



Trends in Volunteerism | 2018

Research Study

MN Association for Volunteer Administration (MAVA)

Preliminary Report

July 2018

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Minnesota Association for Volunteer Administration (MAVA) conducted a study on trends in volunteerism in April 2018 with 239 leaders of volunteers across the state responding to the survey. After a decade of rapid change in volunteerism trends, the study found a relative stabilization of the key volunteerism trends, with new trends on the horizon to watch. The results indicated that keys to addressing the trends include having some shorter term, flexible and skilled roles to offer volunteers and skilled use of technology in volunteer engagement.

What volunteers are seeking

- 47% seeing increased interest in short term volunteering
- 35% seeing increased interest in volunteering on evenings and weekends
- 30% seeing increased interest in using workplace skills
- 19% seeing increased interest in home/virtual volunteering

Who is volunteering

- 35% seeing more inquires from Boomers
- 31% seeing more inquires from high school and college students
- 31% seeing more inquires from Millennials
- 27% seeing less inquires from Traditional generation
- 26% seeing more inquires from corporate groups
- 24% seeing more inquires from job seekers and 17% seeing less inquiries
- 21% seeing more inquires from Gen X
- 18% seeing more inquiries from immigrant communities

Other trends

- 48% seeing increase in volunteers seeming busy
- 45% seeing increase in older volunteers aging out and hard to replace
- 35% seeing increase in regulations/requirement related to volunteering
- 18% seeing increase in volunteering due to political climate

Volunteer Availability

- Regarding new inquiries from potential new volunteers, 13% saw fewer, 59% saw about the same and 28% saw more
- Regarding amount of time per volunteer, 19% seeing less time, 60% seeing about the same and 22% seeing more time
- Regarding current supply of volunteers compared to need, 16% have more people who want to volunteer than space, 25% have about the right amount, 50% are somewhat short on time for needs, and 8% are very short on time for needs

Organizations are updating their volunteer engagement practices

- 66% reported involving volunteers in new roles and positions
- 60% increased communication with volunteers
- 57% increased use of social media
- 56% used technology in new ways to communicate with and track volunteers
- 53% streamlined/standardized practices for volunteer intake, screening, placement or training
- 51% reinvigorated volunteer recruitment
- 43% evaluated impact of work
- 43% increased the flexibility of when volunteers can volunteer
- 42% reported involving volunteers in leadership positions or managing projects
- 41% added volunteer positions designed specifically for shorter term volunteers
- 40% stepped up internal advocacy to gain support
- 38% trained staff on how to lead and support volunteers



INTRODUCTION

The following report is based on responses to a survey conducted by the Minnesota Association for Volunteer Administration (MAVA) in April 2018. This was a follow-up study to MAVA's 2009, 2010, 2013 and 2014 research on trends in volunteerism. Two hundred and thirty nine leaders of volunteers across the state responded to the survey. After a decade of rapid change in volunteerism trends, the study found a relative stabilization of the key volunteerism trends, with new trends on the horizon to monitor and develop strategies to address them.

FINDINGS

Three of the top trends found in MAVA's 2014 study remained top trends in MAVA's 2018 study: interest in short term volunteering, interest in volunteering on evenings and weekends and interest developing or utilizing workplace skills.

The MAVA studies on volunteerism over the past decade found rapid change in who was volunteering and what volunteers expected. With the generational changes there has been an increased interest in skill based volunteering, shorter term volunteering and volunteering on evenings and weekends. A key finding of the 2018 study was that these three trends are still strong. Comments indicated that along with the trend of shorter term volunteering is the desire for flexibility and not volunteer for the same shift every week. The stability in these trends should offer the potential to get on top of the trends. As in the 2014 survey, the trend of shorter term volunteerism received the most comment as a difficult trend to respond. However, many organizations indicated they were developing strategies to address the trend.

In response to a question on trends over the past year:

- 47% of organizations reported increased interest in short term volunteering
- 35% of organizations reported increased interest in volunteering on evenings and weekends
- 30% of organizations reported increased interest in developing or utilizing workplace skills

“Volunteers seem to want ‘1 and done’ take a selfie and move on. Some of our missions don't fit that. We are trying to break some of our longer-term tasks into these short bits.”

“It takes more work on our part for each volunteer hour when we have lots of short term people to onboard rather than longer term volunteers.”

“The younger applicants are not interested in set dates and times. More on-call requests.”

“We have seen an increase in people seeking skills based volunteer opportunities with us. We are starting small with 2 specific opportunities and plan to expand.”

Volunteers seeming busy emerged as another top trend.

The trend that was identified by the most organizations was that volunteers seem busy. This trend had been reported in the past but seems to be growing in urgency. With close to half the organizations reporting this trend, the volunteerism field will need to rise to the challenge of figuring out strategies to address it.

In response to a question on regarding trends over the past year:

- 48% of organizations reported that volunteers seem busy

“Parents/guardians that weren't working are going back to work and having less time to volunteer.”

“People have very busy schedules with kids' activities.”

“Volunteers are too busy. They say they have the time to volunteer but then end up not volunteering as much as they originally thought.”



There were fewer inquiries from the Traditional generation for volunteering but inquires from other generations and groups of volunteers are growing.

The growth in volunteer inquiries was spread across the Boomer, Gen X, Millennial generations and students.

The survey results indicate that we are in a period of time where organizations are seeing increased inquiries for volunteering across the generations from Boomers to students.

In response to a question on categories of people inquiring about volunteering:

- 35% of organizations are seeing more inquires from Boomers
- 31% of organizations are seeing more inquires from high school and college students
- 31% of organizations are seeing more inquires from Millennials
- 21% seeing more inquires from Gen X

“We are seeing a trend of people from the Millennial generation actively seeking volunteer opportunities for their free time. Hoping this will continue to diversify our volunteer community that is already established with older people.”

Inquires by groups about volunteering continues to increase.

Inquiries from corporate groups were increasing for 26% of organizations, similar to what was found in MAVA 2014 trends study. However 9% of organizations were seeing a drop in inquiries from corporate groups, which indicate that changes in where corporate groups are volunteering may be occurring. Twenty-three percent of organizations were seeing an increase of interest from other groups (faith-based, schools, etc.) in volunteering. In the comments received, frustrations were voiced that for at least some organizations it continues to be difficult to productively engage the interest of group volunteers.

“Corporate groups and faith communities wanted to do service projects and large group volunteer projects. They don't always start by asking what OUR needs are.”

“More groups calling for one-time volunteer opportunities. Wish we had enough work for them.”

Older volunteers aging out and being hard to replace was a trend of top concern.

In the MAVA 2010 study, comments indicated worry that the Traditional generation of volunteers will eventually age out of volunteering and that this will be a big loss. That seems to be happening now and is difficult because the same type of volunteers are hard to find and often it takes two or more volunteers to cover what one volunteer used to do.

In response to a question on trends over the past year:

- 45% of organizations reported older volunteers are aging out and hard to replace

“Older volunteers that are hard to replace as they served regular weekly hours with agencies. We need to find twice or triple the number of volunteers to meet the same number of hours.”

“Long term volunteers who are trusted are aging out and staff expect that new volunteers can immediately start with the same skills, knowledge and open availability as the old ones.”

Organizational issues continue to make it difficult for some programs to make progress.

Similar to the 2014 survey, a number of comments indicated that organizational changes and problems are affecting the ability to engage volunteers. The concerns centered on:

- Organizations restructuring
- Unwillingness to accept the changing interests and expectations of volunteers
- Staff receptivity to working with volunteers
- Having enough time and resources to keep up with the work

However some comments reported positive organizational changes such as an increasing priority on volunteers and staff being more accepting of volunteers.

“Old school ideals on volunteering that are not matching the changing needs & interest of younger volunteers.”

“Continuous organizational restructuring.”



Is volunteerism up or down? Inquiries from volunteers seemed stable or increasing overall but the majority of organizations were at least somewhat short on volunteers to meet needs.

The trend survey addressed the question of whether volunteerism is going up or down in Minnesota. This was an important question as some organizations were reporting that it was harder to find volunteers or that volunteers were giving less time. Volunteering and Civic Life in America (<https://www.nationalservice.gov/vfa>) reported the volunteer rate in the U.S. was down 5.3% between 2010 and 2015, and the volunteer rate in Minnesota was down 9.2% in that period.

Inquires from new volunteers are stable or increasing for most organizations compared to the previous year.

The MAVA 2018 trend study did not find a drop in interest in volunteering in the past year. However, the comments indicated that for the organizations that were seeing less inquires from volunteers that this was very difficult and making it hard to deliver needed services. The scenario that some organizations described was that because more organizations have increased engagement of volunteers there is now more competition for volunteers.

New inquiries from potential new volunteers compared to a year ago:

- 13% of organizations saw fewer
- 59% of organizations saw about the same
- 28% of organizations saw more

“Our programs are run by volunteers, we have had tremendous growth, and to keep serving more people, we need more volunteers.”

The amount of time organizations are seeing volunteers give was about the same compared to a year ago for the majority of organizations.

Regarding amount of time per volunteer compared to a year ago:

- 19% of organizations seeing less time
- 60% of organizations seeing about the same
- 22% of organizations seeing more time



However, the majority of organizations are short on volunteers to meet their needs.

Although inquiries from volunteers were stable or up for most organizations, 58% of organizations reported being somewhat or very short on volunteer time compared to needs. Related to the trend of shorter volunteer commitments, organizations commented that it is the ongoing volunteer roles that are shortest on volunteers. Though response was not large enough to segment whether the shortage of volunteers was greater in some service sectors or some parts of the state, from a review of the data it appeared the shortage of volunteers is greater in rural areas.

Regarding current supply of volunteers compared to need:

- 16% of organizations have more people who want to volunteer than space
- 25% of organizations have about the right amount
- 50% are somewhat short on time for needs
- 8% are very short on time for needs

“We are not able to meet the needs of tutoring children or helping keep seniors in their own homes, both important in our society.”

“More organizations are relying on volunteers due to staff budgets decreasing so the demand for volunteers seems to exceed the supply in our rural environment.”

“There are a few areas for which regular volunteers are needed but we have a difficult time filling those roles, while other roles are nearly saturated. Very Challenging.”

The survey results indicate some intriguing emerging trends to watch.

Although the top trends were continuation of the trends we have been seeing over the last 5-8 years, there were indications in the survey results of emerging trends. These will be important trends to watch to see how they develop and to start to create strategies to get ahead of them.

Interest in virtual volunteering.

Nineteen percent of organizations reported seeing an increase in virtual volunteering and less than 1% reported seeing a decrease. Although it is hard to know how much this trend will take off, it is important one to pay attention to as virtual volunteering:

- Is a strategy that addresses the big concern over volunteers seeming increasingly busy.
- Addresses the problem that as traffic gets more bottlenecked in cities, it is a way for busy people to volunteer without wasting time commuting.
- Offers potential for organization in rural areas where volunteers are in short supply.



"We have had an increase in virtual volunteerism, which has positively affected our organization."

Interest in politically motivated volunteering.

Eighteen percent of organizations reported an increase of interest in volunteering due to the political climate. This is an emerging trend that will be interesting to watch into the future.

"A lot of volunteers due to political climate but not always reaching placement into volunteer positions due to over commitment."

"The political climate over the past two years has affected us the most. We've seen an equal increase each year (first due to the election, then the #MeToo movement.)"

Seeing more volunteers from immigrant communities.

The 2018 study had 18% of organizations reporting seeing increased inquiries about volunteer from immigrant groups. This is up from 14% of organizations reporting this increased interest in 2014. The increase may be an indicator that organizations are breaking through to get more interest from immigrants communities in volunteering.

"We have a growing immigrant community that are highly educated but do not have work visas. They are looking for volunteer roles in their area of expertise to grow into or help them with future employment."

"Our organization is seeking out volunteers from underserved and immigrant populations more than past years."

Still seeing volunteer inquiries from job seekers.

One of the most unexpected results of the survey was that although we are approaching a record low level of unemployment, 24% of organizations reporting seeing more inquires from job seekers and only 17% reporting seeing less inquiries. A deeper look at this surprising data suggested two possibilities explanations. It may be partially due to:

- Organizations seeing job seekers looking for experience to change careers more than people who are unemployed who are volunteering for experience.
- Organizations seeing volunteers from immigrant communities seeking job skills through volunteering for job advancement.



“Immigrant communities looking for volunteer roles that lead to jobs.”

Boomers may be becoming more visible as volunteers.

While comments indicated that some organizations are still struggling to catch the interest of Boomers in volunteering and many Boomers are delaying retirement, some organizations are seeing more Boomers volunteering and are adjusting to working with the unique characteristics of this generation as volunteers. In the 2018 study, 35% of organizations reported seeing increased inquiries from Boomers about volunteering, which was up from 31% reporting increased inquiries in 2014. A decade ago, research indicated that as Boomers retire they will continue to seek shorter term, flexible and skill based volunteer opportunities. It appears that some organizations have made changes that are appealing to Boomers as they retire and seeing more Boomers volunteer. While other organizations that have not made adjustments are frustrated that Boomers are doing as predicted and avoiding long term, regular scheduled and many hours a week volunteer positions that previous generations would do.

“Where are the Boomers???”

“Boomers are unwilling to commit 15 hours or more per week to one volunteer site”

“The unique interests of Baby Boomers aren't changing but we're relying on them more.”

Although organizations are not seeing the rush of student volunteers that occurred during the recession, the interest in volunteering by students and the quality of their volunteer work shows good potential for Generation Z as it enters the volunteer workforce.

Close to one third of the organizations (31%) reported having more inquiries from students about volunteering than in the previous year. However, it was clearly noted that youth have more employment opportunities in the current economy, need the income from work and are less dependent on volunteering for experience than in the years of the tight job market. The comments indicated many organizations are having positive experiences involving students. This is good news as today's students are the beginning of the large Generation Z (people born after about year 1997) that will soon be critical for the volunteer workforce.

“More college students are finding paying jobs with the good job market instead of volunteering.”

“We are seeing more students who are required to volunteer as part of their coursework.”

“We are having greater success with college students who are being active and dependable, which had previously been a problem with this group in the past.”



Regulations and requirements are increasing and causing difficulties.

Thirty-five percent of organizations reported seeing an increase in regulations/requirements related to volunteering compared to last year. The requirements and regulations mentioned included background checks, flu vaccinations, required training and requirement to issue 1099 tax documents for volunteers who receive over \$600 in mileage. Comments indicated concerns especially by organizations in the health care and social service fields. This was one of the few trends that no strategies were suggested to address, which raises the question if there is more the volunteerism field can do to address the increase in regulations and requirements.

“Background check process that is required is intense and can be an obstacle to volunteering.”

“Requirement of flu vaccinations caused several volunteers to quit.”

Staff retirements are creating new organizational dynamics around volunteerism.

We are clearly in period of time where many organizations are seeing higher levels of staff retiring. How this is affecting organizational dynamics around volunteer engagement seems to be positive for some organizations and negative for others. Some survey respondents commented that new staff are not as comfortable with supervision and so not as comfortable with volunteers. Other respondents said that new staff are more open to volunteers. With more of the large Boomer generation retiring, there is the opportunity for leaders of volunteers to step up and provide training and organizational advocacy to leverage new staff interest in engaging volunteers and help them develop the skills to do it.

“That is not true of all older managers but I do find younger are more interested in finding ways to use volunteers creatively, which increase interest in volunteering.”

“New staff and often younger staff are replacing a large number of long-time staff reaching retirement. The new staff members are often unfamiliar with engaging volunteers and/or have little supervisory experience and are often reluctant to consider asking for volunteer help. Staff training has ramped up to educate and hopefully, overcome this trend.”



The use of technology for volunteer recruitment and communication is rapidly changing. The forefront of use of technology with volunteers may be advancing into using technology created for sectors (such as natural resources) for volunteers working in that sector.

Uses of technology in volunteer engagement that were considered innovative in MAVA's 2014 survey, such as texting, social media, volunteer management database and online volunteer orientation, were cited as the norm for many programs in the 2018 survey. Increased use of Facebook was the most common of the changes in use of technology, with implementation of a volunteer management database (such as Volgistics or Better Impact) the next most common change mentioned. However, comments indicated that it is important to accept different uses of technology by volunteers and meet volunteers where they are at in the use of technology. The cutting edge of technology and volunteer engagement may be moving into applying technology created for sectors to volunteer management. For example, volunteers working on projects are using project management products such as Basecamp and volunteers working in the natural resources area are using iNaturalist and eBird.

“Increased usage of social media/online outlets such as volunteer website posts to gain potential volunteers across a wide range of age groups.”

“Talent Gather is a recruitment event management tool for Android and iOS that empowers college recruiters to be more efficient on-site. Simply take a picture of a candidate's resume, and Talent Gather instantly converts it into searchable keyword text. With the ability to annotate, fill out a candidate questionnaire, and share candidate profiles with colleagues, this digital strategy allows for more natural conversations with candidates and faster follow-up after your campus recruitment events.”



Volunteer managers are proactively developing and implementing strategies to address the complex changes in volunteerism.

In response to a question about what strategies or ideas you have used to make your volunteer program as effective as possible:

- 66% reported involving volunteers in new roles and positions
- 60% increased communication with volunteers
- 57% increased use of social media
- 56% used technology in new ways to communicate with and track volunteers
- 53% streamlined/standardized practices for volunteer intake, screening, placement or training
- 51% reinvigorated volunteer recruitment
- 43% evaluated impact of work
- 43% increased the flexibility of when volunteers can volunteer
- 42% reported involving volunteers in leadership positions or managing projects
- 41% added volunteer positions designed specifically for shorter term volunteers
- 40% stepped up internal advocacy to gain support
- 38% trained staff on how to lead and support volunteers

The final survey report will include a listing of the 100+ strategies that survey respondents shared as ones they had implemented to be as effective as possible.

SURVEY RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Respondents identified the population size of the region served by their organization as follows: 4% serve rural area or small town (under 1,000 population), 14% serve medium town (1,000 – 19,999 population), 15% serve small city (20,000 – 99,999 population), 15% serve medium city (100,000 – 299,999 population), 36% serve large city (300,000+ population) and 16% indicated “other.” Regarding geographic distribution: 46% of the respondents indicated they were from organizations that serve the Twin Cities Metro area, 15% serve Central Minnesota, 8% serve Southern Minnesota, 13% serve Northern Minnesota, 6% serve Western Minnesota, 11% serve statewide, 7% serve nationally, and 25% indicated “other.”

Respondents represented a wide range of activity areas, budget sizes and sizes of volunteer program. Regarding type of organization: 24% identified as education-based, 9% as faith-based, 27% as health or healthcare, 28% as social services, 10% as arts or cultural, 6% as environmental, and 31% as “other.” Respondents identified the size of their organization’s annual budget as follows: 7% have budgets under \$100,000, 9% have budgets of \$100,000 - \$249,999, 7% have budgets of \$250,000 - \$499,999, 6% have budgets of \$500,000 - \$1,000,000, 16% have budgets of \$1,000,000 - \$2,999,999, 34% identified budgets of \$3,000,000 or more, and 21% did not know the size of their organizational budget.



CONCLUSION

The MAVA 2018 Trends survey found that volunteerism is still in a period of change that requires organizations to reexamine how they are engaging volunteers and to update volunteer engagement practices. However we found that trends are more consistent than they had been over the past ten years of rapid change in the field. The three top trends found in 2014 survey of volunteers seeking shorter term, evening/weekend/flexible and skill based opportunities continued as top trends in 2018.

The two other top trends uncovered in the survey of volunteers being busy and the aging out of the Traditional generation of volunteers warrant attention to help organizations deal with these changes. Virtual volunteering offers potential to address how busy volunteers are but hopefully more strategies can be developed to respond to this trend. The aging out of the Traditional generation volunteering was expected to be difficult for organizations and the survey results certainly showed that it is. The results indicated that, also as expected, the Boomers will continue their preference for shorter term, flexible and skilled volunteer positions as they retire and not be inclined to change and be like previous generations of volunteers in retirement. The survey results indicated that organizations will need to perfect their ability to include some shorter term, flexible and skilled roles in their volunteer positions as well as expertly use technology in volunteer engagement or get left behind in the dust.

The good news is that many organizations are developing and implementing strategies to address the trends. The responses showed amazing creativeness and hard work to adapt volunteerism to meet what today's volunteers are seeking. There still is much more work to do to implement strategies that will truly tap the wealth of what today's volunteers offer but we are starting to see the path to accomplish this.

However, it is not time to settle back and get complacent, as we are seeing some emerging trends that will require new innovations. All signs are that the next ten years will be on overall period of rapid change in most aspects of our society, culture and use of technology. These changes will likely trigger new changes in volunteers that we will need to be ready to identify and develop responses.

The final 2018 trends survey report will be available in September 2018.



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The 239 leaders of volunteers who responded to the survey

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