

Volunteering in America

HIGHLIGHTS

Volunteering Yesterday and Today

Introduces the concept and practice of volunteering in America and beyond

The Volunteer Agenda

Describes the impact and outcomes of volunteering

Motivations for Volunteering

Discusses activities and reasons people volunteer

Older Adult Volunteering

Describes how and why older adults volunteer

International Volunteering

Provides a glimpse at international volunteer opportunities

A "Two For" Contribution

Translates volunteer hours into dollars

Corporate Social Responsibility and Volunteerism

Discusses why corporations initiate social and volunteer activities, and identifies several corporate volunteer programs

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Please visit the numerous fact sheets and exercises in addition to the planning, implementation, and evaluation sections of the TurnKey Kit.

YESTERDAY AND TODAY

Volunteering has been part of American life since colonial times. As early as the 1600s, colonists formed citizen fire brigades to combat fires in Boston and Philadelphia.

Alexis de Tocqueville, in his 1835 study of American society and politics, viewed volunteering as a form of civic engagement; recognized and applauded American voluntary action on behalf of the common good; documented that Americans make real sacrifices for the public welfare; and noted instances in which citizens hardly ever failed to lend support to one another. Because organized volunteering was run on private donations, his observations often are used to support his belief that America is a uniquely philanthropic country.

A February 2016 report (most recent available) by the Bureau of Labor Statistics found that about 62.6 million people volunteered nearly 7.7 billion hours to or for an organization at least once between September 2014 and September 2015. At the same time, more than 50% of Americans also engaged in "informal volunteering" in their communities and helping neighbors with tasks such as watching each other's children, helping with shopping, or house sitting.

Although we generally consider volunteering an American phenomenon, a 2011 study by the Johns Hopkins Center for Civil Society estimated that approximately 140 million people in 37 countries engaged in volunteer work in a typical year. If those 140 million volunteers comprised the population of a country, it would be the 9th largest country in the world with a contribution of \$400 billion to the global economy annually.

THE VOLUNTEER AGENDA

According to the Independent Sector, volunteering refers to rendering service by choice or free will for the benefit of the community by an individual, group, or institution without necessarily expecting monetary gain or appreciation for being a volunteer. The literature tells us that the volunteer sector plays a key role in social life. For example, volunteer activities bring together people who might not otherwise have contact with one another. It follows that society's social fabric will be strengthened by volunteer efforts that bridge socioeconomic divides. Volunteering also can accomplish other social agendas: enhance social connections between different sectors; build bridges for governments, enterprises, and employees; build more cohesive, stronger communities; increase social networks between communities and neighborhoods; encourage more active civic engagement; encourage people to work in the public sector; and help raise educational performance of youth. Volunteering also can have positive effects on volunteers by increasing their self-esteem, enhancing skills and capacities, expanding career paths, and resulting in improved physical and mental health.

ACTIVITIES AND MOTIVATIONS FOR VOLUNTEERING

A 2013 report by the Corporation for National and Community service identified several key activities for which people volunteer: fundraising or selling items to raise money (26%); collecting, preparing, serving, or distributing food (24%); engaging in general labor or transportation (20%); and tutoring or teaching (18%). In addition, volunteers also serve on boards, donate blood, participate in political campaigns, help out in schools, serve as docents, help people with legal problems or with tax preparation, read to little kids, teach bible studies, act as spokespersons for nonprofit organizations, help with home repairs, help children with learning disabilities, and recruit others as volunteers. Their payment includes opportunities to socialize and meet people, feeling that they have made a difference, new or additional business opportunities, and/or future employment.

Volunteering is an important resource and contributor of social capital. Volunteer labor produces rewards for organizations, the community, and the volunteer. There often is a relationship between volunteering and civic participation. For example, individuals who voluntarily help out at a sporting event often are the same people who attend community meetings with government officials to talk about community problems. Individuals who volunteer at the local school often are the people who vote in school board elections and attend school related meetings. And finally, those who volunteer at a young age are more likely to sustain their participation in later life. In fact, a study in the *American Educational Research Journal* identified community service during high school as a strong predictor of voting and volunteering in adulthood.

5 Outcomes of Volunteering

- enhancement of social capital
- enhancement of community life
- enhancement of organizational life
- enhancement of civic engagement
- enhancement of self esteem

Ten Reasons People Volunteer

- to give back
- to support a personal cause
- to be a good example for others
- to meet like-minded people
- to do good
- to make a difference
- to feel needed
- to do something that helps others
- to spend time in a meaningful way
- to set the stage for employment

OLDER ADULT VOLUNTEERING

A 2009 survey by The Hartford found that respondents aged 50 or older were more likely to participate in volunteer work (53%) and were more likely to provide monetary donations to causes they support (77%) than those under age 50 (45% and 61% respectively). Of those age 65 and over, 47% did their volunteer service mainly through or for a religious organization. They typically met a wide range of community needs: helping older adults live independently in their homes, tutoring and mentoring at-risk youth, providing financial education and job training to veterans and their families, and helping communities recover from disasters. In addition to providing valuable services to individuals, volunteers contributed to their communities by engaging in activities that enabled other residents to live active lives.

INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEERING

Attachment and commitment to neighborhood or community can impact on a willingness to volunteer for a cause that supports neighbors. At the same time, a person's commitment to helping others can engender a desire to volunteer for causes that help neighborhoods throughout the world. Individuals and groups, especially faith-based groups, have been engaging in volunteerism around the world for many years. Following President Kennedy's "ask not" speech, the Peace Corps was founded; from 1961 to 2015 more than 220,000 men and women heeded his call and volunteered in 140 countries to promote peace. Today, Peace Corps Volunteers are tasked with building capacity in agriculture, health, economic and youth development, education, and environment. Additionally, volunteers are tasked with the third goal of the Peace Corps: to return home and strengthen Americans' understanding about the world and its people. Other types of organizations that offer international volunteer opportunities are Amigos de las Americas, Habitat for Humanity, United Nations Volunteers, Doctors Without Borders, Earth Watch, the International Rescue Committee. Many faith-based service organizations also mobilize international volunteers.

A "TWO FOR" CONTRIBUTION

There is a saying that "the reason volunteers aren't paid is not because they are worthless, but rather because they are priceless." Perhaps one reason they are priceless is that, in addition to their time and energy, volunteer contributions also have a dollar value. This value is based on the average hourly earnings (approximated from yearly values) of all production and non-supervisory workers on private non-farm payrolls (based on estimates provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics). As we saw earlier, in 2015, 62.6 million Americans contributed 7.7 billion hours volunteering through formal organizations, which resulted in a \$182 million volunteer contribution.* This is not simply a "nice to know" tidbit. According to the Financial Accounting Standards Board (FASB), the value of volunteer services can be used on financial statements including statements for internal and external purposes, grant proposals, and annual reports. However, the translation of hours to dollars is valuable only if a volunteer is performing a specialized skill for a nonprofit. The general rule when determining if contributed services meet the FASB criteria is whether the organization would have purchased the services if they had not been donated.

*This total was calculated using the Independent Sector's value of \$23.56 of a volunteer hour in 2015. The dollar value also is calculated by state. For example, in 2020 a volunteer hour in Arkansas was valued at \$22.87 and in New York area \$33.17.

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND VOLUNTEERISM

The discussion of volunteerism generally focuses on the voluntary or not-for-profit sector. However, private sector corporations increasingly organize volunteer programs. These tend to promote corporate responsibility by linking business decision-making with ethical values.

What is Corporate Social Responsibility?

This generally refers to a business practice when a private sector company undertakes or participates in an initiative that benefits society. Such programs have become mainstream in attempting to create shared value for their businesses and for society. These efforts suggest a double bottom line for corporations: concern with a positive economic outcome for the organization and a positive social impact on the community. Employees, investors, consumers, and the general public are exerting new demands and pressures on businesses, offering their loyalty and dollars in exchange for demonstrated ethical business practices, care of employees, safety and reliability of products and services, and investment in improving conditions in communities in which they are located. Thus, it is often a critical business necessity because businesses realize that their bottom line, their delivery of profitable products and services, their reputation, and their retention of high-quality employees all depend on their commitment to responsible, community-centered business practices.

What is Corporate Volunteerism?

According to the Center for Corporate Citizenship at Boston College, volunteerism is one of the most common approaches companies take in their corporate responsibility efforts. Employee volunteers are said to be the greatest asset companies can leverage because of their positive impact where they operate and do business. Such corporate volunteerism can provide immense benefits to a community while at the same time generating business value in the form of increased employee engagement and opportunities for teambuilding. Often called EVPs (Employee Volunteer Programs), corporate volunteering initiatives allow companies to make a difference at a much lower cost than traditional checkbook philanthropy.

Examples of Corporate Volunteering

- Target team members volunteered a total of more than 1.1 million hours in 2017.
- Northrop Grumman's community service grant program provides grants to nonprofit organizations to which employee volunteers are committed.
- Bank of America employee volunteers contributed 2 million hours in 2017 as part of its goal to achieve "Two Million Connections for Better." Employees volunteered in a variety of ways (e.g., mentoring the young, feeding the hungry, supporting the needs of veterans).
- 53,134 Oracle volunteers contributed 189,704 hours in 52 countries in 2017.
- AT&T Pioneers, organized in 1911 with 734 members (including Alexander Graham Bell), is today the world's largest group of industry-specific employees and retirees dedicated to community service. They volunteer more than 15 million hours annually to meet needs in their communities.