

THE STATE OF VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT:

INSIGHTS FROM NONPROFIT LEADERS AND FUNDERS

By Nathan Dietz, Robert T. Grimm Jr

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic affected the nonprofit sector in many profound and significant ways, but it may have had the most disruptive impact on activities, such as volunteering, that often require or include in-person participation. Given that reality, it is important to understand how volunteer engagement is playing out in the United States almost two and a half years after the onset of the pandemic.

Well before anyone heard of COVID-19, many leaders, advocates, researchers and others have wondered how nonprofits could do more to engage volunteers. These discussions centered on a

recent nationwide decline in the percentage of people who volunteer,¹ which, together with a similar decline in the number of people who donate to charity,² sparked concerns about a crisis in generosity. This report enables the reader to understand the state of nonprofit leaders and institutional philanthropic funders' engagement with volunteers today. The study is a direct descendent of one of the most prominent organization-level studies of volunteering, the 2004 Volunteer Management Capacity in America's Charities and Congregations (VMC),³ which the authors of this report developed in partnership with the Urban Institute and others. Drs. Mark A. Hager and the late Jeffrey R. Brudney updated the original 2004 report⁴ through a new organizational survey of nonprofits in 2019 – just months before COVID wreaked havoc on all aspects of daily life.

This report contains evidence from a new 2022 survey of nonprofit organizations that updates key findings from the original VMC, which surveyed nonprofits in 2003, as well as the 2019 nonprofit survey conducted by Hager and Brudney. Our survey collected data directly from nonprofit chief executive officers (CEOs) about the importance of volunteers to their organization, with 1,210 nonprofit leaders across the country responding to our 2022 survey. Separately, we surveyed philanthropic grantmaking organizations. We received 103 full or partial responses to this “funder survey” – to our knowledge, the first of its kind to gather information about the extent to which funders (such as private foundations, community foundations, family foundations and corporate foundations) choose to support or not support volunteering in nonprofits.

¹ Grimm, Robert T., Jr., and Dietz, Nathan (2018). “Where Are America's Volunteers? A Look at America's Widespread Decline in Volunteering in Cities and States.” Research Brief: Do Good Institute, University of Maryland. Available at <https://dodgood.umd.edu/research-impact/publications/where-are-americas-volunteers>.

² Osili, Una, and Sasha Zarins (2018). “Fewer Americans are giving money to charity, but total donations are at record levels anyway.” The Conversation, July 3. Available at <https://theconversation.com/fewer-americans-are-giving-money-to-charity-but-total-donations-are-at-record-levels-anyway-98291>.

³ Urban Institute (2004). “Volunteer Management Capacity in America's Charities and Congregations: A Briefing Report.” Washington DC. Available at <https://web.archive.urban.org/publications/410963.html>.

⁴ Hager, M.A., and Brudney, J.L. (2021). Volunteer Management Capacity in America's Charities: Benchmarking a Pre-Pandemic Field and Assessing Future Directions. Arizona State University. Available at https://www.volunteerlive.org/docs/Hager_Brudney_VMC2_2021_brief.pdf.

KEY FINDINGS

VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT CAPACITY TODAY

Sixty three percent of all nonprofits that involve volunteers have a paid staff member, or volunteer engagement professional (VEP), who manages their volunteers. In 2003, 62 percent of organizations reported having a VEP and 65.2 percent of organizations had a VEP in 2019. While this trend has not changed noticeably in two decades, other trends related to volunteer management capacity have changed.

VEPs appear to be spending more time on volunteer engagement today than they did twenty years ago. The median VEP spent between 40 and 50 percent of their time on

volunteer engagement in 2022 compared to 30 percent in 2003.⁵ Similarly, the number of organizations with nobody serving as a volunteer engagement specialist has been reduced by half since the pandemic. These findings and others in the report suggest that volunteer engagement has become more, not less, important for organizations today.

Most nonprofit leaders appear to be highly involved with the recruitment and management of volunteers. Almost half (47.3 percent) of CEOs report that they supervise the VEP directly, while more than 75 percent say that the VEP reports to someone in the “C-suite” of executives. Even 67.7 percent of unpaid volunteer engagement specialists report to senior C-suite executives (with 52.6 percent reporting directly to the CEO). However, VEPs are less likely to report to senior executives within larger organizations.

THE EFFECTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Two and a half years after the pandemic’s onset, nonprofit CEOs are facing one of three starkly different realities: 28.2 percent report operating with more funding and paid staff; 42.0 percent report operating with about the same amount of funding and paid staff; and 28.7 percent report operating with less funding and staff.

At the same time, many nonprofits are experiencing an increase in demand for their organizational services (64.4 percent). Fifty-one percent of nonprofits have increased their delivery of services and goods and 48.5 percent have increased staff workloads in the last year.

Many nonprofits - 31.3 percent - reported that they are involving very few volunteers today and a few nonprofits - 2.6 percent - continued to temporarily close their volunteer operations altogether due to the pandemic’s lingering effects. Meanwhile, only 13.0 percent of nonprofits reported they are involving more volunteers than before the pandemic.

Today, **nonprofits are more likely to experience volunteers doing less, rather than more, to support any specific organizational activity (such as delivery of services, fundraising, professional assistance or advocacy).** These volunteer involvement decreases are noteworthy given that more than half of nonprofits say that they have delivered more services since the pandemic began, and more than 60 percent say that demand for their services has increased today.

THE BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT

Compared to the past, larger numbers of nonprofit CEOs believe that volunteers deliver benefits – including providing services it could not otherwise provide, cost savings or an increase in the quality of services – “to a great extent” today. Even though nonprofit leaders report substantial challenges related to recruiting, deploying and applying volunteers’ skills in 2022, nonprofits seem to be more convinced of the benefits of volunteer engagement today

compared to the past. For instance, **the percentage of nonprofit CEOs who believe “to a great extent” that volunteers allow the organization to provide more detailed attention to the people served has increased from 37 percent in 2019 to 65.6 percent in 2022, and the percentage who believe “to a great extent” that volunteers increase the organization’s return on its resource investments has increased from 43 percent to 68.4 percent over the same time.**

⁵ The median amount of time spent by VEPs on volunteer engagement was not published in the 2019 report.

While the main challenges of volunteer engagement in 2003 and 2019 are still perceived as the main challenges today, the percentage of CEOs who say that each challenge is a “big problem” has sharply increased in 2022. **Today, 46.8 percent of CEOs say that recruiting sufficient volunteers is a big problem for their organization. Those numbers have almost doubled from the 2003 survey, in which 29 percent of nonprofits saw this issue as a big problem.** Nonprofits appear challenged to find the volunteer support they need even as the demand for their services increases.

Similarly, **CEOs say it is a “big problem” to find volunteers who are available during the traditional workday (38.4 percent) and who have the necessary skills (35.4 percent) today.** In 2019, a much smaller number of nonprofits viewed finding volunteers who are available during the workday (21 percent) and volunteers with the necessary skills (18 percent) as a “big problem.”

FUNDING VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT

Funders and nonprofit leaders either disagree, or have starkly different perceptions, about the benefits of volunteer engagement. **Large differences of opinion exist, for example, on whether volunteers to a “great extent” provide cost savings (73.9 percent for nonprofits vs. 38.9 percent for funders); increase the quality of services or programs provided (72.2 percent for nonprofits vs. 25.2 percent for funders); and provide more detailed attention to people served (65.6 percent for nonprofits vs. 29.3 percent for funders).** In general, nonprofit CEOs are much more positive about the benefits of volunteering compared to nonprofit funders.

Funders and nonprofit leaders also either disagree, or have significantly different perceptions, about the challenges of volunteer engagement. **The biggest difference of opinion by far is that 46.8 percent of nonprofit leaders believe that a lack of volunteers is a “big problem”, while only 18.2 percent of funders see this as a “big problem.”** Funders believe the biggest challenge for nonprofits is a lack of funding for volunteer involvement – which nonprofit CEOs view as their fourth biggest challenge: only about one-third of nonprofit leaders think a lack of funding is a big problem, compared to 43.4 percent of funders.

Almost two-thirds of funders provide nonprofits with resources for volunteer engagement to strengthen the social ties among community members, which represents funders' top motivation for supporting volunteering.

Most funding organizations believe that funding volunteer involvement does improve the organization's capacity, but not in the way many would expect. While 43.9 percent of organizations that fund volunteer involvement agree (moderately or strongly) that such funding improves the organization's capacity to deliver goods and services, 55.3 percent agree that it improves the organization's capacity to make connections with people or organizations within their community. This difference is even more stark for non-funders: 32.2 percent agree that volunteer engagement funding helps service delivery, while 70.2 percent agree that it helps strengthen civil society.

Most funders who support volunteer engagement (and accept unsolicited funding requests) report that most nonprofits never ask for funding to engage volunteers. Only 5.5 percent of these funders say that more than half of the nonprofits that they work with request funding for volunteer engagement; 28.2 percent report that they never receive such requests.

Corroborating these findings, nonprofit CEOs report that individual donors (versus grant-making organizations) are their top focus when fundraising for their volunteer engagement efforts.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the nonprofit sector in many profound and significant ways, but it may have had the most disruptive impact on activities that require in-person participation.

In the early pandemic period, many nonprofit organizations struggled to adapt to the sudden inability to bring people together for in-office or on-site volunteer opportunities, fundraising events and other activities. Although volunteering does not have to be done in person – each year, millions of people provide useful services while online – most nonprofit organizations that rely on volunteers had settled into traditional in-person routines, where many of the same volunteers, who are supervised by the same people, provide the same services in the same locations year after year. Given that reality, it is important to understand how volunteer engagement is playing out in the United States almost two and a half years after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

America's nonprofit organizations support millions of individuals who channel their volunteer energies and talents to address pressing community needs. Well before anyone heard of COVID-19, many sector leaders, advocates, researchers and others wondered how nonprofits

could do more to engage volunteers. Many of these discussions have centered on a recent nationwide decline in the percentage of people who volunteer,⁶ which, together with a similar decline in the percentage of people who donate to charity,⁷ have sparked discussions about a crisis in generosity. Because other, overall measures of generosity – such as hours volunteered or dollars donated – have either not declined or declined much more slowly, this concern is not widespread.

The research we present in this report is not motivated by the COVID-19 pandemic, or by the worry about an overall decline in generosity, but to understand how nonprofit organizations engage with volunteers today. The study is a direct descendent of one of the most prominent American organization-level studies of volunteering, the 2004 Volunteer Management Capacity in America's Charities and Congregations (VMC),⁸ which was commissioned by the Corporation for National and Community Service and conducted by the Urban Institute in 2004 with the authors of this report. Mark A. Hager and the late Jeffrey R. Brudney updated the original 2004 report last year⁹ after conducting a new organizational survey of nonprofits in 2019 – months before COVID wreaked havoc on the sector.

This report contains evidence from a new survey of nonprofit organizations that updates key statistics from the original VMC, which surveyed nonprofits in 2003, as well as the 2019 survey conducted by Hager and Brudney. Designed for nonprofit chief executive officers (CEOs), our survey collected data directly from leaders about the importance of volunteers to their nonprofit. In all, 1,210 organizational leaders across the country responded to our 2022 survey. Along with the nonprofit CEO survey, we surveyed organizations that have provided, or were likely to provide, funding to nonprofits to support volunteer engagement. We received 103 full or partial responses to this “funder survey” – to our knowledge, the first of its kind to gather information about the extent to which funders support volunteer engagement in nonprofits.

Footnotes 6-9:

6 Grimm, Robert T., Jr., and Dietz, Nathan (2018). “Where Are America's Volunteers? A Look at America's Widespread Decline in Volunteering in Cities and States.” Research Brief: Do Good Institute, University of Maryland. Available at <https://dogood.umd.edu/research-impact/publications/where-are-americas-volunteers>. 7 Osili, Una, and Sasha Zarins (2018). “Fewer Americans are giving money to charity but total donations are at record levels anyway.” The Conversation, July 3. Available at <https://theconversation.com/fewer-americans-are-giving-money-to-charity-but-total-donations-are-at-record-levels-anyway-98291>. 8 Urban Institute (2004). “Volunteer Management Capacity in America's Charities and Congregations: A Briefing Report.” Washington DC. Available at <https://webarchive.urban.org/publications/410963.html>. 9 Hager, M.A., and Brudney, J.L. (2021). Volunteer Management Capacity in America's Charities: Benchmarking a Pre-Pandemic

VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT: THE VIEW FROM NONPROFIT LEADERS

NONPROFIT SURVEY: SNAPSHOT OF ORGANIZATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

The nonprofit leaders who responded to the survey overwhelmingly lead organizations that rely on volunteers. In many other respects, though, our sample of organizations is very similar to the class of nonprofit organizations that file IRS Forms 990 or 990-EZ (990 filers), which is the population that the sample was intended to represent. The 1,001 organizations whose responses could be matched to 990 data are slightly less likely to focus on education and more likely to focus on human services. Small organizations (total revenues less than \$50,000) and, especially, large organizations (revenues of \$1 million or more) are slightly overrepresented, while mid-size organizations (revenues of \$100,000 to \$500,000) are underrepresented. The sample organizations also tend to be “younger,” according to their IRS registration date: 13.9 percent of the sample organizations are five years old or less, compared to 2 percent of 990 filers.¹⁰ We constructed weights to correct for these observable differences between sample and population, and have published an online Appendix that contains all weighted results for both the nonprofit CEO and funder surveys, a detailed discussion of the methodology, and all supplementary statistics cited in this report.

The survey asked questions about the organization’s geographic scope and substantive focus areas that are not found on the 990s. More than 70 percent of respondents describe their activities as “local,” while 25.7 percent also say they are active “regionally” within the states where they are headquartered; 18.3 percent say they are active nationally or internationally. Human services (43.7 percent) and/ or education (37.3 percent) are the most common substantive focus areas, with almost 20 percent also reporting mission orientations related to health, the environment, public or social benefit, and the arts. About 6 percent of all organizations say they participate in activities related to democracy and civic engagement; a similar number say they are involved in capacity building.

The main difference between the sample and the population is likely to be the degree to which the sample organizations rely on volunteers. Of respondents, 97.9 percent report that their organization involves volunteers “in any of its activities”;¹¹ only 28 organizations answered the follow-up questions about why they do not engage volunteers in their activities. As a result, the results presented here center on questions about why and how organizations involve volunteers,

rather than why many organizations do not embrace volunteering or how to encourage more organizations to work with volunteers.

Within the sample, many organizations could be considered “small” (in terms of paid staff): 57.3 percent of sample organizations have five or fewer paid employees on staff, and 20.2 percent have no paid staff members. Meanwhile, a large minority (35.2 percent) report that they engage with 100 or more volunteers. While the organizations with the most paid staff members are significantly more likely to involve 100 or more volunteers, small organizations (less than five paid staff members) that work with a large number of volunteers (100 or more) comprise 15 percent of the overall sample.

VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT PROFESSIONALS AND SPECIALISTS IN NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS TODAY

To make the best use of the time and talents that volunteers have to offer, nonprofit organizations need to ensure that the people who work most closely with volunteers have sufficient training and experience, and these volunteer engagement specialists have the active support of the organization’s leaders. Our nonprofit CEO survey contained several questions about the characteristics of the volunteer engagement specialist(s), followed by several questions about how closely these specialists work with the organization’s leaders, paid staff and board of directors. Together, the responses to these survey questions suggest that, despite the pandemic, the specialists responsible for engaging with volunteers may have slightly better qualifications and may devote somewhat more time to volunteer engagement today compared to the past, even though they perform many other tasks for their nonprofit.

¹⁰ The Appendix (which is published as a separate document) contains full, weighted results for both surveys, as well as supplementary statistics, like these, that are cited in the report.

¹¹ The complete wording of the question, which is identical to the wording on the 2003 VMCS survey, is: “Does your organization involve volunteers in any of its activities? For the purposes of this survey, a volunteer is any person who works on a regular, short term, or occasional basis and who provides services to your organization or to the people your organization serves, but is not paid as a staff member or a consultant. Do not include members of your board of directors unless they provide volunteer services to the organization beyond their traditional governance duties. And do not include special events participants unless they are also volunteering to help with the event or provide other volunteer services to the organization.”

A detailed look at trend data illustrates that the pandemic may have affected the way organizations staff the position of volunteer engagement specialist more than any recent factor. Figure 1 shows that about 63 percent of all organizations that involve volunteers have a paid staff member, or volunteer engagement professional (VEP), in this position. Almost 20 years ago, in 2003, 62 percent of organizations reported having a VEP; in 2019, before the pandemic, 65.2 percent of organizations had VEPs. While this trend has not changed noticeably in over two decades, other trends related to VEPs have changed.

FIGURE 1: PRESENCE OF A VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT PROFESSIONAL (VEP)

Does your organization have a paid staff person whose responsibilities include management of volunteers?

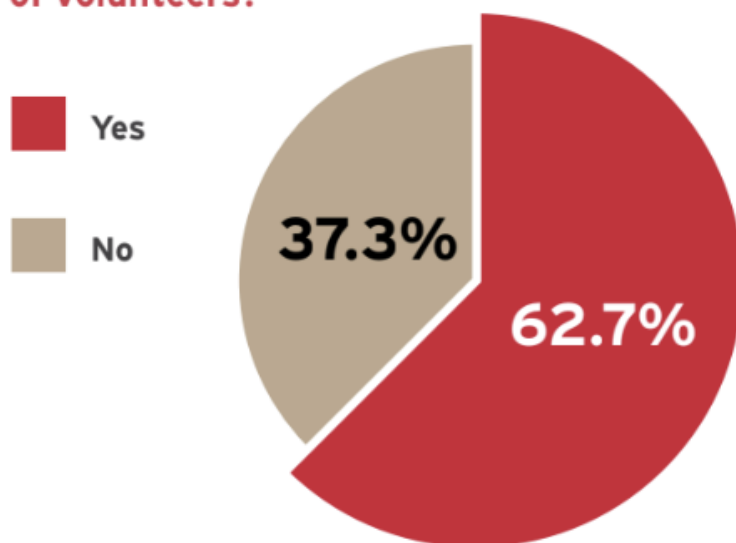
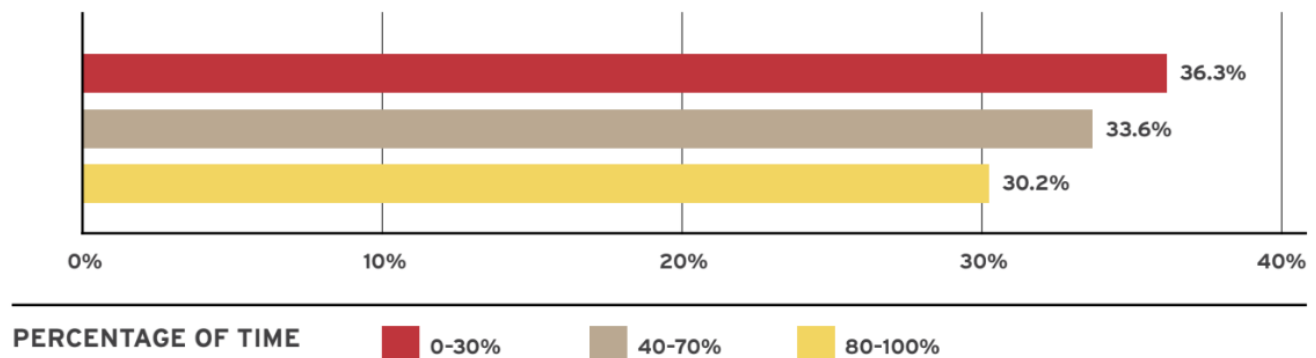


Figure 2 shows that the position of VEP is not often a full-time job: only 16.8 percent of VEPs spend all their time on volunteer engagement, according to the organization's leaders. However, VEPs today appear to be spending more time on volunteer engagement than they did 20 years ago. In 2022, the median VEP spent between 40 and 50 percent of their time on volunteer engagement, compared to 30 percent among the VEPs of 2003.¹² If nonprofits generally responded to the pandemic by asking their paid employees to do more to address mission-critical needs, this suggests that volunteer engagement has become more, not less, important for organizations today.

FIGURE 2: TIME SPENT ON VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT BY THE VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT PROFESSIONAL

What percentage of time on the job does this person devote to volunteer management? If your organization has more than one such person, please describe the person who is most closely identified with volunteer involvement, or is more senior in the role.



¹² The median amount of time spent by VEPs on volunteer engagement was not published in the 2019 report.

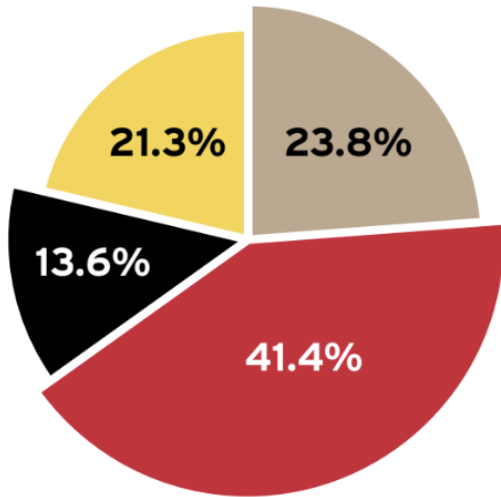
Many organizations without paid staff VEPs entrust the responsibility of volunteer engagement to volunteers. Altogether, almost half (49.8 percent) of all nonprofits reported that an unpaid volunteer engagement specialist is completely, or partially, responsible for volunteer engagement. In their 2019 report, Hager and Brudney combine the results from these questions to illustrate four different organizational approaches to managing volunteer involvement. Figure 313, which contains the four-category breakdowns for 2019 (left) and 2022, suggest that the pandemic may have induced some nonprofits to shift the organizational resources devoted to volunteer involvement. In recent years, more organizations have increased the VEP's time commitment from below 50 percent to half-time or more. More significantly, the number of organizations with nobody at all serving as a volunteer engagement specialist has been reduced by half since right before the pandemic's onset.

Size appears to influence an organization's strategic choice for staffing the volunteer engagement specialist role, but not the decision to appoint or employ a specialist at all. Large organizations are more likely to have paid VEPs rather than volunteers handling volunteer engagement, and on average, the specialists (paid or unpaid) spend more time on volunteer engagement than in smaller organizations. However, smaller organizations are neither more or less likely to have nobody serving as a volunteer engagement specialist.

FIGURE 3: VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT SPECIALISTS AND PROFESSIONALS, 2019 AND 2022

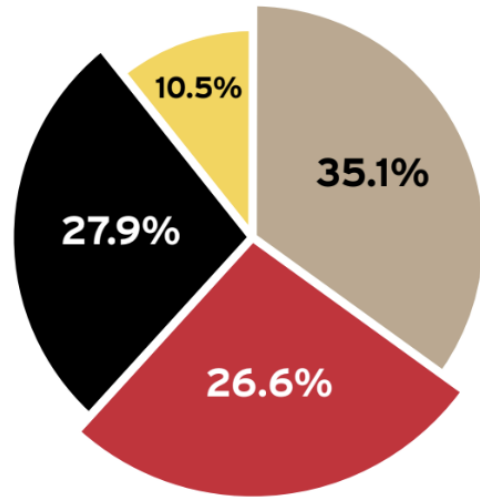
2019:

Volunteer engagement specialists and professionals: Time commitment



2022:

Volunteer engagement specialists and professionals: Time commitment

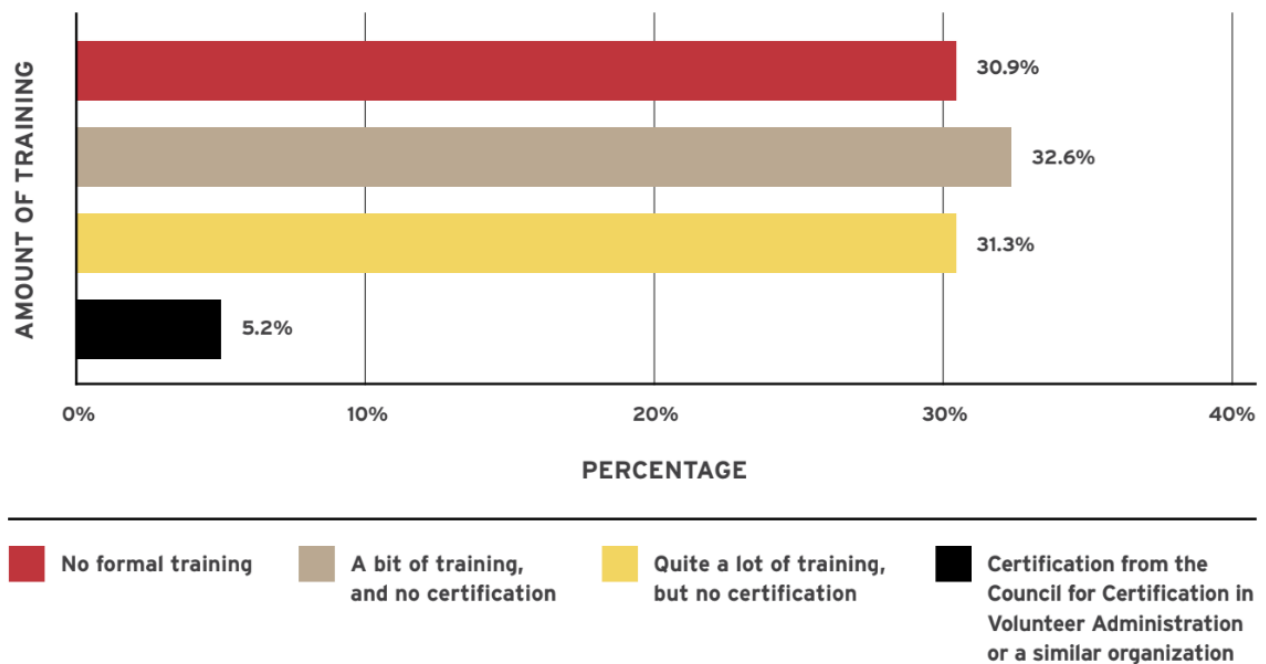


Footnote 13: The pie chart at right is a reproduction of Figure 5 in Hager and Brudney, 2021.

Today's volunteer engagement specialists – both professionals and unpaid volunteers – are slightly more likely to have training in volunteer administration compared to 20 years ago. In 2003, 66 percent of VEPs had had at least some training; in 2022, as seen in Figure 4, this percentage has risen to 69.1 percent. Sector-wide, 5.2 percent of VEPs have been certified by the Council for Certification in Volunteer Administration or a similar organization. VEPs are likely to have more training, on average, as well as certification, if they work for organizations with more paid staff. In addition, almost half (46.6 percent) of volunteers who serve as volunteer engagement specialists have had at least some training, although the likelihood of training for these unpaid volunteers is not higher in larger organizations.

FIGURE 4: TRAINING STATUS OF VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT PROFESSIONALS, 2022

Does this person have any formal training in volunteer administration, such as coursework, workshops, or attendance at conferences that focus on volunteer engagement?



LEADERSHIP ENGAGEMENT WITH VOLUNTEERS AND VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT SPECIALISTS

Although organizations seem to be more likely to invest in volunteer engagement by training their volunteer engagement specialists and professionals, and by asking them to spend more time on this work, many argue that volunteer engagement is still not viewed as a priority by nonprofit leaders. In 2018, a report by the Minnesota Association for Volunteer Advancement (MAVA)¹⁴ argued that nonprofit CEOs, based on data from a nationwide survey, gave VEPs less access to executive decision-making processes, as well as lower salaries, compared to other high-ranking professionals in the organization with similar qualifications. By allowing VEPs to have the same influence as other executives in the organization, MAVA argues, nonprofits can extend the organization's capacity by realizing more benefits from volunteer engagement.

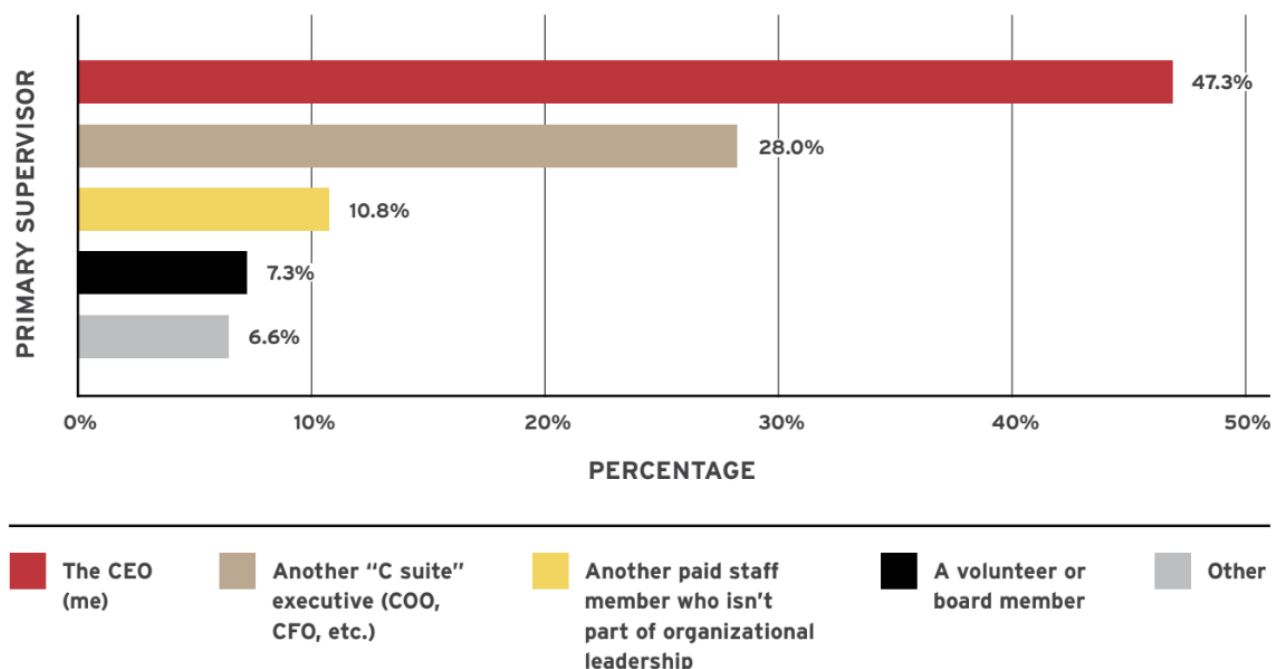
Footnote 14: Minnesota Alliance for Volunteer Advancement (2018). "Promoting Job Equity for Volunteer Engagement Professionals: How Volunteer Engagement Professionals Compare with Other Key Staff." [Minnesota Alliance for Volunteer Advancement website](#).

How closely do VEPs and volunteer engagement specialists work with nonprofit CEOs, paid staff and board members, and how much influence do they have in decision making? The 2022 survey suggests that some, but by no means all, nonprofits give VEPs and specialists access to leadership. As Figure 5 shows, almost half (47.3 percent) of CEOs report that they supervise the

VEP directly, while more than 75 percent say that the VEP reports to someone in the “C-suite” of executives. Even 67.7 percent of unpaid volunteer engagement specialists report to senior C-suite executives, with 52.6 percent reporting directly to the CEO. However, VEPs are less likely to report to senior executives within larger organizations, which tend to have more people in executive positions.

FIGURE 5: PRIMARY SUPERVISOR FOR THE VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT PROFESSIONAL, 2022

Who within the organization is the primary supervisor for this person? [the VEP]



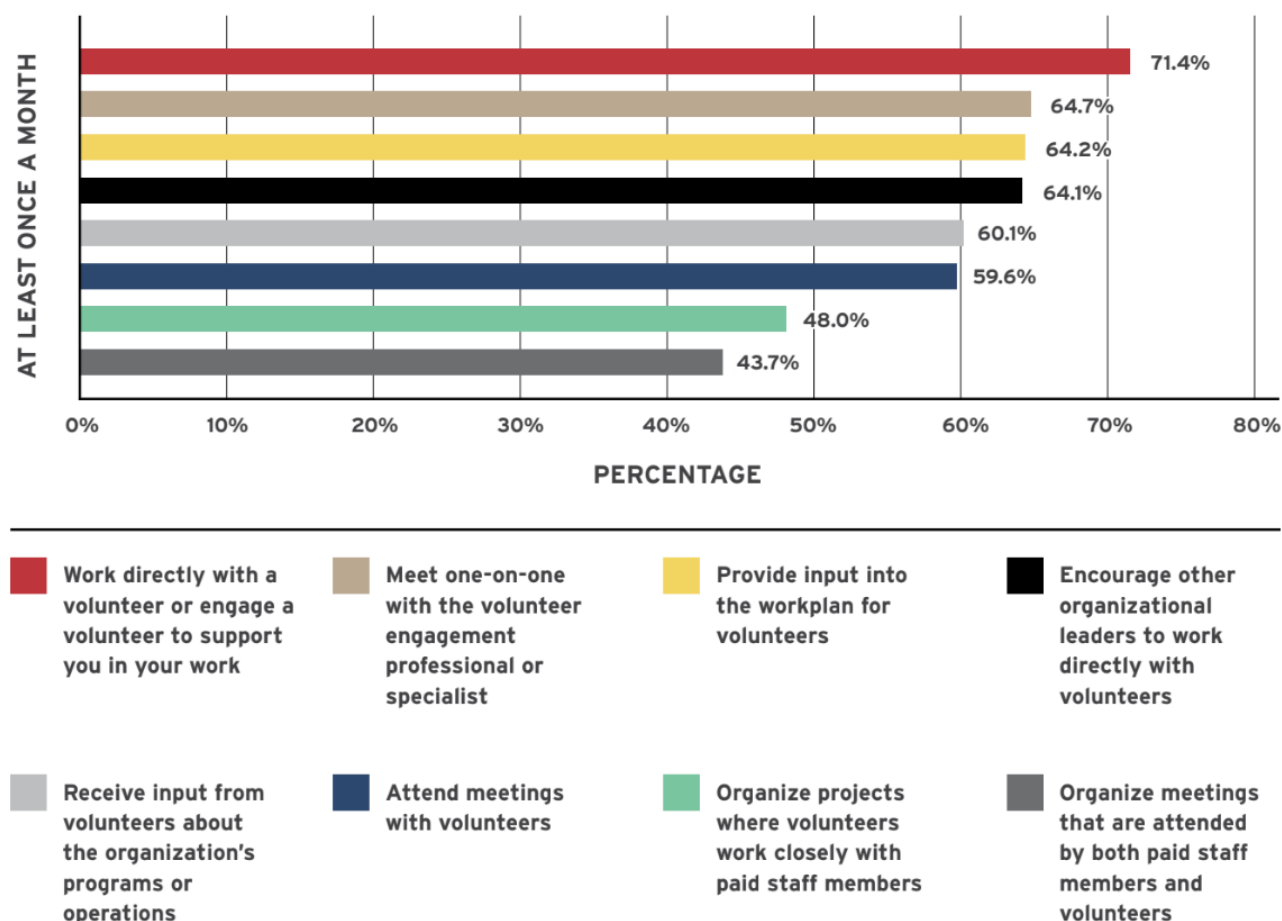
When asked to describe their personal involvement with volunteer engagement, more than 73 percent of nonprofit CEOs rated themselves as a 4 or 5 on a scale where 1 means “I talk with the volunteer engagement specialist only when I become aware of problems with volunteers,” and 5 means “I work closely with the volunteer engagement specialist to plan our organization’s volunteer involvement strategy.” In addition, most CEOs report that they work directly with the VEP or volunteers, or encourage staff members to do the same, in a variety of ways on a regular basis. Figure 6 shows the percentage of CEOs who say that the following types of interactions with VEPs and volunteers happen at least once per month. About 65 percent say that they meet regularly with the VEP or specialist or provide input into the work plan for volunteers; a similar percentage say that they encourage other organizational leaders to work directly with volunteers.

On average, CEOs of larger organizations are less likely to work closely and proactively with the volunteer engagement specialist and are generally less likely to engage directly with volunteers or VEPs or encourage their employees to do so. However, if CEOs encourage staff members and executives to work directly with volunteers and VEPs, or do so themselves, they can reinforce

the organization-wide norm of support for volunteer engagement by integrating volunteers into the daily work routines of their employees.

FIGURE 6: HOW OFTEN DO CEOS ENCOURAGE DIRECT INVOLVEMENT WITH THE VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT PROFESSIONAL?

How often do you, the chief executive officer, interact with volunteers or encourage others to interact with volunteers in each of the following ways?



CEOs report that their board of directors play active roles in volunteer engagement in some, but not many nonprofits. Figure 7 shows that board members are most likely to receive information about volunteer engagement from the organization's leadership or to provide pro bono services themselves. Board members are less likely to be directly involved in the organization's administration of volunteer operations. Still, almost 30 percent meet with leadership about the organization's volunteer involvement strategy, and 22.7 percent serve on a committee devoted to volunteer involvement.

Finally, many CEOs encourage their paid staff to work closely with the volunteer engagement specialist, or to work directly with volunteers. When asked to share their views about the relationship between paid staff members and volunteers within their organization, 64 percent of

CEOs placed themselves at 4 or 5 on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means “The role of volunteers is to assist staff and perform tasks assigned by staff” and 5 means “Volunteers lead critical programs and services for our organization.”

FIGURE 7: BOARD MEMBER INVOLVEMENT WITH VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT

Which of the following activities do the organization's board members perform?

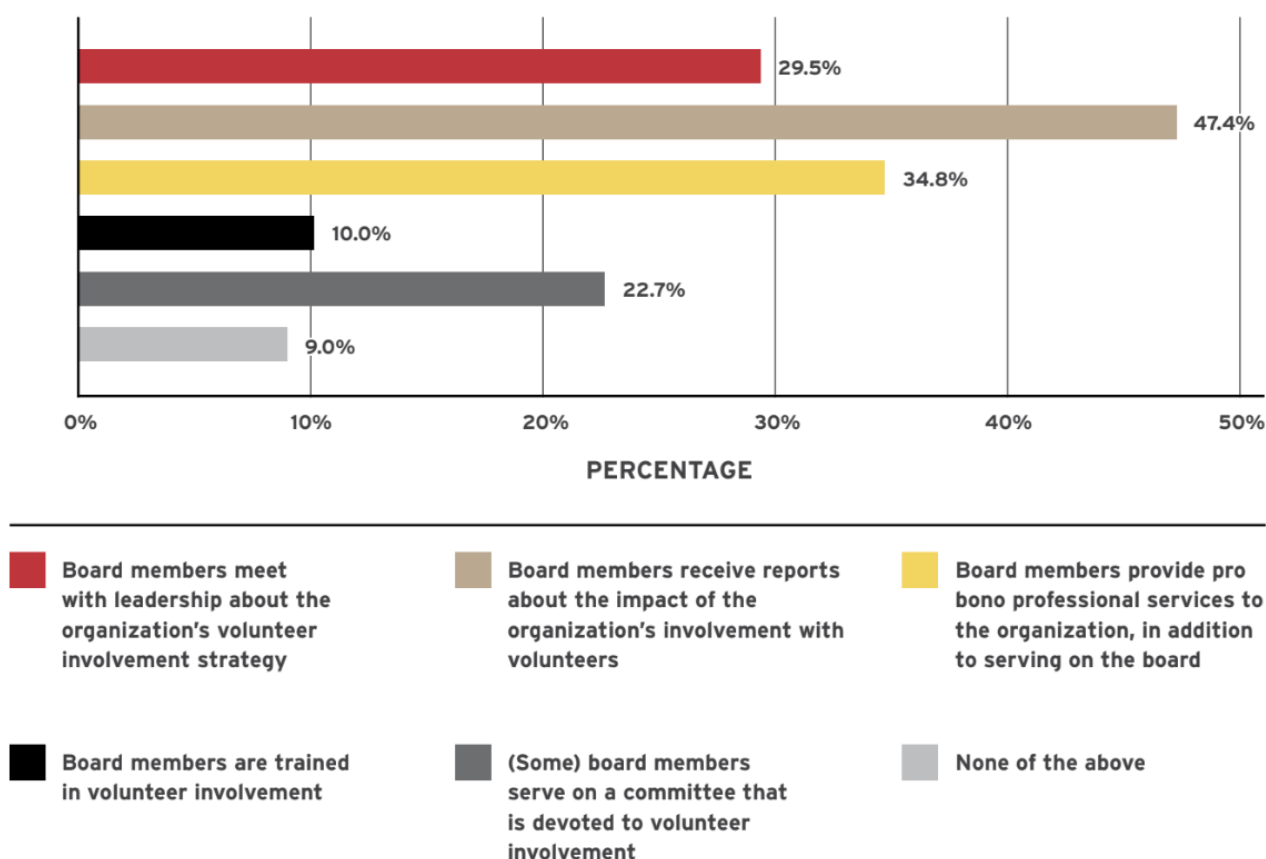
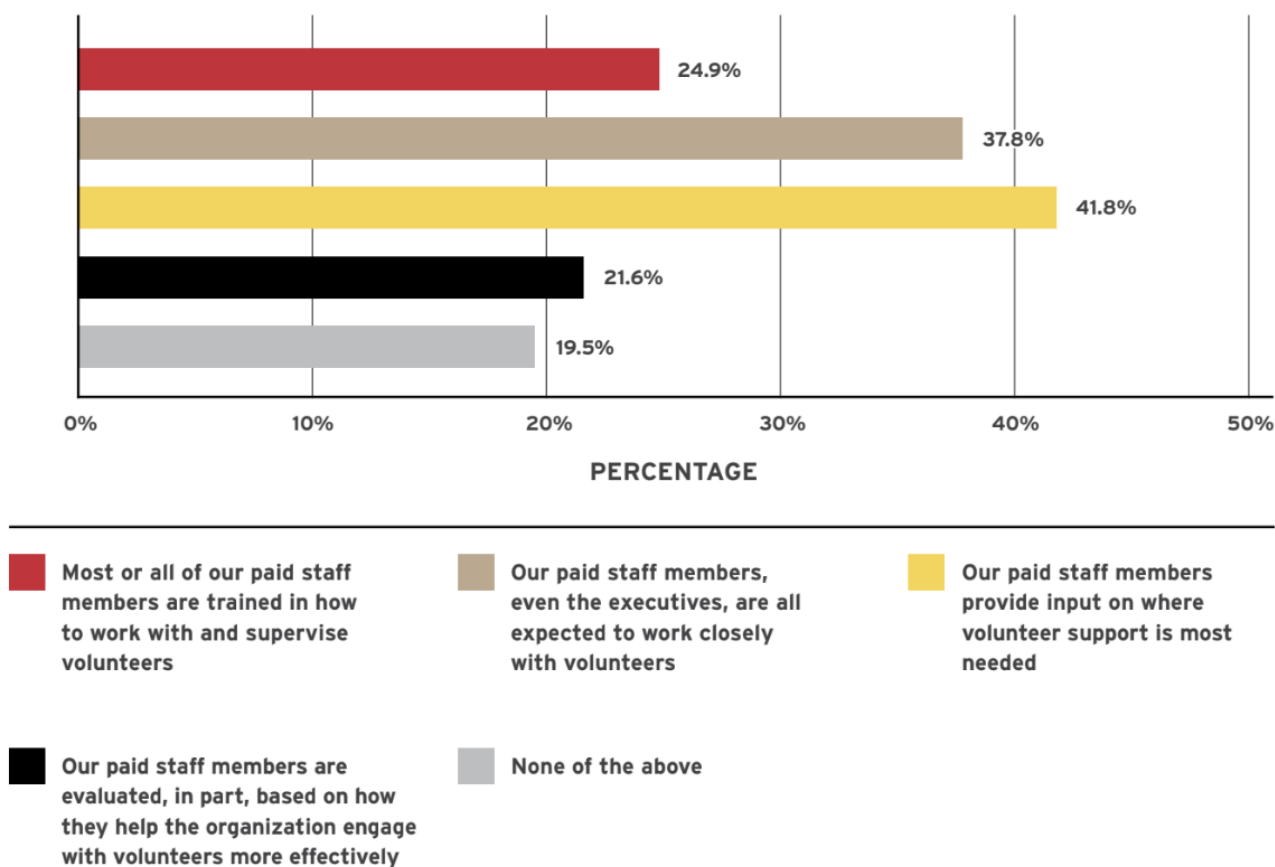


Figure 8 shows that most CEOs report that the work of paid staff intersects in meaningful ways with the work provided by volunteers. Of respondents, 41.8 percent say that their staff has some say in the ways that volunteers could be engaged most strategically, while 37.8 percent say that everyone – even executives – is expected to work closely with volunteers. Smaller percentages say that their staff members should bear even more responsibility for supporting the organization's commitment to volunteer engagement, by being evaluated on how much they support this aspect of the organization's mission, or by receiving training in volunteer supervision. In larger organizations, staff members are less likely to be involved with volunteer engagement in these ways, and the CEOs of larger organizations are less likely to see volunteers as leaders on par with paid staff.

FIGURE 8: STAFF MEMBER INVOLVEMENT WITH VOLUNTEERS AND VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT

Which of the following statements are true for your organization's paid staff members?



THE EFFECTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

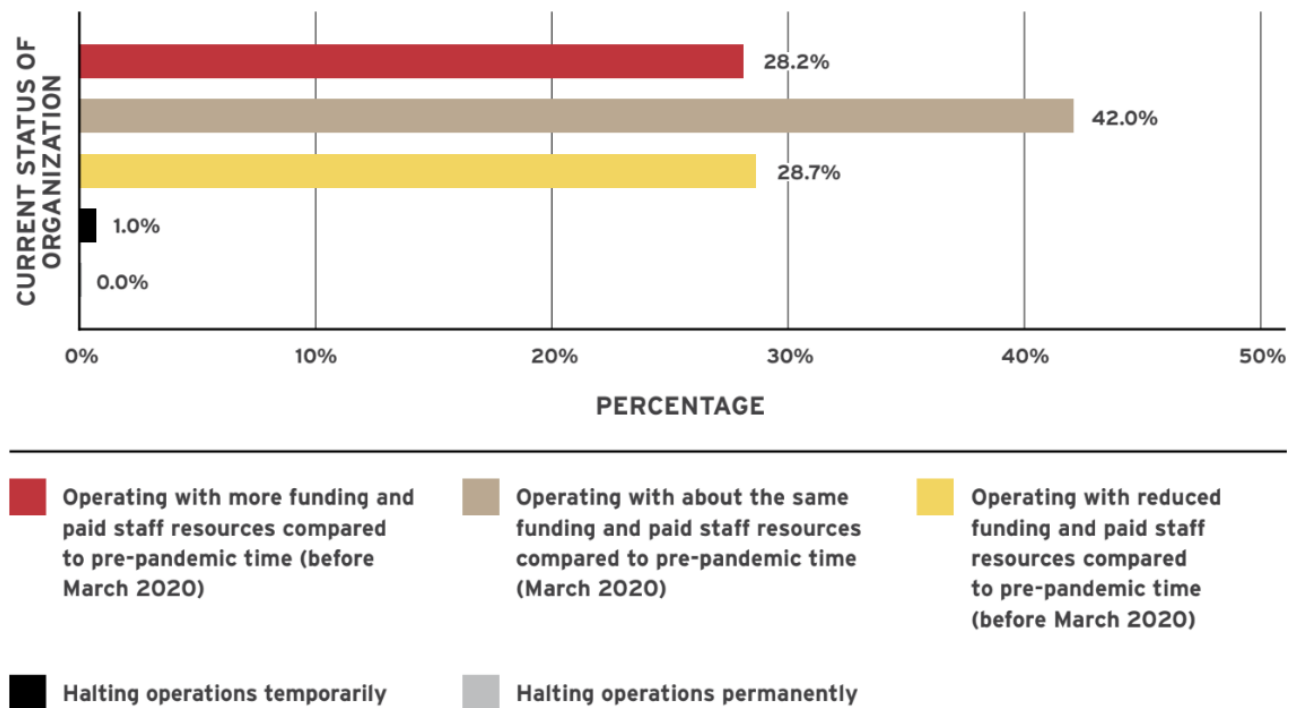
The results of the last two sections suggest that many nonprofit organizations have the structural pieces in place to provide active support for volunteer engagement despite the challenges COVID-19 brought. The fact that some of the indicators of capacity to work with volunteers have slightly improved since 2003 is remarkable, given the effects of the pandemic – but the small changes observed between 2019 (as seen in the second Brudney-Hager report) and 2022 are understandable. Our survey allows us to assess several other aspects of the pandemic's impact on nonprofit volunteer engagement, including the organization's status of operations, the duties performed by volunteers and volunteer retention.

During the first year of the pandemic, VolunteerMatch – a partner in this research project – conducted several surveys of organizations and volunteers to assess the status of volunteer involvement. In their 2021 report,¹⁵ which summarizes the results of their previous studies, VolunteerMatch reported that 65 percent of organizations had experienced reductions in resources, while 10 percent had temporarily halted operations, and 1 percent had closed

permanently. Figure 9 shows that many of the organizations in our sample had rebounded since then: only 28.7 percent were still operating at reduced capacity, while 28.2 percent were reporting that they had more resources than before the pandemic. The most commonly reported changes to program operations, as seen in Figure 10, were increased demand for organizational services, increases in services and goods delivered and an increase in staff workloads. Among respondents, 30.3 percent of organizations reported reductions in funding and 22.8 percent said they had reduced the number of paid staff from pre-pandemic levels.

FIGURE 9: STATUS OF OPERATIONS FOR NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS, 2022

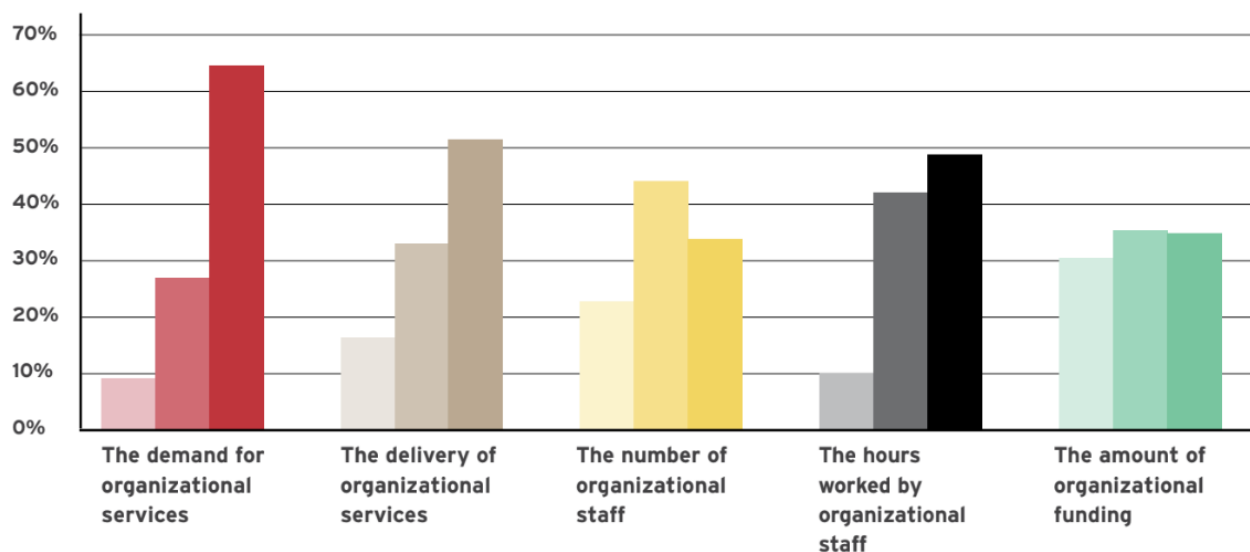
What is the current status of your organization at this time?



¹⁵ VolunteerMatch (2021). "2020 in Review: The Impact of COVID-19 on Volunteering & The Social Sector." Available at <https://solutions.volunteermatch.org/hubfs/Ebooks/The%20Impact%20of%20COVID-19%20on%20Volunteering%20-%20A%20Two%20Month%20Comparison.pdf>.

FIGURE 10: CHANGES IN PROGRAM OPERATIONS DUE TO THE PANDEMIC, 2022

How have your organization's operations changed in the past year?



CHANGE IN ORGANIZATION'S OPERATIONS

Decreased	9.0%	16.1%	22.8%	9.8%	30.3%
No Change	26.6%	32.7%	43.6%	41.8%	35.0%
Increased	64.4%	51.1%	33.6%	48.5%	34.7%

Importantly, these changes did not affect the employment status of most VEPs and specialists: only 3.9 percent of organizations said that these volunteer managers had been reassigned to other duties, or temporarily or permanently furloughed.

However, as Figure 11 shows, many organizations reported that they are involving very few volunteers today (31.3 percent) or have temporarily closed their volunteer operations (2.6 percent) due to the pandemic's lingering effects.

FIGURE 11: CHANGES IN VOLUNTEER OPERATIONS, 2022

At this point in time, what level of disruption has COVID-19 had on the involvement of volunteers at your organization?

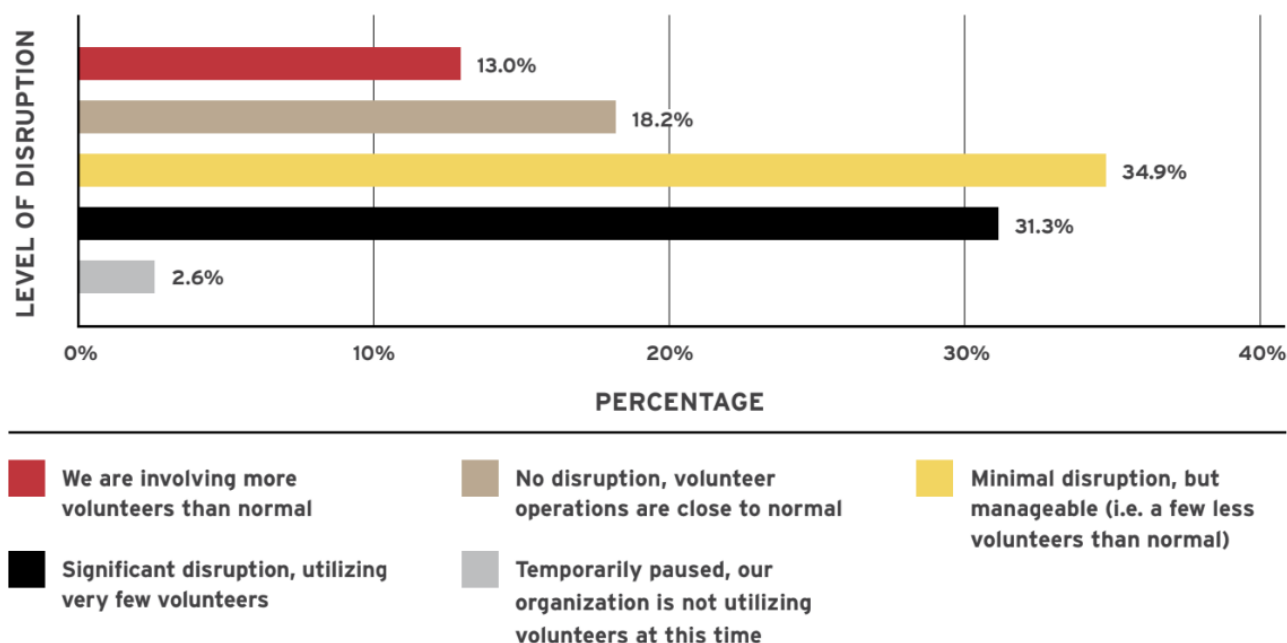
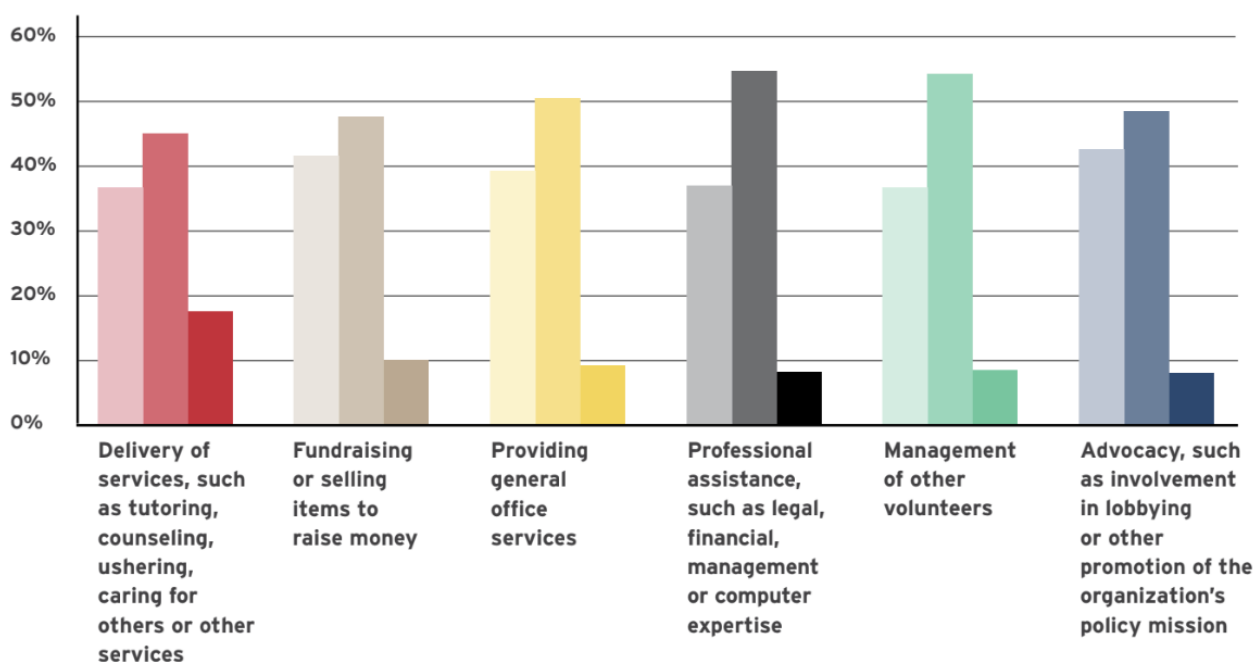


Figure 12 shows how the activities and assignments of the volunteers themselves have changed during the pandemic. Almost 18 percent of nonprofit CEOs say that their volunteers are spending more time on service delivery, the most common activity where volunteers are doing more today. On the other hand, 37 percent of nonprofit CEOs report that their volunteers are spending less time on service delivery. Figure 12 illustrates a striking reality for the nonprofit sector: nonprofits are more likely to experience volunteers doing less, than more, to support any organizational activity today. Organizations are most likely to report that volunteers are spending less time on fundraising and advocacy work, but at least 35 percent of nonprofit CEOs report that their volunteers are doing less of each of the activities depicted in Figure 12. These decreases in volunteer involvement are noteworthy, given the finding in Figure 10 that more than half of nonprofits say that they have delivered more services since the pandemic began, and more than 60 percent say that demand for these services has increased.

FIGURE 12: CHANGES IN VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES DUE TO THE PANDEMIC

Since the pandemic began, over the last two years, how has the engagement of volunteers in each of the following activities changed?



Volunteers are doing less of this	37.0%	42.0%	39.7%	37.2%	37.1%	42.9%
Volunteers are doing the same amount of this	45.4%	48.0%	51.0%	54.8%	54.3%	48.9%
Volunteers are doing more of this	17.6%	10.1%	9.3%	8.0%	8.6%	8.2%

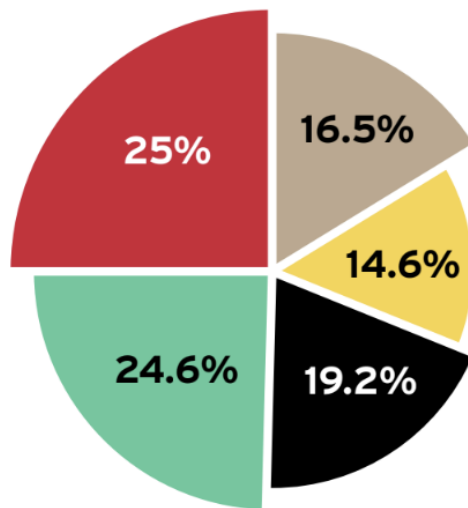
Considering the lasting disruptions that the pandemic has inflicted on volunteer involvement, volunteer retention would seem to be a primary objective for nonprofit organizations. In our survey, we asked nonprofit CEOs¹⁶ to compare retention rates (the percentage of volunteers from a previous year who volunteered in a given year) from before the pandemic to the present day. Figure 13 illustrates this difference: the median retention rate has increased from 60 percent in 2019-2020 to 70 percent in 2020-2021, probably because volunteers are now an especially scarce commodity for nonprofit organizations.

In other words, nonprofit CEOs cannot afford to lose as many volunteers today, which might relate to the increased investment in volunteer management capacity uncovered in this study. However, the median retention rate in 2003 was 80 percent,¹⁷ which still suggests that many

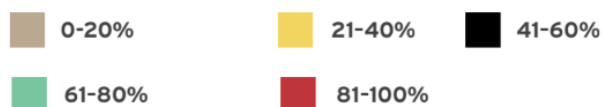
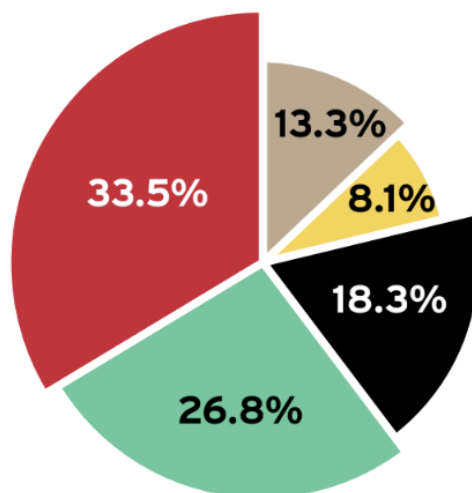
nonprofits have experienced greater difficulty in retaining volunteers in recent years. Thus, the rebound in retention rates depicted in Figure 13 should be placed in a larger historical context: over and above the pandemic's effects, it has been harder for nonprofits to keep volunteers they engaged in recent years than it used to be two decades ago.

FIGURE 13: VOLUNTEER RETENTION BEFORE AND DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Volunteer retention from 2019
(percent retained in 2020)



Volunteer retention from early 2021
(percent retained, mid-2022)



Footnotes 16 and 17: 16 Although CEOs may have less direct knowledge about retention rates than VEPs or volunteer engagement specialists, we encouraged respondents to seek accurate information from others in the organization when necessary. 17 Urban Institute (2004). “Volunteer Management Practices and Retention of Volunteers.” Washington DC. Available at <https://webarchive.urban.org/publications/411005.html>

THE BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT

When nonprofits make the effort to engage volunteers in their mission-related activities, they do so because they expect volunteers will provide organizational benefits, but they often face challenges associated with those efforts too. The 2003 VMC study, as well as the 2019 follow-up survey by Hager and Brudney, both contain extensive discussions of the benefits and challenges of volunteer engagement for nonprofits.

The 2019 survey added questions to the lists of benefits and challenges that were not asked on the 2003 survey. Nevertheless, the question wordings were similar enough to permit a comparison of the results from our 2022 survey to those of the previous studies. Tables 1 and 2 summarize these comparisons, which must be qualified by the fact that the 2003 and 2019 surveys did not target CEOs as respondents (as ours did). However, the overall lesson from these results is that nonprofit CEOs in 2022 feel that everything – almost all the benefits and almost all the challenges – is more important than it was 20, or even three, years ago.

One lesson from Table 1 is that the main benefits that nonprofits realize from volunteer involvement (such as providing services it could not otherwise provide, cost savings or an increase in the quality of services) are largely the same ones as nonprofits reported 20 years ago. Of the top five benefits (in terms of 2022 respondents who said that volunteers provided the benefit “to a great extent”), all five were also in the top five benefits in 2019, and three of the original six 2003 benefits are also in today’s top five. The more striking finding, though, is that larger numbers of 2022 respondents say that volunteers deliver each of these benefits “to a great extent.” This trend is virtually across the board in Table 1. Even though 2022 nonprofit leaders report substantial challenges related to recruiting, deploying and retaining volunteers during the pandemic, as well as to applying their skills to mission-related activities, nonprofits seem to be even more convinced of the benefits of volunteer engagement compared to the past.

TABLE 1: PRIMARY BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT**Percentage of respondents saying that volunteers provide each type of benefit “to a great extent”**

	2003	2019	2022
Allow the organization to provide services or levels of services it otherwise could not provide	60%	58%	78.9%
Extend the organization's reach		56%	74.2%
Provide cost savings to the organization	67%	58%	73.9%
Increase the quality of services or programs provided	68%	58%	72.2%
Increase the organization's return on its resource investments		43%	68.4%
Extend the organization's budget		58%	67.6%
Provide more detailed attention to the people served	59%	37%	65.6%
Bring more energy to mission than staff alone are able to bring		21%	63.2%
Bring more authenticity to mission than staff alone are able to bring		22%	62.6%
Provide increased public support for programs, or improved community relations	62%	42%	62.2%
Bring more passion to mission than staff alone are able to bring		21%	62.1%
Provide an enhanced organizational focus on mission		37%	59.3%
Bring the organization into contact with potential donors			36.2%
Provide access to specialized legal, financial, management, or technology expertise	34%	21%	27.9%

Table 2 tells a similar story: the main challenges for volunteer engagement in 2003 and 2019 are still perceived as the main challenges by nonprofit CEOs, but the percentages who say that each is a “big problem” have sharply increased. The “top five” challenges in 2022 are also the top five from the previous surveys, but the order has changed. Today, 46.8 percent of CEOs say that recruiting sufficient volunteers is a big problem and 41.1 percent say it is a small problem. Those numbers have almost doubled from the 2003 survey, in which 29 percent of respondents saw this issue as a big problem and 32 percent saw it as a small problem. This suggests that the frequently discussed “generosity crisis” noted in our introduction may be affecting the ability of nonprofits to find the volunteer support they need, even as the demands for their service delivery have increased.

Other recruitment challenges, such as finding volunteers who are available during the traditional workday and finding volunteers with the necessary skills, were seen as big problems by many nonprofits before the pandemic but appear to be even bigger problems today. This reality suggests that the “market” for reliable volunteers may be suffering from the same negative influences as the market for paid employees. Similarly, the percentage of CEOs who say that unreliability and absenteeism are “big problems” is still not very large, but the number has risen from 4 percent just before the pandemic to 15.4 percent in 2022.

Finally, about one-third of nonprofits report that a lack of funding to support volunteer involvement is a “big problem.” While this is one of the few challenges whose “big problem” percentage has not increased by much since 2003, only 20 percent considered a lack of funding a significant challenge in 2019, just before the pandemic. Although today’s nonprofit leaders feel that other problems – primarily volunteer recruitment – are more pressing, the perceived lack of funding is worth exploring from another point of view: those who make the funding decisions.

TABLE 2: PRIMARY CHALLENGES OF VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT

Percentage of respondents saying that each type of challenge in volunteer engagement is a “big problem”

	2003	2019	2022
Recruiting sufficient numbers of volunteers	29%	22%	46.8%
Recruiting volunteers available during the workday	34%	21%	38.4%
Recruiting volunteers with the right skills or expertise	16%	18%	35.4%
Lack of adequate funds for supporting volunteer involvement	33%	20%	33.3%
Lack of paid staff time to properly train and supervise volunteers	21%	22%	27.4%
Absenteeism, unreliability, or poor work habits or work quality on the part of volunteers	6%	4%	15.2%
Difficulty of assessing the value of volunteer involvement to the organization			7.0%
Regulatory constraints to working with volunteers, such as background checks	3%	2%	6.9%
Having more volunteers than the organization can accommodate	5%	3%	6.5%
Legal liabilities and associated costs, such as insurance		1%	6.2%
Indifference or resistance on the part of program staff toward volunteers		2%	6.2%
Unwillingness or disinterest of volunteers in following rules and procedures		2%	5.8%
Indifference or resistance on the part of management or the board toward volunteers	1%	1%	4.1%

FUNDING VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT: THE VIEW FROM PHILANTHROPIC FUNDERS

Given that one out of every three nonprofit leaders believe that a lack of funding for volunteer engagement is a big problem, what are potential funders prepared to do to help? To address questions like these, we administered a newly created survey of institutional funders who have funded, or would be likely to fund, nonprofits seeking to engage volunteers. The survey contained questions designed for organizations that have funded volunteer engagement (funders) as well as questions designed for organizations that do not fund/that have not funded these activities (non-funders). The survey was launched shortly after the survey of nonprofit CEOs in summer 2022; when the surveys closed, we had received 103 partial or complete responses.

FUNDER SURVEY: SNAPSHOT OF ORGANIZATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

Unlike the nonprofit survey, the sample of organizations that responded to the funder survey was very different from the population of organizations that the sample was intended to represent. Because many, but not all, potential funders are private foundations, our target population is the group of nonprofit organizations that file IRS Forms 990, 990-EZ, or 990-PF (for private foundations). The substantive focus of 58.3 percent of the respondent organizations could be classified as “Philanthropy, Voluntarism and Grantmaking,” a category that includes many private foundations as well as public charities that specialize in this work. Sector-wide, only 3 percent of organizations that file Forms 990, 990-EZ or 990-PF fall into this category. Using total assets to measure size, the sample organizations tended to be much larger. Of the respondents, 43.7 percent had total assets of \$50 million or more, whereas only 1.5 percent of the population manage assets of that magnitude. As with the nonprofit CEO survey, we constructed weights to correct for these observable differences. Details of the sample-population comparison and all results from the weighted data are available in the online Appendix.

The funder survey, like the nonprofit CEO survey, asked respondents about characteristics that are not found on the 990s. Compared to the nonprofit sample, the funders were much less likely to describe the geographical scope of their activities as “local” (39 percent, compared to 70 percent for nonprofits) and much more likely to say they have “national” or “international” activities (39.6 percent versus 18.3 percent). The funder organizations are also much less likely to focus on single substantive issues, and much more likely to be involved with capacity building (53.0 percent) and democracy support and civic engagement (33.8 percent) than the nonprofit respondents are.

After weighting the survey responses, we found that 52.5 percent of respondents answered “yes” to the question, “Does your organization provide funding to support the involvement of volunteers in nonprofits? This could include project support, program support or general

operating support.” The unweighted sample includes 68 “funders,” who answered “yes” to this question, and 35 “non-funders,” who answered “no.” These subsamples are just large enough to present some selected results for funders and non-funders, but not to break these groups into smaller subgroups for further analysis.

PERCEIVED BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT: THE FUNDERS’ PERSPECTIVE

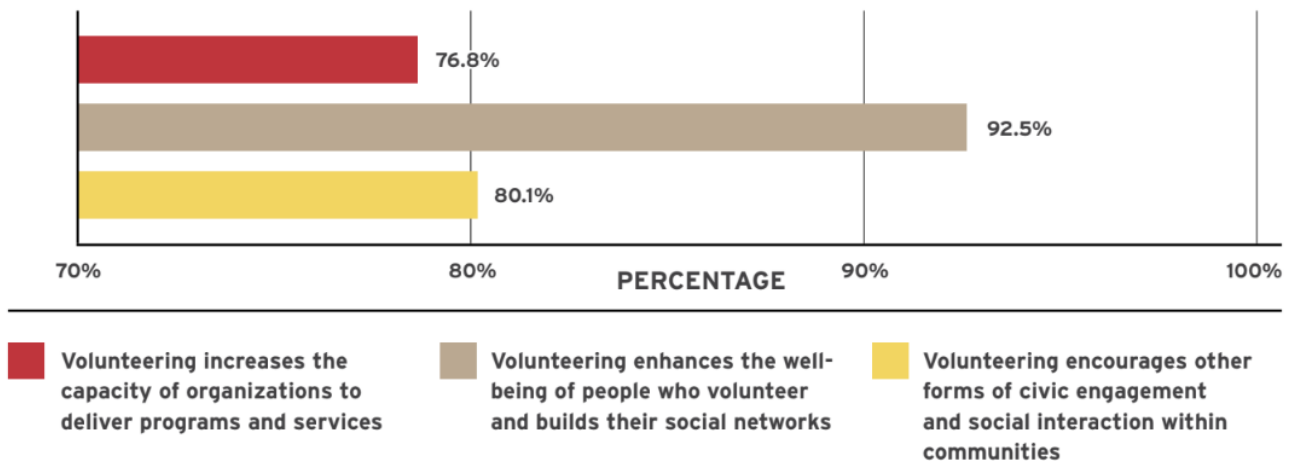
With few exceptions, the organizations in the sample for the funder survey have sufficient resources to award grants to nonprofit organizations, and many do act as grantmakers. However, finding out why funders do, or do not, fund a particular type of activity (like volunteer engagement) is notoriously difficult. Before we asked respondents to describe and explain their organization’s funding preferences and practices, we included a few questions about the overall value of nonprofit volunteer engagement – including a series of questions about the benefits and challenges of volunteer engagement, which were exact parallels for the questions on the nonprofit CEO survey.

The first question on this topic asked funders the following question: “When people volunteer their time with an organization, several potential benefits could result. In your opinion, using a scale of one through nine, how much does volunteering contribute to each of the following types of benefits?” This question was intended to give respondents the opportunity to compare the potential benefits of volunteering to the organization against other benefits: to the community or to the volunteers themselves.

As Figure 14 shows, most respondents agreed strongly that volunteering benefited organizations, individuals and communities (giving responses of 7, 8 or 9 on a 1-9 scale, where 9 indicates “Provides these benefits to a great extent”), but the question with the highest consensus was the question about benefits to volunteers. The average score was significantly higher on this question than on the question about benefits to the organization, which suggests that funders are more confident that volunteer engagement helps volunteers than that volunteer engagement helps the organization. While they may still view volunteer engagement as worth supporting, this result implies that funders do not believe that building nonprofit capacity is the primary benefit of volunteering.

FIGURE 14: PERCEIVED BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING, BY POTENTIAL PHILANTHROPIC FUNDERS

When people volunteer their time with an organization, several potential benefits could result. In your opinion, using a scale of one through nine, how much does volunteering contribute to each of the following types of benefits? Percentages reflect the number of respondents who gave responses of 7, 8 or 9 on a nine-point scale, where 9 indicates “Provides these benefits to a great extent.”



These results are consistent with another key finding: funders and nonprofit leaders either disagree, or have different perceptions, about the benefits and challenges of volunteer engagement. Tables 3 and 4 compare funders’ and nonprofit CEOs’ responses to questions about the benefits and challenges of volunteer engagement, which gives another view to the question: What do funders value about volunteer engagement?¹⁸ Although funders and nonprofits agree that volunteer engagement extends the organization’s reach “to a great extent” (the top-ranked benefit for funders, and #2 for nonprofits), both groups doubt that access to specialized skills is a primary benefit (#12 for funders, #14 for nonprofits), Table 3 shows that large differences of opinion exist about many other benefits. For nine of the fourteen benefits, nonprofit CEOs are much more positive than funders, and the percentage-point difference is large (30 points or more).¹⁹ Nonprofit CEOs believe much more strongly, on average, that volunteer engagement “increase[s] the quality of services or programs provided” (#4 for nonprofits, #10 for funders) and “extend[s] the organization’s budget” (#6 for nonprofits, #11 for funders). Perhaps funders would be more willing to invest money in volunteer engagement if they believed in the benefits of volunteers as strongly as nonprofit leaders do.

TABLE 3: PRIMARY BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT - NONPROFITS AND FUNDERS
Percentage of respondents saying that volunteers provide each type of benefit “to a great extent”

	NONPROFITS	FUNDERS
Extend the organization’s reach	74.2%	61.8%
Provide increased public support for programs, or improved community relations	62.2%	55.9%
Allow the organization to provide services or levels of services it otherwise could not provide	78.9%	50.6%
Provide cost-savings to the organization	73.9%	38.9%
Bring the organization into contact with potential donors	36.2%	37.0%
Provide more detailed attention to the people served	65.6%	29.3%
Bring more energy to mission than staff alone are able to bring	63.2%	28.2%
Increase the organization’s return on its resource investments	68.4%	27.3%
Bring more passion to mission than staff alone are able to bring	62.1%	26.1%
Increase the quality of services or programs provided	72.2%	25.2%
Extend the organization’s budget	67.6%	23.1%
Provide access to specialized legal, financial, management, or technology expertise	27.9%	22.2%
Provide an enhanced organizational focus on mission	59.3%	17.2%
Bring more authenticity to mission than staff alone are able to bring	62.6%	14.1%

Footnotes 18 and 19: 18 All funder organizations, regardless of whether they fund volunteer engagement today, could answer these questions.

19 The question about the potential benefit of volunteer engagement as a donor recruitment method was new to the 2022 survey. Notably, more funders than nonprofit CEOs felt that volunteer engagement provided this benefit to a great extent.

Table 4 presents the same funders-versus-nonprofit CEOs comparison for the series of questions about the challenges of volunteer engagement. Here, the biggest difference of opinion by far is that the largest number of nonprofit leaders believe, on average, that a lack of volunteers is a “big problem”. The difference in responses to the question about recruiting volunteers during the workday is similar, but the percentage-point difference is smaller. For funders, the challenge with the largest “big problem” percentage is a lack of funding for volunteer involvement – which ranks fourth for nonprofit CEOs, but only about one-third of nonprofit leaders think this is a big problem, compared to 43.4 percent of funders. Finally, funders are much more likely to consider the difficulty of assessing the value of volunteer engagement as a big problem than nonprofit

CEOs do. Table 4's results suggest that nonprofit CEOs are much more attuned than funders are to the problems that are most pressing today – especially, but not limited to, the lack of available volunteers.

TABLE 4: PRIMARY CHALLENGES OF VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT - NONPROFITS AND FUNDERS

Percentage of respondents saying that each type of challenge in volunteer engagement is a “big problem”

	NONPROFITS	FUNDERS
Lack of adequate funds for supporting volunteer involvement	33.3%	43.4%
Recruiting volunteers with the right skills or expertise	35.4%	37.0%
Lack of paid staff time to properly train and supervise volunteers	27.4%	36.9%
Recruiting volunteers available during the workday	38.4%	27.3%
Difficulty of assessing the value of volunteer involvement to the organization	7.0%	18.9%
Recruiting sufficient numbers of volunteers	46.8%	18.2%
Regulatory constraints to working with volunteers, such as background checks	6.9%	14.5%
Absenteeism, unreliability, or poor work habits or work quality on the part of volunteers	15.2%	10.4%
Legal liabilities and associated costs, such as insurance	6.2%	9.6%
Indifference or resistance on the part of management or the board toward volunteers	4.1%	6.2%
Having more volunteers than the organization can accommodate	6.5%	5.4%
Unwillingness or disinterest of volunteers in following rules and procedures	5.8%	5.3%
Indifference or resistance on the part of program staff toward volunteers	6.2%	5.1%

WHY DO FUNDERS SUPPORT (OR NOT SUPPORT) VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT?

The results of the previous section support the claim that funding organizations do not have a complete understanding of how nonprofit organizations benefit from volunteer engagement, or what challenges they face when doing so. Another reason why the respondents to the funder survey do not fund volunteer engagement is because, according to many respondents, most nonprofit organizations simply do not ask for funding for this activity. When asked, none of the non-funders (organizations that do not offer support for volunteer engagement) say that more than 25 percent of nonprofits ever ask them for this type of funding. Perhaps understandably, 35.2 percent say that nobody ever asks, while 27.4 percent say that they do not consider

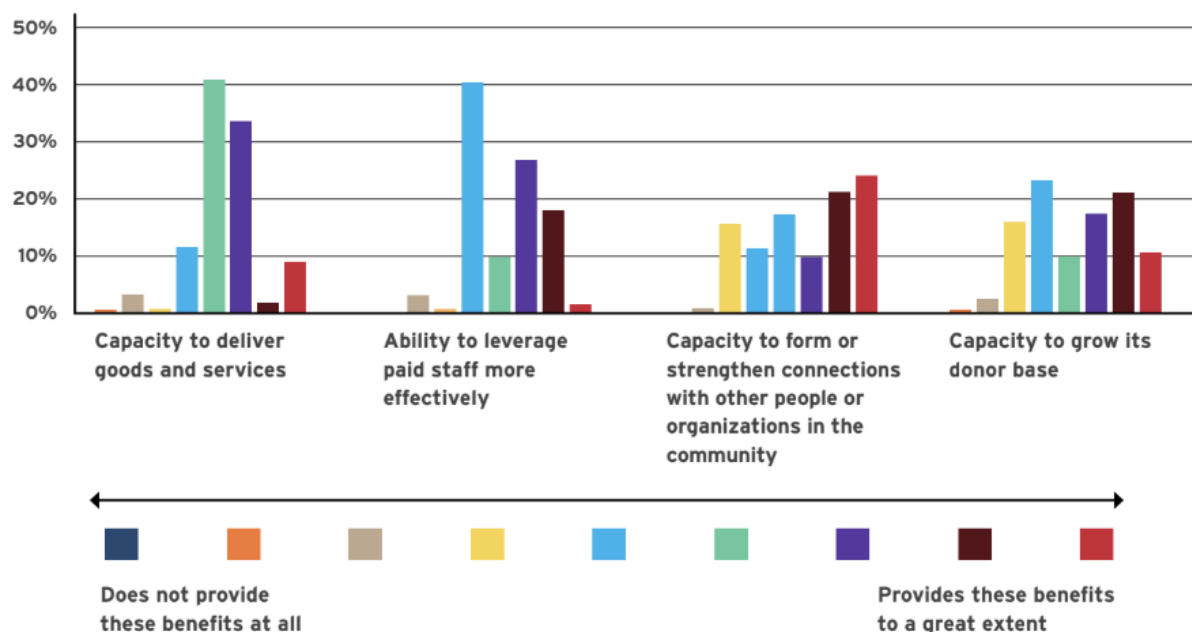
unsolicited requests for funding at all. Even most funders of volunteer engagement – excluding the 17.2 percent who do not accept unsolicited funding requests – report that most nonprofits never ask for this type of support. Only 5.5 percent of these funders say that more than half of the nonprofits they work with request funding for volunteer engagement; 28.2 percent report that they never receive such requests.

This raises the question: if more nonprofit organizations asked potential funders to support their volunteer engagement activities, would funders be receptive to their requests? The answer to this question depends on what philanthropic funders find valuable about providing funding for volunteer engagement – that is, not the benefits provided by volunteering (as seen in Figure 14) but the benefits of funding nonprofits so they can involve volunteers in their work. Figures 15a and 15b contain the results of direct questions, posed to both funder and non-funder organizations, about the perceived benefits of funding for volunteer engagement. The structure of the questions are similar to the ones illustrated by Figure 14: respondents were asked to describe four ways in which funding for volunteer engagement might enhance the capacity of nonprofit organizations, using a 1-9 scale, where 1 means “Does not provide these benefits at all” and 9 means “Provides these benefits to a great extent.”

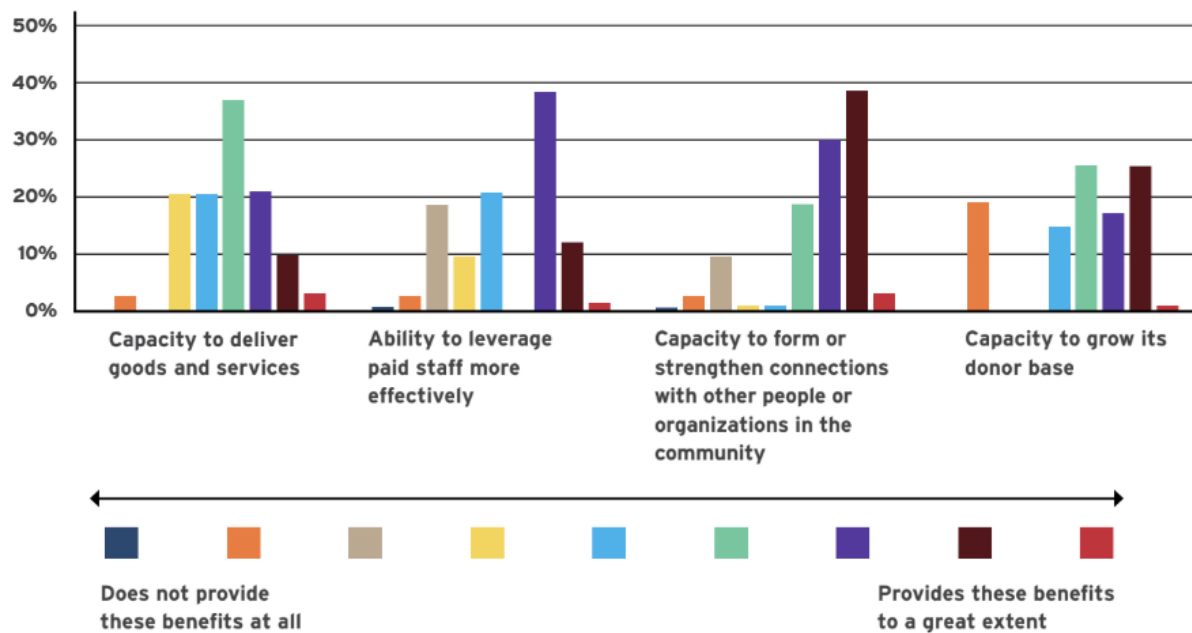
FIGURES 15A AND 15B: VALUE OF PHILANTHROPIC FUNDING FOR VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT

In your opinion, how much value does philanthropic funding for volunteer involvement add to nonprofit capacity in each of the following areas?

15A: Funders of Volunteer Engagement



15B: Non-Funders of Volunteer Engagement



As with Figure 14, we can compare the percentages of respondents in each group who rated each type of potential benefit as a 7, 8 or 9 on the 1-9 scale. Table 5 displays these results for funder and non-funder organizations:

TABLE 5: PERCENT AGREEING THAT FUNDING FOR VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT BUILDS NONPROFIT CAPACITY

Percent giving a 7, 8 or 9 on a nine-point scale, where 9 means "Provides these benefits to a great extent"

	FUNDERS	NON FUNDERS
Capacity to deliver goods and services	43.9%	32.2%
Ability to leverage paid staff more effectively	46.1%	50.6%
Capacity to form or strengthen connections with other people or organizations in the community	55.3%	70.2%
Capacity to grow its donor base	48.9%	42.1%

Like our earlier findings, these results suggest that non-funders are skeptical that investing in volunteer involvement will enhance the organization's ability to perform its core mission-related activities. They do believe it will help nonprofits strengthen connections with people and organizations within their community. In fact, the main difference between funders and non-funders appears to be that funders are more likely to perceive more different types of benefits from the resources they provide for volunteer engagement. Although funders are less likely than non-funders to believe strongly in the community-building benefits of volunteer engagement funding, this is still the benefit that attracts the most consensus among funders. These results suggest that organizations that have not funded volunteer engagement might be more likely to do so if nonprofits emphasized community benefits, rather than to their own internal capacity.

Finally, both funders and non-funders were asked to explain their organization's decisions to provide funding to nonprofits for volunteer engagement. Many of the results shown in Table 6 reinforce the results presented earlier in this section: community benefits seem to be among the primary motivations for these funding decisions. Funders also seem to be motivated by the internal capacity benefits that funding volunteer engagement provides to organizations - and by convincing evidence that the funding has a positive impact - but more than half say that they fund volunteer engagement simply because their grantees ask them to.

TABLE 6: REASONS WHY FUNDERS SUPPORT VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT

RESPONSE	PERCENTAGE
More funding for volunteer involvement would allow the organization to strengthen social ties among community members	63.7%
Organizations are better able to meet their missions when they involve volunteers strategically	56.3%
Our grantees ask us for funds to support volunteer involvement	50.6%
We have seen convincing evidence that volunteer involvement is associated with important organizational outcomes	50.5%
More funding for volunteer involvement would help organizations improve the amount and quality of the services they deliver	49.8%
More funding for volunteer involvement would enable more community members to have a satisfying volunteer experience	37.6%
More funding for volunteer involvement would allow organizations to enhance their stature and visibility within the community	35.9%
More funding for volunteer involvement would enable organizations to cultivate more donors	33.5%
With more funding for volunteer involvement, organizations could provide services in a more cost-efficient manner	32.5%
We work collaboratively with our grantees to see if they would benefit from more funding to support volunteer involvement	27.0%
Other	8.6%

Meanwhile, Table 7 contains the responses from the 35 non-funders in the sample about why their organization does not fund volunteer engagement. Consistent with the results presented earlier, most non-funders say that they do NOT provide funding for this activity because nobody ever asks for it. The other two most common answers suggest that they do not discourage organizations from funding volunteer engagement, but they do not provide funding explicitly for this activity. Surprisingly, no respondents said that they do not fund infrastructure, which

suggests that nonprofits might be surprised at the reaction if they formulated a funding request to a funder who had never indicated that they might support volunteer engagement.

A follow-up question for non-funders asked what factors would be most likely to convince them that their organization should fund volunteer engagement. The most common responses were that they would consider funding requests from organizations that could demonstrate that volunteer involvement had helped them improve the scope and impact of their programs (29.0 percent) or could present a persuasive plan describing how increased volunteer involvement would expand their programs and impact (36.6 percent). Only 11.1 percent said that they would fund such a request if someone only asked; however, only 0.6 percent said that no request would be effective and that the organization's leaders would need to decide to fund volunteer engagement.

TABLE 7: REASONS WHY NON-FUNDERS DO NOT SUPPORT VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT

RESPONSE	PERCENTAGE
Grantees do not request funding for volunteer involvement	59.0%
The organizations that approach us for funding generally support their volunteer involvement with other resources	35.0%
We provide general operating support; organizations can use it for volunteer involvement, but we do not direct or restrict it for that purpose	27.0%
Other	19.2%
I'm not sure how our organization should measure the effectiveness of funding for volunteer involvement	16.6%
We prioritize other organizational capacity needs but not explicitly volunteerism	10.8%
We fund systems/structures/policy, and volunteerism is not a lever or strategy within our theory of change	10.6%
I'm not sure how our organization can effectively fund volunteer involvement	8.3%
We fund specific causes/issues/community needs; and do not consider volunteerism as falling into these categories	4.1%
Volunteers are part of the infrastructure of an organization, and we do not fund infrastructure or organizational capacity	0.0%
Our priority is to fund our own internal employee volunteerism; we do not fund volunteer involvement for nonprofits	0.0%

DO NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS REQUEST FUNDING FOR VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT?

Given that funders might support volunteer engagement if nonprofits asked, we return to the nonprofit CEO survey to find out which funding sources nonprofits are most likely to approach. Figures 16a and 16b show the percentages of nonprofit CEOs who have requested funding from

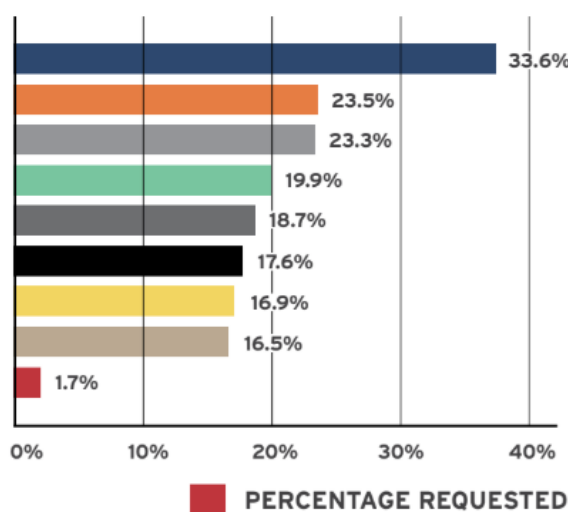
various sources (Figure 16a) and their success receiving financial support for volunteer involvement from various sources (Figure 16b). Neither figure includes the 35 percent of nonprofit CEOs who say that they have never asked for funding for volunteer engagement – even though their organizations involve volunteers, and, in many cases, have structural supports in place to derive benefits from volunteer engagement.

The results show that individual donors are the most common funding source approached by nonprofit leaders, and 74.3 percent of those requests are successful. The only funders who are more likely to fund requests for volunteer engagement are government agencies (80.7 percent), though many smaller nonprofits may have trouble meeting the capacity requirements for government funding. Nonprofits are nearly equally likely to have approached private foundations (23.5 percent) and community foundations (23.3 percent) but are more likely to receive funding from corporate foundations (74 percent success rate) than from any other type of foundation.

FIGURES 16A AND 16B: FUNDING REQUESTS, AND SUCCESS RATES, FOR VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT

16A: FUNDING REQUESTED

During your tenure as the chief executive officer, has your organization requested funding for volunteer involvement from any of the following external sources?



16B: FUNDING RECEIVED

During your tenure as the chief executive officer, has your organization received funding for volunteer involvement from any of the following external sources?

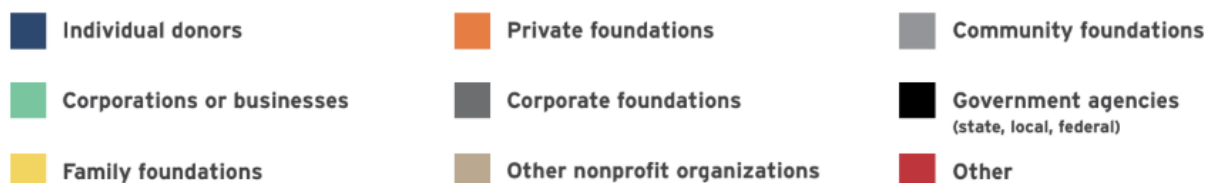
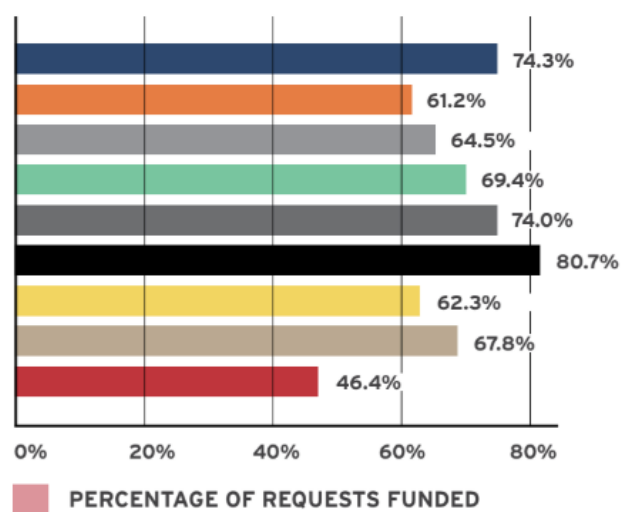


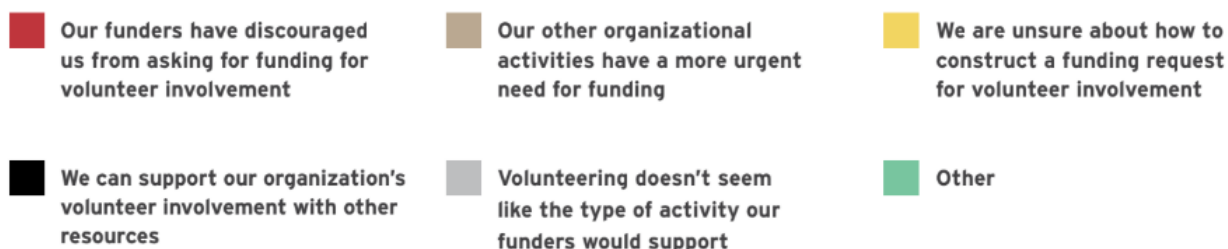
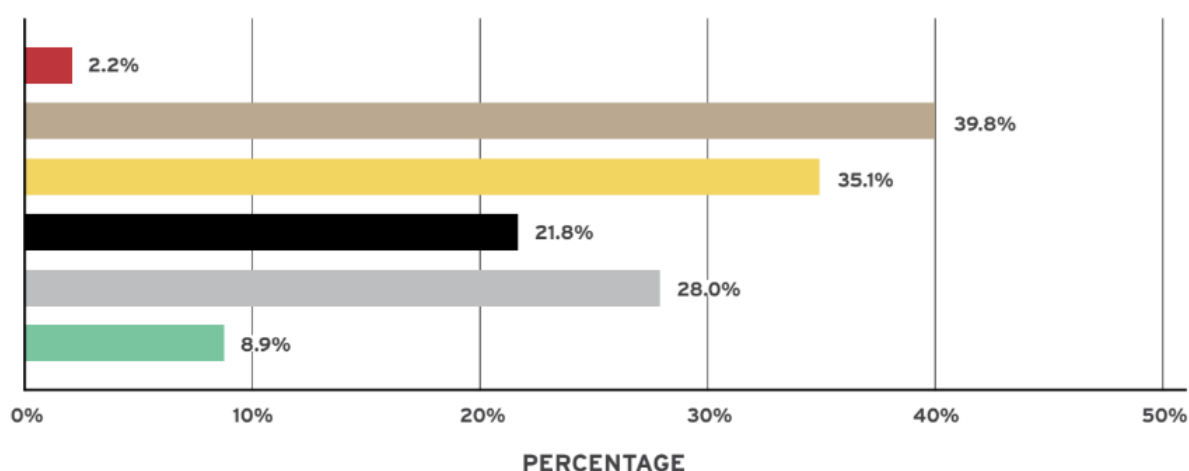
Figure 17 explains why 35 percent of nonprofits have never requested funding for volunteer

engagement. While many nonprofit leaders indicate that such fundraising is not a priority compared to other funding needs (39.8 percent) or that they can support volunteer engagement without external funds (21.8 percent), a sizable minority (35.1 percent) could probably benefit from some technical assistance with their funding requests.

The perception that funders would reject such a request seems to be more of a myth than the reality: while 28 percent of nonprofit leaders say that they don't believe their funders would grant a request for funding for volunteer engagement, hardly any of them (2.2 percent) say that they have actually been discouraged from asking.

FIGURE 17: WHY NONPROFITS HAVE NOT REQUESTED FUNDING FOR VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT

Which of the following reasons have influenced your decision not to seek funding for volunteer involvement?



HOW PHILANTHROPIC FUNDERS SUPPORT VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT

Although philanthropic funding organizations that support volunteer engagement help nonprofits directly by providing funding, the funders also report that they support volunteering in general in other ways. Table 8 contains the responses given by the 65 funders who shared the wide variety of tangible actions they take to support volunteer engagement.

The practice with the greatest degree of support is also the action that will encourage more nonprofits to request funding for volunteer engagement: 39.5 percent of funders say that they invite organizations to submit such requests. Almost 30 percent give funding preference to organizations that effectively engage volunteers, while more than 30 percent say that they help organizations build capacity for volunteer engagement by funding or providing training (32.9 percent) or encouraging organizations to find community institutions that can help with volunteer recruitment (30.1 percent). Many of these respondents also report that they help to build the evidence base for volunteer engagement by asking their grantees to report on volunteer engagement, especially on how volunteers improve program performance and impact (25.3 percent). Others say that they support volunteer engagement by encouraging their own staff to use their specialized skills as volunteers (30.4 percent) or by providing pro bono contributions of professional services (28.1 percent).

TABLE 8: WHAT DO FUNDERS DO TO SUPPORT VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT?

RESPONSE	PERCENTAGE
We encourage organizations to specifically request funding for volunteer involvement	39.5%
We specifically ask our grantees to report back to us about how they engage volunteers	34.1%
We fund, or provide, training for staff and/or volunteer leaders in volunteer involvement	32.9%
We provide paid time off for our own staff to volunteer their skills to perform business functions of organizations (technology, finances, etc.)	30.4%
We encourage our grantees to partner with local institutions that can serve as sources of volunteers (e.g., businesses, religious institutions, schools, community organizations)	30.1%
We give funding preference to organizations that engage volunteers effectively	29.5%
We ask organizations to report on the number of volunteers they have and the hours they served	28.5%
We provide in-kind contributions of professional services to organizations (pro bono legal, accounting, etc.)	28.1%
We ask organizations to report on the ways in which volunteers improved the performance or impact of programs	25.3%
We allow volunteer contributions to be leveraged as an organizational “match” to funding we provide	16.0%
Other	9.8%

The survey also asked funders what they do to advertise their support for volunteer engagement. While only 30.0 percent say that they don’t do anything to publicize their own work, very few

organizations have a multi-pronged strategy for advertising their support for volunteering to their grantees and potential grantees. The most popular response (43.7 percent) was to advertise the volunteer work performed by the funder organization's own employees instead of the work done by their grantees. Of respondents, 33.5 percent say that they have published a statement about the importance of volunteer involvement to their organization, while 31.2 percent report that they encourage their employees to perform their own volunteer work or to take on "pro bono" assignments. These results suggest funders of volunteer involvement could do a lot more to communicate their financial support for it.

We also asked both funders and nonprofit CEOs to rate the importance of various ways one could evaluate the value of volunteer engagement, which allows us to compare the performance measurement strategies preferred by funders and nonprofit leaders. Table 9 shows that funders overwhelmingly believe that it is "very important" for nonprofits to collect feedback from three main groups of people: volunteers (98.5 percent), employees (96.4 percent) and community members who receive services (83.5 percent). While nonprofit leaders tend to agree on the importance of collecting feedback from volunteers (85.3 percent believe this is "very important"), fewer of them seem to think that collecting feedback from employees and service recipients is critical.

TABLE 9: MEASURING THE SUCCESS OF VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT: VIEWS OF FUNDERS AND NONPROFITS

Nonprofit organizations can assess the overall impact of the contributions made by volunteers in a number of ways. Would you say that it is very important, somewhat important, or not very important for nonprofits to assess the contributions of volunteers in each of the following ways?

Percentages represent the percent of respondents who believe each strategy is “very important”	NON PROFITS	FUNDERS
Obtaining feedback from those who volunteer	85.3%	98.5%
Obtaining feedback from employees	59.8%	96.4%
Obtaining feedback from community members who receive services	64.5%	83.5%
Staff are freed up to do work for which they are uniquely suited	53.9%	64.4%
Increased reach (numbers of clients served or geographic reach) as a result of volunteer involvement	58.1%	57.3%
Retention of current volunteers	83.7%	57.3%
Increased quality of services provided	73.3%	53.9%
Obtaining feedback from organizational partners	41.5%	53.8%
Counts of the hours served by volunteers	64.4%	51.3%
Continued or increasing financial support from funders for programming	71.0%	44.0%
Counts of the number of people who volunteer	67.0%	43.6%
Performing an internal assessment of how volunteers contribute to the organization's mission and goals	44.4%	42.8%
Obtaining feedback from board members	43.5%	41.5%
Increased donations from those who volunteer	41.1%	25.1%
Hiring an external contractor to conduct a rigorous evaluation of how volunteer involvement helps the organization advance its mission	7.5%	4.2%

Nonprofit leaders seem to attach more importance to the collection of common performance measures such as number of volunteers, hours served and volunteer retention than funders do. Nonprofits are also more likely to believe that improved quality of service delivery and the donation rate among volunteers are key indicators of volunteer engagement effectiveness. This last result is noteworthy because less than half of all funding organizations (funders and non-funders) agree that this result is a probable benefit of funding for volunteer engagement (as seen in Table 5).

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON FUNDERS AND FUNDING PRIORITIES

The final questions on the funder survey asked respondents to discuss some especially timely issues: how (or whether) they have changed their approach to funding volunteer engagement

during the COVID-19 pandemic and what changes they would like to see nonprofits adopt in the way they engage with volunteers. The pandemic does not seem to have stimulated very many changes in the funding practices of organizations that could – and in many cases, do – support volunteer engagement. Most respondents (87.2 percent) indicated that their organization had not changed its strategy on this issue at all during the pandemic. Of the very small number of organizations that had changed their strategy, almost all reported that they are funding volunteer engagement initiatives for fewer organizations today than they had before the pandemic. Among the 27.6 percent of funder organizations who report receiving funding requests for volunteer engagement, almost all of them say the number of requests has neither increased nor decreased.

If funders have not changed their approach to funding volunteer engagement since the pandemic began, would they change their minds if they knew what nonprofits did to enhance their engagement of volunteers? Table 10 compares responses from the funder survey and nonprofit survey that suggest possible answers to this question.

The last question on the funder survey reads, “In your opinion, which of the following practices do you think would be especially effective in helping organizations involve volunteers to further their missions?” A similar question was posed to nonprofit CEOs: “In the past year, what strategies or ideas have you used to make your organization’s volunteer involvement as effective as possible (that may or may not have been in response to COVID)?” Although neither question asks respondents specifically about changes that have been made, or should be made, in response to the pandemic, COVID-19 certainly provides background for the responses of both groups.

TABLE 10: WHAT NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS DID DURING THE PANDEMIC- AND WHAT FUNDERS WOULD LIKE TO SEE

	NON PROFITS	FUNDERS
Investing more resources into volunteer engagement	21.6%	56.7%
Using technology in new ways to support volunteers (i.e. online training, meetings)	28.9%	53.0%
Training staff on how to lead and support volunteers	11.5%	52.7%
Evaluating the impact of the volunteers' work	18.9%	49.3%
Reaching out to new groups or communities to involve as volunteers (communities of color, youth, etc.)	33.1%	45.2%
Using technology in new ways to communicate with and track volunteers (i.e. volunteer database, virtual newsletters)	29.9%	45.0%
Involving volunteers in new roles and positions in the organization	33.0%	44.3%
Adding volunteer positions designed specifically for shorter term volunteers	23.9%	44.1%
Creating more remote and virtual volunteer opportunities	31.3%	38.0%
Increasing the use of social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) to promote volunteer opportunities	37.2%	37.2%
Increasing the flexibility of when volunteers can volunteer	35.2%	33.3%
Involving more student interns	22.3%	32.3%
Improving the organization's website to facilitate contact with volunteers (i.e., online application, sign up options)	29.2%	31.7%
Increasing staff time devoted to engaging volunteers	13.8%	26.6%
Streamlining practices for volunteer intake, screening, placement or training	23.4%	23.5%
Involving volunteers in leadership positions or managing projects	22.7%	20.5%
Helping staff understand that volunteers do not replace paid staff	6.9%	19.9%
Developing new ways to transition volunteers into new roles or out of volunteering when life or interest changes occur	12.2%	19.6%
Developing new ways of recognizing the contributions of volunteers	21.3%	14.0%
Setting up a volunteer advisory committee or task force	5.1%	13.3%
Increasing internal advocacy for the volunteer program to build support from other staff administration and board members	6.6%	10.5%
Incorporating volunteer engagement into all staff position descriptions	11.5%	6.1%

As Table 10 illustrates, nonprofit organizations have made many changes to their volunteer engagement practices during the pandemic, but only some of these changes align with what funders would most like to see. Of the top ten actions that funders would most like to see nonprofits take, seven are also in the top ten most common actions taken by nonprofits. However, the most frequently adopted change by nonprofits – increasing the use of social media to promote volunteer opportunities – is only tenth on the list of actions recommended by funders.

The rest of the top five actions taken by nonprofits – increasing the flexibility of when volunteers can volunteer; recruiting volunteers from a variety of communities; involving volunteers in new roles and positions in the organization; and creating more remote and virtual volunteer opportunities – are all strategies that nonprofits have been using to confront their number one challenge: finding more volunteers.

Meanwhile, only one of the top four actions recommended by funders (using technology in new ways to support volunteers) is in the top ten actions taken by nonprofits in the past year. Table 10 suggests that both participants in the discussion about funding for volunteer engagement would benefit from a better understanding of the other side's position. Nonprofits would appreciate hearing what funders would like to see – especially if they have already taken steps to address these concerns – and funders would certainly want to know what nonprofits are facing, and how they have responded, to the current challenges of volunteer engagement.

CONCLUSION

The results from the two surveys conducted for this project – one of nonprofit chief executive officers, and the other of representatives from philanthropic organizations – give a unique perspective on the state of volunteer engagement in the nonprofit sector. The nonprofit CEO survey carries on a tradition of assessing the ability of organizations to involve volunteers in a meaningful way in their mission-related activities. The 2003 Volunteer Management Capacity (VMC) study was motivated by practical concerns about an aspirational goal: If many more Americans answered the president's call to service, which was issued in response to the tragedies of September 11, 2001, would nonprofit organizations (congregations and secular charities) be able to manage the increased workload and help volunteers help communities?

Twenty years after 9/11, the concern expressed by many is not how the nonprofit sector can handle a surge of volunteers, but how organizations can find volunteers. The COVID-19 pandemic may have disrupted the normal flow of activity for volunteers and the places where they work, but the decline in civic behaviors seems to have begun a few years before then. This places the ongoing concerns about the capacity of organizations to engage volunteers in a new context: if nonprofits had challenges engaging volunteers before the pandemic, how different – and, potentially, how much worse – might these challenges be today?

The nonprofit CEO survey establishes some fundamental facts about the current situation: Many nonprofits may have slightly more capacity to engage volunteers than they did before the pandemic, in that volunteer engagement professionals (VEPs) spend more time on this task than they did twenty years ago, and organizations without VEPs are more likely to have someone who plays this role than they were before the pandemic. In many organizations, the VEP or (unpaid) volunteer engagement specialist reports to a senior executive who takes a proactive stance toward overseeing volunteering and encourages volunteers and their managers to interact with paid staff and the board of directors. The pandemic has profoundly changed the market for the

services delivered by nonprofit organizations, and the demand for volunteers – which makes nonprofit leaders more convinced of the benefits of volunteer engagement, but also more aware of the challenges of this work, especially when they are confronting shortfalls of people who can serve.

The funder survey – the first of its kind – indicates that requests for funding for volunteer engagement from potential grantees are uncommon occurrences, even when the funders have a track record of supporting this work directly. The survey results suggest that both funders and nonprofits could benefit from a better understanding of what funders value: the potential benefit of funding volunteer engagement that has the most resonance for philanthropic organizations (both funders and non-funders of this activity) is that such funding helps the organization form or strengthen relationships within their communities. If nonprofit organizations are not approaching potential funders with requests for volunteer engagement funding because they doubt that funders would want to fund capacity building, they might rethink their strategy if they knew what really appealed to funders. By the same token, if funders knew how much trouble many nonprofits were having with volunteer recruitment – which might be an indicator of an overall “generosity crisis” – they might be more receptive to funding requests that emphasized the ability of nonprofit organizations to build civil society.