

Volunteer Drivers

HIGHLIGHTS

Great American Pastime

Explores volunteering in the United States, primary volunteer activities, and volunteering to drive

Who Volunteers to Drive

Creates a profile of the volunteer driver

Why Volunteers Drive

Outlines reasons for driving and the assistance provided to passengers

Where Volunteers Go

Describes destinations and how they get there, when they drive, and challenges they face

What Volunteers Give and Get

Describes the roles volunteer drivers play and the satisfaction they receive

Challenges Volunteers Face

Outlines common challenges identified by volunteers

How Long Volunteers Drive

Presents length of time in the volunteer driver role and roles the volunteer driver plays

A GREAT AMERICAN PASTIME

Volunteerism is valued in the United States and is a way of life for many Americans. It also contributes significantly to the economy. According to a report by the Corporation for National and Community Service, in 2018, 77.3 million Americans (30.3% of the population) contributed approximately 6.6 billion hours of volunteer activities, which, according to the Independent Sector, translates into \$167,000,000* in services.

Volunteers are most often involved in their local communities and their neighborhoods. Volunteering locally can strengthen community ties, broaden support networks, build a social safety net, and increase local resources.

Four primary volunteer activities include:

- fundraising
- collect, prepare, distribute, or serve food
- engage in supportive labor tasks
- tutor or teach

While the profession of driving may fall into the broad category of general labor, volunteer driving for a family member, neighbor, friend, or even a stranger is an altruistic community-service activity. In many communities, volunteer transportation organizations make it possible for older adults to live independent lives and remain engaged in their community. In 2004 and 2005 (most recent information available), the Beverly Foundation surveyed 714 volunteer drivers, all of whom provided transportation to older adults. Their responses provided considerable information on the background, experience, and attitude of volunteer drivers in America.

**Data from the Corporation for National & Community Service*

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Please visit the numerous fact sheets and exercises in addition to the planning, implementation, and evaluation sections of the TurnKey Kit.

VOLUNTEER DRIVER PROFILE

Age

- 37% under age 65
- 63% age 65+

Marital Status

- 68% married
- 18% widowed

Gender

- 51% female
- 49% male

Household Income

- 36% below \$30,000
- 36% \$30,000 to \$60,000
- 28% \$60,000+

Education

- 40% graduated high school
- 51% graduated college

Driving a Car

- 54% 50+ years

WHO VOLUNTEERS TO DRIVE

The accompanying chart provides a profile of volunteer drivers surveyed by the Beverly Foundation and discussed in this fact sheet. The chart indicates that volunteers have considerable experience in both life and in driving. However, it does not tell the whole story. Although the majority were age 65+, a large number (23%) could be called “Boomers” (age 56-64). Although the majority graduated from college, the vast majority (91%) graduated from high school or engaged in higher education opportunities. Volunteer drivers had a household income of \$30,000 or more; however, a large number (19%) had a household income of \$75,000 or more. More than 80% had driven 40 years or more.

REASONS FOR DRIVING

- to help others
- to do something meaningful
- to give back
- to stay active
- because they were asked

WHY VOLUNTEERS DRIVE

A key word analysis of an open-end survey question indicated that respondents volunteered to drive for many of the same reasons people volunteer to do other activities: in response to a need, to help others, and to give back. However, responses also indicated personal reasons such as being tired of being bored, having time on their hands, and being retired from the workforce. Enjoyment of driving, the desire to remain active, and a need to do something meaningful also were identified. Other responses to the multiple selection question are provided in the accompanying chart. This reinforces the notion that volunteer driving is more about doing something for others than for personal gain. Interestingly, only 12% of those responding to the survey associated their volunteer driving with “a sense of duty.”

WHERE VOLUNTEERS GO

Volunteer drivers say their most frequent trips are related to medical services. And, while some only provide transportation to non-emergency medical services, others take their passengers grocery shopping, to the pharmacy, to the library, to the bank, to visit a friend, to volunteer activities, to church, and even to the barber and beauty shop. In rural areas, they are especially dedicated, as each trip may require many miles of driving and many hours of waiting. What is important is that volunteer drivers make it possible for older adults to travel to a variety of life-sustaining and life-enriching destinations, and quite often such travel to these destinations is only possible because of the assistance and support provided by volunteer drivers.



HOW VOLUNTEERS GET THERE

While some volunteer drivers use program owned vehicles, the majority drive their own vehicles. Potential liability and the need for insurance coverage for the driver, the passenger, and the automobile often is a topic of discussion for prospective volunteer drivers. Programs that field volunteer drivers generally purchase an umbrella policy to provide coverage in the event of property damage or bodily injury; however, the volunteer driver's automobile insurance policy generally is the first line of coverage. And, although some people express concern that their automobile insurance rates will increase when they volunteer to drive, insurance is based on miles driven and not on who is riding in the vehicle.

WHEN VOLUNTEERS DRIVE

As the accompanying chart indicates, the availability of volunteers to provide rides is much greater in the daytime and during the weekdays than in the evenings and on weekends. The fact that such a low percentage of the respondents drove in the evenings and on weekends suggests that people who are dependent on volunteer drivers for their transportation could find it difficult to participate in evening and weekend activities.

And, although many of those surveyed drove for interfaith groups, the accompanying chart indicates that only a small percent of them provided transportation in evenings and weekends. According to many program administrators, providing Sunday transportation services often is not necessary because congregations often provide rides to members who need transportation.

**Volunteer Driver Challenges
Mean on 1-5 Scale**

- Driving people with:
- incontinence (3.3)
 - dementia (3.2)
 - cognitive limitations (2.6)
 - assistive devices (2.1)
 - heavy loads (2.0)
 - limited visual acuity (1.9)
 - through the door assistance (1.6)

“Volunteer drivers are the hardest volunteers to recruit, but once you’ve got them, you’ve got them.”

Availability to Provide Rides

| | | | |
|-----|----------|-----------|-----|
| 99% | Daytime | Saturdays | 37% |
| 99% | Weekdays | Sundays | 27% |
| 32% | Evenings | 24/7 | 10% |

CHALLENGES VOLUNTEERS FACE

In order to identify challenges drivers experience in providing transportation, survey respondents were asked to rate seven specific challenges from 1 (least difficult) to 5 (most difficult). The accompanying chart indicates their top ratings for the seven challenges. The results suggest that incontinence and dementia appear to be viewed as the greatest challenges. In addition to their ratings, the drivers also identified other challenges in providing transportation. Included were passenger aggressiveness, mental health challenges, language barriers, hearing limitations, hygiene problems, people using wheelchairs, not getting enough personal information, and passengers who need help in addition to transportation. None of the challenges identified by respondents appeared to be severe enough to cause providers to refuse to transport a passenger.

HOW LONG VOLUNTEERS DRIVE

The vast majority of respondents to the survey (86%) reported their age as 56 or more, which suggests that people who volunteer to drive tend to do so in their middle and later years. There also is evidence that their length of service is substantial.

Only 13% of the survey respondents had volunteered to drive for less than 1 year; 33% had volunteered for 1-3 years; 24% had volunteered for 4-6 years; and 30% had volunteered for 7 or more years. While there is some evidence why volunteers are difficult to recruit, perhaps the main reason is that driving someone can be challenging.

TIME SPENT DRIVING

Not only do they continue to drive for many years, but volunteer drivers also contribute considerable hours of their time. For example, when asked about their time commitment per week, 55% said they committed 1-5 hours, 19% 6-10 hours, 10% 11-20 hours, and 6% more than 20 hours a week. Additionally, 10% said they committed less than 1 hour per week, were on call, or contributed on a weekly or monthly basis.

ROLES VOLUNTEERS PLAY

The chart below indicates the needs of older adults, roles of volunteer drivers, and examples of volunteer driver programs that enable volunteer drivers to meet transportation needs.

Illustrative Needs, Roles, and Programs

| Rider Needs | Volunteer Driver Roles | Volunteer Driver Programs |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|---|
| getting to church | driving on weekends | Shepherd's Centers of America-Kansas City, MO |
| paying for transportation | helping raise funds | Bedford Ride - Bedford, VA |
| help with wheelchairs | wheelchair assistance | COAST - Colfax, WA |
| getting to another city | driving long distances | YCCAC Volunteer Driver Program - Sanford, ME |
| help at residence | going through the door | West Austin Caregivers - Austin, TX |
| help at destination | staying at the destination | Neighbor to Neighbor - Prescott, AZ |

WHAT VOLUNTEERS GET

The reason volunteer drivers continue their involvement for long periods of time (and contribute so many hours) appears to be related to the satisfaction they receive. The accompanying chart of "greatest satisfaction" was developed from volunteer drivers' responses to a list of 14 areas of satisfaction. Interestingly, they are similar to what volunteers in general find satisfying. The selections that the respondents seldom identified were related to personal habits and logistics such as having a regular schedule, being able to drive personal vehicle, getting out of the house, riders being on time, and learning new driving skills.

Greatest Satisfaction

- Helping people (89%)
- Feeling Needed (89%)
- Getting to know riders (60%)
- Donating time rather than money (39%)
- Appreciation and recognition (21%)