



# The Role of Volunteering in Philanthropy

 **FIDELITY** Charitable<sup>SM</sup>  
*Make more of a difference*

# Introduction

Volunteers are an essential resource for a sustainable nonprofit community. For many charities, a steady supply of individuals willing to give their most valuable resource—time—is critical for their basic operations. And the value of ready volunteers has never been more evident than in 2020 throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Now more than ever, the work that volunteers do has a clear and direct effect on the people and communities they are serving, but the benefits go beyond the meals served and care packages distributed. Hands-on philanthropy strengthens community bonds and gives donors an up-close look at the issues and challenges many of their neighbors are facing.

At a time when the importance of volunteers is felt more keenly than ever, this report provides insight into how individuals are engaging in volunteerism today. In what ways do donors give of their time, and how has the pandemic changed their approach? And how do their volunteer activities intersect and overlap with their financial support to charity?

To understand the full picture of volunteerism in America today, Fidelity Charitable conducted two separate research studies:

- A March 2020 survey of 1,842 philanthropic individuals illustrates how donors in the general population think about and engage with their favorite causes as volunteers.
- An August 2020 follow-up survey among 491 Fidelity Charitable donors depicts how volunteering changed amid the COVID-19 crisis.

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# Key themes and implications

**The overlap between financial and volunteer support indicates that many donors are deeply invested in making an impact. Nonprofits that offer meaningful volunteer opportunities will be best poised to flourish amid the pandemic and beyond.**

When engaged in a significant and meaningful way, volunteers can be an invaluable resource for many charities—not just for their labor, but for the financial support, network connections, professional skills and advocacy they can provide. Successful nonprofits will understand that volunteerism is an opportunity to forge deep and lasting connections with their current and future donors.

- Donors are more than passively involved in their favorite charities; nearly two-thirds of donors have also volunteered within the last year.
- Most donors support a charity financially first before volunteering, but four in ten are more likely to donate their time before committing their charitable dollars.
- A third of Millennials say they give more to the nonprofit they volunteer with than they would if they didn't volunteer—compared to 21 percent of Gen X and 12 percent of Baby Boomers.

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**Like other giving behaviors, different generations have different priorities and preferences when it comes to volunteering. As Millennials age and become a major force in philanthropy, they could drive a transformation in the way many nonprofits operate.**

As a generation that seeks to integrate their values into every aspect of their lives, Millennials' approach to philanthropy represents a marked shift from previous generations. Millennials value transparency from the organizations they support and want to understand their impact. Nonprofits that secure support from Millennials will be the ones that engage with the generation more deeply—offering opportunities to become personally involved in the organization's mission and impact.

- Older generations are more traditional volunteers, while Millennials prefer to get involved in unique ways. Sixty-three percent of Baby Boomers and Gen X donors prefer to serve by lending a hand to their favorite charities—doing activities like delivering meals or participating in a neighborhood cleanup. Sixty-five percent of Millennials donate skilled labor that requires training or experience.
- Religious institutions receive high volunteer engagement among all generations—but Millennials are much more likely than older generations to volunteer for a political candidate or advocacy organization.





**Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, volunteerism was on the rise, but the crisis has made it difficult or dangerous for many volunteers to continue their regular work. The disruption in the way people volunteer will continue until COVID-19 social distancing guidelines are lifted—but the long-term effects of the pandemic on volunteerism are uncertain.**

With the value of a volunteer hour currently estimated to be \$27.20,<sup>1</sup> the sharp decrease in volunteerism caused by COVID-19 represents an impact of millions of dollars across the nonprofit community—a devastating blow for many organizations. These charities are reckoning with the fact that they cannot meet demand or are being forced to adapt the way they provide services, which can be costly.

The duration of the pandemic will in part determine whether the nonprofit community is able to recover quickly or if the landscape of volunteerism will change forever. The ongoing health of the nonprofit sector could hinge on the various players adapting to unprecedented circumstances: nonprofits, by offering opportunities to volunteer that are safe, and donors, by offering greater financial support to their favorite charities in order to supplement for the loss of volunteer labor.

- In March 2020, before social distancing guidelines were issued, 30 percent of volunteers in the general population said that the amount of time they volunteer had increased in the past two years.
- But the pandemic has dealt a real blow to nonprofits who rely on volunteers. In an August 2020 survey, two-thirds of Fidelity Charitable donors said they decreased the amount of time they volunteer or stopped entirely due to the pandemic.
- Many volunteers who wish to continue giving their time have turned to virtual or remote volunteer opportunities, but virtual volunteering remains little-known among most Fidelity Charitable donors. The majority of volunteers prefer in-person or on-site activities.

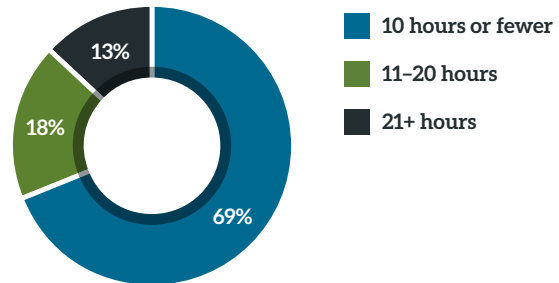
<sup>1</sup> Independent Sector, "The Value of Volunteer Time," July 2020.

# Depicting volunteerism today

**Seven in ten volunteers donate only a few hours per month—while 30 percent volunteer 11 or more hours.**

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic made volunteer work challenging, most volunteers spent 10 hours or less per month volunteering. Free from responsibilities related to their careers, retired donors were more likely to give more time to their volunteer activities. Thirty-eight percent of retirees volunteered 11 hours or more each month, compared to 26 percent of volunteers who are employed.

Amount of time spent volunteering, monthly<sup>2</sup>



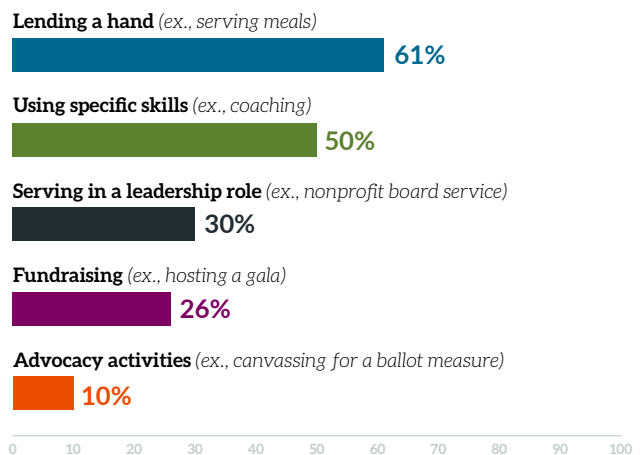
## Spotlight on donor-advised fund donors

Fidelity Charitable donors devote more time to their volunteer activities. Forty-three percent volunteer 11 or more hours each month.

**Six in ten volunteers spend time simply lending a hand to their favorite charitable organizations.**

The most common way that people volunteer is by lending a hand. Sixty-one percent of volunteers perform the simple activities that for many are synonymous with volunteering, such as delivering meals to the elderly or participating in a neighborhood cleanup. Half of volunteers use specific skills that require training or are related to the volunteer’s profession, such as coaching a youth sports team or working in a charity health clinic. Smaller—but significant—numbers of volunteers are involved in ways that suggest a deeper commitment to their favorite cause, such as serving in a leadership role or taking on fundraising responsibilities.

## What type of volunteer activities have you done?



<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted, base is respondents who volunteered within the last 12 months.

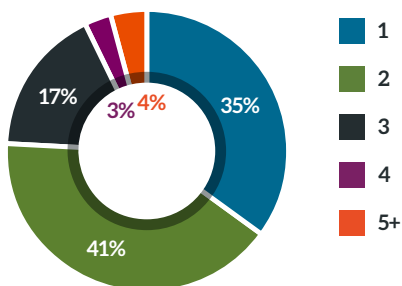


### Most donors narrowly focus their volunteer efforts, with religious institutions and charitable organizations receiving the most engagement.

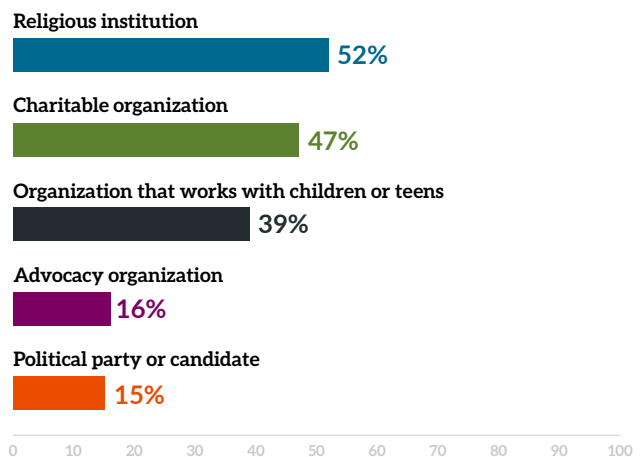
Three-quarters of volunteers concentrated their time on only one or two organizations in the last year—underscoring their dedication to the causes they care for most. Religious institutions see the highest rates of volunteer participation, which can be attributed to their role in the daily lives of many donors. Other charitable organizations—like homeless shelters, museums or environmental groups—are also popular for volunteer support.

A far smaller percentage of donors engage directly in advocacy work, either by volunteering for an advocacy organization or for a political party or candidate. Though a smaller population, these nonprofits can continue to count on a reliable core of volunteers even in a highly polarized environment.

**For how many organizations have you volunteered?**



**For what type of organizations have you volunteered?**



Base: Respondents who have ever volunteered

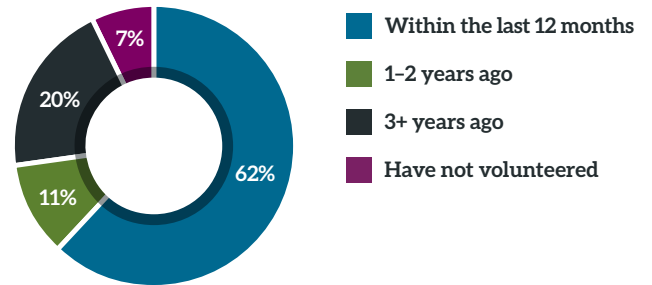
# Time and money

## Giving time and giving money go hand in hand; nearly two-thirds of charitable individuals are also recent volunteers.

Before the pandemic began, 62 percent of philanthropic individuals had recently volunteered for a charitable organization, indicating their interest in providing more than financial support for their favorite causes.

The significant overlap between financial and volunteer support has important implications for the nonprofit sector. Charities that provide meaningful volunteer opportunities not only benefit the populations they serve; they also help volunteers feel connected to the organization and its mission—building bonds that strengthen and enrich the donor-nonprofit relationship.

When charitable donors last volunteered



Base: All respondents

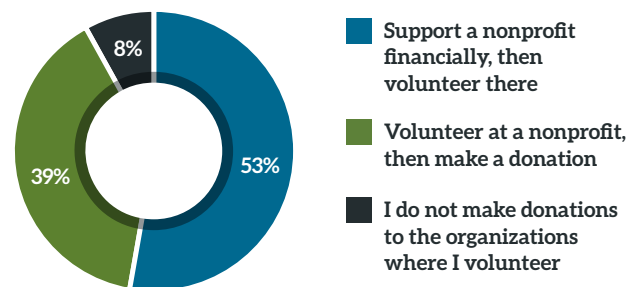
### Spotlight on donor-advised fund donors

Fidelity Charitable donors are more likely to be recent volunteers. Sixty-nine percent have volunteered in the last year.

## The majority of donors support a nonprofit financially before volunteering their time.

Fifty-three percent of volunteers say they give money to an organization before volunteering. However, 39 percent say they're more likely to volunteer first. For a significant subset of donors, volunteering can be an important way of evaluating an organization for future financial support.

Are you more likely to...



Base: Respondents who have ever volunteered

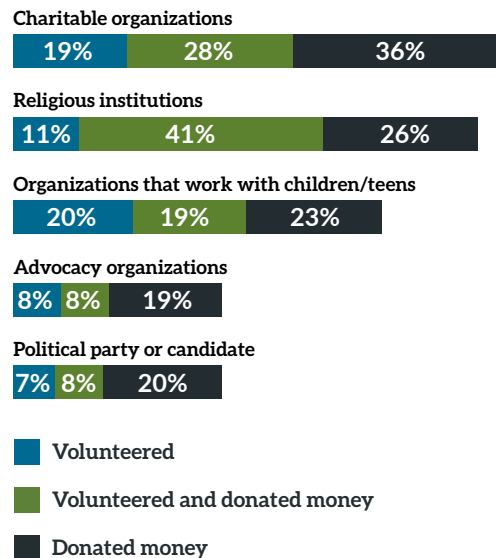




### The overlap between financial and volunteer support varies among different types of organizations.

Religious institutions see the largest overlap between financial and volunteer support, with 41 percent of volunteers giving both time and money. Religious institutions are woven into donors' daily lives and are often more structured about engaging both volunteer and financial support.

#### Donor support, by organization type



Base: Respondents who have ever volunteered

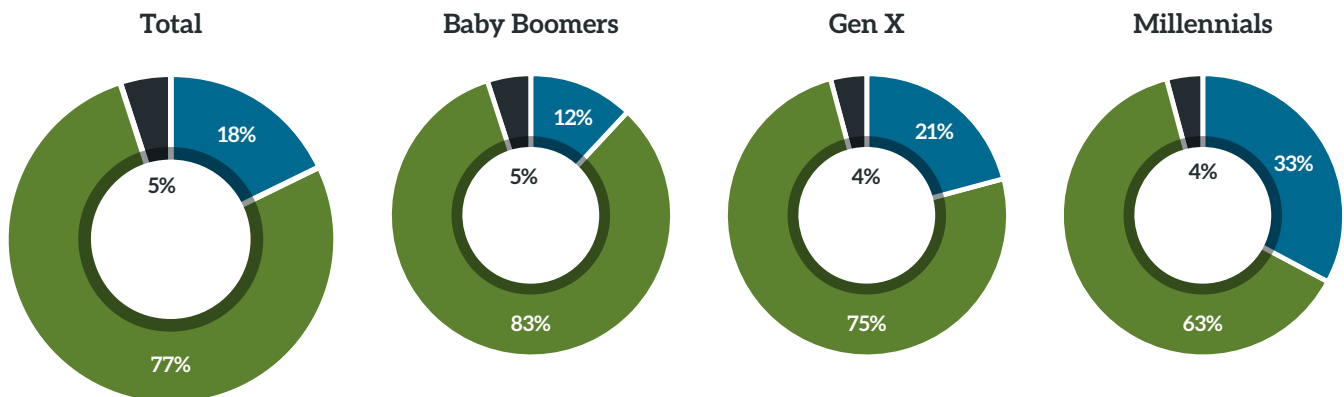




**For most donors, decisions about financial support are not affected by volunteer time—but this connection could evolve as Millennials enter the philanthropic landscape.**

More than three-quarters of donors say that they give the same amount to their favorite charity as they would if they didn't volunteer there. However, this could change as younger donors become more involved in philanthropy. Spending time volunteering with an organization is a bigger driver for financial support among Millennials than other generations. A third of Millennials say they give more to the nonprofit they volunteer with than they would if they didn't volunteer—compared to 21 percent of Gen X and 12 percent of Boomers. This suggests that meaningful volunteer opportunities can provide the transparency that Millennials value when choosing organizations to support.

**How volunteer time affects financial support**



- I give more than I would if I didn't volunteer
- I give the same amount as I would if I didn't volunteer
- I give less than I would if I didn't volunteer

## SPOTLIGHT

# Generational divides in volunteering

## Baby Boomers

Baby Boomer donors are more traditional volunteers, who are most likely to spend their time doing things such as lending a hand serving in a soup kitchen, cleaning up litter or sorting donations to a charity. Boomers take a more focused approach to volunteering, with 39 percent reporting that they volunteered for only one organization in the last year—compared to the 35 percent of Millennials who have recently volunteered for three or more organizations.

## Millennials

Millennials are a generation that prioritize giving back. Nearly half of younger donors say the amount of time they volunteer has increased in the last two years—compared to a quarter of Baby Boomers and 29 percent of Gen X. As a generation that values individuality, Millennials prefer to use their unique talents to support their favorite causes. Younger donors are most likely to say that they volunteer specific skills that they've been trained for—either through their profession or outside of it. The younger generation is also politically aware and active, and much more likely to participate in advocacy activities or to volunteer for a political party or candidate.

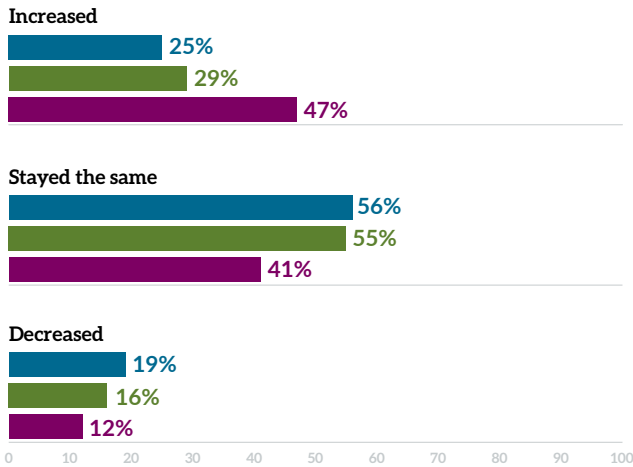
## Gen X

Sandwiched between Millennials and Boomers, Gen X donors also fall in the middle of most attributes measured in this study and share characteristics with both adjacent generations. Like Boomer volunteers, they are most likely to lend a hand to support their favorite causes, but nearly a third say that they participate in fundraising activities—like Millennials. Also similar to Millennials, Gen X donors are more likely to volunteer for organizations that work with children or teens, which fits with their life stage. Many Gen X donors have children who participate in organizations that often solicit parent volunteers, like schools, sports teams and Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts.

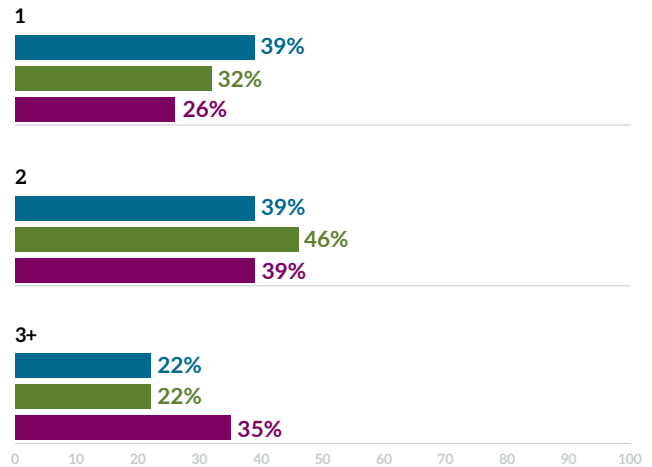
# Generational divides in volunteering

■ Baby Boomers ■ Gen X ■ Millennials

## How has your volunteer time changed in the last two years?

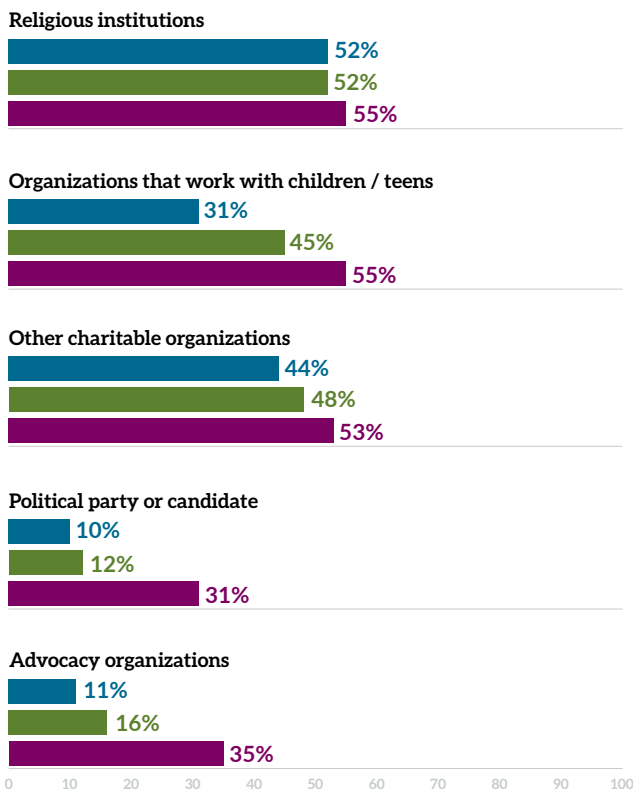


## For how many organizations have you volunteered?

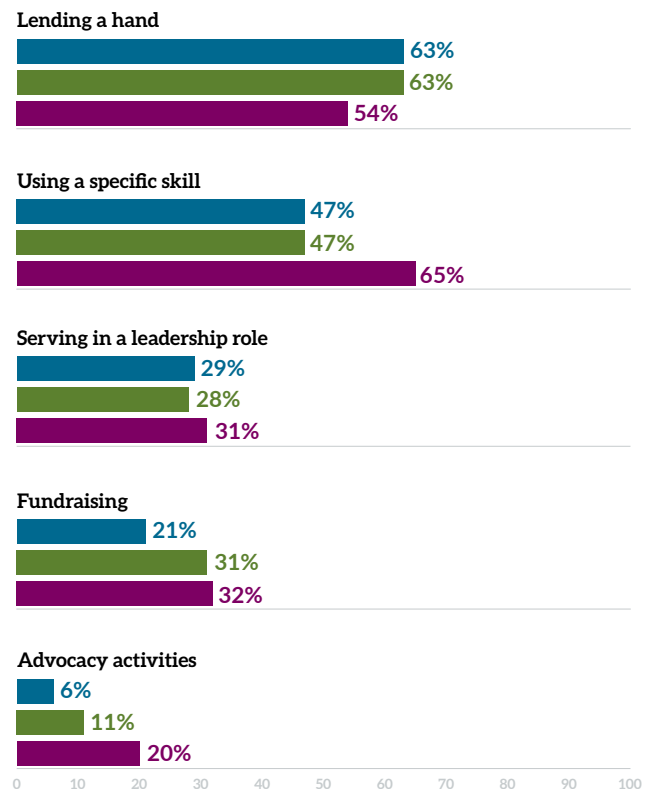


Base: Respondents who volunteered within the last two years

## For what type of organizations have you volunteered?



## What type of volunteer activities have you done?



Base: Respondents who have ever volunteered

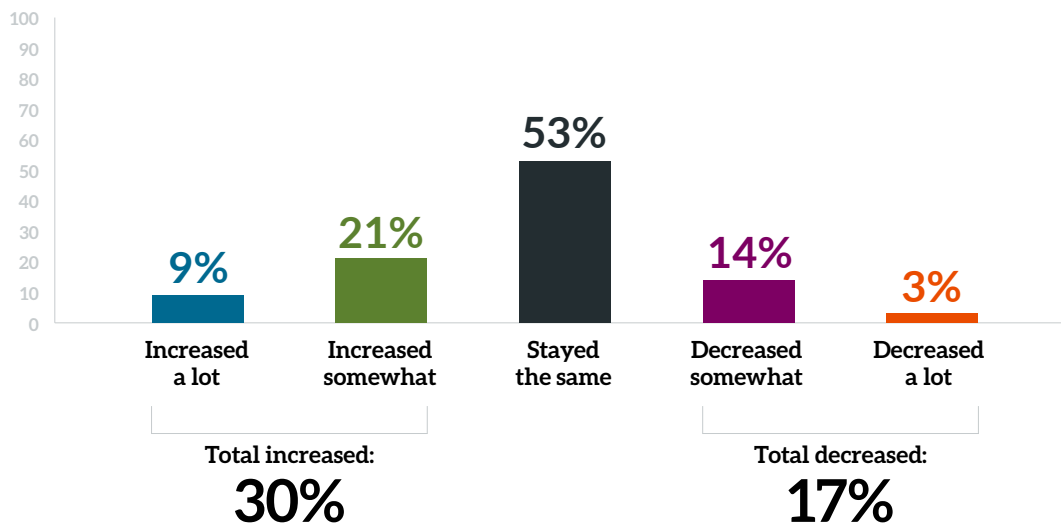
# Volunteering and COVID-19

## Before the pandemic, volunteering was on the rise for 30 percent of donors.

Prior to the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, half of volunteers said the amount of time they volunteered had stayed the same in the previous two years, while 30 percent had increased their time. Of those who had spent more time volunteering, nearly three-quarters said it was because they wanted to become more involved in a cause or their community. Gen X and Millennial volunteers were more likely to give this reason; 79 and 78 percent, respectively, said this, compared to 62 percent of Baby Boomers.

A donor’s decrease in volunteer time was most often attributed to having less time available. Younger generations especially felt the time constraints. Eighty percent of Gen X and 79 percent of Millennials said they have less time available or they’re too busy, compared to 45 percent of Baby Boomers.

How volunteer time has changed in the last two years



### Reasons for increased volunteering

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| I want to become more involved in a cause or community | 72% |
| I have more time available                             | 43% |
| Someone asked me to get more involved                  | 36% |
| I wanted to meet other people                          | 19% |
| I wanted to get my family involved in volunteering     | 19% |

### Reasons for decreased volunteering

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| I have less time available                     | 49% |
| The priorities of me or my family have changed | 41% |
| I am too busy                                  | 20% |
| The volunteer work I was doing was temporary   | 13% |
| I am less interested/passionate                | 7%  |

Base: Respondents who volunteered within the last two years



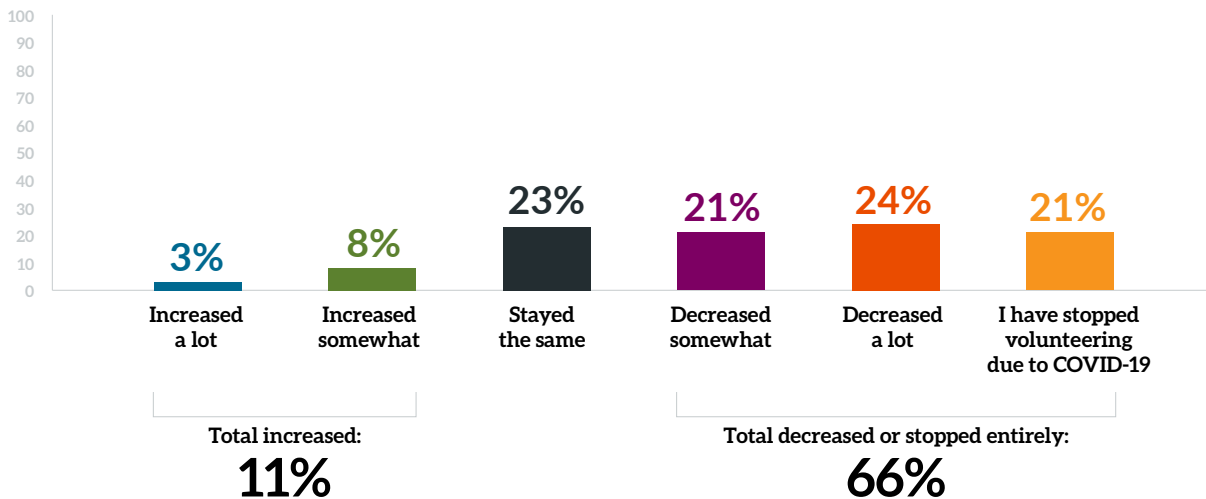


**However, as the COVID-19 crisis intensified, volunteers reconsidered their activities and sharply decreased the amount of time they volunteer.**

In March 2020, state and local governments began urging residents to stay home to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus. At the time, nearly half (47 percent) of recent volunteers believed the amount of time they volunteered would decrease or stop entirely due to pandemic-related social distancing.<sup>3</sup>

But five months into the crisis, those expectations proved to underestimate the true impact of the pandemic on volunteerism. In an August 2020 survey of Fidelity Charitable donors, two-thirds said they have decreased the amount of time they volunteer or stopped entirely due to the pandemic.

**How volunteer time has changed during COVID-19**



Base: Respondents who volunteered within the last two years

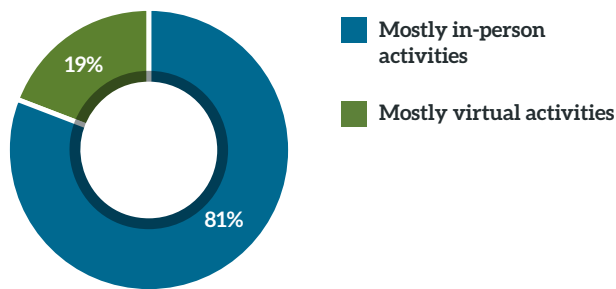
<sup>3</sup> Fidelity Charitable, "How COVID-19 is shifting donor giving," April 2020.



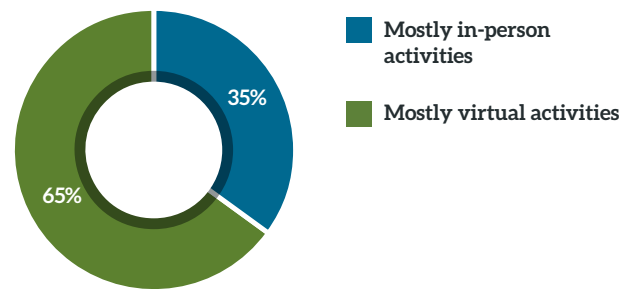
**The COVID-19 crisis has forced many donors to shift away from in-person volunteering. Eight in ten volunteers did in-person activities before—but during the pandemic, 65 percent moved to mostly virtual activities.**

Before the pandemic, the vast majority of donors participated mostly in on-site or in-person volunteer activities. But as COVID-19 made it risky to gather in public, many of the donors who wished to continue supporting their favorite nonprofits shifted to remote or virtual volunteer activities. Donors who have participated in virtual volunteerism during the pandemic are split in their reactions; 38 percent are mostly or very satisfied with their virtual experience, while 27 percent are only a little or not at all satisfied.

**Before COVID-19, I participated in...**



**During COVID-19, I have participated in...**

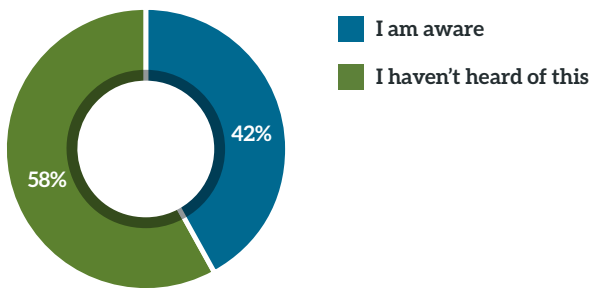


Base: Respondents who continued volunteering during the pandemic

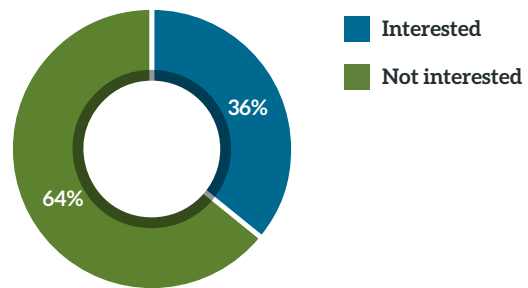
## Most donors are new to the concept of virtual volunteerism and are not sure how to find remote opportunities.

More than half of donors have yet to engage in virtual or remote volunteering. This group says they have never heard of virtual volunteerism and aren't interested, and nearly two-thirds say they don't know how to seek out remote volunteer roles. But as the pandemic wears on and in-person volunteering remains risky, these opportunities may become more prevalent—particularly if nonprofits pivot to provide meaningful virtual opportunities and actively promote them among their regular volunteers who wish to remain engaged.

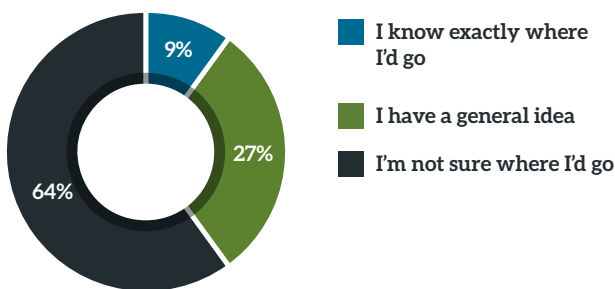
**Awareness of virtual volunteer activities**



**Are you interested in virtual volunteer activities?**



**Do you know where you would find virtual volunteer activities?**



Base: Respondents who stopped volunteering during the pandemic or haven't participated in virtual volunteerism

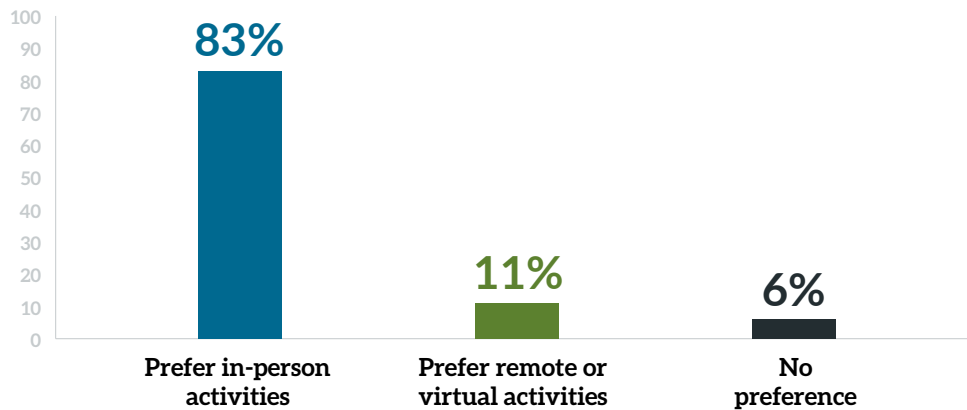




**Given the choice, more than eight in ten volunteers prefer in-person volunteer activities.**

Volunteers show a strong preference for in-person and on-site activities—with many saying that volunteering in-person helps them feel like more a part of their community. However, as more nonprofits pivot to offering virtual volunteer opportunities and the variety of options broadens, more volunteers may find virtual roles they prefer.

**Donor preference**



**Why do you prefer in-person volunteering?**

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| It makes me feel like part of my community | 75% |
| I like socializing with others             | 53% |
| I can work with my preferred nonprofits    | 43% |
| I can use more of my specific skills       | 40% |
| I can volunteer with a group               | 31% |

**Why do you prefer virtual volunteering?**

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| It's flexible/fits into my schedule                  | 54% |
| It's easier for me                                   | 50% |
| I can use more of my specific skills                 | 29% |
| I don't have to interact with other people           | 17% |
| I can volunteer for a wider variety of organizations | 8%  |

Base: Respondents who have done both in-person and virtual volunteering

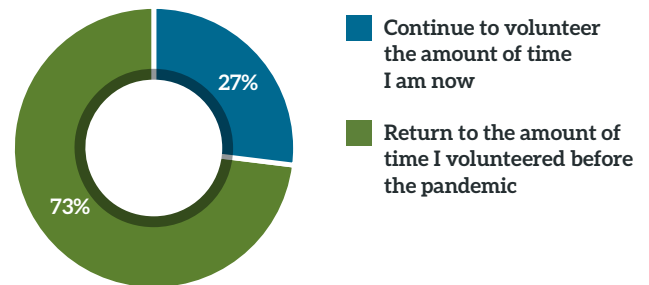




**When the pandemic ends, nearly three-quarters of donors expect to return to their pre-pandemic volunteering routines.**

At this stage, volunteers are planning to revert back to their pre-pandemic volunteer engagement once the COVID-19 crisis ends. This is a hopeful indicator for nonprofits concerned that the reduction in volunteer support due to the pandemic may be permanent. At the same time, the longer the crisis continues, the more likely it becomes that the sector will need to find new models to continue to engage volunteers or to deliver services without them.

After COVID-19, I expect I will...



Base: Respondents who either increased or decreased their volunteer time during the pandemic or stopped volunteering entirely

# Methodology

Artemis Strategy Group, an independent research firm, conducted a research study on behalf of Fidelity Charitable about how donors engage in volunteerism. 1,842 adults in the U.S. who donated at least \$1,000 to charity in 2019 were surveyed in March 2020.

In addition, a survey was conducted in August 2020 among 491 Fidelity Charitable donors about how volunteerism was impacted by COVID-19. The data and analysis on pages 13–17 is based on this survey.



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