



The Investigator

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Encouraging research in volunteerism and the management of volunteers

DATA SETS ON VOLUNTEERISM: A RESEARCH PRIMER

Although volunteering is a mainstay of the American way of life, researching volunteerism is a complex undertaking. Researchers face many barriers in studying volunteerism. One of these barriers is choosing the most appropriate information or data set. As is true in all research projects, each data set approaches the subject from a different angle and may provide different information. The choice of data sets depends on the objective of the researcher for a particular project.

This document, designed to encourage research in volunteerism, describes several data sets that include questions on volunteering. Several of the more popular instruments are described in this document. For additional information see either www.rgkcenter.org or www.serviceleader.org. Unless otherwise noted, all data sets are drawn from the US population and are available to the general public.

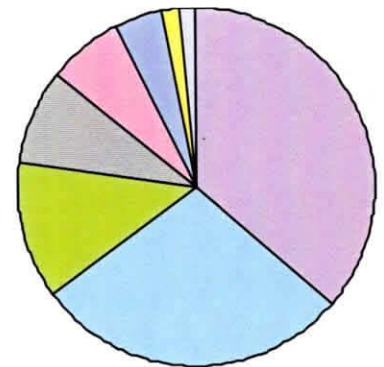
Giving and Volunteering in the United States

The Giving and Volunteering survey is conducted by the Gallup (Poll) Organization and by Westat for the Independent Sector (IS), a nonprofit organization that supports the voluntary sector. The survey is often referred to as the IS or Gallup survey, though as of 2001, the IS survey is conducted by the Westat organization. IS has been collecting data on philanthropy and volunteerism for over a decade. Gallup collected data for years 1990, 1992, 1994, 1996, and 1998. Westat collected data in 2001. The change in survey design in the 2001 survey likely accounts for the large percentage drop in volunteering rates. Although approaches vary, IS surveys generally query persons via face-to-face or telephone interviews, and ask participants about both the service they have rendered, as well as the contributions they have given. While the data sets are not publicly available, they may be purchased from the Independent Sector. www.independentsector.org

Current Population Survey

The Current Population Survey (CPS) is the source of US employment and other economic statistics. Though the survey focuses on employment characteristics, volunteering information is included in April 1974, May 1989, August 2002, September 2002, and September 2003 supplemental surveys. Detailed information about volunteering activities and organizations served is available in September 2002 and 2003 supplements. The CPS is conducted by the US Department of Labor and Census Bureau. It is a monthly survey of about 60,000 households, or about 150,000 individuals. www.nber.org/data/cps_index.html

Volunteer Organizations

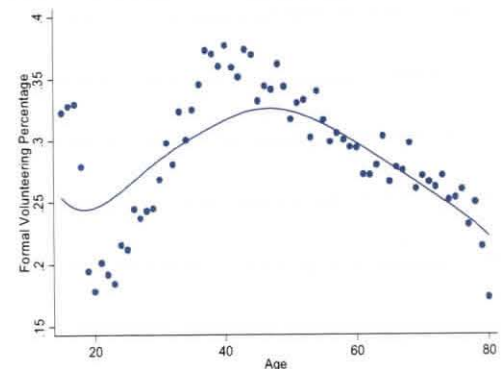


- Religious (34.6%)
- Educational or youth service (27.4%)
- Social or community service (11.8%)
- Hospital or other health (8.2%)
- Civic, political, professional, or international (6.4%)
- Sport, hobby, cultural, or arts (4.1%)
- Environmental or animal care (1.7%)
- Public safety (1.2%)

Source: Current Population Survey, September 2002.

Note: The legend follows the pie chart in a clockwise pattern.

Volunteering Rates by Age



Source: Current Population Survey, September 2002.

National Longitudinal Surveys

The National Longitudinal Surveys (NLS) is a collection of surveys that follow various groups of people over time. Surveys in some years and for some groups include questions about volunteerism. In the late 1960's, four surveys began, one on each of the following age groups: older men, mature women, young men, and young women. Young men, as of yet, are not questioned about volunteer activities. Individuals in these groups were chosen so that some of the young men and young women are the children of individuals in the older men and mature women groups. Since the initial surveys, these four groups have been interviewed continuously. These four groups are known as the "Original Cohorts". Other surveys have been created to follow the children of individuals in the young men and young women groups. In 1997, another survey of young people was begun. www.bls.gov/nls

American Citizen Participation Study

The American Citizen Participation Study (ACPS) was funded by a variety of private foundations (Spencer, Ford, and Hewlett) and the National Science Foundation. In 1990, the study asked individuals 18 years and older about their participation in the political process including voting, campaigning, campaign contributions, and volunteering. In addition to volunteering for political purposes, the survey also asked about volunteering in other organizations and about the type of service rendered. Sidney Verba served as principal investigator. www.icpsr.umich.edu

Americans' Changing Lives

The Americans' Changing Lives survey is conducted by the Survey Research Center at University of Michigan and funded by the National Institute on Aging. The survey asks respondents about both formal and informal volunteering. Information is included about how respondents feel toward their volunteering service and their perception of volunteering outcomes. The survey covers sociological, psychological, mental, and physical topic questions, in addition to household demographic information. The survey follows the same individual through three waves, 1986, 1989, and 1994. The principal researcher is James S. House. www.icpsr.umich.edu

National Survey of Families and Households

The National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) is conducted by The Center for Demography and Ecology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The survey contains information about informal volunteering. The survey covers all aspects of family life in the United States. The same survey participants were interviewed in 1987-1988 (13,000 individuals), in 1992-1994, and then in 2001-2002. www.ssc.wisc.edu/nsfh

American Time Use Survey

The American Time Use Survey (ATUS) is a monthly sample of approximately 1,100 individuals. The ATUS includes data on time spent volunteering, as well as time spent in other activities. This survey is conducted by the US Department of Labor and Census Bureau. Individuals are randomly sampled from households rotating out of the Current Population Survey (CPS). Sampling began in 2003 and will continue indefinitely. www.bls.gov/tus/home.htm

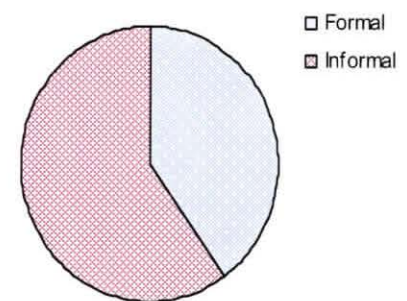
Location of Volunteer Questions in NLS

| Survey Year | Older Men | Mature Women | Young Men | Young Women |
|-------------|-----------|--------------|-----------|-------------|
| 1973 | S | | S | V |
| 1974 | | V | | |
| 1976 | S | V | S | |
| 1978 | V | | S | V |
| 1979 | | V | | |
| 1981 | S | V | S | |
| 1984 | | V | | |
| 1988 | | | | V |
| 1991 | | | | V |
| 2003 | | V | | V |

Source: NLS Handbook, 2003.

Note: The chart includes only survey years when one of the cohorts is asked about volunteer activities. Surveys with information about volunteering are denoted by a "V". Otherwise a survey is denoted by a "S". For example, the Young Men surveys never include a question about volunteering. Surveys are not necessarily conducted annually.

Volunteer Types



Source: Giving and Volunteering in the US, 2001.

Notes: Formal volunteering is volunteer work through an organization. Informal volunteering is other volunteer work, such as caring for loved ones.



Data Sets on Volunteerism: A Research Primer is the first in the *Investigator* series, previously published on eVolunteerism.com.

The *Investigator* series is designed to promote research and interest in volunteerism and volunteer administration. More information is available online at www.rgkcenter.org and www.serviceleader.org.



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