

Volunteering in America Research Highlights

July 2009



The Corporation for National and Community Service hosts the most comprehensive collection of information on volunteering in the U.S. at its Web site: www.VolunteeringInAmerica.gov. The site allows civic leaders, nonprofit organizations, and interested individuals to retrieve a wide range of information regarding trends and demographics in volunteering in their regions, states, and almost 200 cities. This document highlights some of the key findings from the data. For the purposes of this report, volunteers are persons age 16 and older who serve through or with an organization without pay at any point during a 12 month-period between September of one year and September of the following year.

Key Findings

- In 2008, 61.8 million Americans or 26.4 percent of the adult population contributed 8 billion hours of volunteer service worth \$162 billion, using Independent Sector's 2008 estimate of the dollar value of a volunteer hour (\$20.25).
- Despite the challenges of a tough economic situation, the volunteering rate held steady between 2007 and 2008, while the number of volunteers slightly increased by about one million.
- Over 441,000 more young adults (age 16-24) volunteered in 2008 than 2007, representing an increase from about 7.8 million to more than 8.2 million.
- Neighborhood engagement levels have risen sharply since 2007, with a 31 percent increase in the number of people who worked with their neighbors to fix a community problem and a 17 percent increase in the number of people who attended community meetings.
- As the economy slows and nonprofit organizations struggle to provide services on smaller budgets, volunteers become even more vital to the health of our nation's communities. Between September 2008 and March 2009, more than a third (37%) of nonprofit organizations report increasing the number of volunteers they use, and almost half (48%) foresee increasing their usage of volunteers in the coming year.¹ Almost no nonprofit organizations are showing a decrease in their volunteer usage.
- Volunteers were much more likely than non-volunteers to donate to a charitable cause in 2008, with 78.2 percent contributing \$25 or more compared to 38.5 percent of non-volunteers.



¹ These results are from the most recent Sounding from the Listening Post Project, a national survey of nonprofit organizations done in partnership with the Corporation for National and Community Service. For a full report from this Sounding, see http://www.ccss.jhu.edu/pdfs/LP_Communicques/LP_Communique_14.pdf.

More New Research Findings

Volunteer Rates

While charitable giving declined in current dollars between 2007 and 2008 for the first time in over 20 years², in contrast the volunteer rate in the United States increased from 26.2 percent to 26.4 percent. That change represents an addition of almost one million volunteers serving in the country. Previous research indicates that a concurrent decrease in volunteering rates could occur during a time of economic recession, especially when there are decreases in home ownership and increases in unemployment rates. The fact that volunteer rates held relatively steady during such a time is a positive sign for service moving forward. Nonprofit organizations striving to meet the needs of families across the country are also hard-pressed by the economic situation, and are finding some relief by using more volunteers to achieve their goals. Many report that they have not only increased their reliance on volunteers of late, but also project that they will continue to increase their reliance on volunteers over the coming year.

Young Adult Volunteering

About 8.24 million young people ages 16-24 volunteered in 2008, over 441,000 more than in 2007. This increase in young adult volunteers makes up almost half of the overall increase in the number of volunteers nationally. The volunteer rate for this group increased significantly from 20.8 percent in 2007 to 21.9 percent in 2008. The interest among young people in volunteering coincides with their reported increase in the belief that it is essential or very important to help other people in need. The Higher Education Research Institute studies the attitudes of first-year college students each year and reported that in 2008, 69.7 percent of students held this belief in 2008—the highest rate since 1970.³

Neighborhood Engagement

In 2008, 8.5 percent of Americans reported that they worked with their neighbors to fix a community problem. In 2007, only 6.5 percent had reported the same. This two-percentage-point difference represents an increase of over 4.6 million people, from a little more than 15 million in 2007 to almost 20 million in 2008. Men were more likely to serve their community in this capacity, with 8.8 percent working with their neighbors compared to 8.1 percent of women doing the same, despite the fact that women were more likely to volunteer through or for an organization than men.

Additionally, 2008 saw an increase in Americans attending community meetings from 8.3 percent in 2007 to 9.6 percent in 2008. Men and women were about equally likely to attend community meetings.

Similarly, voter turnout rates were higher in 2008 than in recent presidential election years. Since the presidential election in 2000, voting rates among adults ages 18 and over have increased by over 7.2 percentage points, from 49.9 percent in 2000, and 55.1 percent in 2004, to 57.1 percent in 2008.

² GivingUSA Foundation press release, "U.S. charitable giving estimated to be \$307.65 billion in 2008," June 10, 2009. Available at http://www.givingusa.org/press_releases/gusa/GivingReaches300billion.pdf.

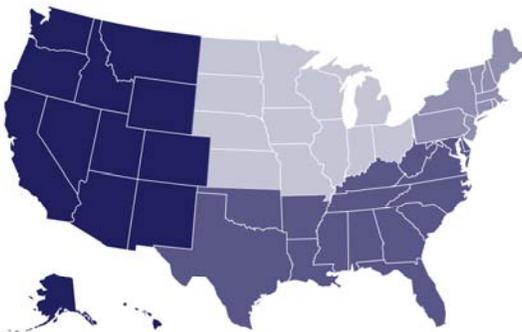
³ This information from "The American Freshman: National Norms for Fall 2008," written by J.H. Pryor, S. Hurtado, L. DeAngelo, J. Sharkness, L.C. Romero, W.S. Korn, S. Tran, and published by the Higher Education Research Institute, released in January of 2009.

What Stops People from Volunteering?

In 2008, the Corporation for National and Community Service investigated the attitudes of volunteers, non-volunteers, and former volunteers to get a better sense of why people do or do not volunteer. Through targeted discussions in focus groups across the country, non-volunteers revealed the perceptions that have kept them from serving, and the things that might persuade them to serve:

- Non-volunteers see themselves as essentially different from volunteers. Non-volunteers tended to think of a volunteer as someone who was retired, without children in the home, and had an excess of leisure time. While these characteristics may be true for some volunteers, research shows that volunteers span a range of demographics including age, race, marital status, employment, and parenthood.
- Many non-volunteers fear the time commitment of service, expressing concerns that signing up for a volunteer activity would require that they continue indefinitely, even possibly for a lifetime.
- Non-volunteers say that they are more likely to serve if a trusted friend asks them to serve. Some people are also more likely to serve if they are able to use a skill they already possess, and others are interested in learning something new. Interviewing potential volunteers to determine their interests in this regard can help ensure they get the experience they are looking for.

Regional Volunteering Trends

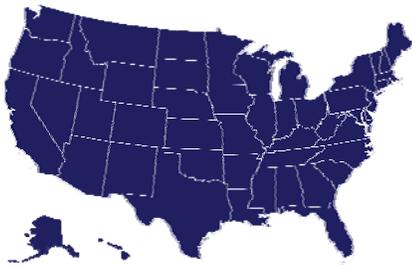


2008 Volunteer Rates by U.S. Region

| | |
|-----------|-------|
| Midwest | 30.2% |
| West | 28.2% |
| South | 24.2% |
| Northeast | 23.7% |

- **Highest volunteer rate:** Since 1989, the **Midwest** region of the United States has had the highest volunteer rate among U.S. regions for all adults, with a rate of 23.9 percent in 1989, and 30.2 in 2008. This is a shift from 1974 when the West had the highest volunteer rate.
- **Largest number of volunteers:** Since 1974, the number of volunteers in the **South** has almost doubled from 10.5 to 20.7 million, giving the South the largest number of volunteers of all the regions. Just between 2006 and 2008, the South has gained almost 300,000 volunteers. The Midwest comes in at a distant second in volunteer numbers at about 15.6 million.
- **Largest number of volunteer hours served per resident:** The **West** region saw the largest number of hours served per adult at 38.8 hours per capita in 2008. Over the period of 2006-2008, the West also had the largest rate of intensive volunteers—those who serve 100 or more hours in a year—with 37 percent serving in this capacity.
- **Highest proportion of volunteers fundraising:** Volunteers in the **Northeast** region are the most likely to serve by fundraising or selling items to raise money than in any other region. Almost 3 out of ten (29.7%) volunteers in the region participate in fundraising as one of their top four activities when they serve.

State Volunteering Trends



Top Ten States for Volunteer Rate⁴

| | | | | | |
|---|-----------|-------|----|--------------|-------|
| 1 | Utah | 43.5% | 6 | Montana | 36.6% |
| 2 | Nebraska | 38.9% | 7 | South Dakota | 36.4% |
| 3 | Minnesota | 38.4% | 8 | Kansas | 36.2% |
| 4 | Alaska | 38.0% | 9 | Vermont | 35.6% |
| 5 | Iowa | 37.1% | 10 | North Dakota | 35.0% |

- Highest volunteer rate:** *Utah* had the highest overall volunteer rate between 2006 and 2008, at 43.5 percent. In fact, in every individual year since 2002, the state has had the highest volunteer rate in the US. Before 2002, state volunteering rates were last measured in 1989, at which point Utah ranked 2nd with a rate of 37.7 percent after North Dakota with a rate of 39.4 percent.
- Largest number of volunteers:** *California* had the largest number of volunteers serving in their state, with about 7.1 million in 2008—almost 12 percent of all the volunteers in America. The state has consistently held the largest number of volunteers for every year complete data is available, starting with about 3.9 million people volunteering in 1989. California has been consistently followed by Texas in volunteer numbers. In 1989, about 2.6 million adults volunteered in Texas, and by 2008 that number grew to about 4.1 million.
- Largest number of volunteer hours served per resident:** In addition to having the highest volunteer rate, *Utah* residents also served the largest number of volunteer hours per resident at 80.1 hours between 2006 and 2008. Additionally, over half (52.7%) of the state’s volunteers served intensively between 2006 and 2008, contributing 100 hours or more in a year, the largest proportion of any state in the U.S. Idaho was second in intensive volunteering over the same time period, with 43.8 percent of their volunteers serving 100 hours or more.
- Volunteer rate changes:** While most states saw their volunteer rate stay about even from 2007 to 2008, some states experienced growth. *Nevada* experienced the largest increase in their year-to-year volunteer rate at 3.6 percentage points, from 17.9% in 2007 to 21.4% in 2008. The rest of the top five states to experience growth in their volunteer rates include Utah, Arizona, New Jersey, and Nebraska, all with an increase of three percentage points or higher.
- Highest level of neighborhood engagement:** *Alaska* had not only the highest percentage of residents attending community meetings in 2008 at 20.8 percent, but also had the second highest percentage of residents working with their neighbors to solve community problems at 17.9 percent, after Utah with 18.4 percent.

⁴ State volunteer rates in the table are computed using three years’ worth of volunteer data (2006, 2007 and 2008), to increase statistical reliability.

Large City Volunteer Trends⁵



Top Ten Large Cities for Volunteer Rate

| | | | | | |
|---|-------------------------|-------|---|-------------------|-------|
| 1 | Minneapolis-St Paul, MN | 38.4% | 6 | Columbus, OH | 32.8% |
| 2 | Portland, OR | 36.7% | 7 | Oklahoma City, OK | 32.5% |
| 3 | Salt Lake City, UT | 36.5% | 8 | Hartford, CT | 32.0% |
| 4 | Seattle, WA | 34.3% | 9 | Denver, CO | 30.9% |
| 5 | Kansas City, MO | 33.4% | 9 | Washington, DC | 30.9% |

- Highest volunteer rate:** *Minneapolis-St. Paul* had the highest overall volunteer rate of the 51 largest metropolitan areas in the country⁶ between 2006 and 2008 at 38.4 percent. Minneapolis-St. Paul was also ranked 1st for their volunteer rate between 2005 and 2007. The median volunteer rate for large cities during 2006 to 2008 was 27.3 percent.
- Largest volunteer rate increases:** The top large cities with the greatest increases in their volunteering rates between 2004 and 2008 are *Virginia Beach, VA*; Las Vegas, NV; San Jose, CA; and Hartford, CT. These increases ranged from 5 percentage points in Hartford to 12.6 percentage points in Virginia Beach.
- Largest number of volunteers:** *New York City* had the largest average number of volunteers per year between 2006 and 2008 at almost 2.4 million. Atlanta saw the largest increase in their volunteer numbers in recent years, with over 249,000 more volunteers in 2008 than in 2004.
- Largest number of volunteer hours served per resident:** Residents of *Salt Lake City* served an average of 55.8 hours per year per person between 2006 and 2008, the highest number of hours in the country. Virginia Beach, VA had the highest rate of intensive volunteering among the large cities with 45.4 percent of residents serving 100 or more hours in a year between 2006 and 2008.
- Highest level of neighborhood engagement:** *Seattle* residents were the most likely to attend public meetings between 2006 and 2008 at 14.2 percent. During the same time period, they also had the third highest rate of working with their neighbors to fix community problems at 11.6 percent after Baltimore at 14.5 percent and Salt Lake City at 12.9 percent.
- Community factors impacting volunteer rates:** While there is no factor that can singularly explain changes in a given area's volunteer rate, there are a number of community characteristics that can work together to have an impact. Cities with higher homeownership rates, higher education levels, shorter commuting times, higher numbers of community organizations and associations and lower levels of poverty and unemployment tend to have higher volunteer rates. Additionally, communities in which volunteers tend to keep serving from one year to the next often have higher volunteer rates.

⁵ All data for cities are collected from Metropolitan Statistical Areas, as designated by the Federal Office of Management and Budget.

⁶ Unless otherwise stated, statistics for large cities are computed using three years' worth of volunteer data (2006, 2007 and 2008) collected from fifty-one of the largest metropolitan areas in the U.S.

Mid-sized City Volunteer Trends⁷



Top Ten Mid-sized Cities for Volunteer Rate

| | | | | | |
|---|----------------------|-------|----|---------------------------|-------|
| 1 | Provo-Orem, UT | 62.9% | 6 | Waterloo-Cedar Falls, IA | 39.3% |
| 2 | Iowa City, IA | 49.2% | 7 | Fort Collins-Loveland, CO | 38.3% |
| 3 | Ogden-Clearfield, UT | 43.6% | 7 | Greenville, SC | 38.3% |
| 4 | Madison, WI | 41.5% | 9 | Des Moines, IA | 38.2% |
| 5 | Topeka, KS | 40.7% | 10 | Grand Rapids-Wyoming, MI | 37.8% |

- Highest volunteer rate:** Mid-sized city volunteer rates tend to be a little bit higher than the volunteer rates for large cities. The highest volunteer rate of the mid-sized cities is 62.9 percent, found in **Provo, UT**, and the lowest at 16.8 percent is in El Paso, TX. The median volunteer rate for mid-size cities is 28.6 percent.
- Largest number of volunteers:** **Grand Rapids, MI** had the most volunteers between 2006 and 2008 of the 75 mid-sized metropolitan areas with almost 272,000. Bridgeport, CT had the second largest number of volunteers with just over 235,000.

Updated Volunteering in America Web Site

The Corporation has updated its *Volunteering in America* Web site located at VolunteeringInAmerica.gov to more easily share information on volunteer activities and demographics across the nation. The site showcases research and rankings of the 50 states and the District of Columbia and almost 200 metropolitan areas in the U.S. The Web site gives individuals and organizations the ability to access and generate unique reports with the most relative data available for their region, state, or city. Additional volunteer research and new resources including effective practices, tip sheets, webinars and more for organizations and prospective volunteers will also be hosted on the site.

Methodological Note

The data used in this report were collected through supplements to the September Current Population Survey (CPS) in 1974, 1989, and 2002-2008. Today the CPS is a monthly survey of about 60,000 households (approximately 100,000 adults), conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau for the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The purpose of the September supplement is to obtain information on the incidence of volunteering, the characteristics of volunteers, and civic life indicators in the United States. The city volunteer statistics reported here are calculated using CPS data collected from Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs). The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) publishes a comprehensive definition of MSA boundaries every 10 years to reflect population changes documented by the decennial Census.

⁷ Unless otherwise stated, statistics for mid-sized cities are computed using four years' worth of volunteer data (2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008) collected from 74 medium-sized metropolitan areas in the USA.