



INDEPENDENT SECTOR

Civic Participation Is a Family Matter



*America's family volunteers*

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The authors would like to recognize the contribution made to this report by **Dr. Arthur Kirsch**.

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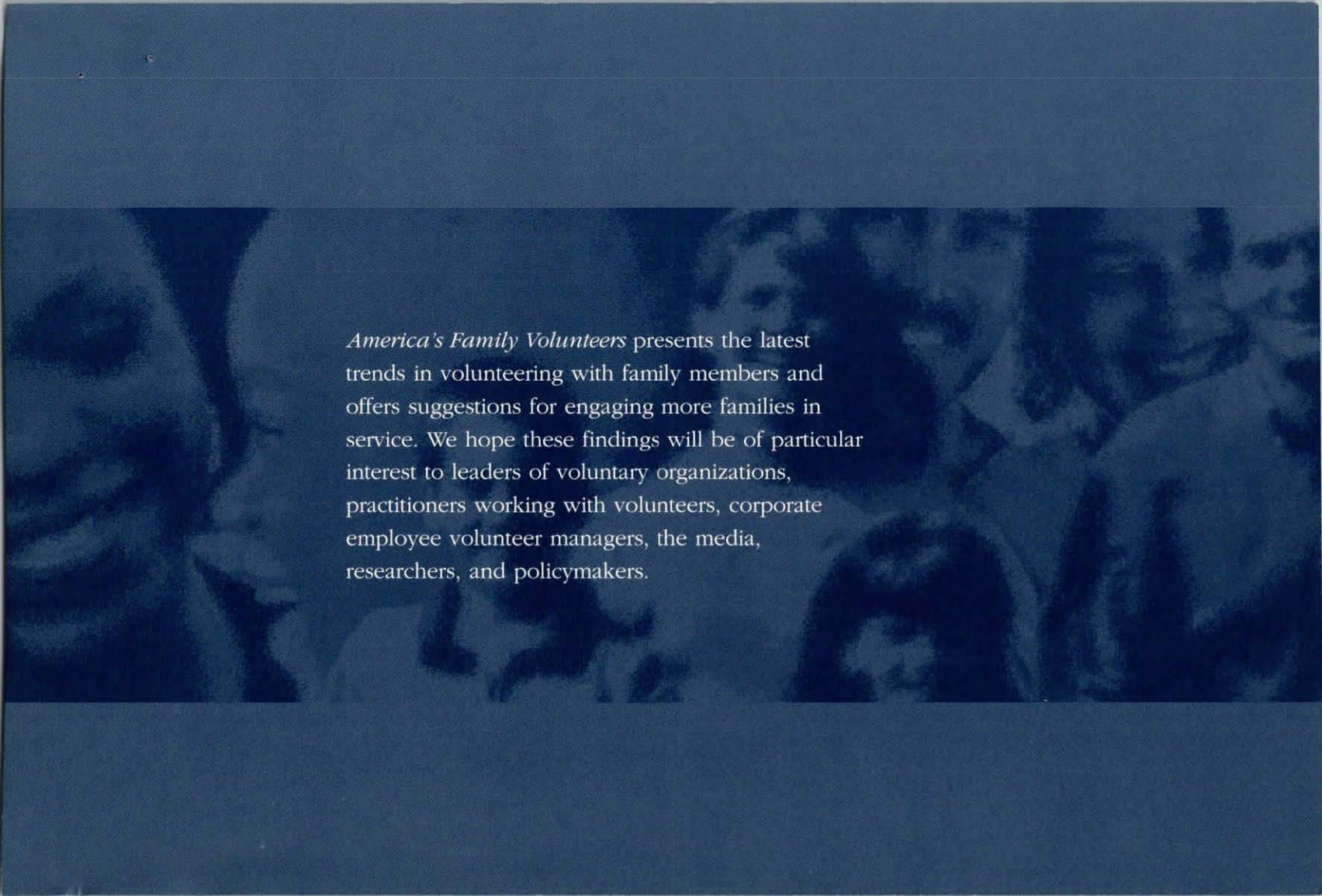
INDEPENDENT SECTOR is a nonprofit, nonpartisan coalition of more than 700 national nonprofit organizations, foundations, and corporate philanthropy programs, collectively representing tens of thousands of charitable groups in every state across the nation. Its mission is to promote, strengthen, and advance the nonprofit and philanthropic community to foster private initiative for the public good.

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INDEPENDENT SECTOR'S Research Program works to build the research necessary to accurately define, chart, and understand the nonprofit sector and ways it can be of greatest service to society. Signature projects include the *Nonprofit Almanac*, *Giving and Volunteering in the United States*, and the Measures Project.


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*America's Family Volunteers* presents the latest trends in volunteering with family members and offers suggestions for engaging more families in service. We hope these findings will be of particular interest to leaders of voluntary organizations, practitioners working with volunteers, corporate employee volunteer managers, the media, researchers, and policymakers.

## Overview



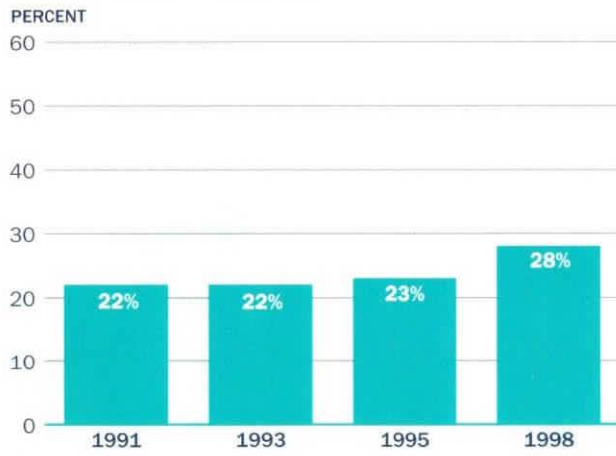
**a** person's family experience affects his or her giving and volunteering behavior for life. Taking part in a positive volunteer experience with family members as a child increases one's likelihood of continuing to volunteer as an adult, which underscores the importance of promoting volunteering activities for children and families as well as adults.

As with many aspects of the American population, the number and make-up of American families have changed over the past ten years. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that in 1998, there were 70.9 million family households in the United States, compared to 66 million in 1990. (A "family household," as determined by the Census Bureau, has at least two members related by blood, marriage, or adoption, one of whom is related to the householder.) According to the Census Bureau, there is no typical family household, but in 1980, 74 percent of all households in the country were family households. By 1998 this number had declined to 69 percent.

Families with single parents as well as families with a member aged 65 years or older are increasing. Families with single parents accounted for 27 percent of families with children in 1998. Married couples (54 million) made up three quarters of all families in 1998, and half of them had children under 18 living in the family. About 15 percent of family households had a member aged 65 years or older.

INDEPENDENT SECTOR'S *Giving and Volunteering in the United States* survey is mainly focused on individual volunteering rather than on family volunteering. However, the survey did ask respondents, "Do you engage in volunteer activities with other members of your family?" Twenty-eight percent of all respondents said they did (Figure 1), and 51 percent of all volunteers indicated that they had volunteered in some activity with a family member, a three-percentage-point increase from 1995, when 48 percent of volunteers reported volunteering with a family member (Figure 2). Trend data seem to indicate that a growing percentage of

FIGURE 1. **Percentage of Americans Who Volunteer with Family Members\***



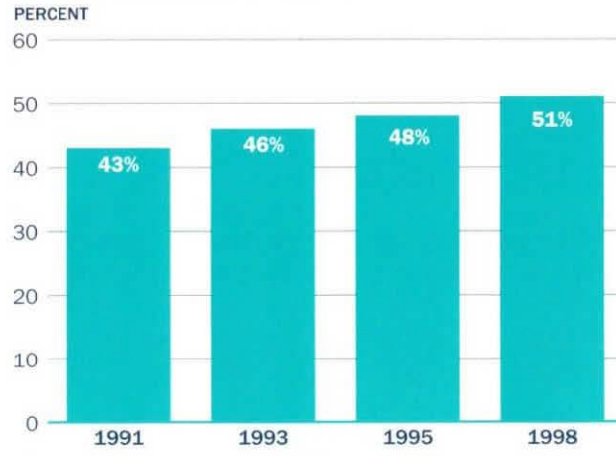
\*A family volunteer is an individual who answered "Yes" to the question, "Do you engage in volunteer activities with other members of your family?"

Source: INDEPENDENT SECTOR, *Giving and Volunteering in the United States, 1999.*

volunteers are volunteering in some type of activity with members of their family.

Among all respondent households, those with four persons or more had the highest rate (37.5%) reporting that they engaged in volunteer activities with family members. The smaller the household size, the lower

FIGURE 2. **Percentage of Volunteers Who Serve with Family Members\***



\*A family volunteer is an individual who answered "Yes" to the question, "Do you engage in volunteer activities with other members of your family?"

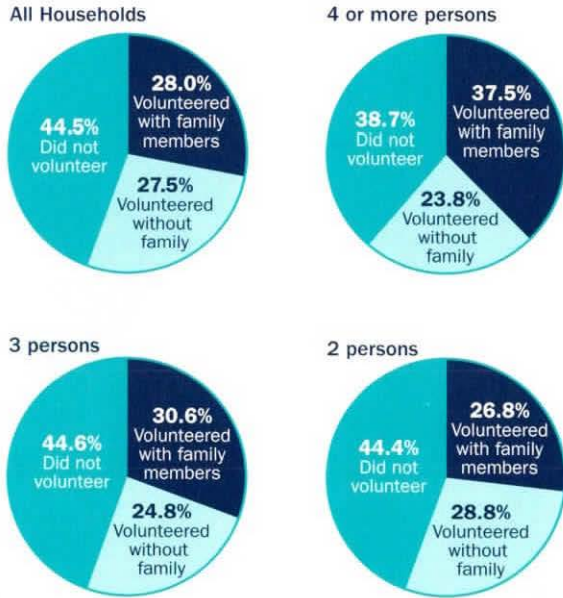
Source: INDEPENDENT SECTOR, *Giving and Volunteering in the United States, 1999.*

the rate of participation in a volunteer activity with a family member (Figure 3).

Among those individuals who engaged in a volunteer activity with a family member, 72 percent reported being active in volunteering activities as a child. There were also high levels of recollection in seeing other family members

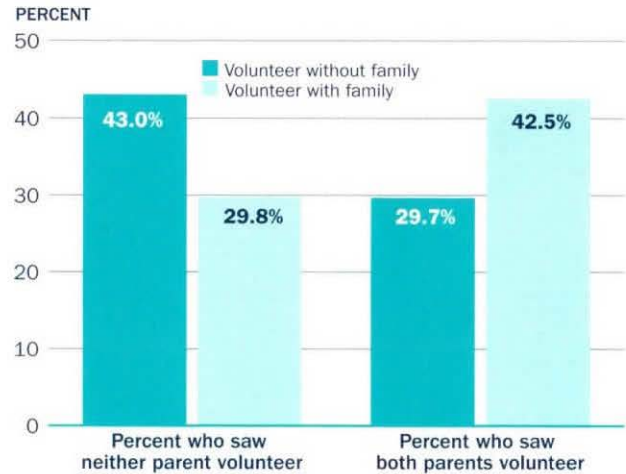


FIGURE 3. Distribution of Volunteer Type by Household Size



SOURCE: INDEPENDENT SECTOR, *Giving and Volunteering in the United States*, 1999.

FIGURE 4. Childhood Recall of Volunteers Who Volunteer with Family vs. Those Who Do Not Volunteer with Family



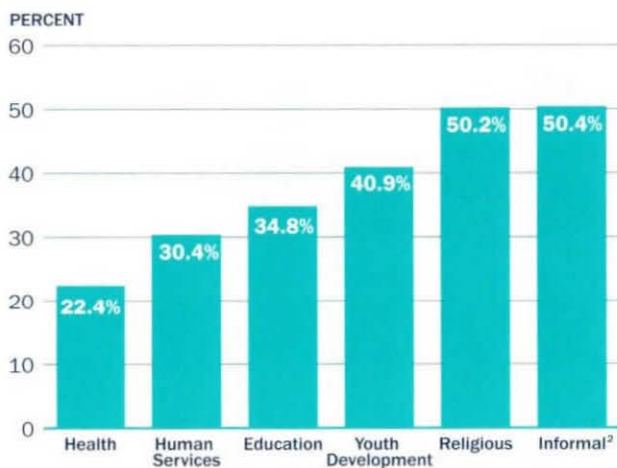
SOURCE: INDEPENDENT SECTOR, *Giving and Volunteering in the United States*, 1999.

volunteering. Eight out of ten recalled seeing a family member helping others when they were young. When asked whether one or both their parents volunteered in community activities, 67 percent said their parents did so, and 42.5 percent said both their parents volunteered (Figure 4).

## Reaching Out to Various Causes

Volunteers who participated with other family members averaged 4.3 hours of voluntary service per week in 1998, compared to an average of 3.5 hours per week for all volunteers, and 2.8 hours a week for those who did not volunteer with family. Volunteers frequently worked in more than one area. Their multiple volunteer assignments indicate that 50 percent of those who volunteered with family members spent time with religious organizations. Another 50 percent volunteered for activities that were not formally associated with a group or organization. This type of informal volunteering could include helping a neighbor, friend, or organization on an ad hoc basis. Youth development organizations such as the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and Junior Achievement also benefited from widespread participation among family volunteers. Close to 35 percent volunteered in the area of education, and 30 percent gave time to human service organizations. It is important to note, however, that volunteers may have served with a family member in only one of these areas.

FIGURE 5. **Where Families Volunteer<sup>1</sup>**



<sup>1</sup>Respondents could choose more than one area.

<sup>2</sup>Time not given through organizations.

Source: INDEPENDENT SECTOR, *Giving and Volunteering in the United States, 1999*.



## *Staying Involved*

**a**lmost 45 percent of volunteers participating with family members volunteered at regularly scheduled times throughout the year, exhibiting a high level of commitment to their causes. Nearly 27 percent volunteered every week, while 18 percent volunteered every month. Thirty-five percent of family volunteers reported volunteering only once during the year, while another 9 percent said that they volunteer during special times of the year such as holidays.

In contrast, only 33 percent of volunteers who did not participate with other family members volunteer on a regular basis. Twenty-two percent of those who did not volunteer with a family member reported volunteering on a monthly basis, and 11 percent on a weekly basis. A higher percentage, 47 percent, volunteer only once during the year.

## *Why Families Volunteer*

**W**hen respondents who engage in activities with family members were asked about their reasons for volunteering, five responses stand out.

The most common reason for volunteering is a feeling of compassion for others in need. Nine out of ten (90.6%) volunteers listed this as an important reason for volunteering. Having an interest in the activity and using the volunteer activity as an opportunity to gain a new perspective on things tied as the second most common reason and were cited as important by over 80 percent of the volunteers. Another popular reason for volunteering is that the activity is important to people the volunteer respects (72%) and that a relative or family member would benefit from the activity or was directly involved in the activity (70%).



## Finding Out about Volunteer Opportunities

Over half (53%) of volunteers who participate with family members learned about their current volunteer activities by participating with an organization or group or from their place of employment. They frequently reported being active in religious organizations. More than 82 percent are either members of a religious organization themselves or have someone in their family who is a member. The church, temple, and synagogue are major venues for learning about volunteering activities. One out of every three learned about their volunteer opportunities this way. Findings from the *Giving and Volunteering in the United States* survey have consistently found religious membership as a strong predictor of volunteer activity.

The next most frequently reported way of finding out about volunteer activities is by being asked by someone

the volunteer knows. Over four out of ten (45%) of the volunteers reported learning this way, and when they were asked it was most often by a friend (52%), someone at their religious congregation (38%), or by a family member or relative (30%). Being asked is not just an important way for learning about volunteer activities; it also helps encourage participation. Eighty-five percent of all family volunteers reported being asked to volunteer in the past year.

Having a family member or friend who benefits from the activity is another popular way to learn about volunteer opportunities. Thirty-seven percent of family volunteers report first finding out about their volunteer activities this way.



## *Characteristics of Family Volunteers*

The study revealed some defining demographic characteristics of volunteers who engage in voluntary activities with other family members.

A higher proportion of volunteers who served with family members were married (72%) in comparison to volunteers who did not serve with family members (47%).

Females reported volunteering at a slightly higher rate than males. Of the volunteers serving with family, 52 percent were females, and 48 percent were males. Among individuals who did not volunteer with family, the gender gap widens, with even more women (59%) volunteering than men (41%).

Most family volunteers reported owning a home (76%) and were most likely between the ages of 35

and 54 (53%). Four out of ten (44%) have a household of four or more people, and 53 percent have children under 18 living in their household.

Moreover, Americans volunteering with family gave a higher average household contribution of \$1,401, compared to those volunteers who did not volunteer with family, who gave an average gift of \$898. As a percentage of household income, family volunteers who contributed gave on average a higher percentage of their income (2.6%) than non-family volunteers (1.9%). Table 1 provides a quick comparison between those volunteering with family members and those who do not.

TABLE 1. PROFILE OF FAMILY VOLUNTEERS AND OTHER VOLUNTEERS

	Family Volunteers <sup>1</sup>	Non-Family Volunteers <sup>2</sup>	All Volunteers
<b>VOLUNTEERING</b>			
Average hours volunteered	4.3 hours	2.8 hours	3.5 hours
Average household income	\$54,804	\$46,927	\$50,862
<b>GIVING</b>			
Average household contribution	\$1,401	\$898	\$1,144
Average percent of household income given	2.6%	1.9%	2.2%
<b>SELECTED DEMOGRAPHICS</b>			
Male	48.3%	41.2%	44.6%
Female	51.7%	58.8%	55.4%
Married	71.7%	47.0%	59.6%
Own home	75.6%	68.3%	71.8%
Households with children under 18	52.6%	35.7%	44.0%
Attend religious services	88.5%	78.3%	83.5%

SOURCE: INDEPENDENT SECTOR, *Giving and Volunteering in the United States, 1999*.

<sup>1</sup>Family volunteers are individuals who report volunteering with other members of their family.

<sup>2</sup>Individuals who report volunteering, but not with family members.

## *Promoting Family Volunteering*

**T**here are clear reasons for encouraging and providing opportunities for individuals to volunteer with other family members. Family volunteers perform, on average, 23 percent more hours of volunteer work per week than other volunteers. A higher proportion of them volunteer more frequently and on a more regular basis. Their motives for volunteering are as altruistic as those of other volunteers and are not necessarily related to family interests or benefit.

Family volunteering also provides the comfort of engaging in an activity with someone familiar and

who will likely benefit from the experience. It provides a venue through which parents can actively demonstrate to their children important family values of helping others in need and the consequences of giving and sharing time and talent with the community. Most importantly, it can provide opportunities for children to become involved in volunteering at an early age, which most often translates to having them volunteer throughout their lives.



## *Ways to Increase Family Volunteering*

### **ASK**

Be prepared to ask. Simply asking is one of the most effective ways to get people involved. When asked to volunteer, over 85 percent will say yes!

### **PROVIDE APPROPRIATE ACTIVITIES**

Provide volunteer activities that are appropriate for various age groups and offer flexible times and arrangements to enable families to participate. This will make it easier for families to bring along another family member.

### **EXPLAIN**

Volunteering can take many forms. By explaining to potential volunteers the specific tasks involved, you can reduce the apprehension about participating in a project.

### **ENCOURAGE**

Encourage individuals to bring a family member and describe the possible benefits they can gain from the experience. Volunteering also provides families with a unique opportunity for spending quality time together.

### **CONNECT**

By affiliating your organization with the membership of a religious or service group, you can tap a great resource for family volunteers. People who participate in these groups are more likely to actively volunteer.

### **IMPACT**

Show real results of how families make a difference in your organization. Discuss the contributions made by volunteers and how such progress would not have been possible without their help. This keeps them committed and motivated in their activities.



## *Additional Resources on Family Volunteering*

The following represents some of the many organizations focused on volunteering—with some specifically geared toward family volunteering. You may also wish to explore other efforts in your local community by checking with your volunteer center, state association of nonprofit organizations, state government commission on volunteers, or the public library.

### **America's Promise**

909 N. Washington Street  
Suite 400  
Alexandria, VA 22314  
703-684-4500  
800-365-0153  
[www.americaspromise.org](http://www.americaspromise.org)

### **Association for Volunteer Administration**

P.O. Box 32092  
Richmond, VA 23294  
804-346-2266  
[www.avaintl.org](http://www.avaintl.org)

### **Corporation for National Service**

1201 New York Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20525  
202-606-5000  
[www.cns.gov](http://www.cns.gov)

### **Points of Light Foundation and the Volunteer Center National Network**

"Family Matters"  
1400 I Street, NW  
Suite 800  
Washington, DC 20005  
202-729-8000  
800-VOLUNTEER (865-8683)  
[www.pointsoflight.org](http://www.pointsoflight.org)  
[familymatters@pointsoflight.org](mailto:familymatters@pointsoflight.org)

#### **ONLINE VOLUNTEERING RESOURCES**

##### **Helping.org**

[www.helping.org](http://www.helping.org)

##### **Action Without Borders**

[www.idealists.org](http://www.idealists.org)

##### **Volunteer Match**

[www.volunteermatch.org](http://www.volunteermatch.org)

##### **Youth Service America**

[www.servenet.org](http://www.servenet.org)

##### **Volunteer Center National Network**

[www.volunteerconnections.org](http://www.volunteerconnections.org)

#### **OTHER RESOURCES OF INTEREST**

National Family Volunteer Day is the Saturday just before Thanksgiving. Contact the Points of Light Foundation for a guidebook. [www.pointsoflight.org](http://www.pointsoflight.org)

*Corporate Volunteerism: How Families Make a Difference*, a report available from the Conference Board, draws from survey data from 400 Target stores. The report gives guidance on how and why to build a corporate employee volunteer program that includes families. [www.conference-board.org](http://www.conference-board.org)

#### **NOTE ABOUT METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES**

*America's Family Volunteers* details findings from INDEPENDENT SECTOR's *Giving and Volunteering in the United States*, 1999, a biennial national survey of 2,553 adult Americans that reports trends in giving, volunteering, and charitable behavior.

#### **DATE REFERENCES**

This study assessed volunteering levels from May 1998 to May 1999. For purposes of this report volunteering is dated 1998. Earlier years have also been adjusted.

#### **DISTRIBUTION PARTNERS**

INDEPENDENT SECTOR is pleased to work with the Points of Light Foundation's "Family Matters" program and the Association for Volunteer Administration to widely distribute these findings.

#### **ADDITIONAL COPIES**

Additional copies of *America's Family Volunteers* (\$3.50 for INDEPENDENT SECTOR members, \$5.00 for nonmembers; plus shipping and handling) and *Giving and Volunteering in the United States* are available from INDEPENDENT SECTOR at 888-860-8118 or [www.IndependentSector.org](http://www.IndependentSector.org).





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