

Volunteering Perceptions and Realities

A National Survey of Adults 18+

Conducted for *AARP*

January 2009

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A National Survey of Adults 18+

Report written by
Jean Koppen, Senior Research Advisor
Member Value Research
Knowledge Management

Survey conducted by
ICR

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www.aarp.org

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AARP is a nonprofit, nonpartisan membership organization that helps people 50+ have independence, choice and control in ways that are beneficial and affordable to them and society as a whole. AARP does not endorse candidates for public office or make contributions to either political campaigns or candidates. We produce *AARP The Magazine*, the definitive voice for 50+ Americans and the world's largest-circulation magazine with over 34.5 million readers; *AARP Bulletin*, the go-to news source for AARP's members and Americans 50+; *AARP Segunda Juventud*, the only bilingual U.S. publication dedicated exclusively to the 50+ Hispanic community; and our website, AARP.org. AARP Foundation is an affiliated charity that provides security, protection, and empowerment to older persons in need with support from thousands of volunteers, donors, and sponsors. We have staffed offices in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

AARP represents more than 40 million Americans, nearly half of whom volunteer each year. The Association recently launched an Office of Volunteer & Civic Engagement, as well as *Create The Good*, a network of members who are looking for opportunities to make a difference. They are working to inspire millions more Americans to serve through their television, radio, web and publications channels.

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Background and Methodology

The purpose of this study was to gather information on people's experiences, thoughts and perceptions about volunteering. The information was gathered to help AARP's Office of Volunteer and Civic Engagement better understand volunteering in America.

This study was conducted via telephone by ICR, an independent research company. Questions were included on an omnibus survey on December 11 – December 15, 2008. The omnibus survey is a weekly national telephone survey of U.S. households. Interviews were conducted from among a nationally representative sample of 1,011 adults age 18 or older. The margin of error for total respondents is +/-3.08%. Throughout the report, when differences are mentioned between subgroups, they are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

Executive Summary

This study surveyed American adults to better understand their attitudes and perceptions about volunteering. The telephone survey was conducted December 11 – December 15, 2008 by ICR among a nationally representative sample of 1,011 adults age 18 or older.

- Three out of four respondents would choose to give time (73%) over money (16%) to help solve a national problem.
- Although most respondents would choose to give time rather than money if given the option, respondents also feel that requests for monetary donations have increased (34%) more than requests for volunteer time (11%).
- Over one-half of respondents (52%) rate volunteering to help others as an important goal and almost seven in ten respondents (68%) said that they have volunteered in the last year.
- The majority of respondents (70%) believe that Americans have not lived up to President John F. Kennedy’s inaugural request to “ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country.”
- Respondents overwhelmingly think older people volunteer more (71%) than younger people (15%).
- Both Republicans (46%) and Democrats (58%) thought their own “group” volunteered more. In reality, previous research has shown that there is no significant difference in volunteering between Republicans and Democrats after controlling for religious attendance.¹

¹ Bridgeland, J. M. et al. (2008). “More to Give: Tapping the Talents of the baby Boomer, Silent and Greatest Generations.” AARP. Available online at http://assets.aarp.org/www.aarp.org/_TopicAreas/Volunteering/PDF/More_to_Give_Boomers_and_Volunteering_Sept_9_08.pdf.

Detailed Findings

A General Profile

Over one-half of respondents (52%) rate volunteering to help others as an important goal and almost seven in ten respondents (68%) said that they have volunteered in the last year.²

Table 1: Compared with other goals in your life, how important are the following to you today?

	% Giving a Top-3 Box Rating (1-10 Point Scale)
a. Being successful in your job or career	72
b. Staying physically active	70
c. Volunteering your time to help others	52
d. Contributing to charitable organizations or causes	43
e. Being involved in your community	43

Table 2: In the past 12 months, have you volunteered, that is given your time or skills, for a non-profit organization, a charity, school, hospital, religious organization, neighborhood association, civic or any other group?

	Yes	No
TOTAL	68	32

² The 2007 Bureau of Labor Statistics report on volunteering stated that 26.2 percent of the United States population volunteered in 2007. The differences in reporting may be due to how “volunteering” was defined for each study.

Perceptions

Respondents were asked whether they thought older people or younger people volunteer more. Overwhelmingly, both younger (18-49) and older (50+) respondents said older people volunteer more. Respondents over age 50 were particularly likely to say older people (78%) volunteer more compared to younger respondents (65%). There were no statistically significant differences between the proportion of younger respondents who said they had volunteered in the previous year (71%) compared to older respondents (63%).

Table 3: On average, do you think younger people or older people volunteer more?

	Older	Younger	Same	Don't know
TOTAL	71	15	11	4
18-49	65	20	12	3
50+	78	7	9	5

Table 4: In the past 12 months, have you volunteered, that is given your time or skills, for a non-profit organization, a charity, school, hospital, religious organization, neighborhood association, civic or any other group?

	Yes	No
TOTAL	68	32
18-49	71	29
50+	63	37

Respondents were also asked whether they thought Democrats or Republicans volunteered more. Both Republicans (46%) and Democrats (58%) thought their own “group” volunteered more. In reality, previous research has shown that there is no significant difference in volunteering between Republicans and Democrats after controlling for religious attendance.³

Table 5: On average, do you think Republicans or Democrats volunteer more?

	Republicans	Democrats	Equal	Don't know	Refused
Total	21	33	8	36	2
Republicans	46	11	9	33	1
Democrats	10	58	4	26	1

³ Bridgeland, J. M. et al. (2008). “More to Give: Tapping the Talents of the Baby Boomer, Silent and Greatest Generations.” AARP. Available online at http://assets.aarp.org/www.aarp.org/_TopicAreas/Volunteering/PDF/More_to_Give_Boomers_and_Volunteering_Sept_9_08.pdf.

The Need for Volunteers

Americans perceive that more is being asked of them compared to last year at this time. Although respondents feel the requests for monetary donations (34%) have increased more compared to requests for volunteer time (11%), when asked what they would CHOOSE to give to solve a national problem, respondents overwhelmingly selected time (73%) over money (16%). Younger respondents were more likely to say they would prefer to give time compared to older respondents.

A segment of the population (7%) offered that they were willing to give BOTH time and money. These respondents may be responding to a perceived greater need in the current economic downturn. The majority of respondents (70%) believe that Americans have not lived up to President John F. Kennedy’s inaugural request to “ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country.”

Table 6: Are you being asked to volunteer more or donate more compared to this time last year?

	Volunteer more	Donate more	Both	Neither	Don’t know
TOTAL	11	34	20	34	1

Table 7: If you could personally solve one of this country’s pressing issues by giving 10% of your time or 10% of your money, which would you give?

	Time	Money	Both	Neither	Don’t know
TOTAL	73	16	7	3	1
18-49	78	13	6	2	2
50+	68	20	7	4	1

Table 8: In President John F. Kennedy’s inauguration speech in 1961 he stated: “ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.” Do you think Americans have or have not lived up to this appeal?

	Have lived up to the appeal	Haven’t lived up to the appeal	Don’t know	Refused
TOTAL	23	70	7	*

Appendix A

Annotated Questionnaire

Please note, all data are given in percentages. Asterisks indicate that cell size is negligible. Not all percentages will add up to 100 due to rounding.

VO-1 Compared with other goals in your life, how important are the following to you today? Please rate each on a scale from 1 “not very important” to 10 “very important.”?

a. Being successful in your job or career

	%
Top 3 Box (NET)	72
10 Very important	47
09	12
08	12
07	7
06	2
05	3
04	1
Bottom 3 Box (NET)	6
03	1
02	1
01 Not very important	5
Not applicable	9
Don't know	*
Refused	--

b. Staying physically active

	%
Top 3 Box (NET)	70
10 Very important	39
09	11
08	20
07	9
06	7
05	8
04	1
Bottom 3 Box (NET)	4
03	1
02	1
01 Not very important	3
Don't know	1
Refused	--

c. Volunteering your time to help others

	%
Top 3 Box (NET)	52
10 Very important	25
09	7
08	19
07	13
06	6
05	14
04	4
Bottom 3 Box (NET)	11
03	3
02	3
01 Not very important	5
Don't know	1
Refused	*

d. Contributing to charitable organizations or causes

	%
Top 3 Box (NET)	43
10 Very important	19
09	8
08	17
07	15
06	6
05	18
04	5
Bottom 3 Box (NET)	12
03	4
02	2
01 Not very important	6
Don't know	*
Refused	*

e. Being involved in your community

	%
Top 3 Box (NET)	43
10 Very important	16
09	5
08	22
07	14
06	6
05	18
04	5
Bottom 3 Box (NET)	15
03	5
02	3
01 Not very important	7
Don't know	*
Refused	*

VO-2 Compared with last year, would you say your engagement in the following activities has increased, decreased, or remained about the same?

	Increased	Decreased	Remained the same	Don't know	Refused
a. Vacation/Travel	14	43	42	*	*
b. Work	29	21	47	3	1
c. Physical fitness activities (aerobics, walking/running, etc.)	28	22	50	--	--
d. Volunteering your time to help others	25	14	60	*	--
e. Being involved in your community	17	17	66	*	*

VO-3 What would you like the incoming First Lady Michelle Obama to make her signature issue?

	Increasing volunteerism	Helping the environment	Healthcare awareness	None of the above	Don't know	Refused
TOTAL	12	19	56	7	5	2

I have some questions about volunteering. What we mean by volunteering is giving time or skills without pay to help a person or organization.

VO-4 In the past 12 months, have you volunteered, that is given your time or skills, for a non-profit organization, a charity, school, hospital, religious organization, neighborhood association, civic or any other group?

	Yes	No	Don't know	Refused
TOTAL	68	32	--	--

VO-5 On average, do you think Republicans or Democrats volunteer more?

	Republicans	Democrats	Equal	Don't know	Refused
TOTAL	21	33	8	36	2

VO-6 On average, do you think younger people or older people volunteer more?

	Older	Younger	Same	Don't know	Refused
TOTAL	71	15	11	4	--

VO-7 In President John F. Kennedy’s inauguration speech in 1961 he stated: “ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.” Do you think Americans have or have not lived up to this appeal?

	Have lived up to the appeal	Haven’t lived up to the appeal	Don’t know	Refused
TOTAL	23	70	7	*

VO-8 Are you being asked to volunteer more or donate more compared to this time last year?

	Volunteer more	Donate more	Both	Neither	Don’t know	Refused
TOTAL	11	34	20	34	1	--

VO-9 If you could personally solve one of this country’s pressing issues by giving 10% of your time or 10% of your money, which would you give?

	Time	Money	Both	Neither	Don’t know	Refused
TOTAL	73	16	7	3	1	--

(Asked of total respondents age 50+; n = 582)

AM-1. Are you or your spouse or partner currently a member of AARP?

	Yes	No	Don’t know	Refused
TOTAL	47	53	1	--

Appendix B

Demographics

	TOTAL	18-49	50+
TOTAL	100	69	29
Gender			
Male	49	50	48
Female	51	50	52
Marital status			
Single	20	29	7
Single, living with partner	7	10	4
Married	54	51	57
Separated	2	3	1
Widowed	8	1	18
Divorced	9	21	15
Age			
18-20	8		
21-24	5		
25-29	9		
30-34	9		
35-39	9		
40-44	10		
45-49	9		
50-54	10		
55-59	9		
60-64	5		
65-70	6		
71-74	3		
75-98	6		
Education			
<HS	15	14	17
HS grad	30	30	30
Some college	27	27	28
College grad	17	20	13
Post grad	9	7	10
Technical school	2	2	2
Race			
White non-hispanic	65	60	73
White Hispanic	13	15	9
Black	12	14	10
Other	7	9	5