

Volunteer Perspective

Industry Insights 2019



Each year, Sterling Volunteers conducts in-depth research in collaboration with a valued partner. This year, we teamed up with VolunteerMatch to provide volunteer insights on screening, training, recruiting, retention, and more. Thank you to VolunteerMatch for your dedication and working together to provide this informative report for the service sector.

Sterling Volunteers

Sterling Volunteers is the only volunteer background screening service dedicated to the nonprofit and service sector to help organizations fulfill their missions and positively impact communities. We have the largest network of vetted volunteers ready to mobilize when opportunities arise.

sterlingvolunteers.com



VolunteerMatch

VolunteerMatch offers online services that strengthen communities by matching good people with good causes and provides resources for organizations to support corporate social responsibility initiatives.

volunteermatch.org





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Leadership Thoughts

We asked leaders from each organization to share their thoughts on volunteering, the survey results, their organizations and more.



Katie Zwetzig

Executive Director,
Sterling Volunteers

Q Tell us a little bit about yourself?

A I believe volunteering is at the heart of a strong community. I am blessed to be in a family whose generations have supported communities through service. My grandparents and parents were Boy Scout and Girl Scout leaders, City Councilmen, Masons, Lion's Club members, PBS volunteers, school volunteers, whatever was needed. Serving others easily became the fabric of our family.

Q Why did Sterling Volunteers — formerly Verified Volunteers — choose to partner with VolunteerMatch on this report?

A Sterling Volunteers has produced an annual research report for the past four years, focusing on valuable insights from nonprofit organizations. This year, we wanted to learn from the volunteers' perspective and who better to partner with than VolunteerMatch.



I love the data showing that 75% of volunteers serve at more than one organization.

Q What's next for Sterling Volunteers? What's new and exciting?

A So much is new and exciting! We are currently working with partners and clients to find out how we can help display their volunteer opportunities and connect them with vetted volunteers. We are also launching a digital credential product that can be used to check volunteers in and out of an organization, track hours and provide communications. And, that's all coming in the first half of the year!

Q What's your biggest takeaway from the report?

A I love the data showing that 75% of volunteers serve at more than one organization. This data supports a portable background check and our mission of building a community of vetted volunteers where one background check, at one price, can be shared among multiple organizations.



Greg Baldwin
CEO, VolunteerMatch

Q Tell us a little bit about yourself?

A I joined the organization as a volunteer from my bedroom in Boston and was on the team VolunteerMatch 1.0 in the spring of 1998. I've been volunteering with my parents since I was a kid and am passionate about helping people find opportunities they're passionate about.

Q What's next for VolunteerMatch? What's new and exciting?

Q Why did VolunteerMatch choose to partner with Sterling Volunteers on this report?

A You need to be able to trust the organization you serve. Sterling Volunteers is the only provider dedicated to working with the nonprofit sector to ensure we've got the information needed to build strong, safe and trusting relationships with volunteers. We are proud to help the nonprofit community better understand what inspires and motivates volunteers, along with their attitudes toward background screening.

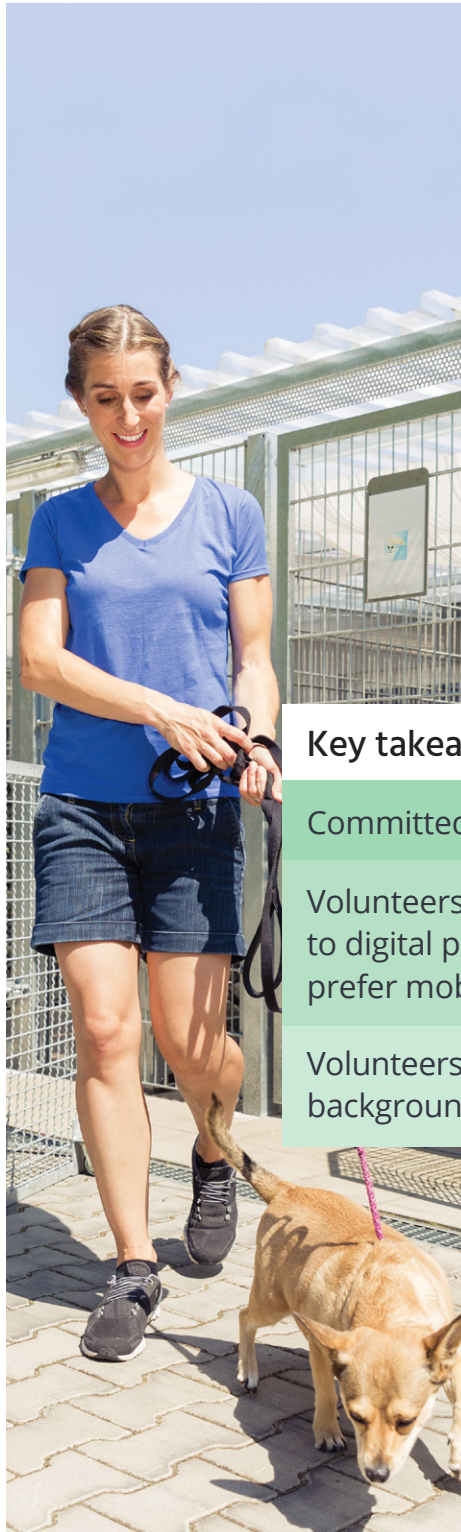
“**Today's volunteers recognize the benefits and importance of a thorough background check.**”

A We are the web's largest volunteer engagement network. For over 20 years, we've helped facilitate 14 million connections between volunteers and organizations. Today, we help more than 120,000 community-based organizations find the volunteers they need to make a difference. We are working on a bunch of projects to make our service better, smarter and easier to access from other digital platforms.

Q What's your biggest takeaway from the report?

A My biggest takeaway is that most volunteers see background checks as a positive part of the volunteering experience. Less than 5% of volunteers report background screening as a negative. Today's volunteers recognize the benefits and importance of a thorough background check.

A New Perspective in 2019



Each year, we report on the volunteer and nonprofit industry, asking people who run volunteer programs about their operations and the challenges they face — particularly in regard to volunteer onboarding and background checks.

This year, we turned our focus to volunteers themselves, offering those who give their time an opportunity to share their perspective. We surveyed a group of volunteers from VolunteerMatch and asked who they are, how they like to volunteer, why they volunteer, what they think about volunteer background checks, and more.

Key takeaways:

Committed volunteers lean in to giving.

Volunteers age 35 and older are open to digital platforms, but don't always prefer mobile.

Volunteers are interested in a portable background check.

Looking back to 2018

Last year we asked nonprofit organizations about their experiences with volunteer screening. Below you'll find some of the most notable results to keep in mind as you read the rest of this report.

Demand for criminal records searches is increasing

Organizations are increasing their usage of most types of criminal searches.

Organizations need to budget for volunteer screening

Background screening was the second costliest aspect of volunteer programs, behind staffing in 2018.

Renewal screening is becoming more common

More than 20% of organizations rescreened volunteers in 2018 — an increase from 2017.

Who Responded

Volunteer Perspective

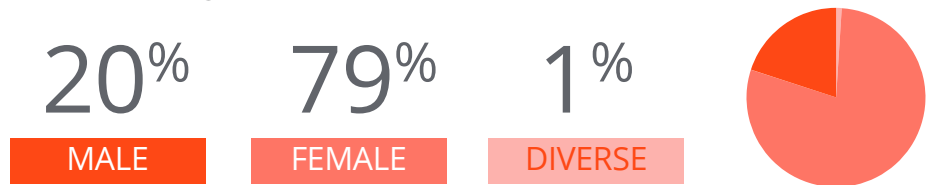
The Volunteer Perspective – Industry Insights 2019 report was researched and produced by Sterling Volunteers. It includes survey responses from more than 7,000 volunteers, sourced from VolunteerMatch and was administered in September–October 2018.

The data contained in this report is designed to provide the volunteer community and those managing volunteer programs insights into volunteers’ needs, motivations and preferences and to help organizations build stronger volunteer programs.

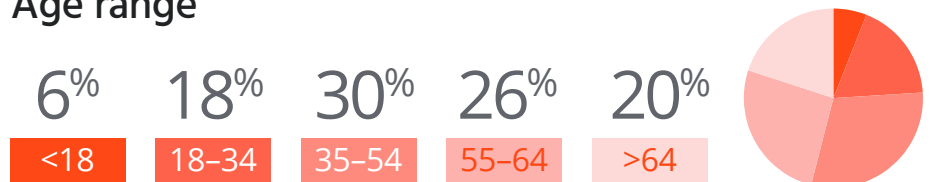
7,215
VOLUNTEERS

from VolunteerMatch responded to our online survey, conducted September – October 2018

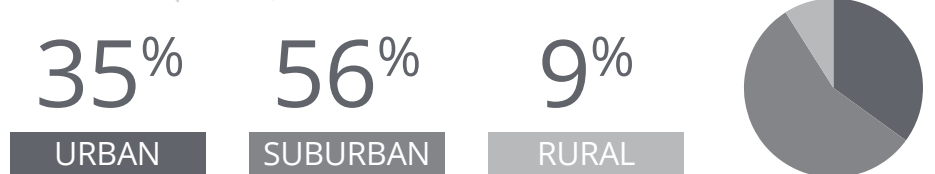
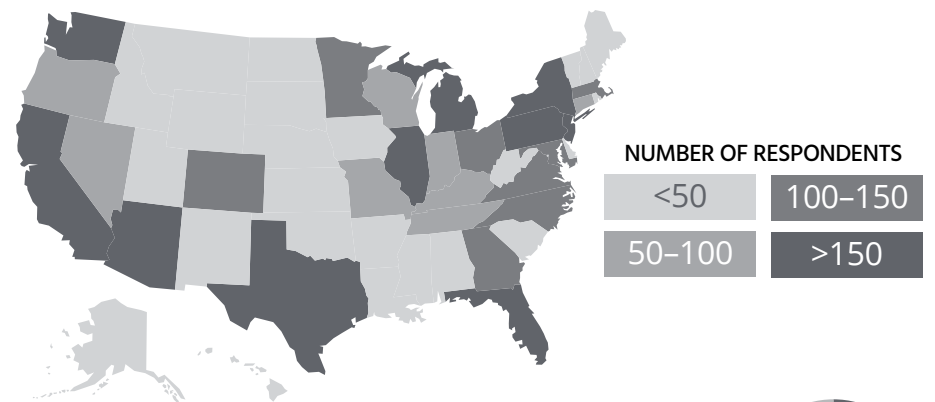
How they gender identify



Age range



Where they volunteer and live



Volunteer Insights

Background screening is just one way Sterling Volunteers offers safety and security to the volunteer and nonprofit industry. Here, we take a closer look at how volunteers prefer to operate and why. We asked, “why do you volunteer?”



Reasons for Volunteering

Recognition Tip



Volunteers prefer their work to be recognized with opportunities and personal notes over gifts.

More than two-thirds of respondents said they would most prefer to be recognized with handwritten thank you notes and kudos from staff members, or by being selected for special opportunities.

Respondents were also given the option to write in their personal motivation for volunteering.



Many stated they are compelled to volunteer for spiritual and ethical reasons.

“I am blessed and have gratitude... believe the best gift you can give is your time.”

“I believe we each have a moral obligation to contribute to our communities and to help those in need.”



Others said they volunteer because it makes them feel good about themselves, or improves their self-esteem.

“It makes me feel good knowing I have brought joy or [addressed] a need in somebody’s life.”

“Giving back is good for the soul... it is a joy to see the smiles of gratitude.”



Some volunteer to honor someone they care about or have lost.

“My husband and I volunteer in honor of our daughter... she was extremely involved in the community and we know it is what she would want us to do.”

Standout Volunteer Trends



We asked volunteers about their volunteering habits and preferences. We found that an overwhelming majority of volunteers agreed on their responses in many cases — sometimes 80% or more. That’s four out of five volunteers. Together, these results reveal that today’s volunteers are committed to giving back in multiple ways.

Four out of five:

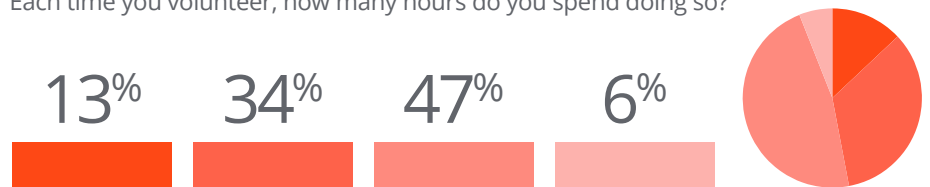
Volunteer at least a few times per year.

84% of respondents volunteer at least a few times a year. More than a quarter volunteer once a week or more frequently.

Four out of five:

Give 2 to 5 hours of their time when they volunteer.

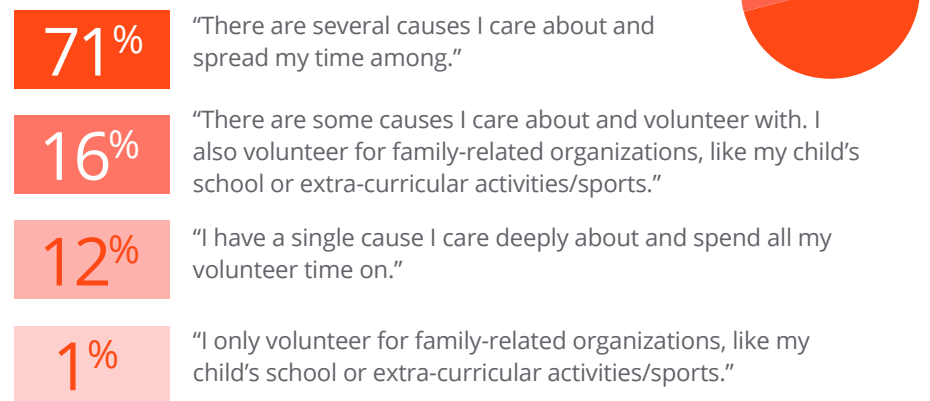
Each time you volunteer, how many hours do you spend doing so?



Interestingly, more respondents give five hours or more of their time than give one hour or less.

Greater than four out of five:

Care about more than one cause.



Notably, only 12% of respondents have a single cause they care deeply about and contribute all their volunteer hours towards.

Deeper Dive



Volunteers that work with multiple organizations tend to give more

Results found that the more organizations a volunteer works with, the more time they'll give each time they volunteer. In fact, nearly one in five (18%) of those involved with four or more volunteer programs give more than five hours each time they volunteer, while only about one in ten (12%) of those who work with three or fewer organizations will donate that much of their time per volunteering opportunity.

Additionally, nearly half (49%) of volunteers who give more than five hours each time they volunteer say they are "much more willing" to make a financial contribution to the organization they volunteer with — significantly more than those who regularly volunteer for one to five hours.

Four out of five:

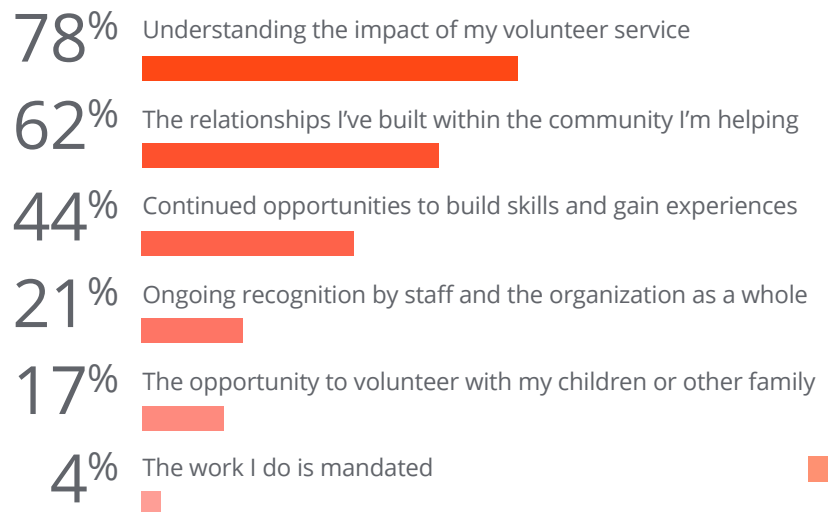
Are more willing to donate to an organization they volunteer with.

83% of respondents were at least somewhat more willing to donate or make an in-kind donation to an organization they volunteer with, among those who selected a definitive survey answer.

Four out of five:

Say that understanding the impact of their volunteer service keeps them engaged.

What keeps volunteers engaged?



Did You Know



Good news!

Sterling Volunteers is releasing a volunteering-focused picture ID/credential in early 2019.



Many volunteers also stated that what kept them engaged was specific to the cause they're giving to.

"The 'magic' of pet therapy can't truly be described, but once you've been part of it, you want to be part of it more and more! It's as magical for the volunteers as it is for the individuals with whom we interact."



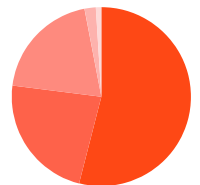
Others stay engaged because they want to set a good example.

"[I stay engaged to show] my daughter the importance of volunteering and giving back to the community."

"[I stay engaged to help] others see how helping for free can be beneficial."

Finding a fit

If there were a way for volunteer organizations to reach out to you with open volunteer positions in your area, how interested would you be?



54%

"I'd love to keep on top of what's available in my area!"

23%

"Let the opportunities come to me so I don't have to search!"

20%

"I'd take a look and see if an opportunity sparks my interest"

2%

"I am good with my current volunteer roles/ organizations and don't need to see others"

1%

"I do not want additional organizations contacting me"

Volunteering in the Digital Age

Deeper Dive



Volunteers and mobile browsing: a complicated relationship

Most marketing experts will recommend optimizing your website for mobile browsing first and desktop browsing second — and for good reason. According to Statista.com 52% of web traffic in 2018 was from a mobile phone.

However, only 14% of those aged 35 years and older prefer to “sign up for volunteer opportunities and complete necessary forms to get started” on their phones. But that’s not to say that population is computer averse — 89% still prefer a digital platform over pen and paper.

Additionally, 40% of Sterling Volunteers orders come in via mobile users. Considering all this information together, we recommend optimizing both your mobile and desktop experience, without prioritizing one over the other.

Unsurprisingly, about 90% of respondents prefer digital over paper when communicating with volunteer organizations. Moreover, when asked about their interest in a volunteer ID credential that proves their identity and screening status, tracks trainings and volunteer hours, and allows them to check in at volunteer locations, more than two-thirds of respondents said they would find both digital and paper IDs useful.

It’s clear that volunteer program managers need to be prepared to engage with volunteers online — but it’s important to understand what kind of content they’re looking for online and when they might prefer an offline approach.

Volunteers find new opportunities online, through friends and by networking

The most common ways volunteers find organizations and opportunities are with an online platform, such as VolunteerMatch (57%), through friends (44%), on social media (39%), and via online searches (38%).

Three out of four volunteers prefer in-person training among those who prefer a specific kind of training

And 37% of all respondents prefer some combination of online training, in-person training and training that uses pamphlets and guides.



Which features would you want in an online volunteer community?

Sterling Volunteers and our partners have begun to build an online volunteer community; we took the opportunity to hear from volunteers themselves on what they would want most in their new community.



Did You Know



Learn more about the onboarding process

Sterling Volunteers offers organizations and volunteers the opportunity to learn about the onboarding process, including background checks.

To learn more, visit sterlingvolunteers.com/events.



As evidenced, a clear majority of respondents were on board with the idea of an online volunteer community. Several were interested in a way to share volunteering knowledge, stories and experiences.

“Volunteers sharing their stories with others that want to volunteer could be meaningful.”

“Personal stories of volunteers’ reasons for activism, as well as new friendly encounters.”



Many reiterated their interest in some of the features listed above, like a volunteer opportunity search, including more specific features.

“Mostly the search for volunteer opportunities with filters to search type (virtual or in person), location, descriptions, [etc.]”

“Would like a clean clear search using ZIP code — some websites are very cumbersome [to use] to find locations.”



And a few were interested in being able to screen organizations.

“[Checking the] credibility of volunteer organizations and how they are rated by their volunteers.”

[Finding] other organizations through the organization that I’m with.”

Screening and Background Checks

Did You Know



Sterling Volunteers doesn't need a volunteer's social security number to access criminal records.

In fact, these records are filed by name, not social security number. We access this information to run a Social Security Trace which reveals the addresses and additional names associated with a volunteer. This allows us to perform a broad, high-quality check.

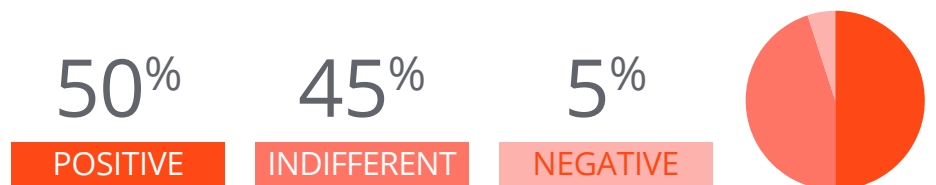


Sterling Volunteers is at the forefront of volunteer screening, helping volunteers and nonprofits navigate and conduct their background checks. In particular, we were curious how much volunteers know about the process and what they think about it.

Almost all respondents were at least somewhat familiar with what makes up a background check

Only 6% of respondents said they were not at all familiar with what makes up a background check, what it includes and how the process works.

Most volunteers said background checks have a positive impact on their volunteering experience



Less than 5% of respondents said that a background check negatively affects how they feel about volunteering. Half consider it a positive.

56% More than half of respondents aren't concerned about undergoing background checks if they know their data is secure. Among those who did have concerns about background checks, 63% cited "disclosing my social security number" as their primary concern.

Deeper Dive



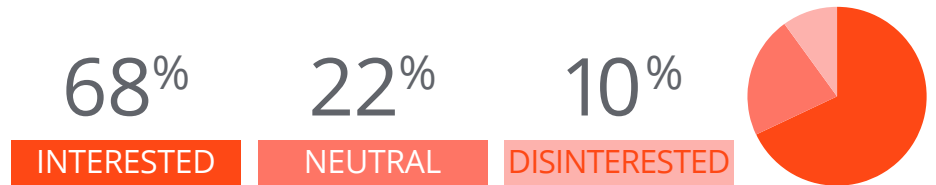
Education in background checks

58% of volunteers who said they are very familiar with background checks also said that background checks strongly affect how they feel about volunteering in a positive way, versus 35% of those who are not at all familiar, and 10% who replied “neutral.”

Additionally, 40% of “very familiar” respondents said they would be willing to spend \$20 on a portable background check, versus only 32% of those not at all familiar, and 26% neutral.

This suggests that the more effort organizations put into educating volunteers about the process and value of background checks, the more willing they’ll be to have a background check done, and cover or share the cost.

More than two-thirds of respondents are interested in a volunteering-focused picture ID/credential



The majority of respondents said they were interested in a digital credential that “proves their identity, verifies their screening history, tracks trainings and hours, and allows them to check in at volunteer locations.”

More than half of respondents said they would be interested in purchasing their own portable background check

Respondents are somewhat unsure how much they would be willing to spend on their background check, with 37% saying they would spend \$20, 27% of respondents saying they wouldn’t and 36% saying they weren’t sure.

Respondents also had the opportunity to write in how much they would be willing to pay. The average write-in amount was \$11 among those willing to pay – about half said \$10.



Thank You, Volunteers



As we keep an eye toward the future of volunteerism, we want to thank the volunteers who participated in this survey for providing such valuable insights. Their input guides us as we develop new tools and processes to support the volunteer community, ensuring the decisions we make as organizations are motivated by how we can improve the volunteer experience.

By helping us better understand their perspective and preferences, these volunteers are helping shape the future of the volunteer and nonprofit community.



Volunteer Program Resources



eBook

Enhancing the Volunteer Lifecycle

Learn how to keep volunteers engaged by clearly communicating volunteer impacts and outcomes, and more.

White Papers

To Screen or Not to Screen?

Four Reasons You May Not be Screening Your Volunteers...
And Why You Need to Start

Counting the Cost of a Bad Volunteer

Why Volunteer Screening Is the Most Critical Step of the
Onboarding Process

Articles

Practical Recommendations for Validating Volunteer Identification

Six simple but important recommendations to consider when
incorporating identity validation tools into your program.

Your Adverse Action Checklist: Getting It Right

It's a confusing process. Learn more about the Do's and Don'ts,
according to the Federal Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA).

Live and On-demand Webinars

Stay informed of volunteer management best practices.

Many of the webinars meet the requirements for renewing Certified in
Volunteer Administration (CVA) credentials.

And More

Return on Volunteer Investment Calculator: Is Your Volunteer Program Paying Off?

Knowing the true value of your program can be the deciding
factor when securing financial support.

Making the Case for Your Volunteer Program Budget

This list outlines the types of metrics, data points, and other
considerations that can help you present a solid case to
decision-makers.

Interested in helping shape the future of volunteering?

We encourage all volunteers and organizations to reach out to us about participating in focus groups as we roll out new programs, like the portable background check and volunteer ID credential.

Let us know by sending your contact information to:

info@sterlingvolunteers.com

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