

Chapter One: Program Overview



“We make a living by what we get; we make a life by what we give.”
- Winston Churchill

1. Volunteerism in America

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/volun.nr0.htm>, about 63.8 million Americans, or 29 percent, did volunteer work at some point from September 2002 to September 2003, up from 59.8 million the previous year. This data was collected through a supplement to the September 2003 Current Population Survey (CPS). Volunteers are defined as persons who did unpaid work (except for expenses) through or for an organization. The CPS is a monthly survey of about 60,000 households that obtains information on employment and unemployment among the nation’s civilian population age 16 and over.

1.1 Volunteer Demographics

Volunteers come from all walks of life. They’re young and old, from both sexes and from all cultural backgrounds. The following statistics are from the same report quoted in the previous paragraph and answer the question, “Who volunteers and at what rate?”

- Women (32 percent).
- Men (25 percent).
- Teens (29 percent).
- Whites (30.6 percent).
- Blacks (20 percent).
- Asians (18.7 percent).
- Hispanics or Latinos (15.7 percent).

Volunteers spent a median of 52 hours on volunteer activities during the period from September 2002 to September 2003, which is unchanged from the previous survey period. The median amount of time men and women spent volunteering was the same at 52 hours.



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Among the age groups, volunteers age 65 and over devoted the most time - a median of 88 hours - to volunteer activities. Those age 25 to 34 years spent the least time, volunteering a median of 36 hours during the year.

1.2 Organizations with the Most Volunteers

Where do people choose to volunteer their time and energy? The BLS indicates the organizations volunteers worked the most hours during the year were:

- Religious (34.6 percent of all volunteers).
- Educational or youth-service related (27.4 percent).
- Social or community organizations (11.8 percent).
- Hospitals or other health organizations (8.2 percent).

The most effective way organizations recruit volunteers is by asking. Almost 44 percent were asked to become a volunteer, most often by someone in the organization. Two in five volunteers became involved with the main organization for which they did volunteer work on their own initiative; that is, they approached the organization and offered their services.

1.3 Volunteer Work

What kinds of work do volunteers do? The most commonly reported in to the BLS were:

- Fundraising or selling items to raise money (28.8 percent).
- Coaching, refereeing, tutoring, or teaching (28.6 percent).
- Collecting, preparing, distributing, or serving food (24.9 percent).
- Providing information, which includes being an usher, greeter, or minister (22.0 percent).
- General labor (21.8 percent).

1.4 Trends in Volunteerism

Dr. Christopher Cihlar, Director of Research and Evaluation with the Points of Light Foundation, notes several new trends in volunteerism:



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- More interest in episodic or short term volunteer opportunities.
- High schools requiring students to do community service work in order to graduate.
- More agencies seeking volunteers.
- More use of the Internet to market to volunteers.

He also indicates volunteers' satisfaction levels are tied to:

- Having quality jobs.
- Being treated well by staff.

2. Volunteerism in the Military

Do active duty service members and their families have similar volunteer patterns? The National Military Family Association did two online surveys about volunteerism in the military in 2004. The surveys were an attempt to determine the differences in patterns of volunteering between military personnel and their families. There was some confusion by respondents in that 70 percent of the respondents to the civilian survey were military spouses, and 25 percent of the military surveys were from active duty personnel and the rest were military spouses. Seems military spouses weren't clear which survey to complete!

About 750 individuals responded to the two surveys – 371 to the military survey and 378 to the civilian survey. Approximately 71 percent of the respondents to the military survey were female and 91 percent of the respondents to the civilian survey were female.

Respondents to the military survey were evenly distributed throughout the service branches. Army family members responded in greater numbers in the civilian survey at 43 percent. The other service affiliations of respondents to the civilian survey were:

- National Guard (19 percent).
- Navy (11 percent).
- Marine Corps (10 percent).
- Air Force (9 percent).



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Unlike the BLS, this survey did not define volunteering purely as working with an organization. Informal volunteer work such as caring for a neighbor's child or picking up groceries for an elderly neighbor was also included.

Of respondents to both surveys, about 70 percent volunteer 5 hours or less per week “formally through an agency.”

In response to the question, “What type of work do you prefer to do when you volunteer?” both civilian and military respondents indicated the following preferences:

- Direct service (64 percent).
- Indirect service (24 percent).
- Fundraising (21 percent).
- Administrative (21 percent).

When asked about virtual volunteerism, 90% had never heard of the concept, but 70% said they'd do it.

The reasons for volunteering were the same for respondents to both surveys:

- To help others.
- Self satisfaction.
- Enjoyment.

And, even though respondents to both surveys indicated that having a volunteer training program made no difference in their decision to volunteer with an organization, if there is a training program both groups want “live training” at rates over 60 percent.

2.1 Uniqueness of Military Volunteerism

While civilians learn about volunteer opportunities from a variety of sources, respondents to the military survey overwhelmingly indicated they learned about volunteer opportunities on the installation (68 percent).

When respondents to the military survey were asked if they volunteered with a uniformed service volunteer organization 60 percent said “yes”, and the primary reason they did so was because they want to give back to the community (44 percent).



In response to the question, “Does the length of an assignment affect your desire/ability to volunteer?” 55 percent said “yes”, and 44 percent said “no.” And finally, living on or off the installation has no impact on volunteering.

3. History and Background of the Volunteer Services Program

The Volunteer Services Program has deep roots in military family support programs. In fact, you could say the Volunteer Services Program preceded military family support programs. Prior to development of formal family support programs within the Department of Defense family support was provided through a volunteer network of spouses, primarily wives, associated with an installation or a military unit. There was no professional training for these volunteers other than life experience.

As the military services transitioned from a population comprised of single active duty personnel to married personnel, often with young spouses and young children, the need for a more formal support system was evident. Volunteers were instrumental in the initial development of the family support program in each branch of the service. Today the military family support Volunteer Program flourishes at some sites and languishes at others.

3.1 Program Challenges

As with any program there are joys and challenges. The joys are seeing family support customers receiving the information and services they need in a caring and efficient manner. The challenges inherent to managing a civilian or military program include:

- Recruiting volunteers.
- Maintaining volunteers.
- Creating fulfilling positions.
- Recruiting supervisors.
- Lack of funding.
- Handling personality conflicts and poor performance.

There are a few challenges that are unique to the military setting. These include:

- Ensuring volunteers are not doing jobs that are supposed to be performed by government or contract staff.



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- Allowing volunteers access to agency computer networks.
- Getting access to the installation with increased security.
- Competing for volunteers with agency that routinely reimburse child care, mileage and other volunteer expenses when yours does not.

Although these challenges can seem daunting, all can be met.

3.2 Philosophy and Program Goals

Every installation has a person who coordinates and manages a volunteer program for the entire installation. In addition, many family support programs have a person whose job includes coordinating and managing volunteers within their specific organization.

Volunteer programs:

- Provide volunteers, primarily active duty military spouses, with opportunities to learn job skills in a professional and supportive environment.
- Create opportunities for professional spouses at remote and overseas assignments to maintain their skills.
- Provide opportunities for active duty service members, retirees and military teens to also develop skills and “give back” to their military community.
- Enhance staff to expand delivery of services provided through the family support program.

3.3 Relationship to the DOD Mission

Military volunteer programs support the DOD mission by:

- Retaining desired active duty personnel by increasing spouse satisfaction with the military lifestyle.
- Enhances mission readiness by ensuring family support services are readily available.
- Increasing morale and community cohesiveness through opportunities to serve others.
- Increasing the awareness of family support programs through volunteers who take information to individual command units.



3.4 Relationship to Other Family Support Programs

Volunteers support every family support program. According to the surveys from the field used to write this desk guide, there are approximately ten volunteers providing service at each family support program. Volunteers:

- Greet clients.
- Answer phones.
- Handle relocation lending lockers.
- Coordinate children's play groups.
- Do base tours for newcomers.
- Teach classes.
- Coordinate special events.
 - Provide information and referral.
 - Do budgets.
 - Coordinate layettes for newborns.
 - Run thrift shops.
 - Lead new spouse orientation programs.
 - Prepare information packets.
 - Critique resumes.
 - Edit newsletters.
 - Provide child care.
 - Serve as advocates for victims of sexual assault or domestic violence.
 - Staff the Retired Activities Office.
 - Update data bases.
 - Complete tax forms.
 - Implement marketing plans.
 - Write articles for installation newspapers.
 - Serve on committees.
- Put on conferences.
- Do administrative work.
- Fill publication racks.
- Take photos for agency events.
- Provide in-service training to staff.
- Supervise other volunteers.
- Maintain agency event calendars.
- Assist during crises.
- Serve as ombudsmen, Key Volunteers and Family Readiness Group Leaders.
- Do accounting.
- Load software.
- Provide graphic support.
- Post and monitor job vacancy announcement.
- Set up Transition Assistance Program classes.
- Maintain agency library.
- Coordinate meetings.
- Compile Welcome Packages.
- Do inventory.
- File case records.
- Do presentations.

And more!



3.5 Impact of Volunteer Services

Independent Sector, a coalition of non-profits, foundations and corporations whose mission is strengthening not-for-profit initiative, philanthropy and citizen actions, estimates the total dollar value of volunteer time in the United States served in 2003 is \$266.4 billion

To estimate the monetary value of volunteer service to your organization you can use the current average figure for 2003 which is \$17.19 and multiply it by the number of hours of volunteer time contributed to your organization in a given time period. You can also go to Independent Sector's web site, http://www.independentsector.org/programs/research/volunteer_time.html, and get the exact figure for your state as the hourly amount varies from a high of \$24.75 in the Washington D.C. to a low of \$9.10 in Puerto Rico.

3.6 Policy and Guidance

DOD Directives that apply to the use of volunteers include:

DOD 1400.33 Employment and Volunteer Work of Spouses of Military

Personnel. States no official shall, directly or indirectly, impede or otherwise interfere with the right of a spouse of a military member to pursue and hold a job, attend school or perform volunteer services on or off a military installation.

DOD 5400.11 - R, Department of Defense Privacy Program. Prescribe uniform procedures for implementation of the Defense Privacy Program.

DOD 1100.21, Voluntary Services in the Department of Defense. Implements policies, responsibilities, and procedures for the acceptance and use of voluntary service in the Department of Defense programs as authorized by 10 USC 1588. Describes the conditions under which voluntary services may be accepted, the responsibilities of accepting officials, and the Government support of authorized volunteers when performing their official duties.

DOD 1342.22, Family Centers. Establishes policy, assigns responsibilities and prescribes procedures for implementation of family centers within DOD and identifies services.

“No matter how big and powerful government gets, and the many services it provides, it can never take the place of volunteers.”

- Ronald Reagan

