



Published on National Council of Nonprofits (<https://www.councilofnonprofits.org>)

Original URL: <https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/articles/new-data-and-resources-volunteers>

# New Data and Resources on Volunteers

By: Amy Silver O'Leary

April is National Volunteer Month, and April 16-22 is National Volunteer Week. These celebrations honor the impact of volunteer service in building stronger communities. Nonprofits are celebrating volunteers and engaging new ones, using hashtags like [#VolunteerAppreciationMonth](#) and [#VolunteerAppreciationWeek](#) through social media and other channels.

Nonprofits that rely on volunteers (which means almost all nonprofits, considering that board members are volunteers) may find new reports on volunteering to be of interest. These reports can help nonprofit leaders compare their experiences to those of their peers, understand trends, and develop strategies to garner funder support for volunteer management capacity.

[Demand for nonprofit services continues to increase](#), paid [staff shortages persist](#), and [donor support is dropping](#), all while inflation eats away at revenue. Volunteers are one resource that can be of critical importance to many nonprofits. For organizations that rely heavily on volunteers, the perennial challenge of creating opportunities and managing volunteers was clearly exacerbated by the pandemic. "Volunteerism had been declining for years before Covid-19, and the pandemic sent many charities' volunteer programs into disarray," Ben Gose wrote

in September (“Why and How Charities Should Revive a Declining but Vital Resource ... Volunteers,” *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*). Nonprofits have been working to engage volunteers virtually and recruit more young volunteers, among other adaptations.

New reports show:

- **Nearly half of nonprofit CEOs surveyed in mid-2022 said recruiting enough volunteers was still “a big problem.”**
- Formal **volunteering dropped more than 23 percent** in 2021 compared with 2019.

In some cases, the [nonprofit workforce shortages crisis](#) is also contributing to volunteer shortages, as volunteer manager positions are unfilled.

The [volunteer mileage rate](#), which has been stuck at 14 cents per mile for 26 years while the business rate is adjusted at least annually – with the latest increase to 62.5 cents – has also become more of a problem as gas prices have risen.

## **Volunteer Board Members: the Backbone of the Sector**

Millions of board members serve America’s more than 1.4 million charitable nonprofits and private foundations. While state laws vary, most require at least three board members, so that’s a *minimum* of 4.2 million board members serving 501(c)(3) organizations each year throughout the country. In practice, it’s multiples of that number.

These hard-working, committed, and conscientious individuals, the vast majority of whom are volunteers, are the very backbone of the sector. Recruiting and engaging high-performing board members who are passionate about the nonprofit’s mission and reflect the community served is one of most nonprofits’ highest priorities.

“Board service is the best leadership development program yet invented,” said Tim Delaney, President & CEO of the National Council of Nonprofits. “Before joining a nonprofit board, I’d read books about leadership, studied leadership in the real world, and participated in leadership programs. But there was something magical about volunteering on a board with other people – learning from them, sharing with

them, and problem-solving with them. It was applied leadership by us all to improve lives in our community. That was pure servant-leadership at its finest.”

Board members are the fiduciaries who steer the organization towards a sustainable future by adopting sound, ethical, and legal governance and financial policies, as well as by making sure the nonprofit has adequate resources to advance its mission. They hire, set the compensation of, and supervise the CEO/executive director (if the nonprofit has paid staff) to run the day-to-day management activities of the organization. Board members also provide guidance to nonprofits by contributing to the organization’s culture, strategic focus, and effectiveness, as well as serving as ambassadors and advocates. It’s an honor and a significant contribution to the equity and vitality of our communities for those who take on these significant duties as volunteers. [Read more about Board Roles and Responsibilities.](#)

Especially in lower-population states, board members are often stretched to serve multiple organizations (including government entities like Parks Boards or Library Commissions that require citizen leadership). In Montana, for example, about 1 in every 15 people need to serve as a nonprofit leader (the highest demand in the country), [according to a recent report from University of Minnesota Extension](#). Some rural counties in Montana require up to 20 percent of adults to serve in leadership roles.

## New Reports on Volunteering

AmeriCorps, in collaboration with the U.S. Census Bureau, released its biennial [Volunteering and Civic Life in America](#) report in late January.

- **The research found that formal volunteering dropped more than 23 percent, from 30 percent of the public in 2019 to 23.2 percent in 2021 (at the height of the pandemic).**
- Informal volunteering, such as doing a favor for a neighbor, remained stable during the period.
- The report website breaks down results by state; for example, Utah had the highest formal volunteering rate in 2021, at 40.7 percent.
- The report website also shows trends by state over time, including charitable giving and other civic behaviors.
- **In 32 states, the number of donors was down in 2021 vs. 2019**, with donor numbers in 15 states down more than 5 percent, and down more than

ten percent in 5 of those states. Donors increased by 5 percent or more only in D.C. and Connecticut.

- Visit [AmeriCorps.gov/VolunteeringInAmerica](https://AmeriCorps.gov/VolunteeringInAmerica) for more information by state, by the 12 largest metropolitan areas, and by demographics.

[A new report from the University of Maryland's DoGood Institute, "The State of Volunteer Engagement,"](#) is based on a national survey of 1,200 nonprofit CEOs conducted in mid-2022. Most of the respondents lead organizations that rely on volunteers.

- Nearly half of respondents said **recruiting enough volunteers is a "big problem,"** a steep (62 percent) increase compared with 2003.
- The report also confirms other sources of data that show **demand for services is up;** nearly two-thirds of nonprofits reported an increase in demand for their organizational services in 2022, while 28.7 percent of nonprofits are operating with **less funding and fewer paid staff** than they had before the pandemic.
- In 2022, the researchers also surveyed funders that provide, or said they were likely to provide, **funding to nonprofits to support volunteer engagement**. The full report will be of interest especially to nonprofits that rely heavily on volunteers, and may help make the case to funders for investing in volunteer management capacity.

More recently, in state surveys of nonprofits such as those conducted in [Florida](#) (fall 2022) and [New Jersey](#) (February 2023), nonprofits **continued to identify finding volunteers - and avoiding burnout of current volunteers - as an ongoing challenge.**

One bright spot: **some indicators suggest that volunteering may finally be recovering.** Art Ferreira, Founder & CEO of Coeus Global, a background screening and human resource services firm that performs background checks for thousands of nonprofit organizations each year, said, "Over the last quarter of 2022 and the first quarter of this year, we have seen a return to pre-COVID levels of screenings for nonprofit volunteers."

For more information on nonprofit boards and volunteers, see our resources:

- [Governance and Leadership](#)
- [Volunteers](#) (practice pointers, management tools, matching, and more)