

# Volunteer Management in America's Religious Organizations

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Corporation for  
**NATIONAL &  
COMMUNITY  
SERVICE** 

# Volunteer Management Capacity Study Series

1 *Volunteer Management Capacity in America's Charities and Congregations*

The Urban Institute

February 2004

2 *Volunteer Management Practices and Retention of Volunteers*

The Urban Institute

June 2004

3 *Volunteer Management in America's Religious Organizations*

Corporation for National and Community Service

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## Background

To better understand the issues confronting our charities and congregational social service programs in managing volunteers, the Corporation for National and Community Service, the UPS Foundation, and the USA Freedom Corps organized the first national study of volunteer management capacity. The data, collected by the Urban Institute in fall 2003, is based on a representative sample of 1,753 charities, drawn from the more than 200,000 charities that filed Form 990 with the IRS in 2000. It also includes information from 541 congregations, representing the 380,000 congregations (of all faiths) identified by American Church Lists. Representative samples of charities and congregations were drawn based on the characteristics of the national populations so that the results can be used to describe current overall conditions in these organizations.

In February 2004, this effort produced a briefing report titled *Volunteer Management Capacity in America's Charities and Congregations*. The research sponsors subsequently created a website at [www.volunteerinput.org](http://www.volunteerinput.org) to share the key findings and gather input on the study and its implications for volunteer management. The sponsors are particularly interested in recommendations concerning what resources are needed and what steps should be taken by the nonprofit sector, funders, policymakers and others to strengthen volunteer management capacity in America. Together with other important stakeholders, the Corporation, USA Freedom Corps, and the UPS Foundation wish to develop a national response to improving volunteer management.

To build upon and better inform that effort, project partners are also supporting further analysis of the volunteer management study data and periodic releases of additional research briefs. This research publication, *Volunteer Management Capacity in America's Religious Organizations*, represents the third brief in that series.

# Executive Summary

*Volunteer Management in America's Religious Organizations* focuses on volunteer usage and management in two types of religious organizations:

- Congregations with social service programs
- Charities with a religious mission

According to the 2003 Volunteer Supplement to the Current Population Survey (conducted by the Bureau of Labor Statistics), 35 percent of Americans devote the greatest amount of their volunteer time to religious organizations and 41 percent volunteer at a religious organization to at least some extent, making religious organizations the most popular site for volunteering. Based on data from the volunteer management survey, we now know that 83 percent of congregations participate in or support social service, community development, or neighborhood organizing projects and 21 percent of America's charities include religious practices and faith as a core part of their mission. Since religious organizations play a key role in producing Americans' volunteer experiences, this brief explores the volunteer management capacity of congregations and charities with a religious mission.

## MAJOR FINDINGS

**Most Congregations With Social Service Programs Focus on Emergency Services.** Based on their main social service activities, congregational social service programs can be grouped into three major categories: emergency services, community development, and ministry and counseling. Most congregations with social service activities (50 percent) provide emergency services.

**129,000 Congregations Manage Volunteers in Social Service Programs.** The vast majority of congregations with social service activities (91 percent) report that their members serve as volunteers in the activities, and 48 percent of congregations with seasonal service activities (an estimated 129,000 organizations) have responsibility for managing volunteers in those activities.

**Most Congregations Partner or Collaborate When They Run Social Service Programs.** Seventy-nine percent of congregations indicated that they participate or collaborate with other organizations in sponsoring their activities, while only 5 percent said that they had primary responsibility for managing these activities and did not collaborate with other organizations. The remaining 16 percent had informal activities that included collaboration but not the same formal partnerships found in the majority of congregational social service activities.

**Most Charities With a Religious Mission Work in Human Services.** Out of the four major subsectors for charities (human services; education; health; and arts, culture and humanities), 63 percent of charities with a religious mission fall within the human services subsector, compared to 44 percent of charities with a secular mission.

**Charities With a Religious Mission Utilize A High Level of Volunteers.** Charities with a religious mission are more likely to have a large scope of volunteer use (more than 50 volunteers a year serving more than a total of 50 hours in week). While only a quarter of charities with a secular mission have a large scope of volunteer use, 38 percent of charities with a religious mission use volunteers to this large degree.

**Paid Volunteer Coordinators Are More Common in Charities With a Religious Mission.** Charities with a religious mission are more likely to have a paid volunteer coordinator than charities with a secular mission, and this coordinator typically devotes more time to volunteer management and is slightly more likely to have at least some formal training than a coordinator for a charity with a secular mission, perhaps highlighting the higher reliance on volunteers for charities with a religious mission.

**Relying on a Volunteer to Coordinate Other Volunteers Results in a Poor Volunteer Management Infrastructure.** While congregational social service programs and charities with a religious mission utilize many volunteers, and there is a tendency to use them as volunteer coordinators, the presence of a paid volunteer coordinator positively impacts the extent to which either group adopts volunteer management practices.

**Charities With a Secular Mission Are Missing the Opportunity to Partner With Religious Organizations.** Charities that partner with religious organizations report greater benefits and a greater scope of volunteer use. Yet, while 73 percent of charities with a religious mission report that they partner with a religious organization, only 15 percent of charities with a secular mission report such a partnership, highlighting the lack of interaction between religious and secular organizations in social service activities.

**Despite Their High Volunteer Use, Congregations and Charities With a Religious Mission Experience a Number of Volunteer Recruitment and Management Challenges.** Even though charities with a religious mission and congregations tend to partner with other religious organizations and potentially have ready access to a pool of volunteers, they still report similar challenges in recruiting and managing volunteers as charities with secular missions, a possible result of the tendency for charities with a religious mission to utilize a large scope of volunteers.

# Congregations with Social Service Outreach Activities

## Key Finding: Most Congregations that Participate in Social Service Outreach Activities Operate Emergency Services and Rely on Collaborations with Other Organizations

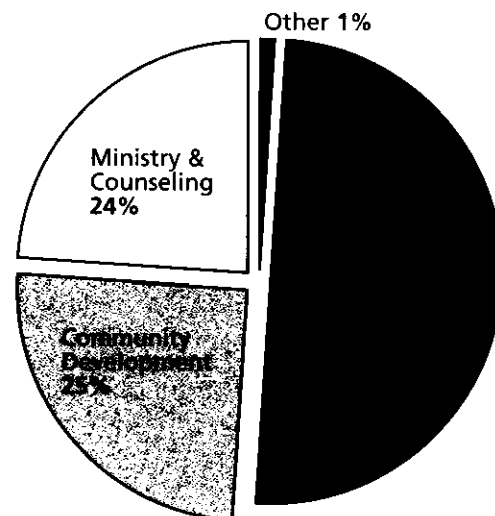
**The Majority of Congregations Participate in Social Service Outreach Programs.** We found that 83 percent of congregations participate in or support social service, community development, or neighborhood organizing projects. Congregations that have social service activities commonly engage in such projects as soup kitchens, homeless shelters, meal delivery for the elderly, GED preparation and job training, family counseling, and rehabilitation services.

**While Congregational Members Frequently Serve as Volunteers in the Social Service Activities, Slightly Less Than Half of These Congregations are Responsible for Managing These Volunteers.** Ninety-one percent of congregations with social service outreach activities report that their members serve as volunteers in the activities, while 48 percent of congregations have responsibility for managing volunteers in those activities.

**Half of Congregations With Social Service Outreach Activities Provide Emergency Services.** Based on the social service activities that congregations reported, we constructed three categories: emergency services, community development activities, and ministry and counseling (Figure 1). Of those congregations with social service activities, most (50 percent) primarily provide emergency services, 25 percent engage predominantly in community development projects, and 24 percent provide services in ministry and counseling.<sup>1</sup> Because emergency

services allow for a less formalized infrastructure and more episodic activities, these activities are more readily adaptable by congregations and may account for their prevalence in congregational social service programs.

Figure 1. Types of social service activities among congregations



Activities among Congregations by Three Main Categories:

- Emergency Services: food and clothing banks, transient assistance, and homeless and women's shelters
- Community Development Activities: educational classes, home ownership assistance, and building restoration
- Ministry & Counseling: religious ministry, family counseling, prisoner reentry assistance, and drug rehabilitation counseling

**Congregations Are Not Likely to Run Social Service Outreach Activities on Their Own.** We asked congregations if they have primary responsibility for activities and if they collaborate with others in these services. Seventy-nine percent of congregations indicated that they participate or collaborate with other organizations in sponsoring their activities, while 28 percent of these congregations also reported that they had primary responsibility for running the activities. Only 5 percent of congregations with social service outreach activities reported that they had primary responsibility for managing these activities and did not collaborate with other organizations. The remaining 16 percent had informal activities that included collaboration but not the same formal partnerships found in the majority of congregational social service activities. (Figure 2)

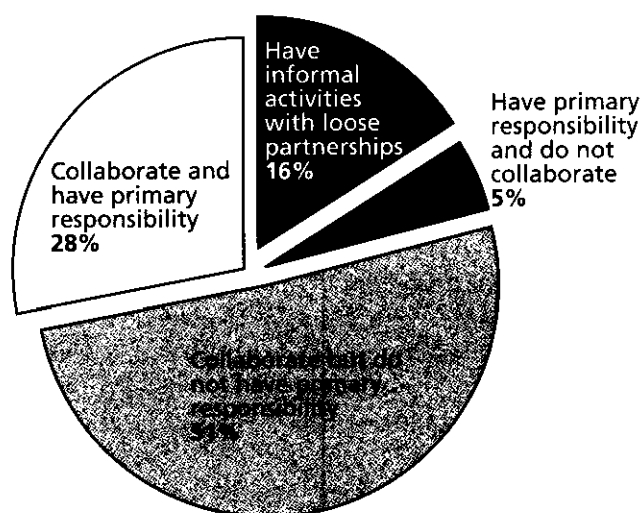
**Larger Congregations Are More Likely to Have Primary Responsibility for Social Service Outreach Activities.** While 54 percent of large congregations (more than 500 active participants) report primary responsibility for activities, only 21 percent of small congregations (100 or fewer active participants) report having this responsibility.<sup>2</sup> The type of social service activity does not appear to impact whether a congregation has primary responsibility for the activities: 39 percent of congregations with community development

activities have primary responsibility, compared to 32 percent of those that provide emergency services and 30 percent of those that provide ministry and counseling services.

<sup>1</sup>A small number of congregations, less than 1 percent, did not fit into these three categories; they were categorized as 'Other' and, given the small sample size, were not included in this analysis of congregations.

<sup>2</sup>Congregational size is based on the number of people that regularly participate in the religious life of the congregation, including both adults and children and people who are not formal members of the congregation.

**Figure 2. Congregations and how they run their social service activities**



# Charities with a Religious Mission

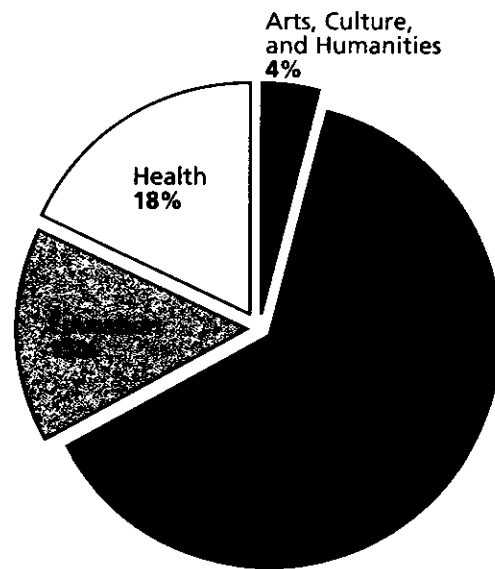
**Key Finding: When Religious Practices and Faith Are a Core Part of a Charity's Mission, It Is More Likely to Be Located in Human Services and Use Volunteers in Direct Service**

The volunteer management capacity survey asked charities if "religious practices and faith are a core part of [their] organization's mission." Of the 1,753 charities surveyed, 21 percent responded that religious practices and faith are a core part of their organization's mission. We designated these charities as 'charities with a religious mission,' while we qualified those who responded 'no' as 'charities with a secular mission.'

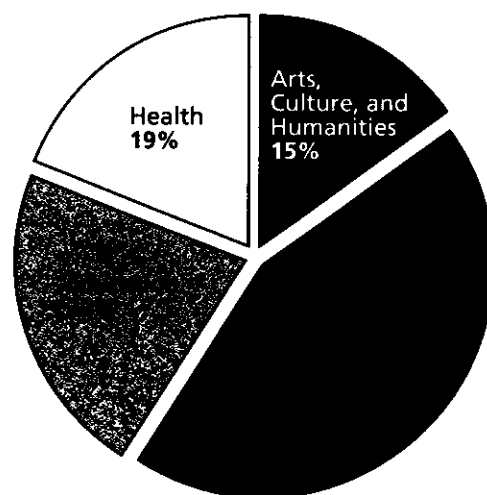
**Charities With a Religious Mission Are More Likely to Utilize Volunteers to Provide Direct Services Than Charities With a Secular Mission:** We asked charities what tasks most of their volunteers performed and then coded the tasks into four categories: direct services, such as mentoring and tutoring; external administrative activities, such as fundraising; internal administrative activities, such as filing and copying; and indirect services, such as planting trees. The majority of charities with a religious mission (70 percent) report that they primarily utilize volunteers to provide direct services, compared to 52 percent of charities with a secular mission.

**Charities With a Religious Mission Are Also More Likely to Be in Human Services.** Analysis was done of the charities surveyed that belong in one of four major subsectors: human services; education; health; and arts, culture and humanities.<sup>3</sup> While only 44 percent of charities with a secular mission are in the human services subsector, the large majority of charities with a religious mission (63 percent) fall within the same subsector. (Figure 3)

Figure 3. Service subsectors among charities with a religious mission



Service subsectors among charities with a secular mission

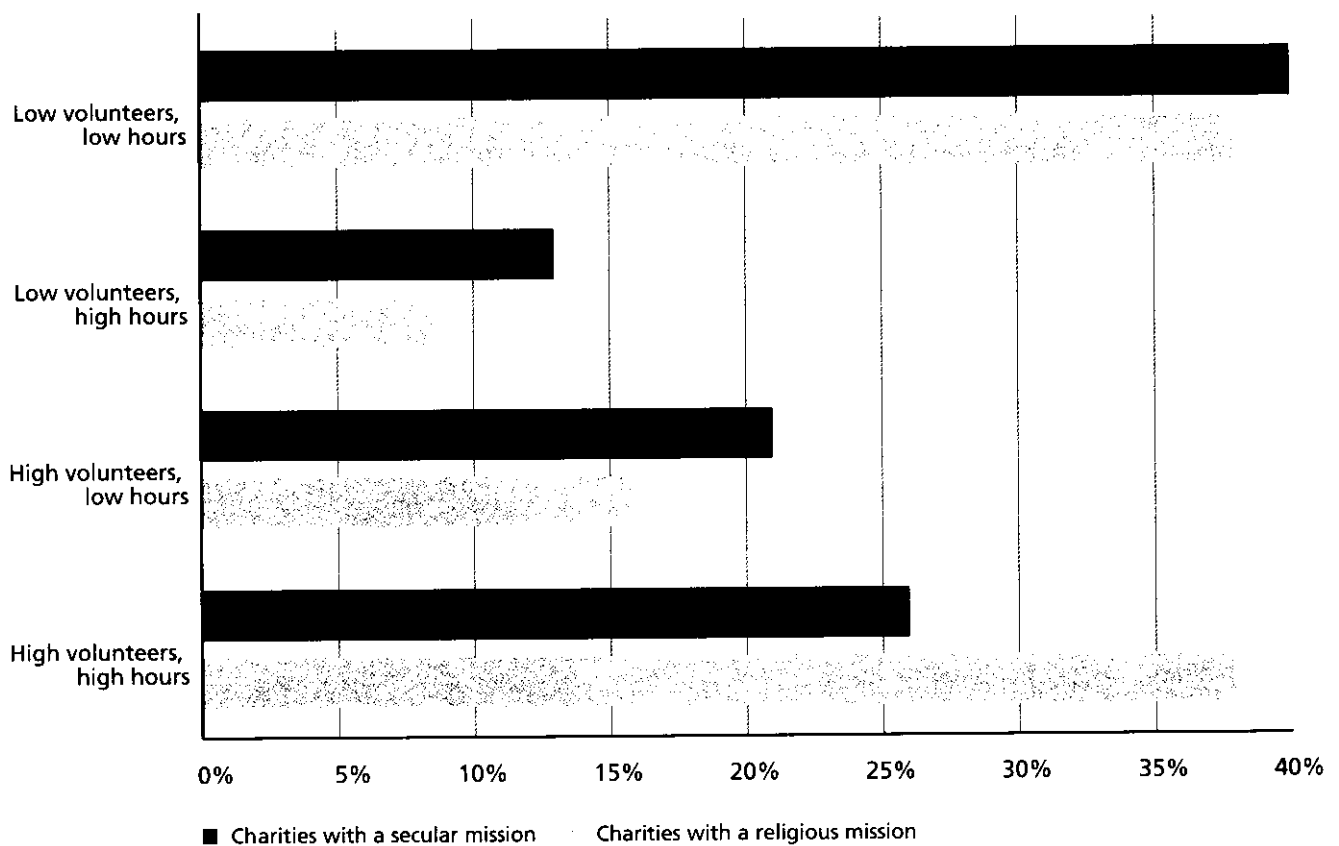


**There Are No Significant Differences in Organizational Size Between Charities With Religious and Secular Missions.** While there is a tendency to characterize religiously-based charities primarily as small, community-based organizations, the findings indicate that charities with a religious mission do not differ from those with a secular mission in terms of the size of their operating budget or the size of their staff. Like charities with a secular mission, charities with a religious mission most commonly have ten or fewer paid staff members. However, only 8 percent have no paid staff and 25 percent have more than 30 paid staff (compared to 16 percent and 24 percent for charities with a secular mission).

**Charities With Religious Missions Are More Likely to Have a Large Number of Volunteers Serving a Large Number of Hours.** Despite their relative similarity in size, charities with a religious mission are more likely to have a large scope of volunteer use (more than 50 volunteers in a year combining to serve more than 50 hours a week). While just 25 percent of charities with a secular mission have a large scope of volunteer use, 38 percent of charities with a religious mission use volunteers to this large degree. (Figure 4)

<sup>3</sup>Three-fourths of the charities surveyed belong to one of these four subsectors. The remaining one-fourth of charities fall within an Other category, which includes charities that support the work of other charities or charities that operate in a smaller subsector, such as environmental or animal services.

Figure 4. Scope of volunteer use among charities\*



\*'Low volunteers' indicates 50 or fewer volunteers in a year, and 'high volunteers' indicates more than 50 volunteers in a year. 'Low hours' indicates 50 or fewer total hours in a week, and 'high hours' indicates more than 50 hours in a week.



# The Benefits and Challenges of Volunteer Recruitment and Management

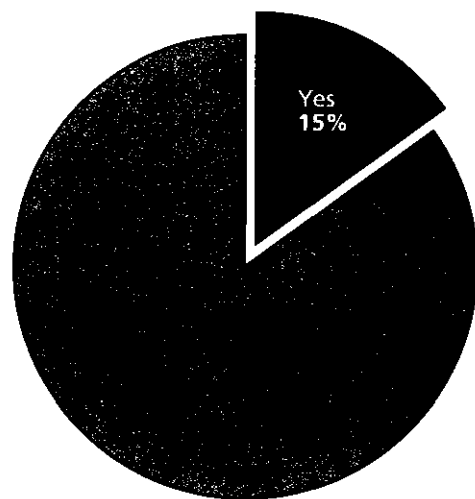
**Key Finding: Charities That Collaborate or Partner With Religious Organizations Report Greater Benefits from Volunteers; However, Charities With a Secular Mission Rarely Develop Such Partnerships**

**The Vast Majority of Charities That Partner With Religious Organizations Also Have a Religious Mission.** According to the study data, 27 percent of all charities partner with religious organizations. While 73 percent of charities with a religious mission report that they partner with a religious organization, only 15 percent of charities with a secular mission report such a partnership, highlighting the lack of interaction between religious and secular organizations in social service activities. (Figure 5)

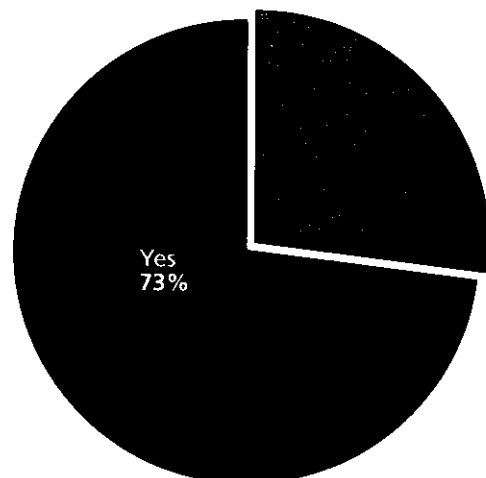
**Charities With a Religious Mission Are Notably More Likely to Report That Volunteers Increase the Quality of Services and Provide Cost-Savings to Their Organization.** Survey respondents indicated whether volunteers benefited their organization to a great extent, some extent, or not at all in six different areas. Figure 6 shows the percentage of charities that say that volunteers benefit their organization to a great extent in each of the areas. With the exception of access to volunteers with specialized skills, charities with a religious mission are more likely to report a greater degree of benefits from volunteers than charities with a secular mission, particularly with respect to quality of service and cost-savings.

**Congregations and Charities With Religious Missions Face Volunteer Management Challenges Similar to Charities With Secular Missions.** Even though charities with religious missions and congregations tend to partner with other religious organizations and potentially have a ready access to a pool of volunteers, they still report similar challenges in recruiting and managing volunteers as charities with secular missions, such as recruiting a sufficient number of volunteers and volunteers available to work during the day. These

Figure 5. Charities with a secular mission that partner with religious organizations



Charities with a religious mission that partner with other religious organizations



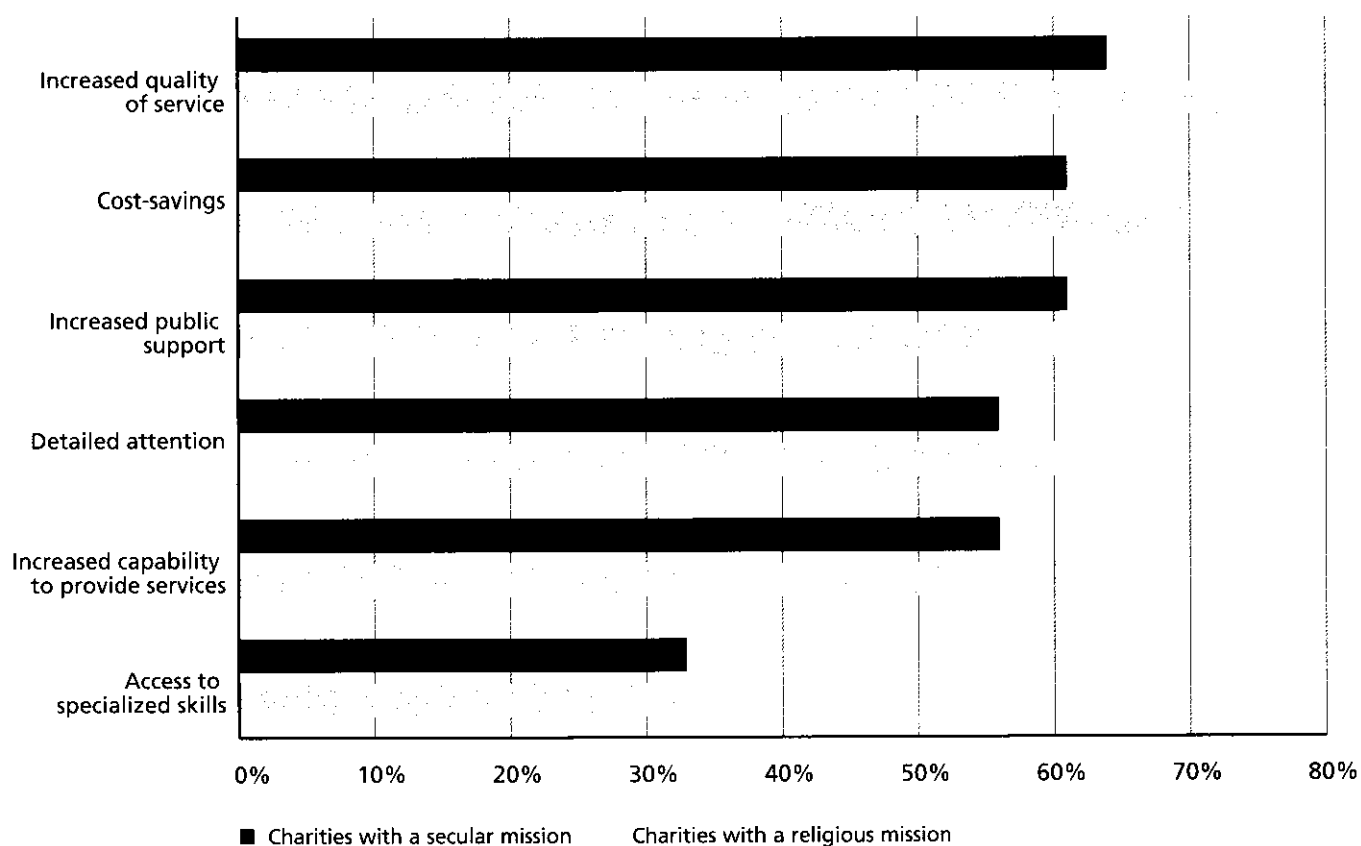
recruitment challenges may be due to the tendency for charities with a religious mission to utilize a large scope of volunteers. However, further attention should be given to the particular nature of volunteer challenges for religious organizations when working to build the volunteer management capacity of charitable organizations.

**Both Congregations and Charities With a Religious Mission Are Ready to Take on Additional Volunteers.**

The median congregation that manages volunteers in social service outreach activities and median charity

report that they can take on 20 additional volunteers at current capacity. Neither the type of activities the congregation engages in, nor the religiousness of a charity's mission, impacts the median number of additional volunteers. This ready capacity, combined with the 2002 CPS estimate that 6.3 million non-volunteering Americans would volunteer if they had more information about volunteer opportunities, highlights the potential opportunities that increased partnerships between religious and secular organizations could bring to increasing the capacity of volunteer organizations.

Figure 6. Volunteer benefits reported by charities to a great extent

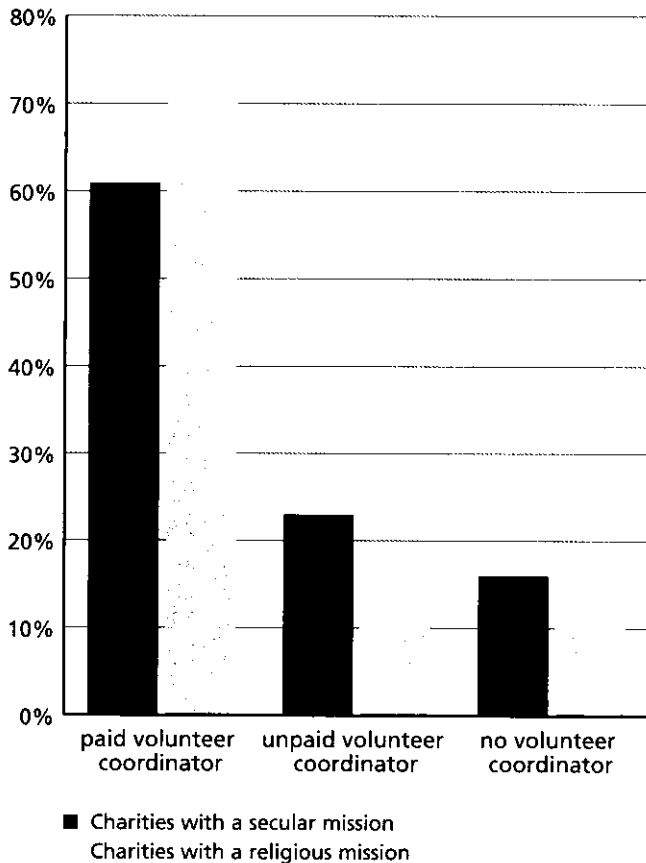


# Volunteer Coordinator

**Key Finding: When Organizations Use Volunteers to Coordinate Other Volunteers, They Lag Substantially Behind in the Adoption of Volunteer Management Practices**

**Charities With a Religious Mission Are More Likely to Have a Paid Volunteer Coordinator Devoted to Volunteer Management Than Charities With a Secular Mission.** Among charities with a religious mission, 73 percent have a paid volunteer coordinator, compared to 61 percent of charities with a secular mission. While the median paid volunteer coordinator for charities with a religious mission spends 40 percent of their time on volunteer management, the median paid coordinator for charities with a secular mission spends only 25 percent. In addition, 70 percent of paid coordinators in charities with a religious mission have formal training in volunteer management, versus 65 percent in charities with a secular mission. (Figure 7)

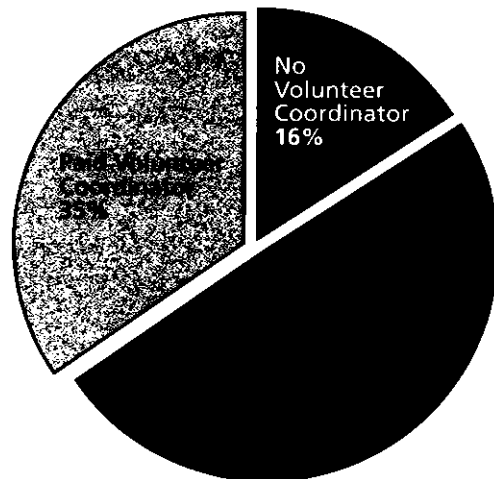
Figure 7. Presence of a volunteer coordinator in charities



**Congregations Are More Likely to Depend Upon Volunteers to Coordinate Other Volunteers.** Half of congregations that manage volunteers in social service outreach activities have a volunteer who coordinates other volunteers. Of the 35 percent of congregations that have a paid volunteer coordinator, the median paid coordinator devotes 30 percent of his or her time to volunteer management. (Figure 8)

**Reliance on a Volunteer to Coordinate Other Volunteers Results in a Poor Volunteer Management Infrastructure.** The presence of a paid volunteer coordinator significantly impacts the extent to which congregations adopt management practices. Of congregations with a paid volunteer coordinator, 62 percent have implemented management practices to a moderately high degree, compared to 34 percent of congregations with a volunteer who coordinates other volunteers and just 19 percent of congregations without any volunteer coordinator. Similarly, the lack of a paid volunteer coordinator in charities with a religious mission has a substantial negative impact on the adoption of management practices.

Figure 8. Presence of volunteer coordinator among congregations with social service activities



# Management Practices

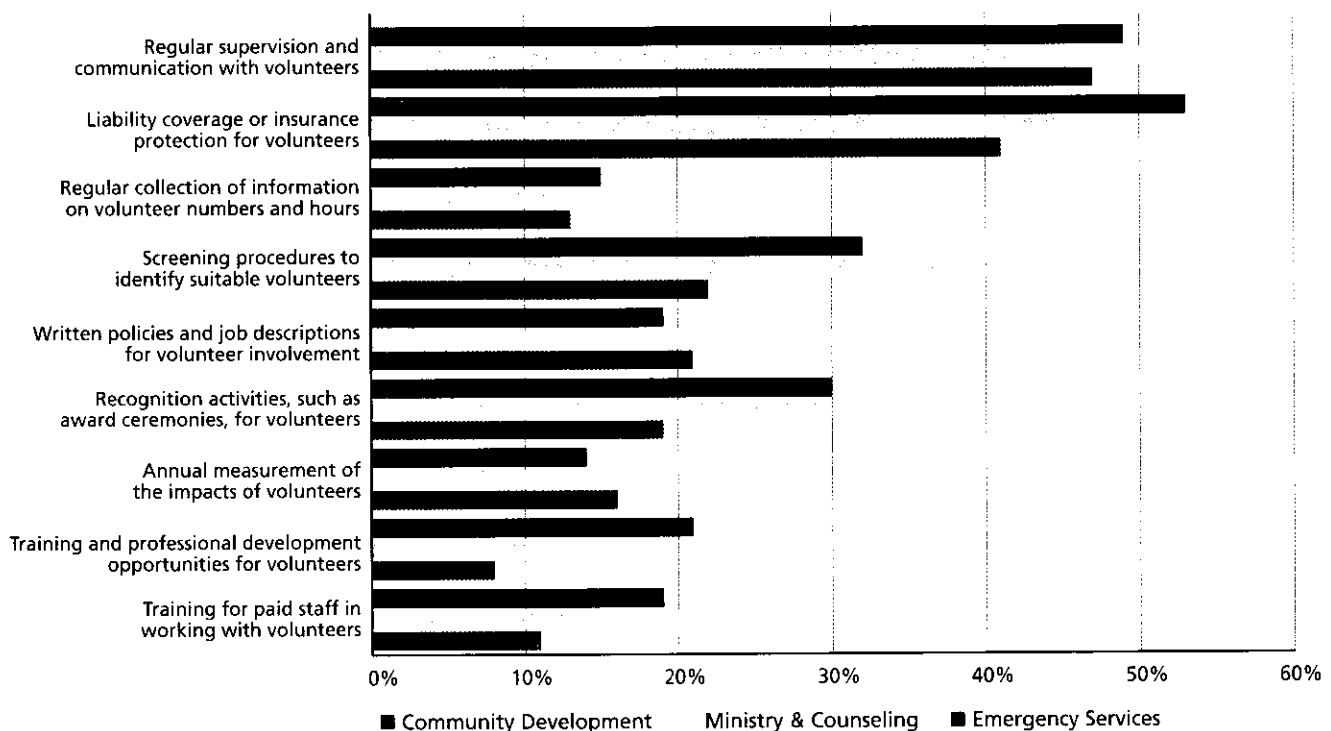
## Key Finding: The Type of Social Service Activity and Size of Congregation Impact the Adoption of Management Practices by Congregations

**The Type of Social Service Activity Impacts the Degree to Which Congregations Adopt Management Practices.** Organizations were asked whether they have implemented various management practices to a large degree, some degree or not at all. Among congregations, those that primarily engage in emergency services are the least likely to implement various management practices to a large degree, most likely due to the fact that many of activities are informal, such as food and clothing banks. Those congregations that participate in community development activities are most likely to implement practices related to building the capacity of volunteers, such as recognition activities and training and professional development activities, while those that engage in ministry and counseling are more likely to implement practices that build their capacity to find volunteers with the right skills and provide for professionalization. (Figure 9)

### Management Index

To compare the overall degree of the adoption of management practices with other organizational characteristics, we created a Management Index from the nine management practices. Each of the practices contributes a value of 0 to the Index if a charity or congregation indicates they have not adopted the practice at all. The practice contributes a 1 if an organization has adopted the practice to some degree and a 2 if an organization has adopted the practice to a large degree. The Index ranges from a value of 0 to 18. The median charity has a value of 10, while the median congregation has a value of 8. For an organization to have moderately high management adoption, the organization would have scored at least a 10.

Figure 9. Management practices implemented by congregations with social service activities to a large degree



**Activity Type Also Impacts the Overall Level of Management Adoption among Congregations.** According to the Management Index, congregations that provide ministry and counseling are more likely to implement the management practices to a greater extent than other congregations. While 50 percent of those congregations that primarily provide ministry and counseling scored at least moderately high on the management index, only 35 percent of congregations that provide emergency services and 39 percent of congregations with activities in community development scored as high.

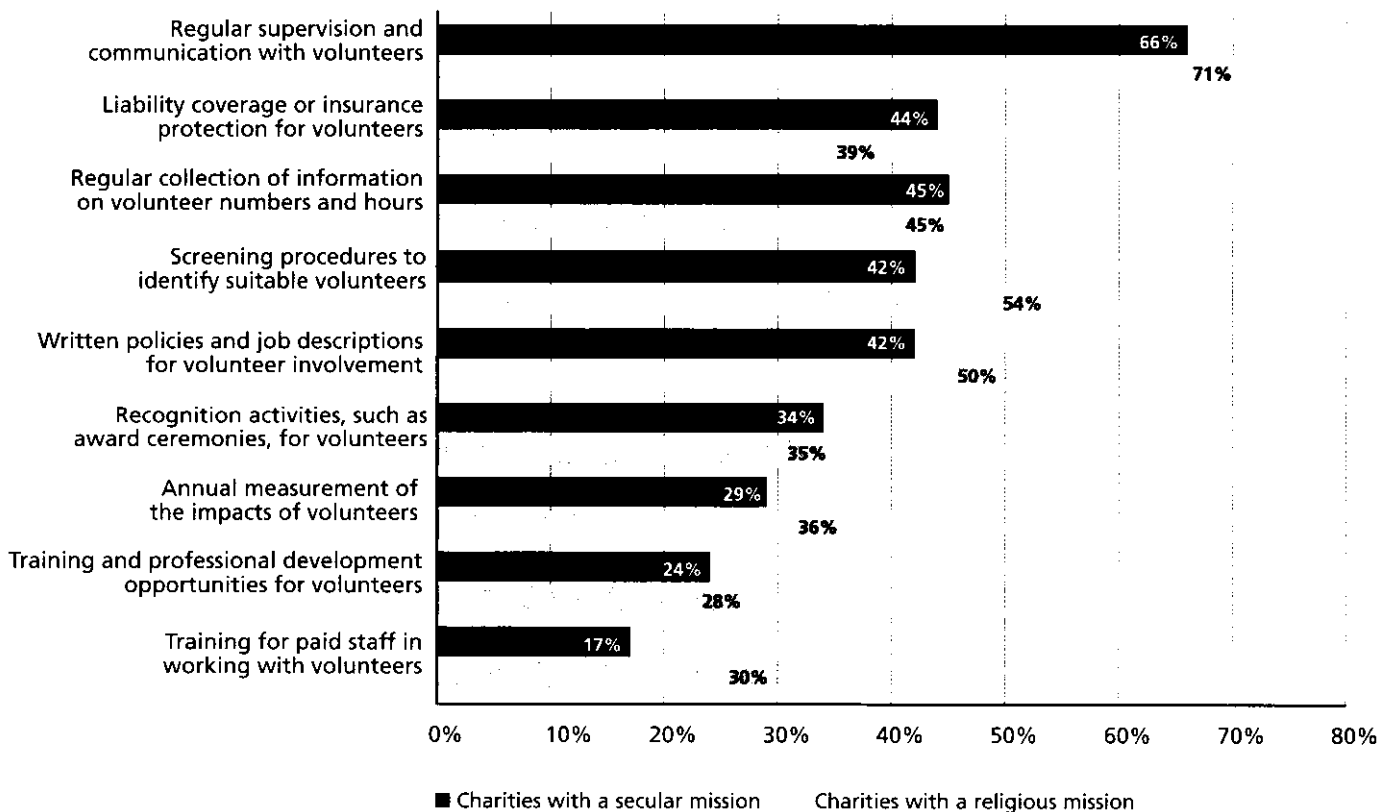
**The Size of Congregations Significantly Impacts the Adoption of Management Practices.** While many congregations provide regular supervision and liability coverage for their volunteers, large congregations (those with more than 500 active participants) are substantially more likely to adopt management practices to a large degree, with the exception of recognition activities, measurement of volunteer impact, and regular collection of volunteer hours. However, many congregations tend to conduct informal activities or have a small number of active congregational participants, which may make large-scale adoption of management practices impracti-

cal. In addition, it is possible that such practices as volunteer recognition are not as important for volunteers that are motivated for religious reasons.

**Religious Mission Mildly Affects Management Practices Among Charities.** Figure 10 shows the percentages of charities that have adopted the management practices to a large degree. With the exception of liability coverage and regular collection of volunteer numbers and hours, charities with a religious mission are more likely than charities with a secular mission to have implemented the management practices to a large degree.<sup>4</sup> In addition, charities with a religious mission are slightly more likely to score high on the management index—65 percent of charities with a religious mission scored at least moderately high on the management index, compared to 56 percent of charities with a secular mission. This difference may be due, in part, to a greater reliance by charities with a religious mission on a larger number of volunteers serving a larger number of hours. (Figure 10)

<sup>4</sup> For more on particular management practices, see the second brief in this series, *Volunteer Management Practices and Retention of Volunteers*

Figure 10. Management practices implemented by charities to a large degree



# Methodology

The volunteer management capacity study is based on surveys of separate populations of U.S. charities and congregations. A sample of 2,993 charities was drawn within expenditure and subsector strata from 214,995 charities that filed Form 990 with the IRS in 2000. A sample of 1,003 congregations was drawn within denominational strata, including an oversample of non-Judeo-Christian congregations, from 382,231 entities provided by American Church Lists in August 2003.

From August to November 2003, the Urban Institute and Princeton Survey Research Associates called organizations to verify their existence, check mailing addresses, and obtain the name of an appropriate contact; they completed precalls with 80 percent of charities. After contact, they mailed a letter that explained the motivations of the study and invited participation, and then called each organization up to 30 times to collect study information. Interviews averaging 20 minutes were conducted with organizational representatives familiar with volunteer

management. In the final weeks of the study, interviewers offered \$50 donations to organizations that were reluctant to participate; 11 percent of interviews were completed with an incentive. Adjusting for sampled organizations that were defunct or could not be verified as "working organizations," our response rate was 69 percent for both the charity and congregation samples.

Responding charities were weighted to represent the expenditure and subsector strata from which they were sampled. Responding congregations were weighted to represent their denominational categories. Weights were further adjusted to account for organizations unreachable in the precall. Because these weights help ensure that our respondents reflect the characteristics of the working population from which they were drawn, the results of the study reported in this brief are based on the weighted responses. For more details on methodology, consult the FAQ at [www.volunteerinput.org](http://www.volunteerinput.org).

## Author Bios

Kimberly A. Spring works for the Corporation for National and Community Service in the Department of Research and Policy Development. Her research interests include community-based development and the impact of culture on community development practices.

Robert T. Grimm, Jr., is currently serving as the Director of Research and Policy Development at the Corporation for National and Community Service. He has directed the research efforts for the Volunteer Management Capacity project since its inception and is also the author of numerous research publications, including a recent book *Notable American Philanthropists: Biographies of Giving and Volunteering*. (Westport, CT and London: Greenwood Press, 2002).

## Project Sponsors

The volunteer management capacity survey project was launched by the USA Freedom Corps. The project is supported by the Corporation for National and Community Service and The UPS Foundation. The data collection was conducted by the Urban Institute. For additional information on these sponsors, consult *Volunteer Management Capacity in America's Charities and Congregations: A Briefing Document*, or visit our joint website at [www.volunteerinput.org](http://www.volunteerinput.org).

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