in each of the following four weeks. (**Failsafe mechanism**)

**V:** volunteer four times in four weeks.

**VW:** volunteer four times (in total) and write two messages per week in four weeks.

# Hypotheses

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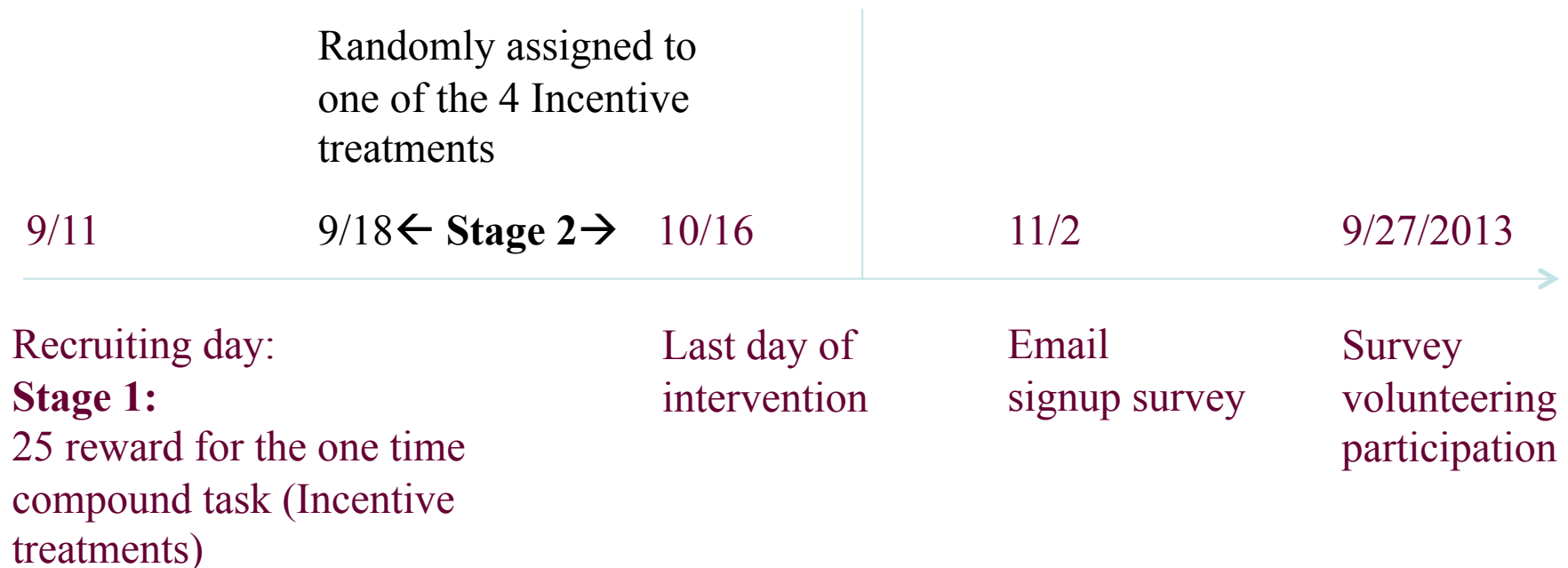
People who comply with Stage 1,

- **V** and **VW**.
  - Compliance in Stage 2 (\$50 activities) leads to positive effects on signup rates (and volunteering activities). (Charness and Gneezy, 2009).
  - Non-compliance in Stage 2 results in detrimental effects on signup rates (and volunteering activities).
- **W** promotes positive attitudes towards signup rates (and volunteering activities) regardless of Stage 2 compliance.

# One Year Time Line

*(9/11/2012-9/27/2013)*

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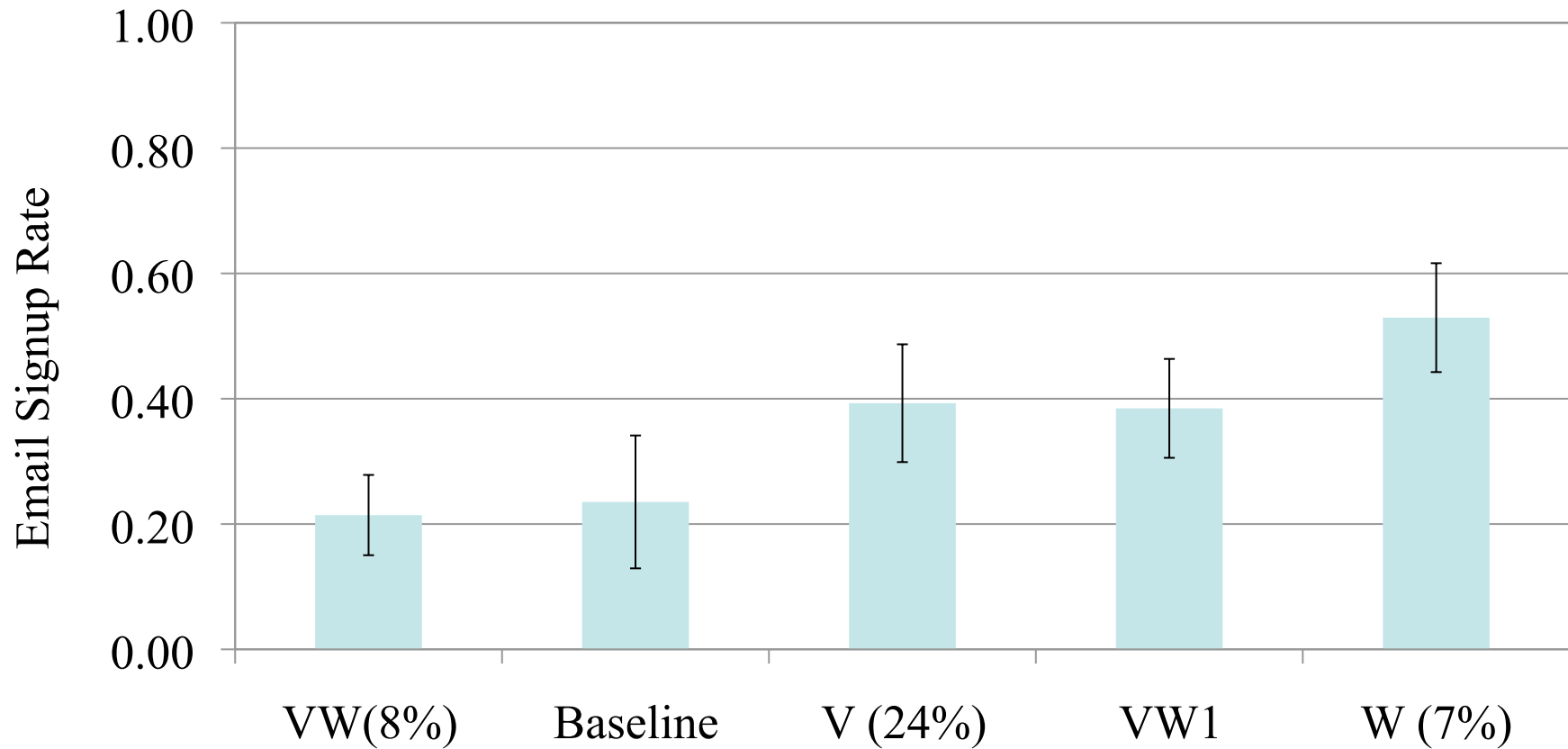
# Results

# Compliance rate during intervention

	# of subjects	Stage 1 \$25 task	Stage 2 \$50 task
Baseline	31	1	
VW1	58	26	
\$25+\$50			
V	58	27	14 (24%)
<b>VW</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>6 (8%)</b>
<b>W</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>4 (7%)</b>

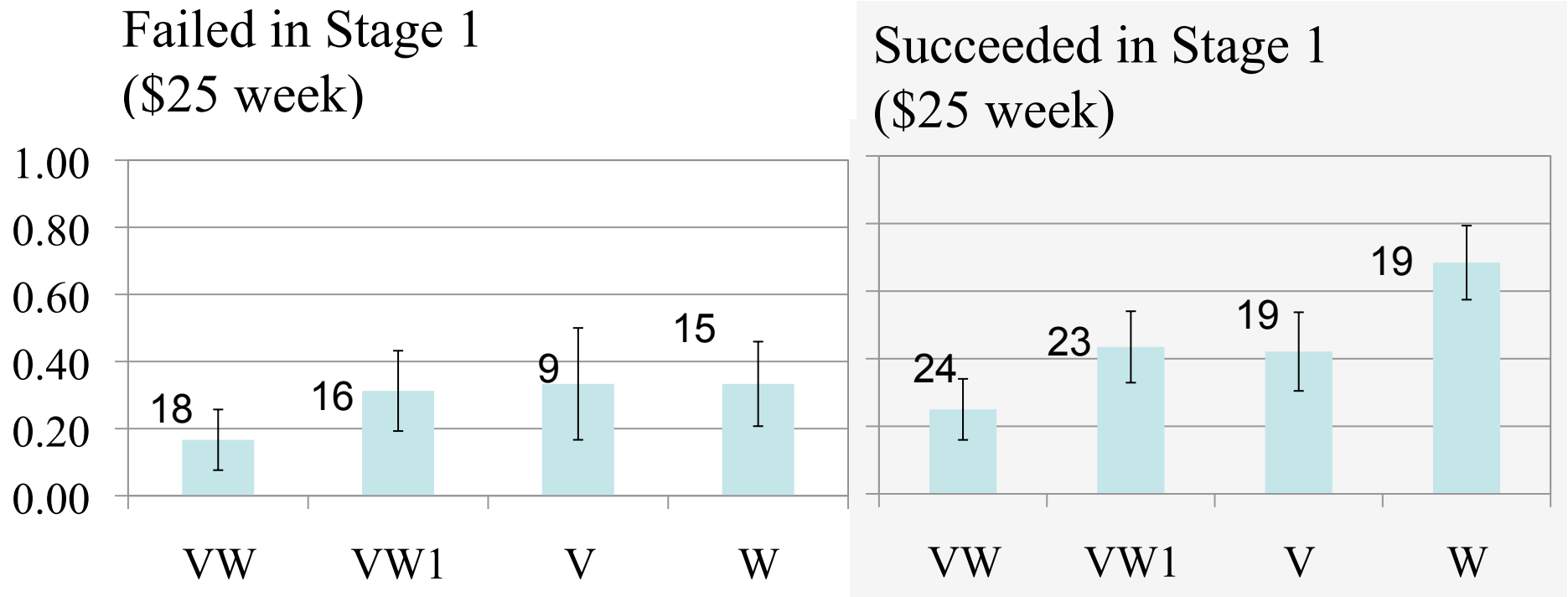


# Overall Sign Up Rate by Treatment



Number in the parenthesis is the compliance rate in Stage 2.

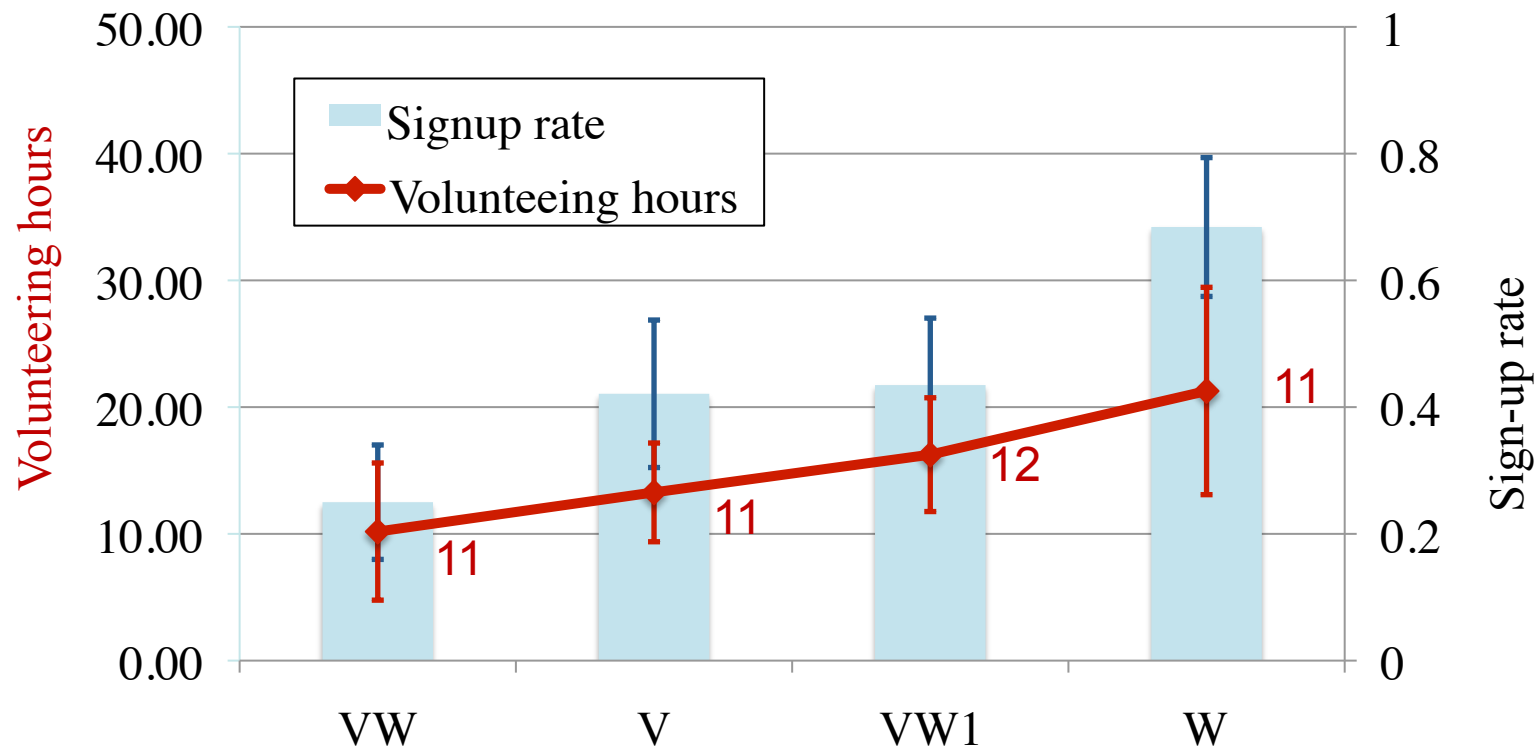
# Sign Up Rate by Treatment



Note: The number on each bar is the # of obs.

# Volunteering and Sign-Up Rates by Treatment

After **Succeeded** in Stage 1 (\$25 week)



Note: The number on each bar is the # of obs for volunteer hours.  
Excludes reports of more than 100 volunteering hours (2-3 in each treatment)

**Sign-Up rates significantly predict pattern of actual volunteering activity (p<0.05).**

# Conclusion

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- Using incentives to promote volunteering can be difficult when compliance rates are low.
- We provide evidence that a two-stage incentivized compound task mechanism can promote
  - a positive attitude toward volunteering
  - actual volunteering activitieseven when compliance with rewarded activities is low.

# Thanks to Many Who Helped

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- Carnegie Library Staff
  - Karen Meharra
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Thank You!