THE UNIVERSITY OF MAINE
Center on Aging

VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERISM Among Older Adults

National Survey Findings from RSVP Programs

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APRIL 2026

FUNDER ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This material is based upon work funded by the Office of Research and Evaluation at AmeriCorps under Grant No. 22REAME001 through the National Service and Civic Engagement research grant competition. Opinions or points of view expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official position of, or a position that is endorsed by, AmeriCorps.

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 1

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW 2

- Virtual Volunteering 2
- Management of Online Volunteers 3
- COVID-19 Pandemic Impact 3
- Challenges 4

SURVEY METHODS AND STUDY BACKGROUND 5

- Background: Interviews previously conducted 5
- Survey 6

RESULTS 7

- Respondent Demographics 7
- Host Site Overview 7
- Use of Virtual Volunteering 9
- Current and Prior Virtual Volunteer Assignments 10
- Barriers Reported by Programs Not Using VV or Formerly Using VV 16
- Phone-Based Volunteering 16

DISCUSSION 18

- COVID-19 Impact on VV 18
- Challenges to VV 18
- Limitations 21

REFERENCES 22

APPENDIX A ADDITIONAL FIGURES 25

APPENDIX B SIGNIFICANCE TABLES 31

APPENDIX C SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE 33

> **"VV offers other benefits to volunteers, such as convenience, that may be leveraged by volunteer organizations."**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A multi-phase study funded by AmeriCorps Seniors and AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation was launched in the fall of 2022 to examine the use of virtual volunteering (VV) with volunteers aged 55 and older. The timing of this study provided a unique opportunity to investigate VV during the latter part of the COVID-19 pandemic and the transition to a post-pandemic era. This report details the results of a national survey conducted with RSVP directors and managers as part of this study.

- Of the 138 respondents, slightly less than half had some experience currently or previously implementing VV.
- The COVID-19 pandemic was indicated as a major driver for increasing VV opportunities.
- Community health education was the most commonly offered VV opportunity at the time of the survey, while the most common VV opportunities prior to the COVID-19 pandemic related to tutoring, mentoring, and literacy. Respondents indicated that the most potential for VV activities was in companionship and friendly visiting.
- The use of VV was predicted to increase or stay the same by the majority of respondents, with those currently using virtual strategies being more open to the continued use and expansion of VV, whilst respondents who hadn't used VV were less open to using it in the future.
- The top benefits of VV were the accessibility and convenience of virtual activities, as well as reduced health risks.
- Implementation challenges for VV highlighted volunteer programs' limited resources and funding, as well as perceptions that volunteers and service recipients were uncomfortable with technology, lacked access to the necessary technology, and had a preference for being in-person.
- Perceived barriers to future use of VV include a perception of service recipient and volunteer discomfort with technology, lack of access to funding resources to support a virtual model, lack of access to the internet, and an overall preference towards in-person service delivery.

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERING

Virtual volunteering (VV) as a strategy for engaging volunteers online has been discussed in research literature since the early days of home computing. VV is defined as an off-site volunteer activity facilitated by computer using web-based platforms. Compared to in-person roles, virtual volunteer roles are often configured into short-term assignments without location-based requirements (Lachance, 2020; Murray & Harrison, 2005; Volunteer Canada, 2020). Virtual volunteers have also been called online volunteers, cyber volunteers, and Information and Communication Technology volunteers (Peña-López, 2007).

VV has been conceptualized from two different perspectives: the proportion of virtual engagement in volunteer activities, and strategies that incorporate virtual aspects into the logistics of volunteer management. Ackermann and Manatashal (2018) categorized three levels of virtual engagement: volunteer activities that are online-only, volunteer activities that are both online and offline/in-person, and volunteer activities that are offline/in-person only. VV also includes virtual volunteer management strategies used to engage with volunteers, including recruitment, training, supervision, and communications (Murray & Harrison, 2005).

Volunteering generally has been linked with improved health, well-being, and social connection among older adults (Hsu et al., 2023; Gil-Lacruz et al., 2019; JBS International, 2019). Volunteering has also been linked with personal resilience against stress, the acquisition of new skills, improved mental health, and increased longevity among older adults (Crittenden et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2020). In addition to these positive benefits, VV offers other benefits to volunteers, such as convenience, that may be leveraged by volunteer organizations. Cravens (2000) found that VV is often sought by individuals with time constraints, disability, home-based obligations, or who prefer to be online.

VV increases accessibility of local and in-person volunteer activities and expands volunteer recruitment options for programs (Lachance, 2020; Mukherjee, 2010). Examples of volunteer tasks that were originally conducted in-person and can be performed virtually include the provision of translation services, mentoring, tutoring, friendly check-in visits, conducting online research, creating databases, supervising online activities like chat rooms and discussion boards, and creating websites. Given the flexibility and range of options, VV can both broaden the scope of volunteer opportunities and diversify the pool of individuals engaged in volunteer activities (Murray & Harrison, 2005).

MANAGEMENT OF ONLINE VOLUNTEERS

As volunteering infrastructure changes in response to volunteer trends and technology, digital platforms may help facilitate volunteer matching based on supply and demand and allow for shorter or episodic commitments (Grandi et al., 2018). A 2008 analysis by Dhebar and Stokes identified two key management practices for virtual volunteers: the importance of routine communication between managers and virtual volunteers, and timely responsiveness by managers. A survey of organizational representatives identified almost 100 different software tools for tracking and managing volunteers, with spreadsheets (Google Sheets, Microsoft Excel, etc.) being the most frequently reported method (Cravens & Jackson, 2012). Infrastructure findings from a survey of organizations reporting success with online volunteers indicated that these organizations had reliable internet access, staff with technology literacy and communication skills, and that their organizations had at least one person primarily responsible for onsite and online volunteers (Cravens, 2006). Other methods for successful management of virtual volunteers include clearly defining tasks and limiting assignment duration and intensity (Dhebar & Stokes, 2008; Cravens, 2006).

COVID-19 PANDEMIC IMPACT

The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns had a drastic impact on participation in traditional, in-person volunteering roles. A 2021 study by Volunteer Maine found that 94% of surveyed individuals at Maine nonprofits reported a reduction or elimination of in-person volunteer activities due to the pandemic. Concurrently, organizations transitioned previously in-person volunteer roles to an online delivery model, when possible, encouraging older adults to engage with technology. Internet traffic during peak COVID-19 increased by 30% across the United States (U.S.) compared to pre-pandemic levels (Branscombe, 2021), and older adults reported higher rates of utilizing technology and the internet to complete activities such as shopping, socializing, and entertainment (Sixsmith et al., 2022). During the pandemic, VV allowed older adults to participate in volunteer roles and maintain a sense of connection and community while adhering to isolation protocols (Lachance, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic created an unprecedented impact on society, particularly on organizations that were forced to navigate through instability and changing conditions. Potential risks for organizations during this time included employee and client health, layoffs, economic concerns related to shutdowns, and environmental concerns (Boiral et al., 2021). Additionally, many organizations lacked knowledge about how to manage a pandemic crisis and the practices that should be adopted to mitigate uncertainty and risks (Chen & Sriphon, 2021; Boiral et al., 2021).

During the widespread economic instability from the COVID-19 pandemic, many nonprofit organizations lacked the financial reserves to survive the unanticipated loss of external funding and subsequent inability to maintain their workforce (Van Steenburg et al., 2022). In a survey conducted by the Independent Sector (2020), 83% of surveyed nonprofit organizations reported a reduction in revenue, 71% reported a reduction in services offered and 47% reported a decline in employment due to layoffs and furloughs.

Nonprofits that took a proactive approach to COVID-19 were more likely to retain volunteers compared to those that were slower to react and reluctant to implement change (Windon et al., 2022). Windon et al. (2022) also noted that organizations that promptly adjusted to changes with new practices and technology were more resilient. COVID-19 posed adaptation opportunities to transition volunteer roles to virtual spaces, create more long-term roles for VV, and sustain a wider use of VV into the future (Lachance, 2020). These concepts are mirrored in telework literature, which indicates that most workers anticipated that the pandemic would make telework and digital conferencing more common in the future (Moens et al., 2022). At the same time, older adults' attitudes towards telework are shifting to be more positive (Moens et al., 2022).

CHALLENGES

Mobilizing technology as an avenue for volunteer opportunities comes with a unique set of challenges that must be overcome for VV to be successful. One challenge of VV is the concern that older adults have low technological literacy. Older adult populations have previously been described as having multi-level digital deprivation through limited to no access to the internet, reduced digital literacy skills, and poor online agency (Morrison et al., 2023). Older adult education about technology is complicated by a variety of physical, cognitive, perceptual, and psychosocial issues associated with aging (Yoo, 2021), as well as low educational attainment and poor health (Li et al., 2021).

Patterns of stratification and inequality that are already present within volunteering may be highlighted or reinforced by VV (Ackermann & Manatashal, 2018), such as a lack of access to adequate technology and internet services required for participating in VV. Barriers that impact older adult daily usage of technology include inadequate training and support, lack of user-friendly and assistive interfaces, and complicated user manuals (Yazdani-Darki et al., 2020). Older adults frequently have low incomes and high household costs which also reduce their ability to access technology (Chiu & Liu, 2017; Vaportzis et al., 2017; Yazdani-Darki et al., 2020;). Geographic location also plays a role in technological accessibility, as those living in rural areas experience more challenges related to reliable internet access and internet infrastructure (Dow-Fleisner et al., 2022; Whitacre & Mills, 2007).

On top of these challenges, older adults may be hesitant to engage with technology if the potential sense of inadequacy that comes with navigating the technology is greater than the perceived utility of the technology (Heinz, 2013). Additionally, a study by Mitzner et al. (2010) noted that factors like inconvenience, features of technology, security issues, and reliability of technology contributed to negative perceptions of technology among older adults.

Further research is needed to identify and understand the challenges associated with VV, the barriers that organizations and individuals must overcome in order for VV to be equitable, accessible, and reliable, and effective methods for overcoming these barriers. Our research aims to further investigate the benefits, challenges, implications of, and opportunities for VV in a post-COVID-19 society through the perspective of volunteer program directors and staff.

SURVEY METHODS AND STUDY BACKGROUND

Beginning in the fall of 2022, researchers from the University of Maine Center on Aging began a comprehensive, multi-stage investigation to better understand how virtual volunteering (VV) is used by adults aged 55 and older. Supported by AmeriCorps Seniors and the AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation, the timing of the project uniquely positioned researchers to be able to examine how virtual service models evolved during a period of social and organizational change, as the height of the COVID-19 pandemic had ended and the nation moved into the post-pandemic era.

A series of interviews was conducted with representatives from 16 AmeriCorps Seniors Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) programs and 14 non-RSVP key informants with expertise in technology and volunteerism. The AmeriCorps Seniors RSVP program engages older adult volunteers across the U.S. in local volunteer opportunities that are facilitated by thousands of nonprofit organizations (AmeriCorps, n.d.). Themes from across the interviews guided the development of the survey discussed in this paper. The interview themes centered around the positive and negative impacts of COVID-19 on older adult volunteerism, the challenges and benefits of VV strategies, and the projected future opportunities for virtual volunteer engagement.

Interviewees highlighted the accessibility of VV to those with geographic or physical barriers impacting their ability to participate, the increased social connections fostered through a virtual service delivery model, and increased opportunities to learn new skills, particularly surrounding technology, as primary benefits to this model. However, many interviewees also highlighted adverse attitudes towards technology and VV among volunteers as a challenge, with reluctance, hesitation, and a preference for in-person engagement by both volunteers and service recipients as barriers to VV. Consideration was also given to technology fatigue, as some interviewees identified that, as a result of being forced into predominantly technologically-driven activities during the height of the pandemic, many volunteers and service recipients were eager to end VV in favor of in-person models. Other challenges included inequity and access to necessary infrastructures to support a virtual model and low digital literacy in both volunteers and service recipients.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on attitudes towards VV was a common theme in the interviews. During the pandemic, programs had to quickly adapt to a socially distanced society to remain successful. While some interviewees reported that some benefits developed as a result of this transition, including the development of new programs and increased flexibility of existing programs, many programs observed decreased volunteer participation. The emotional toll the pandemic took on the general population was underscored, with many interviewees agreeing that the pandemic highlighted many anxieties and other negative emotions that influenced how people participated in VV.

SURVEY

The findings from the interviews and resulting themes guided the development of the survey that is discussed hereon in this paper. In August and September of 2023, RSVP program directors from across the U.S. were invited to participate in an anonymous online survey, administered via Qualtrics. For recruitment purposes, AmeriCorps granted the research team access to an email directory of all AmeriCorps Seniors RSVP program directors in the U.S. An initial survey invitation was distributed, along with follow-up reminder emails to encourage participation at two weeks and one week before survey closure, respectively.

The survey contained 43 questions in total with question sets tailored to sites currently using VV (current), those that had used VV in the past but are not currently using it (former), and sites that have never used VV (never). The survey questions contained a mix of yes/no, multiple choice, open-ended, and 5-point Likert scale questions. The first eight questions consisted of program background about the program director, organization, and AmeriCorps Seniors RSVP program nonprofit host site. The remaining questions collected data on current and former virtual volunteer assignments, perceived benefits and challenges, management practices, management attitudes towards VV, and predicted future use of VV. In addition, the survey identified if phone-based volunteering was currently being used and for what type of volunteer assignments as a point of comparison. Phone-based volunteering questions were added as RSVP interviewees had previously identified phone-based volunteering as a complementary remote strategy to virtual volunteer assignments.

Question sets were derived from the existing research literature. Since no validated instruments existed to measure VV concepts, survey items were constructed based on VV survey questions from prior studies, most of which were conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic (Abdulkadir & Dobrin, 2022; Baughman, 2021; Cravens, 2000; Murray & Harrison, 2005). Additionally, survey questions were constructed based on the initial interviews conducted for this study, complemented by concepts within the literature on the topics of VV and telework (Ackermann & Manatschal, 2018; Criscuolo et al., 2021; Dhebar & Stokes, 2008; Moens et al., 2022; Owens, 2017).

All survey protocols were reviewed and approved by the University of Maine Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB# 2023-07-09). To incentivize participation, respondents were offered the opportunity to enter a gift card raffle.

Once collected, the survey data underwent descriptive and comparative analyses to identify the opportunities, challenges, and benefits of VV within the context of RSVP programming. Analysis was conducted across the full sample in addition to between-groups analysis across three program profiles: the current, former, and never sites.

RESULTS

RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Of the 468 RSVP directors contacted via mass email distribution, 138 completed a survey for a response rate of 29.5%. Most survey respondents listed their job position as an RSVP/program/project "Director" or "Manager." Similarly, some respondents used "Coordinator" to describe their position. In one instance, a respondent titled their position as a "Grant Administrator," while another respondent described their role as a "Chief Program Officer." Most survey respondents reported that their length of time in their current role was between 1-4 years, followed by 5-10 years. See Figure 1 for more information.

HOST SITE OVERVIEW

Private nonprofit organizations accounted for the majority of respondents (55.1%), with university/college affiliates, area agencies on aging, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services/government-based organizations, and other organizations roughly splitting the remaining responses (Figure 2). None of the RSVP grantees surveyed reported being a for-profit organization.

There was a great deal of experience with the RSVP program model across the sample, as the majority of host sites reported being an RSVP grantee for more than 20 years (60.9%), followed by 11-20 years (16.7%). The approximate number of volunteers served by each organization's RSVP program ranged from 14 to 3,000, with the majority of RSVP programs serving approximately 100 to 299 volunteers (44.5% of respondents) or 300 to 599 volunteers (33.6%).

Figure 1

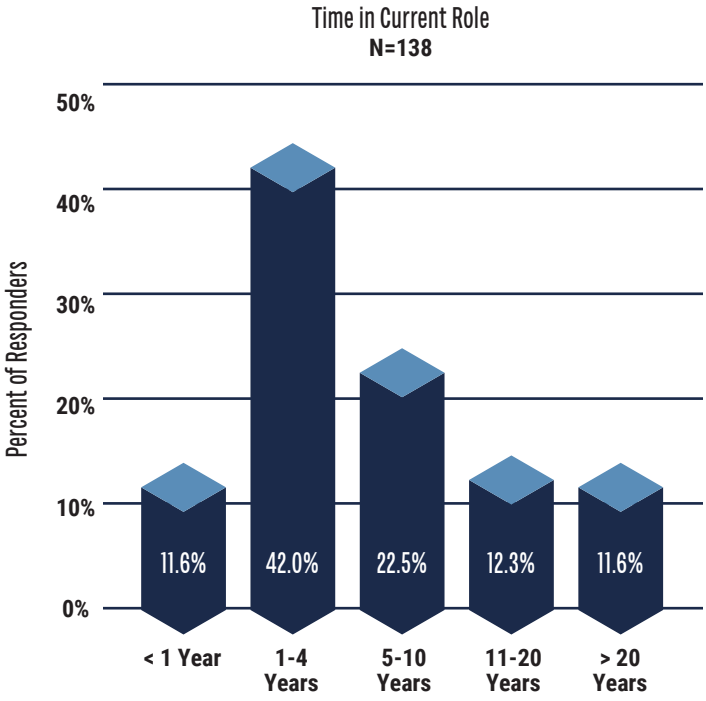
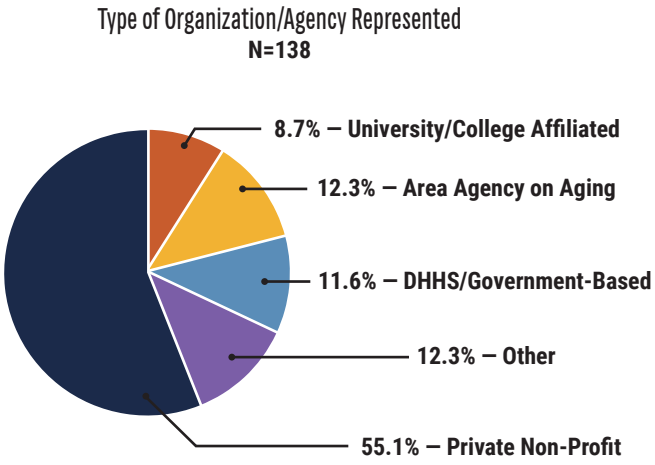


Figure 2



Healthy Futures, Community Priorities, and Education were the most frequently identified RSVP program focus areas by respondents. Volunteer activities that address health needs, such as access to care, caregiver support, health education, and aging-in-place, known as “Healthy Futures” in AmeriCorps, were noted by the vast majority of respondents. Community Priorities, a service category focused on volunteer activities that meet local and state-identified needs, was the next most frequently identified RSVP program focus area. Education, encompassing volunteer work focused on improving educational outcomes for economically disadvantaged individuals through activities such as mentoring and tutoring, was identified by fewer than half of responding programs. The remaining RSVP focus areas identified included Economic Opportunities, Veterans and Military Families, Disaster Services, and Environmental Stewardship, as shown below in Figure 3.

More than half of the programs reported that they had never used VV (52.9%), as shown in Figure 4. For the remaining respondents, approximately a third were currently using VV (34.1%) while the rest had formerly used VV (13.0%).

Figure 3

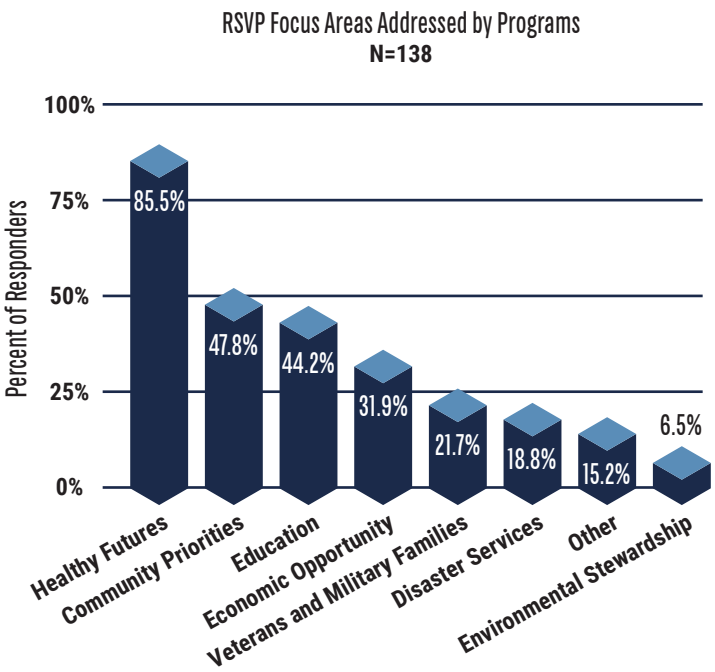
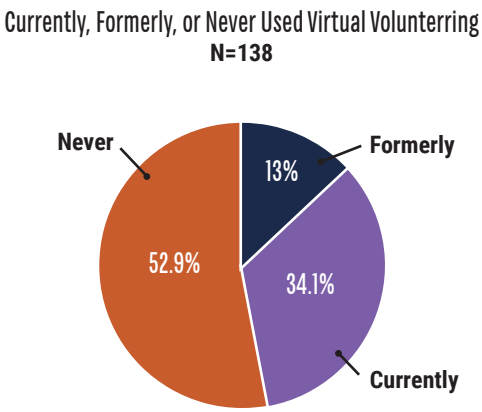


Figure 4



VV was examined across the different AmeriCorps Seniors program focus areas to identify the category of volunteering most often associated with VV. The proportion of respondents with volunteers within the Economic Opportunity category was not equally distributed across virtual volunteer status groups, $X2$ (2, N = 138) = 6.0942, p = .0475. Respondents who reported currently using virtual volunteers (40.9%) and never using virtual volunteers (38.6%) were more likely to address the RSVP Economic Opportunity focus area than respondents who had formerly used virtual volunteers (20.5%).

Forty-one states and the U.S. territory of Puerto Rico were represented in the survey sample. The state of Florida had the highest number of respondents (13 respondents), followed by New York (9), and Texas (8). The proportion of respondents serving metropolitan areas was not equally distributed across virtual volunteer status groups, X2 (2, N = 138) = 10.372, p = .006. Overall, programs were more likely to serve rural and suburban areas (73.2% and 44.9%) compared to metropolitan areas (31.2%). Programs that reported currently using virtual volunteers or formerly using virtual volunteers were more likely to serve metropolitan areas (28.0% and 23.5% respectively) than respondents who had never used virtual volunteers (14.4%). See Appendix A for additional information. The distribution of programs that were currently, formerly, or never serving suburban or rural areas with virtual volunteers was near significant (see Appendix B Table 1). Programs serving rural areas were more likely to never use VV (58.8%) compared to those programs that were formerly or are currently using VV (38.7% and 44.1%, respectively).

USE OF VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERING

Almost a third of the respondents (28.7%) agreed that VV is an effective tool for addressing the needs of RSVP volunteer assignments. A handful of respondents strongly agreed, while almost half of the respondents neither agreed nor disagreed (see Figure 5). A smaller portion disagreed or strongly disagreed that VV was an effective tool for RSVP volunteer assignments.

All survey respondents were asked to identify volunteer assignment categories for which they would like to use virtual volunteers but have not done so yet. The most frequent type of volunteer assignment reported was companionship/ friendly visits, as shown in Figure 6. While about one-third of respondents said that they do not desire to use or extend VV, other sites expressed wanting to implement VV for tutoring/mentoring, computer/technology education, and community health education.

Figure 5.

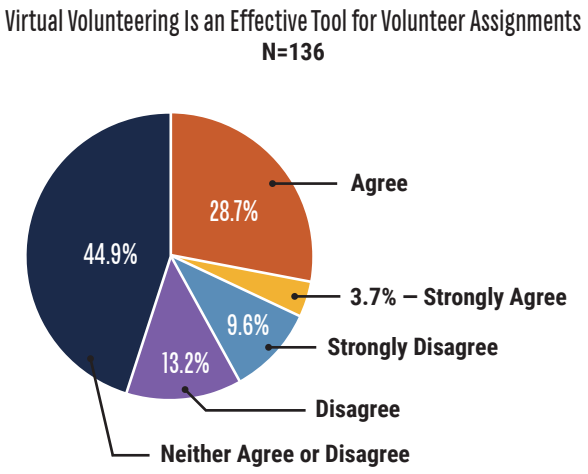


Figure 6.

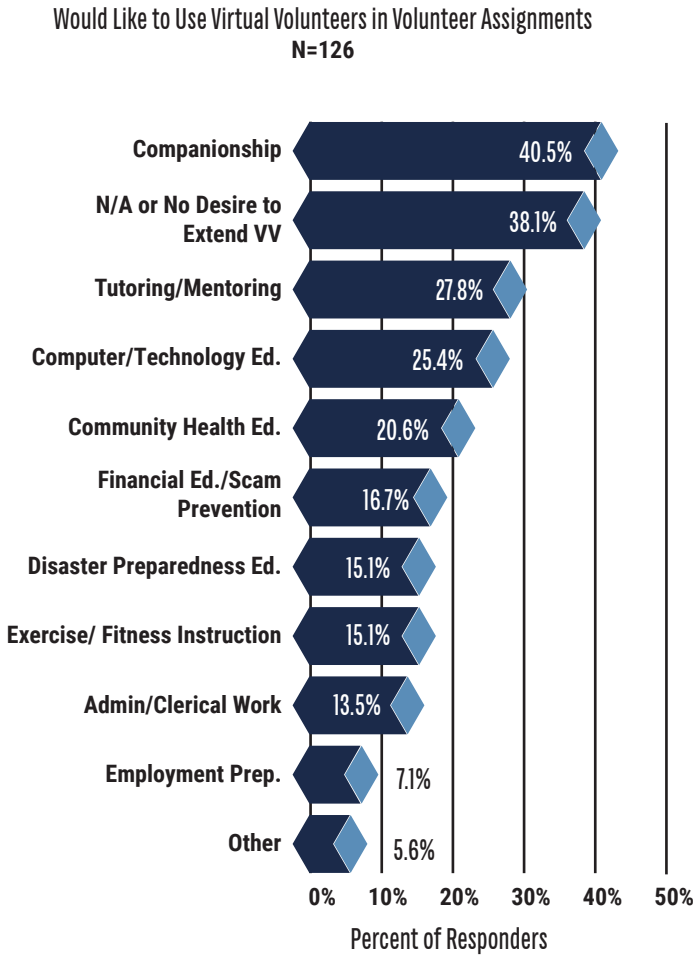
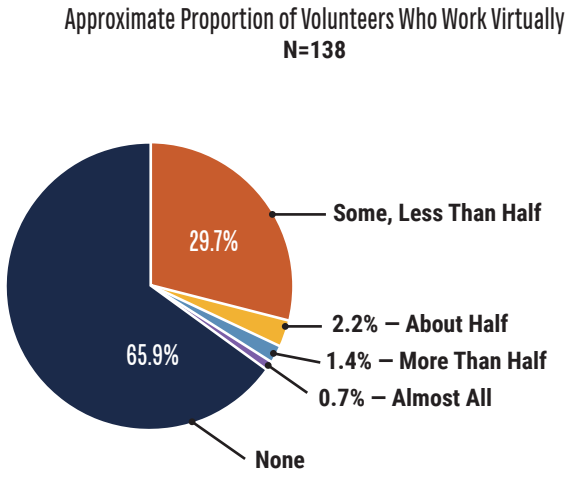


Figure 7.



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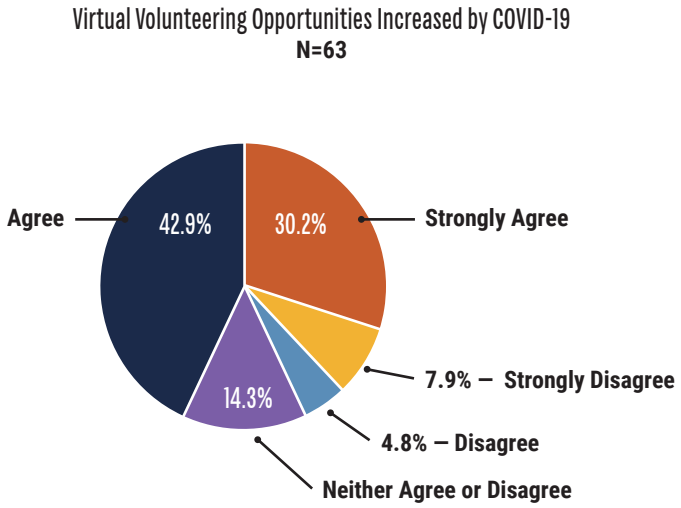


CURRENT AND PRIOR VIRTUAL VOLUNTEER ASSIGNMENTS

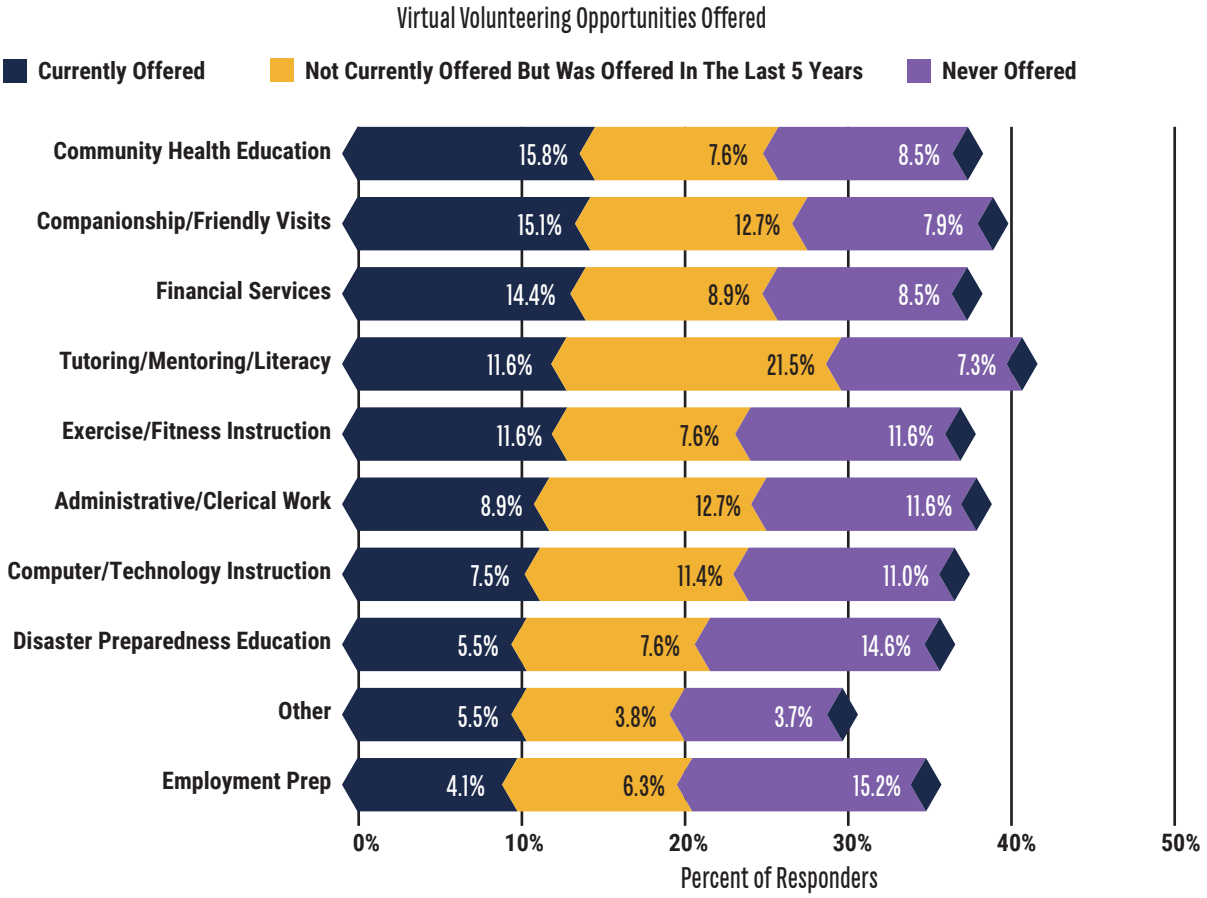
Respondents were asked to indicate the approximate proportion of their volunteers who complete at least part of their work through VV. More than half of respondents reported that none of their volunteers were currently volunteering virtually. Close to a third reported that some, but less than half, of their volunteers were volunteering virtually (see Figure 7).

For the programs that currently or previously used VV with their older adult volunteers (N = 63), a majority (79.4%) reported that, before the COVID-19 pandemic, their organizations did not offer VV opportunities. When asked if COVID-19 was a major reason for implementing VV, nearly three-quarters of respondents agreed or strongly agreed. Similarly, nearly three-quarters of the survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that COVID-19 increased the number of VV assignments offered by programs (Figure 8).

Respondents were asked to indicate the types of volunteering assignments that their programs currently offer, have previously offered in the past five years, or have never offered. Figure 9 visualizes the volunteer assignment types across these three categories of offerings. Of the volunteer assignment types currently offering VV, community health education was the most frequently reported (15.8%), followed by companionship/friendly visits (15.1%), financial services (14.4%), exercise/fitness instruction (11.6%), and tutoring/mentoring/literacy (11.6%). Less frequently reported VV opportunities currently offered by programs included administrative/clerical work (8.9%), computer/technology instruction (7.5%), disaster preparedness education (5.5%), and workplace development/employment preparation services (4.1%).

Volunteer assignment types that have previously been offered virtually within the last five years but are not currently offered virtually were most frequently tutoring/mentoring/literacy (21.5%), administrative/clerical work (12.7%), companionship/friendly visits (12.7%), and computer/technology instruction (11.4%).

Figure 9.



In contrast to the volunteer assignment types currently or formerly offered virtually, the assignment types that have never been offered virtually by responding programs were most frequently reported to be workplace development/employment preparation services (15.2%), disaster preparedness education (14.6%), exercise/fitness instruction (11.6%), administrative/clerical work (11.6%), and computer/technology instruction (11.0%). These results suggest that there are greater barriers to offering or participating in virtual opportunities in these volunteer assignment types; primarily employment prep, disaster preparedness education, computer/technology instruction, and administrative/clerical work.

The most frequently reported methods of recruitment for virtual volunteer assignments were word-of-mouth, in-person recruitment, e-mail, web and social media, and print advertisements, as shown in Figure 10. Most respondents (79%) say that VV and in-person recruitment methods were similar.

The most frequently reported methods of communication used by programs with virtual RSVP volunteers were personal email, phone calls, group email distribution, video conferencing, in-person conversations, texting, physical mail, and social media, as shown in Figure 11.

BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES

Programs that currently or previously used VV identified numerous benefits associated with VV for their programs and volunteers, as shown in Figure 12. Increased accessibility for those with mobility or health

concerns, reduction in possible COVID-19 transmission, and increased convenience and flexibility were among the most frequently identified benefits of VV, as reported by survey respondents. A small proportion (6.7%) of respondents reported "other" benefits, with write-in comments indicating that VV attracts a younger/diverse pool of older adult volunteers and that it facilitates program oversight due to the reduced need for staff to travel between sites. One respondent reported observing no benefits in using VV.

Based on statistical analysis using Fisher's exact tests (see Appendix B Table 4), current VV programs were more likely to agree with the following benefits of VV as compared to programs that started but are no longer using VV (significant at the $p \leq .05$ level):

- Brings in new and different types of volunteers
- Increases convenience and flexibility
- Offers access to a wider range of service recipients
- Makes volunteering more accessible for those with mobility or health concerns

Figure 10

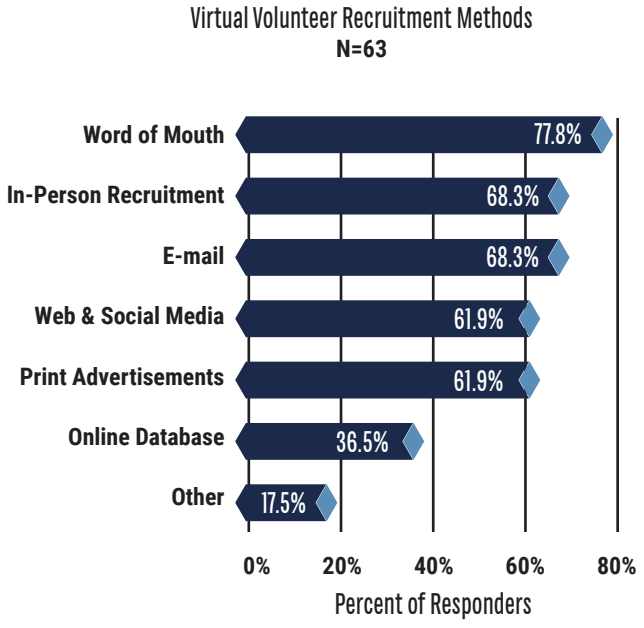


Figure 11

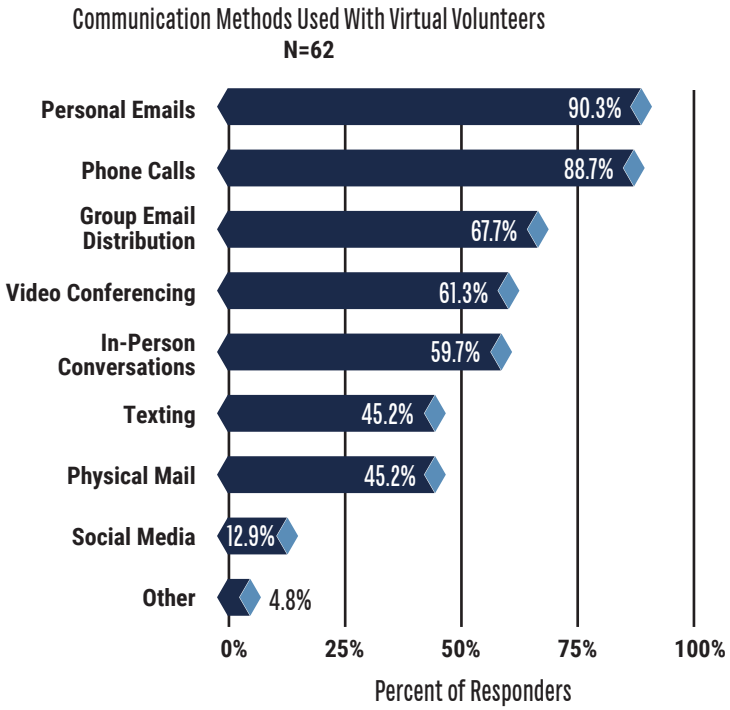
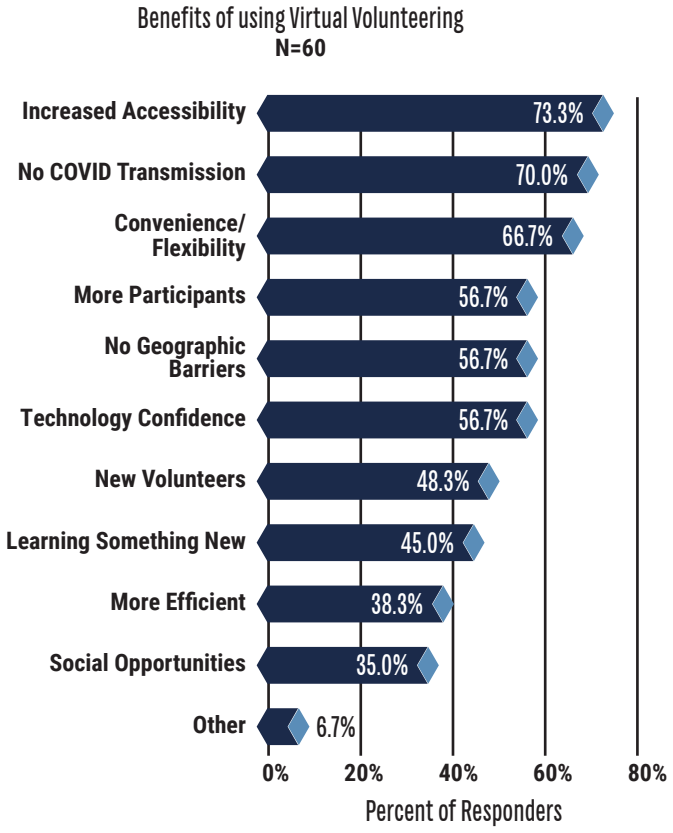


Figure 12

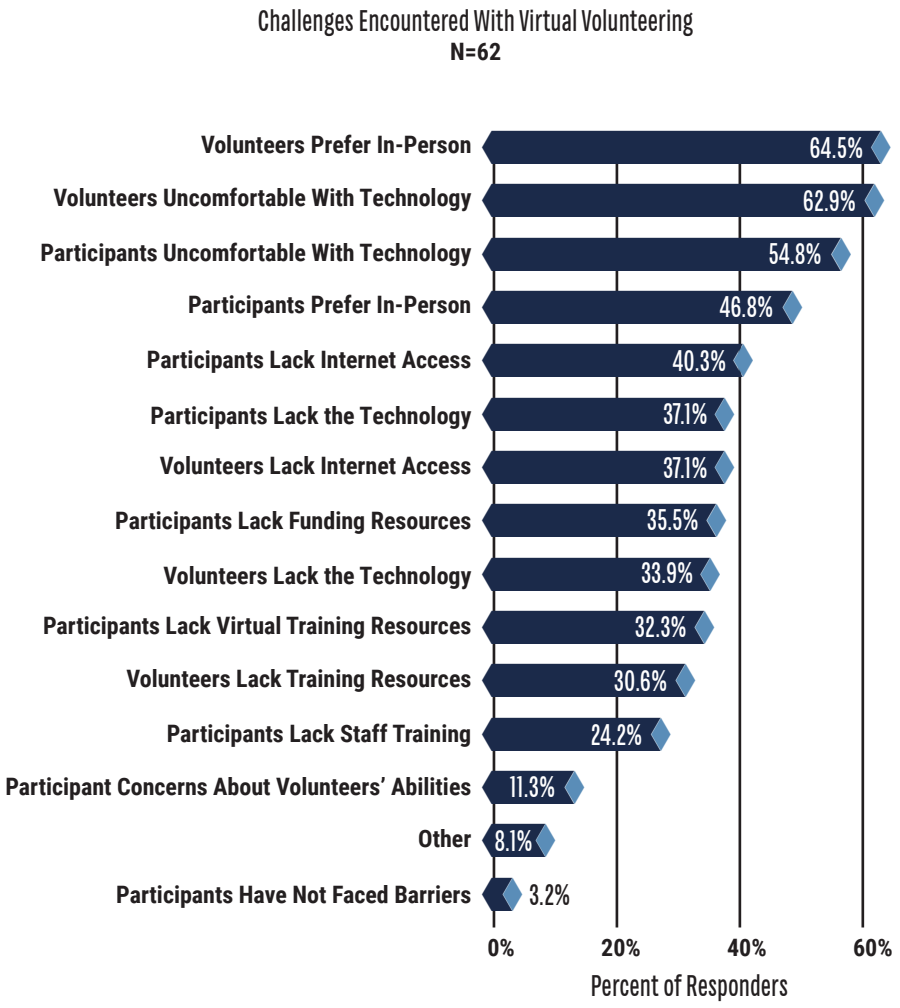


Respondents also describe challenges related to the implementation of VV, including discomfort with the use of technology by service recipients/beneficiaries and volunteers, along with preferences for in-person service delivery models by service recipients and volunteers. Equity and accessibility-related concerns were also commonly noted, including lack of internet access for service recipients and volunteers, difficulty obtaining technology for service recipients and volunteers, and an overall lack of funding and resources (Figure 13). Write-in responses included concerns regarding volunteer workloads and overall job safety, and incentives for recruitment and retention.

Based on statistical analysis using Fisher's exact tests (see Appendix B Table 3), current VV programs were more likely to agree with the following challenges of VV over those programs that used VV in the past (significant at the $p \leq .05$ level):

- Volunteers lack the technology for VV
- Volunteers lack the internet access for VV
- Programs lack the internet access to support VV

Figure 13

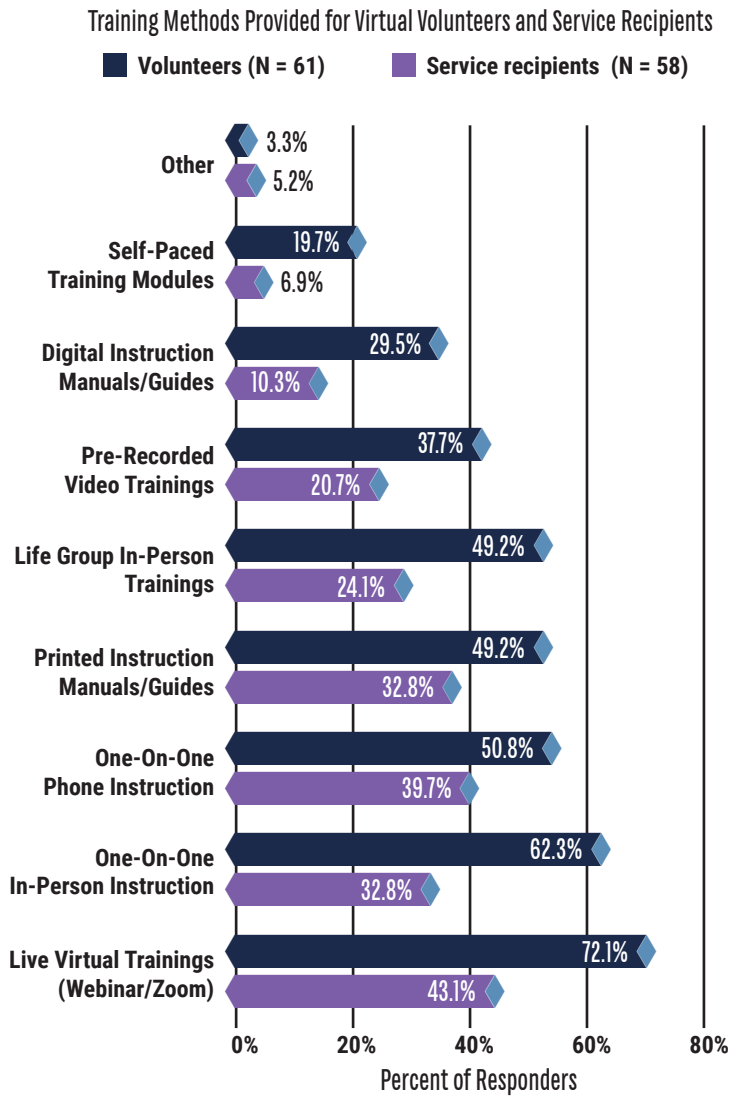


VIRTUAL VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT

When asked about the development of partnerships with other groups or organizations to support VV, an overwhelming majority of the 62 respondents (79%) reported that no new partnerships had been developed. Of the 13 respondents who indicated that they had developed partnerships to support VV, 12 respondents shared that these partnerships were with organizations that include the Department of Health, National Digital Equity Center, other nonprofits, local reading specialists, technology training resources, and fitness trainers.

Respondents were asked to share if their virtual volunteers received different or additional recognition for their volunteering efforts compared to in-person volunteers. A very small percentage of respondents (1.6%) reported that virtual volunteers were given different or additional recognition compared to in-person volunteers, such as a recognition lunch for their virtual volunteers. A different respondent clarified that while they had previously hosted virtual recognition events for all volunteers, they have since shifted back to hosting recognition events in-person.

Figure 14



The training methods provided for virtual and in-person volunteers were largely similar, with volunteers being provided training options more frequently than service recipients (Figure 14). The training provided to virtual volunteers and service recipients ranged from digital methods and printed materials to in-person training. Respondents noted a lower provision of one-on-one, in-person instruction for service recipients compared with one-on-one phone instruction (32.8% and 39.7%, respectively). This trend was flipped with virtual volunteers, who received more in-person instruction compared to one-on-one phone instruction (62.3% and 50.8%, respectively). The most frequently used training methods for virtual volunteers and service recipients were live virtual training through Zoom or webinars, one-on-one, in-person and phone instruction, printed manuals and guides, group in-person training, and pre-recorded video training.

SATISFACTION AND FORECASTING - A MIXED PICTURE FOR THE FUTURE

Though not all survey respondents shared a strong positive view of VV, the majority (51.7%) of programs that currently or formerly used VV reported being “very” or “extremely” satisfied with the skills of their virtual volunteers. See Figure 15 for more details.

Overall satisfaction with managing VV was somewhat mixed, with just under half of respondents who used VV in the past or use it currently reporting being “very” or “extremely” satisfied with such assignments (Figure 16), while half of the respondents indicated “moderate” or “slight” satisfaction with VV assignments. A Welch two-sample t-test indicated significantly higher satisfaction scores with VV reported by programs currently using VV (M = 3.53 out of five points, SD = 0.991) as compared to those that stopped using VV (M = 2.60 out of five points, SD = 1.06), $t(22.81) = 3.01$, $p = .006$ (see Appendix B Table 5).

Despite mixed attitudes toward and satisfaction with VV assignments, about a third of respondents projected a growth in the future use of VV assignments and roughly another third projected that VV assignments would remain the same in the future. Close to one in five programs (17.5%) projected a reduction in the use of VV in the future (Figure 17).

When asked to provide any additional insights they may have about VV, respondents shared that VV was generally successful for their programs, that it benefited older adult engagement, and that virtual volunteers want to stay virtual. Respondents also shared that VV was generally challenging to administer, with both volunteers and service recipients lacking the internet access needed to offer new virtual volunteer opportunities. Respondents also said that they used more phone-based volunteer assignments than virtual assignments, that some older adults don’t like virtual volunteer methods, and that there is a need for different management strategies for VV compared to in-person volunteering.

Figure 15

Satisfaction With Virtual Volunteers’ Skill Sets
N=60

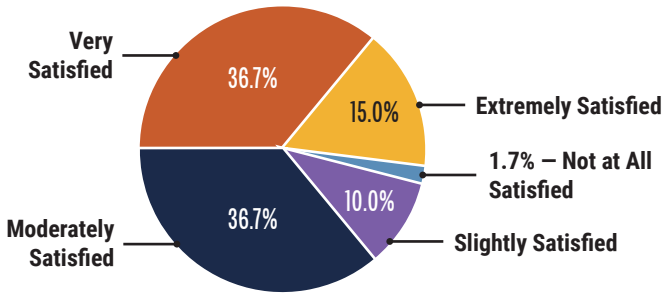
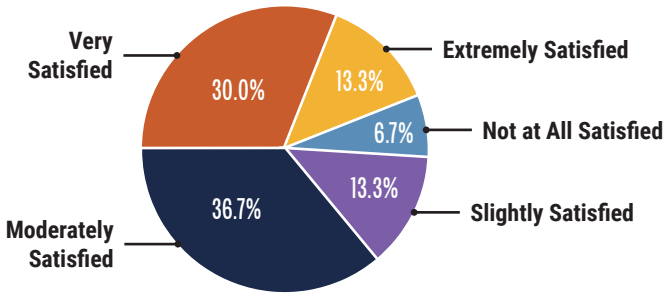


Figure 16

Satisfaction With Virtual Volunteer Assignments Managed
N=60



BARRIERS REPORTED BY PROGRAMS NOT USING VV OR FORMERLY USING VV

When respondents that had never used VV were asked about their interest in using VV in their programs going forward (Figure 18), the majority indicated slight or no interest in pursuing VV in the future.

Programs that had never used virtual volunteers in their RSVP programs were asked to share the barriers that prevented them from doing so. The most frequently reported barrier to VV was volunteer preference for in-person activities, indicated by almost three-quarters of the respondents. Other commonly identified barriers included volunteer discomfort with technology, service recipient preference for in-person activities, a lack of funding, and service recipient discomfort with technology. Lack of internet access for both volunteers and service recipients was reported as a barrier by more than one-third of the survey respondents who have never used VV as well. Fisher's exact tests revealed statistically significant differences (see Appendix B Table 2) between the programs that formerly used VV and the programs that had never used VV with regard to service recipients preferring to be in-person ($p \leq 0.003$) and service recipient comfort with technology ($p \leq 0.05$). See Figure 19 for additional information.

Figure 17

Projected Future Use of Virtual Volunteerism Compared to Current Use
N=63

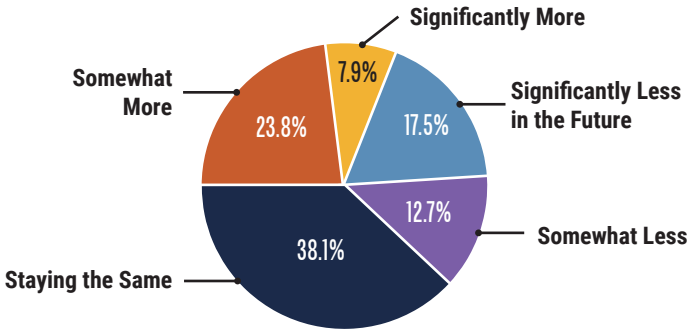
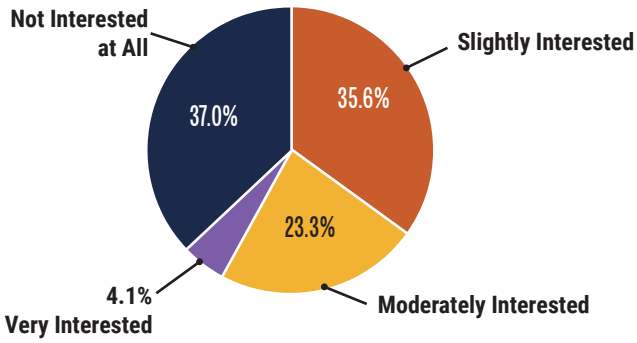


Figure 18

Interest in Using Virtual Volunteering Going Forward
N=73

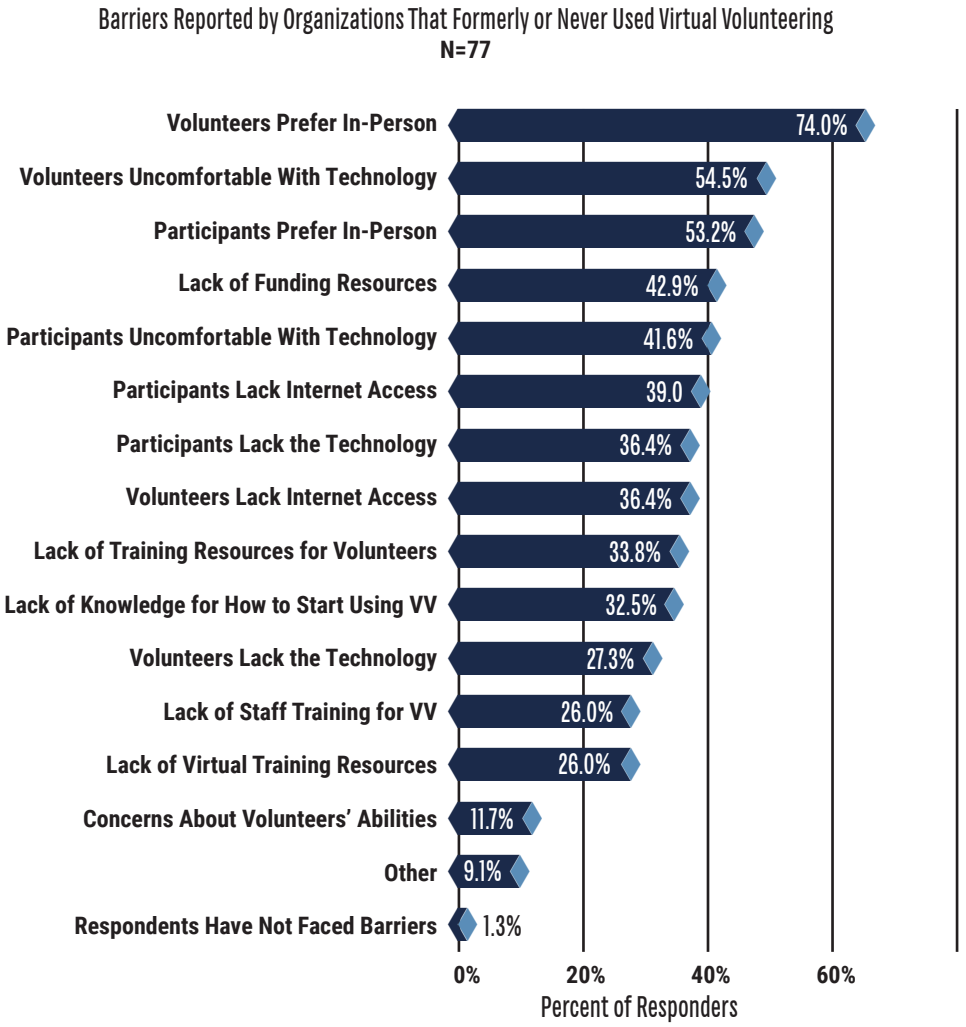


PHONE-BASED VOLUNTEERING

Survey findings underscore that phone-based volunteering methods are more widely used across the sample compared to VV, with 61% of respondents reporting current use of phone-based volunteering compared to 34.1% reporting current use of VV. While the use of VV among sites has been driven by COVID-19, this is not the case for phone-based volunteering, with more than half (56.4%) of the programs surveyed reporting use of phone-based volunteering before COVID-19.

When asked to share further insights about phone-based volunteering via write-in, respondents reported that they felt it was a successful volunteer strategy for hospice programs and in rural and lower-income areas. Phone-based volunteering was also noted to increase companionship and reduce social isolation, be viewed as more accessible to volunteers, and be easier to use than virtual/

Figure 19



internet-based volunteer methods. Concerns around safety and privacy were shared, as well as the sentiment that an in-person relationship is needed between volunteers and service recipients before going phone-based. It was also shared that, much like VV, volunteers and service recipients often prefer in-person methods over phone-based methods, and phone-based volunteering is perceived as having a less positive impact and is overall less successful than in-person volunteering.

Of those sites not currently using phone-based volunteering, approximately one in five reported having used phone-based volunteerism in the last five years. By and large, phone-based volunteering is used for companionship and friendly visiting activities, with fewer assignments used for community health education, administration/clerical, and financial education activities.

DISCUSSION

While much has been written about the promise and benefits of VV, the results of this survey of RSVP program directors and managers indicate that satisfaction with and projected future use of VV are mixed. Respondents currently using virtual strategies appear to be more open to the continued use of VV and growth of VV. However, respondents who had formerly or never used VV highlighted hurdles to the use of this practice. The important barriers to VV's projected future use include a perception of service recipient and volunteer discomfort with technology, lack of access to funding resources to support a virtual model, lack of access to the internet, and an overall preference towards in-person service delivery. Furthermore, the majority of respondents who had never used VV indicated that they are not interested at all or only slightly interested in using VV in the future.

COVID-19 IMPACT ON VV

Overwhelmingly, respondents who were currently or previously using VV viewed COVID-19 as a major contributor to virtual volunteer assignments. In fact, the second leading benefit to using VV reported was the reduced transmission of COVID-19, followed by the increased accessibility for service recipients with mobility limitations or health concerns. However, a post-pandemic world with shifting challenges and changing views of virtual engagement will shape the future of VV. The future use of VV will also be impacted by the substantial drop in overall volunteering that has broadly impacted nonprofit organizations (AmeriCorps, 2023). Notably, respondents currently using VV were almost equally split between forecasting increased, decreased, or similar levels of VV engagement in the future.

CHALLENGES TO VV

Prior research has noted that volunteers' preferred service format shifted from virtual during the peak of the pandemic back to in-person activities with the anticipated end of the pandemic (Sun et al., 2023). There has been renewed interest in many in-person activities as COVID-19 restrictions and safety concerns have waned. Additionally, technology fatigue has factored into the preference for in-person volunteering post-pandemic. The concept of "Zoom fatigue" has been associated with the sharp increase in video conferencing during the COVID-19 pandemic (Riedl, 2022). Contributing to the Zoom fatigue phenomenon is the reduced ability in video conferences to read social cues, and increased pressure to provide social cues, as well as dissatisfaction with personal appearance on

> **“Satisfaction with and projected future use of VV are mixed. Respondents currently using virtual strategies appear to be more open to the use of VV…”**

screen, inability for side conversations, and technical problems (Nesher Shoshan & Wehrt, 2022; Ratan et al., 2022). Volunteers may have experienced Zoom fatigue or a general technology fatigue as a result of necessary virtual formatting by volunteer programs during COVID-19.

An encouraging note is that recent research has shown a rise in tech adoption among older adults. Adults age 50 and over have been found to own primary tech devices (such as smartphones, tablets, etc.) at approximately the same rate as adults under the age of 50 (AARP, 2024). This rise in tech adoption could fertilize the ground for increased VV interest among older adults. However, the broad resurgence of interest for in-person experiences as pandemic restrictions have been lifted in the more immediate post-pandemic landscape may be attributable to technology fatigue resulting from the sudden reliance on technology during the peak of COVID-19.

Respondents’ perceptions of volunteers’ discomfort with technology was another key barrier to using VV. Simultaneously, slightly over half of respondents with VV experience reported that they were very satisfied or extremely satisfied with their virtual volunteers’ skill sets, and more than one-third of respondents reported being moderately satisfied. This indicates a contradiction between respondents’ perceptions of virtual volunteers’ skill sets and perceptions of volunteers’ discomfort with technology. This may indicate that finding volunteers with sufficient skill sets and interest in VV is initially challenging, but programs are generally satisfied with volunteers’ performance once individuals with skills suited to VV are found. This also speaks to the tenet of “fit” between volunteer and assignment; a principle of volunteer management that transcends both in-person and virtual formats (Cravens & Ellis, 2014; Hager & Brudney, 2004; Windon et al., 2022). Additionally, previous research has found that training is an important component of developing virtual volunteer assignments (Murray & Harrison, 2005; Sun et al., 2021). This may mean that training that enhances volunteer comfort with technology could increase volunteer and program director satisfaction with virtual assignments.

Discomfort with technology and preferences for in-person experiences were two of the top five most frequently reported VV challenges and barriers for both volunteers and service recipients. Importantly, we do not yet know if program directors' perceptions of challenges and barriers to VV align with volunteers' and service recipients' viewpoints. Several other barriers and challenges were also noted by a large proportion of respondents, including the lack of internet access, funding resources, necessary technologies, and training, suggesting that a variety of factors play a role in the use of VV.

Though several barriers to using VV were reported by respondents, a multitude of benefits were also identified. In addition to reducing COVID-19 transmission, the leading benefits of VV include increased accessibility, reduced geographic barriers, and increased convenience/flexibility. These themes align with the benefits of VV previously identified in the research literature both before and during the pandemic (Cravens & Ellis, 2014; Lachance, 2020; Naqshbandi et al., 2020; Seddighi & Salmani, 2018). Programs may be able to leverage these benefits to increase virtual volunteer participation. For example, flexibility has been shown to be a motivating factor for volunteers looking to be involved in a particular cause and might otherwise be unable to participate due to geographic barriers (Silva et al., 2018).

The three most common virtual volunteer assignments reported by respondents were community health education, financial services, and companionship/friendly visits at a nearly equal frequency. Community health education and financial services assignments may be sustainable options for virtual assignments with their more frequent and continued use post-pandemic. Interestingly, tutoring/mentoring assignments were reported to be offered at a considerably higher rate than other virtual assignments in the past 5 years but with less frequent current use. It is likely that tutoring/mentoring was utilized most during COVID-19 and has since transitioned back to in-person. Sun et al.'s (2023) study of an online tutor program that transitioned from in-person to virtual during the pandemic highlighted challenges to online tutoring that included difficulty maintaining students' attention, less ability to control the students' physical environments (e.g. background distractions, noise, lack of supervision), and the lack of meaningful and informal encounters in the students' environment such as staff and other students.

Respondents reported the same overall training methods, recruitment methods, and volunteer recognition strategies for their virtual and in-person volunteers. This suggests that programs may not make a major distinction between in-person and virtual volunteers, at least in terms of basic programmatic functions. This also suggests that VV can be supported to some degree by existing volunteer practices and resources, which reduces the operational demands on programs looking to utilize virtual volunteers. On the other hand, there may be room for improved methods such as targeted recruitment techniques, remote strategies for volunteer appreciation and retention, and enhanced training and support for virtual volunteers. For example, the most frequently reported training methods used with virtual volunteers were reported as live virtual training, one-on-one in-person instruction, and one-on-one phone training. Each of these approaches requires staff time and energy to directly instruct volunteers and is arguably less efficient than using more standardized

training methods, such as recorded training materials or partnerships that provide training. This is a potential area where the burden of staffing resources may be reduced by developing effective and efficient training materials for virtual volunteers.

A lack of targeted recruitment techniques for virtual volunteers could also mean that programs are not capitalizing on prospective virtual volunteers. Research has found that older adults are using more technology over time and that the pandemic has been a larger driver in this continued expansion (Faverio, 2022; Li et al., 2021). With the growing use of technology by older adults, there is potential for increased interest in VV by older adults. Future research should investigate the extent to which there is interest in VV among older adult volunteers more generally to further triangulate the program perspectives noted in these survey findings.

Nearly twice as many respondents reported using phone-based volunteering compared to VV. In addition, a much greater proportion of respondents reported using phone-based volunteering before the pandemic, indicating that COVID-19 was less of an impetus for phone-based volunteering. Respondents also reported a smaller variety of volunteer assignments being used by phone-based methods. Over 60% of phone-based volunteering was used for companionship/friendly visiting assignments by programs, whereas other types of volunteer assignments were used around 10% or less by programs. This suggests a narrower focus for phone-based volunteering compared to VV and indicates that some phone-based volunteer activities have fewer program infrastructural requirements.

The application of VV across many volunteer assignments indicates its feasibility and potential for growth. One challenge that remains is the likelihood of VV adoption by programs that have never used it. Nearly half of all the programs in this study (including programs that have never used VV) reported a neutral stance on VV being an effective tool for volunteer assignments. This suggests that many program directors are unsure of how VV can be used to address programmatic needs. For the future success of VV and large-scale adoption, programs can clarify the potential benefits, identify steps for implementation, and remove perceived barriers. It also seems that volunteers and service recipients will shape future demand for VV through their comfort with technology, which will influence program integration of more VV opportunities. As such, future research should investigate volunteer perceptions of VV and associated benefits and challenges.

LIMITATIONS

In general, a smaller body of research exists on the topic of VV, which limits the identification of broader trends and comparisons with other studies. Research conducting surveys on VV with program staff is particularly scarce. The unprecedented influence of COVID-19 on everyday lives and its intersection with VV is also largely novel.

Additionally, RSVP may not be representative of the broader nonprofit and volunteer sectors due to its federal funding and unique infrastructure. Though surveying RSVP programs across the country allows for wider reach and engagement of a diverse range of VV sites and programs, a larger sample size may be needed to draw additional conclusions. The inclusion of a wider variety of volunteer programs across the U.S. and internationally may reveal more about the full spectrum of experiences in VV.

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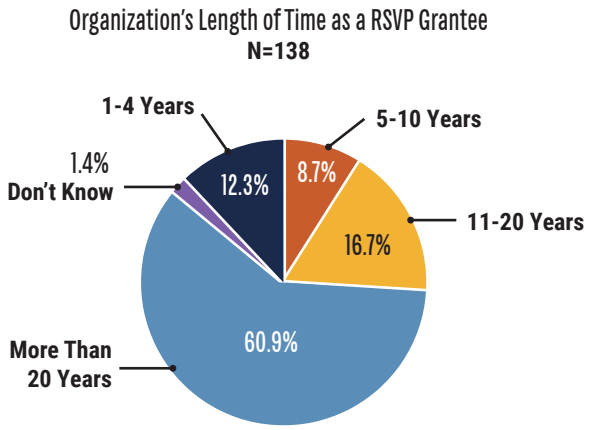
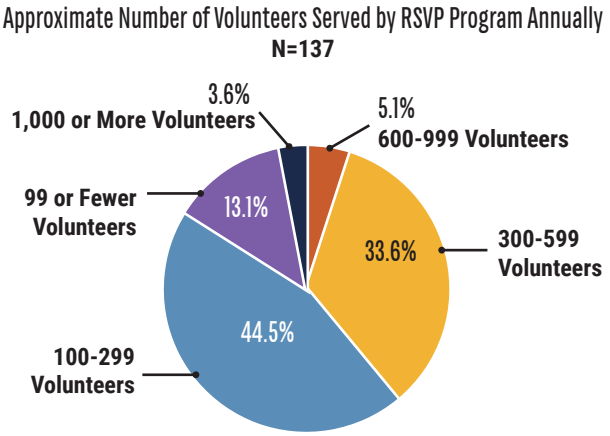
APPENDIX A
ADDITIONAL FIGURES

Sample: All respondents

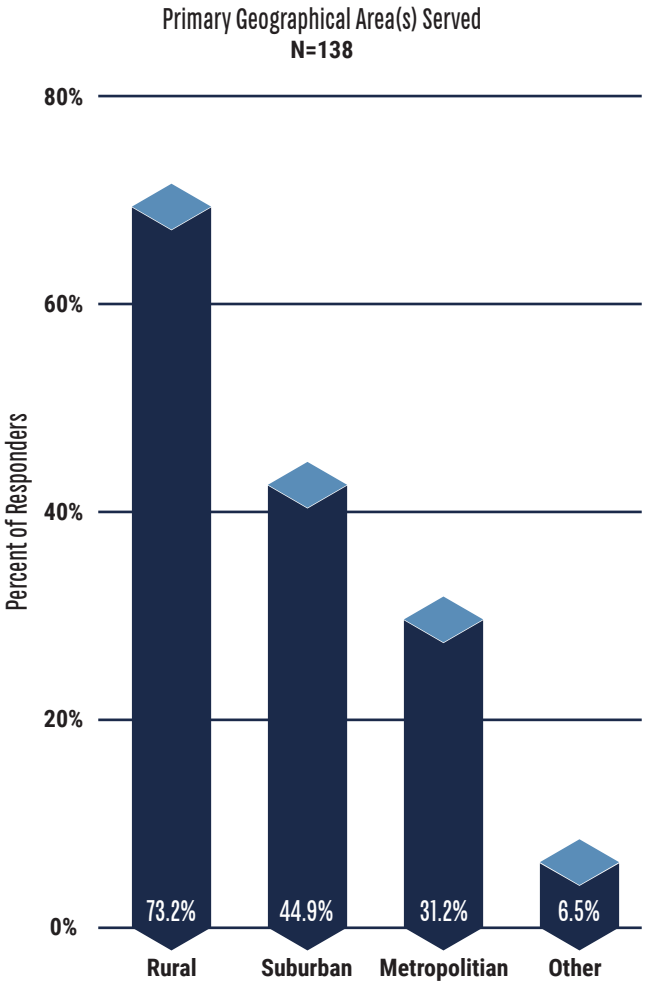
HOW LONG HAS YOUR ORGANIZATION BEEN AN RSVP GRANTEE?



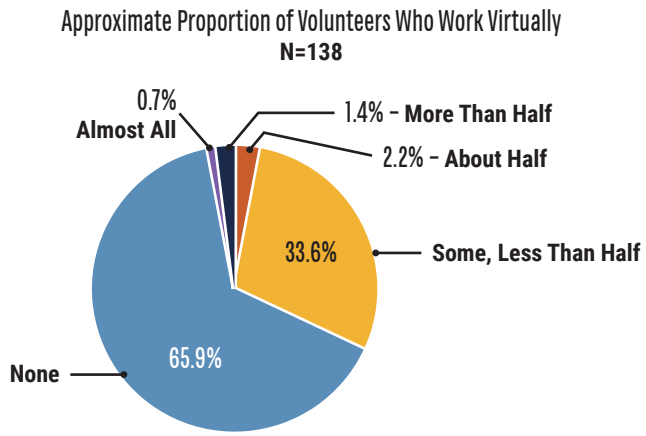
APPROXIMATELY HOW MANY VOLUNTEERS DO YOU SERVE ANNUALLY THROUGH YOUR RSVP PROGRAM?



WHAT ARE THE PRIMARY GEOGRAPHIC AREA(S) THAT YOUR RSVP PROGRAM SERVES?

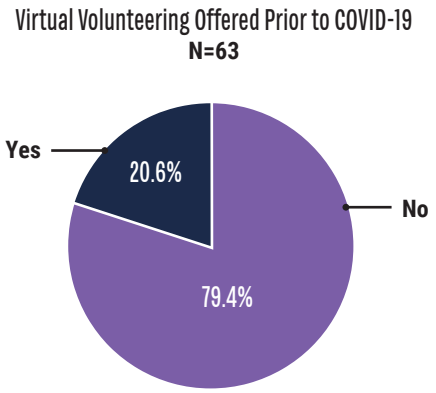


APPROXIMATELY WHAT PROPORTION OF YOUR RSVP VOLUNTEERS ARE COMPLETING AT LEAST PART OF THEIR WORK ONLINE THROUGH VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERING?



Sample: Virtual volunteers currently or previously

WERE YOU OFFERING VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERING TO YOUR RSVP VOLUNTEERS BEFORE THE START OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC?

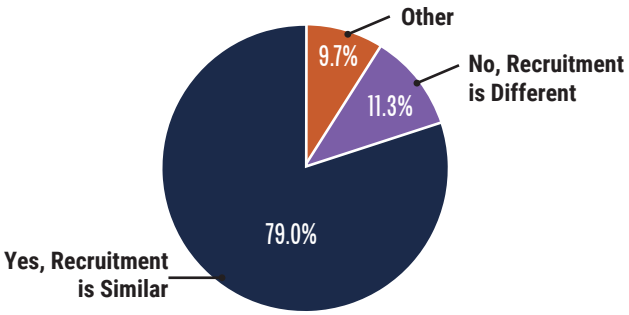


WHAT STATE ARE YOU LOCATED IN?

STATE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Alabama	2	1.5
Arizona	1	0.7
Arkansas	3	2.2
California	4	2.9
Florida	13	9.5
Georgia	2	1.5
Hawaii	3	2.2
Illinois	4	2.9
Indiana	1	0.7
Iowa	6	4.4
Kansas	5	3.6
Kentucky	2	1.5
Louisiana	2	1.5
Maine	4	2.9
Maryland	2	1.5
Massachusetts	4	2.9
Michigan	6	4.4
Minnesota	5	3.6
Mississippi	1	0.7
Missouri	4	2.9
Montana	3	2.2
Nebraska	2	1.5
New Hampshire	1	0.7
New Jersey	5	3.6
New Mexico	2	1.5
New York	9	6.6
North Carolina	1	0.7
Ohio	2	1.5
Oregon	1	0.7
Pennsylvania	7	5.1
Puerto Rico	1	0.7
Rhode Island	2	1.5
South Carolina	2	1.5
South Dakota	1	0.7
Tennessee	2	1.5
Texas	8	5.8
Utah	1	0.7
Vermont	1	0.7
Virginia	4	2.9
Washington	1	0.7
West Virginia	1	0.7
Wisconsin	6	4.4
TOTAL	137	

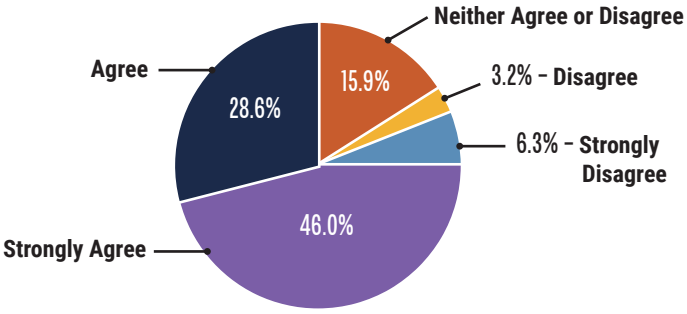
ARE THESE RECRUITMENT METHODS FOR VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERING SIMILAR TO THOSE USED TO RECRUIT IN-PERSON/ON-SITE VOLUNTEERS?

Recruitment Methods Are Similar for Virtual and In-Person Volunteering
N=62



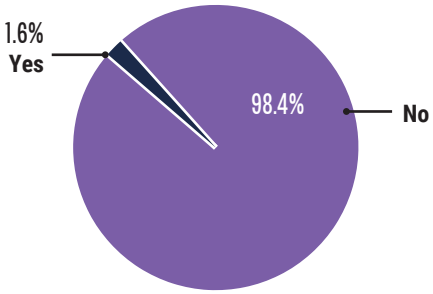
COVID-19 HAS BEEN/WAS A MAJOR REASON BEHIND THE USE OF VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERING WITHIN OUR RSVP PROGRAMMING.

COVID-19 Was a Major Reason for Using Virtual Volunteering
N=63



ARE VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERS GIVEN ANY DIFFERENT OR ADDITIONAL VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION COMPARED TO YOUR IN-PERSON/ON-SITE VOLUNTEERS YOU WORK WITH?

Virtual Volunteers Receive Different/Additional Recognition to In-Person Volunteers
N=61



If Yes, please describe.

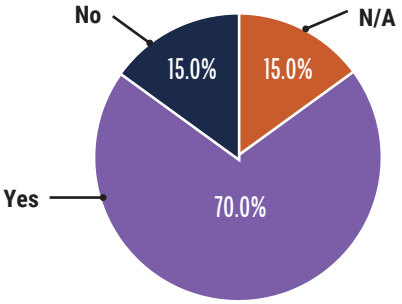
Open-ended question.

Summary: The topic of recognition lunches was shared. It was also shared that recognition activities have shifted from virtual to back to in-person.

ARE THESE TRAINING METHODS FOR VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERING SIMILAR TO THOSE PROVIDED TO YOUR IN-PERSON/ON-SITE VOLUNTEERS?

- Yes, we use similar training methods for both in-person and virtual volunteer training
- No, we use different training methods for in-person and virtual volunteer training
- N/A

Similar Training Methods Used for Virtual and In-Person Volunteers
N=60



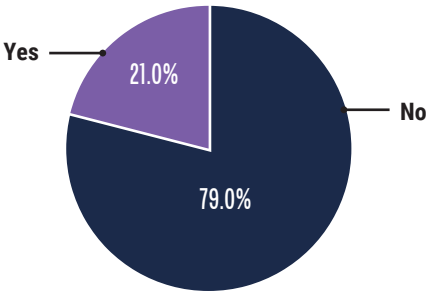
HAVE YOU DEVELOPED/DID YOU DEVELOP ANY NEW PARTNERSHIPS TO SUPPORT VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERING (such as partnerships with technology experts, volunteer training experts, government agencies/resources, other non-profit organizations, for-profit organizations, etc.)?

If yes, please briefly describe those partnerships including the types of organizations and what they might provide.

Open-ended question.

Summary: For the open-ended question, "If yes, please briefly describe those partnerships including the types of organizations and what they might provide," respondents shared partnerships with the Department of Health, Healthy Aging, National Digital Equity Center, other non-profits, local reading specialists, technology training resources, and fitness trainers.

New Partnerships Developed to Support Virtual Volunteering
N=62

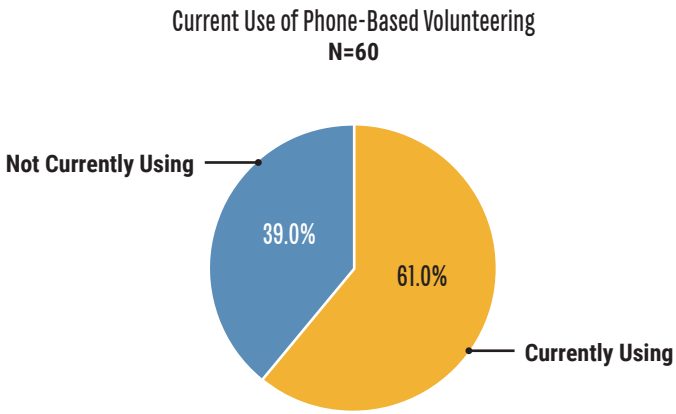


ARE THERE ANY OTHER INSIGHTS YOU WOULD LIKE TO SHARE ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERING?

Open-ended question.

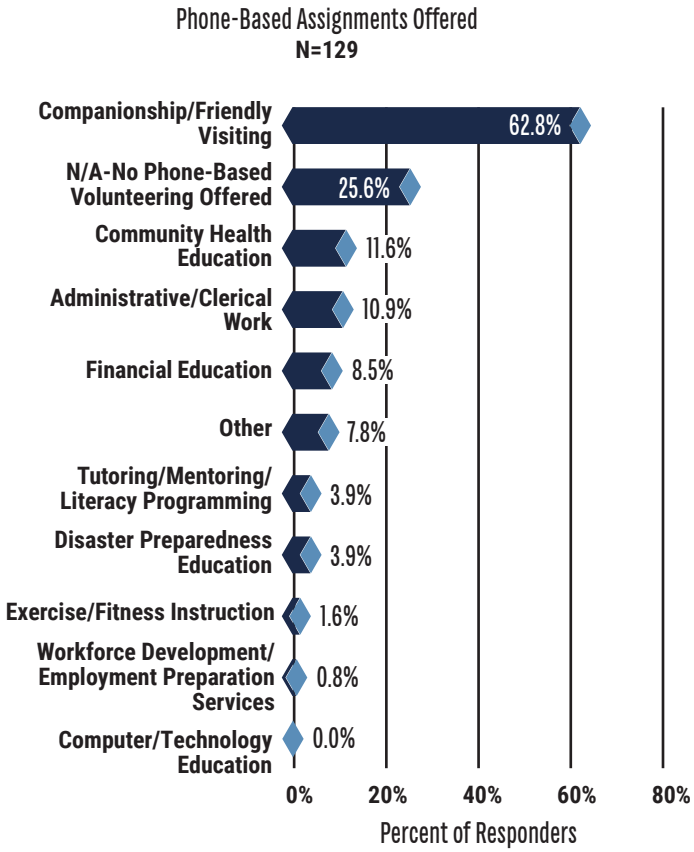
Summary: Respondents were asked, "Are there any other insights you would like to share about your experience with VV?" Respondents shared challenges to VV, including the need for more qualified technology trainers, volunteers and beneficiaries preferring in-person volunteering over VV, safety in the virtual space, lack of internet access for both volunteers and beneficiaries, hybrid models needing different management, and technology being too big a barrier to overcome. Positive comments related to the use of VV were noted for its ability to combat social isolation and loneliness for older adults, benefits for baby boomers, it generally being helpful for RSVP members and older adults, and that it gives volunteers the opportunity to become experts on VV.

DO YOU CURRENTLY USE PHONE-BASED VOLUNTEERING WITH YOUR RSVP VOLUNTEERS?

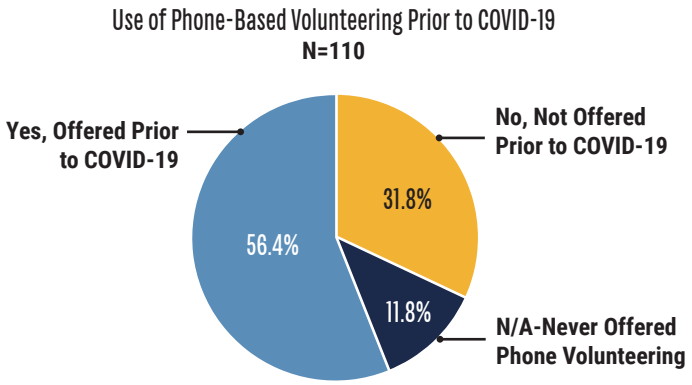


PLEASE SELECT THE TYPES OF PHONE-BASED VOLUNTEERING ASSIGNMENTS YOU HAVE OFFERED TO YOUR RSVP VOLUNTEERS.

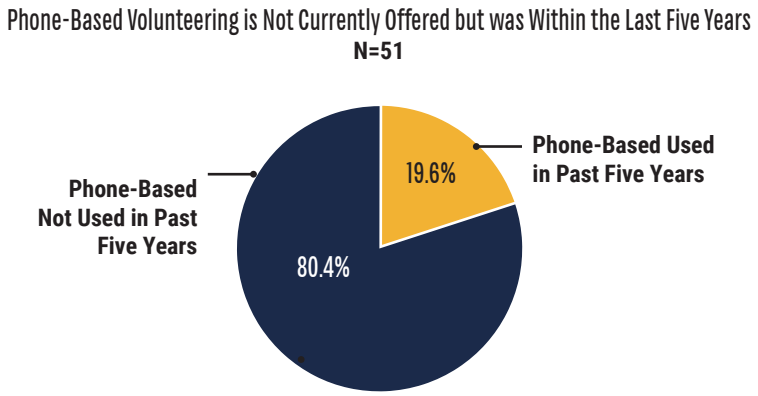
Select all that apply.



WERE YOU OFFERING PHONE-BASED VOLUNTEERING TO YOUR RSVP VOLUNTEERS BEFORE THE START OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC?



STATUS OF PHONE-BASED VOLUNTEERING IN THE LAST FIVE YEARS AMONG THOSE NOT CURRENTLY OFFERING IT



ARE THERE ANY OTHER INSIGHTS YOU WOULD LIKE TO SHARE ABOUT PHONE-BASED VOLUNTEERING?

Open-ended question.

Summary: When respondents were asked, "Are there any other insights you would like to share about phone-based volunteering?", replies included that it was a successful strategy, a positive strategy in rural and lower income areas, accessible, helpful for companionship and to combat social isolation, and easier than virtual/internet based volunteering. Concerns around safety and privacy were shared, including the sentiment that an in-person relationship is needed before phone-based assignments, volunteers and service recipients prefer in-person volunteering, phone-based volunteering had a less positive impact, and it is overall less successful.

Sample: No phone volunteer

APPENDIX B
SIGNIFICANCE TABLES

Table 1. Significant findings on respondents' metropolitan area by respondents currently and formerly providing virtual volunteer programs.

METROPOLITAN AREAS	CURRENT		FORMER		NEVER		PEARSON'S CHI-SQUARE TEST		
	N	%	*N*	%	*N*	%	*P*	X^2	*df*
Yes	21	44.7%	8	44.4%	14	19.2%	0.0056	10.372	2

Table 2. Significant findings on the barriers to virtual volunteering by respondents formerly and never providing virtual volunteer programs.

VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERING BARRIERS	FORMER		NEVER		FISHER'S EXACT TEST			
						LOWER	UPPER	
	N	%	*N*	%	*P*	95% CI	95% CI	OR
Service recipients are uncomfortable with/avoid technology	11	61.1%	21	28.8%	0.014	0.075	0.853	0.261
Service recipients want to be in-person	14	77.8%	27	37.0%	0.0030	0.037	0.617	0.171

Table 3. Significant findings on the challenges to virtual volunteering by respondents currently and formerly providing virtual volunteer programs.

VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERING CHALLENGES	CURRENT		FORMER		FISHER'S EXACT TEST			
						LOWER	UPPER	
	N	%	*N*	%	*P*	95% CI	95% CI	OR
Lack of or difficulty obtaining technology (laptops, smart phones, iPads, etc.) for virtual volunteers	20	42.6%	1	5.6%	0.0063	0.0018	0.6087	0.159
Lack of access to internet for virtual volunteers	21	44.7%	2	11.1%	0.019	0.0159	0.7975	0.159
Lack of access to internet for service recipients	22	46.8%	3	16.7%	0.044	0.0381	0.9781	0.232

Table 4. Significant findings on the benefits of virtual volunteering by respondents currently and formerly providing virtual volunteer programs.

BENEFITS OF VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERING	CURRENT		FORMER		FISHER'S EXACT TEST			
						LOWER	UPPER	
	N	%	*N*	%	*P*	95% CI	95% CI	OR
Brings in new and different types of volunteers	26	55.3%	3	16.7%	0.0058	0.027	0.698	0.166
Increased convenience and flexibility	34	72.3%	6	33.3%	0.0090	0.049	0.706	0.197
Offers access for a wider range of participants/service recipients	31	66.0%	3	16.7%	0.00062	0.017	0.456	0.107
More accessible for those with mobility or health concerns	36	76.6%	8	44.4%	0.0188	0.066	0.897	0.251

Table 5. Significant findings on respondents' satisfaction with virtual volunteering by respondents currently and formerly providing virtual volunteer programs.

	CURRENT			FORMER			WELCH TWO SAMPLE T-TEST				
								LOWER	UPPER		
	N	*Mean*	*SD*	*N*	*Mean*	*SD*	*P*	95% CI	95% CI	t	df
Satisfaction	45	3.53	0.991	15	2.6	1.06	0.0063	0.29	1.57	3.01	22.81

APPENDIX C
SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

For this survey, we define virtual volunteering as volunteer work that is undertaken using internet-based technologies. This includes activities and job assignments that can be conducted completely off-site or can be used part-time to supplement on-site and face-to-face volunteering. During this survey, keep in mind that volunteering via phone calls is not considered virtual volunteering because it does not typically utilize internet-based technologies.

There is a separate set of questions at the end of the survey pertaining to phone-based volunteering.

BACKGROUND QUESTIONS

1. WHAT IS YOUR TITLE/POSITION WITHIN YOUR RSVP PROGRAM?

Open-ended question

2. HOW LONG HAVE YOU WORKED IN YOUR CURRENT RSVP ROLE?

- Less than a year
- 1-4 years
- 5-10 years
- 11-20 years
- More than 20 years

3. HOW LONG HAS YOUR ORGANIZATION BEEN AN RSVP GRANTEE?

- Less than a year
- 1-4 years
- 5-10 years
- 11-20 years
- More than 20 years
- Don't Know

4. APPROXIMATELY HOW MANY VOLUNTEERS DO YOU SERVE ANNUALLY THROUGH YOUR RSVP PROGRAM?

Open response

5. WHAT ARE THE PRIMARY GEOGRAPHIC AREA(S) THAT YOUR RSVP PROGRAM SERVES? PLEASE CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.

- Rural
- Suburban
- Metropolitan area(s)
- Other (please specify): _____

6. WHAT TYPE OF ORGANIZATION OR AGENCY DO YOU REPRESENT? (PLEASE CHECK ONE)

- Private non-profit
- DHHS or government-based
- Area Agency on Aging
- University or college affiliated
- For-profit
- Other (please specify): _____

7. WHAT STATE ARE YOU LOCATED IN?

- Dropdown list provided

8. WHICH RSVP PROGRAM FOCUS AREAS DOES YOUR PROGRAM ADDRESS? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)

- Disaster services
- Economic opportunity
- Education
- Environmental Stewardship
- Healthy futures
- Veterans and military families
- Community priorities (Please briefly specify)_____
- Other (please specify)_____

VIRTUAL VOLUNTEER SURVEY QUESTIONS

This first part of the survey is about virtual volunteering, i.e. volunteering using the internet. Virtual volunteering for the purposes of this part of the survey does not include phone-based volunteer activities. Please answer these questions with internet-based volunteering in mind. There is a separate section of this survey that will ask about your use of phone-based volunteering.

9. APPROXIMATELY WHAT PROPORTION OF YOUR RSVP VOLUNTEERS ARE COMPLETING AT LEAST PART OF THEIR WORK ONLINE THROUGH VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERING?

- None
- Some but less than half
- About half
- More than half
- Almost all

9B. IF YOU ARE NOT CURRENTLY USING VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERING, HAVE YOU UTILIZED VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERING IN THE PAST WITH YOUR RSVP VOLUNTEERS? (POPULATES IF ANSWERED NONE TO #9)

- Yes
- No

9C. IF YOU ARE NOT CURRENTLY USING VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERING WITH YOUR RSVP VOLUNTEERS, WHAT BARRIERS KEEP YOU FROM OFFERING VIRTUAL ASSIGNMENTS? SELECT ALL THAT APPLY. (POPULATES IF ANSWERED NO TO #9)

- Virtual volunteering does not fit our specific needs
- Lack of knowledge for how to start using virtual volunteering
- Lack of staff training for virtual volunteering
- Lack of volunteer training resources for virtual volunteering
- Lack of participant training resources for engaging virtually
- Lack of funding resources for the costs associated with virtual volunteering
- Lack of necessary tools for virtual volunteer management
- Lack of or difficulty obtaining technology for virtual volunteers
- Lack of or difficulty obtaining technology for participants
- Lack of access to internet for virtual volunteers
- Lack of access to internet for participants
- Lack of organizational partnerships
- Volunteers are uncomfortable with/avoid technology

- Participants are uncomfortable with/avoid technology
- Lack of interest in virtual volunteering among volunteers
- Volunteers want to be in-person
- Participants want to be in-person
- Concerns with performance, dependability, or overall abilities of virtual volunteers
- Communication difficulties with virtual volunteers
- Other _____
- N/A we have not faced barriers that have kept us from using virtual volunteering

(If answer is Yes to #9 or Yes to #9B - continue on with full survey)

10. WERE YOU OFFERING VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERING TO YOUR RSVP VOLUNTEERS BEFORE THE START OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC?

- Yes
- No

For the next set of questions, please review the statement provided and indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statement.

11. COVID-19 HAS BEEN/WAS A MAJOR REASON BEHIND THE USE OF VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERING WITHIN OUR RSVP PROGRAMMING.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

12. COVID-19 INCREASED THE NUMBER OF VIRTUAL RSVP ASSIGNMENTS OFFERED.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

13. WHAT TYPES OF VOLUNTEER ASSIGNMENTS ARE YOU USING VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERING FOR NOW? SELECT ONE RESPONSE PER CATEGORY

Response options are: currently offered; Not currently offered but was offered in the last 5 years; never offered

- Tutoring/mentoring/literacy programming (for any ages)
- Companionship/friendly visiting/visits to reduce isolation
- Community health education (e.g., insurance education/health/nutrition, caregiver education, addiction, and disease)
- Workforce development/employment preparation services
- Disaster preparedness education
- Computer/technology education
- Exercise/fitness instruction
- Financial education including tax preparation/financial education/scam prevention
- Administrative/clerical work
- Other (please specify) _____

14. PLEASE SELECT THE RSVP VOLUNTEER ASSIGNMENTS YOU WOULD LIKE TO USE VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERS FOR BUT HAVE NOT DONE SO YET. SELECT ALL THAT APPLY.

- Literacy program (including early literacy and adult literacy)
- Tutoring/mentoring (for any ages)
- Companionship/friendly visiting/visits to reduce isolation
- Community health education (e.g. health/nutrition, caregiver education, addiction, and disease)
- Health insurance education
- Employment preparation services
- Disaster preparedness education
- Computer/technology education
- Exercise/fitness instruction
- Tax preparation services
- Financial education/scam prevention
- US citizenship preparation services
- Ombudsman services
- Administrative/clerical work
- Board/committee assignments
- Other _____
- N/A-Do not desire to use virtual volunteering further/beyond current assignments

15. HOW HAVE YOU RECRUITED FOR RSVP VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERS? PLEASE SELECT ONE RESPONSE FOR EACH RECRUITMENT METHOD.

- Web and social media (such as website postings, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter): Yes/No
- Online volunteer recruiting service or database (e.g., VolunteerMatch.org, Create the Good): Yes/No
- Word of mouth: Yes/No
- In-person recruitment at events, information fairs, meetings, etc.: Yes/No
- Print advertisements (newspaper postings, brochures, newsletters, flyers, etc.): Yes/No
- Email announcements/e-mail newsletters: Yes/No
- Other (Please specify) _____: Yes/No

16. ARE THESE RECRUITMENT METHODS FOR VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERING SIMILAR TO THOSE USED TO RECRUIT IN-PERSON/ON-SITE VOLUNTEERS?

- Yes, we use similar recruitment methods for both virtual and in-person volunteer recruitment
- No, we use different recruitment methods for virtual and in-person volunteer recruitment
- Other

17. WHAT PROPORTION OF YOUR VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERS ARE CURRENTLY VOLUNTEERING COMPLETELY ONLINE (MEANING NO IN-PERSON/ON-SITE TASKS)?

- none
- Some but less than half
- About half
- More than half
- Almost all
- N/A do not currently use virtual volunteering

18. WHICH METHOD(S) OF COMMUNICATION HAVE YOU USED TO COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR RSVP VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERS? SELECT A RESPONSE FOR EACH CATEGORY.

- Personal email: Yes/No
- Texting: Yes/No
- Video conferencing - such as zoom or skype: Yes/No
- Group email distribution: Yes/No
- Social media - such as Instant messenger: Yes/No
- Phone calls: Yes/No
- Face-to-face conversation: Yes/No
- Mail/physical mailings: Yes/No
- Other _____: Yes/No

BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES

19. WHAT ARE SOME BENEFITS YOU HAVE FOUND WITH USING VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERING? SELECT ALL THAT APPLY.

- Brings in new or different types of volunteers
- Reduces the risk of Covid-19 transmission
- More efficient/saves time
- Increased convenience/flexibility
- Offers access for a wider range of participants/service recipients
- More accessible for those with mobility or health concerns
- Eliminates geographic barriers
- Volunteers learn something new
- Increased or new social opportunities
- Increased confidence with technology
- Other (Please specify) _____

20. WHAT CHALLENGES HAVE YOU ENCOUNTERED USING VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERING? SELECT ALL THAT APPLY.

- Lack of staff training for virtual volunteering
- Lack of volunteer training resources for virtual volunteering
- Lack of participant/service recipient training resources for engaging virtually
- Lack of funding resources for the costs associated with virtual volunteering
- Lack of or difficulty obtaining technology (laptops, smart phones, iPads, etc.) for virtual volunteers
- Lack of or difficulty obtaining technology (laptops, smart phones, iPads, etc.) for participants/service recipients
- Lack of access to internet for virtual volunteers
- Lack of access to internet for participants/service recipients
- Lack of necessary staffing
- Volunteers are uncomfortable with technology
- Participants/service recipients are uncomfortable with technology
- Volunteers prefer to volunteer in-person
- Participants/service recipients prefer to be in-person
- Concerns with performance, dependability, or overall abilities of virtual volunteers
- Other (please specify) _____
- N/A-We have not experienced challenges

MANAGEMENT

21. HAVE YOU DEVELOPED/DID YOU DEVELOP ANY NEW PARTNERSHIPS TO SUPPORT VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERING (SUCH AS PARTNERSHIPS WITH TECHNOLOGY EXPERTS, VOLUNTEER TRAINING EXPERTS, GOVERNMENT AGENCIES/RESOURCES, OTHER NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS, FOR-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS, ETC.)?

- Yes
- No

22. IF YES, PLEASE BRIEFLY DESCRIBE THOSE PARTNERSHIPS INCLUDING THE TYPES OF ORGANIZATIONS AND WHAT THEY MIGHT PROVIDE.

Open-ended question.

23. ARE VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERS GIVEN ANY DIFFERENT OR ADDITIONAL VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION COMPARED TO YOUR IN-PERSON/ON-SITE VOLUNTEERS YOU WORK WITH?

- Yes
- No

24. IF YES, PLEASE DESCRIBE.

Open ended question.

25. WHICH, IF ANY, OF THE FOLLOWING TRAINING METHODS DO YOU PROVIDE TO YOUR RSVP VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERS? SELECT A RESPONSE FOR EACH CATEGORY.

- Live virtual trainings (webinar/Zoom): Yes/No
- Live group in-person trainings: Yes/No
- Pre-recorded video trainings: Yes/No
- Self-paced training modules: Yes/No
- Digital instruction manuals/guides: Yes/No
- Printed instruction manuals/guides: Yes/No
- One-on-one in-person instruction: Yes/No
- One-on-one phone instruction: Yes/No
- Other (please specify) _____: Yes/No

26. ARE THESE TRAINING METHODS FOR VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERING SIMILAR TO THOSE PROVIDED TO YOUR IN-PERSON/ON-SITE VOLUNTEERS?

- Yes, we use similar training methods for both in-person and virtual volunteer training
- No, we use different training methods for in-person and virtual volunteer training
- N/A

27. WHICH, IF ANY, OF THE FOLLOWING TRAINING METHODS HAVE YOU PROVIDED TO YOUR PARTICIPANTS/SERVICE RECIPIENTS/PROGRAM BENEFICIARIES? SELECT ALL THAT APPLY.

- Live virtual trainings (webinar/Zoom)
- Live group in-person trainings
- Pre-recorded video trainings
- Self-paced training modules
- Digital instruction manuals/guides
- Printed instruction manuals/guides
- One-on-one in-person instruction
- One-on-one phone instruction
- Other (please specify) _____
- Training is not provided

SATISFACTION WITH VV

All satisfaction questions derived from: Murray V., Harrison Y. (2005) Virtual Volunteering, unless otherwise specified.

For the next set of questions, please review the statement provided and indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statement.

28. VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERING IS AN EFFECTIVE TOOL FOR ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF RSVP VOLUNTEER ASSIGNMENTS:

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

29. HOW SATISFIED HAVE YOU BEEN WITH THE SKILL SET OF THE RSVP VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERS YOU HAVE WORKED WITH?

- Not at all satisfied
- Slightly satisfied
- Moderately satisfied
- Very satisfied
- Extremely satisfied

30. OVERALL, HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH THE RSVP VIRTUAL VOLUNTEER ASSIGNMENTS YOU HAVE MANAGED?

- Not at all satisfied
- Slightly satisfied
- Moderately satisfied
- Very satisfied
- Extremely satisfied

FORECASTING AND OTHER INSIGHTS

31. TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU SEE YOUR RSVP VOLUNTEERS DOING VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERING IN THE FUTURE AS COMPARED TO YOUR CURRENT USE OF VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERING?

- Significantly less in the future
- Somewhat less
- Staying the same
- Somewhat more
- Significantly more

32. ARE THERE ANY OTHER INSIGHTS YOU WOULD LIKE TO SHARE ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERING?

Open-ended

PHONE-BASED VOLUNTEERING QUESTIONS

Based on recent research interviews with RSVP programs, we know that some RSVP programs consider phone-based volunteering to be an important remote volunteering option. This next set of questions is about phone-based volunteering, separate from virtual volunteering discussed in the prior questions.

33. DO YOU CURRENTLY USE PHONE-BASED VOLUNTEERING WITH YOUR RSVP VOLUNTEERS?

- Yes
- No

33B. IF YOU ARE NOT CURRENTLY USING PHONE-BASED VOLUNTEERING, HAVE YOU UTILIZED PHONE-BASED VOLUNTEERING IN THE PAST WITH YOUR RSVP VOLUNTEERS? (POPULATES IF ANSWERED NO TO PREVIOUS QUESTION)

- Yes
- No

34. PLEASE SELECT THE TYPES OF PHONE-BASED VOLUNTEERING ASSIGNMENTS YOU HAVE OFFERED TO YOUR RSVP VOLUNTEERS. SELECT ALL THAT APPLY.

- Tutoring/mentoring/literacy programming (for any ages)
- Companionship/friendly visiting/visits to reduce isolation
- Community health education (e.g., insurance education/health/nutrition, caregiver education, addiction, and disease)
- Workforce development/employment preparation services
- Disaster preparedness education
- Computer/technology education
- Exercise/fitness instruction
- Financial education including tax preparation/financial education/scam prevention
- Administrative/clerical work
- Other (please specify) _____
- N/A-We do not offer phone-based volunteering

35. WERE YOU OFFERING PHONE-BASED VOLUNTEERING TO YOUR RSVP VOLUNTEERS BEFORE THE START OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC?

- Yes
- No
- N/A-We have never offered phone-based volunteering

36. ARE THERE ANY OTHER INSIGHTS YOU WOULD LIKE TO SHARE ABOUT PHONE-BASED VOLUNTEERING?

Open-ended question

SURVEY QUESTIONS FOR PROGRAMS NOT CURRENTLY USING VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERING

37. PLEASE SELECT THE RSVP VOLUNTEER ASSIGNMENTS YOU WOULD LIKE TO USE VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERS FOR BUT HAVE NOT DONE SO YET. SELECT ALL THAT APPLY

- Tutoring/mentoring/literacy programming (for any ages)
- Companionship/friendly visiting/visits to reduce isolation
- Community health education (e.g., insurance education/health/nutrition, caregiver education, addiction, and disease)
- Workforce development/employment preparation services
- Disaster preparedness education

- Computer/technology education
- Exercise/fitness instruction
- Financial education including tax preparation/financial education/scam prevention
- Administrative/clerical work
- Other (please specify) _____
- N/A-Do not desire to use virtual volunteering further

38. HOW INTERESTED ARE YOU IN USING VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERING IN YOUR RSVP PROGRAM GOING FORWARD?

- Not interested at all
- Slightly interested
- Moderately interested
- Very interested
- Extremely interested

39. VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERING IS AN EFFECTIVE TOOL FOR ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF RSVP VOLUNTEER ASSIGNMENTS:

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

40. ARE THERE ANY OTHER INSIGHTS YOU WOULD LIKE TO SHARE ABOUT THE TOPIC OF VIRTUAL VOLUNTEERING?

Open Ended Question

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