



INDEPENDENT
SECTOR

Americans Volunteer - 1981

To determine more closely the extent of volunteering in the United States, INDEPENDENT SECTOR commissioned a survey by The Gallup Organization which has resulted in a report from them entitled "Americans Volunteer - 1981". This is a companion report to the one developed for us by Gallup entitled "Patterns of Charitable Giving by Individuals".

For this survey, INDEPENDENT SECTOR defined volunteer activity broadly, including the typical categories such as advocacy, direct service and fund raising, and also including informal service to others such as helping clean up the neighborhood. In order to determine the extent of both kinds of volunteering, the responses for formal or informal services were kept separate.

When volunteer service is broadly defined, 52% of American adults and an almost equal proportion of teenagers volunteered in the year between March 1980 and March 1981.

When Gallup subtracted from that total those who volunteered, only in an informal way, the proportion of the population engaged in some more structured pattern turned out to be 47%.

In order to try to determine the proportion of the population that might be described as regular or active volunteers, we asked the Gallup Organization to tell us how many people averaged 2 or more volunteer hours a week. That proportion turned out to be an encouraging 31%. Indeed 10% of the adult population averaged 7 or more volunteer hours a week.

Whether one focuses on the 52% of the population engaged in at least some broadly defined volunteer service or looks at the 31% of the population that could be described as regular or active volunteers, the results are encouraging.

The Gallup Report might more appropriately have been titled - "Americans Still Volunteer" or better yet "Americans Volunteer - More Than Ever".

INDEPENDENT SECTOR is indebted to BankAmerica Foundation for its contribution toward this survey.

A copy of the Introduction and Summary from the Gallup Report are enclosed. Copies of the full Report are available from INDEPENDENT SECTOR at \$15.00 each.

Brian O'Connell
President
INDEPENDENT SECTOR

A NATIONAL FORUM TO ENCOURAGE GIVING, VOLUNTEERING AND NOT • FOR • PROFIT INITIATIVE
1828 L Street, N.W. • Washington, D.C. 20036 • (202) 659-4007

SUCCESSOR TO THE COALITION OF NATIONAL VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS AND THE NATIONAL COUNCIL ON PHILANTHROPY

AMERICANS VOLUNTEER

1981

Conducted For:

INDEPENDENT SECTOR

Conducted By:

THE GALLUP ORGANIZATION, INC.

53 Bank Street

Princeton, New Jersey

INTRODUCTION

This is a study designed to determine the number of people who volunteer, the kinds of volunteer work people are involved in, the amount of time devoted to volunteer work, changes in the amount and type of volunteer work and reasons for volunteering or not volunteering. For the purposes of the study, volunteer work was broadly defined as "working in some way to help others for no monetary pay." This would include the person who regularly helps an elderly neighbor as well as the person who volunteers at a nursing home; the work need not be done with an organization. Volunteer work would not include membership in a volunteer group if no work is actually done. Nor would it include working in a cooperative (e.g., cooperative nursery school) where, although there is no direct monetary pay, there is monetary compensation through lowered cost of the service (e.g., lower nursery school tuition). Volunteer work, according to this definition, would include a broad range of activities—for example, volunteering at a local hospital, room mother at a school, scout troop leader, usher at church, working to get a traffic light put in at a dangerous neighborhood intersection, canvassing for a political candidate, collecting money for a charity, and so forth.

For this study, personal in-home interviews were conducted with a national sample of people 14 years of age and older. All interviewing was conducted between March 13 and March 23, 1981.

A description of the composition of the sample and the design of the sample, tables of recommended sampling tolerances, and a copy of the questionnaire can be found in the Technical Appendix of this report.

SUMMARY

Volunteerism has traditionally been defined as giving time to help others for no monetary pay through organizations like hospitals, schools, churches, and various social service organizations. Moreover, volunteer work is generally thought of as a regular commitment, such as the person who spends four hours each week or each month helping in the school library or hospital admissions department. However, this concept of volunteerism which ties volunteer work to organizations may tend to underrepresent the actual amount of volunteer activity in the country because it excludes the activities of the person who gives his or her time on an informal, individual basis. For example, should the person who works with a group of neighbors to clean up a local playground or park be called a volunteer? Or the individual who helps an elderly neighbor? Or the parent who bakes cookies for a school fund raiser?

Efforts to measure the incidence and amount of volunteer activity are complicated by the fact that not only can researchers in the area not agree upon a clear definition of what constitutes volunteer activity, but it is likely that the public has varying perceptions as well. Because there is no generally accepted understanding of what constitutes volunteer activity, we would expect that in surveys on volunteer activity the percent of people who call themselves volunteers will be fairly easily influenced by the way in which the question used to measure incidence of volunteer activity is asked. One method of addressing this issue would be to compare the results to different questions. Specifically, one can examine the kinds of activities that volunteers say they have done when questions are variously worded. Unfortunately, most studies that ask people whether or not they have participated in any kind of volunteer activity do not then ask volunteers to describe those activities which they have done.

This problem is not unique to the issue of volunteerism. To the contrary, public polls frequently find varying levels of support for issues

which are attributed to differences in question wording. Studies have indicated that question wording has the greatest impact when the issue or topic of the question is one about which respondents do not have strongly held beliefs or about which they do not have a great deal of knowledge.

Another factor that must be taken into consideration when trying to determine the incidence of volunteer activity by means of a survey is the timing of interviewing. Many kinds of volunteer work are seasonal; for example, because they are based on the school year or related to religious holidays. As a result, a study that measures the incidence of volunteer activity in a two- or three-month period in the spring when schools are in session and there are numerous religious holidays--Easter, Passover--may find differing results from a study conducted in the summer months because of the dates of interviewing.

For its 1981 survey of volunteerism in America, INDEPENDENT SECTOR chose to define volunteer activity in the broadest sense to include both the traditional kinds of volunteer activities, such as working as a "volunteer" for an organization, as well as the informal and often individual kinds of volunteer activity, such as helping an elderly neighbor. In response to a very broad question which asked citizens what, if any, kind of volunteer activity they had participated in in the past year, some kinds of responses were elicited that might normally not have been classified as volunteer activity. For example:

- I sing in the church choir.
- I baked brownies for my son's cub scout troop.
- I am an attorney, and I sometimes give free advice to my neighbors.
- I helped my neighbors when they were moving.
- I have a sister in a mental institution who I visit and take food to.
- I help my neighbors with home repairs.
- I took care of my neighbor's dog when she was sick.

When these kinds of volunteer activity are included along with the more traditionally defined kinds of volunteer activity, we find that 52 percent of American adults and an almost equal proportion of teenagers (53%) have volunteered in the year between March 1980 and March 1981. The areas in which the largest percentage volunteer include religious activities (19%), health (12%), education (12%), and informal activities done without organizational support (23%). Upper socioeconomic groups are most likely to volunteer. More specifically, 63 percent of people with annual household incomes of \$20,000 or greater and 63 percent of the people with some college education have volunteered in the past year. Additional demographic groups that are slightly more likely to volunteer include women, people under the age of 55, people who are employed, people with children still at home, suburban and rural residents, and people in larger households.

One method of determining which of these individuals is a volunteer in the more traditional sense is to consider the number of hours worked. If an individual has done no volunteer work or has spent less than one hour per week on volunteer work in the past three months, we may guess that the individual is involved in volunteer activity on a sporadic basis or for a one-time cause. As the table on the following page points out, 69 percent spent either no time or less than an average of one hour per week on volunteer activity in the past three months, and 31 percent spent an average of two hours or more per week on volunteer activity. We might speculate that it is this 31 percent that most people have in mind as the typical volunteer who volunteers on a regular basis for an organization. This is only speculation, however.

Average Number of Hours Per Week Spent in
Volunteer Activity During the Past Three Months

<u>Average Hours Per Week*</u>	<u>Percent of All Citizens**</u>	
0	56*** ⁷	} 69
1	13	
2	8	} 13
3	5	
4	4	} 18
5	2	
6	2	}
7	1	
8 or More	<u>9</u>	
Total	100	

Volunteers are more likely than non-volunteers to give monetary charitable contributions, regardless of whether the contribution is made to an organization for which the person does volunteer work. Ninety-one percent (91%) of all volunteers have made a charitable contributions, compared with 66 percent among non-volunteers. The group most likely to give a charitable contribution in a particular area is those who have volunteered in that area. For example, among people who did volunteer work for a health organization in the past year, 65 percent also gave a charitable contribution to a health organization.

* This is based on a 13-week quarter. One hour per week includes 1-13 hours per quarter; two hours per week include 14-26 hours per quarter; and so forth.

** This table excludes all who were not able to estimate the number of hours volunteered.

*** This includes 48 percent who did no volunteer work in the past year, plus 8 percent who did volunteer work in the past year but who did no volunteer work in the past three months.

vi

If we limit charitable contributions to those that are made to an organization for which the contributor does no volunteer work, 79 percent of volunteers have made a charitable contribution to a group or organization for which they have not volunteered, compared with 66 percent of non-volunteers who have made such a contribution to a group for which they did not work.

Although there is a relationship between doing volunteer work and making charitable contributions, we cannot conclude that volunteer work makes people more likely to contribute money. It could be that the kind of person who becomes active in volunteer work is already making charitable contributions. Most likely, the direction of the relationship works both ways to some degree.

Among adults who have volunteered in the past year, the largest percentage first became involved in the volunteer activity because they were asked by someone if they would volunteer (44%). Other sources of information or reasons for becoming involved in the volunteer activity are having a family member or a friend involved in the activity (29%) and through participation in a group or organization (31%). One person in four (25%) sought out the activity on their own. Relatively few (6%) first volunteered because they had seen an ad for or some information about the volunteer activity in the media.

Volunteers were asked why they first became involved in the volunteer activities they currently participate in and why they continue to participate in these volunteer activities. The responses to these two questions were similar. To both, the largest proportion of volunteers mentioned wanting to do something useful; interest in the activity; enjoying the work/feeling needed; having a child, relative, or friend who was involved in or could benefit from the activity; and religious concerns.

The reasons people mention most often for continuing to volunteer are the same reasons most frequently mentioned for first becoming involved in a volunteer activity. For example, the largest proportion of volunteers first became involved in their volunteer work because they wanted to do something useful and to help others. This is also the reason most frequently mentioned for continuing to do volunteer work. However, it is not the case that reasons for first volunteering are always the same as reasons for continuing to volunteer. This particularly true for people who first volunteered to gain

job experience; of those who first volunteered to gain job experience, only 37 percent are continuing to do the volunteer work to gain job experience, 54 percent of this group are continuing to do the volunteer work because they are interested in the work, and 67 percent because they enjoy doing something that is useful and helps other people. On the other hand, large proportions of people who first volunteered because they thought they would enjoy the work (63%), because they wanted to do something useful (77%), for religious reasons (79%), and because they were interested in the work (72%) continue to do the volunteer work for the same reasons they give for first volunteering. But in each case, there are also other reasons for continuing to do the volunteer work.

The survey further indicates that the pool of people who volunteer changes over time. When volunteers were asked whether they do more, less, or the same amount of volunteer work today as they did three years ago, roughly one third chose each response: 36 percent more, 30 percent less, 30 percent the same. Similarly, when all adults were asked whether they were involved in any volunteer activity three years ago that they no longer do today, 21 percent responded affirmatively. Among adults who have stopped doing a volunteer activity in the past three years, the reasons most frequently offered for no longer participating are that the volunteer became too busy to continue (33%), private, personal reasons (18%), that the project was completed (11%), and that the volunteer moved (12%). Some also mentioned that they had begun working at a pay job (10%), that the family friend or relative was no longer involved (8%), and that they had lost interest (9%).

In the past year, one person in five has been asked to do some kind of volunteer work which they have not done. Among this group, the most frequently mentioned reason for not doing the volunteer work is lack of time or too busy, mentioned by almost half (46%). Other reasons for not doing the volunteer activity include health problems (14%), lack of interest (13%), and the lack of time because of a paid job (8%).

A Study Commissioned by:

INDEPENDENT SECTOR
1828 L Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036
(202) 659-4007