



# Volunteering

**SUMMARY:** Cultural, demographic, and technological changes are altering volunteer expectations and experiences in an increasingly dynamic and digital organizational environment. Associations and nonprofits are experimenting with more flexible roles and structures to support collaboration and contribution.



## Forecasts

- The aging and retirement of a large percentage of older workers will lead to the hollowing-out of institutional knowledge of organizations that rely on these older workers serving in volunteer capacities.
- The rise of new business models—for instance, distributed networks of ad hoc teams instead of traditional hierarchies—will pose a challenge to established volunteering models. Younger volunteers using social media and online tools will be more inclined to organize from the bottom up and avoid working through an organization’s centralized hierarchy.
- Improvements in media and communications technology, productivity programs, and association management software will enable more seamless blending of volunteer versus paid staff positions in organizations.
- Different generational experiences and expectations could lead to innovations in volunteering and reshape how volunteering is conducted; for example, microvolunteering features lower levels of commitment and smaller tasks.

## Key Uncertainties

*Evolution and public acceptance of new reputation systems*



*Impact of automation in professional fields*



*Generational differences in attitudes toward online work and socializing*



*Evolution of flexible-work practices and technologies*



*Impacts of baby boomer retirements*



## Supporting Trends

- **Virtual volunteering.** More volunteering is happening online. Younger volunteers are providing online services, especially for cause-driven organizations, by engaging through social media or extending an advocacy or fundraising campaign to their social networks.
- **Mobile tools for today's activist.** A growing number of online tools allow people to easily participate in political or social activism.
- **Gig work for good.** Taking a page from short-term gig work, dozens of microvolunteering websites have sprung up to serve people seeking to volunteer in short stints that they can fit into busy schedules.
- **Occupational licensing on the rise.** Over the past several decades, the number of American workers and professions that require licensing has grown substantially.
- **Graying America.** The number of Americans 65 and older is growing and expected to double by 2050. This means that the share of Americans in this age group is projected to grow from 13 percent of the overall population in 2010 to 22 percent in 2050.
- **Millennials less attached to tradition.** While Americans of every generation have loosened their ties to traditional institutions, millennials are at the forefront of this trend. Conversely, millennials will join professional organizations but need the right incentives.

### Related Drivers of Change

- The Next-Gen Professionals
- Automating Work
- Aging World

## Notable Data Points

### RATE OF VOLUNTEERING IN US GROWS

The volunteer rate in the U.S. was 30% in 2018, up from 25% in 2016, with the total number of **volunteers in 2018 at 77 million, compared to 63 million in 2016.**

Source: The Corporation for National and Community Service, "Volunteering in America"

### GEN X IS GENERATION V(OLUNTEER)

**Gen Xers lead all generations in volunteering rates, with a 36% volunteer rate.**

Boomers follow at 30%, millennials at 28%, and the silent generation at 25%.

Source: The Corporation for National and Community Service, "Volunteering in America"



## Strategic Insights

- Transforming association volunteering toward more flexible, project-focused models could provide new opportunities to attract younger, ambitious volunteers by offering them a lower threshold of commitment along with activities that match their expectations for responsibility and achievement.
- Associations could explore how to deploy reputation systems to enhance accountability and transparency among volunteers. Innovative approaches like “gamification” of volunteering activities could create new incentives and expand volunteer participation.
- New organizational-reputation systems and the adoption of HR management approaches could drive greater professionalization of volunteer roles. This could blur the lines between staff and volunteer activities in some organizations.
- Digitization and the accelerating rate of change are bringing greater complexity and uncertainty to many organizational environments, increasing the need to accelerate decision making. This poses challenges for traditional volunteer boards and committees and increases the need to explore new decision-making processes.
- Philanthropic and charitable organizations are likely to provide attractive volunteer opportunities for retiring baby boomers. Associations should not assume that their current volunteers will not pursue alternative volunteer opportunities after retirement.

### Timing

- **Stage:** This field is mature but unsettled, with multiple forces weighing on it.
- **Speed:** Medium, but could be accelerated by a retirement wave.

### Potential Alternative Futures

- **Organizational analytics:** Ubiquitous data collection and new reputation systems enable much better metrics for tracking the productivity and effectiveness of volunteers.
- **Volunteering boom:** The boomer retirement wave ends up generating a compensatory volunteer wave.
- **White-collar automation:** AI and automation displace workers from “rote” intellectual tasks, increasing the importance of the social and emotional skills of volunteers.



## Take Action

- **Match members to their ideal volunteer opportunity.** New and younger members might welcome a microvolunteering task for a manageable introduction to service. Older and retiring members might be ready to ease into advisory and mentoring roles. Discover members' unique skills and passions and help them find meaningful opportunities.
- **Shrink time and break down tasks.** Get rid of expectations that people must pay their dues and serve their time. Redefine what qualifies someone to serve. Reimagine how the work of boards and committees can be deconstructed into doable jobs that good volunteers can accept. Associations can function well with a healthy blend of agility and continuity.
- **Automate and coordinate the volunteer experience.** The right technology infrastructure can shepherd members through every step of their volunteer journey: member databases that track and recognize service; learning management systems that support orientation and training; and effective communication and collaboration platforms that are user-friendly. Give volunteers the tools to make volunteering easy and fun.
- **Validate, recognize, and reward.** People build their professional reputations and networks through volunteering. Associations can use new forms of reputation systems such as social media and digital badging to help members tell a powerful story about their contributions to the profession or industry. As more volunteer interaction occurs virtually, associations must facilitate connection and recognition in new ways.
- **Train staff for volunteer success.** Staff will be key to coordinating a diversity of volunteer experiences. They will need enhanced skillsets in project management and customer service. Associations that encourage staff to become volunteers themselves can increase their appreciation for the role.
- **Calculate your volunteer ROI.** Done right, volunteer management is a cost center. Associations need metrics for quantifying and valuing all that volunteers make possible through their gifts of time and talent.

## Keyword Search

To continue researching this change driver, use these search terms:

***volunteering, volunteerism, microvolunteering, volunteering and associations, millennials and volunteering, retirement and volunteering, volunteer management, volunteer management system***

### Who Will Be Affected

The future of volunteering looks very promising for associations prepared to take advantage of demographic shifts, work preferences, and technological capabilities. Generous people will give their time somewhere, and nonprofit organizations that match their changing expectations will have the competitive advantage that can unlock every other resource they need to succeed.

### About ASAE ForesightWorks

ASAE ForesightWorks is a deliberate, evidence-based research program and emerging line of products to provide association professionals with a continual stream of intelligence about the changes facing the association industry, including:

- regularly updated action briefs;
- tools for applying insights from the research in your association;
- guidance in performing environmental scans; and
- opportunities to engage with peers around the research.

Ultimately, the program's mission is to empower association leaders to create a culture of foresight.

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