

HUMAN APPEAL USA
VOLUNTEERING AND CHARITY -
THE BACKBONE OF AMERICAN COMMUNITIES



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Introduction

In many ways, the volunteer is emblematic of the spirit of America itself. This concept of being a 'good neighbor' is so woven into the fabric and psyche of the country that it not only has a dedicated national day (28 September) but the phrase was also borrowed for a Roosevelt international policy initiative in the 1930s. Over time, the nation's schools, communities, sports clubs, charities and nonprofits have all become reliant on the donation of time, labor and thought power, all given freely by generous volunteers.

This trait is most evident in times of crisis. A cursory search on Google shows just how frequently groups of community volunteers step in and step up in times of emergency to offer support and aid. And the most recent research released by the [US Census Bureau and AmeriCorps](#) found that during the pandemic, well over half of Americans informally helped out neighbors and local communities, while 23% - over 60 million people - had formally volunteered with an organization during COVID.

To explore just how strongly the concept of volunteering flows through modern America, we recently conducted a survey among American volunteers.

We asked a series of questions relating to voluntary time commitments to a sample of 1003 US-wide volunteers, from a range of locations, ages and backgrounds.

We found that:

- 62% of the volunteers surveyed said that they volunteered in their local town.
- 38% of volunteers only volunteered their time within their home state.
- Many volunteers we surveyed choose to specifically donate their time to local education and health services.

When asked 'Why do you volunteer?', the vast majority of volunteers replied, 'To help my community.'

It is not just geographical locations that frame and inspire engagement from the country's volunteers. Many respondents also stated that they chose to donate their time within their local cultural communities (black, hispanic or other ethnic minorities) to further support the members of their local areas.

At all levels, community seems not just central but fundamental to reasons why people choose to engage with volunteering activities, and where the American volunteer gives their time.

Community Volunteering

Let's begin by defining community volunteering.

With public resources stretched and varied from region to state, many public sector organizations and institutions throughout the US are greatly underfunded.

Cuts in funding for education, libraries and community centers mean that at-risk communities may have limited access to schooling, legal assistance, healthcare and information around health matters. Low-income areas often rely on free access to public community spaces more than high income areas. For example, libraries are becoming places to stay warm, to access the internet (which is now vital to function within society), to use other library resources and meet with community support groups. This often includes everything from parent and baby groups, free after school tutoring or homework assistance and addiction recovery services.

Of course, when many people think of volunteering, thoughts typically lead to donating time and energy towards charitable work, beyond supporting aspects of an individual's local communities more directly. Yet, from our survey feedback, the reality of volunteering across the United States is much more diverse than simply supporting a charitable cause.

For example, it is worth acknowledging that healthcare through insurance is also not widely available to all across the nation, and healthcare itself is often unaffordable without debt for many Americans. Free healthcare services and advice centers play a vital role in keeping America healthy, and so we found that over a quarter - 28% - of the volunteers we surveyed give their time to healthcare initiatives.

Without volunteers these spaces would cease to exist and the gap between rich and poor in America would widen even further. The time given by volunteers ensures that more US citizens and residents are able to access these much needed resources and services.



Causes supported by US volunteers

Community work	34%
Food provision	34%
Homelessness	31%
Healthcare	28%
Education	27%
Childcare	26%
Fundraising	25%
Senior/Elderly care	21%
Environment	21%

Mental health	20%
Animal welfare	19%
Climate change	17%
Sporting events	15%
Music	14%
Refugee aid	12%
Conservation	11%
Farm work	10%
Other	5%

When it comes to why they have chosen to give their time to these particular causes, we wanted to dig a little deeper. So we also asked about what most influenced their choice of volunteering beneficiary. They told us:

Influences on chosen cause

Organisation's mission and values	33%
Interests and passions	32%
Outcome / impact of volunteering	31%
Having an enjoyable experience	30%
Location	26%
Level of responsibility	33%

Time commitments	21%
Safety measures	20%
Training and support	17%
Type of skills that will be learnt	16%
Other	1%

Time Spent Volunteering

How much time are our volunteers spending on initiatives to help within their communities?

The mean amount of time most of our volunteers surveyed commit to their causes is 62.7 hours per annum - which equates to just over five (5.225) hours per month. At the current US average hourly salary of [\\$29.81](#), this would equate to \$1,869.09 per volunteer if the work were paid.

Nearly nine in ten - 88 percent - of volunteers surveyed stated that they felt they had adequate opportunity to volunteer within close proximity to them, with most volunteers donating their time locally.

We also found during our research that the time spent volunteering differed according to region. In all USA regions except the Southwest, the percentage of volunteers who gave their time a few times a week was between 11 percent and 17 percent. The Southeast proved an unusual outlier with 27 percent of volunteers giving their time a few times a week.

Most volunteers instead donated their time weekly or monthly.

WEEKLY:

Midwest	23%
West	22%
Mid-Atlantic	20%
Northeast	25%
Southwest	18%
South	20%

MONTHLY:

Midwest	26%
West	33%
Mid-Atlantic	18%
Northeast	28%
Southwest	25%
South	34%

Drivers for Volunteering

To understand this dedicated set of people in more detail, we also wanted to look at what motivated them to donate their time so regularly and freely. They told us:

To help my community	56%
To help others and have a positive impact	55%
My faith encourages volunteering	32%
To gain life experience	31%
To give back to organizations that have helped me in the past	31%
To meet new people	31%
To gain a sense of accomplishment	29%

To have fun	25%
To improve my mental health	24%
To improve my physical health	21%
To gain work experience for CV/ Resume	16%
My education/workplace requires it	12%
Other	2%



Volunteering gives back - benefits gained

Our study also recognised that while volunteering requires tremendous regular commitment to give your time, many also receive a great amount back from the act, personally and mentally.

The volunteers told us some of the benefits they receive back from their time included;

Greater sense of community	57%
New friendships	52%
Increased knowledge	48%
Increased skills	40%
Improved mental health	38%
Increased physical health	30%

Support and assistance for my own needs	29%
Increased employability	21%
Other	1%
I haven't experienced any benefits	1%

Not only would this set of volunteers broadly agree that they gain a range of personal benefits from the act of giving time to others, the vast majority would also encourage others to do the same.

Would you recommend volunteering to others?

Very likely	69%
Somewhat likely	24%
Neither likely nor unlikely	6%
Somewhat unlikely	1%
Very unlikely	1%
% LIKELY	93%

How to Support the American Volunteer more effectively

While our survey sought to find out the details of how and why volunteers generously give their time to communities and causes, it also couldn't ignore the sharp economic pressures which are currently being felt all across the globe, as well as throughout America.

Volunteers don't often just give their time to organizations and issues - many of them give more to be able to donate their time, in the form of travel costs, hotel and accommodation stays, even paying for their own wifi to conduct their volunteering activities.

We sought to break this down to clarify just how an organization's supporters may need additional support themselves, and found that only three in ten volunteers admitted that time was all they gave for free, with a further 12% either being reimbursed or non-profits having allowed for additional out-of-pocket expenses in advance:

Hidden costs of volunteering

Travel costs	35%
Data / WiFi costs	24%
Accommodation	23%
Fees for the opportunity to volunteer	22%
Hours lost from my paid work	19%
Other	2%

No, any expenses are reimbursed	7%
No, any expenses are prepaid by the organization I volunteer with	5%
No, there are no costs associated with my volunteer work	29%
I don't know	2%

Looking more deeply at the cost of living impacts on the country's volunteers, we also investigated just how the economic pressures had affected their ability to spend time volunteering.

A worrying trend emerged - a third proved less able to give their time to their volunteering initiatives than a year ago, due to the pressures on their household costs.

Impact of cost of living

I volunteer less now than I did 12 months ago	33%
I volunteer more now than I did 12 months ago	29%
The cost of living crisis hasn't affected my volunteering activities	34%
I don't know	4%

Of course we sought to find out from those really feeling the economic pressures and cutting back on volunteering as a result, what were the major factors on this decision to cut their time back.

They told us:

I have other responsibilities now in my spare time related to cost of living (e.g. increased childcare)	45%
I need to spend more time working at my paid job	34%
I cannot afford costs associated with volunteering (e.g. travel, accommodation)	33%
I feel too exhausted/disenchanted to volunteer	28%
Other	3%

Clearly, organizations and communities which benefit from such generous and widespread donations of volunteers' time and efforts need to be mindful of the increased pressures on their home lives, if they are to continue to benefit from the gifts of their time and attention. As the cost-of-living pressures drag on, and facing another winter, it is likely that both nonprofit organizations and their volunteers will be put under still further pressures. It is an unfortunate irony that nonprofits will need volunteers more than ever as living costs rise, but those selfsame and selfless individuals may be under even greater personal pressures.

In some cases it is not always possible for charities and organizations, many of which are heavily reliant on volunteers to continue operating, to provide additional financial support towards costs incurred through volunteering. However, by increasing the focus on the benefits from participating in activities in other areas, they can provide greater support, and increase the social and economic benefits of volunteering.

It is also important to understand why people volunteer. The 'why' also holds great value and meaning for individuals. We've seen the range of benefits which people can take from giving their time to volunteering initiatives, and even organizations who are tightening their belts themselves can dial up focus on some of these less monetary advantages to help to keep volunteers engaged, if financial assistance is not an option.

Finally, recognition of volunteers and their value is absolutely key, including the profound importance and effect they have on organizations and lives in their local communities. We must understand, mark and celebrate the significance of the role that they play in the sector and beyond. They are the foundation of American charitable initiatives.





About Human Appeal USA

Here for Every Human. Human Appeal is a non-profit organization working across the globe to strengthen humanity's fight against poverty, social injustice and natural disaster. Through the provision of immediate relief and the establishment of self-sustaining development programmes, we aim to save and transform lives.

Human Appeal USA is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization.

Tax ID # 87-2410117. Your donations are tax deductible.

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