

# Volunteering in America 2011

## Research Highlights

August 2011

The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) hosts the most comprehensive collection of information on volunteering in the U.S. at its Web site: [www.VolunteeringInAmerica.gov](http://www.VolunteeringInAmerica.gov). The site allows civic leaders, nonprofit organizations, and interested individuals to retrieve a wide range of information regarding trends and demographics in volunteering in their regions, states, and nearly 200 metro areas. Volunteering data available through the Web site was collected through the Current Population Survey in 1974, 1989, and every year since 2002. This document highlights some of the key findings from the new data released in 2011.



### Key Findings

**Generation X shows a high rate of volunteering in 2010 after increases since their teen years.**

- Generation X stepped up their commitment in 2010, giving 2.3 billion hours of service—an increase of almost 110 million hours since 2009. Once stereotyped as skeptical and disengaged, Generation X is showing signs of optimism that they can make a difference in their communities through service as they become more connected to local networks through their careers and their children.
- Gen X members have more than doubled their volunteer rate between 1989 and the present day (2010). In 1989, 12.3 percent of Generation X members who were between 16 (the minimum age to participate in the survey) and 24 volunteered with an organization. By 2010, the Gen X volunteer rate had risen to 29.2 percent.<sup>1</sup>
- The increases in volunteer rates seen among Generation X reflect an observable pattern in volunteering among different age groups that holds true year after year. You might call it a “volunteer lifecycle.” What we see is that in every year for which we have volunteer data the following is true:
  - The volunteer rate tends to be higher in teen years than in early adulthood, when the volunteering rate is typically at its second lowest point after very old age.
  - In the mid- to late twenties, volunteering rates begin to pick up again, growing until they reach a peak around the time of middle age.
  - After middle age, volunteering rates begin to drop as age increases.

Millennials: Born After 1981\*

Generation X: Born between 1965 and 1981

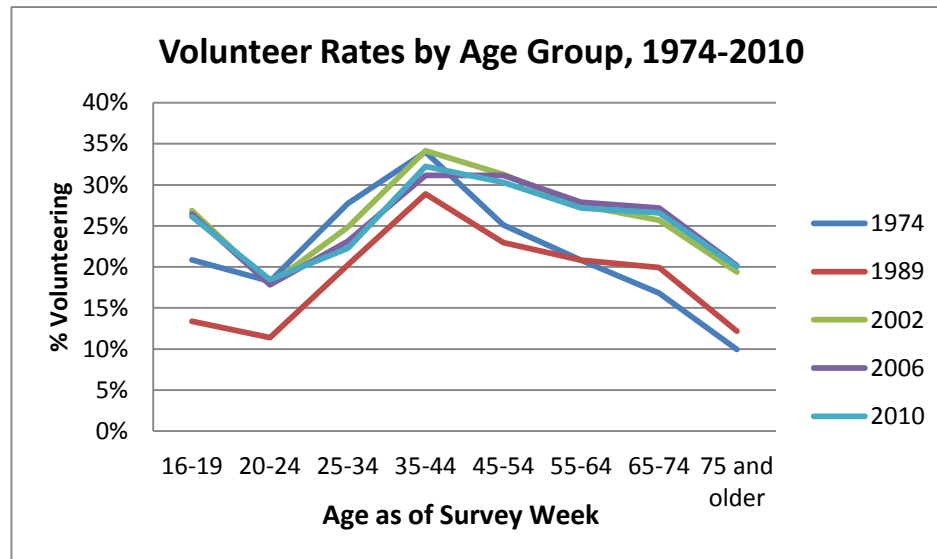
Baby Boomers: Born Between 1946 and 1964

Silent Generation: Born Between 1931 and 1945

\*Data only includes people ages 16 and older



<sup>1</sup> The Generation X members who were survey-eligible in 1989 were the oldest Generation X members, and were between the ages of 37-45 in 2010. That group's volunteer rate in 2010 was 32.5 percent.



Even given this life-cycle trend, data show that Generation X members volunteered at an usually low rate in their teens and early twenties in 1989 compared to teens and young adults in 1974 and in 2002-2010. Because of that low starting point, their high volunteering rates today are particularly striking in contrast.

The drop off in volunteering from the middle age peak has diminished quite a bit since 1974 and 1989. It would appear as though more adults are serving later in life today than in previous years. As the large Baby Boomer generation ages, the number of older adults will dramatically increase in the coming years. This means that while more Americans may become reliant on services for the elderly, there may also be a much greater number of older adults ready and willing to serve. Older adults also tend to serve a greater number of hours per year than other adults, which makes the trend of higher volunteering rates among this group particularly promising.

There may also be opportunity here to further flatten out the decline in volunteer rates in the later years of life, by promoting the health benefits of volunteering for older people. Volunteering is related to greater longevity and increased emotional and physical health among older adults. Service and medicine can be mutually beneficial tools to strengthen one another in increasing the health and vitality of older adults and the communities in which they live.

### **Volunteers served 8.1 billion hours in 2010, valued at an estimated \$173 billion.**

Although the volunteer rate showed a slight decrease from 26.8 percent in 2009 to 26.3 percent in 2010, volunteers contributed approximately the same amount of hours—8.1 billion in both years. As nonprofit organizations across the country continue to face serious budget challenges, the vital contribution volunteers make takes on more importance all the time. The proportion of volunteers who serve 100 hours or more increased between 2009 and 2010 from 33.2 percent to 33.8 percent, and the median number of hours served per volunteer rose from 50 to 52 per year. All told, the total estimated value of volunteer service in 2010 was about \$173 billion based on the Independent Sector's annual estimate of the average value of a volunteer hour, which was \$21.36 in 2010.

The decrease in the volunteer rate may be due in large part to a corresponding decrease in volunteer retention. Only 63.5 percent of the volunteers who served in 2009 returned to service again in 2010, which is two percentage points lower than the volunteer retention rate between 2008 and 2009, which was 65.5 percent. Previous research shows that strategies aimed at enriching the volunteer experience—recognition, training and professional development opportunities, and matching volunteers’ skills to their service tasks—all influence greater volunteer retention.

**Volunteers Meet Crucial Needs in the Community**

Across the nation, organizations are serving the country’s most vulnerable using fewer resources. Between 2008 and 2010, volunteers worked in a range of critical areas to bridge these gaps.

- Millions of volunteers devoted their time to working with youth through mentoring (17.0 percent) or tutoring and teaching (18.5 percent)
- More than one-quarter of volunteers (26.5 percent) participated in fundraising activities or sold items to raise money for an organization
- Other volunteers collected, prepared, distributed, or served food (23.5 percent) or contributed much needed sweat hours through general labor or providing transportation (20.3 percent)

**State and Metro Area Rankings**

States and Metro areas are ranked yearly on a number of volunteer-related factors including their volunteer rates. We use a 3-year average rate for this to ensure reliable comparisons between states and metro areas.

Top states and large metropolitan areas for pooled volunteer rates including data from 2008, 2009, and 2010 include:

Rank	State	Rate
#1	Utah	44.5%
#2	Iowa	37.9%
#3	Minnesota	37.5%
#4	Nebraska	37.4%
#5	South Dakota	37.2%

Rank	Large Metro Area	Rate
#1	Minneapolis-St. Paul	37.1%
#2	Portland, OR	36.2%
#3	Salt Lake City	34.1%
#4	Seattle	33.9%
#5	Rochester, NY	33.8%

**About the Data**

Data are collected each year through a supplement to the Current Population Survey (CPS) September Volunteer Supplement. Yearly collection began in 2002. Before 2002, some volunteering data was also collected through the Current Population Survey in 1974 and 1989. The Volunteer Supplement collects data on the volunteering activities of adults aged 16 and older. Volunteers are considered individuals who performed unpaid volunteer activities through or for an organization at any point during the 12-month period, from September 1 of the prior year through the survey week in September of the survey year.

**The Corporation for National and Community Service**

The Corporation for National and Community Service is a federal agency that engages more than five million Americans in service through its Senior Corps, AmeriCorps, and Learn and Serve America programs, and leads President Obama's national call to service initiative, United We Serve. For more information, visit [NationalService.gov](http://NationalService.gov).