

Research Brief:

## Long-Distance Volunteering in the United States, 2007

July 2008



### Key Findings

- In 2007, about 3.7 million volunteers – about 6 percent of all volunteers age 16 and over – reported doing at least some long-distance volunteering, traveling at least 120 miles to volunteer with an organization located within the U.S., but outside their communities.
- The ten most popular destinations for long-distance volunteering that occur outside one’s own state include several of the most populous states, plus the five states affected by the 2005 Gulf hurricanes, Katrina, Rita and Wilma: Texas, Florida, Mississippi, Alabama and Louisiana.
- If we count “total” volunteers as state residents who volunteer plus non-residents who travel 120 miles or more to volunteer, non-state residents are at least ten percent of “total” volunteers in nine states.
- The effect of efforts to bring volunteers to areas ravaged by Katrina continues to be felt. In 2007, over 140,000 people – about 25 percent of the “total” number of volunteers – traveled more than 120 miles from out of state to volunteer in Mississippi. Over 166,000 long-distance volunteers from other states – about 19 percent of the “total” number of volunteers – traveled to Louisiana to volunteer there.
- Compared to all adult volunteers, a larger proportion of long-distance volunteers are single and do not have children. Adult volunteers in general are considerably more likely to be married or raising children.
- Compared to all adult volunteers, a larger proportion of long-distance volunteers are young adults, aged 16-24.
- The most committed volunteers are also the most likely to engage in long-distance volunteering. For example: individuals who volunteer more than 100 hours per year, serve more than 12 weeks per year with their main organization, or serve with more than one organization, are much more likely to serve as long-distance volunteers.

### How Many People Volunteer Long-Distance?

While most American adult volunteers serve within their own community, or close to home, many others travel a considerable distance to volunteer in other parts of the country. According to recent reports, there are many reasons to think that volunteering outside of the community has grown in popularity in recent years, even though the overall volunteer rate has decreased slightly over the past two years. “Long-distance” volunteers may be motivated by a number of factors. First, many sources suggest “voluntourism” – travel for which volunteer work is one of the main purposes

is growing in popularity (especially among younger volunteers).<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, a number of retirees and older adults spend the cold-weather months living in warm-weather climates. These “snowbirds” may volunteer at one or both of their primary residences. Other long-distance volunteers travel to provide service in response to a crisis or natural disaster. For example, many Americans responded to Hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma by traveling to the Gulf region to volunteer. However, it is unknown how many people may still be volunteering in the affected areas to assist the rebuilding efforts.

This issue brief provides the first detailed view of *long-distance volunteers* – people who travel a considerable distance (more than 120 miles) away from their homes to volunteer. The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), in partnership with the US Census Bureau and the Bureau of Labor Statistics, began collecting information on long-distance volunteering through the Current Population Survey (CPS) in 2007 (see Methodology box). The CPS data reveals that 3.7 million volunteers – about 6 percent of the 60.8 million adults who volunteered through or with an organization between September 2006 and September 2007 – reported doing at least some long-distance volunteering.

### Where Do Long-Distance Volunteers Serve?

When asked to name up to five states where they engaged in long-distance volunteering, almost three-fourths of all long-distance volunteers (73 percent) served in only one state. In fact, 34 percent of all long-distance volunteers served 120 miles or more away from home, but exclusively within their home state. Among long-distance volunteers who traveled outside their home state to serve, the ten most popular destinations include several of the most populous states, plus the five states affected by the 2005 Gulf hurricanes, Katrina, Rita and Wilma: Texas, Florida, Mississippi, Alabama and Louisiana.

**Table 1: Top Ten Destination States for Long-Distance Volunteers, 2007**

Rank	State	Number of Long-Distance Volunteers Serving There, 2007	State Population Rank (2007)
1	California	362,184	1
2	Texas	335,507	2
3	New York	281,044	3
4	Florida	260,386	4
5	Illinois	195,600	5
6	Louisiana	174,648	25
7	Mississippi	165,276	31
8	Georgia	156,453	9
9	Pennsylvania	155,349	6
10	Ohio	149,441	7

<sup>1</sup> Dave Carpenter, “‘Voluntourism’ Becomes Popular.” April 8, 2007. Associated Press. Available at <http://www.casefoundation.org/spotlight/travel>.

As the table above illustrates, the Gulf states (Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida and Texas) are still frequent destinations for long-distance volunteers in 2007. As one might expect, a lot of long-distance volunteers serve in the largest states, which tend to contain the largest cities and other tourist attractions. However, Louisiana and Mississippi, which are not large states, nonetheless attract an extraordinary number of long-distance volunteers, almost three years after the devastating hurricanes of 2005.

Where do these hurricane-related volunteers come from? As seen in the table below, many long-distance volunteers live in Gulf states themselves, and many travel long distances to serve in affected areas within their home states. Volunteers living in several other states, such as Georgia, Oklahoma, Maryland, Indiana and Kansas, are also especially likely to travel to the Gulf states to engage in long-distance volunteering.

**Table 2: Top Ten States – Resident Volunteers Who Served Long-Distance in Gulf States**

Rank	State	% of State Volunteers who Served as Long-Distance Volunteers in Gulf States <sup>2</sup>	Number of State Volunteers who Served as Long-Distance Volunteers in Gulf States
1	Mississippi	7.2%	31,026
2	Alabama	6.3%	53,176
3	Texas	5.0%	229,379
4	Louisiana	4.1%	28,339
5	Georgia	3.0%	52,892
6	Florida	2.8%	77,579
7	Oklahoma	2.4%	19,732
8	Maryland	2.3%	28,678
9	Indiana	2.1%	30,798
10	Kansas	1.9%	14,364

Nationwide, even though only about 6 percent of volunteers do any long-distance volunteering, a look at the “total” number of volunteers – volunteers who are state residents, plus out-of-state volunteers who live more than 120 miles away<sup>3</sup> – sometimes gives a different view of how much volunteering is occurring in an area. For example, over 140,000 non-state residents traveled 120 miles or more to volunteer in Mississippi. Since over 429,000 Mississippi residents volunteered in 2007, you could say that there were 569,000 “total” volunteers in the state in 2007, and that about 141,000 non-resident volunteers comprised one-fourth of the “total” volunteers. Meanwhile, Wyoming had over 135,000 state resident volunteers in 2007 as well as over 35,000 nonresidents who volunteer long-distance in Wyoming, which means long-distance volunteers equaled about one-fifth of the “total” number of volunteers in Wyoming in 2007. Overall, for nine states, at least 10 percent of their “total” volunteers are non-state residents who are long-distance volunteers.

<sup>2</sup> These percentages include volunteers who live in Gulf states and travel 120 miles or more within the state to volunteer.

<sup>3</sup> The long-distance volunteering question does not allow us to identify volunteers who serve in a different state, but less than 120 miles from home. Thus, the “total” number of volunteers seen here underestimates the number of non-state residents who volunteer in a given state.

The ten states with the highest proportion of long-distance, out-of-state volunteers relative to their “total” volunteers appear to illustrate the “voluntourism” idea (See Table 3). For example, Wyoming, Idaho, South Dakota, and Nevada are all popular tourist destinations that contain such national parks as Yellowstone, the Badlands, Mount Rushmore, and Lake Mead. Similarly, Alaska, Hawaii and Washington, DC are quintessential tourist destinations for a lot of Americans. As for the other three states on the list, Mississippi and Louisiana became a hot spot for college alternative spring breaks and other forms of “voluntourism” after Hurricane Katrina, while the high levels of poverty in West Virginia have motivated a long tradition of people traveling there to volunteer and help low-income individuals in Appalachia.

**Table 3: Ten States with the Highest Proportion of Long-Distance Volunteers Compared to the State’s “Total” Volunteers, 2007**

Rank	State	Number of adult (16+) residents who volunteer	Number of long-distance, nonresident volunteers	"Total" number of volunteers	% of total volunteers who are out-of-state, long-distance volunteers
1	Washington, DC	137,407	88,731	226,139	39.2%
2	Mississippi	429,064	140,093	569,157	24.6%
3	Wyoming	135,358	35,553	170,910	20.8%
4	Alaska	190,213	46,891	237,104	19.8%
5	Louisiana	698,067	166,244	864,310	19.2%
6	Idaho	372,494	69,917	442,411	15.8%
7	West Virginia	369,712	67,204	436,916	15.4%
8	Nevada	352,564	55,764	408,328	13.7%
9	South Dakota	223,236	33,367	256,603	13.0%
10	Hawaii	231,864	25,492	257,356	9.9%

### Who Are the Long-Distance Volunteers?

Many of the same factors that are associated with volunteering for an organization are also associated with long-distance volunteering. Like adult volunteers in general, volunteers who serve 120 miles from home or farther are more likely to be white, well educated, more affluent, employed, and to live in the Midwest.

However, there are several key differences between long-distance volunteers and adult volunteers in general. There are more long-distance volunteers who are male, single and do not have children – characteristics that are negatively associated with volunteering in general – than there are among all adult volunteers. These findings may illustrate that volunteering long-distance may be more challenging for families or individuals with children, or that long-distance volunteer opportunities attract a different type of volunteer than community-based volunteering does.

Similarly, college-age volunteers – those under age 25 – make up a much larger proportion of long-distance volunteers than they do for adult volunteers on the whole. This also may reflect the loose ties that many young adults have with the community – or communities, in the case of college students – in which they live. It may also reflect the popularity of “Alternative Spring Break” and other service opportunities targeted at young people. Whatever the reason, the table below illustrates how frequently young adults engage in long-distance volunteering.

**Table 4: Demographic Characteristics of Long-Distance Volunteers**

Proportion of Volunteers in Each Category:

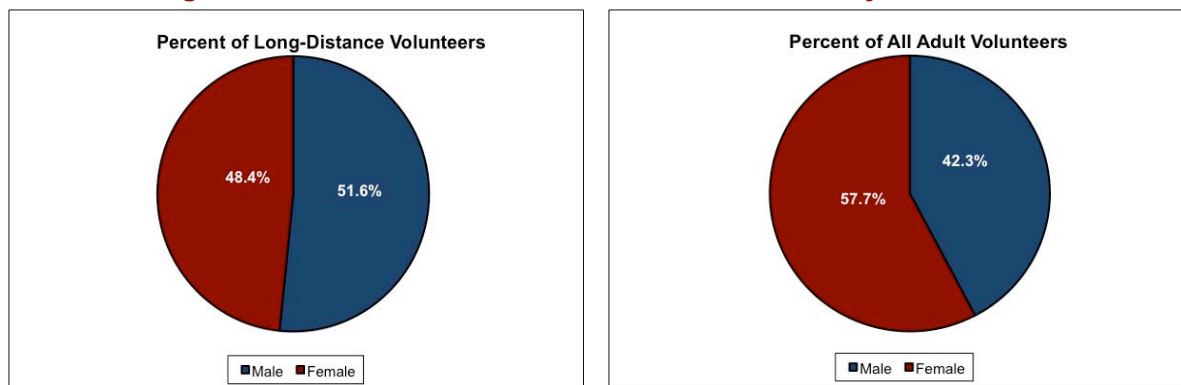
Category	Long-Distance Volunteers	All Adult Volunteers
Male	51.6%	42.3%
Female	48.4%	57.7%
Race: White	90.8%	86.4%
Race: Black	6.0%	8.2%
Race: American Indian, Alaskan Native	0.5%	0.6%
Race: Asian	1.3%	3.1%
Race: Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander	0.2%	0.3%
More than one race category	1.2%	1.4%
Latino	4.1%	7.0%
Non-Latino	95.9%	93.0%
Educ: Less than HS Diploma	7.9%	8.7%
Educ: HS Grad	14.1%	21.2%
Educ: Some college	30.6%	29.4%
Educ: College grad +	47.4%	40.7%
Income: Missing	10.6%	13.9%
Income: Less than \$35,000	14.7%	18.4%
Income: Between \$35-\$50,000	9.5%	11.0%
Income: Between \$50-\$75,000	21.6%	19.5%
Income: \$75,000 and over	43.6%	37.3%
Employed, full-time	53.2%	53.8%
Employed, part-time	16.6%	14.8%
Unemployed	2.0%	2.8%
Not in labor force	28.2%	28.7%
Region: East	13.2%	16.5%
Region: Midwest	29.7%	26.3%
Region: South	34.2%	34.2%
Region: West	22.8%	22.9%
No own children under 18	71.9%	63.3%
Own children under 18	28.1%	36.7%
Single – Never been married	25.7%	20.7%
Married – spouse present	62.1%	63.9%
Other marital status	12.2%	15.4%

Table 4, continued

Proportion of Volunteers in Each Category:

Age Group	Long-Distance Volunteers	All Adult Volunteers
16–19	9.1%	6.9%
20–24	9.8%	6.0%
25–34	11.4%	14.8%
35–44	17.1%	21.2%
45–54	22.2%	21.6%
55–64	16.5%	15.3%
65 and older	13.9%	14.2%

Chart 1: Long-Distance Volunteers and All Adult Volunteers by Gender, 2007



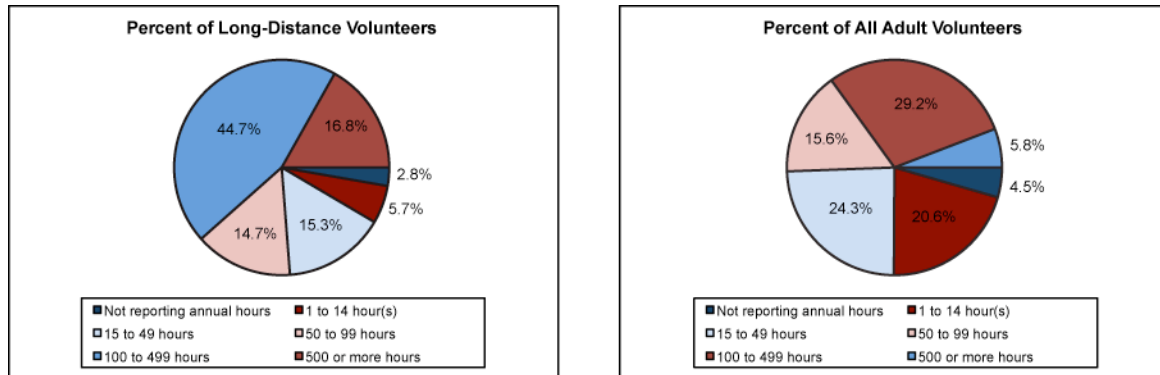
Volunteers who serve far away from home are likely to be very committed volunteers within their own communities as well. In fact, long-distance volunteers are more likely than other volunteers to serve more than 100 hours per year, serve more than 12 weeks per year with their main organization, serve with more than one organization, or perform multiple activities with their main organization.

**Table 5: Volunteering Habits of Long-Distance Volunteers**

Proportion of Volunteers in Each Category:

Category	Long-Distance Volunteers	All Adult Volunteers
<b>Frequency</b>		
Not reporting annual hours	2.8%	4.5%
1 to 14 hour(s)	5.7%	20.6%
15 to 49 hours	15.3%	24.3%
50 to 99 hours	14.7%	15.6%
100 to 499 hours	44.7%	29.2%
500 or more hours	16.8%	5.8%
<b>Hours</b>		
Episodic (0-2 wks/yr)	13.6%	18.5%
Occasional (3-11 wks/yr)	18.1%	23.2%
Regular (12 or more wks/yr)	64.9%	52.8%
<b>Number of activities</b>		
One volunteer activity	34.5%	57.8%
Two volunteer activities	14.7%	16.0%
Three volunteer activities	13.2%	9.3%
Four volunteer activities	8.3%	5.6%
Five volunteer activities	8.2%	3.6%
Six or more activities	20.1%	5.7%
<b>Number of organizations</b>		
1 organization	48.5%	68.8%
2 organizations	26.1%	19.7%
3 organizations	13.9%	7.3%
4 organizations	6.5%	2.5%
5 organizations	4.8%	1.4%
Not reporting # orgs	0.2%	0.3%

**Chart 2: Annual Hours Served by Long-Distance Volunteers and All Adult Volunteers, 2007**



Which types of organizations<sup>4</sup> are most likely to feature long-distance volunteers, and which activities are long-distance volunteers most likely to specialize in? In each case, the tendency is different for volunteers in general than for long-distance volunteers. Like volunteers in general, long-distance volunteers are most likely to serve with religious organizations, educational organizations, or community service organizations. However, long-distance volunteers are more likely than other volunteers to serve primarily with organizations devoted to causes such as the environment, animal welfare, sports, culture and the arts, and to civic, political and professional organizations. For example, voluntourism opportunities that are located on public lands or national parks are a longstanding tradition.

**Table 6: Main Organization Types for Long-Distance Volunteers**

Proportion of Volunteers in Each Category:

Category	Long-Distance Volunteers	All Adult Volunteers
Civic / Political / Professional	7.8%	5.1%
Educational / Youth Service	21.6%	26.2%
Environmental / Animal Care	3.6%	1.9%
Hospital / Health	7.1%	7.8%
Public Safety	1.5%	1.3%
Religious	34.2%	35.6%
Social / Community Service	11.7%	13.1%
Sport / Hobby / Cultural / Arts	6.2%	3.5%
Other Type	5.3%	3.7%
Not Determined	1.0%	1.7%

<sup>4</sup> Tables 6 and 7 refer to the *main organization* with which the volunteer serves. The main organization, the one where the volunteer spent the most hours volunteering, is not necessarily the organization where the long-distance volunteering took place. [Almost half of long-distance volunteers, and over two-thirds of all volunteers, served only with one organization, which is the main one by definition.] These tables illustrate how the interests and skills of long-distance volunteers may differ from those of other adult volunteers.



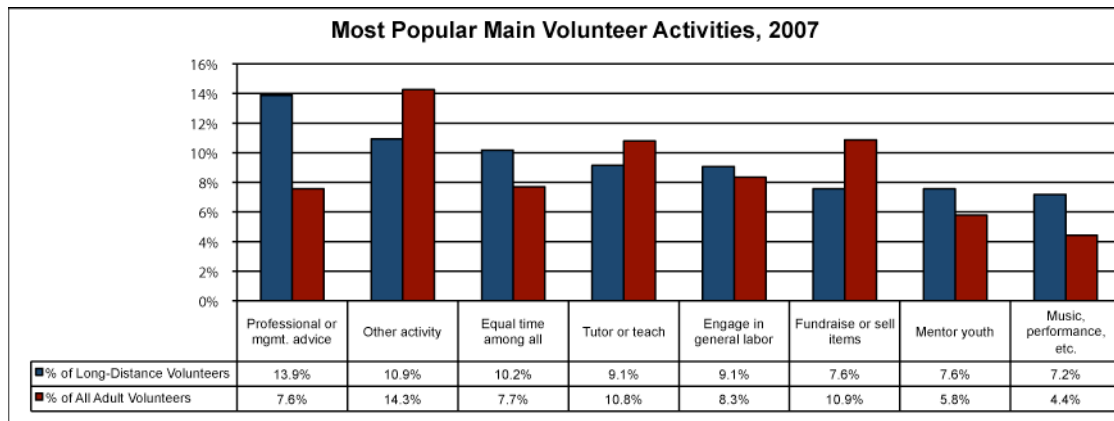
The same pattern holds for the activities that volunteers specialize in with their main organizations. Long-distance volunteers are quite unlikely to specialize in the activities that are the most common specialties among all volunteers – such as fundraising, tutoring or teaching, collecting and preparing food or clothing – perhaps because these are activities that are most useful at community organizations. Long-distance volunteers are more likely to specialize in activities that require specialized skills, such as professional or management assistance, music and arts performances, counseling and medical care, and mentoring youth.

**Table 7: Main Volunteer Activity (at Main Organization) for Long-Distance Volunteers**

Proportion of Volunteers in Each Category:

Category	Long-Distance Volunteers	All Adult Volunteers
Coach, referee, etc.	6.9%	5.8%
Tutor or teach	9.1%	10.8%
Mentor youth	7.6%	5.8%
Usher, greeter, or minister	3.1%	4.2%
Collect, prepare, etc. food	4.0%	9.2%
Collect, make, etc. clothing	1.8%	3.2%
Fundraise or sell items	7.6%	10.9%
Counseling, medical care, etc.	4.2%	3.1%
General office services	4.6%	4.7%
Professional or management advice	13.9%	7.6%
Music, performance, etc.	7.2%	4.4%
Engage in general labor	9.1%	8.3%
Other activity	10.9%	14.3%
Equal time among all	10.2%	7.7%

**Chart 3: Most Popular Main Activities for Long-Distance Volunteers, 2007**



## Conclusion

While most Americans who volunteer serve in or around the communities where they live, a small but dedicated group of volunteers are traveling long distances to serve away from home. Much has been written about people who “travel with a purpose,” combining tourism with service; about those who travel to places where a crisis or natural disaster has occurred; and about people, often older adults, who spend large portions of the year in summer or winter homes. Predictably, all these types of “long-distance” volunteers tend to be individuals highly committed to volunteering (often giving large amounts of volunteer hours a year. for example) but some of their characteristics – male, college age adults, people who are unmarried and/or have no children – are overrepresented among long-distance volunteers compared to volunteers in general.

If, as many people argue, “voluntourism” and other forms of long-distance volunteering provides a new model for volunteer service, one can already see its potential in places like Mississippi and Louisiana. Both states dramatically expanded the amount of “total volunteerism” in their state in 2007 by recruiting and mobilizing large numbers of long-distance volunteers from out of state. How long this pattern holds, and where the future hot spots for long-distance volunteering will be located, are questions to follow for the future.

### Methodology: Counting Long-Distance Volunteers with the CPS Volunteer Supplement

The Corporation for National and Community Service is releasing this issue brief along with the Volunteering in America website. This website will contain data on volunteering from the annual Supplements on Volunteering, which have been administered with the monthly Current Population Survey every September since 2002, and in May 1989 and April 1974 prior to that. The CPS is a monthly survey of about 60,000 households (and approximately 100,000 adults) conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau for the Bureau of Labor Statistics. It focuses on obtaining information on employment and unemployment for the nation’s civilian non-institutionalized population, ages 16 and older. The purpose of the Supplement on Volunteering is to obtain information on the incidence of volunteering, the characteristics of volunteers, and civic life indicators in the United States.

The data used in this report were collected with the September 2007 CPS Supplement on Volunteering. In 2007, the CPS Supplement on Volunteering added a series of questions asking adults whether they volunteer a considerable distance from home:

[Other than your volunteering abroad,] Did any of the volunteer work you have done since September 1 of last year take place more than 120 miles from your home?

[if yes] About how much of it was done more than 120 miles from your home?<sup>5</sup>  
Would you say:

- <1> All or almost all
- <2> More than half
- <3> About half
- <4> Less than half
- <5> Very little

[if yes] In what state or states did it take place?

For more information about the CPS data used in this report, please see the Technical Note in the 2007 CNCS report *Volunteering in America: 2007 State Trends and Rankings in Civic Life* ([http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/VIA/VIA\\_fullreport.pdf](http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/VIA/VIA_fullreport.pdf)).

<sup>5</sup> Only 1,721 volunteers in the 2007 CPS sample reported engaging in any long-distance volunteering. As a result, the state sample sizes for most states are too small to report reliable results for this question.