

2020 Industry Insights:

How Volunteer & Organization Perspectives Align





Sterling Volunteers and VolunteerMatch have partnered for a second consecutive year to produce this informative report and give you deeper insight into the world of volunteering and nonprofit organizations. The data and personal insight presented here show you what each of these groups think. We share how volunteers' and organizations' responses align on topics ranging from what motivates volunteers to the importance of background screening.

Sterling Volunteers

Sterling Volunteers is a background screening service dedicated to the nonprofit and service sector to help organizations fulfill their missions and positively impact communities. With the largest network of millions of vetted volunteers ready to mobilize when opportunities arise, nonprofits can better recruit their volunteers. Sterling Volunteers is a division of Sterling, which has pioneered innovation in the background screening industry for more than 40 years.

sterlingvolunteers.com



VolunteerMatch believes everyone should have the chance to make a difference. As the Web's largest volunteer engagement network, serving 130,000 participating nonprofits, 150 network partners, and 13 million annual visitors, VolunteerMatch offers unique, award-winning solutions for individuals, nonprofits, and companies to make this vision a reality.

volunteermatch.org



Contents

- 4 Leaders and Volunteers
- 6 Sharing Perspectives in 2020
- 8 Who Responded
- 10 Demographics Deep Dive
- 13 Volunteer Insights
- 17 Background Screening
- 22 Accounting for Screening
- 25 Let's Get Digital
- 27 The Future is Bright
- 28 Volunteer Program Resources

Leaders and Volunteers

Typically, leaders at nonprofit organizations are also volunteers, including Katie Zwetzig, Executive Director of Sterling Volunteers, and Greg Baldwin, CEO of VolunteerMatch. We asked each of them to share some thoughts from both perspectives — as representatives of their organizations, and as on-the-ground volunteers.



Katie Zwetzig

Executive Director,
Sterling Volunteers

Katie's average day at Sterling

"I'm lucky. I spend a good part of my day talking with nonprofits large and small to learn about their missions and how we can best support them. I then get to relay those to the Sterling Volunteers team so we can implement solutions that have a positive impact on our clients and, ultimately, the service sector."

Katie's average day as a volunteer

"Having three girls, most of my volunteer time was with schools, the Girl Scouts, the National Charity League, and community work within our local United Way network and mentoring organizations. While it is all gratifying, there is something really special about instilling volunteerism in the next generation."

What drives Katie as a volunteer

"I really believe that the heart of any community is its nonprofit community, and the stronger the nonprofits are, the stronger the community is. I'm blessed to live in a community where volunteerism is high and access to nonprofits is relatively unconstrained."

What drives Sterling Volunteers as a volunteer organization

"Our mission is to build communities of vetted volunteers and reduce the time, risk and cost of onboarding volunteers. We are laser-focused on that mission."

On upcoming opportunities for Sterling Volunteers

"We continue to look at new ways to support our clients, our partners, and the sector by mobilizing trusted volunteers. In addition to new identity products that will ensure the volunteers are who they say they are, we are working closely with partners like VolunteerMatch to create ways to connect vetted volunteers to more organizations, reducing onboarding time and costs for both organizations and volunteers."

On what's exciting about the future of volunteerism

"We are working hard to bring disparate sector systems together through collaboration and technology. We're working closely with our partners to streamline the onboarding process of a volunteer, ultimately helping organizations see higher impact and volunteers gain higher levels of satisfaction in their volunteer work."



Greg Baldwin
CEO, VolunteerMatch

Greg's average day at VolunteerMatch

"It is a lot of planning, communication, problem-solving, and hustle to execute on our vision of a public interest platform to amplify the ethics and impact of volunteering at scale."

Greg's average day as a volunteer

"I volunteer a lot to support my kids' schools and their extracurricular activities, and that looks like meetings, outreach, fundraising and pitching in to support events, games, and team get togethers. I also volunteer as an advisor to a number of groups and that looks more like listening, problem-solving, advocacy, and match-making."

What drives Greg as a volunteer

"A desire to contribute to communities that I am already a part of and finding opportunities where my interests and experience might be helpful. I think voluntary association is the bedrock of healthy communities, relationships and identity, and drives both my commitment to volunteering and my vision for VolunteerMatch. "

What drives VolunteerMatch as a volunteer organization

"A shared passion for using technology to bring good people together and create better ways to put time and talent to good use."

On upcoming opportunities for VolunteerMatch

"VolunteerMatch is in the middle of an exciting strategic shift to open its network of volunteer opportunities to other like-minded technologists to encourage innovation, adoption, and impact. We believe that by opening the VolunteerMatch network to third-party developers we can better serve our nonprofit stakeholders, connect more volunteers, and elevate the influence and impact of volunteering on our lives. We are particularly excited to be working with the leading CSR technology platforms to create new possibilities for connecting the talent of the private sector with the needs of the social sector at scale."

On what's exciting about the future of volunteerism

"I really enjoy watching how smart causes are framing their volunteer opportunities to make them interesting, clever, impactful, and compelling. Volunteering has become so much more than stuffing envelopes and it is exciting how nonprofits are elevating their expectations to engage volunteers across a broad range of activities, skills, and interests."

Sharing Perspectives in 2020

Whether it's family, friends, or coworkers, the strongest relationships are built on trust, transparency, shared goals, and a mutual understanding of values. The relationship between volunteers and nonprofit organizations is similar. In the 2020 report we explore the shared perspectives and commonalities between volunteers and organizations, as well as the differing points of view that make each group unique.

Key takeaways



Volunteers are increasingly giving their time for the social aspect.



Sharing the impact of a volunteer's service is key to engagement.



Volunteers are willing to spend more on their own background check than organizations think.



More than half of volunteers use digital platforms such as VolunteerMatch to find opportunities.



People are optimistic about the future of volunteerism.



People are optimistic about the future of volunteerism

“ I feel that more [people] are getting excited about the sense of fulfillment and networking that volunteering produces.”

– A volunteer who values building relationships

“ Social media has brought a ton of awareness to issues and is a great medium to rally people behind a cause, spurring more people to give their effort and time.”

– A Generation X volunteer from Missouri

“ Most people WANT to give something positive back to their community.”

– An organization from New York

“ People continue to have a desire to be connected to something bigger than themselves and, in my opinion, the best way to build/strengthen community is through volunteerism.”

– A volunteer who gave his time to 4+ organizations in 2019

“ Each generation seems to be more into [volunteering] than the last.”

– An organization from California



Who Responded

10,811 Volunteers
from VolunteerMatch

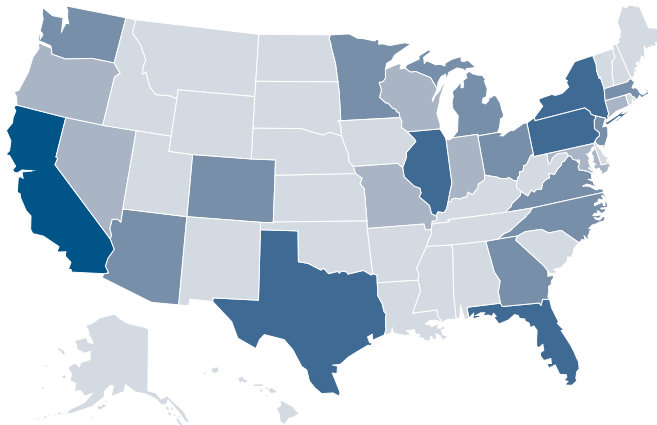
735 Organizations
from Sterling Volunteers

We asked both nonprofit organizations and volunteers for some demographic information, as outlined below. Of the 735 organizations who responded, **384 (52%)** identified as “volunteer managers.”

Where they volunteer and live

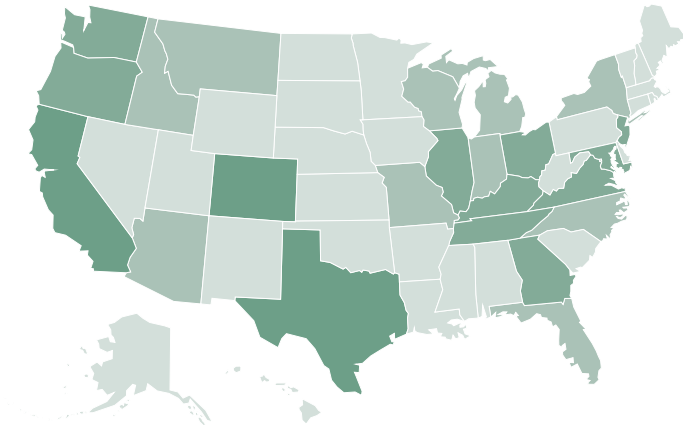
VOLUNTEERS

11% Rural | **41%** City | **48%** Suburban

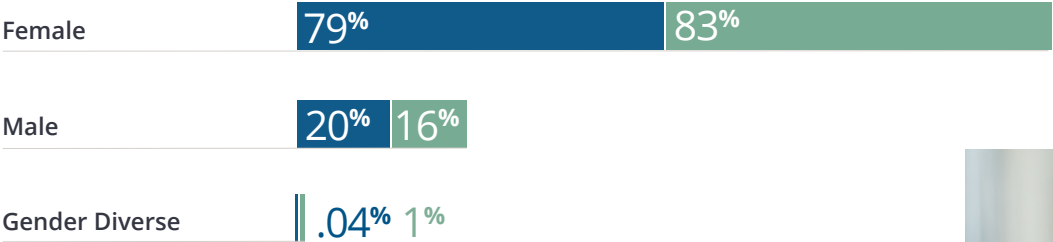


ORGANIZATIONS

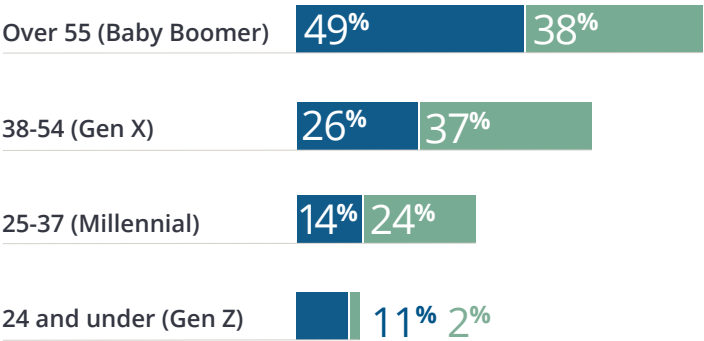
20% Rural | **50%** City | **30%** Suburban



How they gender identify



What is their age range



Demographics Deep Dive

We asked questions that go beyond traditional demographics to gain further insight into the 2020 respondents, including questions about the scope, scale, and focus of volunteers' efforts and organizations' operations.

**Nearly two-thirds of both groups agree:
Volunteerism is thriving.**

62% **of volunteers** consider themselves active volunteers.

62% **of organizations** report having highly engaged, frequent volunteers.

Additionally, 38% of volunteers say they volunteer once a year or less, while 31% of organizations report having a mix of active and infrequent volunteers. Last year about a third (36%) of volunteers said they volunteer only a few times a year. This year about a third of volunteers (33%) said they consider themselves regular volunteers.

30% **of volunteers** give 8 hours or more of their time per month.

Volunteer and organization responses regarding how much time volunteers give were remarkably similar. Both groups agree that about 30% of volunteers give 8 hours or more of their time each month, 26% give 5 to 8 hours, and 23% give 3 to 4 hours.



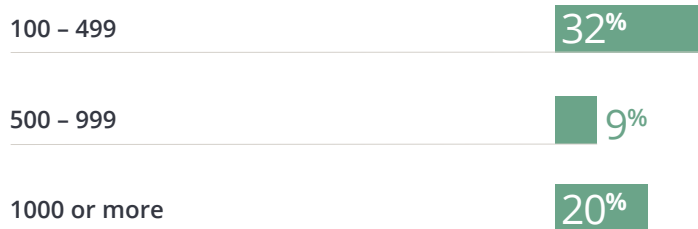
Two-thirds of volunteers gave their time to multiple organizations in 2019.



Some sectors are more likely to have volunteers devoted to a single organization — **more than 40%** of those volunteering for disaster relief, education, and healthcare said they dedicated their efforts to just one organization.

Two out of five organizations work with less than a hundred volunteers each year.

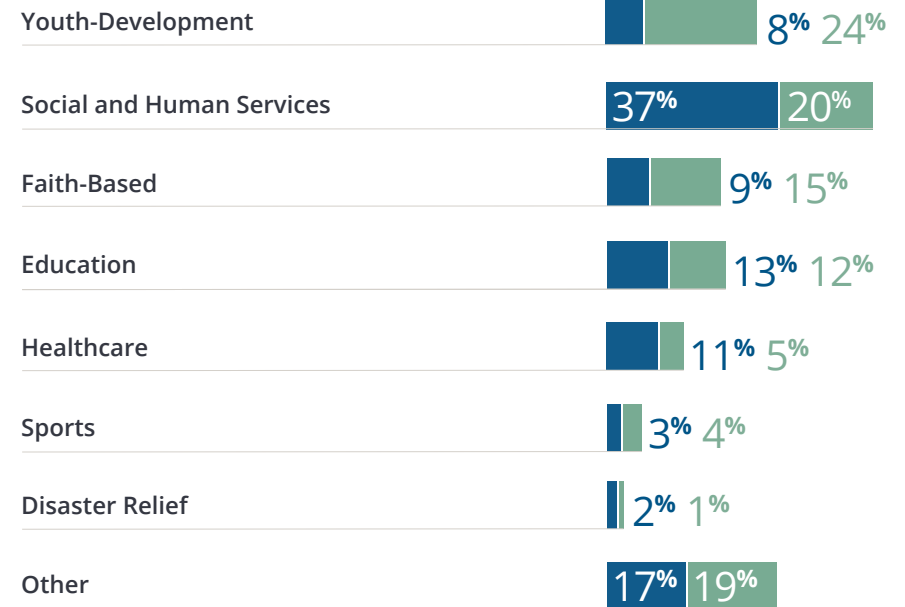
39% of organizations worked with 99 volunteers or fewer in 2019.



More than half of both groups focus on social and human services, youth development, or education:

58% of volunteers

56% of organizations



Write-In Responses

17% of volunteers and **19% of organizations** (indicated as: *Other* on previous page) filled in their own answer. Here's a sample of some of the amazing and interesting work they're doing:

Volunteers

- Political activism was mentioned by more than 100 volunteers, including fighting for civil rights, canvassing for candidates, and championing environmental causes.
- Promotion of the arts was a common theme, including those volunteering in museums and galleries and other artistic endeavors.
- Food banks, soup kitchens, and other community food services were also frequently mentioned in write-in responses.

Organizations

- Many organizations report operating in more than one of the areas that were included in the response options (refer to Table on page 11).
- Animal welfare, animal conservation, etc. were mentioned by about 2% of all respondents.
- Many social and human service organizations focus on specific populations, such as older adults, the homeless, women in engineering, etc.
- **Here are some of the interesting and inspiring causes represented:**
 - Teaching knitting and crocheting to those with limited or no means
 - Animal-assisted support during disaster relief
 - A professional theater company featuring exclusively actors with varying disabilities
 - Beekeeping
 - Humanitarian efforts, conservation, civil rights and civil liberties, and more



Volunteer Insights

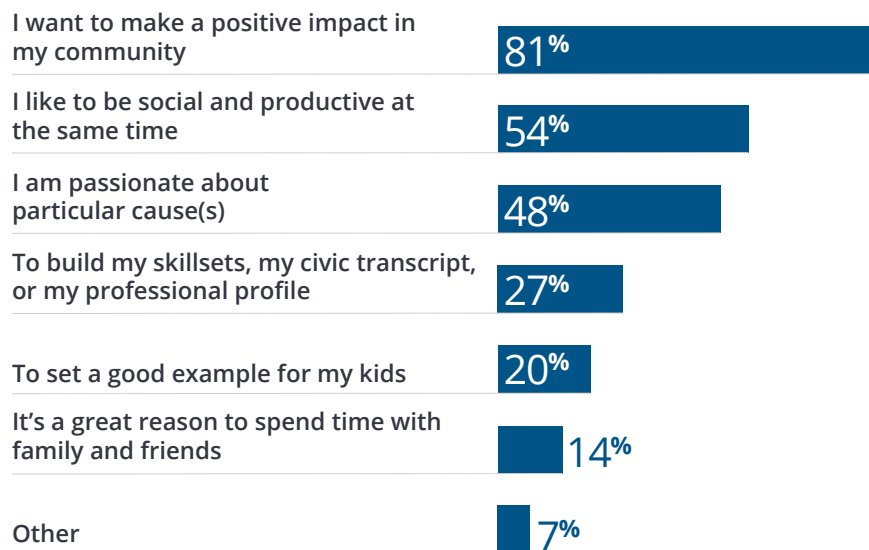
We asked volunteers what motivates them, what keeps them engaged, how they want to find opportunities, and more. Then we asked organizations similar questions to see how their responses line up.



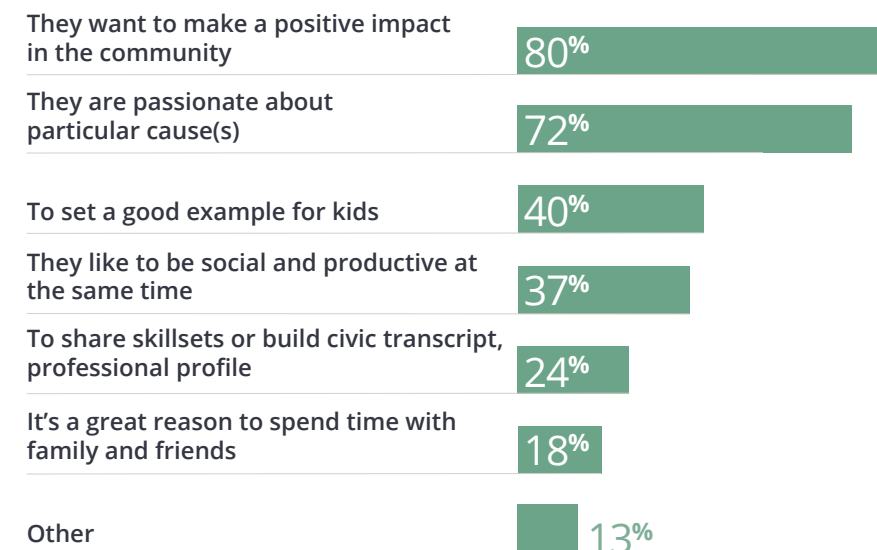
What motivates volunteers?

Volunteers and organizations mostly agree on what motivates volunteers to give their time. Last year we found that volunteers ranked “making a positive impact” as the second-most important reason behind “contributing to a cause.” This year organizations rated a similar response (“they are passionate about particular causes”) much higher (72%) than volunteers (48%).

81% of volunteers say they volunteer to make a positive impact in their community.



80% of organizations say volunteers want to make a positive impact in the community.



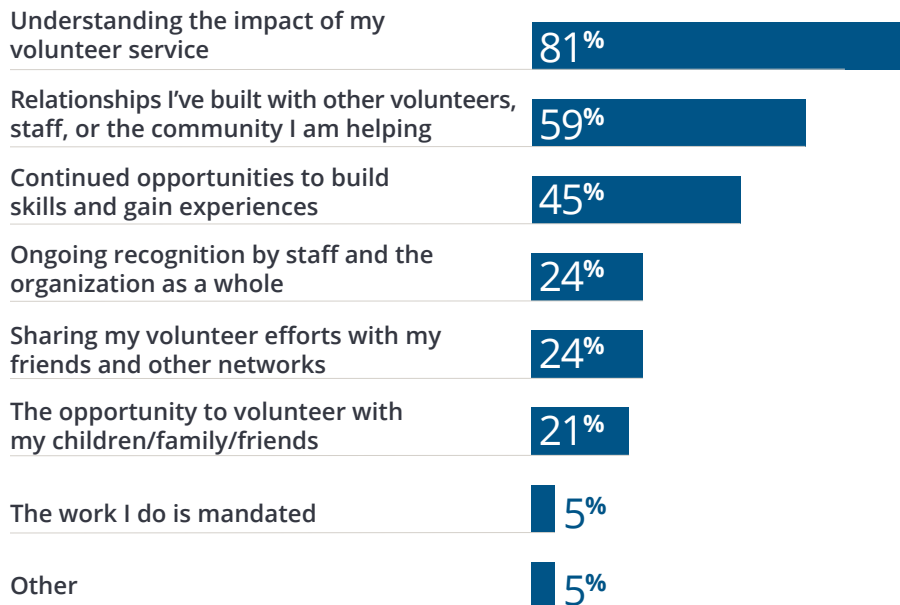
A Closer Look: Volunteering to be Social

Volunteers are increasingly choosing to give their time for the social aspect. Last year 35% of volunteers said they volunteer to socialize. This year **54% of volunteers** said they like to be social and productive at the same time.

What keeps volunteers engaged?

Volunteers and organizations are mostly aligned on what keeps volunteers engaged and how organizations should approach engagement. They agree that understanding the impact of service, skill-building, and relationship-building are important aspects of volunteer engagement. However, there are some differences, including between how much recognition organizations are giving (74%) and how much volunteers say recognition keeps them engaged (24%).

What volunteers say keeps them engaged:



What organizations do to keep volunteers engaged:



Write-In Responses

Volunteers shared that using their unique skill or talent, staying active and gaining insight into how the nonprofit is run all help keep them engaged. Many volunteers also said that they don't necessarily need to be "kept engaged" because they want to volunteer, enjoy giving back, are passionate about their cause, etc.

Organizations shared that they give active volunteers special opportunities to network, hold appreciation events, and work with volunteers to find their special niche or match within the program in order to keep volunteers engaged.

Volunteer impact

82% **of volunteers** want to hear about the direct impact their efforts make to an organization's mission.

97% **of organizations** let their volunteers know about the direct impact their efforts made to the mission.

Write-In Responses

We also asked organizations what motivates them to share the impact of volunteers' efforts:

- “ It is important for volunteers to know why they are important to us.”
- “ What [our volunteers] are doing is important and they should know it.”
- “ [Sharing the impact of the volunteers' efforts] is what it's all about.”
- “ Because they're making a difference in the lives of children.”

Organizations use a variety of methods to recognize their volunteers, and share the impact of their service. They publicly acknowledge volunteers and share the impact of individual volunteer efforts in public forums, such as bulletins, newsletters and social media; they offer volunteers special opportunities, privileges, and more.

- “ [We hold] an awards ceremony.”
- “ [We provide] direct thanks from the people they help ...”
- “ We find people's niche where they will be happy, and we're open to options like rotating a team so they don't have to help every week. We always take time to let them know they are valued and appreciated!”



A Closer Look: Volunteer Impact

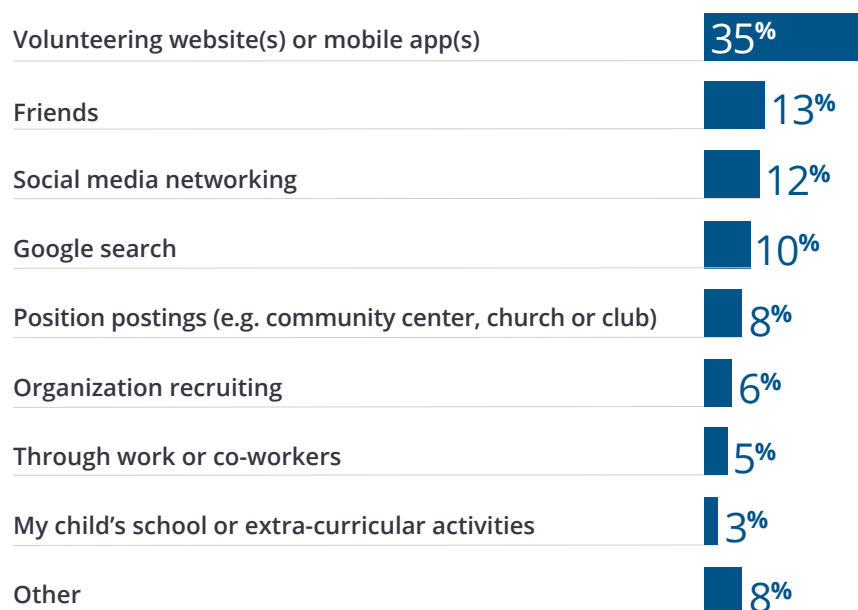
Last year 78% of volunteers reported that “understanding the impact of my volunteer service” was the top factor in keeping them engaged, staying consistent with the **82% of volunteers** who want to hear about the impact of their efforts this year.

Finding opportunities and recruiting

It's important for volunteers and organizations to be aligned on where and how opportunities are shared and searched for. Here we compare the similarities and differences between how volunteers find opportunities and how volunteer organizations approach recruiting.

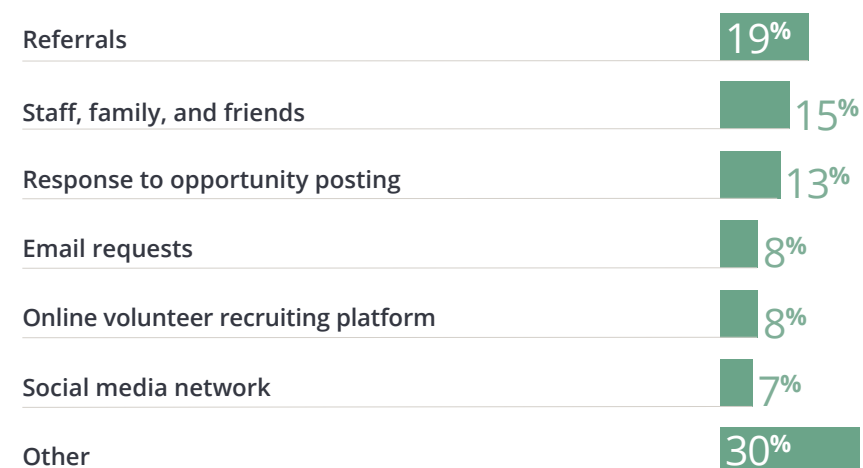
47% of volunteers find opportunities through volunteer websites, apps, or on social media.

How volunteers find opportunities



15% of organizations recruit volunteers via online recruiting and social media.

How organizations find and recruit volunteers:



Write-In Responses

30% of organizations chose to fill in their own answer. Here are a few of the other ways organizations are recruiting volunteers:

- Program announcements
- Clubs and other group-based networking
- Various forms of word of mouth, such as through volunteers' families and friends
- Recruitment events

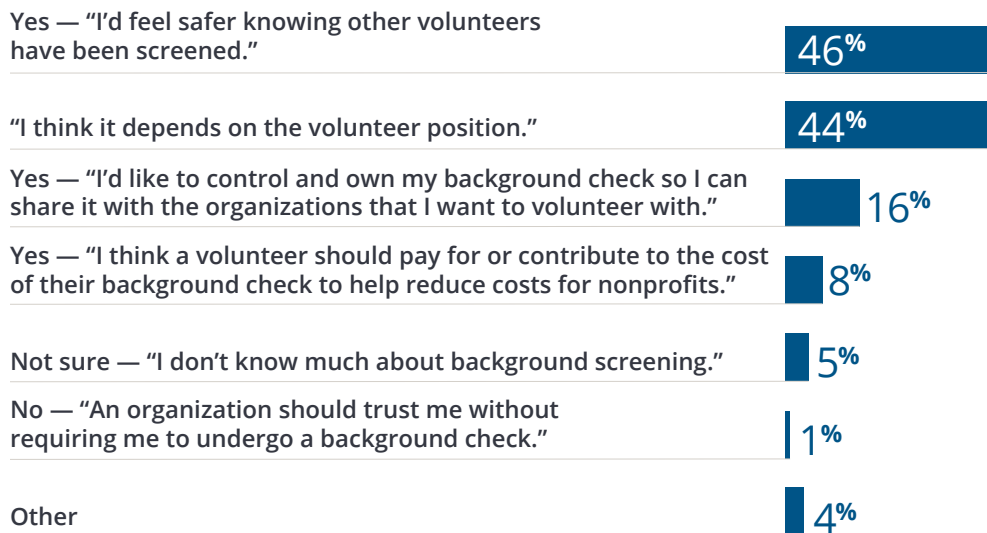
Background Screening

Sterling Volunteers is at the forefront of volunteer screening, helping volunteers and nonprofit organizations navigate and conduct their background checks. Here we see how organizations and volunteers align as they share perspectives on the background screening process.

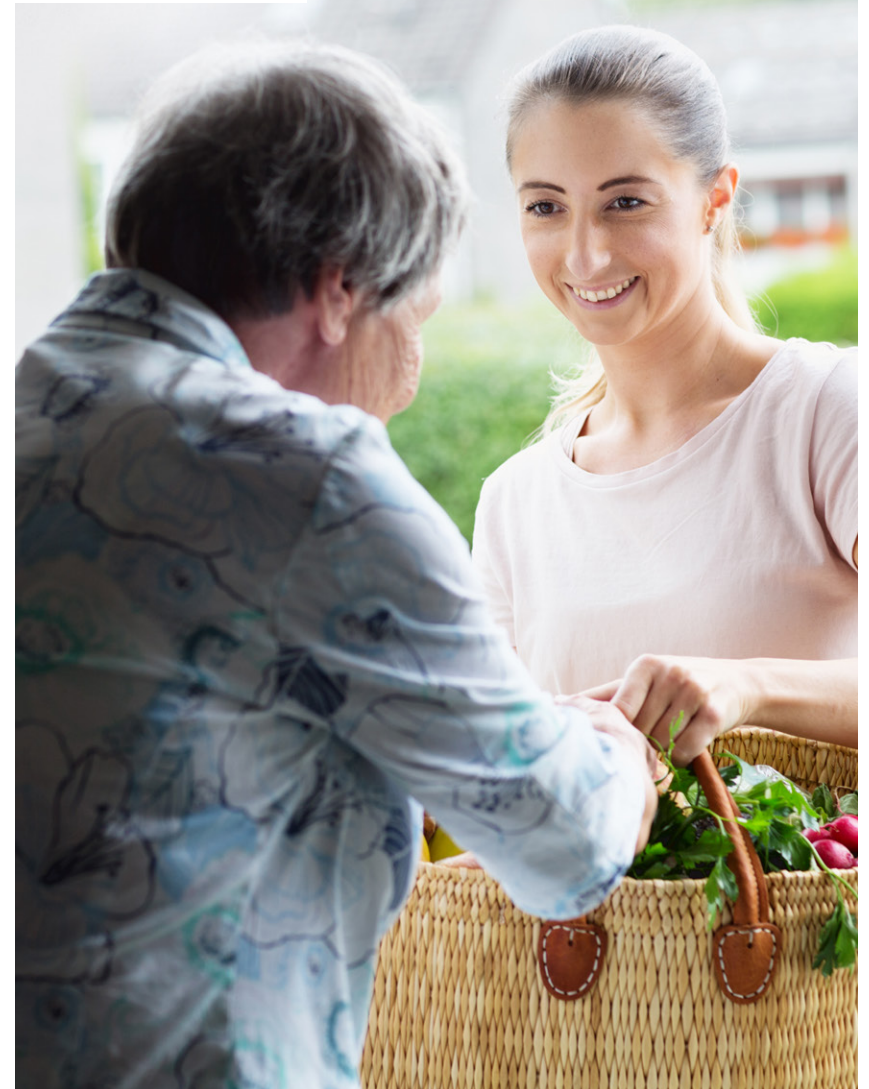
70% **of volunteers** are in favor of screening; 44% say it should depend on the volunteer's position.

98% **of organizations** say they conduct background checks; 27% say sometimes, depends on the role.

Volunteers agree with background screening

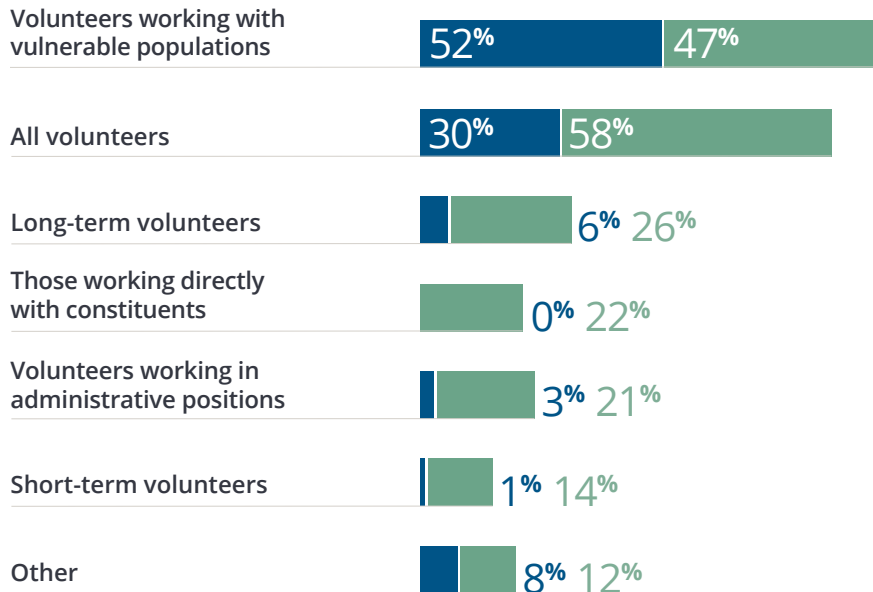


Educating volunteers is an important part of the screening process. We learned that a large majority (**86%**) **of organizations** say they educate volunteer candidates on the background screening process by verbally explaining their program and the kind of information they would be looking for, meaning most organizations have room to expand their screening education program.



Who should be screened?

Around half of all volunteers and organizations agree that volunteers working with those in vulnerable populations should be screened or are being screened. On the other end of the spectrum, only 1% of volunteers and 14% of organizations said short-term volunteers such as those working at events, festivals, conferences, etc. should be screened. However, it's notable that many organizations screen everyone, and there are cases of organizations having issues with short-term volunteers.



Write-In Responses

Write-in responses from both **volunteers** and **organizations** included mentions of specific vulnerable populations, such as children, the elderly, victims of domestic violence, and those who are disabled. Several organizations said they don't screen anyone under 18, and several others noted that they also screen board members.



What background checks find

48% **of volunteers** say they feel safer knowing background checks are required.

68% **of organizations** say they've uncovered criminal history with background checks.

Background screening is an important aspect of most volunteer programs, for the safety and security of volunteers, organizations, and the people that they help, but do you know what type of checks are most commonly run, and what issues they typically find? We looked into how organizations are using background checks. We found that they screen for sex offenders most often (91%), and frequently review national, state, and county criminal records. Misdemeanors are the most common issue organizations find.

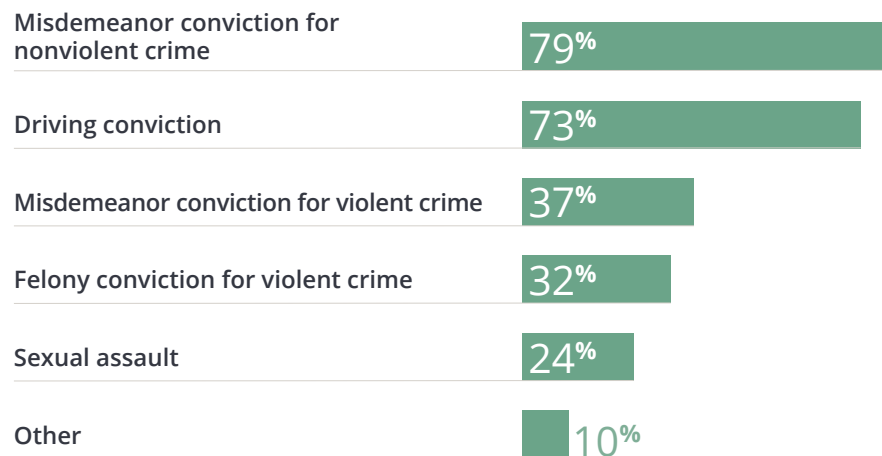
Most common searches used by organizations

Sex Offender Search	91%
National Criminal Search	88%
State and County Searches	69%
Motor Vehicle Records Search	49%
Social Security Trace	39%
Identity Verification	35%
Federal District Search	27%
Reference Check	22%
International Criminal Searches	21%

Less than 15% of organizations use social media screening (13%), fingerprinting (12%), drug screening (12%), credit checks (5%), and education verification (4%).



Issues organizations find



Write-In Responses

- Felony conviction for a nonviolent crime
- Active cases
- Incorrect alias names
- Restraining orders
- Hunting violations
- And more

A handful of organizations said they don't conduct background checks, so we asked, "why not?" to better understand their organizations' unique situations. We learned that a quarter of those who filled in their own response said that it simply wasn't required by their organization, and others were just beginning to screen.

A Closer Look: Volunteer Concerns

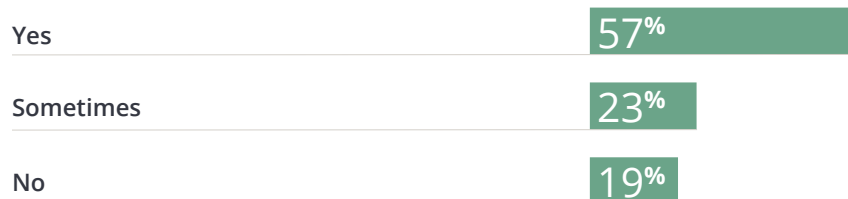
We asked volunteers what concerns, if any, they have about screening. Data security was at the top of the list **with 42% of volunteers** expressing concern, followed by privacy (38%), and the cost of background checks (34%). Additionally, 68% of volunteers said they would only share a background screening profile with an organization if they could securely control the information, and 31% of volunteers said they would if it didn't cost any additional money.



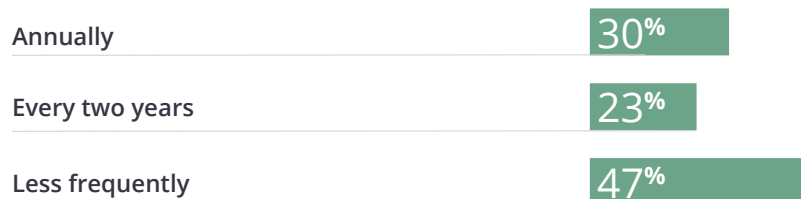
Rescreening volunteers

While only **4% of volunteers** reported being asked to renew their background check or rescreen in 2019, **57% of organizations** reported conducting background renewals and 14% listed rescreening as their biggest challenge.

More than half of organizations conduct background renewals



More than half of organizations that rescreen do so every two years or more frequently



A Closer Look: Volunteer Rescreening

The more an organization prioritizes screening in the budget, the more frequently they conduct repeat screening — **52% of organizations** that made background screening a top priority in their 2019 budget also conduct annual rescreens.



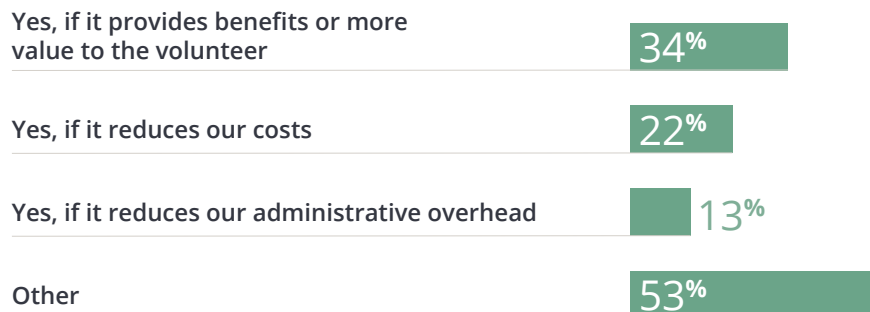
Accounting for Screening

For a nonprofit, incorporating screening into its budget can be a big undertaking — there are several factors to consider, and difficult questions to answer. In this section we find out how organizations and volunteers are addressing the issue of screening costs and look at what aspects of the screening process are most important to respondents.

Who should pay for screening?

We asked organizations if they'd be willing to ask volunteers to pay for their own background checks and more than half of respondents chose to write a custom response.

Would your organization be willing to ask volunteers to pay for their own background checks?



Write-In Responses

Two-thirds of write-ins said they would not be willing to ask their volunteers to pay for their own background checks — that's around one-third of the total responses. Nearly three-quarters of those organizations focus on youth development, human and social services, or faith-based services.

“As long as we can afford it, we will pay for it. They are graciously giving us their time for free. The least we can do is pay for a \$20 background check.”

“...We're willing to ask them to do this for [the reasons listed in the prompt], but we're not willing to require them to do it.”

“Maybe. We wouldn't want to create a financial barrier to someone volunteering. We kind of like giving them a choice to contribute.”

A Closer Look: Background Screening Budgeting

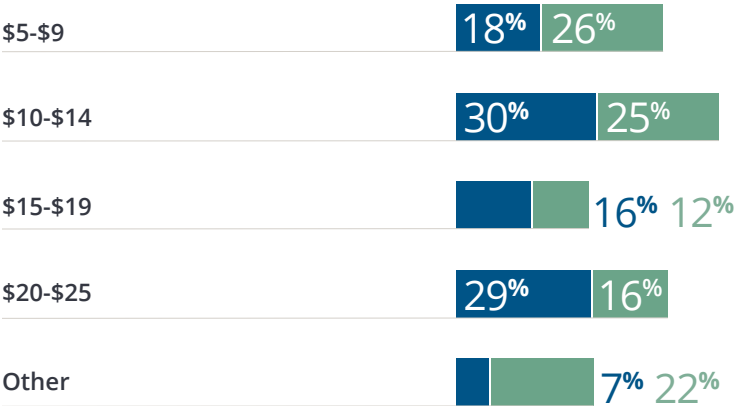
Sterling Volunteers offers several options to help organizations save on their budget with the ability to allow volunteers to pay for all or a portion of the screening costs — or you can ask for an optional contribution. In 2019 alone, we saw **\$3.52 million contributed by volunteers** toward the cost of their background check.

How much would a volunteer pay?

We asked volunteers how much they would pay for their own background check, then asked organizations how much they think a volunteer would pay for comparison.

What Volunteers Say

What Organizations Think



Organizations assume that volunteers would be willing to pay less.

76% of volunteers say they'd be willing to pay \$10-\$25 for their own background check

53% of organizations thought volunteers would be willing to pay in that range.



A Closer Look: Screening Costs

The older a volunteer is, the more they are willing to spend on screening costs.

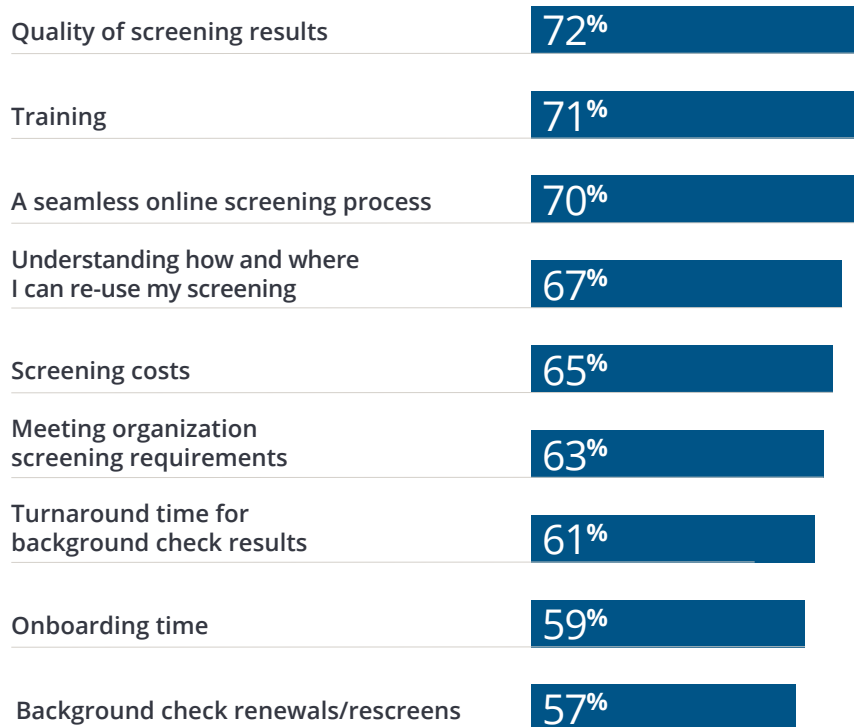
Willing to spend \$15-\$25 on screening



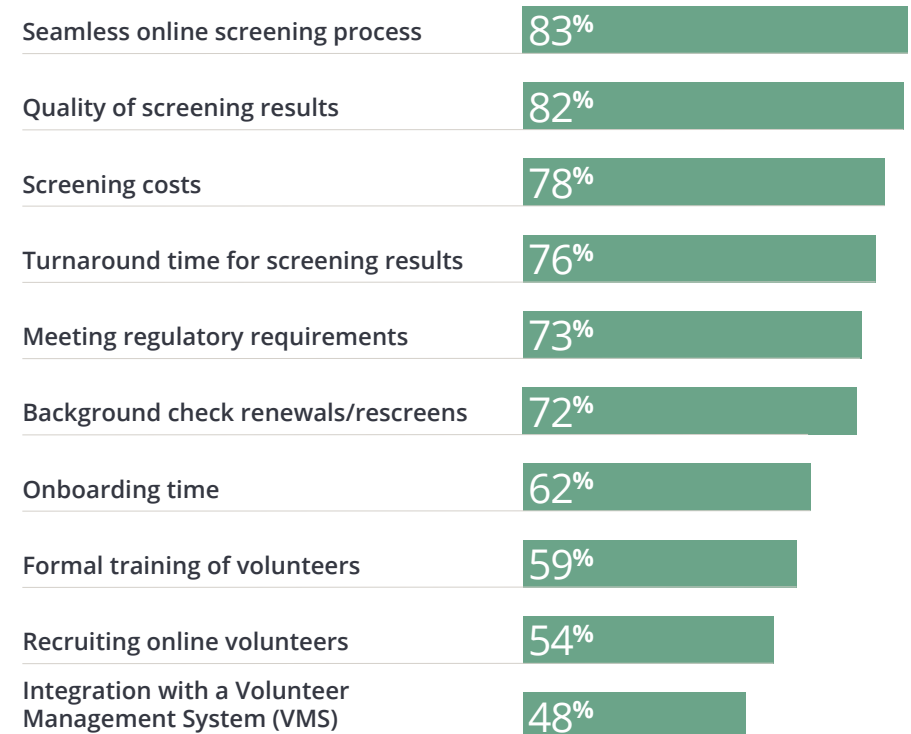
What's most important?

We asked survey respondents to rank aspects of the screening process by importance. Below we compare the two groups using the percentage of respondents who ranked each item “very important” (1) or “important” (2).

Most Important to **Volunteers**



Most Important to **Organizations**



The quality of screening results is highly important to both groups, with **volunteers ranking it first (72%),** and **organizations ranking it second (82%).**

They also agree that a seamless screening process (third for volunteers and first for organizations) and screening costs (fifth for volunteers and third for organizations) are important. However, volunteers find training more important than organizations do — volunteer training was ranked second by volunteers (71%) and formal training of volunteers was ranked eighth by organizations (59%).

Let's Get Digital

Almost all volunteers say that access to an online community of nonprofits is what they want. Organizations are a little more hesitant, though the majority do agree.

95% of volunteers would find a trusted online community of organizations with volunteer listings helpful.

59% of organizations say a community such as this would be helpful for finding volunteers.

The digital shift

Last year we found that **90% of volunteers** prefer digital communications over paper, and that older volunteers don't prefer a mobile experience. This year, we further explored the use of digital technology in volunteering and found some interesting results. Volunteers are using digital platforms more than organizations.



57% of volunteers report using digital platforms as their primary means to find volunteer opportunities.

24% of organizations report that they primarily find and recruit their volunteers on digital platforms.

Organizations' use of digital platforms

Organizations post opportunities on digital platforms as frequently or more frequently than other forums such as newspapers or bulletin boards. Organizations also post opportunities through social media channels (59%), and email (63%) about as frequently as they do through personal referrals (63%). So, while digital platforms aren't every organization's primary recruiting tool, many are still posting opportunities and finding volunteers online.

Organizations are also finding volunteers in other ways:

- Church bulletins and networking
- Community boards at coffee shops, veterans centers, etc.
- Kiosks on hiking trails
- Directly on their website
- Radio PSAs

And many are using volunteer recruiting platforms to help in their recruiting efforts, including:

- VolunteerMatch
- HandsOn Connect
- Catholic Volunteer Network
- Salesforce
- Their own internal system

A Closer Look: Finding Opportunities Online

Last year **volunteers reported** that some of the most common ways they find opportunities are with an online platform such as VolunteerMatch (57%), on social media (39%), and via online searches (38%), staying consistent with this year's results.

Social Media

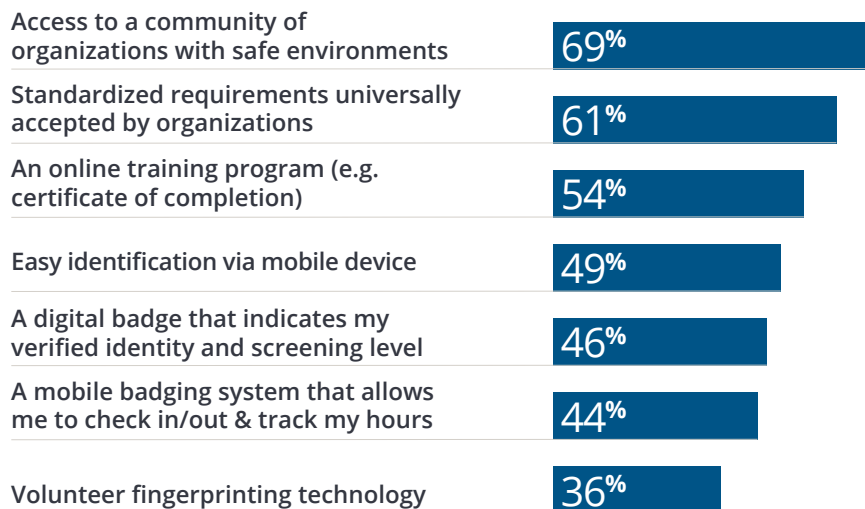
Facebook is the top social media recruitment channel, but it's notable that Instagram is second with 44% of organizations using the platform and 28% of volunteers. No organizations reported using Pinterest for recruitment, but 8% of volunteers have found opportunities there.

84% of volunteers use Facebook to find volunteer opportunities.
95% of organizations use Facebook to find volunteers.

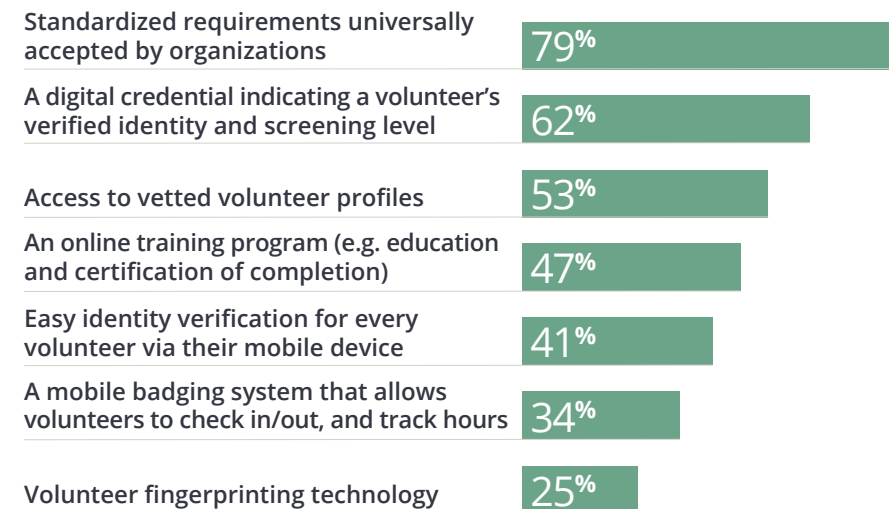
Trusting Technology

We provided volunteers and organizations a list of seven options and asked them to rank how important it is that an organization ensures a trusted, high-quality volunteer experience for each. They ranked the options one through five, with one being "very important" and five being "not important at all." Here's how they compare, using the percentage of respondents who ranked each item "very important" (1) or "important" (2). The two groups have the same top four ranked in a different order: standardized requirements, a digital credential, and an online community of volunteers and organizations that have been vetted.

Most Important to Volunteers



Most Important to Organizations



A Closer Look: Digital Credential

Last year more than two-thirds (68%) of volunteers reported that 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." This year we found that **Generation X volunteers** were the most likely to rate "a digital badge that indicates my verified identity" as "very important or important".

The Future is Bright

94% of **volunteers** and **organizations** agree that they're optimistic about the future of volunteerism.

“ **Volunteering is becoming a cultural norm** which is great!”

– A youth-development organization

“ **We can show youngsters** how good it is to volunteer.”

– A Baby Boomer volunteer from California

“ **The volunteers I get to work with give me hope in humanity again**, and I've seen an increase in volunteer interest, especially from the millennial and younger generations.”

– An animal rehabilitation organization

“ **People are very aware of the impact of volunteerism** on their lives, the lives of their children, the community and the future of society.”

– A youth-development organization

“ **There are always people willing** to help others.”

– A volunteer who strives to make a difference



“ **I think voluntary association is the secret sauce of American society** that will need to be emboldened to bring the good, the true, and the beautiful with us into the future.”

– Greg Baldwin, VolunteerMatch CEO

“ **We're working closely with our partners to streamline the onboarding process of a volunteer**, ultimately helping organizations see higher impact and volunteers gain higher levels of satisfaction in their volunteer work.”

– Katie Zwetzig, Sterling Volunteers Executive Director

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

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.

sterlingvolunteers.com/resources



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.

Let us know by sending your contact information to:

info@sterlingvolunteers.com

Recruit more volunteers for your cause.

Tap into our network of over 13 million volunteers. Get connected to qualified volunteers when and where you need them. VolunteerMatch is how good people and good causes get connected.

Start Now:

volunteermatch.org/nonprofits

Sterling Volunteers

113 S. College Ave.
Fort Collins, CO 80524

Questions?

✉ info@sterlingvolunteers.com

📱 1.855.326.1860

💻 sterlingvolunteers.com

Follow Us

