

Volunteer Survey Summary Report

Methodology

The Fort Bend Volunteer Survey was developed as part of an ongoing effort to understand the nature of volunteerism in Fort Bend County, Texas. Survey organizers hope that the information derived from the survey will be used by participating organizations and the community as a whole to better understand the needs and desires of the volunteer, and, in turn, enable nonprofits to do a better job in all aspects of volunteer staffing.

The survey was underwritten by the Henderson – Wessendorff Foundation and sponsored by Fort Bend Volunteers (Fort Bend Chamber), who contracted with Oklahoma City-based firm Nonprofit Consultants Group (NCG) to administer the survey. NCG Consultants Sandra Walling LeVan and Amber Larason Niblett developed and managed the survey process, with input and assistance from Dee Koch, Grant Officer for the George Foundation. Participants in the Volunteer Management Series also offered input into survey design and language, and Koch reviewed and approved the survey before its release. Survey Monkey was chosen to be the survey tool because of its ease of use and guarantee of participant anonymity, which was a priority. Survey participants were completely anonymous, and their responses were confidential.

ORGANIZATION	# of Volunteers
ARTReach	120
Attack Poverty	200
Child Advocates of Fort Bend	400
Children's Museum of Houston	72
DBSA Houston	31
East Fort Bend Human Needs Ministry	500
Fort Bend County Libraries	30
Fort Bend Family Promise	15
Fort Bend Museum Association	10
Fort Bend Senior Citizens	200
Houston Museum of Natural Science at Sugar Land	50
Literacy Council of Fort Bend	250
Second Mile	500
St. Laurence Social Concerns Ministry	450
St. Vincent de Paul - Epiphany of the Lord	40
Sugar Land Heritage Foundation	80
Texana Center	40
The Brookwood Community	100
Volunteer Services of the Richmond State School	60
SIRE	112
Total	3260

The survey was distributed to 20 organizations, who reportedly forwarded the link to a total of 3,260 volunteers. Over the course of three weeks, we received 569 responses, a participation rate of 17%, which is good for a survey of this type.

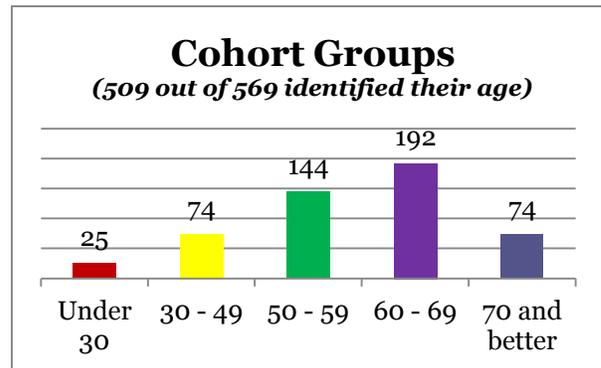
Timeline

The survey was active for about three weeks, from Monday, February 24 until late Friday, March 14.

- On Thursday, February 20, Niblett sent an introductory e-mail to all participating organizations that explained the survey’s purpose and process. The e-mail included an attachment for organizations to distribute to their volunteers the following Monday.
- Volunteer e-mails were sent on Monday, February 24, which included the survey link and instructions for accessing and completing the survey.
- Reminder e-mails were forwarded to organizations for distribution to volunteers on March 10 and March 14, which included progress updates and some troubleshooting tips about accessing the survey.
- The survey was closed late Friday, March 14, with 569 total responses.

Participation

A total of 569 participants completed the survey. Some respondents skipped one or more questions; the response rate varies from question to question. Question eight, which asks people to list challenges or obstacles to volunteer work, received the lowest response rate (241 answered, 328 skipped), which reinforces the theory that challenges are few or not important enough to prevent participation.



Age Cohorts

Question 14 asked people to identify their age group, and their answer to that question was used as a filter to create a report for each of five different age cohorts. Cohorts were determined by both the number of respondents in each age group, and by shared generational characteristics. Comparing and contrasting survey responses across age groups enabled us to identify differences in the volunteer experience that could be age-related, and may enable organizations to develop recruitment and retention strategies to suit every generation. A full discussion of cohort comparisons follows the survey summary.

Report Structure

The report is basically divided into four sections beginning with methodology, then an executive summary, a snapshot of interesting themes from each cohort and a few appendices that expand on report discussions.

Overview of Results - First Impressions

While the survey was designed with a goal in mind, NCG approached this process without any preconceived expectations about participation level, survey results, and the trends that would eventually reveal themselves in the data. When the survey closed and we began to review the responses, we were blown away by how overwhelmingly positive and complimentary results turned out to be. When 90% of volunteers report feeling valued, then you know you’re doing something right!

As you review this report, we ask you to consider the risk-free nature of this survey, which was designed to provide those disappointed with their volunteer experience an opportunity to express their dissatisfaction

without fear of retribution. Typically, those who are unhappy are eager to vent, so we were surprised and delighted by how few negative responses we received. That being said, there were fewer than 10 comments throughout the whole survey that might be construed as negative, and only seven respondents felt they were not valued.

Therefore, our report turns out to be an exercise in how these organizations can move their volunteer management programs from GOOD to GREAT. We have some ideas, some suggestions and have included some appendices with sample documents, resources, etc. We look forward to any comments you might have after you have had time to digest the report. Please feel free to contact us with any questions or comments.

Executive Summary

HOW YOU MAY USE THIS REPORT

Use survey results to conduct an audit of your current volunteer program to help you identify areas for improvement and/or concern.

- a. Use the report as a benchmark.
- b. Use the report summaries as a basis for creating a set of action steps.
- c. Use appendices for references and sample documents.

Section I - Background Information

(Questions: 1, 2, 3, 14, 15, 16, and 17)

The vast majority of survey respondents (across all cohorts) devoted a minimum of 10 hours or fewer each month to volunteer activities, with the youngest cohort devoting the least of amount of time. The bigger news from our vantage point is that those who volunteered 11-20 hours were predominantly 60 and older - fairly intuitive as this cohort may have more time available for voluntary service.

In addition, the majority volunteered for two organizations on a regular or semi-regular basis. Religious, education and social services were the most frequently identified organizational types.

CAVEAT - We believe that even though these results may follow the national trend, it is also an indication of the types of organizations that chose to participate in the survey at higher rates.

By an order of magnitude, respondents identified their work as “direct service”, and since a vast majority indicated their volunteer experience was a positive one, it follows that direct service opportunities clearly have an advantage in recruiting volunteers.

→ **Why it matters** – In terms of volunteer recruitment and volunteer job descriptions, results lead to some questions to ponder. Are there fewer administrative jobs available for volunteers? Or do volunteer administrative positions go unfilled? Do volunteers naturally avoid administrative work and opt instead for direct service? Clearly, the majority of volunteers are pleased with their contribution as direct service providers.

That being said, event staff and fundraising peaked with the 30 – 49 and 50 – 59 cohorts, and declined dramatically in the 60 and over categories.

↑ **Why that matters** – Organizations may be more successful recruiting volunteers from those cohorts for fundraising events and event staff. Make sure event guest lists are heavy on older folks, and consider designing special events that cater to the 60+ crowd.

Section II - Recruitment and Training

(Questions 4, 5, 6)

In terms of recruitment, personal connections far and away are the most effective – better than 70% identified word of mouth or friend and family as “influencing” their volunteer choice, and church as the place they learned of the volunteer opportunities.

That being said, respondents identified e-mail as a principle communication tool, churches as a place to learn of volunteer opportunities and the website and internet were mentioned in both the comments and open-ended questions as vehicles for receiving and distributing information. Though social media lagged in this category, the trend toward social media as a recruitment tool is important for organizations to embrace. And keep in mind, “word of mouth” is now commonly considered “twitter and Facebook,” as well

→ **Why it matters** - Organizations must be prepared to develop multi-faceted communication strategies across all platforms to ensure that they are reaching all of their target audiences. (This discussion continues in Section Three).

Organizations over-performed in the orientation and training category, scoring in the 80’s and 90’s – good work! Because these areas are essential to volunteer retention, organizations should be proud of their efforts in this critical area of volunteer program management.

On the other hand, only 50 to 60 percent of respondents recall being presented with a Volunteer Manual or being asked to sign a Volunteer Contract. Both of these documents are considered best practice “must haves,” functioning much like a board contract/agreement/job description. They prevent misunderstanding regarding the role of the volunteer, and organizations that do not use these management tools put themselves at risk of liability, not to mention hurt feelings and volunteer dissatisfaction.

The number one reason people volunteer?

They volunteered as children

Number one place to find volunteers?

Places of worship

Social Media Policies

Typically, volunteers may post or re-tweet anything the organization posts or tweets, but policies differ from organization to organization, based on privacy restrictions, nature of the work being performed, and other factors.

- Develop a solid social media policy
- Communicate that policy with all staff and volunteers
- Encourage volunteers to share the volunteer experiences through social media

Numerous comments from volunteers revealed that many people are unsure what, if anything, they are allowed to share about their work through social media or e-mail; and many people falsely believed that – due to privacy concerns – they were patently prevented from sharing anything about their work. While privacy is a priority for many agencies, there are always creative and effective ways to spread meaningful information about an organization’s good work.

→ **Why it matters** – the Volunteer Manual is a good place to describe and define policies, set up expectations of behavior, and describe potential conflicts of interest. For example, social media policies – this may include ideas and suggestions for how volunteers may use social media to “highlight the work of the organization,” which may encourage others to volunteer.

Sections III and IV - Volunteer Experience and Communication

Questions 7, 8, and 9 (Experience) and Questions 10, 11, 12 and 13 (Communication)

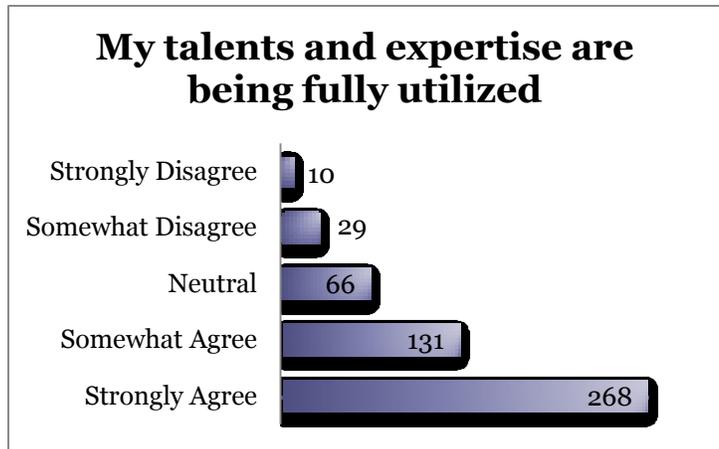
WOW – Respondents were incredibly positive regarding their working environment across all cohorts!

- 84% felt welcomed and appreciated by staff.
- 96% want to continue their volunteer work.
- 96% feel their work is important to the organization’s mission.

These positive responses correlate with volunteers’ preferences for being thanked - they appreciate and want to be thanked, preferably by e-mail, but no gifts please – use the money on direct service. However, many people commented that their work was reward enough. Furthermore, 230 people skipped this question altogether (the highest drop rate in the survey by far), which supports a “No need to be thanked” attitude. This somewhat contradicts an oft-repeated theory about volunteer management, which emphasizes volunteer recognition as an important retention tool. Regardless, a proper “thank you” is just good manners, and should not be forgotten.

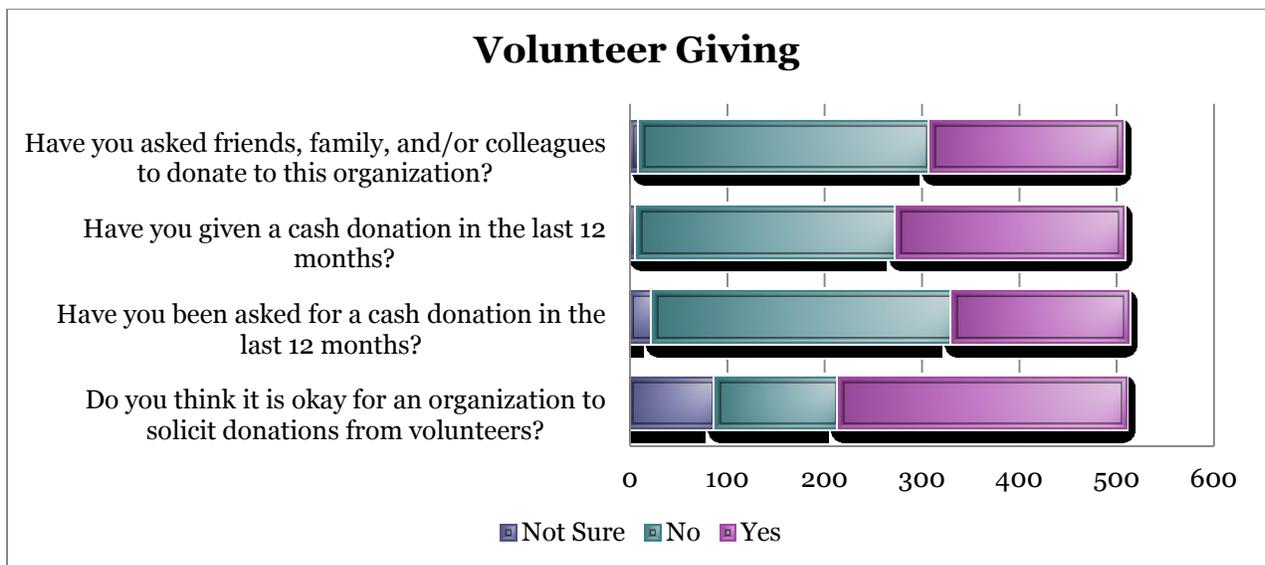
→ **Why this matters** – Across all cohorts, responses indicate that any and all “thank you’s” should emphasize the volunteer’s impact on the client, on the mission, and not on the organization itself. Much like fundraising, both donors and volunteers want to know how their gift of time and money impacts people, not the office.

Suggestions – There were two areas worth mentioning. Question 11 dealt with the volunteer atmosphere. Where a majority did feel that they were being fully utilized, it was a smaller majority than other questions, and people were a bit less enthusiastic about encouraging others to volunteer at the same organization. Organizations may want to be more sensitive to how they utilize their volunteers and how they communicate with them as well. Across all cohorts, and in comments, respondents mentioned they felt their work was not as meaningful as they wished, nor as they expected.



An additional area for some careful consideration and sensitivity is how to involve the volunteer in the resource development process, both as solicitors and donors. Across all cohorts, better than 50% of respondents felt it was acceptable to solicit contributions from volunteers. However, there was a wide divergence of opinion on how that was to be done, by whom and for what. That being said, it is worthwhile to reflect on the place the volunteer may have in the wide arc of resource development.

→ **Why it matters** – Volunteers are considered your inner circle – your family – so understanding their appropriate role in the fundraising process is essential. One strategy may be for your organization to have a focus group of volunteers that addresses this specific issue. A second strategy is to tie a request to a volunteer-specific activity – one in which they are involved and for which they feel a sense of ownership and pride, ensuring its success. Whatever and however, the evidence is there.



Cohort Snapshot

Cohort Under 30

- Even in this hip age – Friends and family and word of mouth were identified as the most common way they found the organization – who knew?
- Even though the number of respondents in this cohort age group was miniscule it was not so much impactful as instructive.
- Identified personal involvement and personal connections as extremely important.
- Found no obstacles to performing volunteer work.
- Felt underutilized and indicated their duties were not as worthwhile as they wished.
- More likely to share experiences through social media if encouraged and educated as to how they might do that.
- Over 50% say it's okay to ask for donations.

Cohort 30 to 49

- 75% volunteered one to 10 hours per month.
- 33% self-identified as fundraising and/or event staff – good prospect for those activities.
- Concerned with giving back to the community, the organization's mission and connecting with people.
- Just as the others groups mentioned, this group was not as satisfied that their opinions were heard, or their talents fully utilized.
- Would volunteer more if they had more time, unlike some other cohorts.
- 57% felt it was okay to ask for a contribution, and 50% had asked others to give.

Cohort 50 to 59

- 62% volunteered one to 10 hours.
- A whopping 43% worked on fundraising and/or event staff.
- Want to give back, the importance of mission, meaningful work and impact on the people and their own personal satisfaction.
- 37 out of 64 respondents said they encountered no obstacles or challenges to volunteering.
- Big shift to yes – 65% said it was okay to ask for a contribution – so consider targeting this group for solicitation.
- 50% are giving and 40% are asking.
- A big jump to selecting religious organizations – 60%.

Cohort 60 to 69

- Fewer than 25% identified working on fundraising and event staff.
- Higher traditional media – probably newspaper – again encourage multiple strategies so you do not miss any group, especially this one as they donate so many hours.

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- Looking for direct service in order to give back and looking for impact – speaks again to the tactic of focusing your thank you message on thanking volunteers for the impact they are making – focus on the work itself.
- 42% out of 91 respondents encountered no obstacles or challenges.
- In this group, a surprising number - 50% - said email was a good way to thank them.

Cohort 70 and above

- 58% volunteered one to 10 hours.
- 88% volunteered 11 to 20 hours, more than any other cohort.
- Low interest in fundraising and special events.
- Valued the opportunity to give back and be with people, feeling purposeful.
- One half of respondents encountered no obstacles and/or challenges.
- 54% felt it was okay to solicit donations from volunteers, but this group had the most negative comments about how they were to be solicited – which only reinforces the sensitive nature of how we ask for gifts and when.