



# → AmeriCorps Volunteer Generation Fund Program Evaluation

Final Report



BUNDLED EVALUATION AND CAPACITY BUILDING PROJECT

March 2024

Prepared by ICF for the AmeriCorps  
Office of Research and Evaluation



## Acknowledgements

The ICF evaluation team would like to acknowledge the many members of the AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE) and the participating state service commissions that contributed to the evaluation of the Volunteer Generation Fund. They provided valuable information and feedback to ensure the ICF evaluation team was able to fully capture the unique Volunteer Generation Fund-supported programming and how this programming was able to leverage AmeriCorps support to tackle a critical priority. The evaluation team looks forward to continued collaboration with ORE on high-quality evaluation work that can inform policy and practice regarding how national service may be used to address national priorities. Finally, we would like to thank the esteemed members of the Technical Working Group—Rachel Bruns, Dr. Leslie Goodyear, Dr. Kathryn Newcomer, Gabriel Rhoads, Dr. Herbert Turner, Dr. Abraham Wandersman—who advised and provided feedback to improve the quality and clarity of this evaluation.

We also want to thank BCT Partners for their external evaluation of the evaluation capacity building component of the project and contributions to this report on this topic. Their outside perspective was vital in supporting the outcomes of the work.

## Contributing Authors

Samantha Spinney, PhD

Lauren Kennedy

Luca Finkbeiner

Andrew MacDonald

Kerry Fitzgerald (BCT Partners)

Miriam Sarwana, PhD (BCT Partners)

## Suggested Citation

Spinney, S., Kennedy, L., Finkbeiner, L., MacDonald, A., Fitzgerald, K., & Sarwana, M. (2024). *AmeriCorps Volunteer Generation Fund program evaluation: Final report*. ICF.

## Photo Credit

AmeriCorps

This report was commissioned by AmeriCorps' Office of Research and Evaluation under Contract # GS00Q14OADU209 and Order # 95332A20F0068. Information in this report is in the public domain.

# Table of Contents

Executive Summary .....	1
About the VGF Evaluation and Capacity Building Project .....	2
Data Sources and Analysis .....	3
Strengthening Evaluation Capacity .....	5
COVID-19 Pandemic .....	5
Summary of Findings .....	5
Program Models, Training Structures and Key Activities .....	6
Emergent Issues in Volunteer Management and Engagement .....	7
Volunteer Management and Engagement Strategies and Outcomes .....	9
Volunteer Management and Engagement Challenges and Needs .....	11
Strengthening Evaluation Capacity to Build Evidence on Volunteer Management and Engagement .....	11
Recommendations .....	12
Limitations .....	13
Introduction .....	15
Overview of Study .....	17
Context for the Study .....	19
Prior Research on Volunteer Engagement and Management .....	20
Engagement .....	20
Recruitment .....	22
Retention .....	22
Terminology .....	24
Organization of This Report .....	25
Overview of Volunteer Generation Fund Program Models, Training Structures & Key Activities .....	26
VGF Grantee Models .....	26
Program Models .....	26
Grantee Role in Training and Capacity Building .....	27
Capacity Building Activities .....	28
Volunteer Platforms & Networks .....	33

Collecting and Tracking Data .....35

    Data Collected by VGF Grantees .....35

    Data Collected by Program Beneficiaries .....36

Emergent Issues in Volunteer Management and Engagement .....38

    Recent Volunteerism Trends .....38

    The COVID-19 Pandemic .....39

    Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion .....42

Volunteer Management and Engagement Strategies and Outcomes .....45

    Strategies Used and/or Learned .....45

        Engagement .....45

        Recruitment .....46

        Retention .....47

    Outcomes .....48

        VGF Grantee Outcomes .....49

        Program Beneficiary Outcomes .....51

Volunteer Management and Engagement Challenges and Needs .....56

    VGF Grantee Challenges and Needs .....56

    Program Beneficiaries Challenges and Needs .....56

Strengthening Evaluation Capacity to Build Evidence on Volunteer Management and Engagement .....58

    Description and Purpose of Evaluation Capacity Building .....58

    Satisfaction with Evaluation Capacity Building .....59

    Insights into Volunteer Generation Fund Evaluation Challenges and Opportunities from Evaluation Capacity Building Discussions .....60

    Outcomes .....60

Discussion and Conclusion .....66

    Discussion .....66

    Recommendations .....71

    Limitations .....74

References .....76

Appendix A: Methods and Data Sources .....78

    Program Logic Model .....78

    Research Questions .....80

Evaluation Design.....84

Study Sites.....85

Data Sources and Data Collection ..... 86

    Program Documents ..... 86

    Interviews and Focus Groups.....87

    Surveys.....87

    Observations .....90

Analysis.....90

Limitations.....90

Appendix B: Case Studies .....92

    Massachusetts Volunteer Generation Fund Case Study .....93

        Overview of Grant Structure and Goals .....93

        Recent Volunteerism Trends in Massachusetts and Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic ..... 98

        Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion..... 98

        Strategies Used and/or Learned ..... 99

        Collecting and Tracking Data.....101

        Volunteer Platform .....102

        Outcomes .....102

        Conclusion.....107

    Minnesota Volunteer Generation Fund Case Study.....108

        Overview of Grant Structure and Goals ..... 109

        Recent Volunteerism Trends in Minnesota and Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic .....114

        Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion..... 116

        Strategies Used and/or Learned ..... 116

        Collecting and Tracking Data..... 119

        Volunteer Platform ..... 119

        Outcomes .....121

        Conclusion.....126

    North Carolina Volunteer Generation Fund Case Study .....127

        Overview of Grant Structure and Goals .....127

        Recent Volunteerism Trends in North Carolina and Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic.....129

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.....130

Strategies Used and/or Learned .....131

Collecting and Tracking Data.....131

Outcomes .....132

Conclusion.....133

Florida Volunteer Generation Fund Case Study .....134

    Overview of Grant Structure and Goals .....134

    Recent Volunteerism Trends in Florida and Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic .....139

    Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.....139

    Strategies Used and/or Learned .....140

    Collecting and Tracking Data.....142

    Volunteer Network.....143

    Outcomes .....144

    Conclusion.....148

Iowa Volunteer Generation Fund Case Study.....150

    Overview of Grant Structure and Goals .....150

    Recent Volunteerism Trends in Iowa and Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic.....153

    Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.....154

    Strategies Used and/or Learned .....154

    Collecting and Tracking Data.....156

    Volunteer Platform .....157

    Outcomes .....158

    Conclusion.....163

New Hampshire Volunteer Generation Fund Case Study.....164

    Overview of Grant Structure and Goals .....164

    Recent Volunteerism Trends in New Hampshire and Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic.....168

    Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.....169

    Strategies Used and/or Learned .....170

    Collecting and Tracking Data.....171

    Volunteer Platform .....171

    Outcomes .....172

Conclusion.....176

Nevada Volunteer Generation Fund Case Study .....177

    Overview of Grant Structure and Goals .....177

    Recent Volunteerism Trends in Nevada and Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic .....181

    Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.....181

    Strategies Used and/or Learned .....181

    Collecting and Tracking Data.....182

    Volunteer Platform .....183

    Outcomes .....184

    Conclusion.....186

New Jersey Volunteer Generation Fund Case Study.....187

    Overview of Grant Structure and Goals .....187

    Recent Volunteerism Trends in New Jersey and Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic.....191

    Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.....192

    Strategies Used and/or Learned .....192

    Collecting and Tracking Data.....194

    Volunteer Platform .....194

    Outcomes .....195

    Conclusion.....198

Utah Volunteer Generation Fund Case Study .....199

    Overview of Grant Structure and Goals .....199

    Recent Volunteerism Trends in Utah and Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic .....204

    Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.....205

    Strategies Used and/or Learned .....205

    Collecting and Tracking Data.....208

    Outcomes .....208

    Conclusion.....213

Appendix C: Tables.....214

Appendix D: Evaluation Protocols.....215

    Volunteer Management Training/Capacity Building Beneficiary Survey .....215

    AmeriCorps Volunteer Generation Fund Grantee Site Visits Stakeholder Interview/Focus Groups Consent220

Program Implementer Interview Protocol..... 221

State Commission (Grantee) Interview Protocol .....224

State Commission (Grantee) Follow-up Interview Protocol..... 227

Volunteer Management/Capacity Building Beneficiary Focus Group Protocol.....229

Volunteer Management/Capacity Building Beneficiary Focus Group Protocol – Volunteers ..... 232

## Executive Summary

Volunteering brings out the best of America (AmeriCorps, 2021). In a polarized, post-pandemic America, volunteers have been described as playing a key role in reestablishing trust and human interaction—critical activities for strengthening American civil society (Hager & Brudney, 2021).

According to the most recent federal data, 23.2 percent of Americans, or 60.7 million people, formally volunteered (i.e., volunteered with an organization) between September 2020 and 2021, serving an estimated 4.1 billion hours with an economic value of \$122.9 billion (AmeriCorps, 2023). In addition, nearly 51 percent of Americans, or 124.7 million people, informally volunteered by helping others (e.g., by exchanging favors with their neighbors) during that same period (AmeriCorps, 2023). These data show that service to others continues to be a priority for millions of Americans and organizations need to be ready to engage those who want to give back (AmeriCorps, 2021).

In the context of formal volunteering, **volunteer engagement** traditionally refers to a broader strategy to leverage volunteers to accomplish an organization’s mission. **Volunteer management** traditionally refers to organizational practices used to recruit and retain volunteers. Volunteer engagement spans many contexts in which volunteers mobilize, from large volunteer mobilization organizations (i.e., volunteer connector organizations such as Points of Light or United Ways), to nonprofit organizations, faith-based or community-based entities, and institutes of higher education. Volunteer management can also require vastly different practices depending on whether volunteers are episodic (e.g., volunteering to respond to a crisis or for an event) compared to those who are continuing or permanent.

AmeriCorps,<sup>1</sup> the federal agency for national service and volunteerism, provides opportunities for Americans to serve their country domestically, address the nation’s most pressing challenges, improve lives and communities, and strengthen civic engagement. As an independent federal agency, AmeriCorps plays a vital role in supporting the American culture of citizenship, service, and responsibility, and is the nation’s largest grantmaker in support of many forms of service and volunteering. AmeriCorps engages more than 5 million Americans in service through its AmeriCorps, AmeriCorps Seniors, and Volunteer Generation Fund (VGF) programs.

The VGF program, which was authorized by the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act in 2009, invests in volunteer management practices that strengthen nonprofit organizations and other entities’ ability to increase recruitment and retention of volunteers to meet critical community needs through service.<sup>2</sup> AmeriCorps seeks to fund effective approaches that expand volunteering, strengthen the capacity of volunteer connector organizations to recruit and retain skill-based volunteers, and develop strategies to use volunteers effectively to solve community problems.

To learn more about how VGF grants have been implemented and the outcomes of those grants in improving volunteer recruitment and retention, the AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation contracted with ICF to conduct an evaluation of the VGF grant program based on the work of participating grantees awarded in Fiscal Year (FY)2020. This contract also included delivering evaluation capacity building sessions to participating grantees. By simultaneously growing the evidence base on volunteer engagement and

<sup>1</sup> AmeriCorps is the operating name of the Corporation for National and Community Service, or CNCS.

<sup>2</sup> According to VGF statute, grantees can fund state commissions and nonprofit organizations to (1) directly carry out volunteer programs or develop and support community-based entities that recruit, manage, or support volunteers; or (2) through subgrants to community-based entities, carry out volunteer programs or develop and support such entities that recruit, manage, or support volunteers. See [National and Community Service Act of 1990](#) for more information.

management practices and incorporating capacity building and dissemination activities, this project seeks to enable AmeriCorps to more effectively support organizations in enhancing the impact of volunteers on critical community needs.

## About the VGF Evaluation and Capacity Building Project

The evaluation assessed how FY2020 VGF grantees implemented their grants to develop and/or support community-based entities to recruit, manage, and support volunteers within their states as well as the outcomes of VGF grantees' efforts. In FY2020, 14 state service commissions were awarded VGF grants. In total, 9 of the 14 VGF grantees elected to participate in the evaluation, as shown in exhibit ES-1.

**EXHIBIT ES-1.—FY2020 VGF grantees**

State	Commission	Federal Funding Amount	Evaluation Participant
Florida	Volunteer Florida	\$658,401	✓
Illinois	Serve Illinois Commission	\$378,522	
Iowa	Iowa Commission on Volunteer Service (Volunteer Iowa)	\$331,976	✓
Kansas	Kansas Volunteer Commission	\$172,176	
Maine	Maine Commission for Community Service	\$132,958	
Massachusetts	Massachusetts Service Alliance	\$352,173	✓
Michigan	Michigan Community Service Commission	\$740,937	
Minnesota	Minnesota Commission on National and Community Service (ServeMN) with partner Minnesota Alliance for Volunteer Advancement (MAVA)	\$266,000	✓
Nevada	Nevada Volunteers	\$216,810	✓
New Hampshire	Volunteer NH	\$360,109	✓
New Jersey	New Jersey Commission on National Community Service (NJ Commission)	\$250,860	✓
North Carolina	North Carolina Commission on Volunteerism & Community Service (VolunteerNC)	\$270,875	✓
Utah	Utah Commission on Service & Volunteerism (UServeUtah)	\$185,000	✓
Wisconsin	Wisconsin National and Community Service Board	\$235,917	

Note. Although 12 commissions initially agreed to participate in the evaluation, 9 followed through in conducting one or both of the major data collection activities (i.e., site visits and/or the program beneficiary survey) and are therefore considered evaluation participants in this table. ServeMN is the fiscal agent of the VGF grant and responsible for grant compliance, though subgranted all aspects of VGF grant implementation to MAVA. ServeMN and MAVA consider themselves as grant partners. Given MAVA's role in grant implementation, MAVA is therefore referenced as a VGF grantee along with the other state service commissions grantees throughout this report.

State service commissions, the state partners of AmeriCorps, are charged with administering AmeriCorps State, VGF, and related programs to address critical community needs and engage citizens in service (America’s Service Commissions, 2023). These governor-appointed public agencies or private nonprofit organizations serve at the state level to regrant federal national service funds; support other community service agencies at the local, regional, or state levels; and work to support local communities.

As a framework to guide the study, a logic model was developed based on a document review of nine participating VGF grantees included in the study. The logic model outlines the relationships between VGF inputs (AmeriCorps, state service commissions, program implementer partners, and subgrantees) and activities; expected outputs; and their desired short-, and long-term outcomes. Rather than representing strategies from any specific grantee or VGF program, the model is comprehensive, covering a broad list of activities across all related VGF programs. The logic model also depicts key contextual factors (e.g., the COVID-19 pandemic; natural disasters; political and economic climate; diversity, equity, and inclusion) that may have influenced grantee implementation and programming.

In acknowledgement of the unique configurations in which state service commissions designed and implemented their VGF grant programs, the evaluation team used a mixed-method case study design—with each VGF grantee considered a case—to fully depict implementation and outcomes for each grantee. An in-depth cross-case analysis was also conducted to understand cross-cutting trends in VGF grant implementation and outcomes among the grantees. The three major objectives that guided the research questions are as follows:

- Describe the state service commissions’ approaches for utilizing VGF funds to improve volunteer recruitment, retention, and support of volunteers within their states and among volunteer organizations.
- Describe promising practices and challenges in implementing these approaches.
- Analyze preliminary outputs and outcomes of these approaches on volunteer organizations.

## Data Sources and Analysis

Data sources for the evaluation included **grant applications** from VGF grant recipients in FY2020; **annual progress reports** submitted by grantees in 2020, 2021, and 2022; two **project director interviews** (in spring 2022 and summer 2023); virtual site visits with **VGF grantees/program implementers** and **program beneficiaries** (fall 2022); and a survey of organizations receiving VGF-funded training and capacity building

## Terminology

The term “program implementer” refers to the state service commission and/or key partner entity that is primarily responsible for implementing the VGF grant. Since in FY2020, all VGF grant awards were provided to state service commissions.

“VGF grantee” is operationalized as the state service commission and/or program implementer.

“Program beneficiaries” refer to the organizations that ultimately have received VGF grant-funded training and capacity building services. They may be subgrant and mini-grant recipients, volunteer organizations, regional volunteer centers, youth who participated in youth initiatives, and other entities.

services (i.e., program beneficiaries) within each of the grantee states (spring 2023).<sup>3</sup> Given the variety of program implementation models and types of program beneficiaries (e.g., subgrant and mini-grant recipients, volunteer organizations, regional volunteer centers), VGF grantees were provided an opportunity to customize their surveys accordingly. Additional supplemental data from U.S. Census Bureau and previous state- or VGF-specific research from grantees was used to provide additional context for the case studies and larger cross-case analysis. An overview of the data sources are as follows:

Program Documents
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State Service Commission FY2020 VGF Grant Application</li> <li>• State Service Commission VGF Progress Reports from FY2020, FY2021, and FY2022</li> <li>• AmeriCorps Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement from 2017, 2019, and 2021</li> <li>• Additional Data and Evaluation Documentation Provided by the Commission</li> </ul>
Interviews and Focus Groups
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project Directors Interviews at the start and conclusion of the study (fall 2021 and summer 2023)</li> <li>• Program Implementers Interviews</li> <li>• Program Beneficiaries (i.e., Volunteer Organizations) Focus Groups</li> <li>• Program Beneficiaries (i.e., Volunteers) Focus Groups</li> </ul>
Surveys
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beneficiary Survey of Volunteer Organizations that participated in volunteer management training/capacity building</li> </ul>

Interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. All qualitative data was indexed and coded for descriptive and thematic analyses using priori codes (informed by the logic model, key evaluation questions, and literature review), as well as emergent codes that were identified through the transcript review. Qualitative data was analyzed for each case independently. Observation notes and program documents were reviewed to help inform the description of VGF activities, successes, and challenges, as applicable. Descriptive and thematic analyses were conducted using the coded qualitative data and observation notes to help provide in-depth information related to how the VGF-funded activities were working within the state, and/or how stakeholders perceived preliminary program impacts on beneficiaries. Beneficiary survey responses were analyzed with basic descriptive statistics (e.g., means, medians, and frequencies) to address the evaluation questions. Survey data was analyzed for each case independently. By triangulating findings from the interviews, focus groups, observations, surveys, and program documents, robust and dynamic depictions of the program approaches and implementation were developed into case studies for each respective grantee. In summer 2023 project director interviews, VGF staff reviewed their respective case study to provide feedback, clarification, or corrections. Variations across the grantees were highlighted through individual case studies and a cross-case analysis. Any contextual factors that emerged, including operating during the pandemic and the focus on/incorporation of diversity, equity and inclusion were also included in the case studies.

<sup>3</sup> For virtual site visits and the program beneficiary survey, the VGF program director and additional VGF staff recruited and selected the program beneficiaries to participate in the data collection activities.

## Strengthening Evaluation Capacity

As noted, evaluation capacity building was provided to VGF grantee evaluation participants as a strategy for strengthening evidence building. In particular, the evaluation capacity building helped participants stay engaged with the bundled evaluation through 1-hour long monthly capacity building sessions spanning 12 months from December 2021 to November 2022. Across the 12 sessions, a total of 25 VGF grantee representatives (e.g., project directors, grantee staff, partners) from the participating grantees, attended at least one of the evaluation capacity building sessions, with an average of 12 participants attending each session. In addition to providing technical assistance on evaluation planning, implementation, and reporting, evaluation capacity building included dedicated sessions to provide updates about and seek feedback on key evaluation activities. In this way, the evaluation capacity building strengthened the bundle evaluation and the evidence it produced.

## COVID-19 Pandemic

One important contextual note is that many evaluation activities occurred in 2021 and 2022—at the height of the coronavirus 2019 disease (COVID-19) pandemic. As has been broadly documented, the COVID-19 pandemic has had far-reaching effects on all aspects of American life—interrupting in-person participation across social sectors—which greatly impacted volunteerism. Meanwhile, despite declines in formal volunteering in the height of the pandemic, there was simultaneously an increase in demand for services. In 2022, nearly two-thirds (64.4 percent) of nonprofits reported an increase in demand for their organizational services (Dietz & Grimm, 2023). Nearly half (46.8 percent) of nonprofit CEOs reported that recruiting sufficient volunteers was a “big problem” for their organization (Dietz & Grimm, 2023). It is within this context that the evaluation was conducted and findings should be interpreted accordingly. Even so, many state service commissions and the volunteer organizations they serve must be agile and adaptive to address the emerging needs of their communities during periods of crisis, such as natural disasters or pandemics. While evaluation activities and findings are framed in the COVID-19 pandemic, they may have relevance to the continued work of volunteer engagement and management in a post-pandemic climate.

## Summary of Findings

The following summary provides a high-level overview of the cross-case analysis findings related to program models, emergent issues, strategies and outcomes, and challenges and needs. Additionally, findings from the evaluation capacity building project component are also discussed.

## Evaluation Feedback Loop

Evaluation capacity building sessions established an important feedback loop on the evaluation and likely helped facilitate greater communication and feedback from VGF grantees to the evaluation team. In January 2023, based on feedback received from VGF grantees, the evaluation design pivoted from a program-level evaluation to using a case study approach (with cross-case analysis). As part of this shift, grantees were also provided opportunities to customize a beneficiary survey instrument to better align with the unique characteristics of their program model. In addition, grantees were given the opportunity to review a draft of their case study and weigh in with any corrections or additions. These key changes helped to ensure that the evaluation yielded authentic and valid findings regarding the VGF program.

## Program Models, Training Structures and Key Activities

Grantees used a combination of program models to implement training and key activities. Seven of the nine grantees cited using an external model—Service Enterprise, Human Resources Management (HRM), or Stanford University’s Pathways of Public Service and Civic Engagement. Additionally, grantees’ models varied in how training and/or capacity building services were provided:

- Eight grantees reported independently providing training and/or capacity building services ranging from directly providing training and technical assistance to providing subgrants to local organizations.
- Seven grantees noted they collaborated with external partners to implement training and capacity building services to varying extents ranging from entrusting nearly all VGF grant implementation to a partner organization to collaborating with an external company to help train subgrantee cohorts.

Overall, six of the nine grantees utilized a combination of these two approaches.

All of the participating grantees incorporated some component of training into their VGF grant programming, with two key associated promising practices:

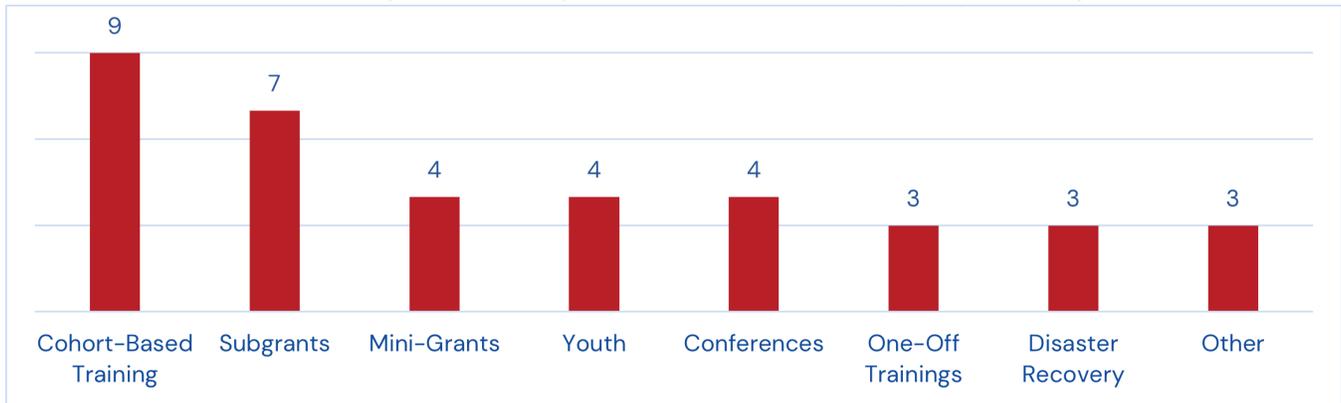
- Developing a structured sequence of trainings—functioning as a pipeline in which individuals or organizations can move from a more basic training to a more advanced training—was a promising practice for building capacity and preparing for greater civic engagement.
- Incorporating a cohort model in trainings or facilitating other peer learning opportunities—such as those offered through Service Enterprise—was also a promising practice for building capacity among program beneficiaries.

In addition to training, the majority of grantees provided subgrants and/or mini-grants. Grantee training and capacity building activities also included youth initiatives and disaster recovery and just under half of the participating grantees developed or supported state-wide conferences. (See exhibit ES-2 for a breakdown of capacity building activities by number of VGF grantees.)

## Service Enterprise

Six of the participating VGF grantees offered the Service Enterprise volunteer engagement training program at some point during their FY2020 VGF grant. Service Enterprise is a program that seeks to strengthen nonprofit capacity through the fundamental and strategic use of volunteers (ALIVE, 2022). In the Service Enterprise model, training, support, and resources to nonprofits are either provided through local training hubs or national trainers. Beneficiaries shared high praise regarding the comprehensive, systematic, and organization-wide change it was able to achieve. VGF grantees were either designated as Service Enterprise Hubs—conducting the program themselves—or funded organizations who were hubs or on their way to become hubs. Training was delivered in a cohort model, which beneficiaries also greatly valued.

**EXHIBIT ES-2.—Number of VGF grantees using different VGF-funded capacity building activities**



Beyond the training and capacity building activities, six VGF grantees also used their grant to develop or support the use of state volunteer portals/platforms intended to link volunteers to volunteer opportunities. All VGF grantees and many program beneficiaries also reported collecting a variety of data to inform VGF grant progress reporting and to support continuous quality improvement of services.

Throughout the evaluation, two key challenges emerged among VGF grantees related to aspects of their program:

- First, while six participating grantees had a volunteer platform or network, they were not universally used by volunteer organizations or volunteers. Platforms or networks were online websites or tools that provided access for volunteer organizations to post available volunteer positions and potential volunteers to search for volunteer opportunities in their local community or broader state. The majority of grantees with a volunteer platform or network reported actively working to build awareness of their programs—through advertising and marketing or training.
- Second, the data collected and tracked by grantees was relatively inconsistent with varying ways of measuring of constructs, except for the two required national performance measures in the annual VGF Progress Report.<sup>4</sup> When given the opportunity to weigh in on any requested changes to the progress report metrics, grantees emphasized the need for qualitative data in the progress report, given the diversity of program activities and outcomes across and within grant programs, as well as the option to break out existing measures into subgroups based on demographic categories. Among program beneficiaries, there were also reported inconsistencies in how to measure key volunteering outcomes, such as retention.

### **Emergent Issues in Volunteer Management and Engagement**

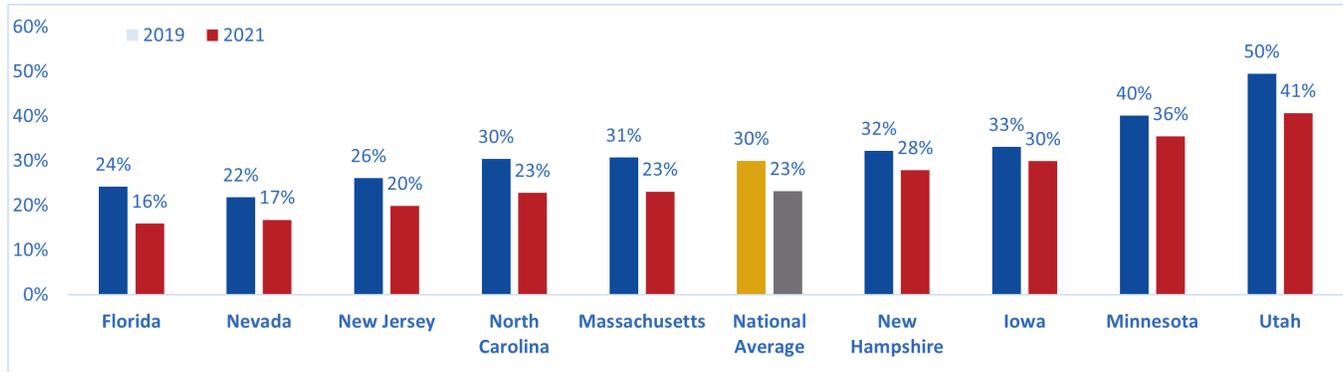
Emergent issues in volunteer management and engagement included recent volunteerism trends; the COVID-19 pandemic; and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).<sup>5</sup> Each of these issues had some influence on VGF grantees.

<sup>4</sup> Grantees collected two national performance measures on number of organizations receiving capacity building services and the number of organizations that increased their effectiveness, efficiency and/or program scale/reach. All grantees were also required to report the number of volunteers recruited or managed and the number of those served by those volunteers.

<sup>5</sup> In the context of this study, findings related to DEI include both internal practices of VGF grantees (i.e., considerations of subgrantees, diverse staff/trainers) and external services provided to program beneficiaries (i.e., training on inclusive volunteer recruitment practices and diversifying volunteers).

**Recent Volunteerism Trends.** Formal volunteering rates across all grantees declined during the COVID-19 pandemic according to the AmeriCorps Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement (see exhibit ES-3). Most grantees also had declines, while slightly smaller, in informal volunteering.

**EXHIBIT ES-3.—Formal volunteerism levels from 2019 and 2021: state and national levels**



**COVID-19 Pandemic.** Since the participating VGF grantees began their programs during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, there were significant disruptions to grant programming and services, such as shifting to virtual platforms and adjusting training content to help support the emerging challenges organizations faced in the pandemic. Multiple grantees found the virtual format of programming had higher viewership than previous in-person trainings, with one grantee noting it decreased cross-organization interactions as fewer organizations participated. Even so, participants valued the offerings, suggesting the smaller groups provided more tailored support. By the end of the evaluation in 2023, a few participating grantees and organizations noted their participant rates had returned to pre-pandemic levels.

**DEI.** Eight of the nine VGF grantees incorporated DEI into volunteer management and engagement. Across grantees, the framework and depth of DEI training and capacity building varied greatly and included topics such as:

- Recruiting diverse volunteers
- Preparedness resources for individuals with disabilities
- Diversifying volunteer programs
- Culturally competent services for immigrant populations
- Reducing economic barriers to volunteer retention
- Disrupting white supremacy within volunteerism best practices

These topics were addressed through trainings, conferences, the use of affinity groups, and other initiatives. The grantees that were most actively engaged in DEI were not just doing one-off DEI trainings but implementing DEI principles in their own work as an organization. For example, beyond incorporating DEI into volunteer management and engagement training and capacity building services, two grantees described prioritizing DEI in staffing and the process for awarding subgrants. VGF grantees and program beneficiaries noted the desire for the Service Enterprise curriculum to better incorporate strategies on how to ensure volunteer opportunities were inclusive and accounted for volunteer

*A lot of the agencies lost volunteers, where some agencies ended up recruiting more volunteers [who] wanted to work in the emergency preparedness field. It was a little bit of a catch-22 for all the grantees. While it was more difficult for them to provide training, they pivoted, and started providing training online.*

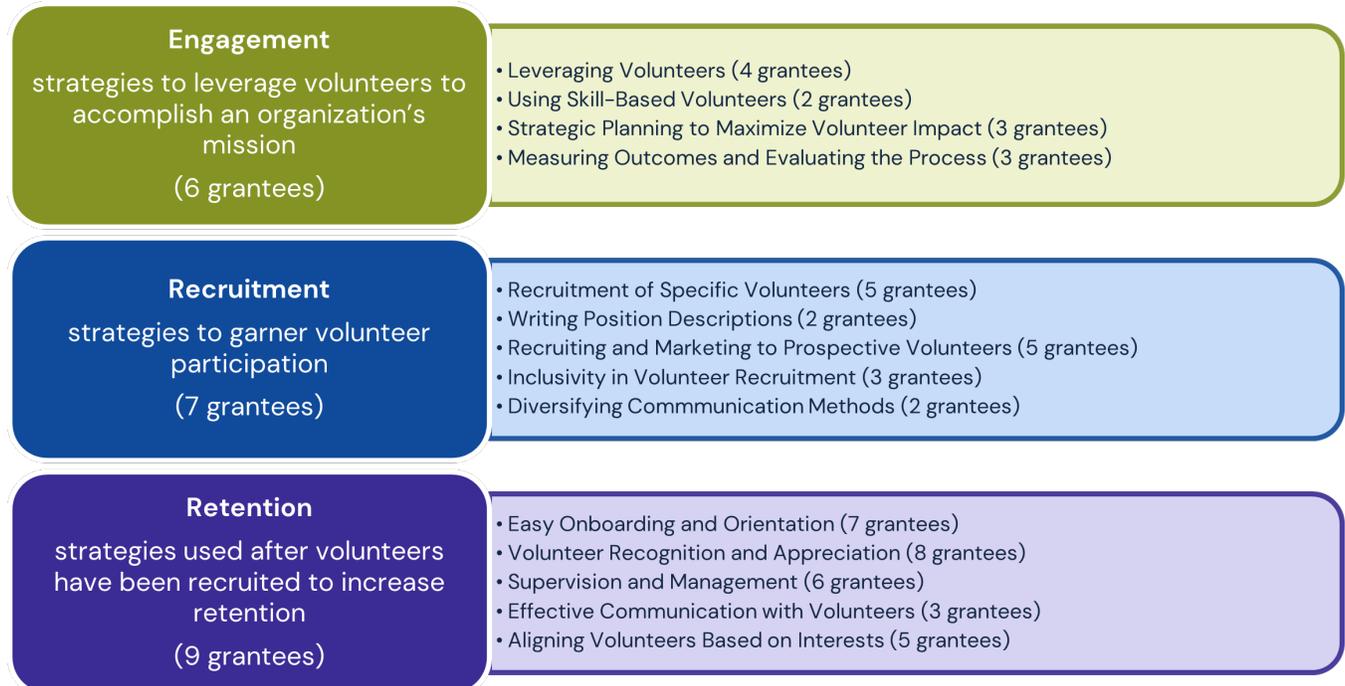
NJ Commission staff member

access to transportation and technology. This feedback had been provided to the Service Enterprise program implementer, which was reportedly working to address the feedback. Several grantees also noted challenges pertaining to DEI, as this topic was heavily politicized at the state level, appearing to be a barrier for some of the grantees.

### Volunteer Management and Engagement Strategies and Outcomes

Participating program beneficiaries reported **strategies** they used and/or learned through their participation in VGF-supported training and capacity building activities, which centered on improving volunteer engagement, recruitment, and retention (see exhibit ES-4). All nine VGF grantees reported strategies and management practices focused on volunteer retention. Many of the prominent retention strategies described aligned with the findings from the prior research on volunteer engagement and management, such as the importance of volunteer recognition and appreciation (Cho et al., 2020; Huynh et al., 2012); aligning volunteers to tasks based on their interests (McBride & Lee, 2012); and easy and clear volunteer onboarding and orientation processes (Tang et al., 2010; Huynh et al., 2012; Newton et al., 2014). Seven of the grantees reported strategies related to volunteer recruitment, such as the recruitment of specific volunteers and recruiting and marketing to prospective volunteers—both of which echoed previous research that suggested explicitly signifying a desire to recruit from specific populations (Boezeman & Ellemers, 2008) and matching recruitment messages to potential volunteers’ motives (Einolf, 2018) improved recruitment of volunteers. Lastly, six of the grantees reported strategies related to volunteer engagement, most frequently noting strategies related to leveraging volunteers to accomplish an organization’s mission and gaining staff buy-in on the use of volunteers.

**EXHIBIT ES-4.—Volunteer management and engagement strategies reported by number of grantees**



In terms of **outcomes**, VGF grantees played a crucial role in supporting volunteer engagement and volunteer management.

According to the 2021 VGF progress reports, the nine participating VGF grantees were able to provide over 2,000 organizations with capacity building services, with over 1,900 organizations increasing their effectiveness, efficiency, and/or program scale/reach. At the volunteer level, VGF grantees reported over 130,000 volunteers were recruited or managed, then serving over one million hours. Additionally, VGF grantee staff shared in interviews the biggest successes and outcomes they had achieved through their grant. These outcomes were centered around increased reach and recognition and improved services for beneficiaries:

*We've all survived a national disaster. FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] declared COVID a national disaster at one point, and we are all disaster survivors. Being able to come out of that situation successfully, I feel like that's a huge triumph.*

MAVA staff member

- **Increased Reach and Recognition.** Four grantees shared they had successfully transitioned to online or virtual services and/or increased their access to new organizations.
- **Improved Services for Beneficiaries.** Two VGF grantees shared that they provided long-term support to organizations served, paid attention to member needs, and created new volunteer management staff positions.
- **Program Beneficiary outcomes** aligned with key focus areas of improved engagement, recruitment, retention, and increased organizational and/or individual staff capacity.
- **Volunteer Engagement.** Program beneficiaries of all nine grantees noted volunteer engagement outcomes from generally better leveraging of volunteers to the promotion of organizational change through Service Enterprise.
- **Volunteer Recruitment.** Program beneficiaries from eight of the grantees noted increased and/or improved volunteer recruitment. Several grantees reported increased reach due to the VGF grant, either because of increased recruitment of volunteers or increased partnership with organizations. A volunteer connector subgrantee reported they expanded the types of organizations to which they sent volunteers, while another grantee hired an outreach coordinator, funded through their mini-grant, to reach more people in the community.
- **Volunteer Retention.** Program beneficiaries from six grantees reported improved volunteer retention. Among six of the eight VGF grantees that administered the beneficiary survey, one third or more respondents from each grantee indicated the VGF grant had a substantial or transformative improvement on their organization's ability to engage and retain volunteers.
- **Increased Capacity.** Program beneficiaries from seven grantees reported increased capacity occurring on various scales. Individual outcomes included increased confidence and networking among volunteer managers and organizational outcomes included increased recognition in the community or state. Obtaining certifications was noted to be achieved on both scales, depending on the scope of the program as either a national certification like Service Enterprise or a state-specific certification developed by the grantee. Across commissions and program beneficiaries alike, a shared outcome noted was the importance of being recognized as a thought and/or planning leader in the field of volunteer management/engagement.

## Volunteer Management and Engagement Challenges and Needs

Looking towards the future, VGF grantees shared needs centered on the request for more resources and support in managing and sustaining their VGF grant. Beneficiaries' needs centered on requests for more support on measuring outcomes, recruiting diverse volunteers, and increasing volunteer engagement and impact. For example, program beneficiaries shared challenges tracking and managing volunteer data, expressing a need for additional support on how to manage and track volunteer data and how to streamline the data collected. Organizations who participated in Service Enterprise expressed the need for more opportunities to discuss how to diversify their organization's volunteer base. Finally, staff from one grantee emphasized they needed sustainable funding to allow them to continue offering programs that had already been implemented. Staff noted that impactful initiatives took time to build, and many of the programs were beginning to gain traction three years after they were initially awarded. But without sustained funding, they would be sunset at the grant's conclusion.

## Strengthening Evaluation Capacity to Build Evidence on Volunteer Management and Engagement

Evaluation capacity building was provided over the course of 12 hour-long technical assistance sessions delivered on a monthly basis delivered between December 2021 and November 2022. Designed to enhance participants' capacity as educated consumers of evaluation, these sessions were divided into three modules: (1) Planning Evaluation; (2) Implementing Evaluation; and (3) Reporting and Using Evaluation. The curriculum was based on the AmeriCorps evaluation capacity building core curriculum with extensive tailoring to the volunteer management and state service commission context, especially through examples and discussion prompts that invited participants to apply evaluation concepts to their experiences.

In total, 25 VGF grantee representatives (e.g., project directors, grantee staff, partners) participated in at least one of the evaluation capacity building sessions, ranging from 1 to 2 representatives from each of 12 grantee organizations that had initially agreed to participate in the evaluation as of spring 2022.

BCT Partners, subcontractor to ICF, conducted a mixed-methods evaluation of the evaluation capacity building sessions to achieve two primary objectives: (1) to provide formative feedback to help enhance the curriculum and delivery of the sessions to better align with grantees' needs, and (2) to provide summative feedback regarding the degree to which the sessions led to changes in participants' knowledge of and attitudes toward evaluation. Data sources for the evaluation included the following:

- A session-specific post-survey administered at the conclusion of each presentation. Results from these surveys were used to calculate a composite satisfaction rating on a 1–5 scale for each session and assess participant knowledge of session content. The post-session surveys also included open-ended opportunities for participants to describe what they liked and what could be improved in the session's content or delivery.
- Direct observations of all sessions.
- A pre- and post-survey that assessed participants' knowledge of and attitudes toward evaluation topics at the beginning and conclusion of the entire curriculum.

For the evaluation capacity building sessions, perceived knowledge of evaluation topics increased across all topics, measured on the pre-post surveys. The topics in which participants' perceived knowledge increased the most were recognizing how quantitative and qualitative analysis was performed; identifying common data analysis terms; and recognizing who in their organization should collect data. Even so, participants

shared mixed feedback on the sessions. The highest reported satisfaction was for the sessions on Data Collection Techniques, Data Analysis, and Using Evaluation for Program Improvement, as they provided the most tangible content that could immediately be applied and provided opportunities to get colleagues' feedback on challenges or approaches. Early in the evaluation capacity building sessions, some participants shared they felt the materials were not relevant to their duties, were too basic, and did not sufficiently address complex evaluation challenges in their field. For subsequent sessions, additional time was allotted for discussion and more tailored examples included, with generally higher satisfaction scores. Nevertheless, feedback on the sessions being too general persisted with a few participants.

## Recommendations

Based on evaluation findings, the following recommendations for AmeriCorps and VGF grantees were provided for consideration in future VGF grant implementation and implementation of similar programming outside of VGF.

### Recommendations for AmeriCorps

- **Continue to offer flexibility in use of VGF grant funds.** VGF grantee staff expressed gratitude regarding the flexibility of the VGF funds and grant and suggested that flexible funding opportunities continue to be provided to support volunteer engagement, recruitment, and retention.
- **Collaborate with commissions to identify how volunteer engagement and management practices can be sustained with grant changes.** With AmeriCorps's recent shift to expand VGF grant awards to nonprofit organizations, beyond state service commissions, commissions have expressed concerns for their future and ability to sustain services. AmeriCorps may wish to engage with FY2020 grantees that were not funded again in FY2023 to discuss strategies for sustainability, support long-term benefits to statewide volunteer engagement and management practices, and maintain rapport with the state service commissions that are critical partners to AmeriCorps.
- **Consider the future directions for supporting volunteer engagement and volunteer management programming.** The pandemic highlighted a shift in volunteering and for many state service commissions and program beneficiaries the traditional model of volunteer engagement and management was no longer feasible. As AmeriCorps seeks to use VGF to support the next chapter in volunteer management and engagement, state service commissions—state partners of AmeriCorps responsible for engaging citizens in service—should be key contributors to the discussion about the future of VGF.
- **Consider more qualitative measures in VGF progress reports and use of optional demographic subgroups for key performance metrics.** VGF grantees emphasized the need for AmeriCorps to collect qualitative data in progress reports on grant accomplishments. While there may be too many varied differences in VGF grantee program models and activities for one or two measures to fully capture the impact of VGF across grantees, there are still several similarities in programming and measures broken out by subgroups or program strategies is an alternate approach but would require the VGF grant to be more prescriptive and less flexible and may be challenging or costly for state service commissions to implement. Volunteer retention is a key outcome of interest for volunteer organizations, but caution should be urged against standardizing this metric in progress reports as retention may have different meanings and different desired outcomes in different contexts.
- **Consider using a participatory approach for future studies involving state service commissions.** VGF grantees had a lot of feedback regarding the appropriateness and relevancy of various evaluation methodological approaches as well as the evaluation capacity building sessions content. AmeriCorps may wish to consider using a participatory process to engage commission staff earlier in project

planning—and throughout the life of the project—to ensure their perspectives are reflected, various program models are considered, and ultimately, the evaluation is more nuanced and authentic.

### Recommendations for VGF Grantees

- **Incorporate opportunities for volunteer organizations to network and collaborate with other organizations.** Cohort-based peer learning training and capacity building opportunities were valued among training participants which allowed VGF grantees to not only educate and support smaller nonprofits on volunteer engagement and management practices, but also to create communities of practice to support increased competency across the state.
- **Diversify offerings to incorporate a multi-faceted approach to provide training and capacity building at the organization level and individual level.** VGF grantees that diversified their training and capacity building to account for both organizational level change (volunteer engagement) and practices of volunteer coordinators (volunteer management) appeared to not only better serve participants, but also were able to continue to offer ongoing support as organizations grew in their own capacity.
- **Consider identifying new metrics to track use of volunteer platforms, not only in site traction but meaningful use and matching between volunteers and organizations.** During periods of high need, such as the COVID-19 pandemic or natural disasters, the quick mobilization of volunteers is crucial. Collecting relevant data on the use or success of volunteer platforms in matching potential volunteers to organizations will provide VGF grantees with actionable data to inform planning.
- **Incorporate DEI into training and capacity building practices.** Going beyond offering trainings focused on inclusivity in volunteerism, diversifying volunteer organization’s volunteer base, and understanding the how increase the inclusivity of the language used, VGF grantees should consider how they can incorporate DEI practices and principles into their own work, such as how subgrants are awarded.

## Limitations

This study provides important information for understanding VGF AmeriCorps grantees and the services they provided to program beneficiaries. However, several limitations were identified that readers should be aware of when interpreting the findings.

**Due to staff turnover and availability, there was high attrition among participating VGF grantees.** The initial study design invited all 14 of the active FY2020 VGF grants, with ultimately 9 grantees agreeing to participate in the evaluation due to challenges with staff turnover and availability.

**The survey sample for the beneficiary survey was low.** Due to the variations in VGF program service models, the sample size of survey administered varied substantially. Participating grantees identified the program beneficiaries among whom they would like to administer the beneficiary survey. Some grantees administered the survey to only their subgrantees—whom may be very familiar with volunteer management topics—while others sent it all individuals who had ever participated in any VGF-funded or partially-funded activity. Given this variation, comparative survey findings across states should be considered with caution.

**While some grantees customized their surveys, not all chose to do so.** Grantees were given the opportunity to customize their program beneficiary survey according to their program model. However, not all grantees opted for customizations. Therefore comparison of some survey findings across participating grantees is not feasible.

**Data collection was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic.** The data collection included in the evaluation was collected from January 2022 to July 2023. Due to the pandemic, all of the participating sites opted for the site visit to be conducted virtually. For some grantees it was difficult to connect with program implementers, beneficiaries, and/or volunteers virtually.

**Unable to ascertain distinguishable differences in outcomes between grantees who funded positions to support VGF programming and those who did not.** VGF grantees were not explicitly asked if funds were used to support staffing full- or part-time positions that supported VGF programming and activities. Use of funding for positions was determined based on VGF grant applications and any relevant information shared incidentally during site visits. Without intentional data collection on funded staff positions, the evaluation was not able to answer the question of how VGF funded positions influenced grantee outcomes.

**The study is not causal.** This study describes the implementation of the VGF grant by AmeriCorps grantees and the self-reported outcomes of program participants. It does not examine the impact of the VGF grant, meaning that it does not answer the question of whether participant outcomes were the result of the training and capacity building from the VGF grant.

## Introduction

Volunteering brings out the best of America (AmeriCorps, 2021). In a polarized, post-pandemic America, volunteers have been described as playing a key role in reestablishing trust and human interaction—critical activities for strengthening American civil society (Hager & Brudney, 2021).

According to the most recent federal data, 23.2 percent of Americans, or 60.7 million people, formally volunteered (i.e., volunteered with an organization) between September 2020 and 2021, serving an estimated 4.1 billion hours with an economic value of \$122.9 billion (AmeriCorps, 2023). In addition, nearly 51 percent of Americans, or 124.7 million people, informally volunteered by helping others (e.g., by exchanging favors with their neighbors) during that same period (AmeriCorps, 2023). These data show that service to others continues to be a priority for millions of Americans and organizations need to be ready to engage those who want to give back (AmeriCorps, 2021).

In the context of formal volunteering, **volunteer engagement** traditionally refers to a broader strategy to leverage volunteers to accomplish an organization’s mission. **Volunteer management** traditionally refers to organizational practices used to recruit and retain volunteers. Volunteer engagement spans many contexts in which volunteers mobilize, from large volunteer mobilization organizations (i.e., volunteer connector organizations such as Points of Light or United Ways), to nonprofit organizations, faith-based or community-based entities, and institutes of higher education. Volunteer management can also require vastly different practices depending on whether volunteers are episodic (e.g., volunteering to respond to a crisis or for an event) compared to those who are continuing or permanent.

### A Note on Terminology

Recently, the term “volunteer management” (referring to practices to recruit and retain volunteers) has been replaced by “volunteer engagement”—reflecting a shift in the field from thinking about volunteers as needing to be “managed” to needing to be “engaged.” Given that the term volunteer engagement also refers to a broader strategy to leverage volunteers to accomplish an organization’s mission, this report uses the traditional definitions of the terms for the sake of clarity in distinguishing between these important concepts. Use of the term is not meant to further the perception that volunteers should be managed rather than engaged.

AmeriCorps,<sup>6</sup> the federal agency for national service and volunteerism, provides opportunities for Americans to serve their country domestically, address the nation’s most pressing challenges, improve lives and communities, and strengthen civic engagement. As an independent federal agency, AmeriCorps plays a vital role in supporting the American culture of citizenship, service, and responsibility, and is the nation’s largest grantmaker in support of many forms of service and volunteering. AmeriCorps engages more than 5 million Americans in service through its AmeriCorps, AmeriCorps Seniors, and Volunteer Generation Fund (VGF) programs.

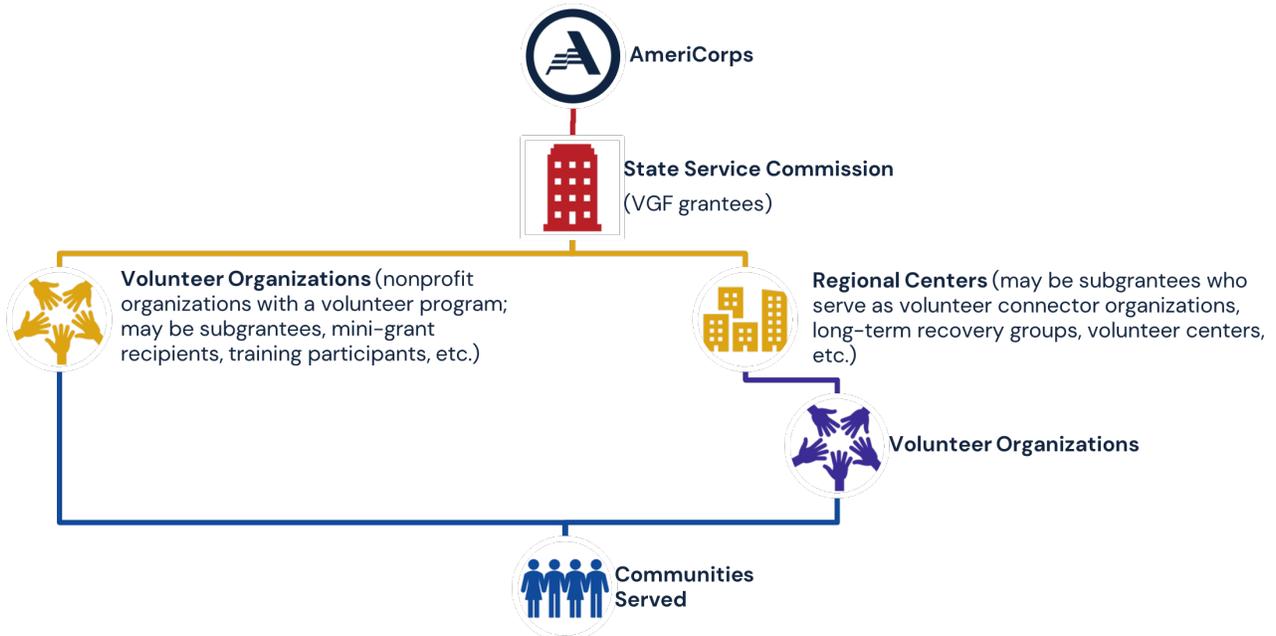
The VGF program, which was authorized by the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act in 2009, invests in volunteer management practices that strengthens nonprofit organizations and other entity’s ability to

<sup>6</sup>AmeriCorps is the operating name of the Corporation for National and Community Service, or CNCS.

increase recruitment and retention of volunteers to meet critical community needs through service. AmeriCorps seeks to fund effective approaches that expand volunteering, strengthen the capacity of volunteer connector organizations to recruit and retain skill-based volunteers, and develop strategies to use volunteers effectively to solve community problems. To learn more about how VGF grants have been implemented and the outcomes of those grants in improving volunteer recruitment and retention, the AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation contracted with ICF to conduct an evaluation of the VGF grant program based on the work of participating grantees awarded in Fiscal Year (FY)2020. This contract also included delivering evaluation capacity building sessions to participating grantees. By simultaneously growing the evidence base on volunteer engagement and management practices and incorporating capacity building and dissemination activities, this project seeks to enable AmeriCorps to more effectively support organizations in enhancing the impact of volunteers on critical community needs.

In FY2020, 14 state service commissions were awarded VGF grants. State service commissions, the state partners of AmeriCorps, are charged with administering AmeriCorps State, VGF, and related programs to address critical community needs and engage citizens in service (America’s Service Commissions, 2023). These governor-appointed public agencies or private nonprofit organizations serve at the state level to regrant federal national service funds; support other community service agencies at the local, regional, or state levels; and work to support local communities. Exhibit 1 depicts the structure of how VGF grant funds flow from AmeriCorps to the state service commissions to other organizations in their state. While this structure is not meant to be exclusive of all funding structures, it is meant to illustrate that in some cases, funding flows directly from the commissions to volunteer organizations (i.e., nonprofits with a volunteer program) and in other cases, funding flows through regional centers or organizations first and then to volunteer organizations within a specific region.

**EXHIBIT 1.—Volunteer Generation Fund (VGF) grant funding structure**



## Overview of Study

The evaluation assessed how FY2020 VGF grantees have implemented their grants to develop and/or support community-based entities to recruit, manage, and support volunteers within their states as well as the outcomes of VGF grantees' efforts.

In total, 9 of the 14 VGF grantees participated in the evaluation (see exhibit 2). Initially, 12 grantees agreed to participate, but over the course of the evaluation, there was some attrition. This was not unexpected given that evaluation activities took place during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. In some cases, grant directors became unresponsive with the evaluation team due to factors beyond our control and, in other cases, state service commission staff noted that there had been staff turnover and they no longer had the capacity to continue with the evaluation.

**EXHIBIT 2.—FY2020 VGF grantees**

State	Commission	Federal Funding Amount	Evaluation Participant
Florida	Volunteer Florida	\$658,401	✓
Illinois	Serve Illinois Commission	\$378,522	
Iowa	Iowa Commission on Volunteer Service (Volunteer Iowa)	\$331,976	✓
Kansas	Kansas Volunteer Commission	\$172,176	
Maine	Maine Commission for Community Service	\$132,958	
Massachusetts	Massachusetts Service Alliance	\$352,173	✓
Michigan	Michigan Community Service Commission	\$740,937	
Minnesota	Minnesota Commission on National and Community Service (ServeMN) with partner Minnesota Alliance for Volunteer Advancement (MAVA)	\$266,000	✓
Nevada	Nevada Volunteers	\$216,810	✓
New Hampshire	Volunteer NH	\$360,109	✓
New Jersey	New Jersey Commission on National Community Service (NJ Commission)	\$250,860	✓
North Carolina	North Carolina Commission on Volunteerism & Community Service (VolunteerNC)	\$270,875	✓
Utah	Utah Commission on Service & Volunteerism (UServeUtah)	\$185,000	✓
Wisconsin	Wisconsin National and Community Service Board	\$235,917	

Note. ServeMN is the fiscal agent of the VGF grant and responsible for grant compliance, though subgranted all aspects of VGF grant implementation to MAVA. ServeMN and MAVA consider themselves as grant partners. Given MAVA's role in grant implementation, MAVA is therefore referenced as a VGF grantee along with the other state service commissions grantees throughout this report.

The three major objectives that guided the research questions are as follows:

1. Describe the state service commissions' approaches for utilizing VGF funds to improve volunteer recruitment, retention, and support of volunteers within their states and among volunteer organizations.
2. Describe promising practices and challenges in implementing these approaches.
3. Analyze preliminary outputs and outcomes of these approaches on volunteer organizations.

In acknowledgement of the unique configurations in which state service commissions designed and implemented their VGF grant programs, the evaluation team used a mixed-method case study design—with each VGF grantee considered a case—to fully depict implementation and outcomes for each grantee. An in-depth cross-case analysis was also conducted to understand cross-cutting trends in VGF grant implementation and outcomes among the grantees.

Data sources for the evaluation included grant applications from VGF grant recipients in FY2020; annual progress reports submitted by grantees in 2020, 2021, and 2022; two project director interviews (in spring 2022 and summer 2023); virtual site visits with VGF grantees and beneficiaries (fall 2022); and a survey of organizations receiving VGF-funded training and capacity building services (i.e., program beneficiaries) within each of the grantee states (spring 2023). Given the variety of program implementation models and types of program beneficiaries (e.g., subgrant and mini-grant recipients, volunteer organizations, regional volunteer centers), VGF grantees were provided an opportunity to customize their surveys accordingly. Therefore, not all survey questions were administered universally across beneficiaries of each VGF grantee.

### Evaluation Feedback Loop

As noted, in addition to participating in the evaluation, VGF grantees also participated in evaluation capacity building sessions. These sessions established an important feedback loop on the evaluation and likely helped facilitate greater communication and feedback from VGF grantees to the evaluation team. In January 2023, based on feedback received from VGF grantees, the evaluation design pivoted from a program-level evaluation to using a case study approach (with cross-case analysis). As part of this shift, grantees were also provided opportunities to customize their beneficiary survey instrument to better align with the unique characteristics of their program model. In addition, grantees were given the opportunity to review a draft of their case study and weigh in with any corrections or additions. These key changes helped to ensure that the evaluation yielded authentic and valid findings regarding the VGF program. Additional details regarding the shift in design are presented in Appendix A.

Data were first analyzed and triangulated at the case or grantee level. Next, a cross-case analysis was conducted to identify themes and trends across the grantees. Note that survey data were not aggregated across all VGF grantees given the large range in sample sizes for each grantee that reflected the structure of their grant design (in other words, the evaluation team did not want grantees with larger sample sizes to drive the overall findings when findings from grantees with smaller samples were just as valid given the design of their grant program).

A detailed description of the methodology, including the complete list of research questions as well as a program logic model are presented in Appendix A.

## Context for the Study

The VGF grantees included in the evaluation were awarded Fiscal Year (FY) 2020, with many evaluation activities occurring in 2021 and 2022—at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Understanding how this global pandemic set the stage for the study is therefore warranted. As has been broadly documented, the COVID-19 pandemic has had far-reaching effects on all aspects of American life—interrupting in-person participation across social sectors—which greatly impacted volunteerism. According to the 2021 Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement, between 2019 and 2021, formal volunteering declined from 30 percent to 23.2 percent, a decrease of 7 percentage points. This represents the largest decline since the supplement was first administered in 2002, according to analysis reported by AmeriCorps (2023). Many factors may have contributed to the decline, including social distancing measures that complicated the ability of organizations to engage volunteers. Nevertheless, volunteers made important contributions to their communities during the pandemic, including supporting COVID-19 testing and vaccination, conducting wellness checks on isolated seniors, supporting food banks, assisting other public health efforts, and helping students stay on track in school (AmeriCorps, 2023). In a survey conducted at the start of the pandemic in May 2020, 73 percent of respondents believed that volunteering will be more important than ever after the pandemic and 95 percent said they will maintain their current level of involvement or do more to get involved and make a difference after the pandemic passes (Points of Light, 2020). These survey data suggest that the declines in volunteerism documented by the civic engagement and volunteering supplement may be temporary.

Meanwhile, despite declines in formal volunteering in the height of the pandemic, there was simultaneously an increase in demand for services. In 2022, nearly two-thirds (64.4 percent) of nonprofits reported an increase in demand for their organizational services (Dietz & Grimm, 2023). Nearly half (46.8 percent) of nonprofit CEOs reported that recruiting sufficient volunteers was a “big problem” for their organization (Dietz & Grimm, 2023). Given these challenges, Dietz and Grimm (2023) argue that nonprofits reported being “more convinced of the benefits of volunteer engagement” than in the past, pointing to data showing increases in the percentage of nonprofit CEOs reporting that they believe “to a great extent” that volunteers allow the organization to provide more detailed attention to the people served (37 percent in 2019 vs. 65.6 percent in 2022) and that volunteers increase the organization’s return on its resource investments (43 percent in 2019 vs. 68.4 percent in 2022).

Hager and Brudney (2021) report that while the pandemic may have greatly changed the volunteering landscape, major changes were already afoot prior to the pandemic. In their study, they surveyed over 600 nonprofit organizations in 2019 to determine the status of volunteer management capacity at that time, and compared the results to those from a survey they administered two decades earlier. Their study provided evidence that the landscape of volunteerism had already begun to change prior to the pandemic in three major ways: (1) volunteers are more interested in episodic, short-term assignments; (2) electronic tools and social media are rearranging how organizations interact with volunteers; and (3) volunteers will be on the front lines for reestablishing trust and human interaction in a post-pandemic civil society and nonprofits will need to engage volunteers in innovative ways to meet this challenge (p. 18).

## Prior Research on Volunteer Engagement and Management

Literature on empirically supported strategies in volunteer engagement and management models and practices was limited. This section provides an overview of prior research that falls under three key topical areas: volunteer engagement, recruitment, and retention.

### Engagement

The bulk of the research found on volunteer engagement related to research and evaluation related to Service Enterprise, a program that seeks to strengthen nonprofit capacity through the fundamental and strategic use of volunteers (ALIVE, 2022). In the Service Enterprise model, training, support, and resources to nonprofits are either provided through local training hubs or national trainers. As of April 2023, there were 21 local training hubs or national trainers across the United States (ALIVE, 2023a). Previous evaluations of the Service Enterprise volunteer engagement training program present some evidence of how the program affects organizational outcomes.

According to the Association of Leaders in Volunteer Engagement (ALIVE)—the administrator of the Service Enterprise program—a Service Enterprise is “an organization that strategically leverages volunteers and their skills to successfully deliver on its social mission” (ALIVE, 2022, p. 2). The Service Enterprise model was developed and revised in several iterations using data from nonprofit organizations (TCC Group, 2009; Deloitte, 2010; ALIVE, 2022; ALIVE, 2023b). Exhibit 3 (reprinted with permission from ALIVE) provides an overview of the current Service Enterprise model depicting 12 key characteristics—which fall under 3 domains—of organizations classified as Service Enterprises (ALIVE, 2023c). While the first domain, Establishing the Foundation, and the third domain, Impact & Outcomes, describe organization-level characteristics, the second domain, Best Practices, includes characteristics of successful volunteer programs within those organizations.

**EXHIBIT 3.—Service Enterprise domains and characteristics**

Establishing the Foundation	Best Practices	Impact & Outcomes
<p><b>Funding &amp; Resource Allocation</b> Provision of the financial, human, space, &amp; material tools necessary for the engagement of volunteers, as well as the willingness to seek additional support as needed</p>	<p><b>Recruitment &amp; Cultivation</b> Engaging individuals &amp; groups to serve your organization is an ongoing cultivation process. Recruitment should be targeted to assure a diverse mix of community members with the skills, interests, &amp; abilities to further your mission</p>	<p><b>Collaboration</b> Being a part of your community is vital to the work &amp; services of nonprofit &amp; public sector organizations. Collaborative undertakings with other organizations, your constituents, &amp; your volunteers build relationships &amp; sharpen the focus of service organizations</p>
<p><b>Technology</b> The broad-based utilization of technology to facilitate all aspects of volunteer engagement, including record-keeping, communication, &amp; service options</p>	<p><b>Onboarding</b> Providing a smooth pathway to service through careful screening, preparation, &amp; guidance that includes both community members &amp; staff involvement</p>	<p><b>Communication</b> Effective communication takes many forms &amp; operates through an increasingly wide &amp; diverse array of channels including formal &amp; informal means, print &amp; social media to send information to external &amp; internal groups</p>
<p><b>Leadership Involvement</b> Executive &amp; board leadership demonstrate through actions their commitment to community involvement &amp; the engagement of volunteers as a key strategy to achieve the organization's mission</p>	<p><b>Training</b> Education &amp; skill development, as well as the knowledge of organizational parameters &amp; boundaries, are critical to ensure that both volunteers &amp; staff are equipped to perform their work &amp; to work effectively together</p>	<p><b>Growth &amp; Change</b> Vibrant, exciting organizations seek ways to improve services, cultivate leaders, continuously seed new ways of thinking, &amp; create new platforms for action &amp; problem-solving. Staying on the cutting edge of industry practices motivates staff, whether paid or unpaid</p>
<p><b>Planning</b> Thoughtful, comprehensive preparations for volunteer &amp; community engagement based on established principles &amp; practices of effective management</p>	<p><b>Supervision &amp; Support</b> Assures that oversight &amp; support are consistently provided to volunteers &amp; community partners to ensure they are empowered to succeed, &amp; to feel valued &amp; appreciated</p>	<p><b>Tracking &amp; Evaluation</b> Assessing the degree to which an organization monitors progress toward institutional goals &amp; the performance of volunteers, staff, &amp; partners in reaching these objectives</p>

The Service Enterprise training program consists of a diagnostic, an online tool that measures the degree to which an organization is a Service Enterprise; 12–16 classroom training hours on volunteer engagement and management; and individualized coaching. After completing these components, participants have the opportunity to apply for Service Enterprise Accreditation.<sup>7</sup> The classroom training includes topics such as building board support, determining the return on volunteer investment, defining strategic roles of volunteers, and identifying ways to institutionalize the changes (ALIVE, 2022).

The previous Service Enterprise program administrator, Points of Light, conducted at least three evaluations of Service Enterprise between 2017 and 2022.<sup>8</sup> The most recent findings, from a 2021 evaluation report are discussed in this section (a review of findings from past reports revealed that trends across the reports are generally consistent). Data sources for the 2021 evaluation included survey data, focus groups, case studies, and a literature review. This descriptive outcomes-based evaluation primarily relied on self-reported outcomes from nonprofit organization staff who had participated in the Service Enterprise program. There was no counterfactual included in the design, so the findings are descriptive and not indicative of an impact

<sup>7</sup> The term “Service Enterprise Accreditation” was previously referred to as “Service Enterprise Certification.” The Service Enterprise administrator, ALIVE, updated the terminology recently. Throughout this report, VGF grantees and other evaluation participants refer to “certification” for Service Enterprise. This language is maintained to reflect the language used by VGF grantees.

<sup>8</sup> The evaluation reports are not public facing but were provided to ICF by staff from Points of Light.

analysis of Service Enterprise. Overall, key findings demonstrated that as a result of participating in Service Enterprise, organizations were better equipped to engage volunteers at their organization, implement consistent volunteer engagement processes, invest more resources in volunteer engagement, measure return on volunteer investment, establish partnerships to improve and increase services, respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, and demonstrate executive commitment to volunteer engagement and management practices. As a result of their participation in Service Enterprise, many organizations at least somewhat extended their reach into targeted communities, offered deeper services or more types of services to beneficiaries, and served more beneficiaries. In addition, individual participants reported that they were better able to affect change related to volunteer engagement.

## Recruitment

Studies examining volunteer organizations' recruitment practices have presented participants with marketing materials for hypothetical volunteer organizations to assess participants' willingness to volunteer. These studies used proxy measures for recruitment, including whether participants perceive the organization as being attractive to volunteer for and participants' interest in volunteering for the organization. The subsequent sections list recruitment practices and the findings from studies supporting each of them.

**Communicate the Organization's Investment.** A series of experiments conducted by Boezeman and Ellemers (2008) in the Netherlands demonstrated that using marketing materials to convey that an organization invests in, and cares for, its volunteers positively impacted participants' perceptions of the volunteer organization's attractiveness.

**Align Recruitment Messaging to Volunteering Motives.** Two studies in Einolf's (2018) review of volunteer management practices found that matching recruitment messages to potential volunteers' motives made them more likely to volunteer with a hypothetical organization.

**Explicitly Invite Different Populations of Interest.** Another practice for recruiting volunteers involves explicitly signifying a desire to recruit from specific populations in recruitment materials. In one experiment conducted in the Netherlands, Boezeman and Ellemers (2008) found that potential volunteers of a different demographic (in this study, young males) were more interested in joining an organization when its recruitment messages emphasized that a demographic group had a unique added value for the organization. The study recommended volunteer organizations consider using such messaging in recruitment materials.

## Retention

The research on volunteer management shows that several organization-level factors are associated with volunteer outcomes. Factors associated with positive volunteer outcomes may promote the likelihood that volunteers are retained with an organization.

**Match Volunteers to Roles Based on Interest.** Matching volunteers to roles based on their career goals has been empirically supported as a best practice for volunteer management. In a longitudinal examination of AmeriCorps members, McBride and Lee (2012) found that members who perceived their AmeriCorps activities to be aligned with their long-term career or job interests were more likely to complete their service term. Based on these findings, the researchers suggested that organizations survey new volunteers at the beginning of the volunteer-organization relationship to understand volunteers' interests and best match them with roles based on their interests.

**Provide Task-Oriented and Emotional Support.** Several studies on the impact of organizational support show that volunteers' perceptions of both task-oriented organizational support (i.e., concrete forms of support to assist volunteers during the performance of volunteer work) and emotion-oriented organizational support (i.e., other forms of support that elicit positive feelings outside of task-oriented supports) were related to positive volunteer outcomes. In an examination of volunteers' perceptions of task-oriented and emotion-oriented organizational support by a United Kingdom wildlife charity, Alfes et al. (2016) discovered that volunteers' perceptions of each type of support equally enhanced engagement with their voluntary work. This, in turn, was positively correlated with volunteers' happiness and perceived social worth (or how one sees oneself as valued in interpersonal relationships) and negatively correlated with volunteers' intent to leave.

**Clearly Define Roles.** One practice for volunteer management is to clearly define volunteers' roles. A study by Allen and Mueller (2013) investigated how feelings of burnout by volunteers at an animal shelter can help explain volunteers' intention to quit. Role ambiguity, which was used as one of the antecedents to burnout, was found to be related to feelings of burnout and increased endorsement of intentions to quit. Based on these findings, the researchers suggest using practices such as creating written guidelines that formally outline volunteers' roles to decrease the likelihood that volunteers will feel burnout and therefore want to quit.

**Provide Training and Learning Opportunities.** Another practice for volunteer management is providing orientation and training for volunteers, which not only prepares volunteers for their role but has been correlated with volunteers' sense of belonging in volunteer organizations. In a longitudinal examination of older adult volunteers at 14 programs, Tang et al. (2010) discovered that volunteers who felt they had adequate training and support from their organization were more likely to stay. In another study conducted by Huynh et al. (2012) in Australia, volunteer access to training provided by the organization related to volunteers' feelings of connectedness. In this case, connectedness was defined as a positive emotional sense of well-being that results from a strong sense of belonging with other workers and the recipients of one's service, which correlated with positive volunteer outcomes including volunteer satisfaction and determination to continue. An additional study by Newton et al. (2014) of more than 2,000 volunteers from 5 nonprofit organizations in Australia showed that volunteer perceptions of learning and development opportunities are significantly related to organizational commitment (feeling a strong sense of belonging to an organization) and an intention to stay in the organization.

**Encourage Volunteers to Voice their Opinions.** Research has also shown that volunteers who perceive that they can provide input into volunteer decision-making processes is associated with positive volunteer outcomes. Allen and Mueller's (2013) study of volunteers at an animal shelter showed how a lack of voice, or the lack of ability to provide input in decision-making processes, is associated with greater feelings of burnout; burnout was associated with an increased likelihood to endorse an intention to quit volunteering at the shelter. According to the researchers, an implication of these findings is that volunteer organizations that promote ways for volunteers to voice their opinions to leadership may promote retention and mitigate any intentions of quitting.

**Promote Autonomy within the Organization.** Some studies have found that volunteer autonomy and decision-making are related to volunteer service completion and retention. In a longitudinal examination of AmeriCorps members conducted by McBride and Lee (2012), researchers found that members who were highly involved in planning volunteer service activities were more likely to complete their service term. In a recent survey of volunteers in China by Cho et al. (2020), volunteer perceptions of empowerment (ability to

engage in leadership opportunities) and schedule flexibility (ability to be flexible with volunteering hours) both related positively to volunteer satisfaction and intent to continue volunteering. Another study by Dwyer et al. (2013) surveyed active volunteers of a large volunteer connector organization and found that volunteers were more satisfied when their volunteer team leaders involved them in decisions, although this was not directly linked to volunteer retention measures.

**Facilitate Relationship Building with Others in the Organization.** Research has shown a positive correlation between volunteer relationships with peers, mentors, and supervisors, and other positive volunteer outcomes (e.g., intent to remain, satisfaction). In a study by Garner and Garner (2011), volunteers' self-reported satisfaction with integration into the organization—or how happy volunteers were with the relationships they formed as a result of their volunteer work—was positively related to their intention to remain. In the longitudinal examination of AmeriCorps members by McBride and Lee (2012), researchers found that members who developed a relationship with a mentor were more likely to complete their service term. In the study by Huynh et al. (2012), volunteers' access to social support related to volunteers' feelings of connectedness, which was also correlated with positive volunteer outcomes, including volunteer satisfaction and determination to continue. Another study by Nencini et al. (2016) of volunteers at four different nonprofit organizations in Italy showed that relational bonds created with other volunteers in an organization have an important role in sustaining motivation and volunteer retention.

**Provide Feedback and Recognition.** Research shows that volunteers who perceive that their organizations provide them with feedback and show them appreciation are more likely to endorse an intent to continue volunteering with an organization. In the study by Cho et al. (2020) of street parade volunteers, volunteers' responses to survey items showed that rewards and recognition positively and significantly related to volunteer satisfaction and intent to continue volunteering. In the study by Huynh et al. (2012), volunteers who received performance feedback were associated with a greater sense of connection to the organization; connection to the organization was associated with volunteer satisfaction and determination to continue volunteering. Huynh et al. (2012) argue that volunteer managers should support individual volunteers through co-volunteer and supervisor support in order to promote connectedness in the workplace, which may then lead to positive volunteer outcomes.

## Terminology

Throughout this report, key terms related to the VGF grant program as well as the field of engaging and managing volunteers are used. This section describes how the terms were operationalized throughout the report, however the descriptions used here are not intended to be exhaustive definitions.

**Volunteer** is operationalized as an individual who donates their time to an organization to further that organization's mission. As described in Chapter 3, Emergent Issues in Volunteer and Engagement, this is a loaded term that is not cross-culturally recognized. Use of this term throughout this report is based on convenience and not intended to imply a position on the part of AmeriCorps or the evaluation team regarding the appropriateness of this term.

As described earlier in this chapter, the term **volunteer management** is operationalized in the evaluation as referring to organizational practices used to recruit and retain volunteers. This term. Volunteer **recruitment** is operationalized as practices used to attract individuals to a volunteering position at an organization (e.g., writing volunteer position descriptions, marketing volunteer opportunities). Volunteer **retention** is operationalized as a variety of practices that have the potential to affect a volunteer's desire to continue

volunteering with the organization. They include organizational practices that take place from the moment the volunteer has accepted the volunteer opportunity (e.g., onboarding, training, recognition).

**Volunteer engagement** is operationalized as a broader organizational strategy to leverage volunteers to accomplish an organization’s mission. As described earlier in this chapter, “volunteer engagement” has been used more recently to also refer to practices traditionally associated with volunteer management (i.e., those used to recruit and retain volunteers)—reflecting a shift in the field from thinking about volunteers as needing to be “managed” to needing to be “engaged.” This report has operationalized volunteer management and volunteer engagement using more traditional definitions of the terms for the sake of clarity in distinguishing between these important concepts. Operationalizing the terms in this way is not meant to further the perception on the part of AmeriCorps or the evaluation team that volunteers should be managed rather than engaged.

**State service commissions** are the state partners of AmeriCorps that are charged with administering AmeriCorps State, VGF, and related programs to address critical community needs and engage citizens in service (America’s Service Commissions, 2023). In FY2020, all VGF grant awards were provided to state service commissions. **VGF grantee** is operationalized as the state service commission or key partner entity that is primarily responsible for implementing the grant. In this evaluation, 8 of the 9 VGF grantees are state service commission, except in the case of Minnesota, in which MAVA is the referred to the VGF grantee.

**Program beneficiaries** are the organizations that have received VGF grant-funded training and capacity building services. They may be subgrant and mini-grant recipients, volunteer organizations, regional volunteer centers, youth who participated in youth initiatives, and other entities. **Subgrantees** are a specific type of program beneficiary that has received a subgrant from a state service commission’s VGF grant. While MAVA is technically a subgrantee to ServeMN, given their primary role in implementing ServeMN’s VGF grant, they are referred to as a VGF grantee, not a subgrantee. **Mini-grant recipients** are another type of program beneficiary that has received a smaller or “mini” subgrant from a state service commission’s VGF grant. Finally, a **volunteer organization** is another type of beneficiary and refers to a nonprofit organization that has a volunteering program.

## Organization of This Report

Chapters 2–5 presents the results obtained and key findings about the VGF programs; including the program models, capacity building activities, and volunteer platforms and networks (Chapter 2), key emergent issues in volunteer management and engagement and their influence on VGF grantees (Chapter 3), volunteer management and engagement strategies and outcomes (Chapter 4); and grantee and beneficiaries challenges and needs (Chapter 5). Additionally, callout boxes are used throughout the report to highlight quotes from participating grantees and beneficiaries to help tell the story of VGF grant implementation using participant voices. While Service Enterprise is not a required component of the VGF grant, 6 of the 9 grantees have used this model at some point during their FY2020 grant, and so the evaluation sought to understand how the use of Service Enterprise influenced grantees’ outcomes. For this reason, key findings related to Service Enterprise noted among grantees are highlighted throughout the report in a callout frames. Chapter 6 presents findings on the evaluation capacity building services provided to participating VGF grantee organizations. The report concludes with a discussion of the study findings and recommendations for AmeriCorps and VGF grantees (Chapter 7). The appendices contain information about the evaluation methods and data sources (Appendix A), the participating VGF grantee case studies (Appendix B), and additional data tables reporting findings broken out by grantee (Appendix C). Instruments used in the evaluation are included in Appendix D.

## Overview of Volunteer Generation Fund Program Models, Training Structures & Key Activities

Chapter 2 describes the program models and training structures of the nine grantees included in this study. This includes a discussion of the various volunteer management and engagement program models used or adapted by VGF grantees as well as the role grantees played in implementing the grant. This also includes a discussion of capacity building activities delivered as part of the grant and grantees' role in building out volunteer platforms and networks. Finally, a discussion of data elements routinely tracked by grantees and program beneficiaries is presented.

### VGF Grantee Models

VGF grantees vary in their approaches to the provision of training, technical assistance, and other capacity building services to community-based entities. The following section describes the overarching themes found among grantees' approaches to supporting these entities and the alignment of these approaches with evidence-based practices.

#### Program Models

While all VGF grantees had customized their program models to some extent, seven of the nine grantees cited using an external model—Service Enterprise, Human Resources Management (HRM), or Stanford University's Pathways of Public Service and Civic Engagement. Details on each of these models and the grantees that used them are as follows.

**Service Enterprise.** Six grantees described using Service Enterprise at some point during their FY2020 VGF grant: Volunteer Florida, Volunteer Iowa, Massachusetts Service Alliance, MAVA, Nevada Volunteers, and VolunteerNC.<sup>9</sup> Developed in part through a FY2010 VGF grant awarded to California Volunteers, Service Enterprise is a volunteer engagement program model for strengthening nonprofit capacity through the fundamental and strategic use of volunteers (ALIVE, 2022). The program is delivered in a cohort model to facilitate wide volunteer change management. Training, support, and resources to nonprofits are either provided through local training hubs or national trainers. As of April 2023, there were 21 local training hubs or national trainers across the United States (ALIVE, 2023a). While some VGF grantees are certified as hubs, some, such as North Carolina, directly fund other organizations to become hubs. (For additional information about Service Enterprise, see Chapter 1.)

**6/9 Grantees**

**Pathways of Public Service and Civic Engagement.** UServeUtah is the only VGF grantee using this framework, which is an approach to community engagement developed by Stanford University that is primarily used in higher education. UServeUtah is the only non-higher education institution on the working board and development team charged with implementing this framework. UServeUtah was given permission to adopt and modify the framework. The framework includes six pathways, including direct service, social entrepreneurship, corporate social responsibility, community engaged learning and research, policy and

**1/9 Grantees**

<sup>9</sup> Nevada Volunteers used to be a Service Enterprise Hub, however certification lapsed at some point following award of the FY2020 VGF grant. A participating Nevada Volunteers staff member noted they were in the process of attempting to re-engage with Service Enterprise and reinstate the certification.

governance, and philanthropy and community organizing/activism (Stanford University Haas Center for Public Service, n.d.).

**Human Resource Management.** Nevada Volunteers is the only VGF grantee using the HRM model of volunteer management,<sup>10</sup> which applies classic human resource management workplace practices to the volunteer work environment (Brudney & Meijs, 2014). HRM is considered a top-down “business-based” approach, and many of the components of the model for managing volunteers are similar to those for managing employees in a company (Einolf, 2018). Used by Nevada Volunteers, this model of volunteer engagement is broken down into nine best practices: clearly defined volunteer roles, volunteer recruitment strategy, volunteer screening and matching procedures, volunteer orientation and ongoing training plans, liability insurance, volunteer supervision and communication plans, volunteer recognition plan, volunteer evaluation and goal setting, and reflection practice.

### Grantee Role in Training and Capacity Building

1/9 Grantees

Grantees utilize VGF grant program funds to provide volunteer management and engagement training and capacity building to organizations in their state. Each grantee has one or more approaches that rely on grantees’ direct and/or indirect involvement in providing capacity building services to other organizations. These approaches are not mutually exclusive, and grantees use one or more of the following approaches in the implementation of their grants:

- **A grantee independently provides volunteer management training, technical assistance, and other capacity building services to community-based entities.** For example, UServeUtah directly provides training and technical assistance to build the capacity of Utah’s community-based entities. Other examples include the Massachusetts Service Alliance, where the grantee serves as a Service Enterprise Hub, and Volunteer Florida, where the grantee distributes subgrants to local organizations. Eight grantees noted they provided some amount of services themselves.
- **A grantee collaborates with one or more organizations to implement training, technical assistance, and other capacity building services with community-based entities.** The level of direct involvement of the grantee ranges widely within this group. For example, Volunteer NH partners with VQ Volunteer Strategies, an external company, to help train their subgrantee cohorts, while still remaining heavily involved in training itself. This contrasts with ServeMN, who has entrusted nearly all implementation of the VGF grant to the Minnesota Alliance for Volunteer Advancement (MAVA), an external nonprofit organization.<sup>11</sup> Other examples include VolunteerNC subsidizing costs for two other organizations to provide Service Enterprise trainings, and the Volunteer Iowa working with local governments to pilot a model using volunteers to solve local issues. Across all grantees, seven noted they collaborated with one or more partner organizations to deliver training and/or capacity building.

As seen in exhibit 4, most VGF grantees reported delivering some training and/or capacity building themselves, while also partnering with external organizations to deliver other elements. Six grantees reported both directly providing training/capacity building and collaborating with partners to provide

<sup>10</sup> Nevada Volunteers cited using both Service Enterprise and HRM program models in their VGF program application.

<sup>11</sup> Since ServeMN partnered closely with MAVA to implement the majority of the VGF programming, throughout the report MAVA will predominantly be referenced as a VGF grantee along with the other VGF state service commissions.

training/capacity building; two grantees reported only providing training/capacity building themselves; and one grantee reported only collaborating with a partner to provide training/capacity building.

**EXHIBIT 4.—VGF grantee program implementation structure**

State	VGF Grantee	Directly provides training/capacity building	Collaborates/partners with other entities to provide training/capacity building
FL	Volunteer Florida	✓	
IA	Volunteer Iowa	✓	✓
MA	Massachusetts Service Alliance	✓	✓
MN	ServeMN		✓
NC	VolunteerNC	✓	✓
NH	Volunteer NH	✓	✓
NJ	NJ Commission	✓	✓
NV	Nevada Volunteers	✓	
UT	UServeUtah	✓	✓
<b>Total</b>	<b>For all</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>

Note. ServeMN partnered closely with MAVA, who implemented the majority of VGF programming; MAVA is therefore referenced as a VGF grantee along with the other state service commissions grantees throughout this report.

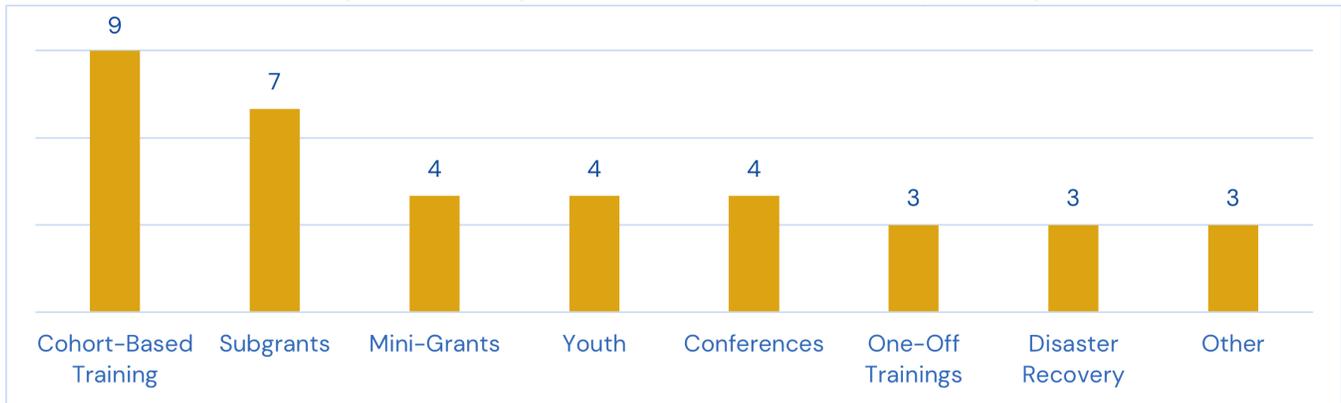
Based on grant applications and interviews with project directors and grantee staff, seven of nine VGF grantees used VGF funds to support staff—Volunteer Iowa, Massachusetts Service Alliance, ServeMN, Volunteer NH, NJ Commission, Nevada Volunteers, and UServeUtah. For the NJ Commission, Volunteer NH, and MAVA (the program implementer of ServeMN), new staff members were hired full-time for specific tasks, in roles such as training administration and implementation of volunteer platforms. For example, MAVA hired a training event coordinator, who coordinated trainings and other meetings, offloading logistical work traditionally given to training facilitators. Volunteer NH transitioned an existing staff member to work on VGF grant efforts full-time, focusing primarily on the cohort of nonprofit organizations to which Volunteer NH provided subgrants. Meanwhile, for Nevada Volunteers, UServeUtah, Volunteer Iowa, and Massachusetts Service Alliance, grantees reported maintaining staff members in more general implementation roles, either partially or entirely through VGF grant funding. There were no distinguishable differences in outcomes between grantees who funded positions to support VGF programming and those who did not; however, it is important to note that differences may be present but fell outside of the primary focus of evaluation data collection, and thus relevant information was not intentionally collected.

**Capacity Building Activities**

Grantees reported spending VGF funds on a broad range of capacity building activities to meet volunteerism needs within their particular state contexts. These activities were not mutually exclusive.

VGF grantees used a diverse but overlapping set of capacity building activities using the VGF grant. To see a breakdown of the number of grantees who used each activity, see exhibit 5 (see also Appendix C for more information about which VGF grantee used each strategy).

**EXHIBIT 5.—Number of VGF grantees using different VGF-funded capacity building activities**



### Training

All nine grantees who participated in the evaluation reported providing some sort of volunteer management training to individuals and organizations in their states.

All VGF grantees reported using a cohort model to provide training, meaning training was delivered in a group with a multi-session curriculum. Multiple populations were selected for cohort training series. For example, Volunteer Florida provides a 3-day training series and five to six additional webinar trainings on volunteer management to their subgrantee cohort. Overall, the cohort model for training was well received and appreciated by participating organizations, who valued the opportunity to learn from and network with their peers.

This cohort model contrasts with one-off training sessions, which were reportedly delivered by three grantees. These one-time training sessions were typically focused on single, more contained topics than those in larger series. Key examples include multiple one-off training sessions by MAVA focused on issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion, with titles such as “No One Right Way” and “Interrupting Racism in Mostly White Communities.”

Three grantees—Massachusetts Service Alliance, MAVA, and UServeUtah—described developing a structured sequence of trainings that are intended for individuals/organizations with limited capacity or knowledge up to those with moderate to advanced capacity or knowledge. This structure functions as a pipeline in which individuals or organizations can move from a more basic training to a more advanced training.

For example, MAVA puts on their Volunteer Impact Leadership Training (VILT) series, which provides a basic foundation of volunteer management practices for individual volunteer managers. It is intended, in part, to be portable and usable for individuals, even if they may move to other organizations. This is followed by a series of individual pipeline trainings, which are often meant to support whole organizations that are beginning to

### A Training Pipeline in Utah

UServeUtah developed a distinct scaffolded training suite. Staff noted the suite was developed based on the Service Enterprise curriculum but adapted to be more Utah specific. The Volunteer Management Training (VMT) series targets volunteer managers looking to upskill individually. Building on individual development, UServeUtah also offers the Volunteer Programming for Maximum Impact (VPMI) training, which targets organizational-level change for those seeking to enhance the use of volunteers across their entire organization, with multiple staff members participating. Following the completion of each respective training, participants receive a training specific certification.

integrate volunteers. Finally, organizations that already have a fairly strong volunteer engagement component and that have the staff, time, and financial resources available can participate in Service Enterprise.

While grantees described teaching several recurring volunteer management strategies (see Chapter 4 for specific examples); overall, the curricula used were disparate, with the most common curriculum cited being Service Enterprise.



### Service Enterprise

Six participating VGF grantees—Volunteer Florida, Volunteer Iowa, Massachusetts Service Alliance, ServeMN, Nevada Volunteers, and VolunteerNC—offered Service Enterprise to program beneficiaries in various capacities at some point during the grant. As with VGF grant program models, implementation of Service Enterprise varied, as some grantees acted as the Service Enterprise Hub themselves, while others partnered with external hubs or consultants to provide coaching services, a component of the curriculum. Due to the substantial time commitment required for Service Enterprise, some participants shared it had been challenging to recruit participants during the pandemic. Staff turnover and burnout within the organizations was also noted as a barrier to obtaining the certification.

**Key strategies and outcomes shared by Service Enterprise participants are highlighted throughout the following report denoted with a gray box, as shown here.**

### Subgrants

Seven VGF grantees implemented subgrants in their capacity building strategy, referring to relatively large sums of funding that include significant reporting requirements. As defined by AmeriCorps in the FY2020 Notice of Funding Opportunity, subgrants to community-based entities must include one or more of the following:

- Address activities consistent with the priorities set by the state’s national service plan
- Recruit, manage, or support volunteers for a community-based entity such as a volunteer coordinating agency, nonprofit resource center, volunteer training clearinghouse, institution of higher education, or collaborative partnership of faith-based and community-based organizations
- Provide technical assistance and support to strengthen the capacity of local infrastructure organizations, address areas of national need, and expand the number of volunteers nationally.

Subgrants above \$25,000 in value must be reported to the federal government in compliance with the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act.

Some subgrants were targeted to specific themes or groups, such as VolunteerNC’s subgrants for four organizations supporting youth volunteerism or Volunteer Florida’s subgrantee cohort made up of one or more organizations from each of the state’s seven emergency management regions. Other subgrants were more general, such as in Volunteer NH, where 5 organizations per year for 3 years (totaling 15 subgrantees), were selected to receive training on volunteer management, with their only thematic grouping being that they need skilled volunteers.

## Mini-Grants

As opposed to subgrants, four VGF grantees reported utilizing smaller mini-grants. These grants were defined by VGF grantees as distinct parts of their program models, and in the cases of VolunteerNC and Volunteer NH, as separate components of their models from subgrants. Mini-grants ranged in size from as little as \$1,000 to as much as \$25,000, and they were typically offered in cohorts/funding cycles in which 9 to 30 beneficiaries were awarded at a time.

Two VGF grantees awarded mini-grants with specific themes; Massachusetts Service Alliance and VolunteerNC offered grants to organizations to support them through the COVID-19 pandemic, and Massachusetts Service Alliance had an additional mini-grant supporting youth volunteerism. In contrast, Nevada Volunteers and Volunteer NH mini-grants were intended for more general capacity building efforts. Volunteer NH specifically used mini-grants to compliment the implementation of their subgrants for organizations that did not have the resources or infrastructure to complete the reporting requirements of subgrants. These grants often went to organizations for one-time needs, such as purchasing volunteer management software or hosting a training session. According to the VGF program manager:

*[The] mini-grant will be focused around increasing the capacity of their volunteer program ... but simpler to apply for, simpler to manage, simpler to report on. We're hoping it'll be a stepping block for organizations that are not in a place to manage a larger grant.*

## Youth Initiatives

Four VGF grantees specifically supported youth and youth volunteerism with their grants. Massachusetts Service Alliance and VolunteerNC provided subgrants and mini-grants to organizations that served youth in a variety of ways, including mentorship programs and emergency response training providers. Volunteer Iowa used VGF funds to support a program to improve youth service-learning by identifying barriers and supports to service-learning through community committees and creating related statewide webinars and toolkits. Finally, UServeUtah used funds to form a set of high school and college youth councils, where members engaged in individual research projects to understand the landscape of youth volunteerism in Utah and developed individual capstone projects in partnership with local nonprofits. Example capstone projects included connecting recent Afghan refugees to local communities in Utah and creating a neuroscience fair at an elementary school.

## Conferences

Four VGF grantees—Massachusetts Service Alliance, MAVA, Volunteer NH, and NJ Commission—used VGF funding to support volunteer management conferences to some degree (though Volunteer NH did not significantly fund their conference other than supporting their VGF program officer's attendance time at the event). Reasons for supporting the conferences cited by grantees included: promotion of volunteerism generally, hosting training courses and webinars, providing networking opportunities for volunteer managers, and broadly introducing organizations to the resources the VGF grantees could provide. All four grantees reported significant disruptions to these conferences during the grant period from the COVID-19 pandemic, including cancellations, delays, and, in

## Continuous Improvement

Volunteer NH used subgrantee feedback to improve the subgrantee training model and reduce grantee burden. Volunteer NH responded to subgrantee feedback and decreased the frequency and structure of their meetings. Previously, subgrantees received training through monthly meetings, during which they shared best practices and challenges. Instead, the grantee shifted to quarterly meetings and included training presentations and additional opportunities to network, which grantees appreciated.

multiple cases, shifts to online formats. Some grantees noted that this exposure to the virtual format revealed some benefits, including making training and talks available indefinitely after being recorded, as well as making attendance more accessible. In addition to their general conference, MAVA created a new virtual annual conference, focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion, to provide learning and networking opportunities aimed at dismantling inequity in volunteerism.

### Disaster Recovery

Three VGF grantees—Volunteer Florida, Volunteer Iowa, and VolunteerNC—intended to utilize their funds for disaster recovery. One of Volunteer Florida’s key goals in their program application was to “ensure that all Florida’s counties are better equipped to utilize volunteers and donations in a disaster.” Although Volunteer Florida staff did not mention specific VGF-funded activities to support this goal, they did share how as an official emergency support organization for the State of Florida, they played a role in directly addressing the COVID-19 crisis by coordinating volunteers and gathering donations.

Volunteer Iowa participated in their state’s Volunteer Management in Disaster Infrastructure Development Project by collaborating with state emergency management and Iowa’s Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters (VOAD) to recruit and train Volunteer Reception Center trainers across the state. Additionally, the project developed resource guides and “go-kits” for the community; encouraged public preregistration on their state volunteer connector website, Get Connected, for disaster volunteers; and provided trainings on how to utilize the Get Connected platform and resources during a disaster.

Finally, VolunteerNC used their VGF-funded volunteer generator position to coordinate with the different counties involved in disaster recovery efforts and meet regularly to discuss ongoing needs within the community, especially those related to disaster recovery. The position also coordinates with volunteers from national, state, and local organizations/groups to support state disaster recovery.

### Other Activities

The NJ Commission used VGF funds to develop the Jersey Strong: I Am a Volunteer media strategy through which the grantee sought to not only encourage individuals to volunteer, but also to identify their existing service as volunteerism. For example, as part of the media strategy, statements included, “I am a coach for my daughter’s soccer team – I am a volunteer.” As shared by the project director:

*[The media strategy is] ... encouraging people to understand that they are volunteers and not just a coach ... getting the definition of volunteerism out there and letting them know that they are volunteers and they’re part of this huge family in New Jersey of volunteers.*

UServeUtah created a public tool/assessment that allows the Utah public to find their “pathway” (which of six pathways from the Pathways of Public Service and Civic Engagement framework best fits them). The results of this assessment include a toolkit on how to make sense of or utilize that pathway. A UServeUtah staff member described the tool as follows:

*It indicates through an online assessment what type of person they are. Are they a leader, an elected official, on the city council, a participant that they can lend a signature, a worker bee? [It] lists out all these different ways they can engage. But then it also gets into what are your issues, what are your passions? What are the issues of public concern that have a sticking point for you?*

The tool entered a soft launch on January 1, 2022, with a formal launch in April 2022 to coincide with National Volunteer Month. As part of the launch, the governor of Utah created a public service announcement video that was shared via email with all 25,000 Utah state employees encouraging them to use the new tool.

## Volunteer Platforms & Networks

Six VGF grantees—Massachusetts Service Alliance, Volunteer Florida, Volunteer Iowa, Volunteer NH, Nevada Volunteers, and NJ Commission—reported using volunteer platforms or networks, or websites and other online resources, that volunteer organizations use to post volunteer opportunities and that potential volunteers use to search for volunteer opportunities.

Program beneficiaries of five grantees with platforms were asked if they had used volunteer platforms and networks to search or identify potential volunteers.<sup>12</sup> For three grantees (Volunteer Florida, Volunteer NH, and NJ Commission), the majority of respondents said they had (66 percent–100 percent); for one grantee (Massachusetts Service Alliance), three-quarters (75 percent) of respondents said they did not; and for the last grantee (Nevada Volunteers), responses were split evenly between those who reported using the platform and those who did not. Similarly, six grantees were surveyed about whether they had used volunteer platforms and networks to post volunteer opportunities with the organization. For four grantees (Volunteer Iowa, Volunteer Florida, Nevada Volunteers, and NJ Commission), the majority of respondents said they had (67 percent–75 percent); and in the remaining two grantees (Massachusetts Service Alliance and Volunteer NH) the majority reported they had not (65 percent and 75 percent, respectively).<sup>13</sup> During the site visits, few participating program beneficiaries noted they utilized their state grantees' respective platform, however due to the small sample, findings should be considered with caution.

Overall, of the six grantees surveyed about their use of volunteer platforms, on average, 58 percent of respondents reported using platforms to identify volunteers, and 54 percent reported using platforms to post volunteer opportunities.<sup>14</sup>

### Connected Volunteer Platform

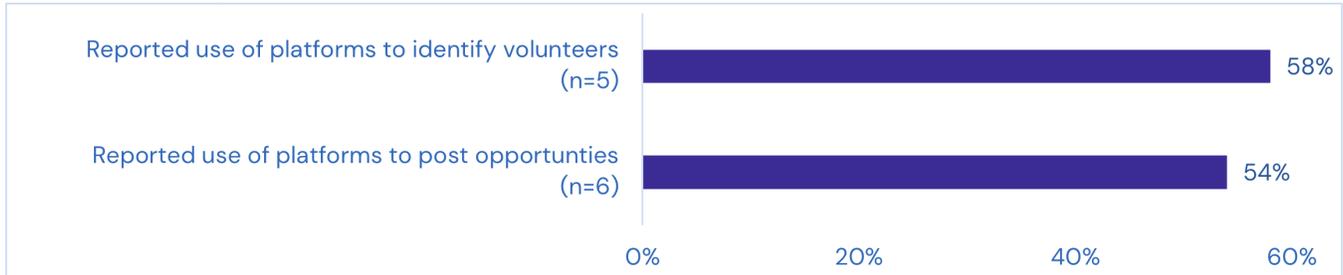
In March 2022, the volunteer platform for the NJ Commission was not live due to an issue with accessibility. The NJ Commission partnered with their United Ways and Volunteer Centers to link the individual platforms with the larger state portal. With this connection between the local and state sites, no additional maintenance was needed, everything is populated based on the inputs from the partner agencies. As part of the VGF grant, an additional United Way was able to have their own local platform.

<sup>12</sup> Due to survey customizations, the Volunteer Iowa program beneficiary survey did not collect data on use of the platform to search or identify potential volunteers.

<sup>13</sup> Due to survey customizations, question language on the Volunteer Iowa program beneficiary survey differed slightly. Respondents were asked "Have you or anyone at your organization used Volunteer Iowa's statewide Get Connected portal/platform, or that of your local Volunteer Center, to post volunteer opportunities with your organization?"

<sup>14</sup> The average state use results reported in exhibit 6 were calculated as an "average of averages," based on the overall average of each grantee's average rate. These results are not the average across all responses, due to the high variability in sample sizes for each VGF grantee.

**EXHIBIT 6.—Average state use of platforms**



Note. Due to survey customizations, the Volunteer Iowa program beneficiary survey did not collect data on use of the platform to search or identify potential volunteers.

No other data were collected that illustrate efficacy of the platforms or outcomes of their use.

Four grantees reported actively working to build awareness of their programs through advertising and marketing or training.

Massachusetts Service Alliance used VGF funding to support the development of the new Massachusetts Service Alliance Connect for Good online platform, switching from an older website in the hope that nonprofit organizations would establish deeper connections with the online users as well as encourage organizations to share data and impact stories.

Similarly, Volunteer NH used VGF funds to hire a full-time VGF program officer on their staff to increase the number of nonprofits using their state’s database, Get Connected, to list volunteer opportunities. The new staff member developed a public service announcement (PSA) to broadcast on local television and radio outlets. The use of Get Connected expanded significantly after the governor of New Hampshire advertised it as a way for citizens to volunteer during the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nevada Volunteers also used VGF funds to develop a PSA for their volunteer connector website, NVVolunteerConnect.org, originally developed in 2019. The PSA ran from September–November 2021 and sought to increase general traffic to the website for volunteers to increase awareness. At the time of interview in February 2022, Nevada Volunteers had almost doubled the number of organizations that were signed up on the platform. As described by the project director:

*We utilize VGF funds to do a PSA with the Nevada Broadcasters Association. There’s a very large lack of knowledge of who Nevada Volunteers is and what they do. I think the primary reason for that is because it’s always been AmeriCorps–centered ... if you’re not interested in becoming a service member then there hasn’t really been a whole lot of outreach ... the goal was to do a big push to get as many organizations across the state to sign up and volunteers driven to the website to utilize it ... at the end of the year we knew we were*

**Public Service Announcement for Access to Volunteer Connector Website**

Nevada Volunteers used VGF funds to develop a statewide multilingual public service announcement (PSA) with the goals of increasing the number of organizations accessing the site to 2,000 and individuals accessing the site to 1,500 per month. Nevada Volunteers also planned to use VGF funds to add additional search filters to the website in response to emerging needs, such as the need for virtual volunteers during COVID-19.

*close to doubling the number of organizations that were signed up on the website from when I first started.*

Volunteer Florida provided optional training on the functionality of their volunteer network to their subgrantees annually.

## Collecting and Tracking Data

VGF grantees and program beneficiaries all collect and track various types of data to inform VGF grant progress reporting and to support continuous quality improvement of services. These data elements are described in further detail in this section.

### Data Collected by VGF Grantees

VGF grantees collect multiple data points as required for the VGF grant progress reporting requirements. All grantees are required to collect two National Performance Measures:

- The number of organizations that received capacity building services.
- The number of organizations that increased their effectiveness, efficiency, and/or program scale/reach.

All grantees also measured:

- The number of volunteers recruited or managed.
- The number of hours served by recruited or managed volunteers.

These four data points were present in annual progress reports across all participating grantees in the evaluation.

VGF grantees were given the opportunity to weigh in on whether they had any requested changes to these progress report metrics. Two of the three grantees that shared perspectives on this topic emphasized the need for AmeriCorps to collect qualitative data from grantees in the progress report—adding a narrative box with a prompt about sharing accomplishments of the grant. One grantee expressed the opinion that the current quantitative measures do not fully capture the impact of VGF, “The activities are too varied, even within just our VGF grant, for one or two measures to capture what is happening.” Beyond this suggestion, one VGF grantee suggested metrics prompting grantees to break out existing measures into subgroups based on demographic categories. For example, grantees could be prompted to report on how many youth, individuals over the age of 65, or individuals living in rural areas were impacted. One grantee also noted they believed some of the questions included in the program beneficiary survey would be useful for AmeriCorps to determine the impact of grant efficacy instead of the options grantees can self-report on the current progress report.

VGF grantees that awarded subgrants required subgrantees to submit standardized reports that aligned with VGF grantees’ own Performance Measures for AmeriCorps. Grantees often had additional reporting requirements for their subgrantees to support subgrantees’ implementation. Volunteer Iowa, for example, required subgrantees to report on how they were connecting volunteers with opportunities to serve, increasing the capacity of nonprofits, doing volunteer recognition and Days of Service, and leveraging volunteerism to meet community needs.

Some grantees also required recipients of their mini-grants to submit reports. For example, a Nevada Volunteers staff member described the reporting frequency requirements for their mini-grant recipients, saying:

*Originally, we were going to do a mid and end progress report and have people send in two larger reports. My problem was I noticed in the last one I wasn't able to catch things fast enough ... And because of risk assessments and all these [grantees] are brand new so they're considered high risk because they're new. So, I just came up with a very small progress report for each month so that I could gauge where people were at.*

In addition to data collected from subgrant and mini-grant recipients, grantees also frequently collected data from participants in trainings. For example, grantees commonly reported collecting pre- and post-tests to see information learned and retained by recipients.



VGF grantees serving as Service Enterprise Hubs collected data from participating volunteer organizations through a diagnostic, an online assessment tool, which was used to help customize the coaching portion of the program. Organizations that went through Service Enterprise also had to track and submit improvement measurements after training and other capacity building was completed as part of the certification process.

Finally, some grantees also collected data through evaluations of their programs. Specifically, Volunteer Florida and Volunteer Iowa reported funding VGF impact studies to assess the value and impact of VGF resources to support skills-based volunteer programs and local communities.

### Data Collected by Program Beneficiaries

Program beneficiaries also reported collecting data elements related to their volunteering program, though generally speaking, program beneficiaries were more likely to cite difficulties with data collection, as discussed in the following subsection.

Data elements commonly collected by program beneficiaries included the following:

- Number of volunteers used
- Numbers of hours served by volunteers
- Number of new volunteers
- Number of hours served by new volunteers
- Narrative data on program changes, challenges, and lessons learned
- Change in volunteer engagement
- Overall volunteer satisfaction

Program beneficiaries also sought to quantify the impact of their volunteering program and collected data elements related to their mission, such as 'homes repaired' or 'pounds of food collected,' allowing the organizations to track progress towards achieving their missions.

### Challenges & Inconsistencies

A crucial takeaway regarding data collection by beneficiaries is how the organizations face two major challenges collecting data: (1) disparities in data collection capacity across organizations, and (2) a lack of standardized ways in which certain constructs, such as "volunteer retention," were measured.

### Robust Data Collection

Volunteer Florida has a particularly robust data use culture, conducting two external evaluations on their use of the VGF grant in 2014-15 and 2020-21. Additionally, Volunteer Florida commissioned the University of North Florida to conduct a study on the nature of volunteerism in the state. Findings from both of these studies were used to inform programming and services provided by the commission.

Program beneficiaries' vast disparities in data collection capacity were widely commented upon by grantees and beneficiaries in site visits. For example, a Massachusetts Service Alliance program beneficiary noted that their organization utilized an online database to track volunteer data, however several participants noted that with or without a database, it was still challenging to manage the data. Another VGF program beneficiary of the Massachusetts Service Alliance noted, by contrast, that as they do not employ a volunteer coordinator to oversee volunteers, it was a very time-consuming process to collect and manage volunteer data:

*We don't have a volunteer coordinator ... it'd be so wonderful if we did ... tracking is difficult! I am not going to lie, it's one of our biggest challenges, because it's very time-consuming to do it right, and it's very time consuming to train multiple staff people, especially with staff turnover.*

Other organizations that had the capacity to collect data commented on challenges standardizing data collection and defining the parameters of certain measurements. For instance, one organization working with Volunteer Florida noted an issue with measuring retention, sharing,

*From a grant writing perspective and also from a programmatic perspective, how do you measure retention? I feel like everyone does it a little differently. Am I retaining them if they're active once every 30 days, what does that look like? Is there a certain number of hours per year?*

Both of these challenges limit the full ability to systematically measure VGF program outcomes in terms of the degree to which volunteer organizations that benefit from a VGF grant are able to serve their communities. At the same time, one of the strengths of the VGF program is building the capacity of volunteer organizations that have a range of capacities—including those with limited data infrastructure.

## Emergent Issues in Volunteer Management and Engagement

The chapter discusses emergent issues in volunteer management and engagement, including recent volunteerism trends; the COVID-19 pandemic; and diversity, equity, and inclusion.

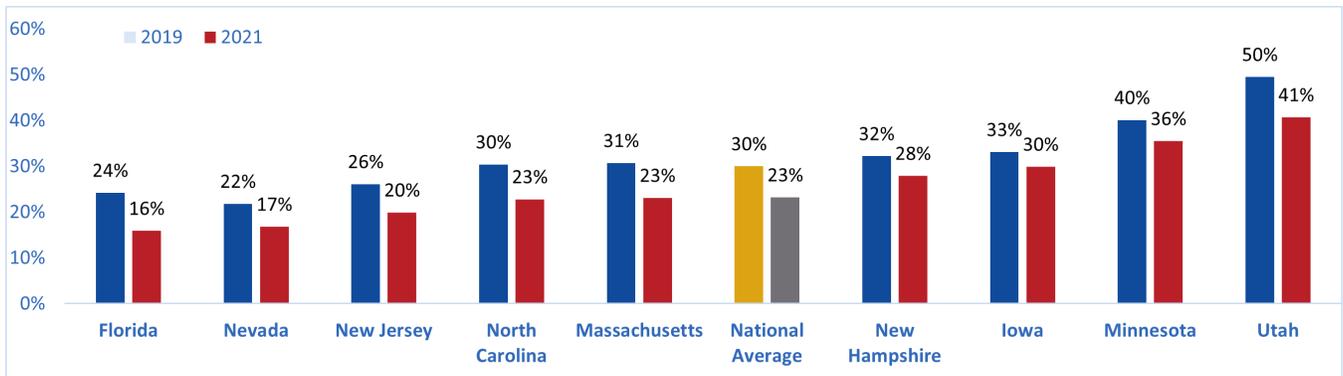
### Recent Volunteerism Trends

Every 2 years, AmeriCorps conducts a longitudinal survey about forms of volunteerism in partnership with the U.S. Census Bureau, called the *Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement*. According to the 2019 report, 30 percent of Americans reported volunteering formally through an organization in that year—and in the 2021 report, the first collected after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, this number had dropped by 7 points to just 23 percent.

Among the nine VGF grantees participating in the evaluation, five were in states with 2021 rates of formal volunteerism that were lower than the national average of 23 percent, with the lowest being Florida at about 16 percent.<sup>15</sup> Four grantees were in states that had rates that were higher, with the highest being Utah at about 41 percent (see exhibit 7). Utah also reported the highest volunteerism rate of any state in the United States in 2021.

All states reported a reduction in formal volunteerism levels between the 2019 and 2021 surveys, mirroring the national reduction in volunteerism attributable to the COVID-19 pandemic. The largest decline in formal volunteerism in a single state was a nine point reduction in Utah from 50 percent in 2019 to 41 percent in 2021, and the smallest decline was in Iowa from 33 percent in 2019 to 30 percent in 2021. Exhibit 7 depicts additional findings.

**EXHIBIT 7.—Formal volunteerism levels from 2019 and 2021: state and national levels**



AmeriCorps also tracks levels of informal volunteering in the Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement, defined as “helping others outside of an organizational context, including doing favors for neighbors like house sitting, watching each other’s children, lending tools, running errands, and other things

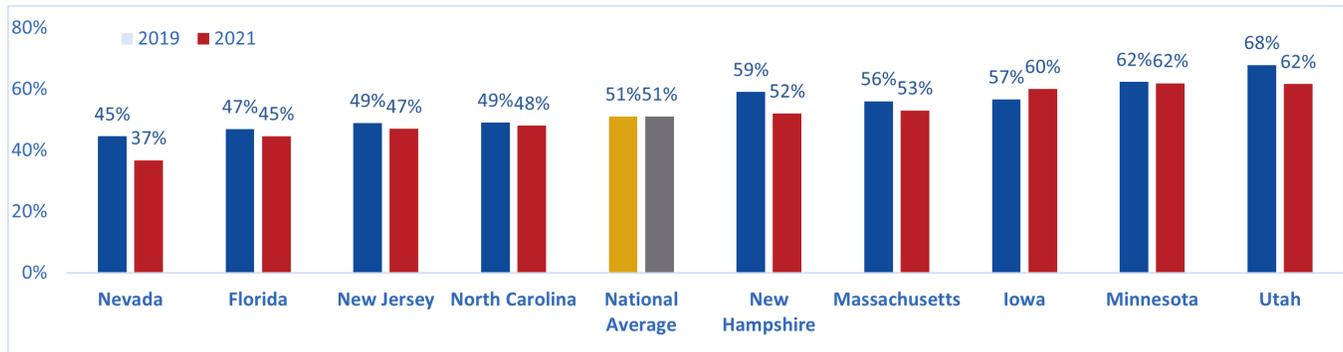
<sup>15</sup> Volunteer Florida commissioned the University of North Florida to conduct a large survey to assess volunteer engagement perspectives among Floridians. Among other topics addressed, the survey included questions related to how often Floridians were currently volunteering. Survey responses were collected from 2,077 respondents. Findings indicate that over half (52 percent) of residents volunteered weekly for at least a quarter of the year or more and 59 percent of residents reported helping their neighbors at least once a month—which are notably higher rates than the results from the 2021 AmeriCorps Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement. For more information on this survey, please visit [The Nature of Volunteerism in Florida](#) report.

to lend a hand.” According to the 2019 results, 51 percent of Americans reported volunteering informally in that year, and in the 2021 report this number had remained consistent.

Across states, informal volunteerism levels tended to be higher than formal volunteerism levels. The highest state in 2021 was Utah at 62 percent (21 percentage points higher than formal volunteerism), and the lowest was Nevada at 37 percent (20 percentage points higher than formal volunteerism).

Rates for informal volunteerism also tended to decrease less than those for formal volunteerism between 2019 and 2021. The largest difference was a 7–percentage point decrease in both New Hampshire, going from 59 percent to 52 percent, and Nevada, going from 45 to 37 percent. Informal volunteerism increased from 2019 to 2021 in one state, Iowa, by 3 percentage points, from 57 percent to 60 percent. See exhibit 8 for more detailed findings.

**EXHIBIT 8.—Informal volunteerism levels from 2019 and 2021: state and national levels**



## The COVID-19 Pandemic

As VGF grantees began implementation of their FY2020 grants in the same year as the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, grantees and program beneficiaries reported significant disruptions to both training activities and volunteer activities.

Across states, grantees reported changes in the format of their programs. Six grantees reported shifting their training activities towards an online format, when they had most often been in-person previously. Some grantees, such as MAVA, that had initially delivered longer in-person sessions (as long as 8 hours per day) pivoted to shorter sessions when they shifted to a virtual format. Grantees that conducted conferences reported delaying them by a year or more or shifting them to a webinar format.

Four VGF grantees (MAVA, Volunteer Iowa, VolunteerNC, and UServeUtah) also reported shifting training content to address the unique challenges brought on by COVID-19, such as creating guidance on best practices in volunteerism through the pandemic. This included effective methods to translate volunteerism to virtual settings, recruiting and retaining volunteers through this period, as well as best practices for safe in-person work when restrictions

### COVID-19 Resiliency Mini-Grant

The Massachusetts Service Alliance (MSA) offered the COVID-19 Resiliency mini-grant to grantees after realizing that there were many volunteer programs in need of COVID-19 relief funding. Through the COVID-19 mini-grant, MSA reached a new group of nonprofit organizations across the state with diverse missions and in rural communities, many of which MSA was unlikely to have reached without the grant.

allowed it. Several grantees also created and enacted innovative support methods, such as the following examples:

- UServeUtah incorporated COVID-19-specific training, such as on how to engage volunteers remotely and what policies and practices to implement based on regulations from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and provided an open forum about responding to the pandemic, attended by up to 250 participants.
- Massachusetts Service Alliance awarded mini-grants from to support organizations through COVID-19.
- VolunteerNC delivered a series of ‘lunch-and-learn’ sessions about responding to COVID-19.
- Volunteer NH developed an online resource center and peer support network which included resources on how to support volunteers during the pandemic while they were volunteering virtually.
- Volunteer Florida mobilized volunteers to address hardships caused by the pandemic through their role as a state emergency response organization.

Volunteer organizations reported significant disruptions to their volunteer programs during the pandemic. Organizations of all types reported steep drops in volunteer numbers outright. While many organizations intentionally curbed their volunteer program for safety reasons, other organizations that were actively open to volunteers struggled to recruit and retain them. A few volunteer organizations that had difficulty retaining volunteers did note that those who remained often were willing to take up more work.

One VGF grantee specifically noted that while there was a substantial shift in the volunteer programs of volunteer organizations during the pandemic, the shift may not have been a result of the pandemic, but rather the pandemic served to amplify an existing issue that nonprofits did not always prioritize their volunteer programs. According to a VGF program manager,

*The pandemic only served to highlight what was already an underlying issue with a lot of nonprofits ... . We’ve learned that nonprofits prioritize their volunteer programs below other organizational projects. It seems that year after year, nonprofits join [one of our programs] with great goals and then—due to staff turnover, internal issues, or a pandemic—have to leave [their volunteer programs] off to go handle other issues, even when they report that the [volunteer program] has increased their capacity.*

Despite all the disruptions to volunteerism during the pandemic, a few grantees did have examples of success through the pandemic. For example, while most organizations tended to lose volunteers, others with specific disaster response or health-related missions reported increased volunteer numbers, such as one mentioned by a NJ Commission staff member:

*A lot of the agencies lost volunteers, where some agencies ended up recruiting more volunteers like NJ VOAD because those volunteers wanted to work in the emergency preparedness field. It was a little bit of a catch-22 for both of them, for all the grantees. While it was more difficult for them to provide training, they pivoted, and started providing training online.*



For two VGF grantees (MAVA and VolunteerNC) the pandemic was seen as an opportunity for organizations to engage in Service Enterprise and innovate to be prepared to re-engage volunteers after the pandemic. While participating Service Enterprise organizations suggested there was little use for Service Enterprise during the pandemic as organizations were managing so very few volunteers, a staff member from MAVA emphasized this was actually an ideal time to complete the certification process, since innovation would be necessary coming out of the pandemic to identify creative ways to keep their organizations functional with the challenges presented to them. Similarly, a Service Enterprise Hub partner of VolunteerNC, noted they used the pandemic as a new marketing strategy to highlight how the certification process could support emerging challenges organizations may have been facing amidst the pandemic (e.g., Were organizations prepared to utilize remote volunteers? What existing volunteer positions could be effectively conducted virtually?) The state hub described how they marketed to organizations that had “gone through this stress test of COVID” and were now poised to identify creative ideas for volunteers, especially for remote volunteering. For both of these grantees, Service Enterprise was promoted as an opportunity for organizations to sit down and truly form a plan for how to innovate during key challenges, such as the pandemic.

Several grantees described being able to quickly adapt their programming to virtual formats. Further, multiple grantees found the virtual format of programming to have greater reach than previous in-person training programs. For example, Volunteer NH found that their recorded virtual trainings had been viewed by more people than their previous in-person trainings had been able to reach, and Massachusetts Service Alliance had more than doubled its participation count in volunteer management meetings by holding webinars and recording them for distribution.

A staff member from MAVA noted that although the transition to virtual allowed for increased offerings, it decreased cross-organization interactions as smaller groups participated in each offering. Even so, MAVA shared that previous training participants noted benefits of the smaller groups which they attributed to increased personal support and closer peer relationships.

Some grantees also cited the pandemic as serving as a catalyst to initiate or change programs. For example, one of the subgrantees of Volunteer Iowa leads a volunteer tax assistance program. During the pandemic, they transitioned to a curbside drop-off and pick-up model as a social distancing measure. This model ended up being more efficient than their previous processes and both volunteers and clients preferred the new model. The subgrantee is continuing to use this process even as the effects of the pandemic have subsided. Additionally, VolunteerNC staff shared they believed the pandemic helped them kick off their lunch-and-learn training series explaining,

*Since they are lunch-and-learns and an hour long, we would probably have had them virtual regardless. But honestly, I think it was COVID that helped us to kick this series off. We saw a need that was even greater during COVID and so bringing nonprofits together twice a month to get these trainings and to learn I think was honestly one of the reasons we started the series.*

While participation in training and capacity building activities tended to decrease, numbers had begun to bounce back for some grantees at the time of the final project director interviews in summer 2023. For example, UServeUtah staff noted how since January of 2023, numbers had rebounded, and participation levels in all VGF activities were back to pre-COVID numbers or beyond, with some trainings fully selling out.

Finally, beyond the disruption that the pandemic caused to the FY2020 VGF grantees and their beneficiaries, as well as the shifts enacted to address social distancing measures, there was evidence that the VGF grant helped support the state and local response to the pandemic. For example, Volunteer Florida played a role in directly addressing the crisis by coordinating volunteers to provide support and gathering donations. Volunteer Iowa and the NJ Commission described volunteer efforts to address food insecurity through the pandemic. The NJ Commission specifically described how one organization used VGF funds to establish a food delivery system for senior citizens who were at high risk during the pandemic.

## Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Eight of the nine VGF grantees reported they were either currently providing or were in the process of developing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) training and capacity building. Volunteer Florida was the only grantee that did not report providing DEI training or capacity building. During the program beneficiary survey, a third or more of respondents from two grantees (Volunteer NH and UServeUtah) reported participating in training related to DEI; 33 percent of Volunteer NH survey respondents reported receiving training on DEI and 41 percent of UServeUtah survey respondents reported receiving training on DEI and its relation to volunteerism.<sup>16</sup>

Across grantees, the framework and depth of DEI training and capacity building varied greatly and included topics such as:

- Recruiting diverse volunteers
- Preparedness resources for individuals with disabilities
- Diversifying volunteer programs
- Culturally competent services for immigrant populations
- Reducing economic barriers to volunteer retention
- Disrupting white supremacy within volunteerism best practices.

These topics were addressed through trainings, conferences, the use of affinity groups, and other initiatives.

Though most VGF grantees and beneficiaries acknowledged the importance of DEI in their organizational culture and program provision, several site visit participants from volunteer organizations reported needing more DEI trainings and a more representative volunteer base.

Volunteers who participated in the ServeMN site visit described what they considered a good level diversity of staff members, and some diversity among volunteers, including a variety in age and ability. One volunteer did note that most volunteers were white but added that this may be associated with their having the privilege to volunteer, which

### Emphasizing DEI in Grant

Across grantees, MAVA stands out for the breadth, depth, and time spent developing and implementing DEI efforts in their programs. Some of these efforts include creating and updating a series of standalone trainings under the VGF umbrella. This includes the training Interrupting Racism in Mostly White Communities, a refined version of their earlier Racism 101 training. In addition to this training, organizations noted participating in BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) and white ally affinity groups hosted by MAVA. Iowa currently uses a MAVA resource that outlines eight steps to engaging volunteers from diverse backgrounds and populations.

<sup>16</sup> Due to survey customizations, Volunteer NH and UServeUtah program beneficiaries were the only survey respondents asked to report if they received training on DEI related topics in the beneficiary survey.

they argued that Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) individuals may not share due to income inequality.

VolunteerNC incorporated DEI topics and training across their initiatives, including DEI sessions within the lunch-and-learn series and a state Service Enterprise Hub’s integration of DEI into the training curriculum. Even so, participating organizations still noted the need for additional training opportunities focused on recruiting diverse volunteers.

Massachusetts Service Alliance and Volunteer NH reported including DEI topics at their respective conferences on volunteerism, and Volunteer Iowa, Massachusetts Service Alliance, and VolunteerNC reported making efforts to incorporate more DEI elements into their Service Enterprise certification trainings. For a full briefing on DEI efforts by grantee see the case studies included in Appendix B.

### Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in Service Enterprise

A participating North Carolina Service Enterprise hub shared how the hub had incorporated their own DEI components to encourage organizations to ensure volunteer opportunities were inclusive and accounted for volunteer access to transportation and technology. The hub noted that the Service Enterprise administrator was aware of the need and adding DEI components to the curriculum.

UServeUtah staff described both their Volunteer Management Training and their Volunteer Programming for Maximum Impact trainings have a module about DEI, but participant feedback suggested the grantee increase the degree to which DEI is addressed in the trainings. As of a fall 2022 interview, UServeUtah staff were expanding that module and being strategic about implementing DEI aspects into every other module, such as including training on making recruitment accessible and reducing language barriers for volunteers, saying:

*We’ve added a piece in every element [of our program] ... we wanted to make sure that it wasn’t just a one off. It wasn’t thrown in there as lip service, but it was something that was strategically placed in every single module.*

The NJ Commission was collaborating with multiple state Chambers of Commerce to expand volunteerism with certain groups, with a staff member explaining,

*We’re currently working with different Chambers of Commerce ... the LGBTQIA+ Chamber of Commerce, the African American Chamber of Commerce in New Jersey, and the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey ... different types of groups within New Jersey to see if there is connections that they can formulate with the grantees and with the volunteer centers.*



## “Volunteer”—A Loaded Term

A 2013 publication in the Canadian journal *Philanthropist* argues that the word “volunteering” is “outdated and connotes an elitist, patronizing, and charitable model of giving time” (p. 37, Sladowski et al., 2013). VGF grantees also pointed out their own concerns with the term, particularly as it relates to using culturally competent recruitment language.

For example, in the context of a planned Nevada Volunteers training on recruiting diverse volunteers and those who are representative of communities served, a Nevada Volunteers staff member stated that a key aspect of this training was on the importance of using representative language, specifically in terms of the word “volunteer.” The staff member explained:

*That’s really important when you talk about recruitment and looking at your volunteer base and who you have and who you’re lacking based on the demographics of your community ... the main part is ensuring that your volunteer base is representative of the community that you’re in ... [Nevada Volunteers] learned that language is very important, the word volunteer isn’t a good word to use when working with our community. And so those are things I will address in the recruitment portion of the training.*

As noted by the staff member, the term volunteer may not be inclusive for all communities.

This sentiment was shared across other VGF grantees, as a volunteer center subgrantee from Volunteer Iowa noted they provided a training to nonprofits on the language used in volunteer recruitment and how to make that language more inclusive for diverse populations, including a focus on the term “volunteer,” which a participant noted was not cross-culturally recognized.

## Volunteer Management and Engagement Strategies and Outcomes

This chapter describes a variety of volunteer management and engagement strategies used by VGF grantees as well as outcomes reported by VGF grantees and program beneficiaries.

### Strategies Used and/or Learned

Through the beneficiary survey and site visit interviews/focus groups, program beneficiary organizations served by the nine VGF grantees—which included regional volunteer centers, volunteer organizations, and other entities—reported various strategies they learned about and/or implemented as a part of the training and capacity building activities they participated in through the VGF grant. Strategies aligned with three key topical areas: volunteer engagement, recruitment, and retention.

#### Engagement

Program beneficiaries of six of the nine VGF grantees reported strategies related to volunteer engagement, which refers to the broader strategy of leveraging volunteers to accomplish an organization’s mission. Strategies included leveraging volunteers, use of skills-based volunteers, organizational strategic planning, and measuring outcomes and evaluating the process.

**4 Strategies**  
**6/9 Grantees**

**Leveraging Volunteers:** Program beneficiaries of four VGF grantees (Volunteer Florida, Volunteer Iowa, Volunteer NH, and UServeUtah), noted they implemented strategies related to leveraging volunteers, which ranged from utilizing existing volunteers to gaining staff buy-in for how volunteers could be utilized at their organization. Volunteer Florida beneficiaries learned how to encourage staff to utilize volunteers by directly asking the organization’s staff members what tasks a volunteer could help with. Additionally, a Volunteer Iowa volunteer center subgrantee noted that during the pandemic, as in-person volunteering was not always feasible, they provided training for organizations on how to engage volunteers virtually. As part of the UServeUtah program beneficiary survey, over a third of survey respondents (39 percent) noted they learned about active engagement in the provided trainings and capacity building activities.

**Use of Skill-based Volunteers:** Program beneficiaries of two VGF grantees (MAVA and UServeUtah), noted strategies focused on skills-based volunteers. Volunteer organizations also learned to consult their staff to identify new roles for volunteers. UServeUtah beneficiaries learned how to determine in what capacity groups could volunteer and then how to make sure to target those groups. Participants in a MAVA Service Enterprise training noted that Service Enterprise had a specific focus on recruiting volunteers with specific skillsets, which participants cited learning more about through the associated trainings.

**Strategic Planning:** As previously noted, program beneficiary survey respondents were asked to report on the practices they received training on. In three of the eight VGF grantees that participated in the survey (Volunteer Florida, MAVA, and UServeUtah), over half of respondents indicated they received training on strategic planning to maximize volunteer impact. Additionally, during site visits, UServeUtah beneficiaries noted identifying volunteer motivations by tracking why volunteers were motivated to volunteer with organizations and seeing how those motivations changed over time.



**Measuring Outcomes and Evaluating the Process:** Over half (65 percent to 100 percent) of program beneficiary survey respondents from three VGF grantees (Volunteer Florida, Massachusetts Service Alliance, MAVA) indicated that they received training on measuring outcomes and evaluating the process. Additionally, UServeUtah beneficiaries described conducting regular evaluations to determine what volunteer management strategies were working and what aspects could be improved. They also noted trainings included strategies on how to identify and share the return on investment for volunteers.

## Recruitment

Program beneficiaries of seven of the nine VGF grantees reported learning about and/or implementing strategies related to volunteer recruitment, which refers to the strategies and management practices used to garner volunteer participation. Strategies included the recruitment of specific types of volunteers, updating volunteer position descriptions for open positions, recruiting and marketing to prospective volunteers, inclusivity in volunteer recruitment, and diversifying volunteer communications.

**5 Strategies  
7/9 Grantees**

**Recruitment of Specific Volunteers:** Program beneficiaries of five VGF grantees (Volunteer Florida, Volunteer Iowa, MAVA, Volunteer NH, and UServeUtah) noted recruitment of specific volunteers was a strategy they implemented. Most frequently, program beneficiary organizations from these grantees reported intentional recruitment of certain age groups. Organizations from two grantees (MAVA and UServeUtah) focused on the recruitment of multiple generations of volunteers. Organizations from one grantee (Volunteer Iowa) noted the recruitment of the next generation of volunteers. Organizations from one grantee (Volunteer Florida) reported learning about how to increase volunteer recruitment by being open to recruiting volunteers from groups they did not typically recruit from, such as older volunteers.

**Writing Position Descriptions:** Program beneficiaries of two VGF grantees (MAVA and UServeUtah) described learning how to craft improved volunteer position descriptions, including how to emphasize to potential volunteers the value of taking on these roles. Program beneficiaries of one grantee (UServeUtah) noted the importance clear position descriptions had on volunteer recruitment, as making volunteers aware of what tasks they were and were not expected to be performing allowed them to identify roles of interest to them. At least half of the beneficiary survey respondents (50 percent) from UServeUtah reported receiving training on interviewing, screening, and selecting volunteers. A participating organization served by MAVA described their organization's implementation of this strategy:

*Our team is currently redoing all of our position descriptions. It was great because [MAVA] had examples of what not to do. Having those to reference was very helpful. [MAVA] also explained how you want potential volunteers to see what they stand to benefit. Even though it's not a salary or pay, what do they get from this position? I think that specifically was really useful for our team as we were trying to think about why people would want volunteer with (our organization), and we put that in our new position description.*

**Recruiting and Marketing to Prospective Volunteers:** As part of the program beneficiary survey, respondents were asked to report on the practices they received training on through the VGF grant. Out of the eight VGF grantees that administered the survey, the majority of respondents from five VGF grantees (Volunteer Florida, Volunteer Iowa, Massachusetts Service Alliance, MAVA, and Volunteer NH) frequently noted receiving training on recruiting and marketing to prospective volunteers, with over half of respondents

(63 percent–100 percent across grantees) reporting that training regarding recruiting and marketing to prospective volunteers was provided; three (Volunteer Florida, Volunteer Iowa, and Volunteer NH) of these grantees had 100 percent agreement that the training was provided.

**Inclusivity in Volunteer Recruitment:** Program beneficiaries of three VGF grantees (Massachusetts Service Alliance, UServeUtah, and Volunteer Iowa) described receiving training on inclusivity in volunteer recruitment. For Massachusetts Service Alliance, participating volunteer organizations noted the importance of intentionality in volunteer recruitment to diversify the volunteer base, with one person saying:

*I would say that organizations are also being more intentional and aware about who they're recruiting and wanting to diversify their volunteer base. So, they're wanting to have more volunteers that reflect the communities that they are serving in and wanting to be more intentional about that recruitment.*

Additionally, from one VGF grantee (UServeUtah), a participant noted learning about inclusive recruitment messaging during the provided training.

**Diversifying Communication:** Program beneficiaries of two VGF grantees (MAVA and NJ Commission) reported strategies related to diversifying communication to recruit volunteers. With NJ Commission, one-third (33 percent) of survey respondents noted social media marketing as a practice on which they received training.<sup>17</sup> For MAVA, one participant described the importance of diversifying communication to current and potential volunteers.

## Retention

Program beneficiaries of all nine of the VGF grantees reported strategies related to retention, which refers to the strategies and management practices used after volunteers have been recruited, with the desired outcome being retention. Strategies included onboarding and orientation, recognition and appreciation, supervision and management, volunteer communication, and aligning volunteer positions with interest.

**5 Strategies  
9/9 Grantees**

**Onboarding and Orientation:** Program beneficiaries of seven VGF grantees (Volunteer Florida, Volunteer Iowa, Massachusetts Service Alliance, MAVA, VolunteerNC, Nevada Volunteers, and UServeUtah) reported in the beneficiary survey or during site visits about strategies learned related to volunteer onboarding and orientation. With two grantees (Volunteer Florida and Volunteer Iowa), onboarding strategies reported by beneficiaries focused on reducing barriers to entry for volunteers. Volunteer Iowa beneficiaries described receiving training on creating easy entryway activities to support streamlined onboarding of volunteers who may be on the fence about volunteering or are too busy to commit a significant portion of time. VolunteerNC mini-grant recipients described learning about volunteer orientations and how to do a better job of orienting volunteers to the organization and volunteer process. Beneficiary survey respondents from six grantees (Massachusetts Service Alliance, MAVA, Volunteer Florida, Volunteer Iowa, Nevada Volunteers, and UServeUtah) reported they received training more broadly on volunteer orientation and training (15 percent–95 percent).

**Volunteer Recognition and Appreciation:** Program beneficiaries of eight of the nine VGF grantees reported during the site visits and/or in the beneficiary survey learning about strategies focused on volunteer

<sup>17</sup> Due to survey customizations, NJ Commission program beneficiaries were the only survey respondents asked to report if they received training on social media marketing in the beneficiary survey.

recognition and appreciation. In six of the eight VGF grantees (Volunteer Florida, Volunteer Iowa, Massachusetts Service Alliance, MAVA, Volunteer NH, and NJ Commission) that administered the beneficiary survey, over half (67 percent–100 percent) of each grantee’s survey respondents indicated that training included volunteer recognition and development. During site visits, program beneficiaries of three VGF grantees (MAVA, VolunteerNC, and UServeUtah) shared additional volunteer recognition and appreciation strategies. MAVA training beneficiaries reported volunteer recognition and appreciation methods learned included implementing explicit awards valuing volunteers in events and on social media and asking volunteers how they individually would like to be recognized. VolunteerNC beneficiaries reported they received training on volunteer appreciation, which one subgrantee noted was “how [they had] been able to retain so many volunteers”—through the use of virtual (e.g., emails or hand-written letters) or in-person recognition services. A VolunteerNC program beneficiary shared, “I learned a lot about how to frame everyone’s accomplishment, so everyone feels a part of that accomplishment, but then they also strive to do better.”

**Supervision and Management:** Program beneficiaries of six of the nine VGF grantees reported during the site visits and/or in the beneficiary learning about survey strategies focused on volunteer supervision and management. At least a third (33 percent–100 percent) of survey respondents from each of five VGF grantees (Volunteer Iowa, Massachusetts Service Alliance, MAVA, Volunteer NH, and UServeUtah) reported receiving training on ongoing supervision and management. During site visits, program beneficiaries of four VGF grantees (Volunteer Florida, Volunteer Iowa, and Volunteer NH) shared additional strategies learned about and/or used related to supervision and management.

**Communication with Volunteers:** Program beneficiaries of three VGF grantees (MAVA, Volunteer NH, and UServeUtah) reported strategies related to communication with volunteers. Beneficiaries of one grantee (Volunteer NH) described communications with volunteers to support volunteer development. Volunteer NH beneficiaries reported receiving training on providing feedback to volunteers. MAVA and UServeUtah beneficiaries described learning about the value of regular communication with volunteers, especially through following up with potential volunteers who have expressed interest.

**Aligning Volunteers Based on Interests:** Program beneficiaries of five VGF grantees (Volunteer Florida, Massachusetts Service Alliance, Volunteer NH, NJ Commission, and Nevada Volunteers) in the beneficiary survey or site visit noted aligning volunteers with tasks or positions of interest. Among the eight VGF grantees that administered the beneficiary survey, survey respondents reported on the extent to which the grantee’s VGF-supported training and capacity building services had improved matching volunteers to volunteer opportunities. Five of the eight grantees (Volunteer Florida, Massachusetts Service Alliance, Volunteer NH, NJ Commission, and Nevada Volunteers) had half or more (50 percent–73 percent) of respondents from each grantee indicate that grant support has been very or extremely helpful. For two grantees (Volunteer Florida and Massachusetts Service Alliance), volunteer organizations emphasized the strategy of aligning volunteers’ skills or interests with positions and related tasks during site visits. Organizations served by Massachusetts Service Alliance were striving to make volunteerism less transactional by “matchmaking” positions with volunteers interests to ensure work was meaningful and engaging to support retention. Volunteer Florida beneficiaries noted they learned to reallocate volunteers who were not able to serve in certain roles to other tasks.

## Outcomes

In interviews and focus groups as well as in the beneficiary survey, VGF grantees and program beneficiaries reported a variety of outcomes their organizations achieved through the VGF grant. Outcomes are

presented as VGF grantee outcomes, those reported by the grantees, and volunteer organization outcomes, those reported by the program beneficiaries.

### VGF Grantee Outcomes

According to the 2021 VGF progress reports, the nine participating VGF grantees were able to provide over 2,000 organizations with capacity building services, with over 1,900 organizations increasing their effectiveness, efficiency, and/or program scale/reach. At the volunteer level, VGF grantees reported over 130,000 volunteers were recruited or managed, then serving over one million hours. Additionally, VGF grantee staff shared in interviews the biggest successes and outcomes they had achieved through their grant. These outcomes were centered around increased reach and recognition and improved services for beneficiaries, as described in this section.

#### Increased Reach and Recognition

Four of the nine VGF grantees reported they achieved outcomes related to increased reach and recognition as a result of their VGF programming. Outcomes included the successful transition to online or virtual services, providing the opportunities for grantees to provide services and training to more organizations; the ability to work with new organizations, like smaller nonprofits; and recognition in the state, either as a major volunteer connector or an expert in DEI in volunteer management, as seen in exhibit 9.

#### EXHIBIT 9.—VGF grantee outcomes related to reach and recognition



**Transition to Online/Virtual Services:** Staff from three VGF grantees (Volunteer Iowa, Massachusetts Service Alliance, and MAVA) mentioned the move to online or virtual services as an outcome of the grant. Volunteer Iowa noted with the transition to virtual training, they were able to increase the number of organizations they trained, though it was more difficult to assess the effectiveness of the trainings in the virtual environment. Additionally, MAVA staff shared that trainings had successfully transitioned to online during the pandemic. A MAVA staff member emphasized the successful transition and ability to continue providing training and capacity building services during the pandemic:

*We've all survived a national disaster. FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] declared COVID a national disaster at one point, and we are all disaster survivors. Being able to come out of that situation successfully, I feel like that's a huge triumph.*

Massachusetts Service Alliance reported with the transition to virtual training during the pandemic they were able to engage new individuals and organizations who would previously not have received the services.

Massachusetts Service Alliance more than doubled their target participation count in volunteer management, serving 496 individuals compared to their target of 200 individuals.

**Increased Access to New Organizations:** Staff from three VGF grantees (Volunteer Iowa, Massachusetts Service Alliance, and Volunteer NH), described that through the VGF grant they were able to increase their access to new organizations. Massachusetts Service Alliance staff further described how their VGF grant helped establish a pipeline for nonprofit organizations to access larger national service membership and continued civic engagement. Massachusetts Service Alliance staff said they have seen organizations move from subgrantees to Service Enterprise and then to a larger state program (e.g., Commonwealth Corps) or AmeriCorps program (e.g., AmeriCorps grantee or VISTA sponsor). Massachusetts Service Alliance staff described this pipeline to be one of the greatest successes they have seen from the VGF grant. Volunteer NH staff emphasized that the grant provided them the ability to work with smaller nonprofits that lacked the infrastructure to be able to receive AmeriCorps funds independently, and that as a result, they were able to help build their capacity. Additionally, a Volunteer Iowa staff member shared that volunteer centers were able to pivot to meet the local needs of their communities directly and VGF supported the creation of the needed infrastructure to pivot to new organizations and emerging needs.

*We've seen that the communities that have strong volunteer centers were able to weather things better because they had that support. We also saw the critical nature of having plans for volunteers in times of disaster ... . We've seen that when there is infrastructure in place, they're able to more readily and easily respond.*

Volunteer Iowa staff member

*MAVA's niche in the field of volunteer engagement training [is] that we focus on DEI. Since 2020, so many organizations have woken up to the fact that they were woefully unable to respond to understanding that our systems are based on white supremacy and are affecting so many community members. We've done a lot of work to incorporate DEI. I think MAVA has been sensitive, thoughtful about approaching people from all over Minnesota about DEI and knowing that all of that is contextual within communities, and I think we've moved the conversation along in our field which is really exciting. I'd call that a success.*

MAVA staff member

**Leader in Volunteer Management/Engagement Sector in DEI:**

MAVA established themselves as a leader of DEI in the volunteer management and engagement sector with staff from other VGF grantees reporting use of MAVA-developed DEI resources. A component of MAVA's DEI approach included the use of affinity groups for BIPOC professionals as well as for white allies. MAVA staff reported they encouraged DEI efforts in areas with varying levels of openness to having these conversations. Around 25–30 percent of MAVA affinity groups were made up of out-of-state participants who were unable to find equivalents within their state, underscoring the important role MAVA has been playing in further DEI efforts in volunteer management and engagement beyond Minnesota.

**Recognition within the State:** Volunteer NH staff reported their VGF grant had helped them develop into and be recognized as a major volunteer connector in the state. Overall, Volunteer NH staff reported they had become “a convener of conversations across [volunteer organizations] to see where the gaps were.”

**Improved Services for Beneficiaries**

Two of the nine VGF grantees reported they achieved outcomes related to improved services for their program beneficiaries as a result of their VGF programming. Outcomes included the long-

term support of organizations served, needs-based training and services provided, and the creation of new volunteer management staffing positions, as seen in exhibit 10.

**EXHIBIT 10.—VGF grantee outcomes related to improved services**



**Long-term Support to Organizations:** VolunteerNC staff reported that their long-term commitment to organizations—the fact that they kept the majority of the same subgrantees over three years—to be one of their biggest successes as it helped increase the capacity of organizations served and a greater reach of services. One staff member shared,

*“We have seen the organizations that we are subgranting funds to and what these funds have done for them. Bringing on staff, being able to expand their reach, being able to expand the number of meals that they’re serving to seniors. I think it’s been pretty incredible to see the number of families and students served. Just the capacity that they’ve been able to add to their organizations.”*

**Paying Attention to Needs of Program Beneficiaries:** MAVA continued to stay active and responsive to the needs of the organizations they served. MAVA reported conducting an annual member survey and utilizing the findings from the survey to decide what training should be used in the future. During the pandemic, MAVA continued to meet these needs by creating COVID-19 tool kits to help their beneficiaries transition to a virtual environment. While several other VGF grantees reported the use of surveys for identifying needs and future planning, none noted this practice as a positive outcome for their organization.

**Program Beneficiary Outcomes**

During the site visits and/or program beneficiary survey, individuals from organizations who received training or capacity building services from the VGF grantee shared their biggest successes achieved through their participation in those services. Similar to the strategies reported by program beneficiaries, outcomes were centered around three key topical areas:

volunteer engagement, recruitment, and retention. However, additional outcomes were also noted by beneficiaries centering on increased capacity of organizations or staff, as described in this section.

**EXHIBIT 11.—Organization outcomes related to engaging volunteers**



## Engagement

Program beneficiaries of all nine VGF grantees reported they achieved outcomes related to volunteer engagement. Outcomes included generally improved leveraging of volunteers and promoting organizational change, as seen in exhibit 11.

**Better Leveraging Volunteers:** Beneficiaries of seven VGF grantees cited outcomes related to being able to better leverage volunteers. In four VGF grantees to administer the beneficiary survey (Volunteer Florida, Volunteer NH, NJ Commission, and Nevada Volunteers), at least half (50 percent–75 percent) of survey respondents from each grantee indicated that the grant very or extremely impacted the recruitment of the types of volunteers aligned with the organization’s needs. Additionally, as part of the site visits, program beneficiaries of three additional VGF grantees (UServeUtah, Massachusetts Service Alliance, and MAVA) noted they were better able to leverage volunteers. In Massachusetts, through Service Enterprise, training participants felt it provided them with the opportunity to be more selective in their volunteer recruitment and focus on recruiting for the key skills and supports their organization needed:

*It’s okay to have a high bar for your volunteers and you don’t have to take everyone who says they want to do it—and that was just reaffirming. We can be particular because we have a specific volunteer profile, and that’s okay.*

Better leveraging volunteers also expanded to increasing the expectations organizations had for certain volunteers. A Utah-based volunteer organization mentioned that the UServeUtah training had increased their capacity by providing “ideas for me to be like okay, I don’t need to do this all alone. I can rely on volunteers as well do to all sorts of jobs for us.”

**Promote Organizational Change:** Volunteer organizations from three VGF grantees (Volunteer Iowa, Massachusetts Service Alliance, and VolunteerNC), indicated Service Enterprise training delivered by the grantee supported their ability to promote organizational change. In North Carolina, the biggest success with the state Service Enterprise Hub was its ability to improve the use of volunteers. One Service Enterprise participant from VolunteerNC expressed how they were “shocked at how much more they could be doing to maximize the impact of the organization,” which in turn maximizes the impact on the community. In Iowa, Service Enterprise participants noted that participating in training allowed get more staff and board members involved in volunteer engagement and management. Additionally, Service Enterprise participants from Massachusetts noted they were able to think about volunteer management, recruitment, and retention from a systems-level perspective, a less intimidating and more feasible approach for larger organizational change. Participants explained not only did Service Enterprise provide them with a road map for future change but was successful in areas where “organization[s] had not previously been able to tackle this challenge without this process.”

*We have one volunteer coordinator who does most of the volunteer engagement. Service Enterprise got more staff and board members involved in actively thinking about how we all engage volunteers.*

*I think that we have opened our eyes to new partnerships and collaborations that we didn't think about prior to SE.*

Volunteer Iowa  
Service Enterprise Participants



## Recruitment

Program beneficiaries of all eight of the nine VGF grantees reported they achieved outcomes related to increased volunteer recruitment as a result of VGF training and capacity building. Program beneficiaries of eight VGF grantees (Volunteer Florida, Massachusetts Service Alliance, MAVA, Volunteer NH, NJ Commission, Nevada Volunteers, VolunteerNC, and UServeUtah) reported in the survey and/or site visit they increased their access or reach of volunteers to support recruitment. For seven of the eight VGF grantees that administered the survey (Volunteer Florida, Massachusetts Service Alliance, ServeMN, Volunteer NH, NJ Commission, Nevada Volunteers, and UServeUtah), at least one third and up to all (37 percent–100 percent) of beneficiary survey respondents from each grantee indicated that as a result of VGF funds, their organization’s recruitment of volunteers was very or extremely affected. Additionally, in site visits, beneficiaries of three grantees (ServeMN, Volunteer Florida, and VolunteerNC), reported increased reach due to the VGF grant, either because of increased recruitment of volunteers or increased partnership with organizations. A volunteer connector subgrantee of ServeMN reported they expanded the types of organizations to which they sent volunteers. In North Carolina, the hiring of an outreach coordinator, which was funded through their VolunteerNC mini-grant, allowed an organization to reach more people in the community. A mini-grant recipient from VolunteerNC noted:

*We’ve had the opportunity to reach out to more people since we have an outreach coordinator and that has helped. What we do is we coach our chapters and chapter leaders [to] learn different methods and ways to reach out to volunteers. So, it’s definitely been helpful, and it’s trickled down through our organization.*

Through a Volunteer Florida training, participants shared they learned they had incorrect assumptions on the tasks their older volunteers were capable of accomplishing. Changing this perception allowed for the potential of recruiting more volunteers.

## Retention

Program beneficiaries of six of the nine VGF grantees reported outcomes related to improving volunteer retention. Among six of the eight VGF grantees that administered the beneficiary survey (Volunteer Florida, Volunteer Iowa, Massachusetts Service Alliance, NJ Commission, Nevada Volunteers, UServeUtah), a third or more of respondents (33 percent–80 percent) for each grantee indicated the VGF grant had a substantial or transformative improvement on their organization’s ability to engage and retain volunteers. Just one VGF grantee had no respondents indicating these strategies led to a substantive or transformative improvement for their organization. Additionally, four grantees (Volunteer Florida, Volunteer Iowa, NJ Commission, and Nevada Volunteers) had at least half (50 percent–80 percent) of respondents from each grantee indicate that implementing strategies for recruiting and selecting volunteers led to a substantial or transformative improvement for their organizations. During site visits, Florida-based volunteer organizations noted they were able to improve volunteer retention by aligning volunteers to their preferred tasks. In addition, one Florida-based volunteer organization staff member described how they gave long-term volunteers new responsibilities to teach/coach other volunteers, which they cited as contributing to increased retention for these volunteers.

## Increased Capacity

Program beneficiaries of seven grantees reported they achieved outcomes related to increased capacity, focused on either increased capacity at the organizational level or the individual level of volunteer coordinators or managers, as seen in exhibit 12. At the individual level, outcomes generally included increased confidence and networking among volunteer managers. While at the organization level, outcomes

included increased recognition in the community or state. Obtaining certifications was noted to be achieved at both levels depending on the scope of the program.

**Volunteer Manager Confidence:** Program beneficiaries of two VGF grantees (Volunteer Florida and MAVVA) described increased capacity and resilience among volunteer managers due to VGF funds. In Minnesota, volunteer managers felt equipped to become leaders in their organizations to advocate for the use of volunteers. In Florida, volunteer managers described how when they connected with other volunteer managers from different organizations, they learned to build resilience in overcoming volunteer management challenges. Shared one volunteer manager:

*I find the group settings, being able to talk to other people in your same role one-on-one is super helpful ... to be able to network and have conversations with people that are in the same role as you are, and that could be seeing some of the same growing pains, challenges, [and] successes.*

**EXHIBIT 12.—Organization outcomes related to increased capacity**



**Network/Collaborate with Other Organizations:** Program beneficiaries of four grantees (Volunteer Florida, Massachusetts Service Alliance, MAVVA, and Volunteer NH), described the networking benefits they experienced as a result of participating in grantee training and capacity building services. Volunteer managers from Florida appreciated the ability to network with other organizations outside of their own team. One Volunteer Florida volunteer manager stated,

*It's just been super helpful knowing that there's an entity basically that I can go and bounce ideas off that isn't so stuck in the everyday.*

Similarly, MAVVA facilitated networks of volunteer managers that allowed staff, who were often the only people in their organizations that work with volunteers, to get ideas and stay relevant in the field. Additionally, participating organizations in Massachusetts appreciated the opportunities to engage in discussion and collaboration with other organizations, especially in Service Enterprise. Even among participants who noted they had been a professional volunteer manager for several years, the ability to network and collaborate with their Service Enterprise cohort was seen as helpful. Finally, Volunteer NH highlighted the value of the networking time provided by their cohort program to help organizations learn new strategies.

*There are tons of small nonprofits where there's one volunteer director entirely responsible for the volunteer program ... they have no experience or people to ask questions [of] within their organization ... so [the cohort members have] gotten support from one another. Getting feedback, learning about each other's program models. I think they're very thirsty for more education about how a small nonprofit runs.*

While beneficiaries three of these four grantees (Volunteer Florida, Volunteer NH, and MAVVA) were not Service Enterprise participants, they were subgrantees in which the VGF grantee utilized a cohort model, similar to that used in Service Enterprise. This suggests that increased networking/collaborating may be connected to the cohort model used in Service Enterprise, or more broadly, other cohort-based programs/subgrants used by VGF grantees.



**Recognition in the Community/State:** Program beneficiaries of two VGF grantees (Volunteer Iowa and MAVA) noted the VGF grant helped increase their recognition in their area, either locally in the community or more broadly across the state. For example, a participating volunteer center staff member in Iowa noted they had established themselves as a leader in the county and state on volunteer engagement.

*“When I look at the work that we do as an organization and success that we’ve had, I’m really proud of the fact that we not only locally are that place that people come to and that they know about and recognize for basic volunteer engagement efforts. But we’re also seen as leaders across the state of Iowa for the work that we do. While we don’t always focus on things outside of our community, it is nice to be able to show other the things we had success on to help support other volunteer connecting organizations.”*

A Minnesota-based nonprofit organization indicated that, because of the training they received from MAVA, they were becoming the go-to organization for recruiting volunteers in their county.

**Certifications:** Beneficiary survey respondents from six VGF grantees (Volunteer Florida, Massachusetts Service Alliance, ServeMN, Volunteer NH, NJ Commission, and UServeUtah), reported that volunteer organizations or organization staff had received some type of certification, either a national certification like Service Enterprise, a state-specific certification developed by the grantee, or another type of organizational certification. The most prominent certification cited was Service Enterprise, which beneficiaries of four of the eight grantees (Volunteer Florida, Massachusetts Service Alliance, ServeMN, and NJ Commission) reported their organization had received or planned to receive by September 2023 in the beneficiary survey. Program beneficiaries of two grantees (MAVA and NJ Commission) reported having received the United Way Certification in Volunteer Administration. In addition, beneficiaries of three grantees (MAVA, Volunteer NH, and UServeUtah) reported they received/planned to receive a state-specific certification.

## Volunteer Management and Engagement Challenges and Needs

VGF grantees and program beneficiaries reported in interviews, focus groups, and surveys about additional challenges they faced and needs they had. Findings presented in this section stem from five VGF grantees.

### VGF Grantee Challenges and Needs

Two VGF grantees, VolunteerNC and UServeUtah, specifically noted challenges and needs among their respective organizations to support their capacity and services provided to program beneficiaries. Grantee needs centered on the request for more resources and support in managing the VGF grant.

**Resource Library.** Staff from one grantee shared it would be helpful for AmeriCorps to provide VGF grantees with a resource library for grantee staff to reference training examples or models and other VGF related materials (e.g., VGF Grant Terms and Conditions).

**AmeriCorps VGF Grant Point of Contact.** Staff from one VGF grantee noted there was not a clear point of contact at AmeriCorps whom they could reach out to directly if they had questions related to the VGF grant.<sup>18</sup> Grantee staff mentioned it would be helpful to have someone they can contact to get clarity or guidance when questions arise.

**Sustainable Funding.** Staff from one VGF grantee noted their staff struggled with writing grant applications focused on innovation, as the application for VGF prompted. The grantee emphasized they really needed sustainable funding to allow them to continue offering programs that had already been implemented. Grantee staff noted that impactful initiatives took time to build, and many of the grantee's programs were beginning to gain traction three years after they were initially awarded. According to the grantee, it seemed as though the VGF grant was shifting away from awarding state service commissions towards awarding nonprofits. This particular commission was not awarded a new three-year VGF grant and noted that most of the activities will therefore sunset.

### Program Beneficiaries Challenges and Needs

In addition to VGF grantee challenges and needs, program beneficiaries of three of the grantees, Volunteer Florida, ServeMN, and Massachusetts Service Alliance, shared challenges and needs of their organizations. Program beneficiary needs centered on requests for more resources and supports on measuring outcomes, recruiting diverse volunteers, and increasing volunteer engagement and impact.

**Data Tracking.** Program beneficiaries of two VGF grantees shared challenges tracking and managing volunteer data. One beneficiary staff member noted challenges with measuring volunteer retention rates, noting they have seen several different ways to measure retention. Another beneficiary staff member representing a different VGF grantee shared the need for additional resources and support on how to manage and track volunteer data, and how to streamline the data collected.

**Diversifying Volunteers.** Service Enterprise participants from one VGF grantee expressed the need for more opportunities to discuss how to diversify their organization's volunteer base. While it was clearly an interest and desire for the VGF grantee/Service Enterprise Hub delivering the grantee, one participant noted there was not enough dedicated time for related discussions.

---

<sup>18</sup> AmeriCorps provides each VGF grantee with a grant portfolio manager and a senior portfolio manager which would serve as grant points of contact. That said, the staff expressed this concern suggesting a potential lack of clarity or miscommunication about who these individuals were or how to reach them.

**Training Difficulty or Relevance.** Participating organizations from one grantee noted challenges with the difficulty and relevance of some offered trainings. Participants shared the required finance training was difficult to understand, for both the standard volunteer managers who participated and the organizational finance team representative who attended as well. Outside of the difficulty level, some participants also noted aspects of the training were less useful for their specific organizations due to the specific mission or requirements of the organization.

**Participant Burnout.** One grantee shared during their fall 2022 site visit that one of the biggest challenges they had in implementing VGF supported activities was that the overall number of participants in training had declined, which may be due to the fee associated with the participating in trainings, challenges with staffing (particularly for activities such as Service Enterprise, which is a long-term commitment from organizations and participating staff), and COVID-19 burnout and pandemic fatigue. Grantee staff noted the participants who did show up to trainings were stretched thin, burnt out, and not actively participating in the session(s).

**Training and Capacity Building Needs.** As a part of the program beneficiaries survey, which was administered by eight of the nine VGF grantees, survey respondents shared their organization’s primary needs for additional training or support on various volunteer management and engagement topics. Specifically, survey respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement on a 4-point scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree) on if their organization needed additional training on each of 8–12 different topics.<sup>19</sup> As shown in exhibit 14, across all of the participating grantees, the topics with the highest agreement regarding needed additional training were strategic planning, volunteer recruitment and marketing, and measuring outcomes and evaluating the process. Conversely, the topics with the lowest agreement regarding needed additional training were those related to volunteer recruitment, supervision/management, and recognition/development.

**EXHIBIT 13.—Highest and lowest agreement regarding organizations’ needs for additional training**



Additional details on the volunteer management and engagement challenges and needs noted by site visit participants and survey respondents for each of the participating VGF grantees are included the grantee case studies in Appendix B.

<sup>19</sup> VGF grantees had the opportunity to customize the program beneficiary survey. As a result, grantee choose to modify the additional training topics included in the survey for a total of 12 topics.

# Strengthening Evaluation Capacity to Build Evidence on Volunteer Management and Engagement

## Description and Purpose of Evaluation Capacity Building

Evaluation capacity building was provided over the course of 12 hour-long technical assistance sessions delivered on a monthly basis delivered between December 2021 and November 2022. Designed to enhance participants' capacity as educated consumer of evaluation, these sessions were divided into three modules: (1) Planning Evaluation; (2) Implementing Evaluation; and (3) Reporting and Using Evaluation. The curriculum was based on AmeriCorps evaluation capacity building core curriculum with extensive tailoring to the volunteer management and state service commission context, especially through examples and discussion prompts that invited participants to apply evaluation concepts to their experiences. Sessions included a mix of PowerPoint presentations and demonstrations, whole group discussions and activities, and breakout discussions. Participants' contributions, especially responses to and insights about discussion questions and report-outs from break-out rooms, were recorded by a note-taker.

In total, 25 VGF grantee representatives (e.g., project directors, grantee staff, partners) participated in at least one of the evaluation capacity building sessions, ranging from 1 to 2 representatives from each of 12 grantee organizations that had initially agreed to participate in the evaluation as of spring 2022. On average, 12 participants attended each session, across participating grantee organizations. As described in Chapter 1, there was some attrition in grantee participation in the evaluation and this was observed in the evaluation capacity building as well; among four grantee organizations, two of which eventually dropped from the evaluation, those organization representatives were absent from most evaluation capacity building sessions, particularly in the latter months in which sessions were delivered. Additionally for one of the grantees who dropped from the evaluation, the low attrition was due to staff turnover at commission while the evaluation capacity building sessions were underway, and three new staff were added to the final few sessions.

The evaluation capacity building was designed to complement the bundled evaluation in ways to support immediate and long-term evidence building for the VGF model. First, in the short term, the evaluation capacity building helped participants stay engaged with the bundled evaluation. Every session included discussion prompts that encouraged participants to draw connections between evaluation concepts presented in the session and their own experiences participating in the bundle evaluation or other evidence building activities. Additionally, there were three sessions specifically designed to elicit participants' feedback on the bundle evaluation, such as their input on data collection activities in their context. By fostering participant engagement and feedback, evaluation capacity building strengthened the bundle evaluation and the evidence it produced. Second, the evaluation capacity building supported participants' knowledge and confidence in evaluation topics, and thus empower participating organizations to build on the bundled evaluation in the long-term by planning and implementing evaluations in their own specific contexts going forward.

BCT Partners, subcontractor to ICF, conducted a mixed-methods evaluation of the evaluation capacity building sessions to achieve two primary objectives: (1) to provide formative feedback to help enhance the curriculum and delivery of the sessions to better align with grantees' needs, and (2) to provide summative feedback regarding the degree to which the sessions led to changes in participants' knowledge of and attitudes toward evaluation. Data sources for the evaluation included the following:

- A session-specific post-survey administered at the conclusion of each presentation. Results from these surveys were used to calculate a composite satisfaction rating on a 1–5 scale for each session and assess participant knowledge of session content. The post-session surveys also included open-ended opportunities for participants to describe what they liked and what could be improved in the session’s content or delivery.
- Direct observations of all sessions.
- A pre- and post- survey that assessed participants’ knowledge of and attitudes toward evaluation topics at the beginning and conclusion of the entire curriculum.

## Satisfaction with Evaluation Capacity Building

Generally, sessions were well-attended and consistent throughout the evaluation capacity building and the closed-ended satisfaction scores were mixed but generally positive, as seen in exhibit 15. Every session, except the first presentation (Introduction and Evaluation Basics), received a satisfaction rating of at least 3.5 out of 5. Participants reported the highest satisfaction for the sessions on Data Collection Techniques (4.5 mean rating), Data Analysis (4.25 mean rating), and Using Evaluation for Program Improvement (4.0 mean rating). In open-ended responses, participants shared these sessions provided the most tangible content they could immediately apply in their context. Participants also noted they liked the opportunities to get their colleagues’ feedback on their challenges or approaches on these topics during discussion activities.

**EXHIBIT 14.—Mean session satisfaction rates**

Session	Mean Satisfaction (1–5)
Introduction and Evaluation Basics	3.29
Getting to Know One Another	3.69
Theories of Change	3.50
Logic Model	3.92
Evaluation Planning	3.95
Preparing to Collect Data	3.77
Connecting to the Bundled Evaluation	3.53
Data Collection Techniques	4.50
Data Analysis	4.25
Evaluation Reporting	3.70
Using Evaluation for Program Improvement and Continuous Learning	4.00
Interpreting Data from the Bundled Evaluation	3.70

Although quantitative satisfaction ratings were generally high, a few participants commented in open-ended responses that they felt the materials were not relevant to their duties, especially during the first Module. Specifically, these participants reported that evaluation capacity building materials were too basic and did not sufficiently address complex evaluation challenges in their field, especially regarding strategies for measuring volunteer engagement. In response, the time allotted for discussion was increased so that participants could raise questions about their own specific challenges and exchange insights with each other based on their shared experiences. After a review of the examples and hypothetical scenarios in Modules 2 and 3, more tailored examples were added. Satisfaction scores were generally higher for these later sessions,

and open-ended feedback indicated participants appreciated these changes, although a small number of participants still felt the sessions were too general.

## Insights into Volunteer Generation Fund Evaluation Challenges and Opportunities from Evaluation Capacity Building Discussions

Every evaluation capacity building session included opportunities for participants to discuss their evaluation challenges and opportunities. Key insights from these discussions included:

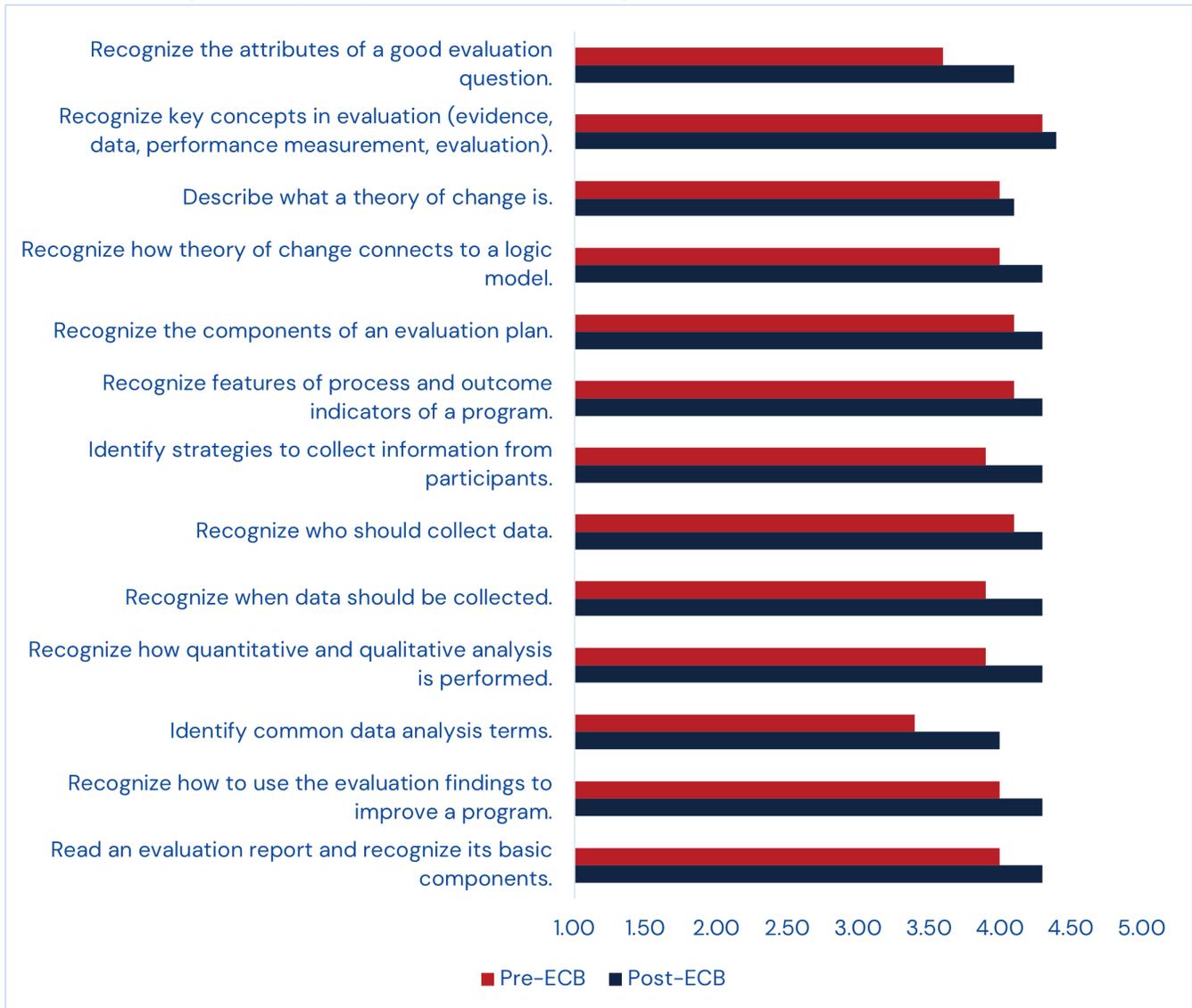
- VGF grantees struggled to articulate a unified theory of change around their models, especially when identifying the underlying connection between their various activities and the intended outcomes. Participants appreciated opportunities to share and constructively critique each other's theory of change.
- VGF grantees tended to share a sense of exceptionalism, citing uniqueness of their activities as barriers to apply evaluation practices or learn from others.
- VGF grantees appreciated opportunities to exchange ideas about potential research questions in the volunteer engagement space, especially by conceptualizing terms like efficiency or effectiveness in ways they can measure.
- VGF grantees commented that their program models often pose data collection challenges, especially because of the indirect nature of many intended outcomes, which are often achieved through intermediaries.
- VGF grantees appreciated guidance on how to collect and analyze qualitative data with rigor. In particular, participants commented that they have struggled to convey their impact solely through numbers in performance measures, and liked hearing about other strategies to make better use of narrative data.
- VGF grantees expressed frustration with the limited feedback they receive from AmeriCorps on their annual reports.

## Outcomes

In addition to the session-specific satisfaction surveys, BCT Partners administered a pre-assessment before the first evaluation capacity building session and a post-assessment following the last session. The evaluators received seven matched pairs.

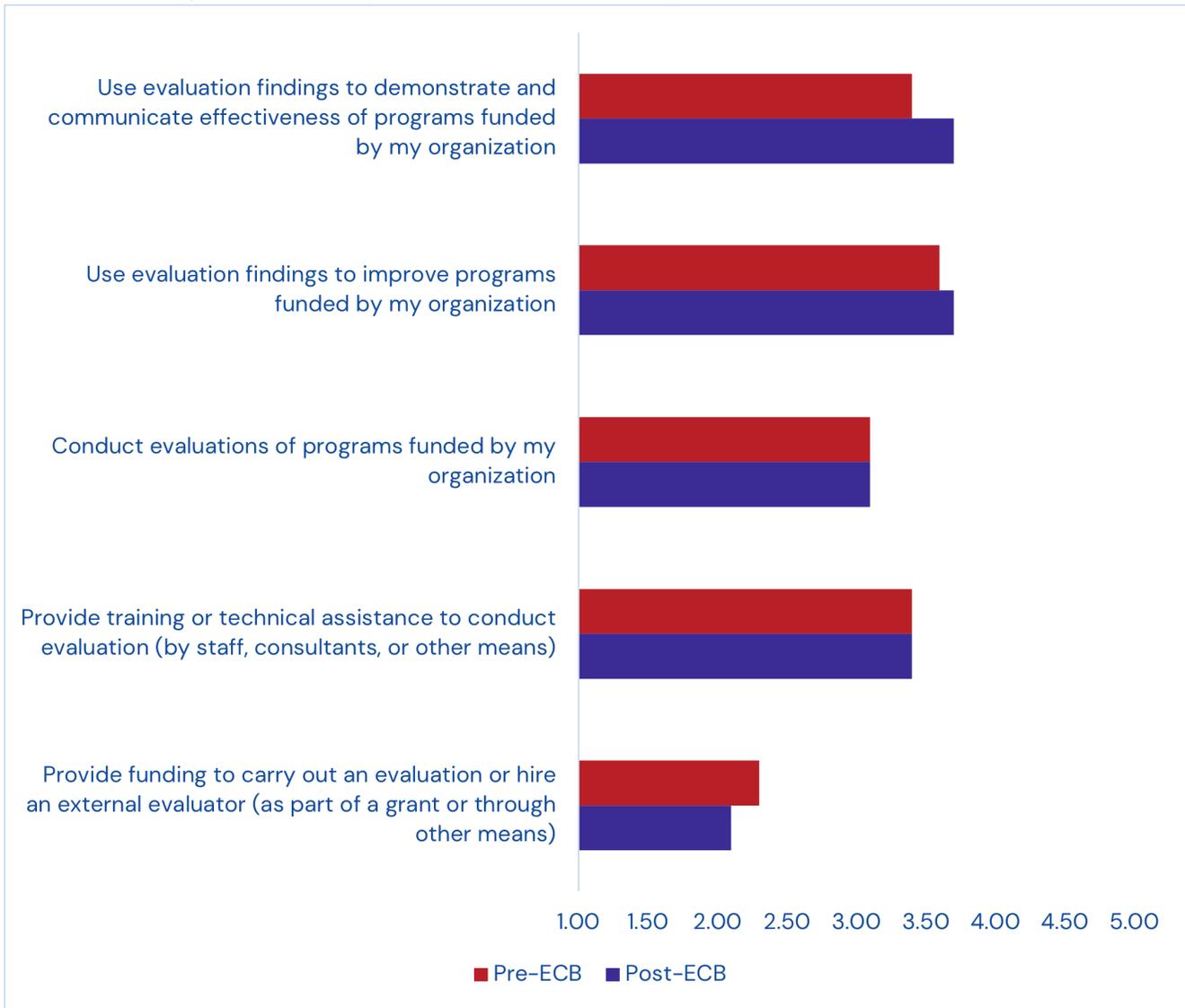
**Perceived knowledge of evaluation topics.** VGF grantees' perceived knowledge of evaluation topics increased across all 13 topics measured on the pre-post survey, displayed in exhibit 16. The topics on which participants' perceived knowledge increased the most were recognizing how quantitative and qualitative analysis is performed; identifying common data analysis terms; and recognizing who in their organization should collect data.

**EXHIBIT 15.—VGF grantees’ perception of their knowledge of evaluation**



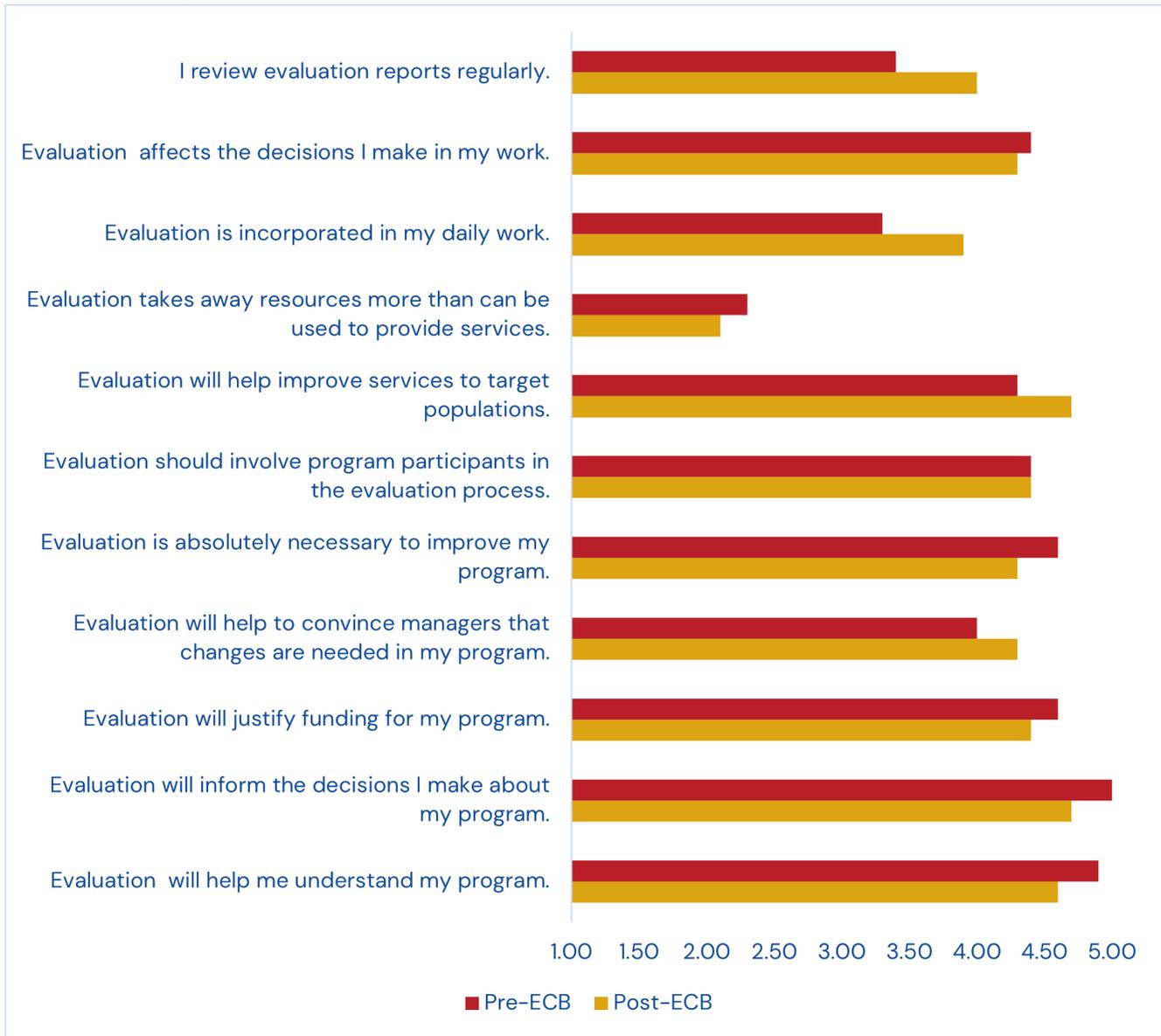
**Use of evaluation behavior and evaluation-related skills.** VGF grantees’ self-reported use of evaluation behavior increased along two of the five topics included on the pre-post survey, as presented in exhibit 17. Grantees had the greatest increase in their use evaluation findings to improve programs funded by my organization. There was no change in VGF grantees’ perceived skills on two topics (conduct evaluations of programs funded by my organization and provide training or technical assistance to conduct evaluation) from pre- to post, and the only skill or behavior that showed a decrease from pre- to post was on their capacity to provide funding to carry out an evaluation or hire an external evaluator.

**EXHIBIT 16.—VGF grantees’ perception of their evaluation-specific skills**



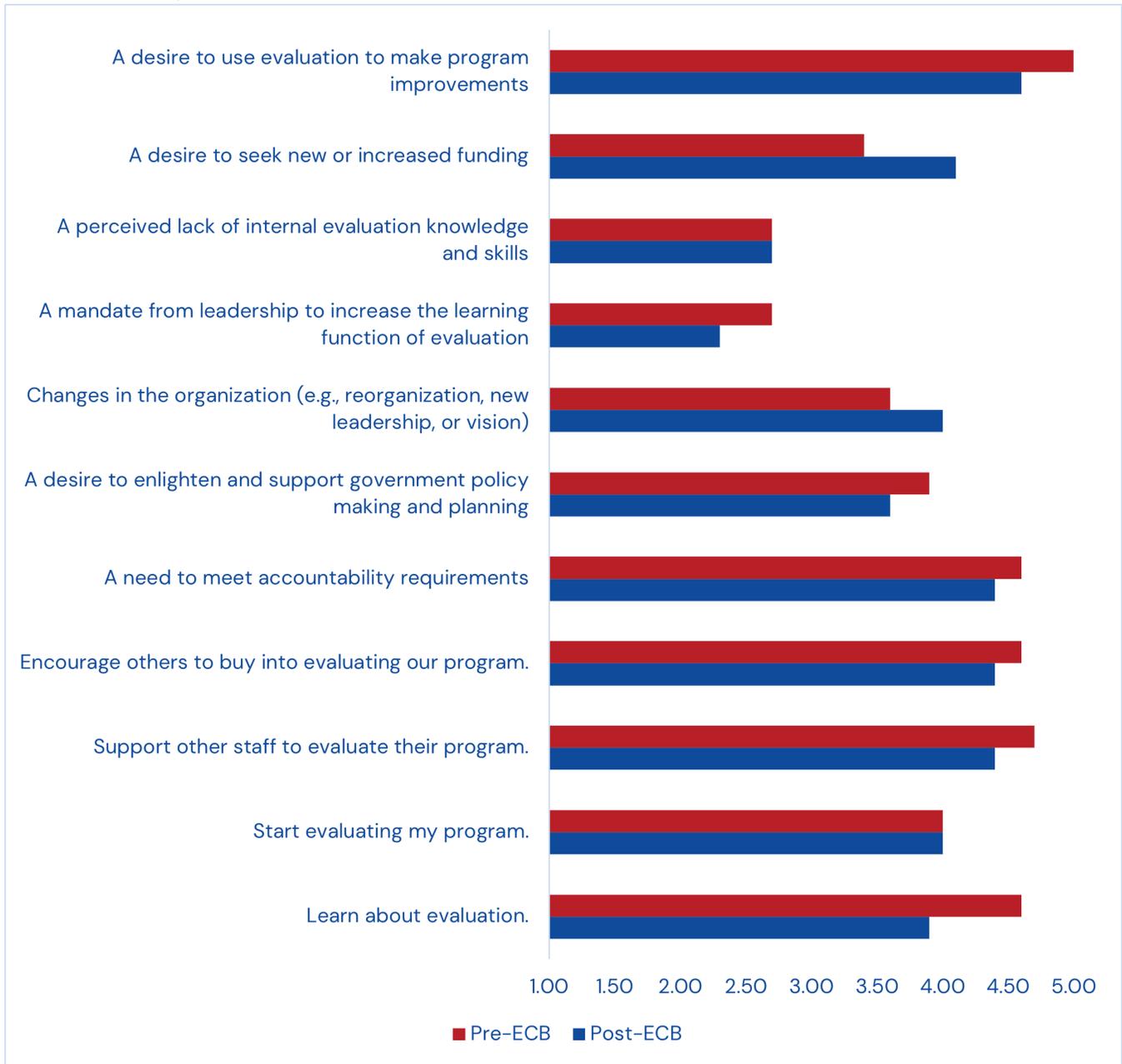
**Attitudes toward evaluation.** Pre-evaluation capacity building, VGF grantees were most likely to agree that evaluation would help them understand their program and inform the decisions they made about their program, as seen in exhibit 18. Post-evaluation capacity building, VGF grantees’ attitudes towards evaluation fluctuated, with an increase in agreement on some statements (I review evaluation reports regularly, Evaluation is incorporated in my daily work, evaluation will help improve services to target populations, Evaluation will help convince managers that changes are need in my program), and a decrease in agreement on others (Evaluation affects the decisions I make at work, Evaluation is absolutely necessary to improve my program, Evaluation will justify funding for my program, Evaluation will help inform decisions I make about my program, Evaluation will help me understand my program).

**EXHIBIT 17.—VGF grantees’ attitudes toward evaluation**



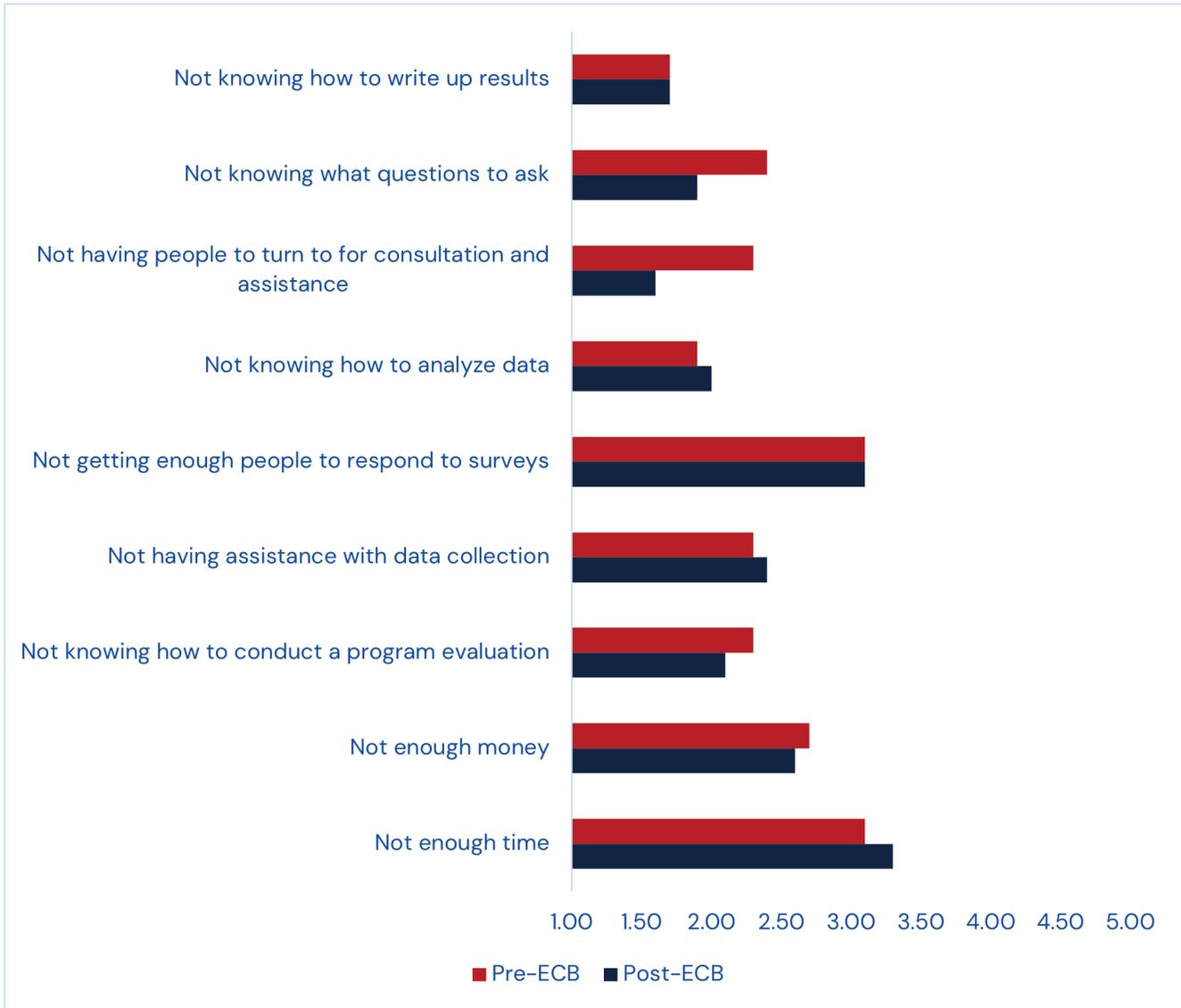
**Motivation to conduct evaluation.** As seen in exhibit 18, pre-evaluation capacity building, VGF grantees were most motivated by a desire to use evaluation to make program improvements. They were also motivated to learn about evaluation, to encourage others to buy into evaluating their program, to support other staff to evaluate their program, and to meet accountability requirements. After the series, grantees’ motivation to conduct evaluation or engage with evaluation generally seemed to decrease across all but two of the statements related to their motivation to conduct evaluation: a desire to seek new or increased fundings and changes in the organization.

**EXHIBIT 18.—VGF grantees’ motivation to conduct evaluation**



**Barriers to evaluation.** VGF evaluation capacity building participants were asked to rate nine potential barriers to engaging in evaluation. Changes from pre- to post-evaluation capacity building showed a decrease on four barriers, no change on two barriers, and an increase on three barriers. VGF grantees perceived not having enough time and money as well as not having enough people to respond to surveys to be their greatest barriers to evaluation. Their perception of having enough money as a barrier decreased over the course of the series; however, the perception of not having enough time increased. Post-evaluation capacity building, VGF grantees’ perception of not having enough assistance with data collection also increased. These findings suggest the series largely reduced barriers to evaluation for VGF grantees, with decreases in perception of barriers on most topics. The barrier that seemed to reduce in importance the most for VGF grantees was knowing what questions to ask, as seen in exhibit 19.

**EXHIBIT 19.—VGF grantees’ barriers that prevent engaging in evaluation**



## Discussion and Conclusion

### Discussion

The United States is facing a key point of inflection following the COVID-19 pandemic, as communities are beginning to re-emerge and engage, during which volunteers will play a vital role in supporting the transition. AmeriCorps, the federal agency for national service and volunteerism, serves as the nation's largest grantmaker, serving over 5 million Americans in service through various program, one of which being the VGF program. Through grants to state service commissions and nonprofit organizations the program seeks to invest in volunteer management practices that increase both volunteer recruitment and retention. In January 2020, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) declared the COVID-19 pandemic to be a federal public health emergency. While the VGF program has been authorized since 2009, FY2020 grantees received funding amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and sought to navigate the challenges and transitions emerging in volunteer management and engagement. Even so, participating grantees were agile and adaptive to emerging needs of program beneficiaries and their broader community to successfully continue to support volunteer engagement and management.

Generally, grantees utilized different program models, offered initiatives based on state-specific needs, and focused on various strategies. However, regardless of the program configuration and focus, grantees provided strategies that addressed volunteer practices on two distinct levels: the organization-level, through volunteer engagement strategies, and the manager or individual-level, through volunteer management strategies. Utilizing a combined approach emphasizing the importance of skilled volunteer managers to lead organization's volunteer programs, in conjunction with organizations and leaders who are engaged in and value the use of volunteers, appeared to be critical to supporting volunteer recruitment and retention and achieving an organization's mission-driven outcomes. Considering data related to training models, strategies used/learned, and outcomes cited by grantees and beneficiaries, all nine grantees participating in the evaluation were addressing practices at both levels to account for volunteer engagement and volunteer management.

This report presented the implementation (models, context, strategies, challenges, and needs) and outcomes of the AmeriCorps-funded VGF grant program for nine FY2020 grantees, as well as findings from the evaluation capacity building delivered to participants in the VGF evaluation. This chapter summarizes these findings and presents recommendations for VGF grantees and AmeriCorps.

**Most VGF grantees delivered training and capacity building services themselves and partnered with other organizations to do so.** Of the nine participating grantees, eight reported independently providing training and/or capacity building services themselves. This ranged from directly providing training and technical assistance to providing subgrants to local organizations. Seven grantees noted they collaborated with external partners to implement training and capacity building services to varying extents. ServeMN entrusts nearly all VGF grant implementation to MAVA whereas Volunteer NH partners with an external company to help train their subgrantee cohorts, while still remaining heavily involved in the training. Of these two different approaches, six state service commissions utilized a combination of the two approaches, directly providing services and collaborating with partners to provide services.

**Various capacity building services provided by VGF grantees included training, subgrants, youth initiatives, conferences, and disaster recovery.** All participating grantees incorporated some component of training into their VGF grant programming. The next most frequently reported practice included the use of subgrants and mini-grants, of which seven grantees reported using. Four of the grantees focused on

supporting youth-serving organizations, improving youth service-learning, or funding student research. Another prominent focus area among grantees was disaster recovery, as three grantees used funding to support disaster recovery through capacity building of community, regional, and state organizations to utilize volunteers during disasters. Just under half of the participating grantees supported state-wide conferences as part of VGF programming. While all VGF grantees noted the COVID-19 pandemic impacted their conferences resulting in cancellations, delays, or shifts in format, some noted the virtual format provided increased accessibility of training. Lastly, six of the grantees developed or supported use of state volunteer portals/platforms and one grantee developed an online tool for increasing civic engagement in the state.

**Most of the participating VGF grantees offered the Service Enterprise volunteer engagement training program to program beneficiaries who shared high praise regarding the comprehensive, systematic, and organization-wide change it was able to achieve.** At least at some point during the VGF grant, six VGF grantees offered Service Enterprise, a national curriculum on volunteer engagement and organization change management. Some of the VGF grantees were designated as Service Enterprise Hubs, and thus conducted the program themselves; others directly funded organizations who were hubs or on their way to become hubs. Some Service Enterprise participants shared in focus groups that due to the training they received, they were able to extend their reach into targeted communities, as Service Enterprise allowed them to focus on recruiting volunteers with specific skillsets, which aligned with findings from the previous Points of Light 2021 evaluation findings. Participants also described the ability to network and collaborate with their Service Enterprise cohort as helpful to continue to learn new strategies, aligning with the Points of Light 2021 evaluation findings that Service Enterprise helped establish partnerships to improve and increase service.

**Developing a structured sequence of trainings—functioning as a pipeline in which individuals or organizations can move from a more basic training to a more advanced training—was a promising practice for building capacity.** A key promising practice noted by grantees and program beneficiaries was the structured sequence approach to training used by three grantees (Massachusetts Service Alliance, MAVA, and UServeUtah). This established a pipeline for organizations to take on more advanced training as they built capacity to prepare for greater civic engagement. MAVA utilized tiered training, which began with training focused on individual volunteer managers and paved the way to the Service Enterprise organization-level training. UServeUtah had a similar model, however used their own state-specific training rather than Service Enterprise (though it had some similarities to Service Enterprise). Massachusetts Service Alliance noted that their pipeline began with their subgrantees, progressed to Service Enterprise, and led to outcomes associated with involvement in a larger state program (e.g., Commonwealth Corps) or AmeriCorps program (e.g., AmeriCorps grantee or VISTA sponsor). Massachusetts Service Alliance staff described this pipeline to be one of the greatest successes they have seen from the VGF grant.

**All participating grantees incorporated a cohort model in their trainings or facilitated other peer learning opportunities—which was also a promising practice for building capacity among program beneficiaries.** In some capacity, all grantees offered volunteer managers, training participants, and/or subgrantees peer learning opportunities, which were widely cited as valuable by participants. Six grantees used Service Enterprise which employed a cohort model (Volunteer Florida, Volunteer Iowa, Massachusetts Service Alliance, ServeMN, and VolunteerNC). Service Enterprise training participants in Massachusetts appreciated the opportunities to engage in discussion and collaboration with other organizations through the program. Even among participants who noted they had been a professional volunteer manager for several years, the ability to network and collaborate with their Service Enterprise cohort was seen as helpful. MAVA worked with volunteers on its Professional Development Committee to create individual topic-based trainings that allowed for peer learning. Volunteer Iowa also included a set of peer learning cohorts, and

Volunteer NH's cohort program was reported to be invaluable in helping organizations learn new strategies and connect with other organizations. A Volunteer NH staff member shared,

*[Some small nonprofits] have no experience or people to ask questions [of] within their organization ... so [the cohort members have] gotten support from one another. Getting feedback, learning about each other's program models. I think they're very thirsty for more education about how a small nonprofit runs.*

In addition, Volunteer Florida program beneficiaries described being able to network with other organizations during training and capacity building services and appreciated the ability to network with other organizations outside of their own team.

**The majority of grantees had a volunteer platform or network; however, they were not universally used by volunteer organizations or volunteers.** Six VGF grantees described use of a volunteer platform or network that was in some capacity supported by VGF funding. Platforms or networks provided access for volunteer organizations to post available volunteer positions and potential volunteers to search for volunteer opportunities in their local community or broader state. Overall, of the six grantees with beneficiary survey questions asking about respondents' use of volunteer platforms, on average, 58 percent of respondents reported using platforms to identify volunteers, and 54 percent reported using platforms to post volunteer opportunities. (The average state use rates are based on the average of each grantee's average rate and not the average across all responses, due to the high variability in sample sizes for each VGF grantee). Four grantees reported actively working to build awareness of their programs—through advertising and marketing or training.

**Data collected and tracked by VGF grantees was relatively inconsistent with varying ways of measuring of constructs, except for what was required in the annual VGF Progress Report.** As required by the VGF grant, grantees collected two national performance measures on number of organizations receiving capacity building services and the number of organizations that increased their effectiveness, efficiency and/or program scale. All grantees were also required to report the number of volunteers recruited or managed and the number of those served by those volunteers. When given the opportunity to weigh in on whether they had any requested changes to the progress report metrics, two grantees emphasized the need for AmeriCorps to collect qualitative data from grantees in the progress report, given the diversity of program activities and outcomes across and within grant programs. Beyond this suggestion, one VGF grantee suggested metrics prompting grantees to break out existing measures into subgroups based on demographic categories (e.g., number of youth, individuals over the age of 65, or individuals living in rural areas who were impacted). Grantees who had their own subgrant programs collected data from their subgrantees as well regarding their outcomes, challenges, and successes and informed VGF grantee reporting—in annual, bi-annual, or quarterly reports. Beyond progress reporting, VGF grantees frequently noted the collection of pre- and post-tests to assess changes in understanding among training participants. Two VGF grantees conducted external evaluations of their grant and one grantee commissioned a statewide survey on volunteerism to inform programming. Among program beneficiaries, there was a huge spectrum in terms of data infrastructure, with staff from some larger organizations reporting use of a robust volunteer management data system, and staff from a smaller organization noting that they were the only person managing a volunteer program and tracking data, without access to the resources to create a more complex data system. There were also inconsistencies in how to measure key volunteering outcomes, such as retention. For example, one participating organization noted "How do you measure retention ... . I feel like

everyone does it a little differently, am I retaining them if they're active once every 30 days ... is there a certain number of hours per year?"

**Formal volunteering rates declined during the COVID-19 pandemic as volunteer organizations sought new ways to engage volunteers.** According to the AmeriCorps Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement, across all participating grantees, formal volunteering rates declined from 2019 to 2021, as with the national average (decline ranged from 3–9 percentage points; national average fell within that range at a 7–percentage point decline). The majority of grantees (seven of the nine) also had declines in informal volunteering from 2019 to 2021; however, the degree of decline was slightly smaller than formal volunteering ranging from a 1–7 percentage point decline. For two grantees, the informal volunteering rate increased or remained consistent from 2019 to 2021; on par with national average which remained consistent. Since the participating VGF grantees began their programs in 2020, the same year as the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, there were significant disruptions to grant programming and services. Most frequently, grantees shifted activities to virtual platforms and/or adjusted training content to help support the emerging challenges organizations faced in the pandemic. Multiple grantees found the virtual format of programming to have some benefits as recorded virtual trainings had higher viewership than previous in-person trainings. Some grantees also cited COVID-19 as being a catalyst to initiate or change programs. Although many participants noted the benefits of the transition to virtual training, one grantee noted it decreased cross-organization interactions as fewer organizations participated. Even so, participants valued the offerings, suggesting the smaller groups provided more tailored supports. Among program beneficiaries, organizations of all types reported steep declines in volunteering rates, struggling to recruit and retain them. By the end of the evaluation in 2023, however, a few participating grantees and organizations noted their rates had returned to pre-pandemic levels. Beyond the disruption that the pandemic caused to the FY2020 VGF grantees and their beneficiaries, there was evidence that the VGF grant helped support the state and local response to the pandemic. Volunteer Florida played a role in directly addressing the crisis by coordinating volunteers to provide support and gathering donations. Volunteer Iowa and NJ Commission described volunteer efforts to address food insecurity through the pandemic. NJ Commission specifically described how one organization used VGF funds to establish a food delivery system for senior citizens who were at high risk during the pandemic.

**Most VGF grantees incorporated DEI into volunteer management and engagement; however, those that were most actively engaged in DEI were not just doing one-off DEI trainings but implementing DEI principles in their own work as an organization.** In addition to providing specific DEI training, two grantees, MAVVA and Massachusetts Service Alliance, noted several approaches they were utilizing to integrate DEI principles into their own work as an organization. For MAVVA, DEI was prioritized in staffing considerations, as MAVVA had created a dedicated DEI staff member, who at time of the fall 2022 site visits, reported working on an initiative to recruit BIPOC-led organizations into MAVVA's capacity building activities. For Massachusetts Service Alliance, they sought to ensure considerations of how subgrant funding decisions were made through the utilization of a review panel for awarding subgrants. Massachusetts Service Alliance reported they were seeking to diversify the panel to ensure it was representative. Along with the diversity of the panel itself, Massachusetts Service Alliance emphasized they were also striving to ensure funding of subgrantees was distributed equitably. Additionally, VGF grantees and program beneficiaries noted the desire for Service Enterprise to better incorporate DEI principals into the curriculum. Grantee staffs reported this information had been communicated to ALIVE, the Service Enterprise program implementer, which was working to address the feedback. Several grantees also noted the challenges pertaining to DEI, as it was heavily politicized at the state level, appearing to be a barrier for some of the grantees. For three VGF

grantees, Massachusetts Service Alliance, UServeUtah, and Volunteer Iowa, volunteer organizations received training on inclusivity in volunteerism, ranging from intentional and inclusive volunteer recruitment to understanding the term volunteer is itself conflictive.

**Participating program beneficiaries reported strategies they used and/or learned through their participation, centered on improving volunteer engagement, recruitment, and retention.** Program beneficiaries of the majority of grantees reported at least one strategy for all three areas of focus. Most frequently, all nine VGF grantees reported strategies and management practices focused on volunteer retention. Many of the prominent retention strategies described aligned with the findings from the prior research on volunteer engagement and management; such as the importance of volunteer recognition and appreciation, as volunteers at organizations who provided feedback and appreciation were more likely to report intending to persist (Cho et al., 2020; Huynh et al., 2012); aligning volunteers based on their interests, as AmeriCorps members who perceived their activities aligned with long-term career interests were more likely to complete their service term (McBride & Lee, 2012); and easy and clear volunteer onboarding and orientation, as providing volunteer orientation and training not only prepared volunteers for their role but influenced volunteers' sense of belonging in organizations (Tang et al., 2010; Huynh et al., 2012; Newton et al., 2014). Participating VGF grantees built on these findings suggesting that the creation of easy entryway activities supported streamlined onboarding of volunteers who may be undecided on volunteering or are too busy to commit. Second, seven of the grantees reported strategies related to volunteer recruitment. The most commonly reported recruitment strategies were the recruitment of specific volunteers and recruiting & marketing to prospective volunteers; both of which echoed previous research that suggested explicitly signifying a desire to recruit from specific populations (Boezeman & Ellemers, 2008) and matching recruitment messages to potential volunteers' motives (Einolf, 2018) improved recruitment of volunteers. Lastly, six of the grantees reported strategies related to volunteer engagement, most frequently noting strategies on leveraging volunteers and gaining staff buy-in.

**VGF grantees and program beneficiaries described key outcomes achieved focused on increased recognition and improved services for commissions and improved engagement, recruitment, retention, and capacity among beneficiaries.** VGF grantee outcomes were centered around increased reach and recognition and improved services for beneficiaries. Among reported outcomes related to increased reach and recognition, four grantees shared they had successfully transitioned to online or virtual services and/or increased their access to new organizations. Among reported outcomes related to improved services for beneficiaries, two VGF grantees shared they provided long-term support to organizations served, paid attention to member needs, and created new volunteer management staff positions. Alternatively, similar to volunteer engagement and management strategies, beneficiary outcomes aligned with key focus areas of improved engagement, recruitment, and retention. Another prominent theme emerged with beneficiaries around outcomes that increased organizational and/or individual staff capacity. Program beneficiaries shared a variety of outcomes, however for the majority of grantees, beneficiaries noted at least one outcome for all four focus areas. Program beneficiaries of all nine grantees noted volunteer engagement outcomes from generally better leveraging of volunteers to the promotion of organizational change, through Service Enterprise. Eight grantees noted increased and/or improved volunteer recruitment. Seven grantees reported increased capacity occurring on various scales; individual outcomes included increased confidence and networking among volunteer managers; organizational outcomes included increased recognition in the community or state. Obtaining certifications was noted to be achieved on both scales, depending on the scope of the program as either a national certification like Service Enterprise or a state-specific certification developed by the grantee. Six grantees reported noted improved volunteer retention. Across commissions

and program beneficiaries alike, a shared outcome noted was the importance of being recognized as a thought and/or planning leader in the field of volunteer management/engagement.

**Looking towards the future, VGF grantees shared needs centered on the request for more resources and support in managing and sustaining their VGF grant, while beneficiaries' needs centered on requests for more supports on measuring outcomes, recruiting diverse volunteers, and increasing volunteer engagement and impact.** A few grantees expressed the need for sample resources and/or a key point of contact for the VGF grant. Alternatively, program beneficiaries of two states shared challenges tracking and managing volunteer data, sharing the need for additional support on how to manage and track volunteer data and how to streamline the data collected. Some participating organizations who participated in Service Enterprise also expressed the need for more opportunities to discuss how to diversify their organization's volunteer base as there was not enough dedicated time for related discussions. Finally, staff from one grantee emphasized they really needed sustainable funding to allow them to continue offering programs that had already been implemented. Staff noted that impactful initiatives took time to build, and many of the programs were beginning to gain traction three years after they were initially awarded. According to the grantee, it seemed as though the VGF grant was shifting away from awarding state service commissions towards awarding nonprofits. This particular commission was not awarded a new three-year VGF grant and noted that most of their activities will therefore sunset.

**For the evaluation capacity building sessions, perceived knowledge of evaluation topics increased across all topics as measured on the pre-post surveys.** The topics in which participants' perceived knowledge increased the most were recognizing how quantitative and qualitative analysis was performed; identifying common data analysis terms; and recognizing who in their organization should collect data. Even so, participants shared mixed feedback on the capacity building sessions. The majority of sessions received a satisfaction rating of at least 3.5 out of 5, with the highest reported satisfaction for the sessions on Data Collection Techniques, Data Analysis, and Using Evaluation for Program Improvement, as they provided the most tangible content that could immediately be applied and provided opportunities to get colleagues' feedback on challenges or approaches. In early evaluation capacity building sessions, some participants shared they felt the materials were not relevant to their duties, were too basic, and did not sufficiently address complex evaluation challenges in their field. For subsequent sessions, additional time was allotted for discussion and more tailored examples included, resulting in generally higher satisfaction scores. Nevertheless, feedback on the sessions being too general persisted with a few participants.

## Recommendations

Throughout the study, the following recommendations for AmeriCorps were identified to consider in future grant implementation and implementation of similar programming outside of VGF:

- **Continue to offer flexibility in use of VGF grant funds.** VGF grantee staff from across participating grant programs expressed gratitude regarding the flexibility of the VGF funds and grant. A Volunteer Florida representative called out the flexibility of the VGF grant as a major highlight, as states could use the funds for a state-specific issue. Similarly, Volunteer NH staff celebrated the flexibility of VGF funds allowing them to easily meet organizations where they were; findings such as these suggest that flexible funding opportunities continue to be provided to support volunteer engagement, recruitment, and retention.
- **Collaborate with commissions to identify how volunteer engagement and management practices can be sustained with grant changes.** With AmeriCorps's recent shift to expand VGF grant awards to nonprofit organizations (versus awards to just state service commissions as had been done traditionally), some commissions have expressed concerns for their future and ability to sustain services. In the most

recent VGF funding cycle (FY2023), only three of the nine state service commissions participating in the evaluation were awarded, as the funding shifted from state service commissions to nonprofits.<sup>20</sup> Participating grantees shared that building impactful initiatives took time to build and as they were in their third year of implementation some of these initiatives were just gaining traction. Grantees expressed discouragement that several of their initiatives or programs would have to sunset, signifying they would be canceled without sustained funding. To address this issue and support statewide efforts, AmeriCorps may wish to engage with FY2020 grantees that were not funded again in FY2023 to discuss strategies for sustainability. This may help to support more sustained and long-term benefits to statewide volunteer engagement and management practices and maintain rapport with the state service commissions that are critical partners to AmeriCorps.

- Consider the future directions for supporting volunteer engagement and volunteer management programming.** The pandemic highlighted a shift in volunteering and for many state service commissions and program beneficiaries the traditional model of volunteer engagement and management was no longer feasible. Engaging and managing volunteers during this transition was a challenge. That said, as demonstrated in Hager and Brudney (2021) study, change was already afoot prior to the pandemic in three major ways: (1) volunteers are more interested in episodic, short-term assignments; (2) electronic tools and social media are rearranging how organizations interact with volunteers; and (3) volunteers will be on the front lines for reestablishing trust and human interaction in a post-pandemic civil society and nonprofits will need to engage volunteers in innovative ways to meet this challenge (p. 18). As AmeriCorps seeks to use VGF to support the next chapter in volunteer management and engagement, state service commissions—state partners of AmeriCorps responsible for engaging citizens in service—should be key contributors to the discussion about the future of VGF.
- Consider more qualitative measures in VGF progress reports and use of optional demographic subgroups for key performance metrics.** VGF grantees were given the opportunity to weigh in on whether they had any requested changes to these progress report metrics. Of the three grantees that shared perspectives on this topic, two emphasized the need for AmeriCorps to collect qualitative data from grantees in the progress report—adding a narrative box with a prompt about sharing accomplishments of the grant. One grantee expressed the opinion that while the current measures do not fully capture the impact of VGF, “The activities are too varied, even within just our VGF grant, for one or two measures to capture what is happening.” Beyond this suggestion, one VGF grantee suggested metrics prompting grantees to break out existing measures into subgroups based on demographic categories. For example, grantees could be prompted to report on how many youth, individuals over the age of 65, or individuals living in rural areas were impacted. The use of optional demographic reporting in performance measures, similar to other AmeriCorps grant program’s progress report, but this may be challenging or costly for some commissions to implement. One grantee also noted they believed some of the questions included in the program beneficiary survey would be useful for AmeriCorps to determine the impact of grant efficacy instead of the options grantees can self-report on the current progress report.<sup>21</sup> The evaluation team supports this recommendation as the team faced challenges in standardizing measurement of VGF outcomes as part of this evaluation. Because of this challenge, the evaluation design pivoted to a case study approach and prioritized allowing VGF grantees to customize some outcome

<sup>20</sup> For more information on the FY2023 VGF awards, please visit [2023 Volunteer Generation Fund Grants | AmeriCorps](#).

<sup>21</sup> For example, questions such as “To what extent has training, resources, or assistance from [grantee] affected you and/or your organization’s ability to recruit the types of volunteers that align with your/your organization’s needs (e.g., certain skills-based volunteers, diverse volunteers)” were noted by the grantee as useful measures efficacy.

measures accordingly. That said, as demonstrated by the cross-case analysis presented in this report, while there are several variations and nuances in VGF grantee program models and approaches, there are still several similarities in programming. Some additional metrics that could theoretically help AmeriCorps fully understand the impact of the grant, in addition to more open-ended questions, is a more detailed breakdown of output and outcome measures by initiatives or strategies. Breaking out annual/bi-annual outcomes by program strategies is an alternate approach used in progress reports for some other federal grant programs. Adoption of this approach would require the VGF grant to be more prescriptive and less flexible, however. Given that many VGF grantees praised the flexibility of the grant as an important factor that supported successful outcomes, this approach may be counterproductive. Finally, while volunteer retention is a key outcome of interest for volunteer organizations, caution should be urged against standardizing this metric in the progress reports. Retention may have different meanings and different desired outcomes in different contexts. For example, long-term retention of volunteers may be desired in an organization that provides consistent services (e.g., tutoring at an elementary school), while short-term retention may be more appropriate for a short-term disaster recovery initiative. Given that an emerging trend in volunteerism is that volunteers have become more interested in episodic, short-term assignments (Hagar & Brudney, 2021), the relevance of retention as outcome of interest may diminish in years ahead.

- **Consider using a participatory approach for future studies involving state service commissions.** VGF grantees, who were largely state service commissions, had a lot of feedback regarding the appropriateness and relevancy of various methodological approaches used in this evaluation as well as the content included in the evaluation capacity building sessions. AmeriCorps may wish to consider engaging commission staff earlier in the process of project planning—and throughout the life of the project—to ensure their perspectives are reflected. Although the evaluation team had convened a Technical Working Group which included a representative of America’s Service Commissions to weigh in on the evaluation design and instruments, staff from VGF grantees charged with participating in or facilitating many of the data collection activities in the evaluation had more tailored opinions regarding how the design and/or instruments were not in synch with their program model. State service commission staff who ultimately provided feedback on the evaluation and/or the evaluation capacity building sessions were passionate, knowledgeable, and eager to build evidence on volunteer management and engagement. Their insights proved to be critical to helping the evaluation to be more nuanced and authentic. Incorporating their perspectives from the start through a participatory process will help to ensure future evaluations are successful.

Additionally, the following recommendations for VGF grantees were identified to consider in future grant implementation and implementation of volunteer training and capacity building services and initiatives:

- **Incorporate opportunities for volunteer organizations to network and collaborate with other organizations.** Cohort-based peer learning training and capacity building opportunities were valued among training participants. These opportunities allowed VGF grantees to not only educate and support smaller nonprofits on volunteer engagement and management practices, but also to create communities of practice to support increased competency across the state.
- **Diversify offerings to incorporate a multi-faceted approach to provide training and capacity building at the organizational level and the individual level.** Volunteer engagement focuses on organizational level change, while volunteer management centers on the practices of volunteer managers or coordinators. VGF grantees that diversified their training and capacity building to account for both

management and engagement topics appeared to not only better serve participants, but they also were able to continue to offer ongoing support as organizations grew in their own capacity (e.g., from improved volunteer management practices learned in a volunteer management basic-level training to building out organizational practices that better leverage volunteers through Service Enterprise). Volunteer managers and organizations all have different levels of experience and comfort with volunteer engagement and management, suggesting the need for a variety of opportunities be provided.

- **Consider identifying new metrics to track use of volunteer platforms, in not only site traction but meaningful use and matching between volunteers and organizations.** While several VGF grantees invested substantial funds to grow and increase use of their volunteer platform/network, there was still minimal data to support how funding contributed to changes in use of volunteer platforms or success in matching potential volunteers to organizations in need of volunteers. During periods of high need, such as the COVID-19 pandemic or natural disasters, the quick mobilization of volunteers is crucial. Collecting relevant data on the platforms will provide VGF grantees with actionable data to inform planning for how to continue to drive growth in platform use.
- **Incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) into training and capacity building practices.** A few of the participating volunteer organizations shared receiving training on inclusivity in volunteerism which focused on not only diversifying volunteer organization’s volunteer base, but also understanding the language used in volunteer recruitment and how increase the inclusivity of the language used. Going beyond offering trainings focused on DEI, VGF grantees should consider how they can incorporate DEI practices and principles into their own work, such as how subgrants are awarded.

## Limitations

This study provides important information for understanding VGF AmeriCorps grantees and the services they provided to program beneficiaries. However, several limitations were identified that readers should be aware of when interpreting the findings.

**Due to staff turnover and availability, there was high attrition among participating VGF grantees.** The initial study design invited all 14 of the active FY2020 VGF grants, with ultimately 9 grantees agreeing to participate in the evaluation due to challenges with staff turnover and availability.

**The survey sample for the beneficiary survey was low.** Due to the variations in VGF program service models, the sample size of survey administered varied substantially. Participating grantees identified the program beneficiaries among whom they would like to administer the beneficiary survey. Some grantees administered the survey to only their subgrantees—whom may be very familiar with volunteer management topics—while others sent it all individuals who had ever participated in any VGF-funded or partially-funded activity. Given this variation, comparative survey findings across states should be considered with caution.

**While some grantees customized their surveys, not all chose to do so.** Grantees were given the opportunity to customize their program beneficiary survey according to their program model. However, not all grantees opted for customizations. Therefore comparison of some survey findings across participating grantees is not feasible.

**Data collection was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic.** The data collection included in the evaluation was collected from January 2022 to July 2023. Due to the pandemic, all of the participating sites opted for the site visit to be conducted virtually. For some grantees it was difficult to connect with program implementers, beneficiaries, and/or volunteers virtually.

**Unable to ascertain distinguishable differences in outcomes between grantees who funded positions to support VGF programming and those who did not.** VGF grantees were not explicitly asked if funds were used to support staffing full- or part-time positions that supported VGF programming and activities. Use of funding for positions was determined based on VGF grant applications and any relevant information shared incidentally during site visits. Without intentional data collection on funded staff positions, the evaluation was not able to answer the question of how VGF funded positions influenced grantee outcomes.

**The study is not causal.** This study describes the implementation of the VGF grant by AmeriCorps grantees and the self-reported outcomes of program participants. It does not examine the impact of the VGF grant, meaning that it does not answer the question of whether participant outcomes were the result of the training and capacity building from the VGF grant.

## References

- Alfes, K., Shantz, A., & Bailey, C. (2016). Enhancing volunteer engagement to achieve desirable outcomes: What can non-profit employers do? *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 27(2), 595–617.
- ALIVE. (2022, December). Introduction to Service Enterprise participant materials. [https://www.volunteeralive.org/docs/Info\\_Session\\_Participant\\_Materials\\_Virtual\\_ALVE.pdf](https://www.volunteeralive.org/docs/Info_Session_Participant_Materials_Virtual_ALVE.pdf)
- ALIVE. (2023a). How to become a SE hub & trainer. <https://www.volunteeralive.org/setrainer.php>
- ALIVE. (2023b). Service Enterprise program history. [https://www.volunteeralive.org/service\\_enterprise\\_program\\_his.php](https://www.volunteeralive.org/service_enterprise_program_his.php)
- ALIVE. (2023). Service Enterprise program overview. <https://www.volunteeralive.org/serviceenterprise.php>
- Allen, J. A., & Mueller, S. L. (2013). The revolving door: A closer look at major factors in volunteers' intention to quit. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 41(2), 139–155.
- AmeriCorps. (2021). Bringing out the best of America. *AmeriCorps*. <https://www.americorps.gov/>
- AmeriCorps. (2023). *Volunteering and civic life in America research summary*. <https://americorps.gov/sites/default/files/document/volunteering-civic-life-america-research-summary.pdf>
- America's Service Commissions. (2023). State Service Commissions. <https://www.statecommissions.org/state-service-commissions>.
- Boezeman, E. J., & Ellemers, N. (2008). Volunteer recruitment: The role of organizational support and anticipated respect in non-volunteers' attraction to charitable volunteer organizations. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 93(5), 1013–1026.
- Brudney, J. L., & Meijs, L. C. (2014). Models of volunteer management: Professional volunteer program management in social work. *Human Service Organizations: Management, Leadership & Governance*, 38(3), 297–309.
- Cho, H., Wong, Z. E., & Chiu, W. (2020). The effect of volunteer management on intention to continue volunteering: A mediating role of job satisfaction of volunteers. *SAGE Open*, 10(2), <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244020920588>.
- Deloitte. (2010, April). Nonprofit Service Enterprise: Research summary. Reimagining Service.
- Dietz, N., & Grimm, R. T. (2023). *The state of volunteer engagement: Insights from nonprofit leaders and funders*. University of Maryland School of Public Policy Do Good Institute. [https://dogood.umd.edu/sites/default/files/2023-02/TheStateofVolunteerEngagement\\_DGI2023\\_0.pdf](https://dogood.umd.edu/sites/default/files/2023-02/TheStateofVolunteerEngagement_DGI2023_0.pdf)
- Dwyer, P. C., Bono, J. E., Snyder, M., Nov, O., & Berson, Y. (2013). Sources of volunteer motivation: Transformational leadership and personal motives influence volunteer outcomes. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 24(2), 181–205.
- Einolf, C. (2018). Evidence-based volunteer management: A review of the literature. *Voluntary Sector Review*, 9(2), 153–176.

- Garner, J. T., & Garner, L. T. (2011). Volunteering an opinion: Organizational voice and volunteer retention in nonprofit organizations. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 40(5), 813–828.
- Hager, M.A., & Brudney, J.L. (2021). *Volunteer Management Capacity in America’s Charities: Benchmarking a Pre-Pandemic Field and Assessing Future Directions*. Arizona State University.
- Huynh, J. Y., Metzger, J. C., & Winefield, A. H. (2012). Engaged or connected? A perspective of the motivational pathway of the job demands–resources model in volunteers working for nonprofit organizations. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 23(4), 870–898.
- McBride, A. M., & Lee, Y. (2012). Institutional predictors of volunteer retention: The case of AmeriCorps national service. *Administration & Society*, 44(3), 343–366.
- Modicamore, D., & Naugler, A. (2020, July), *AmeriCorps and Senior Corps Quantifying the impact*. ICF. <https://voicesforservice.org/research-and-reports/national-service-produces-171-return-on-investment/#:~:text=ICF%20examined%20and%20monetized%20the%20benefits%20to%20quantify,academic%20support%2C%20public%20lands%20work%20and%20much%20%20more>
- Nencini, A., Romaioli, D., & Meneghini, A. M. (2016). Volunteer motivation and organizational climate: Factors that promote satisfaction and sustained volunteerism in NPOs. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 27(2), 618–639.
- Newton, C., Becker, K., & Bell, S. (2014). Learning and development opportunities as a tool for the retention of volunteers: A motivational perspective. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 24(4), 514–530.
- Points of Light. (2020). Service Enterprise. <https://www.pointsoflight.org/service-enterprise-program/>
- Sladowski, P. S., Hientz, M., & MacKenzie, R. (2013). Volunteering: A catalyst for citizen engagement, social inclusion, and resilient communities. *The Philanthropist*, 25(1), 37–44. <http://thephilanthropist.ca/original-pdfs/Philanthropist-25-1-515.pdf>
- Speevak-Sladowski, P., Hientz, M., & MacKenzie, R. (2013). Volunteering: A catalyst for citizen engagement, social inclusion, and resilient communities. *The Philanthropist Journal*, 25(1). <https://thephilanthropist.ca/2013/02/volunteering-a-catalyst-for-citizen-engagement-social-inclusion-and-resilient-communities/>
- Stanford University Haas Center for Public Service. (n.d.). *Pathways of Public Service and Civic Engagement* [Video]. <https://haas.stanford.edu/about/our-approach/pathways-public-service-and-civic-engagement>
- Tang, F., Morrow-Howell, N., & Choi, E. (2010). Why do older adult volunteers stop volunteering? *Ageing and Society*, 30(5), 859.

## Appendix A: Methods and Data Sources

Appendix A provides a program logic model as well as a description of the evaluation design, the study sample, data sources, and data collection methods. The analytic approach is described as well as a discussion of the limitations of the methods and data sources.

### Program Logic Model

As a framework to guide the study, a logic model (see exhibit A.1) was developed based on a document review of nine participating VGF grantees included in the study. The logic model outlines the relationships between VGF inputs (AmeriCorps, state service commissions, program implementer partners, and subgrantees) and activities; expected outputs; and their desired short-, and long-term outcomes. The logic model is comprehensive, covering a broad list of activities across all related models rather than representing strategies from any specific grantee or VGF program model. The logic model outlines the connections between components of the models (i.e., the relationships between activities and results or outputs and outcomes), and the relationships within the components (i.e., how activities employed by grantees will influence those employed by partners and/or subgrantees and subsequently the program beneficiaries). The logic model also depicts key contextual factors (i.e., the COVID-19 pandemic; natural disasters; political and economic climate; diversity, equity, and inclusion) which may have influenced grantee implementation and programming.

EXHIBIT A.1.—Logic Model



## Research Questions

The questions for this evaluation are organized to address the following three overarching research objectives:

1. Describe the state service commissions' approaches for utilizing VGF funds to improve volunteer recruitment, retention, and support of volunteers within their states and among volunteer organizations.
2. Describe promising practices and challenges in implementing these approaches.
3. Analyze preliminary outputs and outcomes of these approaches on volunteer organizations.

These overarching objectives are broken down into program design, implementation, and output/outcome research questions. If applicable, we also include the three major stakeholders: grantees (state service commissions), program implementers (state service commissions, subgrantees, other partner organizations, consultants), and beneficiaries (e.g., volunteer connector organizations, volunteer organizations, subgrantees, government agencies, corporations, schools, community-based organizations, volunteers). To incorporate the current context of COVID-19 and issues surrounding racial diversity, equity and inclusion, we have also included some contextual questions on these topics.

### Program Design Questions

Program design questions describe the different approaches that state service commissions propose to increase volunteers and build volunteer management capacity within their states.

#### Grantees

1. What is the overall approach that state service commissions use to recruit and retain volunteers and build capacity of volunteer organizations within their states? To what extent are approaches shared by grantees?
  - a. What training frameworks do state service commissions use to build capacity of volunteer organizations to increase volunteer engagement, retention, and support of volunteers?
  - b. What approaches do states use to create and improve volunteer networks within the state?
  - c. What approaches do state service commissions use to improve volunteer recruitment?
  - d. What approaches do state service commissions use to engage targeted populations (e.g., corporate employees, students/youth, seniors/retirees, skilled volunteers in disaster management or other professions) in volunteer opportunities?
2. What are the approaches that grantees use to collect data from program implementers and volunteer organizations?

### Contextual Questions

#### Grantees

1. What are grantee experiences related to volunteer management during the pandemic?
  - a. How have grantees shifted their VGF funding strategies as a result of COVID-19?
2. What are grantee experiences related to volunteer management within the context of racial diversity, equity and inclusion?

- a. How if at all, have grantees incorporated efforts to increase racial diversity, equity and inclusion as it related to VGF strategies or activities?

### Implementation Questions

Implementation questions assess how program implementers (e.g., state service commissions, partner organizations, subgrantees) are working with other entities (e.g., volunteer organizations, corporations, community-based organizations, schools) to build volunteer management capacity of organizations, and/or to increase volunteer opportunities, and to describe the successes and challenges of implementing their activities.

#### Grantees

1. Who provides trainings or support to volunteer organizations, corporations, schools, or youth-based programs? To what extent are training approaches and support to entities shared by grantees?
  - a. Are trainings or support provided through an existing program (e.g., Service Enterprise Program) or are they developed in-house by program partners?
    - i. If the Service Enterprise Model is used, how is it being implemented? How does this approach vary across grantees?
  - b. Does the grantee use a train-the-trainer model? How is it implemented?
  - c. Are any of the organizations subgrantees?
    - i. How are subgrantees selected?
  - d. Who are the beneficiaries of the grantees' VGF-funded program activities? To what extent are beneficiary categories common among VGF grantees?
  - e. How are the volunteer or nonprofit organizations, local agencies, corporations, schools, or youth-based programs selected for participation in program activities?
  - f. Are any of the organizations subgrantees?
    - i. What are subgrantee training participation requirements?

#### **Program Implementers** (Commission Staff,<sup>22</sup> Partner Organizations, Subgrantees, Consultants)

1. How do program implementers work with volunteer organizations and other entities?
2. What type of training (coaching, technical assistance, in-person, virtual, length of training) do program implementers provide?
  - a. What is the frequency and duration of the training?
  - b. How do they select volunteer organizations and other entities to participate in training?
  - c. What VM training approach (e.g., Service Enterprise) do program implementers use?
    - i. What curriculum is used?

---

<sup>22</sup> Note some grantee staff are directly involved in implementing capacity building activities and others are not. These questions focus on program implementers, which may include some VGF grantees.

- d. To what extent do program implementers incorporate VM strategies to manage and recruit volunteers within the COVID-19 context?
  - e. To what extent do program implementers incorporate VM strategies to address racial diversity, equity and inclusion?
3. How do program implementers work with targeted populations (e.g., corporations, schools, community-based youth programs, seniors/retirees, skilled volunteers in disaster management or other professions)?
- a. If applicable, what type of activities do program implementers provide to schools or youth programs?
    - i. What is the frequency and duration of the activities?
    - ii. How do they select schools or youth programs?
  - b. If applicable, how do program implementers work with corporations to increase employee volunteering?
    - i. What is the frequency and duration of the activities?
    - ii. How do they select corporations?
  - c. How do program implementers work with other targeted populations (e.g., seniors, skilled professionals)
4. How do program implementers build networks with volunteer organizations?
5. How do program implementers track or monitor volunteer organizations' implementation of volunteer management practices?
6. What are program implementers' experiences in working with volunteer organizations, schools or youth programs, corporations, or other recipients of program activities? What are successes and challenges?

**Beneficiaries (Volunteer Organizations, Corporations, Schools, and Youth Programs)**

- 1. What are volunteer organizations, schools and youth programs, corporations, or other program activity recipients' experiences in interacting with program implementers? What are the successes and challenges?

**Outputs/Outcome Questions**

Output and Outcome questions assess the extent to which state service commissions (grantees) are on track to meet their intended results based on the data collected at the time of the evaluation.<sup>23</sup> Output and Outcome questions also focus on the perceived outcomes based on program implementers and volunteer organizations' experiences to date.

**Grantees (and/or Program Implementers)**

- 1. How have grantees been able to demonstrate the impact of VGF?

---

<sup>23</sup> Data collection will end in Fall 2022 (at the end of year 2 of the 3-year grant). ICF will only be able to report progress and not the extent that grantees met their goals or targets by the end of the grant.

2. To what extent have state service commissions met their volunteer goals?
3. To what extent do volunteer organizations within the state receive capacity building services?
4. To what extent do participating volunteer organizations within the state demonstrate an increased effectiveness or efficiency in volunteer management?
5. To what extent have state service commissions met their goals with regard to establishing or expanding volunteer networking?
6. To what extent have state service commissions met their goals with regard to working with schools or youth programs?
7. What are best practices or lessons learned as it relates to collecting performance measure data from program implementers and volunteer organizations?

### **Program Implementers**

1. To what extent have program implementers documented evidence that volunteer organizations have implemented effective volunteer management strategies/practices?
  - a. Where have volunteer organizations been the most successful with regard to volunteer management strategies (e.g., what volunteer strategies have they successfully implemented)?
  - b. Where have volunteer organizations struggled or where do they need more support with regard to implementing volunteer management strategies?
2. If applicable, to what extent have program implementers documented evidence that schools or youth program staff have implemented service-learning curricula and/or provided service-learning opportunities?
  - a. Where have schools and youth programs been the most successful?
  - b. Where do schools and youth programs struggle or where do they need more support?
3. If applicable, to what extent have program implementers documented evidence that corporations have implemented employee volunteering programs?
  - a. Where have corporations been the most successful?
  - b. Where do corporations struggle or where do they need more support?

### **Beneficiaries (Volunteer Organizations, Government Agencies, Corporations, Schools, Youth Programs)**

1. To what extent do volunteer organizations implement effective volunteer management practices?
  - a. How have their recruitment practices changed since their participation in the program?
    - i. What changes have they noticed in the number of volunteers recruited or the characteristics of volunteers recruited?
  - b. How has their support for volunteers changed since their participation in the program?
    - i. What changes have they noticed in volunteer retention?
    - ii. What changes have they noticed on volunteers? (What evidence do they collect?)

- c. What are the most important strategies that volunteer organizations have learned through their participation in program activities?
    - d. What are areas where volunteer organizations still struggle and need additional assistance with regard to volunteer management?
  2. If applicable, to what extent do schools and youth programs teach service-learning curricula and provide service-learning opportunities for youth?
    - a. How many schools/programs have implemented service-learning curricula?
    - b. How many schools/programs have provided service-learning opportunities?
    - c. What changes have school staff/program directors noticed on student participation in service learning?
    - d. What are the approaches to service learning that school staff/program directors have found to be the most important/successful?
    - e. What are the areas where school staff/program directors still struggle and need additional support with regard to implementing service-learning curricula or providing service-learning opportunities to youth?
  3. If applicable, to what extent do corporations provide volunteer opportunities for employees?
    - a. How many corporations/employers have participated in grantee (or subgrantee) activities?
    - b. What changes have corporation volunteer coordinators noticed on employee participation in volunteer opportunities?
    - c. What approaches to volunteer opportunities have corporation volunteer coordinators found to be the most important/successful? What are areas where they could use more support?

### **Beneficiaries (Volunteers)**

1. What are volunteers' experiences with how they have been recruited and managed?

## **Evaluation Design**

The evaluation seeks to assess how AmeriCorps grantees (state service commissions) have designed and implemented their Volunteer Generation Fund (VGF) grant program. It also provides insights into how state service commissions have utilized funds to develop and/or support community-based entities to recruit, manage, and support volunteers within their states, and opportunities, challenges, and lessons learned with regard to program design and implementation.

In Year 1 (fall 2021), a program design study, which was largely descriptive and utilized qualitative methods (interviews and document review) to document the overall program designs for each selected state was conducted. In spring 2022, an implementation study was conducted, utilizing qualitative methods to assess how program implementers worked with volunteer organizations, schools, and youth programs. In Year 2 (fall 2022), a mixed-methods outcome study, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative methods to look at impacts of the programs on beneficiaries (i.e., volunteer organizations, schools, youth programs, and volunteers) was conducted.

In winter of 2023, based on feedback shared by commissions, the evaluation methodology design was modified to include a case study approach, with each VGF grantee serving as an individual case. For each

VGF grantee that participated in at least the site visits and/or survey as part of the implementation or outcomes evaluations, the case study triangulated findings from all available data sources to tell the story of VGF for that grantee. Member-checking was utilized to provide VGF grantees the opportunity to play a role in helping with interpretation of findings and add any additional context. The final program director interview was used, in part, to facilitate the member checking process. Cross-case analysis was utilized from state VGF grantee case studies to tell the program-level story of VGF. The whole case of each grantee was considered when drawing conclusions about the overall program overall or any specific program models or components that may have led to successful implementation or outcomes. In other words, a program-level analysis of only survey data was not conducted; conclusions were drawn from assessing triangulated findings from across the case studies to draw conclusions from the entire program.

## Study Sites

The evaluation used a bundling approach by pooling the FY2020 VGF grantees that were in their first year of the grant at the start of the evaluation, and that all have the ultimate goal of increasing the capacity of volunteer organizations to implement effective volunteer management strategies in the areas of volunteer recruitment, retention, and support. The bundling approach is similar to meta-analysis, except bundling relies on primary research, whereas meta-analysis relies on secondary research.

All 14 grantees (state service commissions) with active FY2020 VGF grants were recruited for the evaluation. All of these grantees were funded for three years and were at the beginning of their second year of implementation when data collection for the evaluation began in fall 2021. Ultimately interviews with 12 of the state service commission’s VGF program directors were conducted. From that sample, nine grantees participated in the site visits (which involved participant observations, interviews with program implementers, and focus groups with beneficiaries (e.g., volunteer organizations), if possible) and/or the program beneficiary survey. All grantees were offered the option of in-person site visits; however, all opted for virtual data collection.

Each of the nine grantees who participated in the outcomes evaluation was responsible for assisting in connecting the evaluation team with program beneficiaries and facilitating the site visit and/or survey administration. Based on the program design evaluation, grantees identified one to two program implementers (“sites”) that were responsible for implementing VGF-funded program activities (e.g., capacity building, corporate volunteer programs, school-based programs) to participate in the evaluation activities (e.g., site visit). Each program implementer also helped identify volunteer organizations or program beneficiaries (e.g., schools, youth programs) to participate in evaluation activities. If possible, volunteer organizations also helped identify volunteers to participate in focus groups. Exhibit A.2 provides an overview of the grantees who participated in each component of the evaluation.

### EXHIBIT A.2.—Participating state service commissions

State service commission	Program Design	Program Implementation	Mixed-Methods Outcome
Volunteer Florida	✓	✓	✓
Serve Illinois Commission	✓	✓	
Volunteer Iowa	✓	✓	✓
Kansas Volunteer Commission	✓		
Maine Commission for Community Service	✓	✓	

State service commission	Program Design	Program Implementation	Mixed-Methods Outcome
Massachusetts Service Alliance	✓	✓	✓
Michigan Community Service Commission	✓		
ServeMN	✓	✓	✓
Nevada Volunteers	✓	✓	✓
Volunteer NH	✓	✓	✓
NJ Commission	✓	✓	✓
VolunteerNC	✓	✓	✓
UServeUtah	✓	✓	✓
Wisconsin National and Community Service Board	✓	✓	
Total	14	12	9

## Data Sources and Data Collection

This report draws on data collected from VGF project directors, program implementers and beneficiaries, and volunteers through surveys and interviews/focus groups. Additionally, supplemental data from VGF grant applications, progress reports, national census data, and previous state- or VGF-specific research from grantees was used to provide additional context for the case studies and larger cross-case analysis presented in this report. The data collection instruments and processes are described in further detail in this section.

### Program Documents

State service commission program documents, including grant applications, progress reports, and data collected by the state service commissions were reviewed. This information helped the evaluation team better understand the grantee’s program approach, the activities of their program implementers and beneficiaries and provided a basis for triangulation with stakeholder perspectives gleaned through other forms of data collection. An overview of the program documents utilized are noted below.

**State Service Commission VGF Grant Application.** Grantee VGF Grant Applications for FY2020.

**State Service Commission VGF Progress Reports.** Grantee Progress Reports from FY2020, FY2021, and FY2022 provided by AmeriCorps.

**AmeriCorps Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement.** Every two years, in partnership with the U.S. Census Bureau, AmeriCorps produces comprehensive research about civic engagement trends across the United States. Longitudinal survey findings on formal volunteering and informal helping from 2017, 2019, and 2021 for each of the participating states were considered.

**Additional Data and Evaluation Documentation Provided by the Commission.** As applicable, state service commissions provided supplemental data or research to support the case study. Documentation provided by the state service commissions included past evaluation reports, state-wide survey findings on volunteerism, and testimonial quotes from training participants.

## Interviews and Focus Groups

Interviews and/or focus groups were conducted throughout the evaluation with project directors, program implementers and beneficiaries. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. An overview of the participant groups and focus of the session are noted below.

**Project Directors Interviews.** To understand the overarching program approach and objectives to be accomplished within the three-year grant term, 90-minute semi-structured interviews in Year 1 (fall 2021) with the state service commission project director were conducted. In Year 3 (summer 2023), 60-minute follow-up interviews to understand any changes to the program approach and any initial program outcomes were conducted. Additionally, summer 2023 interviews were used for project directors to review their respective case study and provide feedback, clarification, or corrections.

**Program Implementers Interviews.** To better understand the program goals and activities, successes, challenges, and lessons learned, semi-structured, 60-minute interviews with program implementers were conducted. The evaluation also sought to understand how the programs monitor the progress of volunteer organizations participating in their capacity building, training, or other services. Interviews included the program director and key staff who were involved in working directly with the volunteer organizations.

**Program Beneficiaries (Volunteer Organizations) Focus Groups.** To obtain feedback from participants about their experiences participating in VGF-funded activities and determine to what extent they have implemented what they have learned through their participation, semi-structured, 90-minute focus groups (one or two per sampled site) with program beneficiaries were conducted. The evaluation also sought to understand successes, challenges, and lessons learned. The focus groups included the program director and key staff who were involved in working directly with the volunteers and/or students/youth.

**Program Beneficiaries (Volunteers) Focus Groups.** To obtain feedback about how volunteers were recruited and how they have been supported as volunteers, semi-structured, 90-minute focus groups with volunteers from one participating state service commission were conducted.<sup>24</sup> The focus groups also sought to understand how support as a volunteer had changed and strengths of the volunteer organization's practices in managing volunteers, as well as any challenges and ways in which volunteers need additional support. The focus groups included volunteers from organizations that had participated in VGF funded training or capacity building.

## Surveys

Beneficiary surveys were conducted in Year 2 with individuals who had participated in volunteer management training and capacity building. All surveys were administered online. Several state commissions administering the survey opted to modifying the survey instrument to better match their VGF's program context and focus areas. An overview of the survey purpose and administration processes is noted below.

**Beneficiary Survey.** An online survey of volunteer organizations that participated in volunteer management training/capacity building within each of the nine participating states was used to assess program implementation and perceived outcomes. The 15-minute survey was administered in spring 2023 to capture participants' feedback about the program and perceived outcomes.

---

<sup>24</sup> The other eight participating state service commissions did not opt to schedule a focus group with volunteers from a program beneficiary organization.

## Survey Sample

Exhibit A.3 presents the demographic characteristics for the survey respondents by grantee. Response rates among grantees ranged from 9 percent to 83 percent with respondents from 4 to 63 different unique organizations. Across the 8 grantees, 216 respondents were included in the survey analysis; given the varying structure of VGF grantees, there was substantial variation in the sample sizes for each grantee, ranging from 5 to 78 respondents. For this reason, grantee survey data was not aggregated at the program level to ensure grantees with larger sample sizes did not drive overall findings as findings from grantees with smaller samples were just as valid given the design of their grant program.

Survey respondents were asked to select the role that most aligned with their organizational/entity role. The most commonly selected category for the majority of grantees was a Volunteer Manager or Coordinator. Generally, the second most reported role amongst survey respondents fell under the "Other" category. For two grantees, Nevada Volunteers and Volunteer NH, this was the most frequently reported category followed by Volunteer Manager or Coordinator. Upon further analysis of the explanations for selecting "Other", there were a wide range of specific roles and position titles. Generally, these responses did not reveal a common theme, but rather referred to position titles as opposed to their occupational roles. Examples of Other roles reported by respondents included AmeriCorps VISTAs, Data & Evaluation/Program Specialists, Vice Presidents, and Division Directors.

Due to the variations in VGF grantee's structure, additional categories, such as Volunteer Engagement Professionals and Youth/College Council Former or Current Members were included in the relevant grantee surveys. See exhibit A.3 for additional details on the survey respondent demographics by grantee.

**EXHIBIT A.3.—Survey respondent demographic characteristics by grantee**

	Volunteer Florida (n=5)	Volunteer Iowa (n=12)	Massachusetts Service Alliance (n=27)	ServeMN/MAVA (n=78)	Nevada Volunteers (n=5)	Volunteer NH (n=8)	NJ Commission (n=6)	UServeUtah (n=75)
<b>Response Rate</b>	20%	29%	56%	9%	83%	26%	67%	19%
<b>Number of Unique Organizations/Entities</b>	5	10	23	63	4	7	6	63
<b>Respondent Role</b>								
<b>Executive Director/CEO/President</b>	20%	8%	22%	3%	0%	0%	33%	4%
<b>Volunteer Manager/Coordinator</b>	40%	-	44%	68%	40%	25%	33%	45%
<b>Other</b>	40%	0%	33%	30%	60%	75%	33%	33%
<b>Volunteer Engagement Professional (Volunteer Manager/Coordinator/Director)</b>	-	92%	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Youth/College Council Former or Current Member</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	17%

Note. Due to grantees being able to customize the survey questions, some responses were only asked of specific survey respondents according to the grantee from whom they received services from. Responses which were only asked of some participants are noted with a dash for those whom the response option was not included.

## Observations

One virtual training/capacity building session provided by the program implementers for the beneficiaries was observed for one of the selected sites.<sup>25</sup> Detailed notes were taken during the observation, focusing on the content of materials presented, how the material is presented (e.g., if sessions are engaging/interactive), what worked well, and challenges observed (implementer challenges and/or beneficiary challenges). These observations provided the evaluation with a more-in-depth understanding of how program implementers trained and/or worked with the volunteer organizations to build volunteer management capacity.

## Analysis

The transcripts for each stakeholder group were reviewed and a code list was developed that included a priori codes (informed by the logic model, key evaluation questions, and literature review), as well as emergent codes that were identified through the transcript review. The team coded the transcripts and analyzed findings for each case independently. Observation notes and program documents were reviewed to help inform the description of VGF activities, successes, and challenges, as applicable. Descriptive and thematic analyses were conducted using the coded qualitative data and observation notes to help provide in-depth information related to how the VGF-funded activities were working within the state, and/or how stakeholders perceived preliminary program impacts on beneficiaries.

For quantitative data, basic descriptive statistics (e.g., means, medians, and frequencies) were produced for all survey data gathered to address the evaluation questions. Survey data was analyzed for each case independently. By triangulating findings from the interviews, focus groups, observations, surveys, and program documents, robust and dynamic depictions of the program approaches and implementation were developed. Additionally, the variation across the grantees was highlighted through individual case studies and a cross-case analysis. Any contextual factors that emerged, including operating during the pandemic and the focus on/incorporation of racial diversity, equity and inclusion were also included in the case studies.

## Limitations

This study provides important information for understanding VGF AmeriCorps grantees and the services they provided to program beneficiaries. However, several limitations were identified that readers should be aware of when interpreting the findings.

**Due to staff turnover and availability, there was high attrition among participating VGF grantees.** The initial study design invited all 14 of the active FY2020 VGF grants, with ultimately 12 grantees agreeing to participate in the evaluation. However due to various challenges with staff turnover and availability, some grantees decided to cease their participation. Following the initial 12 interviews with FY2020 VGF grantee staff, the biggest impact on implementing VGF activities was VGF staff turnover or not having a VGF program director; the case for three grantees (Illinois, Wisconsin, and Nevada) with Illinois and Wisconsin choosing to opt-out of the study. Additionally, one grantee, Maine, was unresponsive to scheduling for additional data collection and was thus removed from the evaluation, leaving a total of nine participating grantees.

**The survey sample for the beneficiary survey was low.** Participating grantees identified the program beneficiaries among whom they would like to administer the beneficiary survey. Due to the variations in VGF program service models, the sample size of survey administered varied substantially. For example, one state

<sup>25</sup> The other eight participating state service commissions did not opt to schedule an observation of the program implementer's training and/or capacity building sessions.

sent the beneficiary survey to only their subgrantees—all of whom may be very familiar with volunteer management topics—whereas another state sent it out to every individual who had ever participated in any VGF-funded or partially-funded activity (e.g., a conference that occurred in 2021) which includes respondents who may not be familiar with that much related to volunteer management. Given this variation, comparative survey findings across states should be considered with caution.

**While some grantees customized their surveys, not all chose to do so.** Amidst survey administration, due to feedback from grantees, the grantees were given the opportunity to customize their program beneficiary survey according to their program model. However, not all grantees opted for customizations. Therefore comparison of some survey findings across participating grantees is not feasible. As appropriate, findings highlight cross-case survey findings for comparable survey data.

**Data collection was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic.** The data collection included in the evaluation was collected from January 2022 to July 2023. The study team planned to conduct in-person interviews and focus groups at each site. However, due to the pandemic, all of the participating sites opted for the site visit to be conducted virtually. The study team attempted to conduct virtual interviews instead, but for some grantees it was difficult to connect with program implementers, beneficiaries, and/or volunteers.

**Unable to ascertain distinguishable differences in outcomes between grantees who funded positions to support VGF programming and those who did not.** In data collection instruments, VGF grantees were not explicitly asked to report on if funds were used to support staffing full- or part-time positions that supported VGF programming and activities. Use of funding for positions was determined based on VGF grant applications and any relevant information shared incidentally during site visits. Without intentional data collection on funded staff positions, the evaluation was not able to answer the question of how VGF funded positions influenced grantee outcomes.

**The study is not causal.** This study describes the implementation of the VGF grant by AmeriCorps grantees and the self-reported outcomes of program participants. It does not examine the impact of the VGF grant, meaning that it does not answer the question of whether participant outcomes were the result of the training and capacity building from the VGF grant.

## Appendix B: Case Studies

This section provides the grantee case studies for the nine state service commissions who participated in the AmeriCorps Volunteer Generation Fund (VGF) evaluation. Case studies provide an overview of the grantee’s grant structure and goals, the effects of recent volunteerism trends, including the COVID-19 pandemic, on the state and grant, and the strategies and outcomes associated with VGF programming. Data used to inform case study findings varied; generally including findings from VGF grant applications and progress reports, focus groups and/or survey data from commission staff, program implementers, and program beneficiaries, and longitudinal data from the *AmeriCorps Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement*. It is important to note that while the evaluation findings presented in Chapters 1–7 of this report have sought to standardize the language and terms used across grantees (see Terminology section in Chapter 1), the findings presented in these case studies are framed according to the language used by grantees and program beneficiaries and their state-specific contexts. Therefore, please note that the uses of volunteer engagement and management outlined in Chapter 1 may not be consistent across the included case studies.

## Massachusetts Volunteer Generation Fund Case Study

The Massachusetts state service commission, the Massachusetts Service Alliance, participated in the AmeriCorps Volunteer Generation Fund (VGF) evaluation through several different phases, including focus groups/interviews with commission staff, program implementers, program beneficiaries, and a program beneficiaries survey.<sup>26,27</sup> In addition to the evaluation data collection activities noted, the following case study brief incorporates additional data sources from VGF grant applications and progress reports and longitudinal data from the AmeriCorps Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement. Exhibit B.1 provides an overview of each of the data sources that were used to inform the following brief.

### EXHIBIT B.1.—Overview of data sources

Data Source	Participant Count	Date Collected
Grant Application	–	May 2020
Fiscal Year (FY)2020 and FY2021 Volunteer Generation Fund Progress Reports	–	December 2020 and 2021
AmeriCorps Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplements	–	September 2017, 2019, and 2021
Project Director Focus Group – Massachusetts Service Alliance	2	March 2022
Program Implementer Focus Group – Massachusetts Service Alliance	2	September 2022
Beneficiaries Focus Group – COVID Mini Grant	3	September 2022
Beneficiaries Focus Group – Youth Development Mini Grant	5	September 2022
Beneficiaries Focus Group – Service Enterprise Mini Grant	5	September 2022
Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey	27	January 2023
Final Commission Focus Group – Massachusetts Service Alliance	2	June 2023

### Overview of Grant Structure and Goals

The focus of the Massachusetts Service Alliance’s VGF grant was to enhance volunteer engagement within Volunteer Connector Organizations (VCOs) and youth-serving agencies across the state, especially focusing on organizations that did not have the capacity to have national service programs. Utilizing a multipronged approach, Massachusetts Service Alliance employed the following five strategies:

<sup>26</sup> The VGF grantee, Massachusetts Service Alliance, also served as the primary program implementer for VGF programing and services.

<sup>27</sup> For the Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey, the state service commission had a 56 percent response rate with a total of 27 individual respondents representing 23 unique organizations. Across survey participants, there was substantial variation in reported average number of volunteers; 10 percent reported fewer than 10 volunteers; 25 percent reported 10–20 volunteers; 5 percent reported 21–30 volunteers; 20 percent reported 31–50 volunteers; 20 percent reported 51–100 volunteers; and 20 percent reported 100 or more volunteers.

1. Deep and intensive training and certification at least 15 organizations through delivery of Service Enterprise;
2. Focused in-person and online trainings and a statewide conference providing best practices from the field;
3. Grants to community-based organizations and schools to support the implementation of a Service-Learning initiative developed by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE);
4. Grants to community-based organizations and VCOs for capacity building in volunteer engagement specifically for either youth-serving programming or for coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic recovery efforts; and
5. Creation of a new advanced online platform to connect volunteers and organizations.

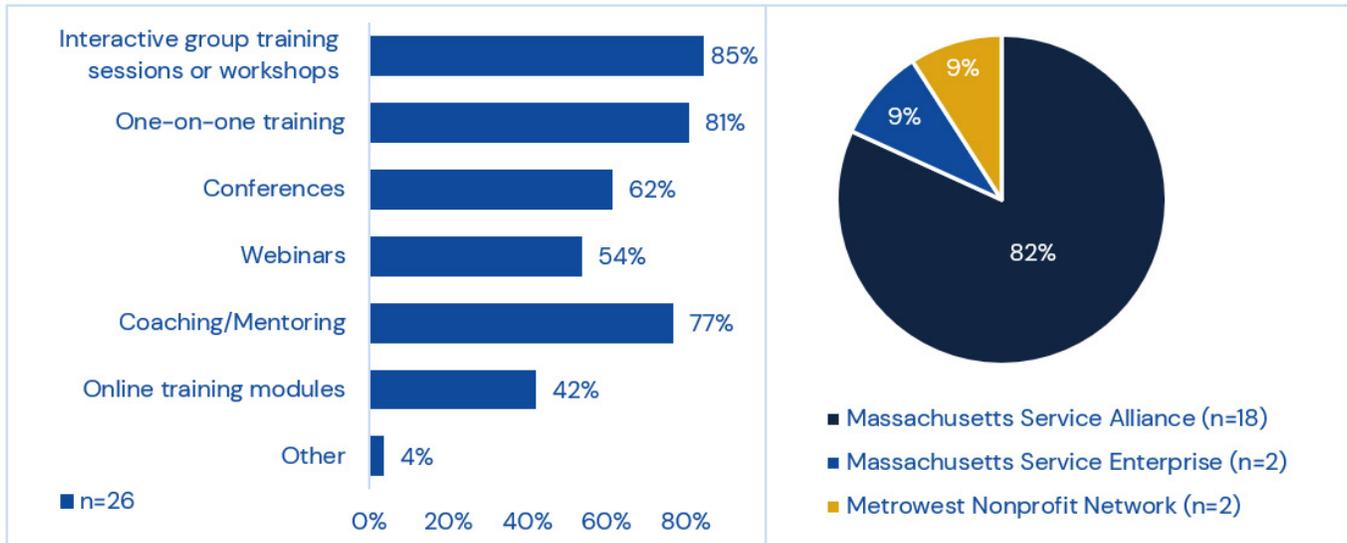
Therefore, across the indicated strategies, Massachusetts Service Alliance reported in the grant application they planned volunteers would serve a total of 18,200 hours, at least 2,200 at-risk youth would benefit from Massachusetts Service Alliance initiatives each funding year, 15 organizations would participate in an intensive training and certification program (i.e., Service Enterprise), and an additional 200 unique staff and/or volunteers would be trained in volunteer management best practices annually by Massachusetts Service Alliance trainings and a biannual conference. During the final director interview, Massachusetts Service Alliance staff shared they had exceeded, if not far exceeded, their intended goals. Having received VGF grant funding since the beginning of the program, Massachusetts Service Alliance has historically used their VGF award to expand the Service Enterprise initiative and fund other mini-grant opportunities.

With the continued COVID-19 related barriers, not all proposed initiatives were implemented as anticipated. Based on the survey data from training participants, the most frequently reported volunteer training and capacity building activities were interactive group training sessions or workshops, one-on-one training, and coaching/mentoring, with the majority (82 percent) of reported training provided by Massachusetts Service Alliance. Exhibit B.2 provides additional details on the types of activities respondents noted were available to their organization through VGF grant activities.

### A Note on Program Beneficiaries

In the context of this case study, “program beneficiaries” include subgrantee volunteer organizations and volunteer connector organizations (VCOs) that took part in Massachusetts Service Alliance’s initiatives, including the Service Enterprise program and mini-grants, and volunteer organizations that participated in other volunteer management trainings and conferences.

**EXHIBIT B.2.—Volunteer training and capacity building activities and providers**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

An overview of the status of each key initiative is included below, as described by the state service commission, through which the majority of initiatives are provided.

**Service Enterprise:** As the primary program implementers, Massachusetts Service Alliance leads the Service Enterprise program across the state utilizing the curriculum previously created and owned by Points of Light (in 2022, the program transitioned to ALIVE, which currently manages the curriculum). Additionally, Massachusetts Service Alliance occasionally coordinates with external consultants who provide in-person coaching services in central and southern Massachusetts so they can physically meet with the organizations. Initially proposed in the grant application, Massachusetts Service Alliance had intended at least 15 organizations across the state complete the certification process. At the time of the state service commission focus group in December 2022, an estimated 13 organizations would receive the certification; a commission representative noted that the COVID-19 pandemic posed a challenge as they had never struggled to reach their certification goals in the past.

**COVID mini-grant:** The COVID-19 Resiliency Grant (COVID-19 mini-grant) is a selection of subgrantees who are awarded a \$4,000 no-match grant with 6-month funding cycles. As of the fall 2022 site visits, Massachusetts Service Alliance had three different rounds of fundings for the mini-grants, with the largest funding cycling having 30 grantees and the smallest with 22 grantees. Through the COVID-19 mini-grant, Massachusetts Service Alliance reached a new group of nonprofit organizations across the state with diverse missions and in rural communities, many of which Massachusetts Service Alliance was unlikely to have reached without the grant.

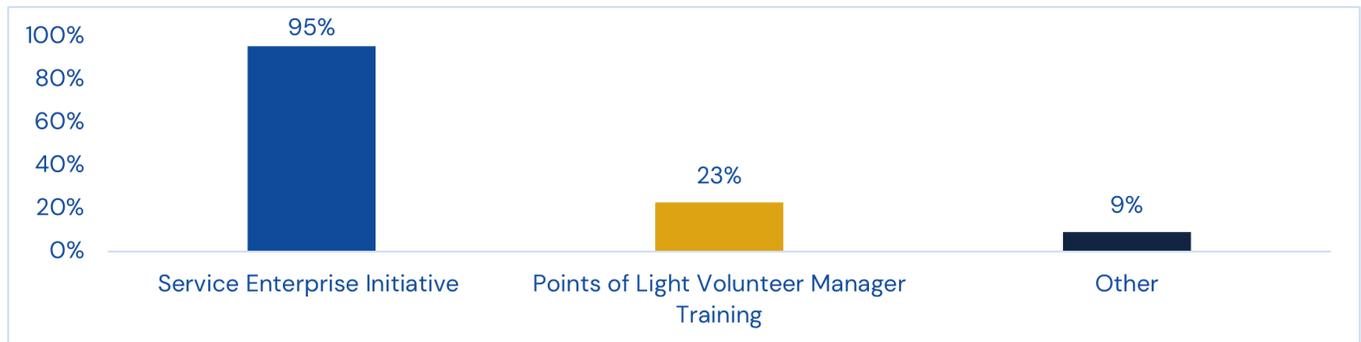
**Youth Development:** The Youth Development mini-grant is a selection of subgrantees who are awarded a \$10,000 matching grant with a 9-month funding cycle. There are roughly 14 subgrantees each year for the Youth Development mini-grant, with slight variation depending on the number of applications each year.

**Additional training opportunities:** Massachusetts Service Alliance utilizes additional online and regional volunteer management trainings and the biannual conference to expose new organizations to Massachusetts Service Alliance as an introduction to the resources and supports they can provide organizations across the state. State service commission representatives noted that the training opportunities are mainly informed

by field surveys offered every few years to identify the key needs of organizations, with some offerings also based on the Service Enterprise core competencies. Additionally, every conference year, the commission does an evaluation that also highlights areas of need, which helps guide planning for future training opportunities. The commission had planned to offer the statewide conference in Year 1 (2021) and Year 3 (2023) of the VGF grant, however, due to the pandemic, the conference was postponed to Year 2 (2022). During the first commission focus group in December 2022, staff expressed that they hoped the conference would still be held in Year 3. Based on previous participation in previous years, it was anticipated that 300–325 individuals would attend in May of Year 2, however, participants noted that participation may be impacted by the pandemic.

In January 2023, Massachusetts Service Alliance training participants participated in a Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey. As seen in exhibit B.3, the majority (95 percent) of the survey respondents reported they participated in training that utilized the Service Enterprise curriculum and 23 percent reported participating in a training that used the Points of Light Volunteer Manager Training. A few participants also reported they participated in other training curriculums, noting miscellaneous professional development offerings and volunteer management prerecorded training series sessions.

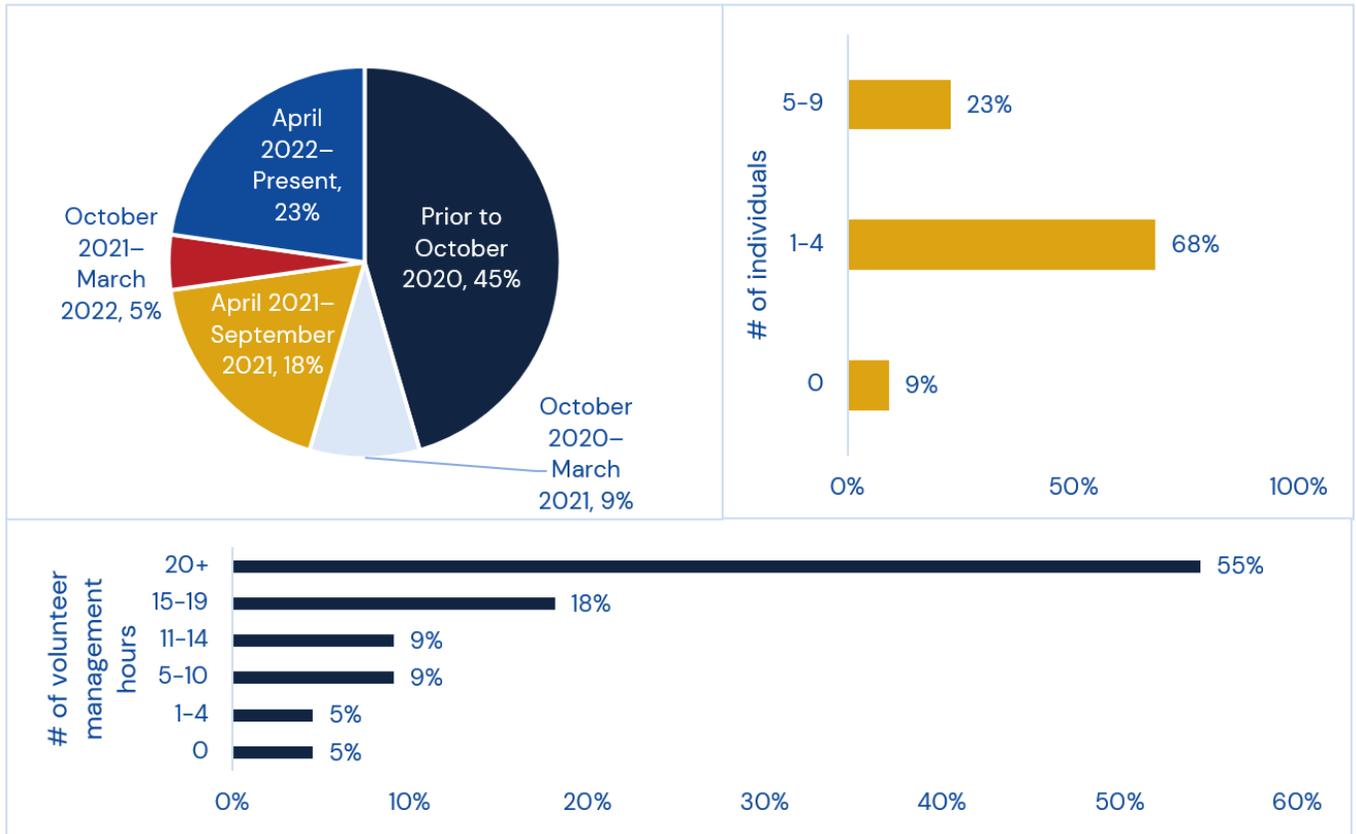
**EXHIBIT B.3.—Types of curriculum used (n=22)**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

The time in which survey respondents reported first participating in an Massachusetts Service Alliance training varied; 45 percent of respondents noted their organization first participated prior to October 2020 while 23 percent noted they did not first participate until more recently (April 2022–Present). Since October 2020, the majority (68 percent) of survey respondents noted that 1–4 individuals from their organization participated in a training or capacity building activity through VGF and 23 percent noted 5–9 individuals participated. Over half (55 percent) of respondents participated in 20 or more volunteer management hours. Exhibit B.4 provides an overview of the time frame in which participating organizations reported they first participated in training and the range of individuals who participated.

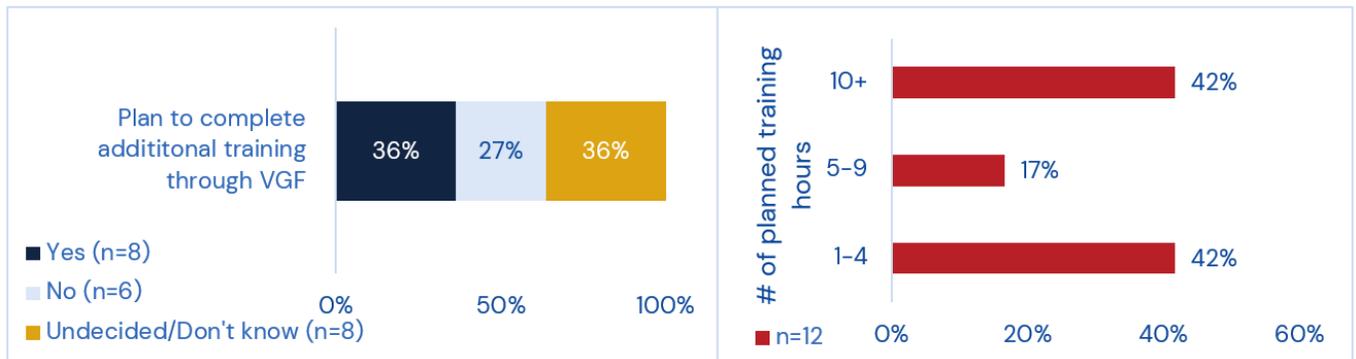
**EXHIBIT B.4.—Organization’s participation time frame, range, and number of hours (n=22)**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

As grant programming continued following the data collection, survey participants were also asked to report on their organization’s plans for additional training. Exhibit B.5 displays the percentage of participants who reported they intended to complete additional training through VGF, with 36 percent noting *Yes* and 36 percent noting *Undecided*. The majority of survey respondents indicated they planned to complete 1–4 additional training hours (42 percent) or 10 or more hours (42 percent).

**EXHIBIT B.5.—Organizational plans for additional training and planned hours**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

## Recent Volunteerism Trends in Massachusetts and Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic

According to the 2021 AmeriCorps Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement, over two-fifths (23 percent) of Massachusetts residents formally volunteered through organizations, comparable to the national rate (23.2 percent) of individuals who formally volunteered. However, in Massachusetts, this was a substantial decline compared to the 2017 and 2019 rates of 33 percent and 31 percent, respectively. In the state, formal volunteering contributed \$2.6 billion in economic value. Alternatively, informal volunteering remained relatively consistent. Informally, over half (53 percent) of residents noted they helped others by exchanging favors with their neighbors, which is comparable to 2017 and 2019 rates of 55 percent and 56 percent, respectively.

From the perspective of participating volunteer organizations, the use of and engagement with volunteers during the pandemic varied substantially, depending on the context of the organization's volunteer program. Several participating organizations shared that during the pandemic their challenge was not around recruiting volunteers, since they had to decrease their numbers of volunteers. Instead, they had to focus on how to maintain engagement with volunteers, which some organizations were still trying to figure out. One survey participant noted:

*The timing [during the pandemic] made it more difficult for us to immediately put into practice what we learned. I believe some things would be different had that not been the case. Nonetheless, we feel very fortunate to have been able to participate.*

## Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Broadly, Massachusetts Service Alliance described that they were working internally to incorporate more intentional and consistent uses of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) across their work. Massachusetts Service Alliance held a community review in which members from the communities served were involved in the selection of subgrant recipients, instead of exclusively Massachusetts Service Alliance staff.

*We're actually later this week holding our first ever community review, where we're having external reviewers come and look at and review proposals for our Youth Development initiative. So, trying to get more community involved in that process, trying to find folks who are working and living and understand the communities that we are trying to support. In the past it's really been an internal review with Massachusetts Service Alliance staff, who may have a relationship with the grantee, but may not necessarily know what the challenges are for an organization in the Berkshires. So we are certainly moving in a direction that's more intentional around having community voice in that review and selection process.*

Within the Service Enterprise curriculum, program implementers noted that they have received feedback from the participating organizations related to the lack of emphasis on DEI within the curriculum. Program implementers shared that feedback had been provided to Points of Light (who had managed the curriculum at the time). Even so, one program implementer noted they have found methods to incorporate DEI into coaching:

*I think [program implementer] and I have both done a lot of training and work in that area, so we bring our knowledge to that, but it maybe isn't formally built into the curriculum. We get a lot of organizations that want to focus on diversifying their recruitment efforts with their volunteer base. So we will work on that sometimes in the coaching time with them and more individualized, based on exactly what they're looking for.*

The program implementers noted that the feedback on incorporating DEI or justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion components into the curriculum was well received and ALIVE is working on updating the curriculum.

With the postponement of the biannual conference in Year 1, Massachusetts Service Alliance focused on providing additional training and capacity building opportunities to organizations, many of which focused on DEI. Of the six virtual trainings offered in Year 1, half (three trainings) focused on DEI in volunteerism. In Year 2, at the time of the first commission interview, Massachusetts Service Alliance held eight DEI focused training sessions (six of which were offered as part of a multipart volunteer management series). Additionally, a substantial focus for the biannual conference hosted in Year 2 was DEI.

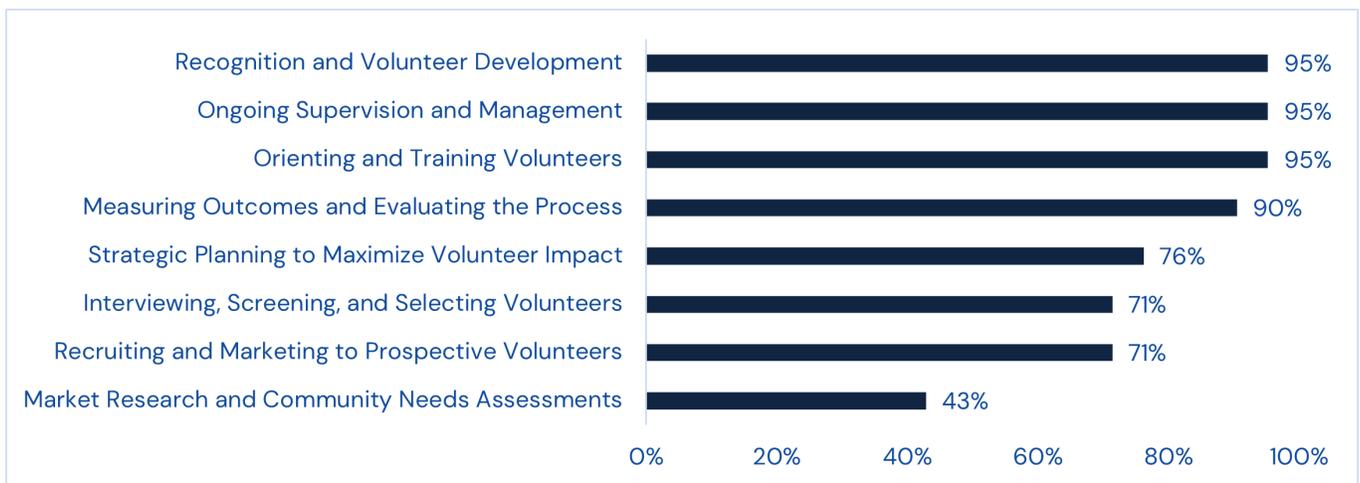
### Strategies Used and/or Learned

Massachusetts Service Alliance reported one of the highest priorities for their organizations, post-pandemic, were recruitment strategies, as organizations were trying to return to their pre-pandemic volunteer numbers. Organizations were struggling to engage volunteers, so Massachusetts Service Alliance noted that the need was specifically targeted at intentional recruitment to diversify the organization’s volunteer base.

*I would say that organizations are also being more intentional and aware about who they’re recruiting and wanting to diversify their volunteer base. So, they’re wanting to have more volunteers that reflect the communities that they are serving in and wanting to be more intentional about that recruitment. So I think those are the two biggest needs, because I think we’ve heard a lot about—it’s not just about recruitment—but it’s recruiting the right people for the role.*

Across survey respondents, there was a wide variation in the types of practices respondents noted receiving training on through the VGF grant. The most frequently reported training practices included recognition and volunteer development (95 percent), ongoing supervision and management (95 percent), orienting and training volunteers (95 percent), and measuring outcomes and evaluating the process (94 percent). Exhibit B.6 provides additional details on the types of practices reported by respondents.

**EXHIBIT B.6.—Volunteer management practices learned about in trainings (n=21)**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

Volunteer organizations who participated in the site visit largely agreed on the priorities. Below is a list of strategies reported by volunteer organizations to increase recruitment and retention.

**Identifying methods to make volunteerism less transactional.** A few organizations highlighted that they were striving to make volunteerism less transactional by listening to what volunteers were interested in and doing “matchmaking” to ensure volunteer work is meaningful and engaging, especially among youth volunteers. One organization described how they used surveys to identify their volunteers’ interests and skills so they can get to know their volunteer better and establish strong relationships to support retention.

**Importance of intentionality in volunteer recruitment.** One organization noted that they identified that many of their volunteers were there because it looked good on a resume, or they were doing so to make themselves feel good (which the organization explained was rooted in “white saviorism”). As part of their Youth Development mini-grant, the organization was focusing on intentional volunteer recruitment to diversify their volunteers and recruit volunteers from the communities they serve.

*One thing we’ve learned is the value of intentionality. I think our strategies of reaching out to different organizations and the different communities, especially the neighborhoods in which many of our youth come from have been helpful. ... I think we are also making a space for diverse mentors to come in. If we are actively recruiting Black mentors, do we have a space that’s welcoming that they feel like they’re seen and they feel like they’re being heard?*

**Remote recruitment.** Especially with the pandemic and its continued impacts, participants noted there was an increase in remote recruitment. One participant explained that with this transition, some volunteers are not included in the process while some new ones are—emphasizing the tradeoffs of remote recruitment.

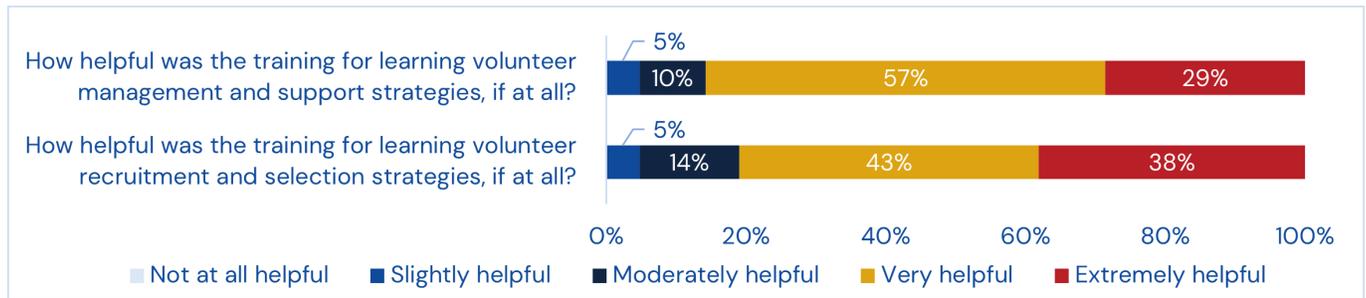
**Volunteer recognition.** Participating organizations noted that volunteer recognition was a key strategy for engaging and retaining volunteers, however some organizations were struggling with the application of recognition strategies after the pandemic. One organization described:

*In the past we did volunteer recognition once a year. ... COVID had made that difficult, we still give the award, but Covid has made it difficult to celebrate that. So, we did a virtual one this past spring. Everyone was telling us we really want to see each other; we want to socialize. So, we planned all these events and had terrible attendance. People were not as ready to come out as I think they thought they were. So, we’re still kind of figuring out in this new COVID space. What does that type of volunteer socialization and recognition really look like? What are folks actually looking for? And I don’t have an answer to that but [I’m] interested if others do.*

Another organization described how they do volunteer recognition more informally through “pop-up opportunities.” For example, the organization noted they had a volunteer connected to a sculpture exhibit who offered to give a special tour to the organization’s volunteers. While it may not be relevant or of interest to all volunteers, the organization noted that finding ways to provide rewarding and meaningful appreciation to volunteers supports retention.

Across survey participants, over four-fifths noted that the training for learning volunteer management and support strategies (86 percent), and recruitment and selection strategies (81 percent) were *Very helpful* or *Extremely helpful*, as seen in exhibit B.7.

**EXHIBIT B.7.—Reported helpfulness of training (n=21)**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

**Collecting and Tracking Data**

Volunteer organizations who participated in site visits noted they collected a variety of data about volunteers, including number of volunteers, volunteer hours, volunteer intake data, and volunteer time logs. One organization noted that they utilized an online database to track volunteer data, however several participants noted that with or without a database it was still challenging to manage the data. One participating organization shared that even though the individuals served as the volunteer manager, the tracking process was still burdensome. Another organization noted that as they do not have a volunteer coordinator solely responsible for overseeing volunteers, it was a very time-consuming process, saying:

*“We don’t have a volunteer coordinator... it’d be so wonderful if we did... tracking is difficult! I am not going to lie, it’s one of our biggest challenges, because it’s very time-consuming to do it right, and it’s very time consuming to train multiple staff people, especially with staff turnover.”*

Massachusetts Service Alliance collects a variety of data through each of the different initiatives. For Service Enterprise, Massachusetts Service Alliance has the participating organizations complete a pre-test self-assessment on best practices in volunteer engagement prior to their participation. As part of Service Enterprise, participating organizations complete a diagnostic that is presented in a report highlighting how the organization performs in different characteristics of Service Enterprise. The diagnostic serves as “a snapshot of where they’re starting from prior to any of the trainings with Service Enterprise.” Organizations also complete a post-test and Massachusetts Service Alliance collects data after training to identify areas of improvement for future training.

For the mini-grants, Massachusetts Service Alliance collects data on the organizations through their applications, including active volunteers, youth volunteers, and goals for growth. In the Fiscal Year (FY)2021 VGF progress report, Massachusetts Service Alliance noted subgrantees provide the following data elements through their progress reports: number of volunteers; number of hours served by volunteers; number of new volunteers; number of hours served by new volunteers; and narrative data on program changes, challenges, and lessons learned. Mini-grantees also complete a financial report at the end of the year and participate in site visits with Massachusetts Service Alliance staff. Additionally, Massachusetts Service Alliance noted they use the data to inform planning for future years. The FY2021 progress report notes:

*In 2021, we began asking subgrantees to provide feedback in their progress reports on their experience working with Massachusetts Service Alliance. We ask if they are interested in learning about other Massachusetts Service Alliance programs, such as Service Enterprise, and refer them to those opportunities when they become available throughout*

*the year. We also ask them if there are other ways we can support volunteerism within their organization—such as specific training, funding initiatives, or other volunteer management resources. This helps us get a better sense of volunteer needs across Massachusetts and how Massachusetts Service Alliance can address those needs.*

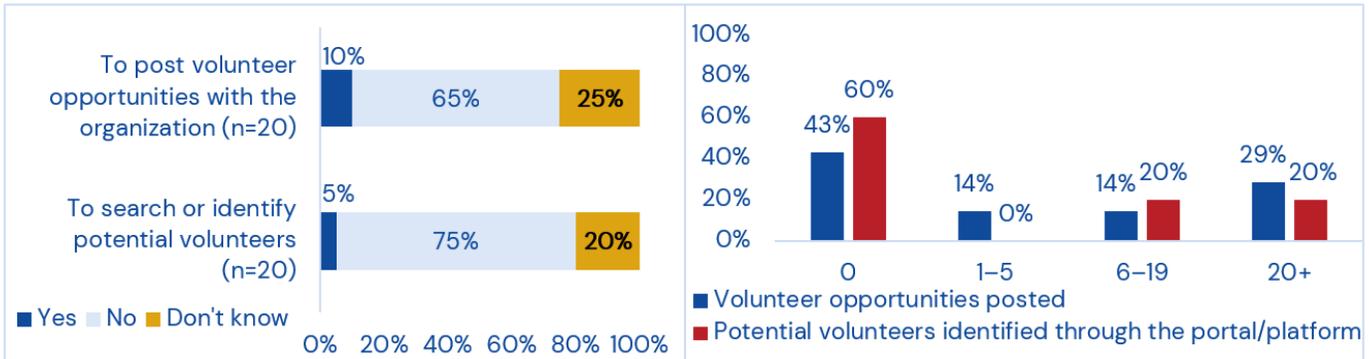
Massachusetts Service Alliance also utilizes VGF subgrantee data to inform decisions on future funding initiatives, which was one of the reasons for the implementation of the COVID-19 mini-grant in 2020.

### Volunteer Platform

Predominantly in Year 1, Massachusetts Service Alliance utilized VGF funding to support the development of the new Massachusetts Service Alliance Connect for Good online platform. Funding was used to support the transition from Galaxy Digital to Inspiring Service in the hopes that it would allow the nonprofit organizations to establish deeper connections with the online users as well as encourage organizations to share data and impact stories. Additionally, one commission participant shared that some of their partners were also transitioning to the new platform, so they noted it would support increased connection with partner organizations as well.

However, as seen in exhibit B.8, over half (65 percent) of survey respondents did not use the platform to post volunteer opportunities and three-quarters (75 percent) did not use the platform to search or identify potential volunteers. Exhibit B.8 also shows the range of volunteer opportunities posted by survey respondents and the range of volunteers identified through the platform.

**EXHIBIT B.8.—Use of state service commission portal/platform**

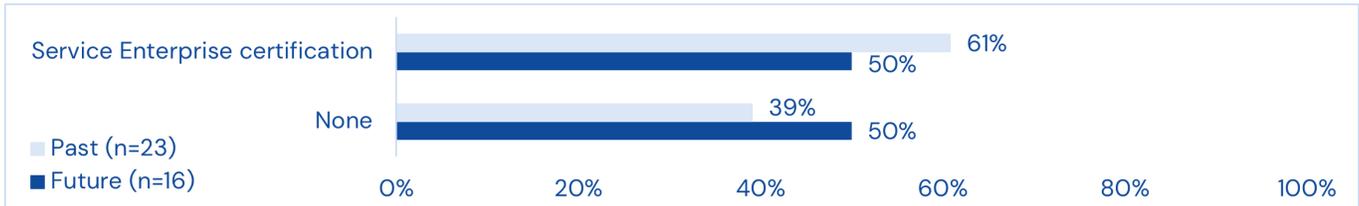


Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

### Outcomes

Overall, both Massachusetts Service Alliance and training recipients reported high satisfaction with the training and capacity building provided through the VGF grant program. As seen in exhibit B.9, survey respondents indicated the certifications their organizations have received since October 2020 and/or were planning to receive by September 2023. As of October 2020, over half (61 percent) of respondents had received the Service Enterprise certification and almost two-fifths (39 percent) received none. Half of survey respondents (50 percent) noted their organization might receive a Service Enterprise certification by September 2023.

**EXHIBIT B.9.—Certifications organizations received as of October 2020 and/or planned to receive by September 2023**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

**Massachusetts Service Alliance’s Outcomes**

Broadly, Massachusetts Service Alliance shared how one of the greatest successes they have seen from the VGF grant is the pipeline it established for nonprofit organizations into national service membership and continued civic engagement—as both member and program recruitment. Over time Massachusetts Service Alliance staff shared they had seen organizations begin with VGF funds through Massachusetts Service Alliance subgrants of Service Enterprise and then progress on to larger state or AmeriCorps programs. In the context of Massachusetts, Massachusetts Service Alliance staff noted organizations start with participation in VGF training or services and then move on to become a Commonwealth Corps or Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) site, ultimately potentially even moving on to host an AmeriCorps program themselves. In support of this, Massachusetts Service Alliance noted within the project reports submitted by grantees, organizations indicate if they are interested in participating in any other programs. Using this information, Massachusetts Service Alliance can support the pipeline to flag interested organizations and connect them to the correct individuals.

Specific to the pandemic, in the FY2021 progress report, Massachusetts Service Alliance described how, due to the transition to virtual trainings, they were able to engage new individuals and organizations who would previously not been able to join in-person trainings. For example, Massachusetts Service Alliance more than doubled their target participation count in volunteer management, serving 496 individuals compared to their target of 200 individuals. Staff noted this increase was due to the inclusion of those who participated in live webinars as well as those who viewed recorded sessions.

**Program Beneficiaries’ Outcomes**

Mini-grant subgrantees shared positive sentiments with the Massachusetts Service Alliance staff about the training and/or capacity building they received. Many participating organizations noted they appreciated the flexibility of the program, especially as COVID-19 continued to impact initial plans for funds. Comments that exemplified these sentiments include:

*Mass Service Alliance was absolutely the best. They are an untouchable resource for the volunteer community in Massachusetts.*

*[Massachusetts Service Alliance] is always willing to field questions, provide networking opportunities, and offer an exceptional statewide event for networking and professional development.*

Broadly, participating organizations valued the opportunities to engage in discussion and collaboration with other organizations, especially among Service Enterprise participants. A staff member of one of the participating organizations described that even though they had been a professional volunteer manager for several years, it was helpful that their cohort group had individuals with a wide range of skills and expertise.

They also noted that with this wide range, Massachusetts Service Alliance successfully “balanced it really well, helping people who were really starting in this role and getting that understanding and then people who had a lot more experience.”

Service Enterprise participants also expressed significant gratitude and appreciation for the Massachusetts Service Alliance staff and the Service Enterprise program as it helped them to think about volunteer management, recruitment, and retention from a systems perspective, which made it less intimidating and more feasible. The following comments typify the sentiments of the participating organizations:

*Helping think about the systemic ways in which we can make those changes. That was really helpful, because it is a tad intimidating to do it on that scale! So, getting those sorts of resources, like everything from looking at that big picture to thinking about, “Okay, what does that mean for what our staff handbook needs to include?” ... It’s really helpful to look at it on both those levels. Because otherwise I can’t imagine we would be able to undertake this process. And in fact, our organization has not previously been able to tackle this challenge without this process.*

*The value of this program is really high. Not only the training is very good, like I mentioned. I feel like it’s one of the best training processes I’ve been through because I’ve been to a lot of these. Massachusetts Service Alliance administers it very well. And they’re such great resources, I think the way that they’re helping us to connect to one another, and I think the more resources we can throw at them for this sort of work, the better! So, if that’s part of the feedback that’s going up the chain, yes. More! Give us more Massachusetts Service Alliance!*

*We absolutely valued the tremendous amount of information provided as part of the [Service Enterprise] process and have implemented many strategies from the training sessions. The [Service Enterprise] has also provided us with a roadmap for further and future improvements as part of the certification process that has improved our volunteer program substantially.*

Subgrantees also highlighted a particularly useful strategy, skills-based recruitment, which they were able to apply from training.

**Skills-based recruitment.** Several of the participating organizations that participated in Service Enterprise noted it provided the opportunity to be more selective in their volunteer recruitment and focus on the key skills or supports their organization needed. As a part of the skills-based recruitment, organizations emphasized that they were able to look at how they recruited volunteers, the types of questions asked in interviews, or volunteers’ availability. The following comments highlight the successes skills-based recruitment provided to organizations:

*It sort of gave us permission to ... recruit people as a job, that it’s a skill-based job. And without that training, I never would’ve thought that was possible or had the confidence to do it.*

*It’s okay to have a high bar for your volunteers and you don’t have to take everyone who says they want to do it—and that was just reaffirming. We can be particular because we have a specific volunteer profile, and that’s okay. So that was affirming.*

Organizations described two main areas for additional training and support. Challenges and needs identified by site visit participants included:

**Increased support and resources on data tracking.** Multiple participants expressed frustration tracking and managing volunteer data, noting that they would like additional resources or support on how to manage and track volunteer data, and to streamline the data collected.

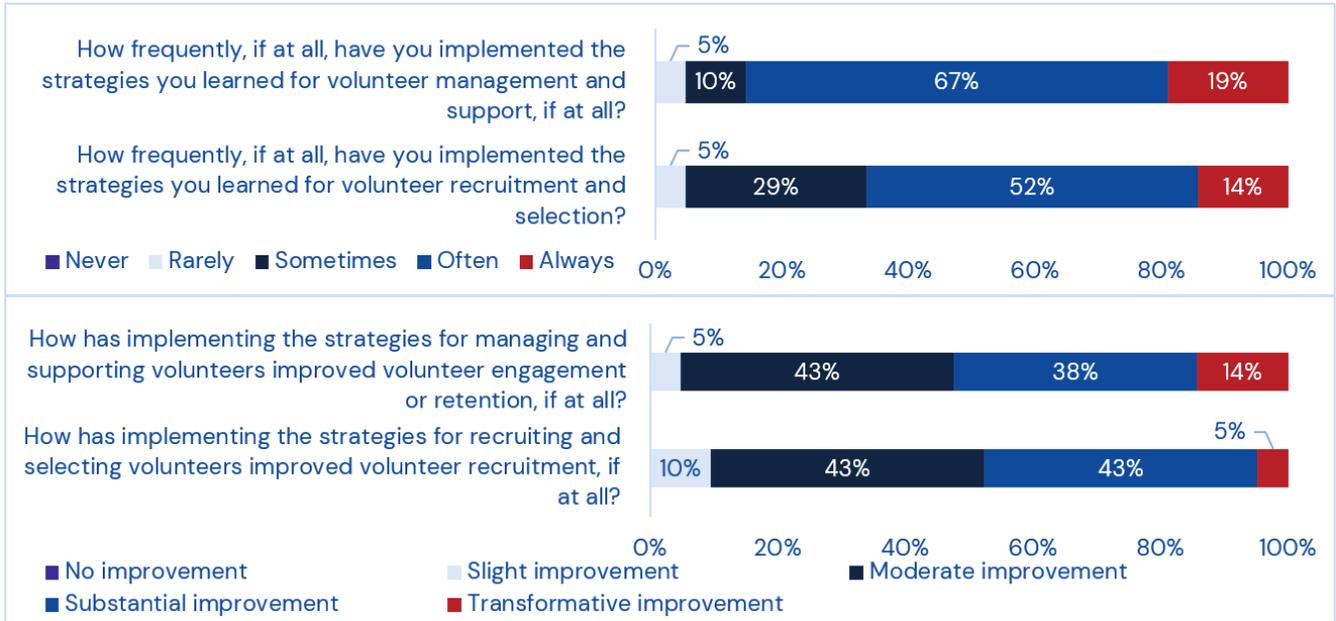
*It's challenging to figure out the nonduplicated volunteers, the new volunteers, the young volunteers. And again, I would just echo what everyone has said, which is if it's necessary for the funder ... and so to the extent that that can match up with getting us information that's valuable to us and information that's valuable to Massachusetts Service Alliance and to the funder, that's really helpful. And if it isn't necessary, unburdening that allows us to have time for more appreciation or evaluation, and just other forms of engagement.*

Additionally, one organization noted specifically for Massachusetts Service Alliance as a mini-grant they report on new volunteers, but the organization described the metric as “frustrating and unhelpful” as it was not useful to develop a tracking tool for one specific metric only one funder requests. The organization member said, “If there was a better or different way to report it, or an opportunity for us to give feedback on that, that would be great.”

**Discussions on diversifying volunteers in Service Enterprise.** Some of the participating organizations from Service Enterprise shared that they would have liked more opportunities to discuss diversifying their organization’s volunteer base. One participating organization noted that “there was a clear desire from Massachusetts Service Alliance about thinking about [diversifying volunteers], but there wasn’t a lot of time dedicated to discussion,” which would have been helpful.

Overwhelmingly, the majority (95 percent) of survey respondents shared that they *Often* or *Always* implement the strategies they learned for volunteer management and support. Additionally, 66 percent of respondents noted they implemented volunteer recruitment and selection strategies *Often* or *Always*, as seen in exhibit B.10. Regarding the outcomes of implementation, approximately half of respondents noted that the implementation of the strategies led to a substantial or transformative improvement in volunteer management and support (52 percent) and volunteer recruitment (48 percent).

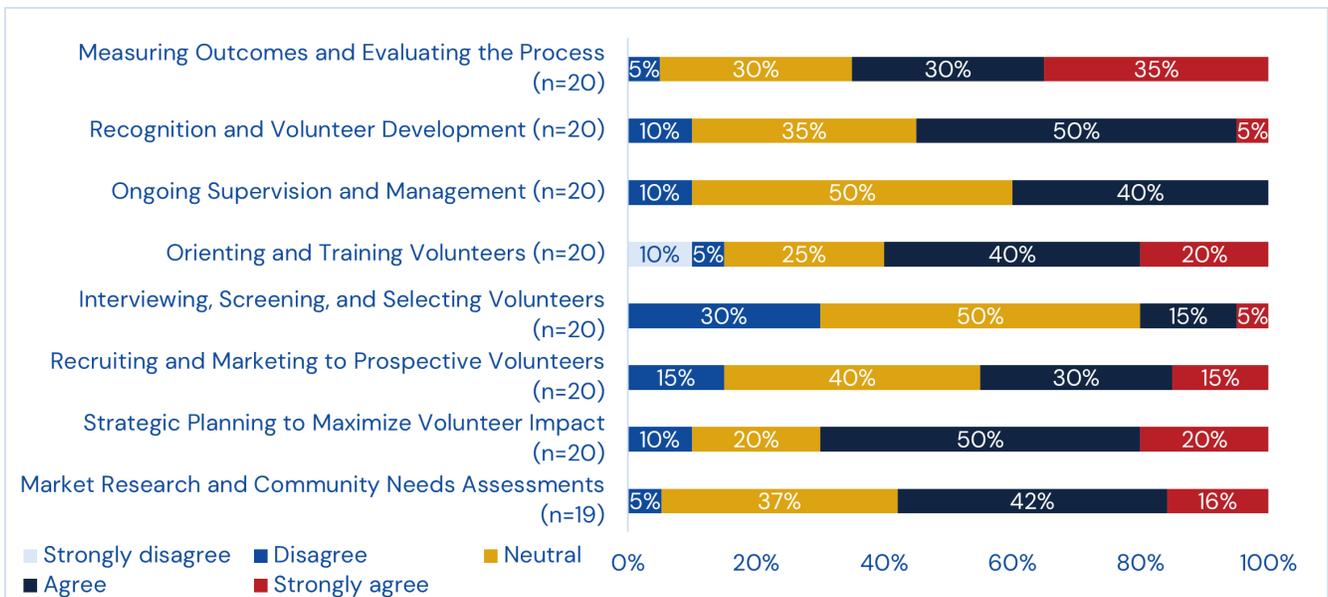
**EXHIBIT B.10.—Frequency of implementation & improvement in recruitment, engagement, and retention (n=21)**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

Survey respondents were also asked to share their agreement regarding their and/or their organization’s need for additional training or support on various topics, as seen in exhibit B.11. The topics with the highest agreement on need were Strategic Planning to Maximize Volunteer Impact (70 percent), Measuring Outcomes and Evaluating the Process (65 percent), and Orienting and Training Volunteers (60 percent). Alternatively, the topics in which respondents noted the lowest needs were Interviewing, Screening, and Selecting Volunteers (20 percent) and Ongoing Supervision and Management (40 percent).

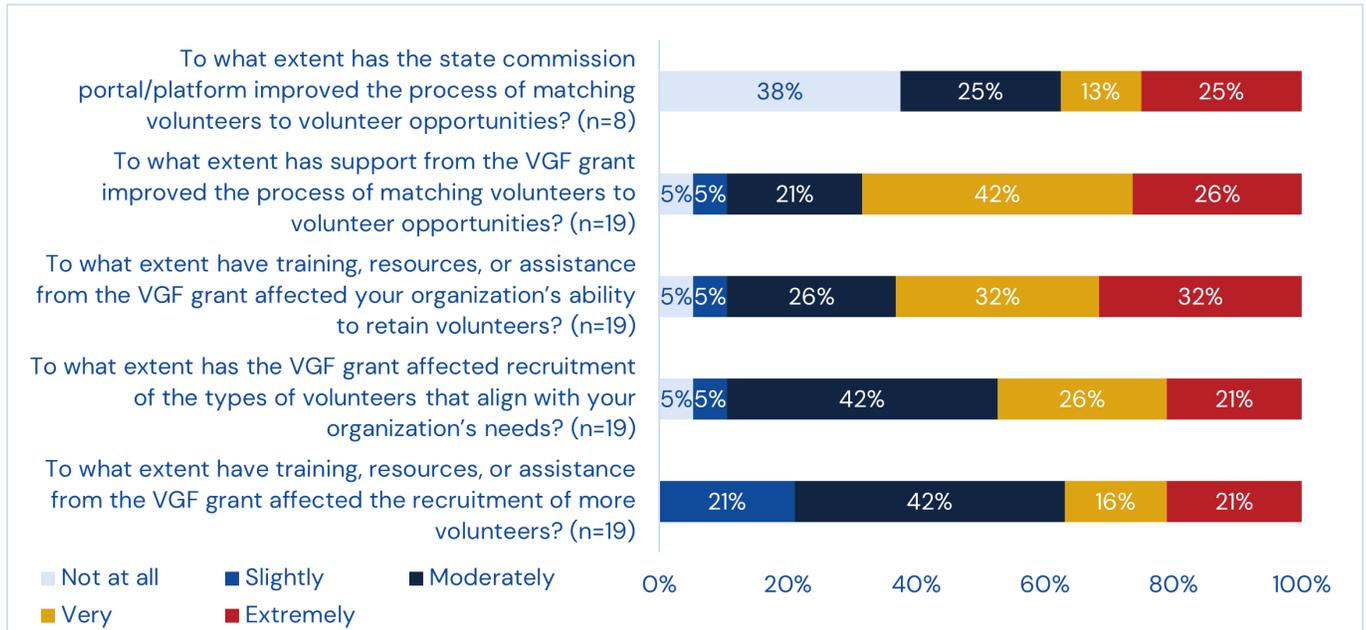
**EXHIBIT B.11.—Agreement with organizational need for additional training by topic**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

Lastly, survey respondents shared their perspectives on the effect of the VGF grant on various volunteer outcomes, presented in exhibit B.12. As reported by survey respondents, the outcomes with the largest effect were improving the process of matching volunteers to volunteer opportunities and recruiting the types of volunteers that aligned with organizational needs (68 percent and 64 percent, respectively).

**EXHIBIT B.12.—Effect of VGF grant on volunteer outcomes**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

## Conclusion

Overall, through Massachusetts Service Alliance’s key initiatives, Service Enterprise training, mini-grants (COVID-19 and Youth Development), and regional trainings/conferences, Massachusetts Service Alliance was able to successfully support organizations’ volunteer management, recruitment, and retention across the state. While the COVID-19 pandemic impacted Massachusetts Service Alliance’s and volunteer organization’s services, organizations were able to pivot to continue to provide training and volunteers amidst the pandemic. When faced with challenges around recruiting organizations for Service Enterprise training, Massachusetts Service Alliance identified that their new COVID-19 mini-grant could reach new nonprofit organizations across the state that they previously had been unlikely to serve. Training and services provided to nonprofit organizations emphasized intentionality in volunteer recruitment and recognition, supporting positive outcomes for participants. While Service Enterprise participants largely appreciated and valued their experiences, several voiced the desire for more collaboration opportunities with other organizations and increased emphasis of DEI within the curriculum. Massachusetts Service Alliance was already aware of this request and was working with ALIVE to identify ways to update the curriculum, as well as finding methods to incorporate diversity and inclusion through coaching or supplemental regional/state trainings provided by Massachusetts Service Alliance.

## Minnesota Volunteer Generation Fund Case Study

The Minnesota state service commission, the Minnesota Commission on National and Community Service (ServeMN) with partner Minnesota Alliance for Volunteer Advancement (MAVA), participated in the AmeriCorps Volunteer Generation Fund (VGF) evaluation through several different phases, including focus groups/interviews with commission staff, program implementers, program beneficiaries; and a program beneficiaries survey.<sup>28,29</sup> In addition to the evaluation data collection activities noted, the following case study brief incorporates additional data sources from VGF grant applications and progress reports and longitudinal data from the AmeriCorps Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement. Exhibit B.13 provides an overview of each of the data sources that were used to inform the following brief.

**EXHIBIT B.13.—Overview of data sources**

Data Source	Participant Count	Date Collected
Grant Application	–	May 2020
Fiscal Year (FY)2020, FY2021, and FY2022 Volunteer Generation Fund Progress Reports	–	December 2020, and 2021, November 2022
AmeriCorps Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplements	–	September 2017, 2019, and 2021
Project Director Focus Group – MAVA	2	February 2022
Project Director Focus Group – ServeMN	1	February 2022
Program Implementer Focus Group – ServeMN and MAVA	5	September 2022
Beneficiary Focus Group – Volunteer Connector Grant Recipients	3	September 2022
Beneficiary Focus Group – Training Recipients	4	September 2022
Volunteer Focus Group	3	September 2022
Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey	78	January 2022
Final Commission Focus Group – MAVA	1	May 2023
Volunteer Impact Leadership Training (VILT) Overview	–	March 2022

<sup>28</sup> The VGF grantee, ServeMN, partnered with MAVA who served as the primary program implementer for VGF programming and services.

<sup>29</sup> For the Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey, the state service commission had a 9 percent response rate with a total of 78 individual respondents representing 63 unique organizations. Across survey participants, there was substantial variation in reported average number of volunteers; 8 percent reported fewer than 10 volunteers; 8 percent reported 10–20 volunteers; 10 percent reported 21–30 volunteers; 13 percent reported 31–50 volunteers; 25 percent reported 51–100 volunteers; and 38 percent reported 100 or more volunteers.

## Overview of Grant Structure and Goals

ServeMN is a nonprofit commission (not housed within the governor’s office or a government entity). The Minnesota Alliance for Volunteer Advancement (MAVA) is a key VGF program partner and Service Enterprise Hub. To this end, ServeMN is primarily the funding entity/organization while MAVA is the primary implementer of VGF-related training and activities. They began working together in 2014 to integrate Service Enterprise into services and have been partners since. As a ServeMN representative said:

*[T]he way that we [ServeMN] administer VGF is to partner with a solid partner like MAVA who has the capabilities to really amplify that great work to deliver a multitude of trainings ... that’s where the skill set lies. [We are] more [focused on] compliance and working on the NSSC [National Science and Service Collaborative] and budgets. [We] don’t get to do as much fun stuff, but [we] do get to hear all about it and celebrate it!*

### A Note on Program Beneficiaries

In the context of this case study, “program beneficiaries” include volunteer organizations and volunteer connector organizations that took part in MAVA’s initiatives, including the Volunteer Impact Leadership Training series, Service Enterprise program, connector innovation grants, topic-specific and tiered trainings, and conferences.

ServeMN is working with MAVA to continue to expand Service Enterprise to Minnesota organizations. Their grant application notes the use of new virtual Service Enterprise modules to expand to rural areas of Minnesota. As their application notes, “[In] the coming year, 200 organizations will be trained; increasing their capacity to recruit, connect and retain 40,000 volunteers who will contribute 500,000 service hours. Combining community and skills-based volunteer efforts, this project will result in an estimated value of over \$14 million.”

ServeMN’s VGF grant application identifies three primary interventions to support volunteer management training and capacity building:

1. **Tiered training.** In this grant cycle, MAVA has developed a set of tiered trainings to make volunteer capacity training more accessible to more people. Both those new to the field “and experienced volunteer engagement professionals” can participate in the Volunteer Impact Leadership Training (VILT) series, which provides a basic foundation of volunteer management practices. This training is targeted to individual volunteer managers and is intended, in part, to be portable and usable for individuals even if they may move to other organizations. Whole organizations, by contrast, can participate in Service Enterprise training, a popular model across multiple states. This training series is much more intense and involves much deeper and lengthier participation from whole organizations, the goal of which is organization change management, as opposed to individual upskilling for staff members. Additionally, between these two trainings, MAVA has developed a series of “pipeline” trainings meant to bridge the gap in needs—for example, for organizations that have trained staff but are currently unwilling or unable to commit to Service Enterprise.
2. **Topic-based training and annual conferences.** MAVA’s staff works with volunteers serving on its Professional Development Committee to create individual topic-based trainings based on data from their annual membership survey and feedback on new developments members see emerging in the field. This includes topics such as engaging volunteers with disabilities. MAVA also has an annual conference attended by 300 volunteer engagement professionals—often reporting it as the only

professional conference they attend each year. In 2020, MAVA added an additional annual conference focused on issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion to its calendar; this virtual conference provides learning and networking opportunities aimed at dismantling inequity in volunteerism.

3. **Connector innovation grants.** ServeMN and MAVA award 2–3 grants to volunteer connector organizations across greater Minnesota to “[e]nable connectors to work with community organizations to increase numbers of volunteers connected in their communities, and implement new methods to recruit volunteers for solving critical problems.”

MAVA describes the target for VILT training as “... people new to providing leadership to volunteers and those who have been in the field for many years and wish to increase their knowledge,” though most participants are typically those new to the field or to the role of managing volunteers generally. VILT training consists of eight modules:

- Capturing Volunteer Motivation and Conducting Effective Interviews
- Designing Volunteer Positions
- Managing Risk
- Recruiting Volunteers
- Supervising Volunteers
- Positioning Your Volunteer Program for Success
- Singing Your Praises ... Measuring Your Impact
- Recognizing and Retaining Volunteers

Following the completion of all eight modules, participants receive a Certificate in Volunteer Impact Leadership from MAVA.

“Pipeline” trainings, or those for groups between VILT and Service Enterprise, are wide ranging in topics. Many topics are developed by MAVA’s Professional Development committee, a group made up of participants responsible for bringing up needs they hear from their peers. These trainings have included:

- Cutting Edge Strategies: Engaging Volunteers in the New Year – A 2 hour workshop in January 2023 about how to make programs innovative and become more adaptable
- Now What? – A similar workshop based on survey feedback based on new research and recommendations from post-pandemic volunteerism
- Interrupting Racism in Mostly White Communities
- No One Right Way – About trending away from commonly understood best practices in volunteerism if they may promote white supremacy
- Gaining staff buy-in for engaging volunteers
- Engaging volunteers in skills-based and higher responsibility roles

Finally, MAVA heavily and individually recruits Service Enterprise organizational participants as well as setting up information sessions and sharing application information on their website. Many organizations are recruited from the previous VILT trainings and topical trainings; messaging to these organizations is focused on “taking the next step” with their volunteer engagement. “The organizations that do well with [Service Enterprise] are those that have a fairly strong volunteer engagement component and we tend to know a lot of those organizations already because of our work with them ...” one MAVA member said. “We wouldn’t want somebody that just has a new volunteer coordinator or is just starting a program.” This broad recruitment is

followed by a vetting process, which ensures organizations are ready for the financial and time commitment from their teams as the training, coaching and certification process lasts an entire year. Vetting also ensures organizations that participate already have a fairly strong volunteer engagement component, with readiness and buy-in from leadership and volunteer coordinators having a good deal of experience.

Service Enterprise cohorts typically consist of 3–6 organizations. Each organization receives a diagnostic evaluation conducted by MAVVA to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses, followed by 16 total hours of training and 10 hours of individualized coaching focused on developing an action plan for organizational change and improvement aimed at demonstrating that the organization has met the criteria to be considered a Service Enterprise organization.

MAVA's target number of organizations to serve annually through training and conferences is 200, though they usually exceed that goal. In 2022 they served 366 organizations and in 2023, halfway through their grant year, they had served 194. Beyond just measuring how many organizations they serve, MAVVA also has a goal of administering more significant data collection with 160 organizations annually to measure if capacity has been built; 108 have been surveyed so far, a number they generally push up by requiring VILT training participants to take pre- and post-tests in order to receive their certificate.

Many types of organizations participate in MAVVA trainings:

- Multiservice organization
- Mentorship organizations
- Girl Scouts of the USA staff
- Healthcare organizations
- Basic needs organizations addressing food insecurity, homelessness, housing, and transportation
- Museums and fine arts organizations
- VISTA members
- Governmental groups such as libraries, cities, county park systems, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
- Veteran service organizations

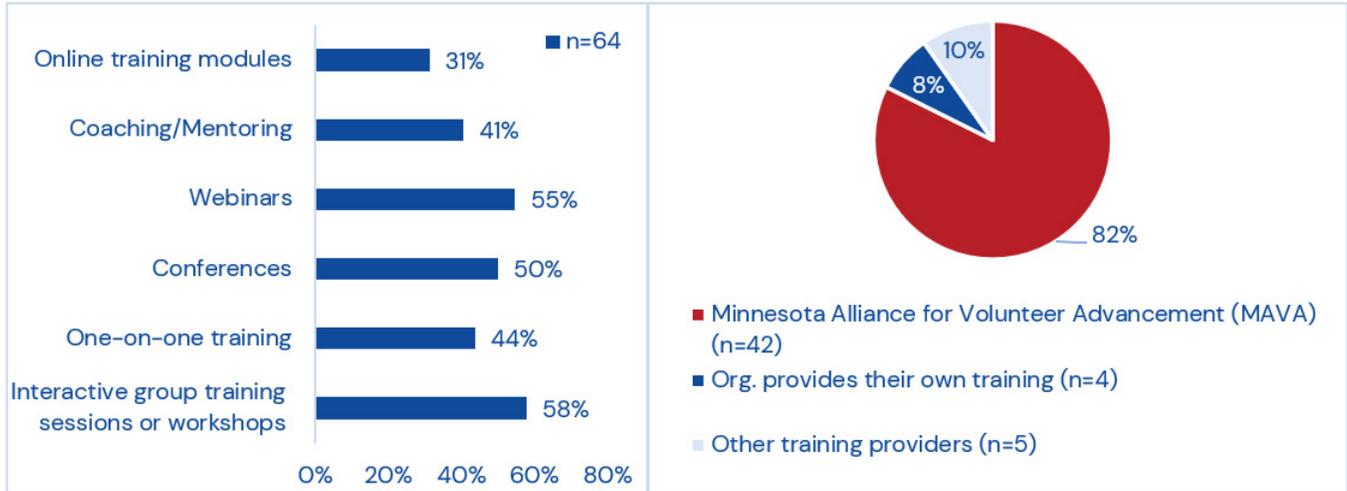
Additionally, MAVVA has seen an increase in training participants from people outside of Minnesota during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. One MAVVA staff member said:

*One of the things that we've seen since the pandemic is that because we have services available virtually anywhere, maybe from 15 to 20 percent of the folks at a lot of trainings are from beyond Minnesota. ... [Additionally], we have a lot of AmeriCorps members that come to our training. For some reason, we have fans in Wyoming and Montana [in particular], so we're seeing a lot of their AmeriCorps members show up in our VILT training or our entry-level trainings.*

In terms of levels of participation, beneficiaries reported a variety of activities and trainings in which they had taken part. Most reported participating in the VILT training as well as regional one-off trainings, webinars, and multiday conferences. Some attended MAVVA trainings as often as once a month. A few also reported participating in Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) and white allies affinity groups and professional development networking sessions. Multiple also were Service Enterprise-certified or in the process of achieving certification.

Based on the survey data from training participants, the most frequently reported volunteer training and capacity building activities were interactive group training sessions or workshops, webinars, and coaching/mentoring, with the majority (82 percent) of reported training provided by MAVA. Exhibit B.14 provides additional details on the types of activities respondents noted were available to their organization through VGF grant activities.

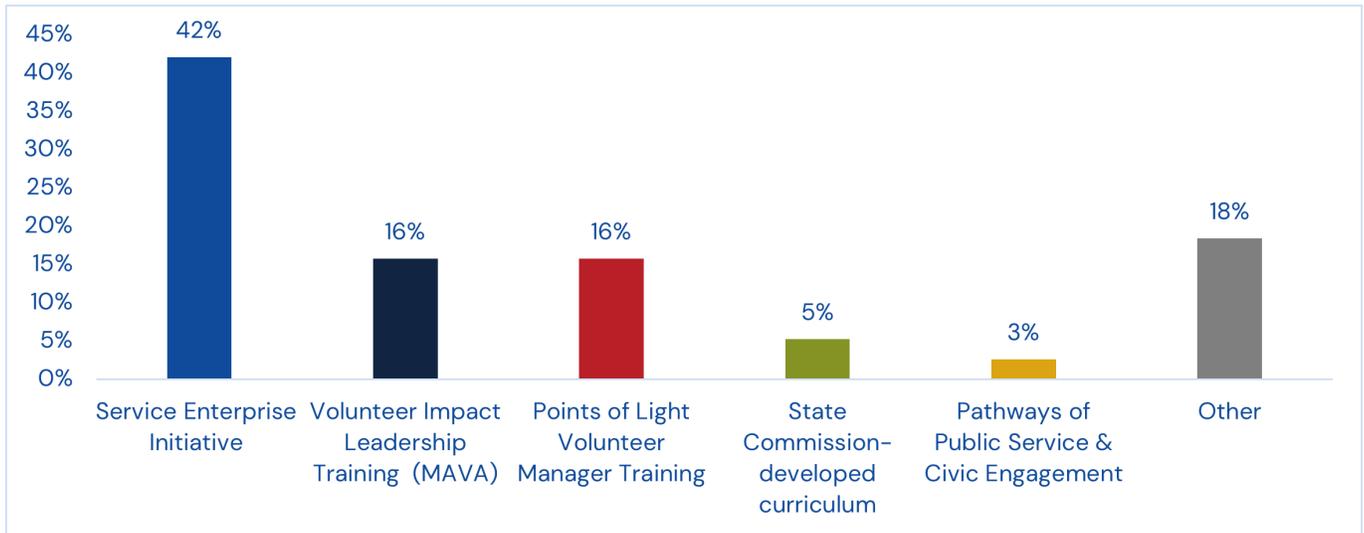
**EXHIBIT B.14.—Volunteer training and capacity building activities and providers**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey administered in January 2023.

In January 2023, MAVA training participants participated in a Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey. As seen in exhibit B.15, three-quarters (75 percent) of the survey respondents reported they participated in training that utilized the Service Enterprise curriculum and 18 percent reported participating in a training that used the Points of Light Volunteer Manager Training. A few participants also reported they participated in other training curriculums, noting miscellaneous professional development offerings and Volunteer Management Training series recorded sessions.

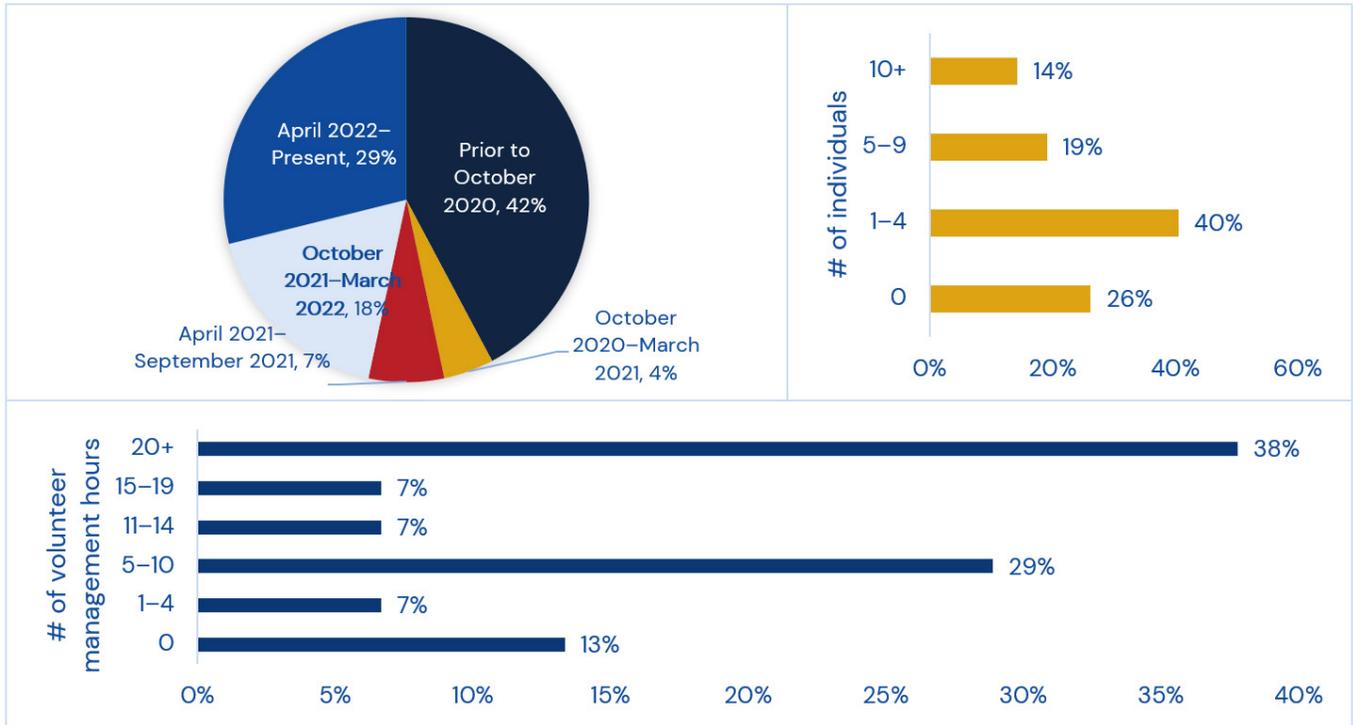
**EXHIBIT B.15.—Types of curriculum used (n=38)**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey administered in January 2023.

The time in which survey respondents reported first participating in a MAVA training varied; 42 percent of respondents noted their organization first participated prior to October 2020, while 29 percent noted they did not first participate until more recently (April 2022–Present). Since October 2020, the plurality (40 percent) of survey respondents noted that 1–4 individuals from their organization participated in a training or capacity building activity through VGF and 26 percent noted no individuals participated. Over a third (37 percent) of respondents participated in 20 or more volunteer management hours. Exhibit B.16 provides an overview of the time frame in which participating organizations reported they first participated in training and the range of individuals who participated.

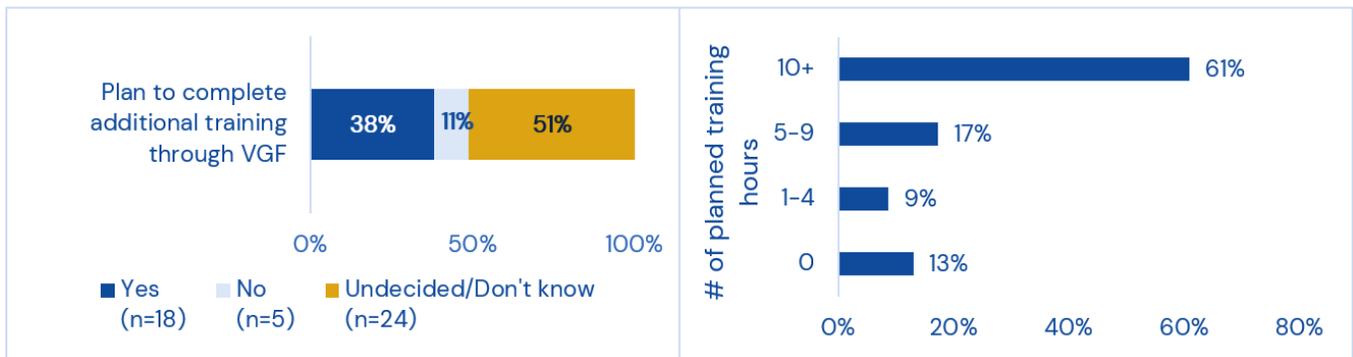
**EXHIBIT B.16.—Organization’s participation time frame, range, and number of hours (n=45)**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey administered in January 2023.

As grant programming continued following the data collection, survey participants were also asked to report on the organization’s plans for additional training. Exhibit B.17 displays the percentage of participants who reported they intended to complete additional training through VGF-funded activities, with 38 percent noting *Yes* and 51 percent noting they were *Undecided*. The majority of survey respondents indicated they planned to complete 10 or more hours (61 percent).

**EXHIBIT B.17.—Organizational plans for additional training and planned hours**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey administered in January 2023.

### Recent Volunteerism Trends in Minnesota and Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic

According to the 2021 AmeriCorps Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement, more than 1.5 million residents volunteered through an organization, contributing \$3.5 billion in economic value. In 2021, 35.5 percent of residents formally volunteered through an organization. This was

12.3 percentage points higher than the national rate of 23.2 percent, but also 4.6 percentage points lower than Minnesota’s pre-pandemic rate of 40.1 percent in 2019, and 9.6 percentage points lower than its 2017 rate of 45.5 percent.

Both program implementers and beneficiaries noticed large shifts in approach after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to its 2020 program implementation update report to AmeriCorps, MAVA cited responding to COVID-19 as its primary focus during this first grant year. MAVA employees reported a number of changes in how and to whom training was offered, including a comprehensive shift to web-based programming using platforms such as Zoom. Over 100 people registered for a webinar early in the pandemic entitled Options for Keeping Volunteers Engaged and Reconnecting with Volunteers. Recognizing this large interest, MAVA undertook field research to understand how the pandemic had been altering volunteer patterns, including conducting a survey of leaders in Minnesota and beyond about volunteer options and any reduced levels of volunteering.

MAVA noticed a shift in training participation once they transitioned to virtual offerings. The absolute number of trainings conducted increased in a virtual environment, while the sizes of groups attending training sessions tended to decrease and less interaction occurred across different organizations—though MAVA reported many organizations who remained within small groups found benefits, such as more personalized support and closer peer relationships. The format of Service Enterprise training shifted away from one 2-day long training, and became seven 2-hour long sessions, and breakout rooms became integrated in the structure of trainings to increase participation. MAVA reported cofacilitating some training through partner organizations in the past but lost some of those connections upon moving training online. Since the pandemic began, 15–20 percent of organizations who participated in training were located outside Minnesota. Many participants in Service Enterprise also had trouble completing their certification process due to large amounts of internal staff turnover and burnout.

MAVA reported that they helped to reframe training participants’ understanding about the importance of volunteer management at the height of the pandemic. Many organizations at the time, such as food pantries and homeless shelters, noticed volunteerism levels decreasing at the same time as their need for volunteers was increasing. During a Service Enterprise training session, organization representatives noted there was little use for Service Enterprise when they had so few volunteers. However, the MAVA training facilitator “[w]as really thoughtful about how ‘this is actually the perfect time, because you NEED to innovate’” and consider more creative ways to keep their organizations functional with the challenges presented to them.

Program beneficiaries reported multiple ways that MAVA offered support during the pandemic within their VGF grant programs. Volunteer managers recalled MAVA organizing several online networking sessions early on during the pandemic where volunteer organizations could share COVID-19 practices and policies. This included collaborating on how to shift volunteer activities online, how to create and run Zoom rooms, identifying affordable online platforms for volunteering, and what to bring back as in-person and what to leave when restrictions were lifted. One volunteer manager recalled a particular appreciation for larger organizations in their networking group providing the language for their policies regarding COVID-19 rules for volunteers and staff. “Since our organization is so small, there were parts we had to pull up from other people. We don’t have a staff person who was able to specifically look into [how to word COVID-19 safety] policies ... being able to adapt somebody else’s was a huge saver of time and money and resources.”

Another volunteer manager who attended a VILT session on risk management, which before the pandemic would touch on topics such as how to ensure safety while using power tools, noted its content shifting toward how to figure out best practices and accessibility in volunteering during the pandemic.

### Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Overall, both program implementers and program beneficiaries reported a strong and comprehensive effort on MAVAs part to implement diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives in their capacity building activities.

MAVA reported an effort on their part to expand DEI efforts over the past 5 years, beginning in earnest in 2017. At the time of interview, this included recruiting a DEI lead, who reported working on an initiative to recruit BIPOC-led organizations into MAVAs capacity building activities. Other specific focuses included creating and updating a series of standalone trainings under the VGF umbrella; this included Interrupting Racism in Mostly White Communities, a refined version of their earlier Racism 101 training. Beyond these specific efforts mentioned, MAVA reported continuous efforts to include diverse perspectives in their work, with one member describing their strategy as “[not] a DEI lens, it’s DEI Lasix. It’s not something you can take off and put on.” Staff lay down vocabulary about diversity early on for participants in VILT training, and expand out from there. A recent focus for MAVA has also been on how to integrate DEI topics in communities in greater Minnesota who may not see these topics as an issue.

Program beneficiaries reported a wide variety of strategies they learned from MAVA-led programs. Training topics included Diversity in Mostly White Areas, the “hustle and grind” culture of white supremacy, simplifying language, and pronoun usage. One beneficiary rethought their interview process after participating in a MAVA training, including adjusting background checks to eliminate mandatory submission of Social Security numbers as well as simplifying language to support those with a less complex command of English. Another participant reported making several changes, including rewriting volunteer descriptions to a sixth-grade reading level, helping develop descriptions for screen readers, changing language from asking for “preferred” pronouns to just pronouns, updating their database to include pronouns, and retooling positions to see if some might be able to waive background checks.

### Strategies Used and/or Learned

Representatives from MAVA shared what they viewed as the four main needs of organizations:

**Recruitment levels.** Volunteerism is still rebounding from low levels during the pandemic.

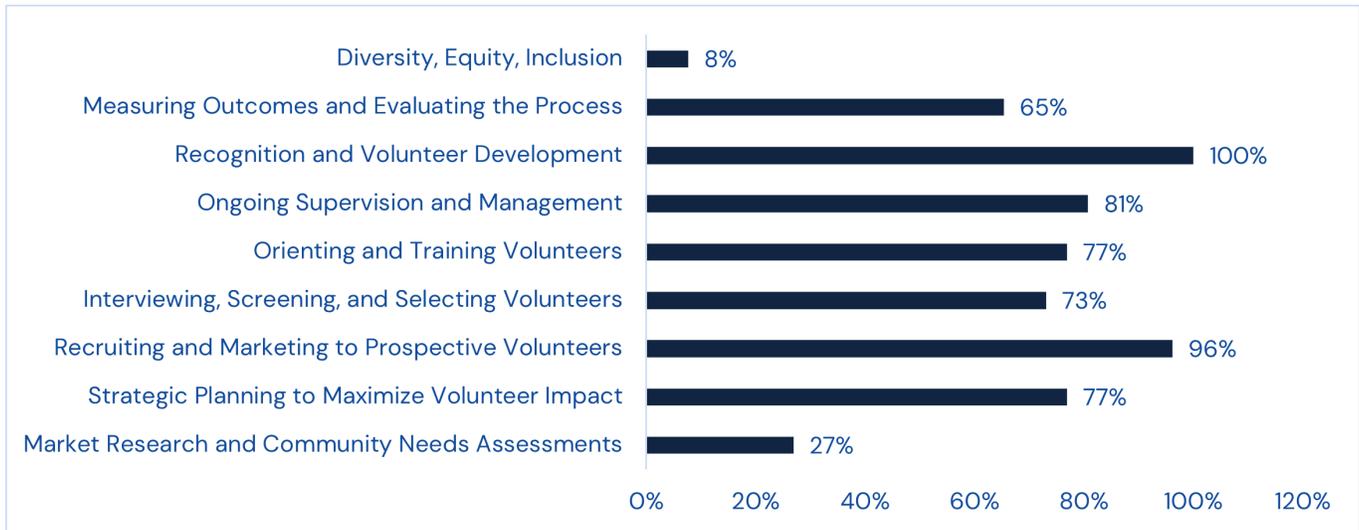
**Assistance with online volunteering.** Many organizations tried to shift volunteering activities online, but many were still struggling to do so.

**Recruiting volunteers who reflect the communities they serve.** Many organizations’ volunteer populations were not made up of those they served with their efforts.

**Generational shifts.** More elderly people shifted away from volunteering due to risks from the pandemic and their need in other areas, such as childcare.

To address these needs, MAVA worked to build the capacity of organizations through the use of a variety of strategies. Across survey respondents, there was a wide variation in the types of practices respondents noted receiving training on through the VGF grant. The most frequently reported training practices included recognition and volunteer development (26 percent) and recruiting and marketing to prospective volunteers (25 percent). Exhibit B.18 provides additional details on the types of practices survey respondents reported learning about in VGF-sponsored trainings.

**EXHIBIT B.18.—Volunteer management practices learned about in trainings (n=26)**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

Volunteer organizations who participated in the site visit also shared strategies they learned about through trainings to increase recruitment and retention.

**Volunteer recognition.** Many participants recalled learning about the value of recognizing volunteers’ efforts to increase retention. Methods of doing so included implementing explicit awards valuing volunteers in events and on social media and demonstrating how much money or time volunteers saved staff. Participants also learned to ask volunteers how they individually liked to be recognized. One participant said, “I thought MAVA was really good at laying out the different motivations people might have [for volunteering] and how you can have conversations around that with them, as well as a variety of appreciation strategies to fit budget, position, and motivation.”

**Volunteer position descriptions.** Participants learned how to create position descriptions for volunteer roles to facilitate recruitment. These position descriptions would demonstrate the value for volunteers even though they don’t receive compensation and guide interested volunteers to specific roles.

*Our team is currently redoing all of our position descriptions. We had gotten rid of a few positions, so just using the example position descriptions that we were provided as part of that training. And it was great because [MAVA] had examples of what not to do. Having those to reference was very helpful. [MAVA] also explained how you want potential volunteers to see what they stand to benefit. Even though it’s not a salary or pay, what do they get from this position? I think that specifically was really useful for our team as we were trying to think about why would people want volunteer with [our organization], and we put that in our new position description.*

**Skills-based volunteers.** Service Enterprise in particular has a focus on recruiting volunteers with specific skillsets, which participants cited learning more about through these trainings.

**Regular communication.** One participant recalled learning the value of regular communication with their volunteer population as a method to increase retention:

*I learned through one of the webinars that it's okay to reach out to volunteers and be like, "Hey, we're still here!" Even if there isn't an ask of volunteers in that message, it's a "Let's keep this relationship going." That's probably been the best recruitment and retention strategy.*

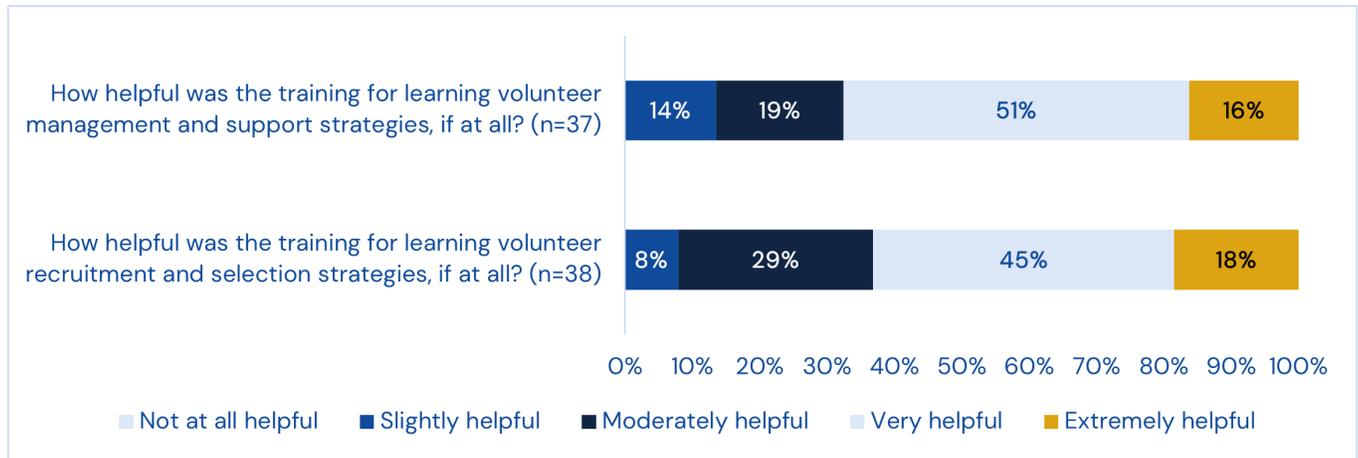
**Diversifying communication methods.** One participant found value in getting recruitment and other volunteerism information out to the public through a variety of methods, including online as well as in-person events such as attending recruitment fairs and setting up booths at restaurants.

**Recruiting multiple generations.** Participants described learning different methods to recruit Generation Z-aged volunteers as opposed to ones to recruit Millennial volunteers.

**Public policy.** MAVA provided strategies to help organizations participate in the political process to elevate volunteerism within their local communities.

Across survey participants, over four-fifths noted that the training for learning volunteer management and support strategies (67 percent), and recruitment and selection strategies (63 percent) were *Very helpful* or *Extremely helpful*, as seen in exhibit B.19.

**EXHIBIT B.19.—Reported helpfulness of training**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

## Collecting and Tracking Data

Historically, ServeMN has conducted site visits and risks assessments, but has not engaged in that this year because they do not see VGF as a “high risk” program that requires additional supervision. Their VGF program officer is interested in doing a wider observation/evaluation at least once in a 3-year grant cycle.

Within their own work, MAVVA noted a number of data points they collect. Firstly, MAVVA administers a survey every year of its 700-plus members, requesting their training and general needs. For their VILT program participants, MAVVA collects a data survey asking about participants’ organizations, including information about their volunteer numbers and hours—all of which MAVVA sends to AmeriCorps. MAVVA also collects a matching pre- and post-test for VILT trainings, where participants rate themselves using a 1–5 scale on 19 different practices of volunteer engagement. For the Service Enterprise program, participating organizations complete an assessment that mirrors the same pre- and post-test survey but is focused on organizational level practices. Finally, for their conference and for their one-off trainings, participants complete a post-test survey, which asks them to name 1–2 ideas, practices, and/or strategies learned that they plan to implement in their work with volunteers.

Program beneficiaries reported a variety of types of data they collect from volunteers. Some beneficiaries collected relatively little data, such as one participant describing their data collection as a “work in progress” and another collecting hours worked from volunteers but little else, for now. Others collect much more data. One participant identified their organization as “a data-heavy group traditionally,” collecting volunteer hours, turnover levels, numbers of *pro bono* volunteers, and more. Another participant collected which trainings and background checks volunteers have collected. A third did not track hours, noting that this sometimes frustrated volunteers, but did collect years of service, numbers of volunteers, and overall satisfaction.

## Volunteer Platform

While MAVVA does not support a central volunteer network or platform, two volunteer connectors it supports through its Volunteer Connector grant do. For one United Way organization interviewed, the main goal of their grant from MAVVA was to build usership for their existing volunteer portal, Hands-On Connect. Launched during the COVID-19 pandemic, this United Way’s adoption of this portal was in direct response to many agencies near them reporting a drop off in volunteer numbers, parallel to those same agencies suddenly lacking capacity to find more volunteers themselves, due to the stresses of the pandemic. Now, this United Way recruits, performs background checks on, and sends volunteers to organizations, taking this effort off their shoulders entirely. The only way the United Way can devote this much staff time to this project is due to the money from their Volunteer Connector grant.

## Volunteer Perspective

Three volunteers of a food bank that had received MAVVA training and capacity building services shared their perspective as volunteers. All three had been involved with this organization for at least 2 years at the time of interview. All had become involved with the organization through word-of-mouth or seeing how innovative the organization was at delivering services. When asked for what they looked for generally in a volunteer opportunity and why they had remained working with this organization, participants identified efficiency, visible impact, and ease of volunteering as aspects they appreciated. Another highlighted how staff members remember volunteers’ names, and that their task—food packing—was very easy cognitively, so they could turn off their brain after a workday and do something good for the world. Another volunteer is a healthcare consultant during their day job and found that they could leverage skills from their paid career in certain tasks for the organization.

Volunteers reported receiving simple training and very little onboarding overall. Volunteers generally work 2-hour shifts, with one volunteer doing one shift per week, one doing more sporadic volunteering with their company, and the healthcare consultant doing weekly *pro bono* work for the organization in addition to some random packing shifts.

Volunteers found staff to be very receptive to any feedback provided. Interview participants found their volunteer work to be very social as they met other volunteers and got to know staff members. The food bank also scheduled networking opportunities for volunteers. Beyond this networking, no other professional or emotional support was provided, but the organization did acknowledge difficulty in participation during the pandemic.

Volunteers felt very appreciated in their roles. Volunteers reported the organization to be very intentional in sharing how their work could not be done without volunteers. After each packing shift, volunteers were informed of their direct impact, including the boxes of food they had packed or the number of meals they had helped ship out. Organization staff sent personalized emails to volunteers thanking them for their service, and displayed trackers on screens within their packing center showing how many employees volunteers had replaced over the past year.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, for a period, the organization did not accept volunteers, and numbers dropped significantly overall. The three volunteers interviewed did continue volunteering and described themselves as part of an increasingly critical group of committed, long-term volunteers, which helped the organization through especially tough times.

In terms of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), volunteers described what they considered as a good level of diversity of staff members, and some diversity among volunteers, including a variety in age and ability. One volunteer did note that most volunteers were white, but added that non-white volunteers may face additional economic pressures due to income inequality.

Overall, volunteers reported being very satisfied in their experience, and anticipated continuing to volunteer as long as they were able.

### **Volunteer Connector Grant Recipients**

Three program beneficiaries who were interviewed were recipients of MAVA's Volunteer Connector grant. All three organizations were local United Way nonprofits and volunteer connectors.

One United Way heard from their organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic that their volunteer organizations needed help with recruitment, so they decided to create a volunteer portal using grant funds. This portal recruits and processes volunteers for their partner nonprofits to use immediately and train in whatever role is needed. This portal may not continue to operate after the grant is complete.

Another United Way is using the grant to build out the usership of their existing volunteer portal. They heard from their community that there was a lack of volunteer coordinators available for their use; therefore, the United Way used grant funds to build out training and webinars to help coordinators use their connector more effectively.

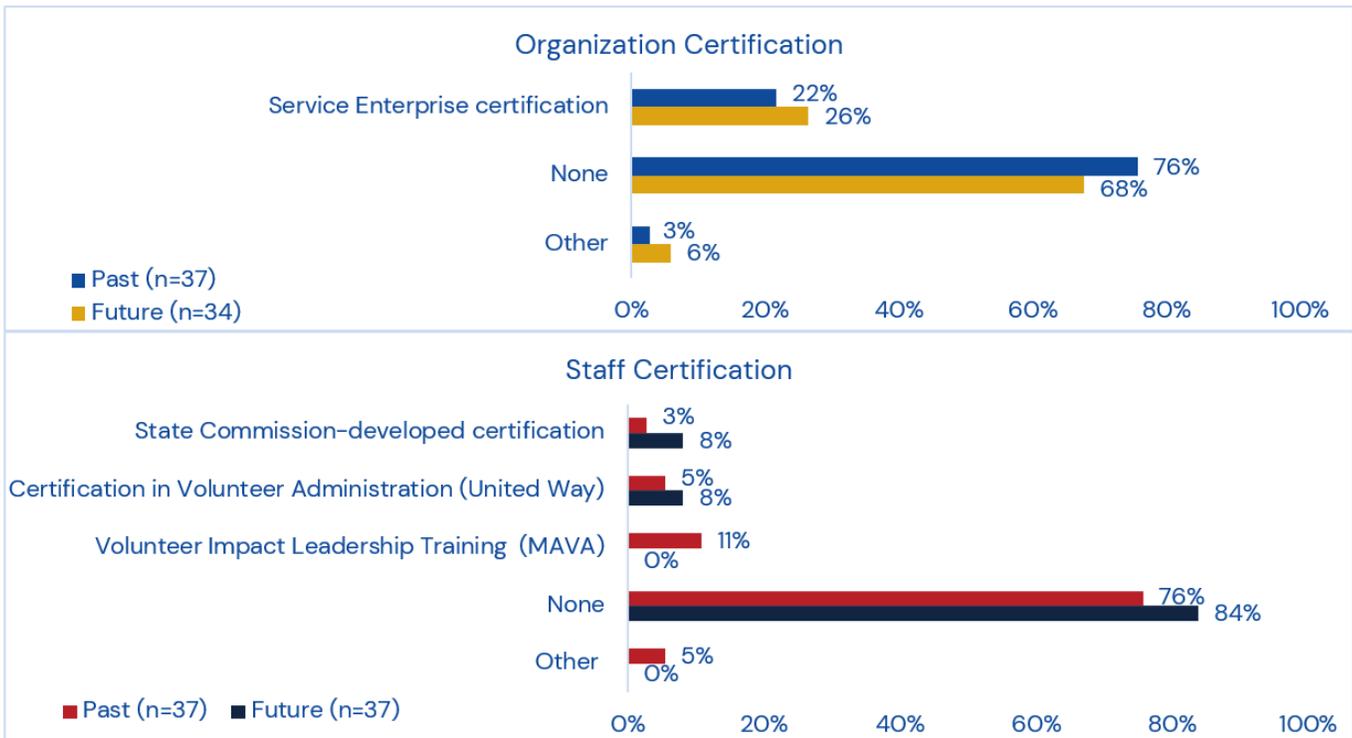
The third United Way used their grant to expand from covering just one Minnesota county to covering three, and to identify more volunteer recruitment methods.

## Outcomes

### MAVA’s Outcomes

Overall, both MAVA and training recipients reported high satisfaction with the training and capacity building provided through the VGF grant program. As seen in exhibit B.20, survey respondents indicated the certifications their organizations had received since October 2020 and/or were planning to receive by September 2023. As of October 2020, slightly under one-quarter (22 percent) of respondents had received the Service Enterprise certification and more than three-quarters (76 percent) received none. Another one-quarter (26 percent) noted their organization might receive a Service Enterprise certification by September 2023.

**EXHIBIT B.20.—Certifications organizations and staff received as of October 2020 and/or planned to receive by September 2023**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

MAVA cited a number of **key successes** achieved through the use of their VGF grant:

**Online transition.** MAVA has been broadly successful in transitioning services to an online environment during the pandemic and, as COVID-19 restrictions have lifted, staff members are evaluating what elements should remain online and what should return to in person. For example, for an upcoming conference in 2023, MAVA is using a hybrid structure as some participants still want the option to attend virtually. Service Enterprise trainings will likely remain online for a while longer as well, and may not transition back to an entirely in-person structure in the future; for example, some cohorts may remain online and some in-person. A ServeMN staffer celebrated MAVA’s great success in pivoting rapidly to meet organizational needs online during the pandemic:

*We've all survived a national disaster. [The Federal Emergency Management Agency] declared COVID a national disaster at one point, and we are all disaster survivors. Being able to come out of that situation successfully—I feel like that's a huge triumph.*

**Creation of training event coordinator position.** As a result of the most recent grant cycle, MAVA established a position that coordinates trainings and other meetings, offloading logistical work traditionally given to training facilitators:

*We were able to use VGF funds to create my position. Originally, I was a part-time, 15-hour a week, contracted employee. And luckily, we moved some things around and my original supervisor left, so we recrafted some positions. The one thing I think my position has allowed MAVA to flourish in is that I take a lot of the minute, little things off people's plates. A year and half ago, [training facilitators] would not only have to think of the bigger picture and what trainings are we doing next, [but they] also would have to set up all the meetings, and then make sure that they're properly run on the Zoom, and then follow up with participants afterwards. Now that we have that extra capacity, I get to take a lot of that off of people's plates.*

**Paying attention to members.** MAVA stayed active and responsive to their members' needs, continuing to conduct their annual member survey each year and using findings to determine trainings needed in the immediate future. This evaluation was stepped up even further in response to the onset of the pandemic—for example, MAVA created two COVID toolkits very early in the crisis to help organizations transition into the new, virtual environment.

**Diversity, equity, and inclusion.** MAVA has been a leader in the volunteer management sector in approaching DEI strategies, including encouraging DEI efforts in areas with different levels of openness to these conversations. MAVA has developed robust affinity groups for BIPOC professionals as well as for white allies. Upwards of 25–30 percent of these affinity groups are made up of out-of-state participants who are unable to find equivalents within their state. As one MAVA staff member said:

*MAVA's niche in the field of volunteer engagement training [is] that we focus on DEI. Since 2020, so many organizations have woken up to the fact that they were woefully unable to respond to understanding that our systems are based on white supremacy and are affecting so many community members. We've done a lot of work to incorporate DEI. I think*

## Removing Barriers to Access

MAVA shared a success story for how one of their beneficiaries expanded access to their trainings:

*"I spoke with someone from Duluth who came in person to our June hybrid volunteer engagement conference. It's hard to put on a hybrid conference. And as staff, we were so enmeshed in the running of it, that it was hard to experience people's reactions. But I was speaking with this [Duluth participant] afterwards, and he said he was blown away. He was so excited. And the thing I'll never forget, he's like, 'I knew I wanted to shake things up at my organization and look at how to make it easier to volunteer with us.' He said he had this training curriculum onboarding for volunteers, and he cut it from 2 hours down to 1 hour because he knew that [additional] hour could be a barrier for people. I think it was super exciting to hear that example from someone that he had a lot of thoughts about how to shake it up and how to be a disrupter and innovator."*

*MAVA has been sensitive, thoughtful about approaching people from all over Minnesota about DEI and knowing that all of that is contextual within communities, and I think we've moved the conversation along in our field, which is really exciting. I'd call that a success.*

MAVA also cited **two major challenges** they have been experiencing in their grant.

**Reduced participant numbers.** The number of participants in trainings is down overall. This may have to do with organizational budget concerns, as all trainings require a fee to participate, and with staffing issues, as almost all Service Enterprise-certified organizations have had major staff changes over the past year. Service Enterprise is a long commitment from organizations and staff turnover makes it difficult to convince organizations to initially acquire Service Enterprise certifications, or to recertify their organizations every 3 years.

**Burnt out participants.** The participants who do show up to trainings are stretched thin and burnt out and are therefore often not able to participate in training to a high degree. According to one representative from MAVA:

*When we look at lower numbers that might be coming to a training, we start thinking, "Is it us, is it them? Are we not giving people what they need? Or are people burned out and not able to spend the money." They can't add one more thing to their calendar. That's why we try to have those conversations with people about how they're doing. Even the things that we offer that are no cost that are more open spaces for networking, we're seeing some smaller numbers there.*

### **Program Beneficiaries' Outcomes**

Program beneficiaries were asked to share outcomes achieved as a result of trainings and capacity building activities they participated in through ServeMN and MAVA. Key outcomes are as follows:

**Volunteer manager confidence.** Volunteer managers felt equipped to become leaders within their wider organizations and to advocate for using volunteers. One manager didn't know until beginning in their position that volunteer management is a profession, and they appreciated MAVA's efforts to support that profession.

**Leader in their county.** As a result of training, a United Way described themselves as becoming the go-to organization within their county for recruiting volunteers.

**Organizational inclusion.** Another United Way expanded the types of organizations to which they send volunteers.

**Making tasks virtual.** Participants used new techniques to do virtual volunteering and maintain volunteer efforts within their organizations.

**Public policy changes.** One organization used strategies learned from MAVA to advocate successfully for the mileage reimbursement rate being increased statewide to the current corporate rate, financially supporting volunteers.

**Creating networks.** MAVA facilitates networks of volunteer managers that allow staff who are often the only people in their organizations that work with volunteers to get ideas and stay relevant in the field.

### **Challenges**

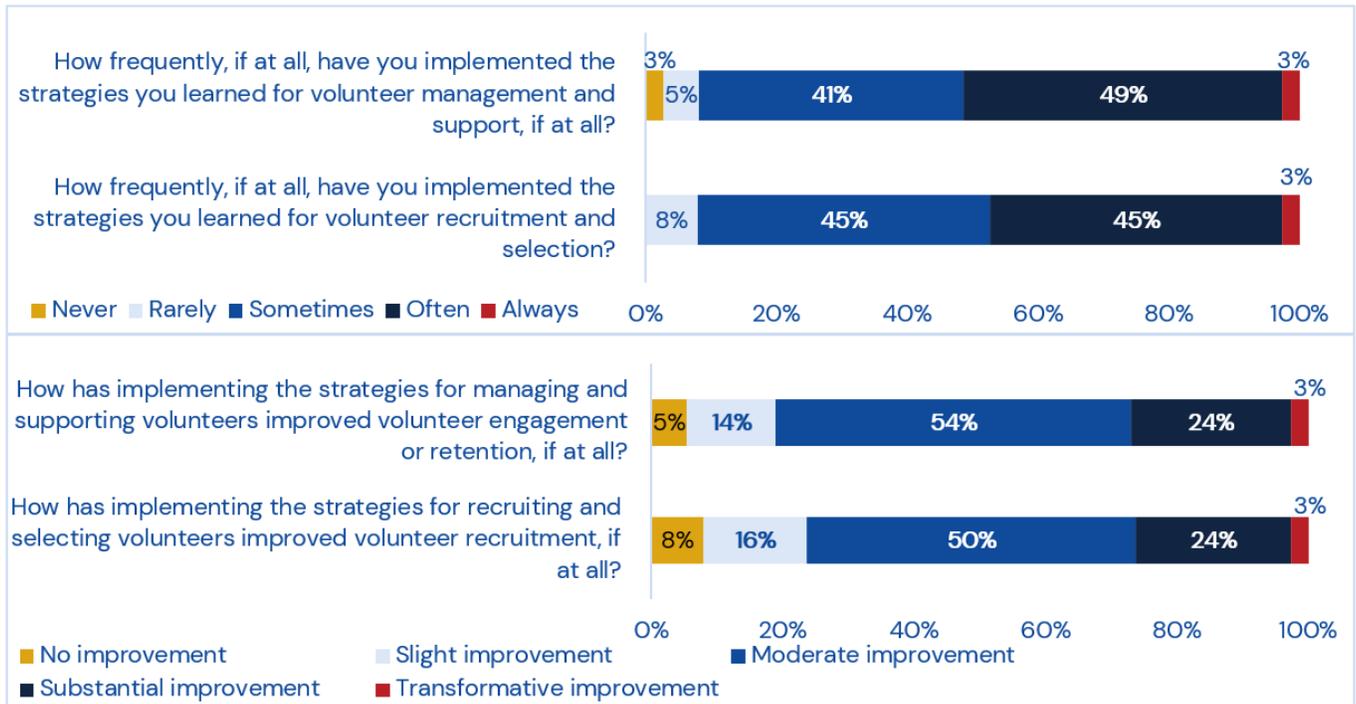
Program beneficiaries also cited challenges they experienced through their trainings and/or their ongoing needs:

**More specific affinity groups.** An organization cited a lack of fellow large organizations in their cohort.

**Continued technical assistance.** Organizations still wanted help updating their websites as well as collecting data efficiently and inexpensively.

The majority (53 percent) of survey respondents shared that they *Often* or *Always* implement the strategies they learned for volunteer management and support. Additionally, 48 percent of respondents noted they implemented volunteer recruitment and selection strategies *Often* or *Always*, as seen in exhibit B.21. Regarding the outcomes of implementation, the majority of respondents noted that the implementation of the strategies led to moderate, substantial, or transformative improvement in volunteer management and support (81 percent) and volunteer recruitment (77 percent).

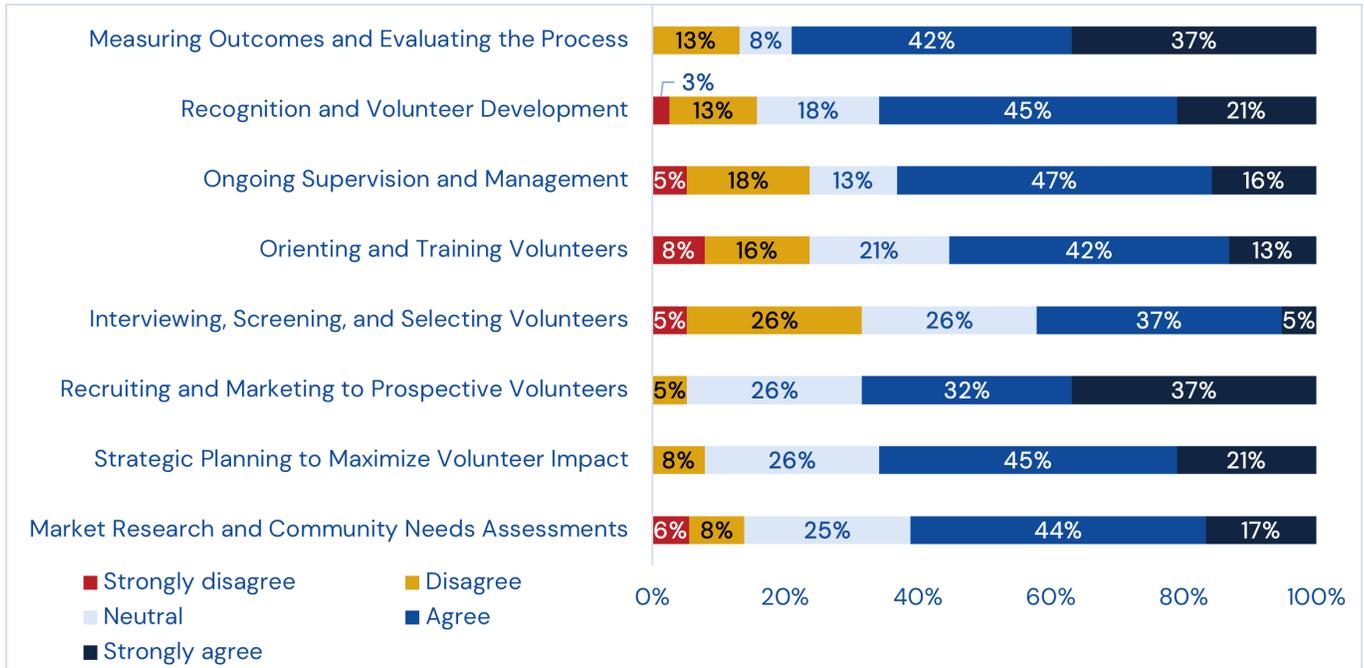
**EXHIBIT B.21.—Frequency of implementation & improvement in recruitment, engagement, and retention (n=38)**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

Survey respondents were also asked to share their agreement regarding their and/or their organization’s need for additional training or support on various topics, as seen in exhibit B.22. The topics with the highest agreement on need were measuring outcomes and evaluating the process (79 percent) and recruiting and marketing to prospective volunteers (69 percent). The topics with the lowest agreement were orienting and training volunteers (55 percent) and interviewing, training, and screening volunteers (42 percent).

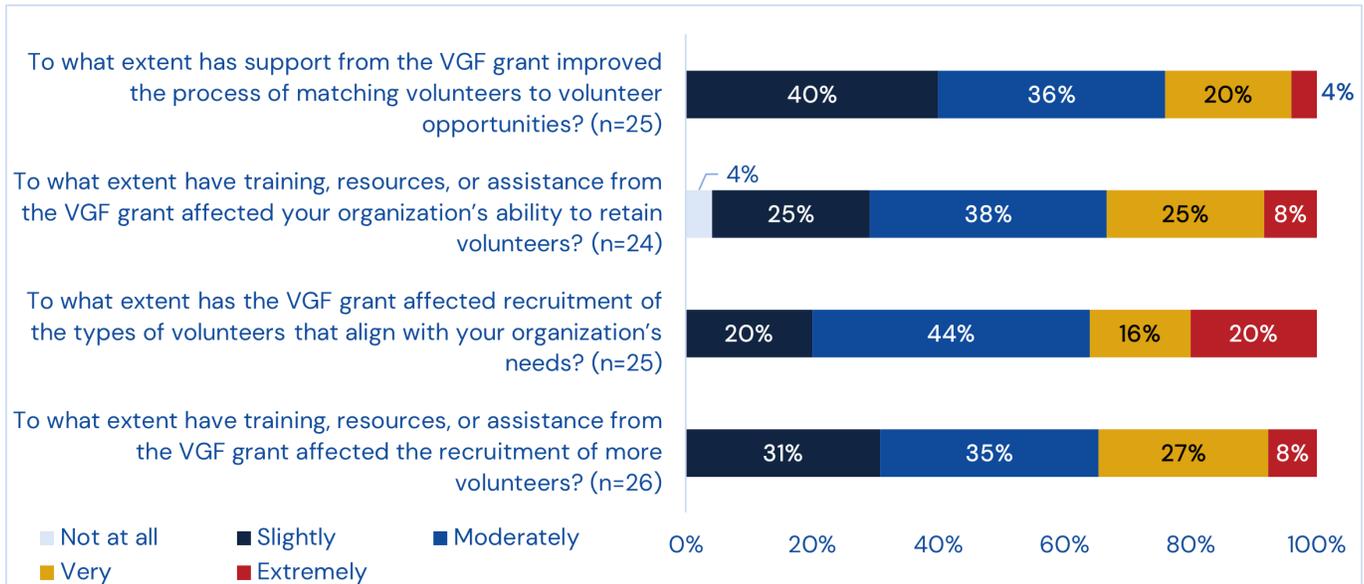
**EXHIBIT B.22.—Agreement with organizational need for additional training by topic (n=38)**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

Lastly, survey respondents shared their perspectives on the effect of VGF grants on various volunteer outcomes, presented in exhibit B.23. Respondents perceived that VGF-sponsored activities had the greatest effects on their organization’s ability to recruit volunteers who align with the organization’s needs.

**EXHIBIT B.23.—Effect of VGF grant on volunteer outcomes**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

## Conclusion

Overall, ServeMN and MAVVA have continued to provide highly praised and effective volunteer capacity building to organizations within their state and beyond. As is the case across sectors, MAVVA has struggled with the lingering effects of the pandemic, including low participation levels within their VILT and Service Enterprise trainings and burnout among those who do attend. However, MAVVA has found success in delivering capacity building services in spite of these barriers, emerging from the pandemic as leaders within the space—particularly on issues of DEI—and the majority of participants have reported finding training and grants received to be effective at increasing their capacity to recruit and retain volunteers.

## North Carolina Volunteer Generation Fund Case Study

The North Carolina state service commission, the Commission on Volunteerism & Community Service (VolunteerNC) participated in the AmeriCorps Volunteer Generation Fund (VGF) evaluation through several phases, an interview with commission staff and a site visit with program implementers and beneficiaries.<sup>30</sup> In addition to the evaluation data collection activities noted, the following case study brief incorporates additional data sources from VGF grant applications and progress reports and longitudinal data from the AmeriCorps Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement. Exhibit B.24 provides an overview of each of the data sources that were used to inform the following brief.

### EXHIBIT B.24.—Overview of data sources

Data Source	Participant Count	Date Collected
Grant Application	–	May 2020
Fiscal Year (FY)2021 and FY2022 Volunteer Generation Fund Progress Reports	–	November 2021 and 2022
AmeriCorps Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplements	–	September 2017, 2019, and 2021
Commission Focus Group – VolunteerNC	2	March 2022
Program Implementer Focus Group – VolunteerNC	2	September 2022
Beneficiaries Interview – COVID-19 Response Mini-Grant	1	September 2022
Beneficiaries Interview – Service Enterprise Hub	1	September 2022
Final Commission Interview – VolunteerNC	2	June 2023

### Overview of Grant Structure and Goals

The goal of VolunteerNC’s VGF grant was to implement three initiatives. According to the 2020 VGF grant application, the proposed initiatives included

1. Disaster volunteerism;
2. A Service Enterprise training program; and
3. Initiatives targeted at youth service and corporate partners.

Overall, VolunteerNC noted that the main initiatives outlined in the grant application had remained consistent, but some components had shifted as a result of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. VolunteerNC shared they partnered with various organizations to deliver services based on the expertise of the organizations. A VolunteerNC staff shared:

*Typically, [VolunteerNC] is coordinating the trainings to have someone else do them, since we are not experts in those fields. We will typically lead the trainings around any VGF administration updates, so whether that’s data reporting or how we need them to complete*

<sup>30</sup> The VGF grantee, VolunteerNC, also served as the primary program implementer for VGF programming and services.

*their forms, but the actual subject area trainings we coordinate with others to lead those. That's not something our staff typically leads.*

Across the initiatives, VolunteerNC reported in the grant application they planned in Year 1 for 20 nonprofit organizations to be certified through Service Enterprise and to leverage an additional 10,000 volunteers; 200 other nonprofits would benefit from leadership training; and they would use targeted programs to engage over 500 youth and 20 corporate partners. An overview of the status of each key intervention is included below, as described by the state service commission.

**Disaster volunteerism:** Initially, VolunteerNC intended to fund five different Long-Term Recovery Groups (LTRGs) to serve counties that experienced previous disasters (e.g., hurricanes, tropical storms) through the funding of a volunteer generator position. The volunteer generator position coordinates with the different counties in the LTRGs to meet regularly and discuss ongoing needs within the community, especially those related to disaster recovery. The position also coordinates with volunteers from national, state, and local organizations/groups to support state disaster recovery.

In the first year of VGF, VolunteerNC funded one nonprofit organization to support their volunteer generator position that served three counties for approximately 6-months, covering three LTRGs. VolunteerNC staff noted during the commission interview that they did not fund additional grants and reallocated funding to support other pandemic-related initiatives.

**Service Enterprise training program:** VolunteerNC partnered with the two North Carolina state Service Enterprise Hubs to support Service Enterprise training across North Carolina by subsidizing training costs for two to three cohorts per year. VolunteerNC provides the state Service Enterprise Hubs with subgrants to provide more affordable Service Enterprise training for nonprofits. VolunteerNC shared that subsidizing Service Enterprise training was specifically helpful for small nonprofits in rural areas that would not otherwise be able to participate in the training opportunity.

Since VGF funding, Service Enterprise cohort numbers were not as large as expected, which VolunteerNC staff attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic as fewer organizations were interested in undertaking the training because they were short-staffed and stretched by the pandemic. Additionally, as a result of the pandemic, training transitioned to a virtual format. While previously, trainers from the two state hubs would go to the organizations or have the organizations come to the state hubs to provide the training, in the pandemic that was no longer feasible. VolunteerNC noted the state hubs were planning on transitioning back to in-person.

**COVID-19 Response mini-grants:** Having initially proposed to fund eight to ten mini-grants, ultimately VolunteerNC funded nine organizations focused specifically on COVID-19-related projects. VolunteerNC commission staff shared the types of projects funded through the COVID-19 mini-grant, predominantly around food insecurity and educational needs:

*During COVID we really saw a need for service around food insecurity. So, several of our VGF subgrantees are organizations that help to feed their communities, so, whether that's running a food pantry [or] feeding seniors. We saw that their volunteer base just dropped off*

### A Note on Program Beneficiaries

In the context of this case study, "program beneficiaries" include Long-Term Recovery Groups (LTRGs), volunteer connector organizations, and volunteer organizations that took part in VolunteerNC's initiatives, including disaster volunteerism, Service Enterprise, and pandemic-, youth-, and cooperate-related initiatives.

*drastically, so for a few of the organizations their funding has allowed them to hire a part-time volunteer coordinator or maybe it pays for that volunteer coordinator to be closer to full-time.*

*Besides food insecurity, education was one of the great needs that we saw. So, we have a few programs that either the volunteers were actually recruited to serve in schools and help with COVID-19 testing or actually providing tutoring and [English as a second language] services for students who are falling behind because they're virtual learning. So those are the two biggest areas that we saw for these COVID-19 subgrants—food delivery/food pantries and education.*

Additionally, VGF funding allowed mini-grantees to expand their volunteer recruitment and services to additional counties; where previously they were just serving maybe one county, mini-grantees could now serve multiple counties.

**Youth Service and Corporate Engagement:** While the pandemic shifted the initial plan of supporting youth engagement initiatives, VolunteerNC provided subgrant funding to four different organizations supporting youth volunteerism. Initially, VGF funding was proposed to provide scholarships in support of youth programs but pivoted to using funding to help recruit and expand youth community volunteering. Subgrantees included the following:

- An organization that is providing community emergency response training to high school students and to community colleges.
- An organization that provides volunteer expos to connect youth volunteers with organizations.
- An organization that recruits high school students to mentor younger students.

### **Recent Volunteerism Trends in North Carolina and Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic**

According to the 2021 AmeriCorps Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement, over one-fifth (23 percent) of North Carolina residents formally volunteered through organizations, on par with the national rate (23 percent) of individuals who formally volunteered. Additionally, one-quarter (25 percent) of residents reported belonging to an organization. Longitudinally, in North Carolina, there has been a decline in formal volunteering rates since 2017, with formal volunteering at 35 percent in 2017, 30 percent in 2019, and 23 percent in 2021. The most substantial drop occurred following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is consistent with national trends. In the state, formal volunteering contributed 139.5 million hours of service, worth an estimated \$3.9 billion. VolunteerNC described in their 2021 progress report that many of their subgrantees and programs were struggling to get volunteers back after COVID-19. Alternatively, informal volunteering declined in 2019 and remained low in 2021. Informally, almost half (48 percent) of residents noted they helped others by exchanging favors with their neighbors, compared to previous informal volunteering rates of 54 percent in 2017 and 49 percent in 2019.

Participating VolunteerNC staff described that overall volunteer recruitment and retention appeared to be the largest challenges organizations were facing during and following the pandemic, especially as

organizations worked to re-engage volunteers. As reflected in the Civic Engagement and Volunteering Survey data, VolunteerNC staff noted volunteerism had not appeared to bounce back as quickly as hoped, as organizations struggled to bring in and bring back volunteers. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, VolunteerNC altered some initiatives and training formats, as previously noted. However, VolunteerNC staff shared they believed the pandemic helped them kick off their lunch-and-learn training series:

*Since they are lunch-and-learns and an hour long, we would probably have had them virtual regardless. But honestly, I think it was COVID that helped us to kick this series off. We saw a need that was even greater during COVID and so bringing nonprofits together twice a month to get these trainings and to learn, I think, was honestly one of the reasons we started the series.*

Additionally, VolunteerNC provided training focused on volunteerism during the pandemic, including sessions on (1) pivoting to virtual volunteerism and (2) recruiting and retaining volunteers during the pandemic.

One participant described how one of the state's Service Enterprise Hubs used the pandemic as a new marketing strategy to highlight how the training could support emerging challenges organizations may have been facing amidst the pandemic. For example, were organizations prepared to utilize remote volunteers? What existing volunteer positions could be effectively conducted virtually? The state hub described how they marketed to organizations that had "gone through this stress test of COVID" and were now poised to identify creative ideas for volunteers, especially for remote volunteering. The Service Enterprise training would provide an avenue for organizations to sit down and truly form a plan for how to innovate.

Additionally, in the 2021 progress report, commission staff shared they were able to identify how programs across the state were adapting to the pandemic, to continue to grow volunteerism while prioritizing volunteer safety.

### **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**

VolunteerNC described providing a few trainings on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) topics, including training focused on preparedness resources for individuals with disabilities, training on diversifying volunteer programs, and training on culturally competent services for immigrant populations. A COVID-19

### **Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) in Service Enterprise**

A participating North Carolina state Service Enterprise Hub shared the extent to which DEI was incorporated into the curriculum and trainings:

*"Points of Lights realizes that's one of the things that hasn't really been incorporated because when they developed it, [it] was not on the forefront as it is right now. [The state hub] put in our own pieces, just making sure when [we're] advertising for volunteers, are you also including volunteers that maybe don't have transportation or who have other limitations that you just don't necessarily think of? Go back through those opportunities and see could someone who needs to catch a bus to your organization—do they have a way to volunteer? Again, that's a great opportunity to do something remotely, but then that assumes they might need a laptop. So, we kind of put our own little pieces in there as we can, but I do know Points of Light is aware of that and they are going to be adding some kind of component; I just don't know what it's going to look like. I don't think it's going to be an add-on for training. I think it's going to be something sprinkled in throughout the training."*

response mini-grantee recipient noted they participated in some trainings during which they learned about recruiting diverse volunteers, however they would like more opportunities to discuss diversity and inclusion in volunteer recruitment since it was an area in which they and their organization struggled.

As part of Service Enterprise, VolunteerNC noted they were not sure if any of the Service Enterprise training activities included a focus on DEI topics. The participating state Service Enterprise Hub described that at the time of the site visit, the hub was integrating aspects of DEI into the training; however, it was not incorporated into the existing curriculum.

### Strategies Used and/or Learned

As part of the VGF grant program, VolunteerNC provided training for all VGF subgrantees. While initially planning to provide specific training according to the subgrant type, as noted in the grant application, VolunteerNC ultimately provided a series of trainings—a lunch-and-learn series roughly twice a month—open to all nonprofits across the state, including subgrantees.

Trainings were offered virtually and recorded to ensure participants were able to obtain the material even if they were not able to attend in real time. Trainings covered topics such as helpful strategies for disaster and crisis preparedness, program valuation for “dummies,” fundraising, and tips to help improve board participation.

Participating COVID-19 mini-grant recipients noted that during the lunch-and-learn trainings they attended, everything may not have been relevant for their specific organization, but they were always able to find at least one strategy or component to apply to their context.

*I was able to learn from everything and take bits and pieces that I wanted, which [was] why I went to all the lunch-and-learns. ... Some of them, I'd be like, "Oh, this is not really what we do," but there's always something that you could get from everything. So, I just tried to grab as much as I could.*

The following were described by participants as strategies they learned about through their participation in the lunch-and-learn series.

**Volunteer appreciation.** Participating mini-grant recipients explained that they received training on volunteer appreciation, which one grantee noted was “how [they’ve] been able to retain so many volunteers”—through the use of virtual (e.g., emails or hand-written letters during the pandemic) or in-person recognition services.

*I learned a lot about how to frame everyone's accomplishment, so everyone feels a part of that accomplishment, but then they also strive to do better.*

**Volunteer orientation.** Participating mini-grant recipients also described learning about volunteer orientations and how to do a better job of orienting volunteers to the organization and volunteer process.

**Nonprofit management.** Participating VolunteerNC staff noted providing several trainings focused on nonprofit management, including training on how to build a better board, contracts and legislation, fundraising, and Philanthropy 101.

### Collecting and Tracking Data

VolunteerNC collects a variety of data from the various subgrantees. As stated in the commission's 2021 progress report, a Google form was used to collect data from VGF subrecipients. In addition to quarterly check-ins, subgrantees also provide a midyear and end-of-year report to the commission. Within the

biannual reports, subgrantees report on the number of volunteers engaged, hours served, and homes repaired through a Google form. Additionally, there is an open field for subgrantees to include any additional data they collect; however no additional data is required by VolunteerNC. Additionally, VolunteerNC collects data following each training through a post-training survey.

As part of Service Enterprise, VolunteerNC received aggregate data at the end of the cohort on how many organizations reported improved capacity. As VolunteerNC was not the organization directly providing Service Enterprise training, they did not collect the regular data associated with Service Enterprise. VolunteerNC did, however, report they could reach out to the hubs if needed to get the collected data. The state hubs that implement Service Enterprise noted they collected a variety of data from participating organizations, which is standard to the program. The participating state hub also noted they internally collect data on organization perception of the training (e.g., Did organizations find it helpful? Were there any next steps they could implement right away? Would you recommend the training to someone else?) The Service Enterprise Hub reported they collect this data to understand what they were doing well to evaluate their training.

Outside of the data collected for Service Enterprise, VGF subgrantees also collect additional data beyond the standard performance measures, as noted in the commission's 2022 progress report, such as pounds of food distributed within the community.

## Outcomes

Overall, grantee recipients who participated in the site visit reported satisfaction with the training and supports provided through the VGF grant program.

### VolunteerNC's Outcomes

Overall, participating VolunteerNC staff noted one of their greatest successes was the ability to provide long-term support to organizations within their community. VolunteerNC staff shared that over the past 3 years, the majority of the subgrantees were the same. Through serving the same organizations over time, VolunteerNC staff said they saw organizations create positive growth within their organizations as they used grant funds to staff positions focused on volunteerism.

According to the post-training surveys, VolunteerNC staff shared they received "excellent feedback" from participants regarding their satisfaction with the trainings. Additionally, as part of the survey, training participants were also able to express other topics of interest in addition to their feedback and perceptions of the provided training. During the program implementer interview, VolunteerNC staff described that they believed their biggest success is the fact that they had kept the same set of subgrantee organizations for 3 years, which had contributed to added capacity, and ultimately greater reach of services:

*We have seen the organizations that we are subgranting funds and what these funds have done for them. Bringing on staff, being able to expand their reach, being able to expand the number of meals that they're serving to seniors. I think it's been pretty incredible to see the number of families and students served. Just the capacity that they've been able to add to their organizations.*

To support increased outcomes, VolunteerNC staff shared that from the administrative side, it would be helpful if AmeriCorps provided more resources specific to VGF, such as training examples, branded resources such as a VGF logo, and an available point of contact at AmeriCorps specific to VGF.

## Program Beneficiaries' Outcomes

As a result of their participation in the COVID-19 mini-grant and participation in the lunch-and-learn series, one grantee noted they were able to reach more individuals within their community, especially with the use of their outreach coordinator:

*We've had the opportunity to reach out to more people since we have an outreach coordinator and that has helped. What we do is we coach our chapters and chapter leaders [to] learn different methods and ways to reach out to volunteers. So, it's definitely been helpful, and it's trickled down through our organization.*

With the state Service Enterprise Hub, the biggest success of the program was attributed to its ability to greatly improve organizational use of volunteers, even with those who believe they were already effectively using volunteers. One participant mentioned organizations were “shocked at how much more they could be doing to maximize the impact of the organization.” This in turn maximizes the impact on the community.

## Conclusion

Overall, through VolunteerNC's key initiatives, Service Enterprise training, COVID-19 mini-grants, LTRGs, and Youth Service and Corporate Engagement subgrants, VolunteerNC was able to successfully support organizations in volunteer management, recruitment, and retention across the state—which VolunteerNC credited with enhanced impact on communities. VolunteerNC training was predominantly offered through the implementation of their lunch-and-learn training series. While the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a shift in VolunteerNC's approach, ultimately, they were able to leverage this challenge to increase the reach of their services and expose new organizations to Service Enterprise. VolunteerNC incorporated DEI topics and training across their initiatives, including DEI sessions within the lunch-and-learn series and a state Service Enterprise Hub's integration of DEI into the training. Even so, participating organizations still noted the need for additional training opportunities focused on recruiting diverse volunteers.

## Indicated Commission Needs from AmeriCorps

VolunteerNC staff suggested that it would be useful for AmeriCorps to provide a resource library for commission staff to reference training examples or models, adding “where if you had a specific question to make it easier for us to be able to find out specific answers a little quicker.” After AmeriCorps updated their website in 2021, VolunteerNC had not been able to find the 2023 VGF specific terms and conditions. A VolunteerNC staff mentioned “two years ago there were VGF specific terms and conditions; to us that's really helpful.” While the staff noted they were aware of AmeriCorps' state and national terms and conditions and many applied to VGF, they were not clear as to which aspects did or did not apply or who to reach out to for clarity.

## Florida Volunteer Generation Fund Case Study

The Florida state service commission, Volunteer Florida, participated in the AmeriCorps Volunteer Generation Fund (VGF) evaluation through several different phases, including focus groups/interviews with commission staff, program implementers, program beneficiaries, and a program beneficiaries survey.<sup>31, 32</sup> In addition to the evaluation data collection activities noted, the following case study brief incorporates additional data sources from VGF grant applications and progress reports, longitudinal data from the AmeriCorps Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement, Volunteer Florida’s 3-year VGF evaluation, and the Nature of Volunteerism in Florida survey data. Exhibit B.25 provides an overview of each of the data sources that were used to inform the following brief.

### EXHIBIT B.25.—Overview of data sources

Data Source	Participant Count	Date Collected
Grant Application	–	May 2020
Fiscal Year (FY)2021 Volunteer Generation Fund Progress Report	–	December 2021
AmeriCorps Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplements	–	September 2017, 2019, and 2021
Commission Focus Group – Volunteer Florida	2	January 2022
Program Implementer Focus Group – Volunteer Florida	2	September 2022
Beneficiaries Focus Group – Subgrantee Group One	3	September 2022
Beneficiaries Focus Group – Subgrantee Group Two	1	September 2022
Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey	5	January 2023
Final Commission Focus Group – Volunteer Florida	1	June 2023
Additional data and evaluation documentation provided by Volunteer Florida	–	June 2023

### Overview of Grant Structure and Goals

Volunteer Florida used their VGF grant to support 24 subgrantees in increasing their volunteer management capacity. Through VGF, Volunteer Florida set out to generate 9,600 skills-based volunteers and contribute 72,000 hours of service—with a focus on rural areas. Volunteer Florida provided statewide training and

<sup>31</sup> The VGF grantee, Volunteer Florida, also served as the primary program implementer for VGF programming and services.

<sup>32</sup> For the Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey, the state service commission had a 20 percent response rate with a total of five individual respondents representing five unique organizations. It is important to note that due to the small sample size of respondents who participated in the survey, findings should be considered with caution.

technical assistance to the subgrantees. As noted in their grant application, Volunteer Florida used the Volunteering Reinvented: Human Capital Solutions for the Nonprofit Sector framework.<sup>33</sup>

This plan reflects Volunteer Florida’s four primary goals in their State Service Plan:

1. **Strengthen Florida’s Communities:** “We will utilize resources and work with our partners and communities to focus on volunteerism and national service where the need is the greatest.”
2. **Increase Volunteerism and Promote National Service through Strategic Partnerships:** “We will facilitate the development of partnerships that will provide additional volunteer opportunities and inspire more Floridians to engage in national service.”
3. **Connect Floridians to Volunteer/National Service Opportunities:** “We will facilitate connections to opportunities for all Floridians to serve.”
4. **Increase Florida’s Disaster Resiliency:** “We seek to ensure that all Florida’s counties are better equipped to utilize volunteers and donations in a disaster.”

*Volunteering has been connected as a pathway to employment, if volunteers are gaining or updating skills that are needed in the workplace through their volunteer activities, those skills may make them more attractive to and productive for employers, and increase their chances of becoming employed.*

Volunteer Florida’s  
VGF Grant Application

Volunteer Florida’s plan calls particular attention to skills-based volunteers. In their grant application, they cite U.S. Department of Agriculture statistics showing unemployment in their state at 3.6 percent, as well as statistics from the Corporation for National and Community Service showing that volunteerism is associated with a 27 percent increase in the odds of finding employment.

Subgrantees apply for funding every year and can do so for up to 3 years. Subgrantees are selected from across the state, with at least one selected from each of Florida’s seven emergency management regions. Priority consideration is given to organizations that primarily serve rural communities and increase economic opportunities for communities by preparing people for the workforce. Subgrantees participate in one 3-day, in-person volunteer management training; 5–6 annual webinars/meetings; technical assistance; and site visits from Volunteer Florida. Volunteer Florida staff noted that subgrantee organizations target three or more of the eight volunteer management practices to increase volunteer management through capacity building services.<sup>34</sup>

Of the subgrantee training participants who participated in a January 2023 survey administered by ICF, the most frequently reported volunteer training and capacity building activities were

**A Note on Program Beneficiaries**

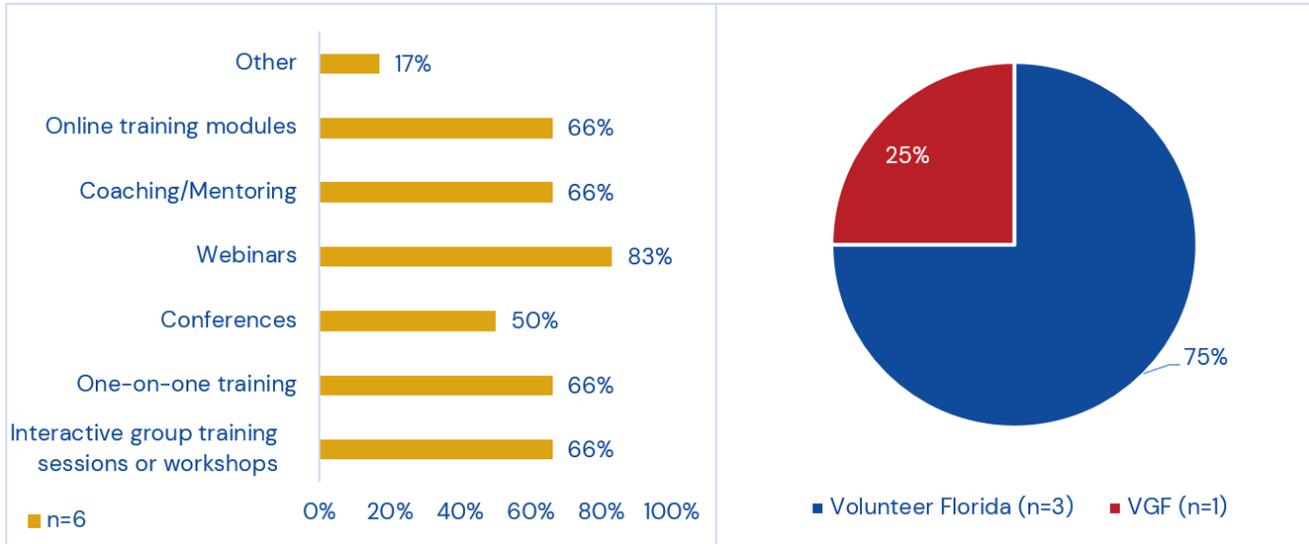
In the context of this case study, “program beneficiaries” include volunteer organization subgrantees who participated in Volunteer Florida’s initiatives, including volunteer management training and webinars, technical assistance, and site visits.

<sup>33</sup> For additional information on this framework, please visit [Volunteering Reinvented: Human Capital Solutions for the Nonprofit Sector](#).

<sup>34</sup> Eight volunteer management practices included Market Research and Community Needs Assessments; Strategic Planning to Maximize Volunteer Impact; Recruiting and Marketing to Prospective Volunteers; Interviewing, Screening, and Selecting Volunteers; Orienting and Training Volunteers; Ongoing Supervision and Management; Recognition and Volunteer Development; and Measuring Outcomes and Evaluating the Process.

interactive group training sessions or workshops and webinars, with the majority (75 percent) of reported training provided by Volunteer Florida. Exhibit B.26 provides additional details on the types of activities respondents noted were available to their organization through VGF grant activities.

**EXHIBIT B.26.—Volunteer training and capacity building activities and providers**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

Note: Response percentages will not add up to 100 percent because respondents were able to select multiple responses.

The 3-day in-person training consists of 10 sessions, covering the same 8 volunteer management best practices. Subgrantees also learn how to engage and track skills-based volunteers. Subgrantees who attend these trainings tend to be new to volunteer management in general.

Volunteer Florida additionally hosts five to six virtual meetings per year for subgrantees. These meetings each cover one of the above volunteer management practices and offer subgrantees a chance to connect with one another and share knowledge.

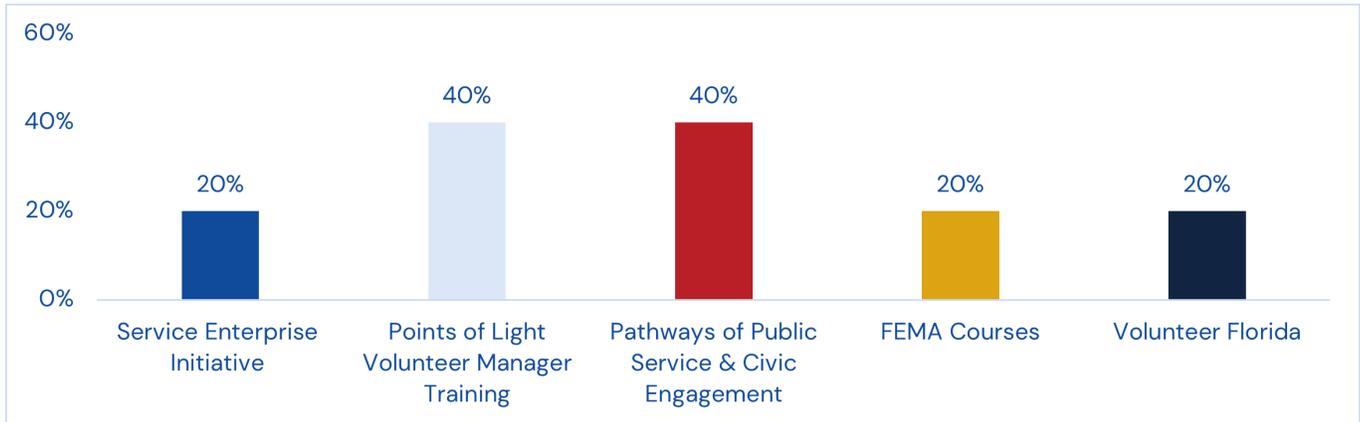
Subgrantees are also provided with technical assistance opportunities from the commission. Topics have included navigating background checks, questions about reports to the commission, exploring expectations for reimbursements, and more. One-on-one technical assistance delivery is most frequently conducted by phone, followed by email for follow-ups.

Volunteer Florida visits each subgrantee at least once per 3-year grant cycle, usually in the first year as grantees need the most help at this time. Volunteer Florida collects data on the three volunteer management practices each organization selected as their personal priority, performs a fiscal evaluation and background checks, observes volunteer activities, followed by writing a report and discussing the visit with each grantee.

At the time of ICF’s fall 2022 site visits, Volunteer Florida was also within its first year as a Service Enterprise Hub—the only such hub within the state. No Service Enterprise cohort participants were interviewed by ICF and all information about training curricula cited in this case study refers to Volunteer Florida’s other training curricula.

In January 2023, VGF training participants participated in a Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey. As seen in exhibit B.27, survey respondents reported a variety of training curricula.

**EXHIBIT B.27.—Types of curriculum used (n=5)**

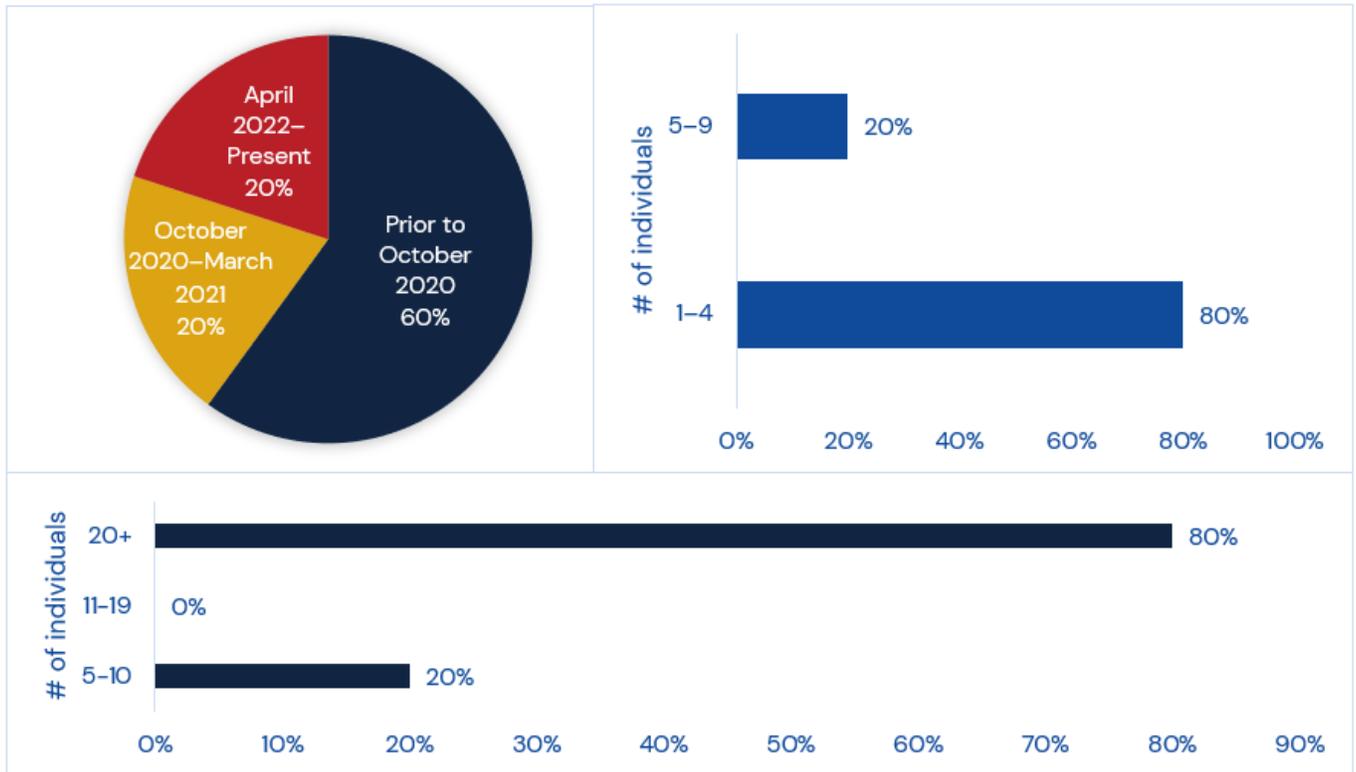


Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

Note: Response percentages will not add up to 100 percent because respondents were able to select multiple responses.

The time in which survey respondents reported first participating in a training varied: 60 percent of respondents noted their organization first participated prior to October 2020, while 20 percent noted they did not first participate until more recently (April 2022–Present). Since October 2020, the majority (80 percent) of survey respondents noted that 1–4 individuals from their organization participated in a training or capacity building activity through VGF and 20 percent noted 5–9 individuals participated. A majority (80 percent) of respondents participated in 20 or more volunteer management hours. Exhibit B.28 provides an overview of the time frame in which participating organizations reported they first participated in training and the range of individuals who participated.

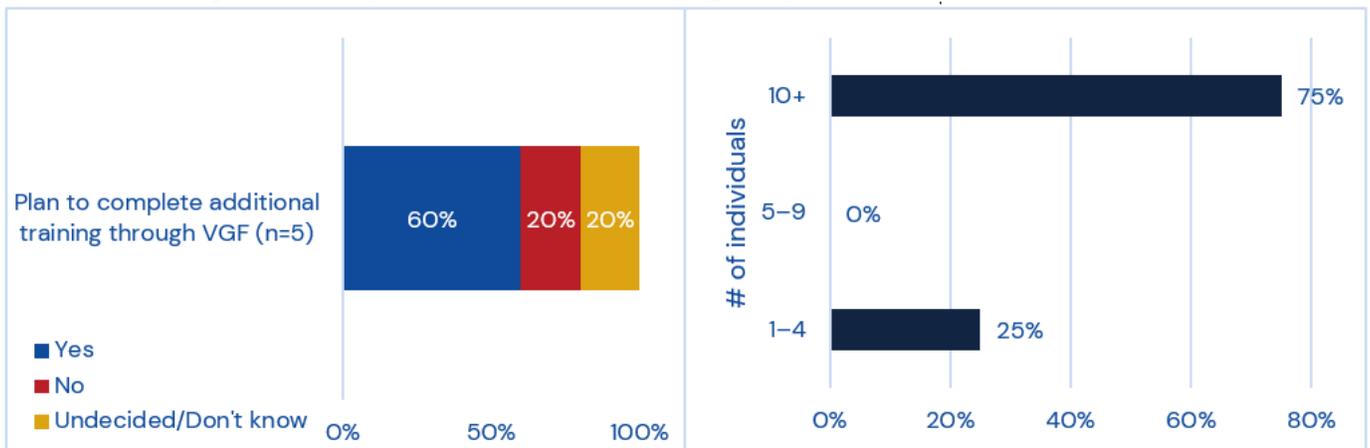
**EXHIBIT B.28.—Organization’s participation time frame, range, and number of hours (n=5)**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

Survey respondents were also asked to report on their organization’s plans for future training. Exhibit B.29 reports the percentage of respondents who reported they intended to complete additional training through VGF, with 60 percent noting Yes, 20 percent noting No, and 20 percent noting they were undecided. Three-quarters of survey respondents indicated they planned to complete 10–plus additional training hours.

**EXHIBIT B.29.—Organizational plans for additional training and planned hours**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

## Recent Volunteerism Trends in Florida and Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic

According to the 2021 AmeriCorps Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement, more than 2.8 million residents volunteered through an organization, contributing \$4.9 billion in economic value. In 2021, fewer than one-fifth (16 percent) of residents formally volunteered through an organization, which was 7 percentage points lower than the 2021 national rate (23 percent), and an 8-percentage point decrease compared to Florida's rate in 2019, before the onset of the pandemic. Alternatively, for informal volunteering, more than two-fifths (45 percent) of residents noted they helped others by exchanging favors with their neighbors in 2021, which was a 2-percentage point decline compared to the pre-coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)-rate (47 percent).

Additionally, Volunteer Florida commissioned the University of North Florida to conduct a large survey to assess volunteer engagement perspectives among Floridians.<sup>35</sup> The survey sought to understand what motivated and prevented Floridians from volunteering, where and how often residents were currently volunteering, and the effect the COVID-19 pandemic had on residents' willingness and capacity to volunteer. Survey responses were collected from 2,077 respondents. Findings indicate that over half (52 percent) of residents volunteered weekly for at least a quarter of the year or more and 59 percent of residents reported helping their neighbors at least once a month—which are notably higher rates than the results from the 2021 AmeriCorps Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement. Floridians primarily reported volunteering in religious organizations (47 percent) and social or community service organizations (37 percent) and noted most frequently that they joined organizations due to their family or friends (45 percent). Lastly, the survey results demonstrated that during the pandemic, residents made donations to charitable or nonprofit organizations (36 percent) and helped run errands, get groceries, or provide free childcare for others (34 percent) as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Participants in the VGF site visits also shared their perspectives on the impacts of the pandemic on volunteerism. One subgrantee noted that their program had recruited fewer volunteers after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic; however, they also found that the volunteers who remained seemed to increase the amount they worked, including participating in more complex and demanding tasks.

Regarding training related to COVID-19, Volunteer Florida reported not providing much specific training to respond to the pandemic. As an emergency support organization for the State of Florida, they played a role in directly addressing the crisis by coordinating volunteers to provide support and gathering donations.

Volunteer organizations themselves reported responding to COVID-19 in different ways. One organization, which historically used volunteers in-person in a medical setting, had to pivot away from that due to safety concerns. Another organization, by contrast, could not afford to reduce their use of volunteers and therefore stop providing services, as they were the only Humane Society in the area; they instead focused more on retaining current volunteers and being as transparent as possible with those volunteers. They also took the chance to mature their workforce development programs after the pandemic created staffing issues. Now they have an internship program for high school students of color and one for veterans.

## Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Volunteer Florida did not provide any specific training on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), though they did report highlighting diversity within their portfolio through a series of peer sharing webinars.

---

<sup>35</sup> For more information, please reference [The Nature of Volunteerism in Florida](#) report.

Program beneficiaries did not generally report a specific focus on recruiting diverse volunteers. One organization found their volunteers to already be diverse, while others prioritized their recruitment through specific partnerships with nonprofits or former volunteer service recipients. As previously noted, one program used the additional time available to them during the pandemic to grow workforce development programs, one of which was an internship program for high school students of color.

### Strategies Used and/or Learned

Volunteer Florida reported the greatest needs of their beneficiaries to be capacity building, flexible funding, more volunteers, and infrastructure. In a macro sense, the COVID-19 pandemic changed the priorities of organizations back and forth; within the grant period, volunteer organizations adjusted to social-distanced and virtual volunteering, followed by a reversal back to in-person volunteering.

Across survey respondents, there was a wide variation in the types of practices respondents noted receiving training on through the VGF grant. The most frequently reported training practices—reported by all respondents—included measuring outcomes and evaluating the process, recognition and volunteer development, recruiting and marketing to prospective volunteers, and strategic planning to maximize volunteer impact. Exhibit B.30 provides additional details on the types of practices reported by respondents.

**EXHIBIT B.30.—Volunteer management practices learned about in trainings (n=4)**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey administered in January 2023.

Volunteer organizations participating in ICF’s site visits elaborated further on strategies learned to increase volunteer recruitment and retention, as described below.

**Reducing barriers to entry for volunteers.** Volunteer organizations learned to reduce the time and effort for volunteers before they began volunteering, such as reducing complicated onboarding tasks. One volunteer manager discovered that their initial generic onboarding process would become redundant or incorrect after volunteers moved to begin working with specific staff members, so they streamlined that initial training considerably.

**Being open to new types of volunteers or using volunteers in new ways.** Volunteer organizations reported learning how to increase the number of volunteers they could recruit by being open to recruiting volunteers from groups they did not typically recruit from. For example, multiple organizations found they had assumed

they could not use older volunteers for tasks that required computers, but upon further investigation, this was not actually the case.

**Aligning volunteers to their preferred tasks.** Volunteer organizations learned to reallocate volunteers who were not able to serve in certain roles to other tasks, including ones they had not previously used volunteers to complete. One recipient noted how “[not] all volunteers fall into one role, but you can also utilize them in other roles if maybe that role isn’t right for them ... from the conversations we realize—‘Hey, this might not be the right fit.’ But what can we find and identify is the right fit?” Volunteer organizations also learned to consult their staff to identify new roles to create for volunteers. These strategies increased retention as volunteers were participating in tasks they felt suited for or enjoyed.

**Leveraging existing volunteers.** Multiple participants from volunteer organizations cited using their existing volunteer forces in ways that increased both recruitment and retention rates, usually by giving them more responsibility. Recruitment strategies included encouraging existing volunteers to recruit their friends and families as volunteers. Long-term volunteers were also given new roles within organizations, including training, leading, and coaching new volunteers, which increased buy-in and retention for those volunteers who held more responsibilities as well as reducing work that would otherwise be performed by paid staff. “Volunteers have a general want to learn and help,” noted one participant, adding, “Out of that help we can teach them other things that will keep them on. The more they’re learning, the more they want to stay around and continue to be a part of the program.”

**Volunteer appreciation:** Volunteer organization participants recalled being encouraged to show appreciation for their volunteers and sharing how useful they were. They recalled learning to show appreciation for volunteers after extended periods, such as after 30 days or a year of volunteering as well as immediately when they began.

**Not getting discouraged:** Volunteer organization participants said that when they connected with other volunteer managers, they discovered that their organizations were not the only ones having trouble recruiting and retaining volunteers during the pandemic, as cited by one participant: “The realization that that happens everywhere not just here. And it’s just the nature of volunteers. Because you know they are (volunteering) free of charge, but it does help us and benefits us a lot. But sometimes people choose other causes they would rather go to or have other priorities.” Participants learned to build resilience in the face of these rejections and not to take them personally.

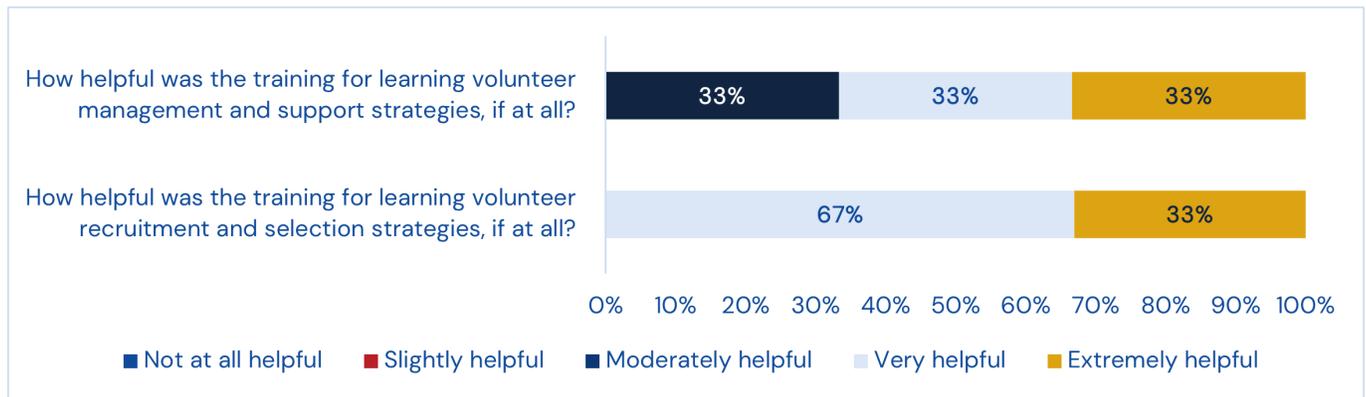
**Gaining staff buy-in:** Volunteer organization participants learned how to further integrate staff who did not have time or capacity to use volunteers previously and to encourage them to use volunteers. Participants did so by connecting with their organization’s staff members and asking directly what tasks with which they could use volunteer help. They also learned to gain staff trust to prevent them from mistreating or devaluing volunteers in a way that would encourage them to leave.

Regarding implementation of the various strategies learned, volunteer organizations cited a variety of contextual factors that led them to pick and choose or adapt strategies based on their own circumstances. For example, one participant described how they were from the only organization in their cohort that works with children under the age of 3. As such, they found a strategy regarding cycling out many volunteers who work for short periods to not be useful, as children that young require a longer period to develop a relationship with a volunteer or even come to learn their name. Another volunteer organization working in animal welfare found suggestions to remove barriers to entry to be difficult to implement as they have more safety concerns and other intense training elements to implement. A third organization working with medical

volunteers uses different training curricula and background checking for their different sites, and therefore had to adapt training differently depending on the location. Finally, an organization noted wanting to implement the reporting of exact money saved by volunteers to demonstrate their value, but due to their accounting practices, they were not able to find that exact sum. Each of these volunteer organizations acknowledged that though they had challenges implementing certain training elements to the letter, they were able to mix and match training elements and adapt them to their own programs.

Overall, two-thirds of volunteer organization survey respondents noted that the training for learning volunteer management and support strategies (67 percent) were Very or Extremely helpful, and all respondents found recruitment and selection strategies (100 percent) to be so, as seen in exhibit B.31.

**EXHIBIT B.31.—Reported helpfulness of training (n=3)**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey administered in January 2023.

### Collecting and Tracking Data

Volunteer Florida supports robust data collection on volunteer management and engagement within the VGF grant and more broadly in the state as a whole. Volunteer Florida funded a VGF impact study from 2014–15 to 2020–21 to assess the value and impact of VGF resources to support skills-based volunteer programs and local communities. Additionally, Volunteer Florida commissioned the University of North Florida to conduct a study on the nature of volunteerism in the state, as described in the Recent Volunteerism Trends in Florida and Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic section. Findings from both of these studies were used by Volunteer Florida to inform programming and services provided by the commission.

Among the participating subgrantees, Volunteer Florida also collects a variety of data, including midyear and end-of-year reports which include number of skills-based volunteers leveraged and hours contributed, activities of individuals, success stories and challenges, and performance measures as well as any additional training and resources they need. This data informs Volunteer Florida’s annual performance report to AmeriCorps, as well as social media posts and information to government commissions reported quarterly on VGF activities. Volunteer Florida sends written feedback to subgrantees evaluating their achievement of performance measures and their financial obligations of the grant. Organizations who are not on track to complete their obligations must provide a plan for how they will do so. Additionally, Volunteer Florida staff said they measured the number of organizations that received capacity building services and increased their program’s effectiveness, efficiency, and/or reach. Subgrantees participate in pre- and post-assessments for the three strategies which they identified as their area of focus. Volunteer Florida staff noted the post-

assessment included Likert-scale questions to assess outcomes of their participation in training and capacity building services.

In their 2021 VGF progress report, Volunteer Florida reported conducting a webinar related to VGF contract requirements, including data collection. Subgrantees then certified that they would maintain a volunteer tracking system which includes “relevant demographic information including location of residence (city), method of recruitment, participation in orientation and/or training activities, planned and actual role, assignment(s) or activities, start and end dates of service, and hours served related to the program that the capacity building activities were intended to support or enhance.” Subgrantees also received training from Volunteer Florida on how to collect these data during the VGF subgrantee annual training.

Volunteer organizations collect a variety of data about volunteers, including volunteers per county, numbers of skilled and unskilled volunteers, volunteer time logs, and other data elements. One organization uses the number of hours volunteers have given in comparison to how much time full-time staff would require, and how much money this has saved. Another does not record any data.

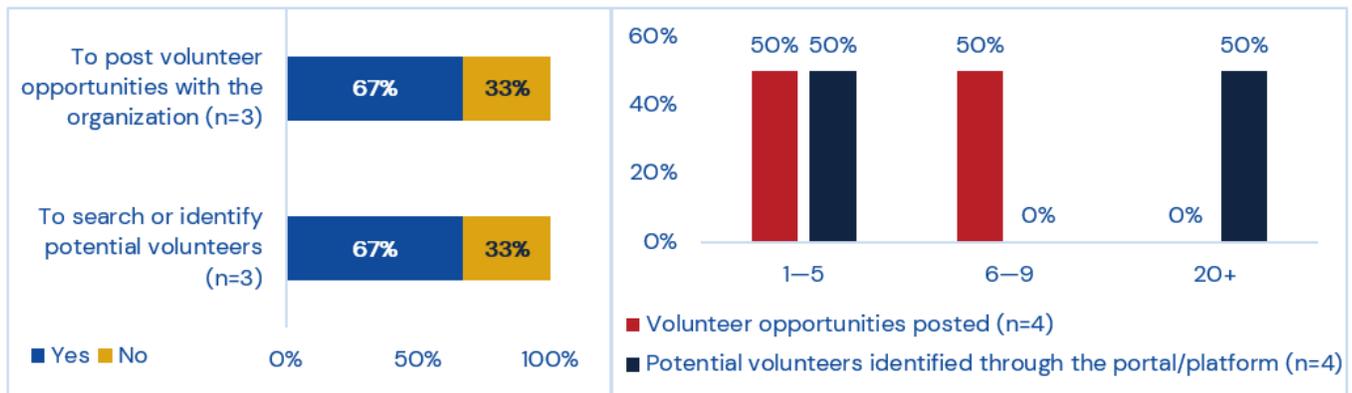
Organizations interact with different levels of sophistication regarding technology to track volunteers. One organization, which cited a more sophisticated tracking system, uses specific volunteer management software that allowed them to track the number of hours as well as when certain volunteers have been inactive. In contrast, another organization that uses many volunteers who the organization perceives to be less tech-savvy has been learning how to encourage their volunteers to record their hours on paper.

### Volunteer Network

Volunteer Florida provides a volunteer network called Volunteer Connect, which subgrantees are expected—though not required—to use. Volunteer Florida provides training on its functionality annually. All organizations interviewed were aware of Volunteer Connect but were not using it at the time of fall 2022 site visits.

As shown in exhibit 8, two-thirds (67 percent) of survey respondents used the platform to post volunteer opportunities and two-thirds (67 percent) used the platform to search or identify potential volunteers. Exhibit B.32 also shows the range of volunteer opportunities posted by survey respondents and the range of volunteers identified through the platform.

**EXHIBIT B.32.—Use of state service commission portal/platform**



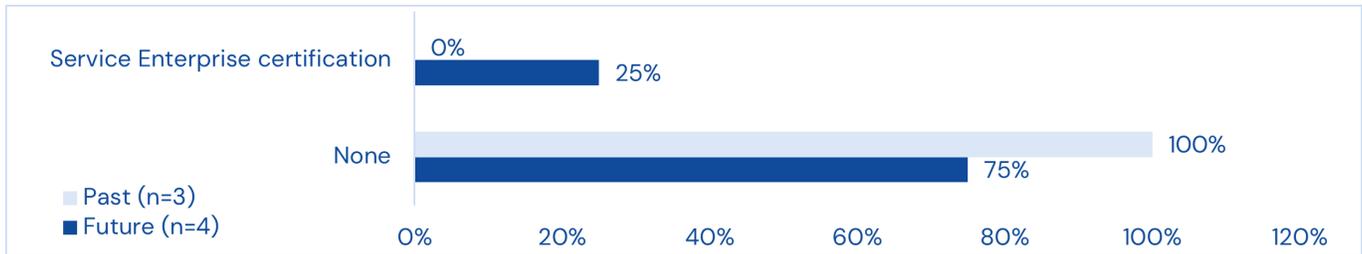
Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey administered in January 2023

## Outcomes

Volunteer Florida conducted a 3-year VGF impact study from 2014–15 to 2020–21 to understand how VGF resources were being leveraged to support skills-based volunteer programs and local communities. The study engaged a total of 88 organizations and 147 subgrantees. Volunteer Florida staff shared that each year, based on the findings from evaluation, they implemented changes in subsequent years. Key findings from the impact study are also presented along with the findings from ICF’s site visit and beneficiary survey. Overall, since 2014, Volunteer Florida staff shared their VGF programs engaged 103,456 skill-based volunteers who have contributed 1,495,388 hours of service, generating over \$39 million in value.

Overall, both Volunteer Florida and participating volunteer organizations reported high satisfaction with the training and capacity building provided through the VGF grant program. As seen in exhibit B.33, survey respondents indicated the certifications their organizations had received since October 2020 and/or were planning to receive by September 2023. While no respondents had reported receiving any kind of certification at the time of survey administration, one-quarter of survey respondents (25 percent) noted their organization might receive a Service Enterprise certification by September 2023, which likely reflected the status of the new Service Enterprise Hub in the state. At the staff level, no staff had received certification in the past or planned to in the future.

**EXHIBIT B.33.—Certifications organizations received as of October 2020 and/or planned to receive by September 2023**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey administered in January 2023.

### Volunteer Florida’s Outcomes

Volunteer Florida representatives called out the flexibility of the VGF grant as a major highlight. According to one interviewee, “VGF is the best ... one of the great things for state service commissions for VGF is it’s very broad and flexible ... a state could apply for and take that resource and really apply it to state issues.” The same representative also found value in the larger America’s Service Commissions network created because of the grant, as Volunteer Florida was able to learn from grantees in other states and expand their capacity.

### Volunteer Organizations’ Outcomes

Based on the findings from the 2020–2021 Volunteer Florida impact study, there were several key positive outcomes volunteer subgrantee organizations achieved as a result of their participation in VGF. Overall, over the last 7 years, the study found that two-fifths (40 percent) of subgrantees reported improvement from the pre- to post-assessment in each of the 8 volunteer management practices, with only a few exceptions. The practices with the greatest change from the pre- to post-assessment were Market Research and Community Needs Assessment (65 percent), Strategic Planning to Maximize Volunteer Impact (63 percent), and Measuring Outcome and Evaluation the Volunteer Process (62 percent). As noted previously, subgrantees were eligible to participate for up to 3 years. Volunteer Florida’s impact study found that of the

26 percent of subgrantees to receive the maximum 3 VGF subgrants, almost all (10 of the 11) reported positive changes in all 8 volunteer management practices.

During the site visits, volunteer organizations reported high satisfaction with the training provided to them from the VGF grant. Staff were described as helpful, kind, and quick to respond. Noted one participant, “Kudos to their staff. [They have] always been very quick to respond. Just yesterday I needed some help with budget clarification and I was like, ‘Yeah the questions you asked me are not making sense in my brain. You have to tell this to me like I am 12 please.’ And they were like no problem and helped me out!”

One volunteer manager found training to be a useful way to understand what they were doing well within their organization and what could be improved. “For us it has just really shone a light on areas we needed to work on or areas that we were doing well, or areas that we’re missing altogether. It’s ... made us more aware of what was succeeding, what wasn’t, and what we can do to get things more standardized and focused and work on our processes.”

Volunteer managers appreciated the ability to network with volunteer managers in other organizations, instead of just within their internal team. As one said, “It’s just been super helpful knowing that there’s an entity basically that I can go and bounce ideas off that isn’t so stuck in the everyday. Sometimes I go and talk about ideas to my team. They’re focused on the children every single day.” Training recipients highlighted the Blackbaud Grants Management platform provided to them by Volunteer Florida as being particularly useful for ongoing collaboration with other volunteer managers as well as being able to communicate face-to-face during 3-day trainings.

Echoing Volunteer Florida’s comments, a subgrantee was grateful for the flexibility of the grant, finding that few others exist to support volunteerism for their type of organization, saying “[Having] a grant that supports a volunteer capacity building is very impactful, because it’s rare that you find ... funding for our organization. And this is the only ... government-supported grant that we receive. To find this grant was very empowering for our organization because we have always viewed our volunteer program to be good, but we know it has the potential to be great.” That same respondent also appreciated the regular check-ins the grant provides to improve capacity, as opposed to more infrequent reviews from other types of grants. “Often with grants—‘Here’s a chunk of money, make it happen. Check in with us in 6 months to tell us how you did.’ Versus here, you know you always have a resource or someone you can reach out to or a community that you can reach out to.”

Program beneficiaries also highlighted outcomes achieved through implementation of volunteer management strategies. These included the following:

*Based on pre-post self-assessment results analyzed by years of funding, it was clear the Florida VGF program catalyzed many positive subgrantee advances in volunteer management capacity over the past seven years. The majority of organizations made strong gains in many of the eight practices that had previously been underdeveloped at their organization. ... The findings that positive changes in volunteer management practices were realized by organizations regardless of size or time as a VGF subgrantee likely indicates that the training and support provided by Volunteer Florida was universally applicable to diverse organizations.*

Volunteer Florida’s 2020–2021  
Impact Study Report

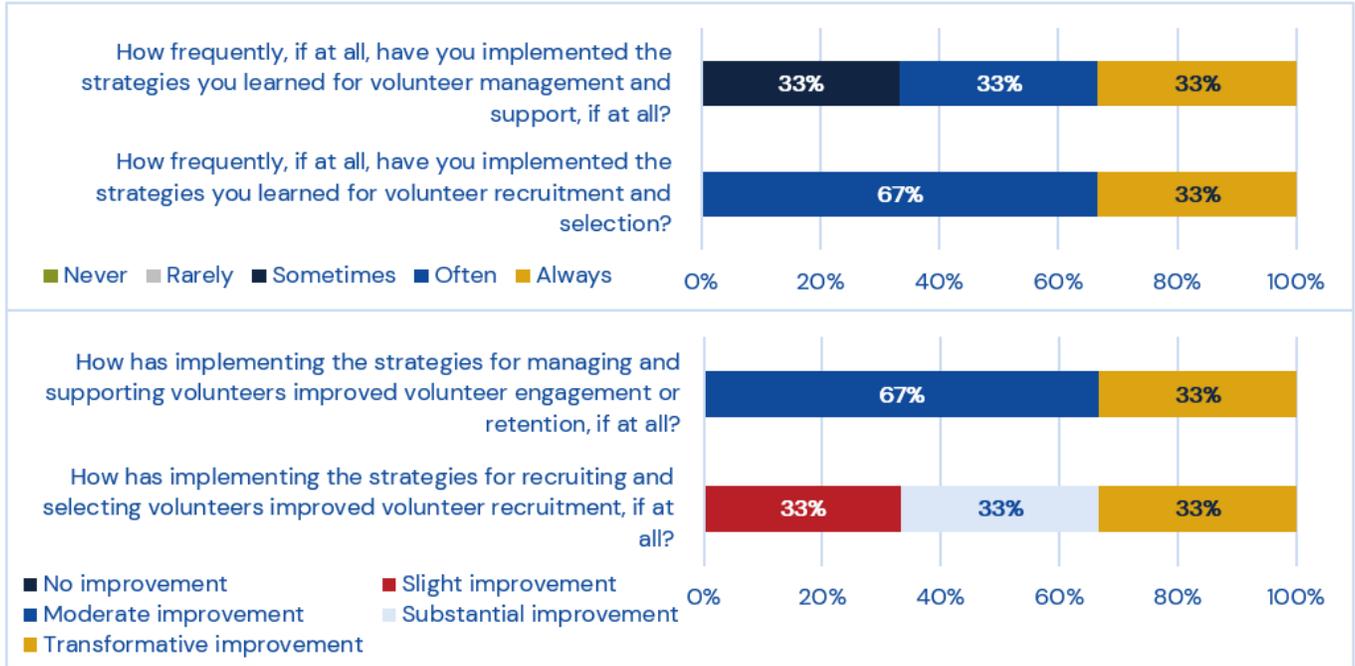
- **Expanded perceptions of volunteer roles.** Through their training, multiple participants found that they had made incorrect assumptions about tasks that older volunteers could successfully complete. Changing these perceptions had the potential to increase the numbers of volunteers.
- **Better volunteer retention and reduced work performed by paid staff.** Participants described learning how to align volunteers to their preferred tasks to increase their retention. In addition, one participant described how they gave long-term volunteers new responsibilities to teach/coach others, which they cited as contributing to increased retention for these volunteers and reduced work for paid staff. This aligned with the 2020–2021 Volunteer Florida Impact Study, which found that measuring outcomes and evaluating volunteer process implementation was one of the three practices with the greatest reported improvement, which included using surveys to assess volunteer perceptions and support improved retention.
- **Volunteer manager resilience.** Participants found that when they connected with other volunteer managers, they learned to build resilience in overcoming volunteer management challenges. Participants found that when they connected with other volunteer managers, they learned to build resilience in overcoming volunteer management challenges. Shared one volunteer manager, *“I find the group settings, being able to talk to other people in your same role one-on-one is super helpful... to be able to network and have conversations with people that are in the same role as you are, and that could be seeing some of the same growing pains, challenges, [and] successes.”*

Organizations cited a few recurring challenges with the trainings they encountered. These included the following:

- **Difficulty with finance training.** One recurring challenge cited by organizations was that the finance training provided was difficult for participants to understand. This was the case for average volunteer managers as well as for one organization’s finance team representative who attended the training.
- **Difficulty measuring retention.** Multiple participants still found it difficult to measure volunteer retention rates, and they identified this issue as something they could use more assistance on from Volunteer Florida. As described by one participant, there were different ways to measure retention, *“From a grant-writing perspective and also from a programmatic perspective, how do you measure retention. ... I feel like everyone does it a little differently. Am I retaining them if they’re active once every 30 days, what does that look like? Is there a certain number of hours per year?”*
- **Non-applicable trainings.** Some participants also cited certain aspects of their training as less useful for their specific organizations. This included two organizations that found it difficult to reduce barriers to entry for their organizations to accept volunteers, as trainings suggested, based on the specific missions of their organizations.

The majority (67 percent) of survey respondents said that they Often or Always implement the strategies they learned for volunteer management and support. Additionally, 67 percent of respondents noted they implemented volunteer recruitment and selection strategies Often or Always, as seen in exhibit B.34. Regarding the outcomes of implementation, all respondents reported improvement in volunteer engagement and retention, with two-thirds of respondents reporting moderate improvement (67 percent) and one-third reporting transformative improvement in this area (33 percent). In terms of volunteer recruitment, a third of participants reported slight improvement (33 percent), while two-thirds reported substantial or transformative improvement (67 percent).

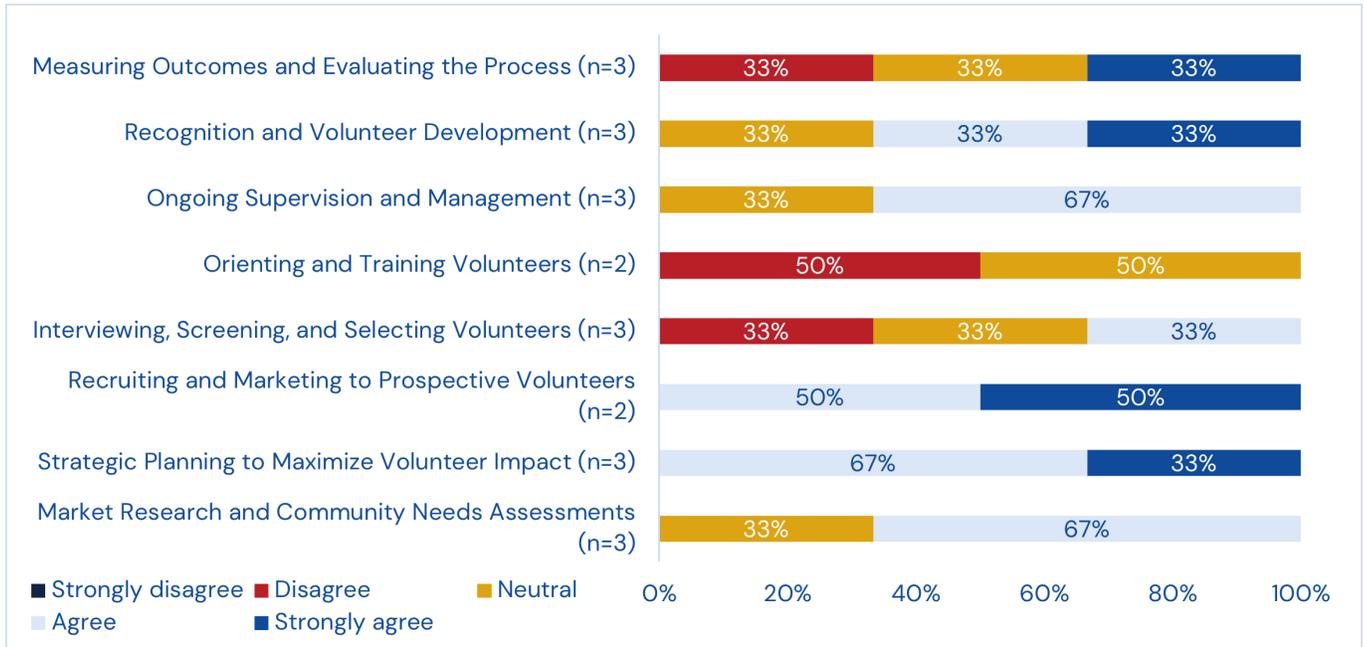
**EXHIBIT B.34.—Frequency of implementation & improvement in recruitment, engagement, and retention (n=3)**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey administered in January 2023.

Survey respondents were also asked to share their agreement regarding their and/or their organization’s need for additional training or support on various topics, as seen in exhibit B.35. The topics with the highest agreement on need were Recognition and Volunteer Development (66 percent), Ongoing Supervision and Management (67 percent), Recruiting and Marketing to Prospective Volunteers (100 percent), Strategic Planning to Maximize Volunteer Impact (100 percent), and Market Research and Community Needs Assessments (67 percent). Conversely, the topics for which respondents noted the lowest needs were on Measuring Outcomes and Evaluating the Process (33 percent); Orienting and Training Volunteers (0 percent); and Interviewing, Screening, and Selecting Volunteers (33 percent).

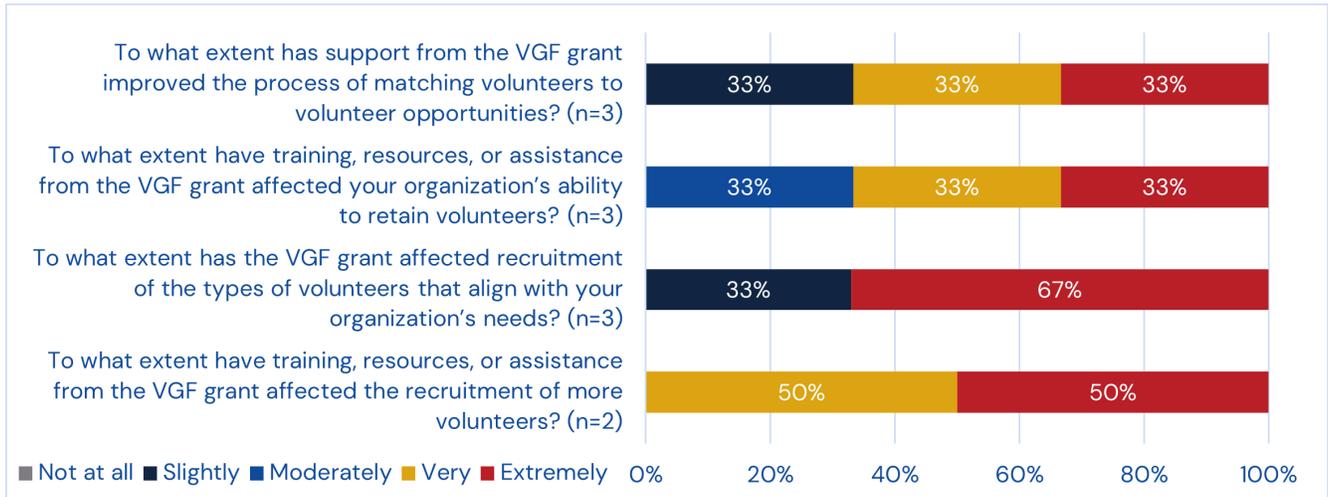
**EXHIBIT B.35.—Agreement with organizational need for additional training by topic**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey administered in January 2023.

Lastly, survey respondents shared their perspectives on the effect of the VGF grant on various volunteer outcomes, presented in exhibit B.36. All outcomes were rated highly by respondents. Respondents perceived that VGF-sponsored activities had the greatest effects on the recruitment of more volunteers.

**EXHIBIT B.36.—Effect of VGF grant on volunteer outcomes**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey administered in January 2023.

**Conclusion**

Overall, Volunteer Florida and the volunteer organizations served through VGF reported high satisfaction with the grant and in Volunteer Florida’s implementation of it within the state. Volunteer Florida has demonstrated a strong culture of collecting and using data on volunteerism and volunteer management to

inform decisions and build evidence. While training participants reported some individual strategies to be inapplicable to their organizations specifically, overall, training participants recalled many strategies that they used as well as outcomes from using those strategies in terms of volunteer recruitment and retention, and volunteer manager resilience. Volunteer Florida's own commissioned external evaluations found notable pre-to-post improvements among subgrantees in eight practice areas, which demonstrates the efficacy of Volunteer Florida's subgrant program and training model for building volunteer management practices. Beyond improving volunteer management practices, however, many subgrantees also praised the flexibility of their subgrants to support volunteerism as unique in the field, and therefore crucial to their work.

## Iowa Volunteer Generation Fund Case Study

The Iowa state service commission, the Iowa Commission on Volunteer Service (Volunteer Iowa), participated in the AmeriCorps Volunteer Generation Fund (VGF) evaluation through several different phases, including focus groups/interviews with commission staff, program implementers, and program beneficiaries; and a program beneficiaries survey.<sup>36, 37</sup> In addition to the evaluation data collection activities noted, the following case study brief incorporates additional data sources from VGF grant applications and progress reports as well as longitudinal data from the AmeriCorps Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement. Exhibit B.37 provides an overview of each of the data sources that were used to inform the following brief.

**EXHIBIT B.37.—Overview of data sources**

Data Source	Participant Count	Date Collected
Grant Application	–	May 2020
Fiscal Year (FY)2020 and FY2021 VGF Progress Reports	–	July 2021 and December 2021
AmeriCorps Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement	–	September 2017, 2019, and 2021
Program Director Interview – Volunteer Iowa	1	February 2022
Program Implementer Interview – Volunteer Iowa	1	October 2022
Beneficiaries Focus Group – Service Enterprise Hub and Volunteer Center	1	October 2022
Beneficiaries Focus Group – Volunteer Center	1	October 2022
Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey – Volunteer Engagement Training Program and Skills Based Volunteering Bootcamp Webinar Series	12	April 2023
Final Commission Interview – Volunteer Iowa	1	July 2023

### Overview of Grant Structure and Goals

Volunteer Iowa is using the VGF grant to accomplish two primary objectives as outlined below:

<sup>36</sup> The VGF grantee, Volunteer Iowa, also served as the primary program implementer for VGF programming and services.

<sup>37</sup> For the Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey, the state service commission had a 29% response rate with a total of 12 individual respondents representing 10 unique organizations. Across survey participants, there was substantial variation in reported average number of volunteers; 11% reported fewer than 10 volunteers; 11% reported 10–20 volunteers; 11% reported 21–30 volunteers; 33% reported 30–50 volunteers; 11% reported 50–100 volunteers; and 22% reported 100 or more volunteers.

- Strengthening Iowa's volunteer infrastructure by enhancing and expanding statewide and local resources for increasing volunteer engagement capacity. Volunteer Iowa is supporting volunteer centers of Iowa<sup>38</sup> and other local institutions to connect citizens with opportunities to serve, increase capacity of local organizations to engage volunteers in meaningful service, promote volunteering, develop local programming that leverages volunteers to meet community needs, and strengthen the network of Service Enterprise Hubs.
- Piloting new initiatives to meet emerging needs around disaster response, strengthening rural cities, and empowering youth as Iowa's newest volunteer force. Volunteer Iowa is supporting emerging needs around disaster response and youth volunteering by developing toolkits, hosting workshops paired with ongoing learning cohorts, and providing implementation funding.

An overview of the status of each key initiative supporting these objectives is included below, as described by Volunteer Iowa.

**Volunteer Centers:** Volunteer Iowa planned to fund 5–10 continuing and new volunteer centers, with 6 centers ultimately funded. Volunteer centers were expected to partner with local emergency management to support volunteerism in times of disaster; identify programming in an AmeriCorps focus area to address community need; offer volunteer management training; engage employers in creating skills-based volunteer opportunities; support community volunteer recognition; conduct Day of Service projects; build relationships with local nonprofits, schools, and governments to learn about volunteer needs and refer volunteers; and utilize the statewide online volunteer connector site Get Connected.

**Statewide Training and Resources:** Volunteer Iowa planned to provide additional training, technical assistance, and resources statewide in partnership with volunteer centers. Through the partnership, Volunteer Iowa and the volunteer centers supported regular networking and professional development opportunities for volunteer centers and other organizations within the state. Volunteer Iowa utilized a “train the trainer” approach to provide these organizations with the skills and knowledge needed to provide volunteer management training and technical assistance to the local organizations they served. Offered trainings were intentionally structured to meet participants where they were and create a pipeline for gaining more advanced knowledge of volunteer management. The Volunteer Engagement Training Program served as an introduction for participants who are in the beginning stages of volunteer engagement. The Skills Based Volunteering Bootcamp Webinar Series was geared towards serving those with more intermediate knowledge of volunteer management. The goal for this pipeline was that Volunteer Engagement Training Program participants could next participate in the bootcamp series, culminating in organizational participation in Service Enterprise. Volunteer Iowa staff shared that through this structure they were able to help connect training participants to the next level of training opportunity.

Additionally, statewide online training was available for organizations without access to a local volunteer center. ICF and Volunteer Iowa administered a survey to individuals who had participated in at least one of two training

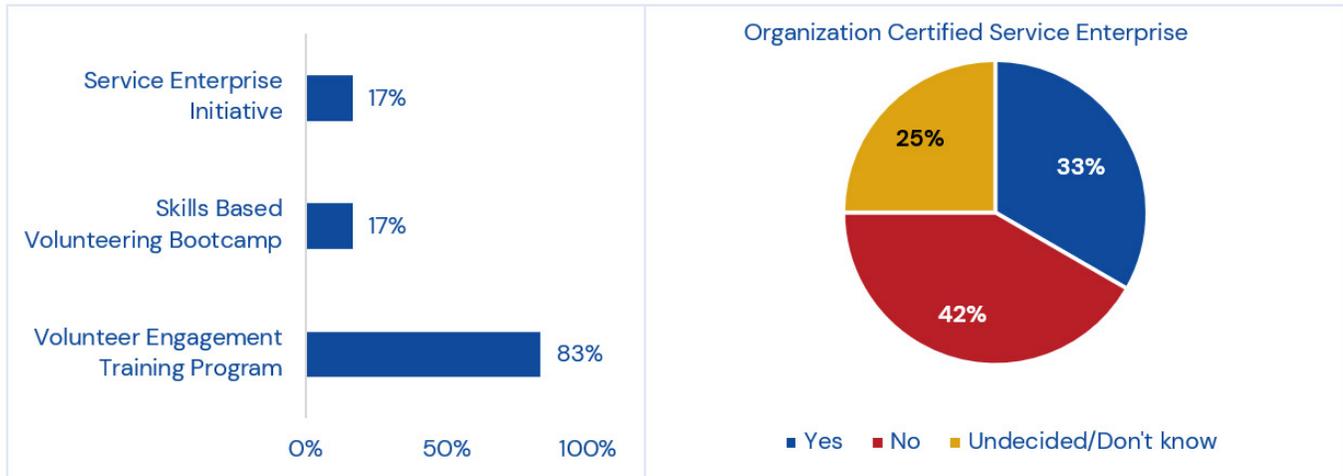
### Volunteer Center Partnerships & Practices

- Facilitates a board member matching program to provide support for organizations seeking university representation on their boards.
- Provides free registration for community education courses to volunteers in recognition of their service.
- Host “Draft Day” to help local community events and festivals recruit new volunteers.

<sup>38</sup> Volunteer Centers of Iowa is a statewide network of volunteer centers located in communities across the state. For more information, please visit [Volunteer Iowa's website](#).

initiatives—the Volunteer Engagement Training Program and the Skills Based Volunteering Bootcamp Webinar Series. Most respondents (83 percent) indicated they had participated in the Volunteer Engagement Training Program; one-third (33 percent) of respondents were from organizations who were Service Enterprise certified. Exhibit B.38 provides additional details on the types of activities respondents participated in through VGF grant activities.

**EXHIBIT B.38.—Volunteer training participation & Service Enterprise certification (n=12)**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in April 2023.

**Service Enterprise:** Volunteer Iowa and five volunteer centers serve as Service Enterprise Hubs. VGF funds were used to support costs of licensing, applications, and other associated fees. Participating Service Enterprise Hubs received \$2,500 to be used for costs associated with the program (e.g., traveling, supplies, staff). VGF funds were to be matched by the hubs using non-federal funds. Over the 3-year VGF cycle, Volunteer Iowa anticipated supporting over 60 organizations in achieving their Service Enterprise certifications.

**School Service-Learning:** At 10 schools across the state, Volunteer Iowa had planned to pilot an evidence informed School Service-Learning program, providing grants and trainings to recipients. However, Volunteer Iowa staff noted it quickly became apparent schools were struggling with the impacts of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and the proposed model was not well-suited for the current needs and context of the schools. To expand the quality of youth service-learning in Iowa, Volunteer Iowa established stakeholder committees comprising nonprofit partners, out-of-school time programs, K-12 schools, and youth and youth-serving organizations or clubs. Within these committees, barriers to service-learning were identified and findings were utilized to direct work moving forward. Statewide webinars and related toolkits were shared with the goal of fostering an awareness and

**A Note on Program Beneficiaries**

In the context of this case study, “program beneficiaries” include volunteer centers (VCs) and organizations that took part in Volunteer Iowa’s initiatives, including receiving funding for expanding capacity and coverage of VCs, and participating in the Service Enterprise program, youth service-learning programs, city volunteer pilot, the Volunteer Management in Disaster Infrastructure Development Project, and additional statewide trainings.

interest in youth service-learning across the many different sectors that serve youth and are impacted by service-learning.

**City Volunteer Engagement:** In partnership with the Iowa League of Cities, Volunteer Iowa was planning to pilot an evidence informed model intended to leverage citizens as volunteers to solve local problems, but this initiative was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. When the pilot was implemented in 2023, nine local governments participated in the pilot in teams of three, at minimum. Teams attended four virtual sessions and one in-person session, followed by four coaching calls to support the implementation of action plans. Participants developed new volunteer position descriptions, gained new recruitment and recognition ideas, and learned how to measure volunteer impact. A train-the-trainer program for future facilitators was held concurrently with the training, building statewide capacity to expand offerings in the future.

**Disaster Response:** As part of the Volunteer Management in Disaster Infrastructure Development Project, Volunteer Iowa collaborated with state Emergency Management and Iowa's Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters to recruit and train Volunteer Reception Center trainers across the state. Additionally, the project developed resource guides and "go kits" for the community, encouraged public pre-registration on Get Connected for disaster volunteers, and provided trainings on how to utilize the Get Connected platform and resources during a disaster.

### Recent Volunteerism Trends in Iowa and Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic

According to the 2021 AmeriCorps Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement, almost one-third (30 percent) of Iowa residents formally volunteered through organizations, substantially higher than the national rate (23 percent) of individuals who formally volunteered. However, in Iowa, this was a decline compared to the 2017 and 2019 rates of 42 percent and 33 percent, respectively. In the state, formal volunteering contributed \$1.3 billion in economic value. Alternatively, informal volunteering has increased over time. Informally, over half (60 percent) of residents noted they helped others by exchanging favors with their neighbors, a slight increase from 2017 (57 percent) and 2019 (57 percent). Additionally, Volunteer Iowa partnered with the Iowa Healthiest State Initiative to include a question in the statewide annual Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey (BRFSS) focused on volunteerism. Volunteer Iowa staff noted this provided annual representative data of volunteer rates within the state as well as correlations with volunteerism and health and behaviors, such as TV viewing. Comparing 2019 pre-COVID numbers to 2021, Volunteer Iowa saw a significant decrease in volunteer rates, especially among women, those without a high school diploma, and those 75–84 years old. Volunteer Iowa staff said information from the BRFSS informed the development of Iowa's State Service Plan and was being used to identify potential barriers and inform programming and resources developed.

Volunteer Iowa also stressed the impact the pandemic has had on volunteerism in the state as 37 percent of the state's volunteers were 55 years or older, and therefore more at risk from severe impacts of COVID-19. Volunteers were also often supporting food pantries, which saw an increase in need for volunteers during the pandemic. At the commission level, some planned initiatives were put on pause due to the pandemic, such as the City Volunteer Engagement initiative. Similarly, Volunteer Iowa staff noted with the service-learning initiative, it became clear during the pandemic that community members were overwhelmed; staff noted it was challenging to ask people to start a new task when they already had too much on their plates. Therefore, Volunteer Iowa was "monitoring to see, is now the best time to do [the service-learning initiative] because we want to make sure that when we do it, it's something that will be successful and be given its best chance to do well." From the perspective of one participating volunteer center, they noted during the pandemic that they

focused their supports on helping organizations understand best practices for virtually engaging volunteers and incorporating safety protocols within volunteering.

Volunteer Iowa staff also noted that they heard that the pandemic also caused many of their subgrantees to modify their approach. For example, one of their subgrantees leads a volunteer tax assistance program. During the pandemic, they transitioned to a curbside drop-off and pick-up model as a social distancing measure. This model ended up being more efficient than their previous processes and preferred by both volunteers and clients. The subgrantee is continuing to use this process even as the effects of the pandemic have subsided.

### Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Broadly, Volunteer Iowa incorporated diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) into all of the commission programs, predominantly through regional trainings in which all commission programs participated. A Volunteer Iowa staff member described:

*We invited not just our VGF subgrants but also our AmeriCorps programs ... all of our program partners. The past year the focus was on equity, inclusion, and volunteer engagement. This provided an opportunity to both learn and discuss with peers in their regions how to put into action what they were learning. We also hosted the Iowa Nonprofit Summit, and had multiple sessions on equity and inclusion both related to volunteer engagement and, more broadly, nonprofit focused.*

A participant from one of the Service Enterprise Hubs said they were trying to learn more about how to incorporate DEI components, but they did not feel as though they had “figured out a plan for Service Enterprise.” In contrast, a participant from one of the volunteer centers shared they utilized a resource created by the Minnesota Alliance for Volunteer Advancement that highlighted the eight steps to engaging volunteers from diverse backgrounds or populations, which they used as the foundation of their eight-part training series. Overall, the volunteer center representative emphasized how their entire community was prioritizing diversity, equity, and inclusion work:

*Making sure that we are bringing in equity into all the things we talk about with volunteer engagement. ... Our community, specifically, has been very focused on how we make this a more inclusive and better place for people of all backgrounds and abilities to be able to live, work, and play. We've been hyper-focused on this throughout the [local] community and one [thing] that I think has really hit home, and volunteer engagement is no different, is the way that we're speaking to our populations in the community—it has certainly been impacted.*

The volunteer center representative shared that through their focus on DEI, they have seen positive transformations from participating volunteer organizations they supported.

### Strategies Used and/or Learned

During the site visit, representatives from two volunteer centers talked about the various volunteer management and engagement strategies that they used in working with volunteer organizations in their communities. A summary of those strategies is listed below:

**Building relationships with nonprofit organizations and volunteers.** One volunteer center participant highlighted the importance of establishing relationships. One of the biggest successes noted by the participant was how building and maintaining relationships through phone calls or messaging with volunteer coordinators kept all staff up to date and informed. The volunteer center participant described how through these communications, they sought to:

*[Make] sure everybody knew that the volunteer center was still here and that we cared about the work that was happening in our community and that we could be an organization for those volunteer coordinators to lean on if they needed that support.*

The continued emphasis on relationship building was a particularly useful strategy during the pandemic. Another volunteer center representative noted that as they were using VGF funds to set up a new volunteer center in their area, they were still early in their work. However, thus far, their volunteer engagement and capacity building had begun by establishing relationships with local nonprofits to grow their services and support.

**Gaining Senior Leadership Buy-In.** Volunteer Iowa staff shared that through their work with organizations, especially Service Enterprise, participating organizations were able to gain executive and senior leadership buy-in and support, which has been a clear future indicator for success. Volunteer Iowa staff noted volunteer centers reported that organizations whose senior leaders were active participants in creating a strategy for volunteer engagement weathered the pandemic better. These organizations pivoted to engage volunteers in new ways instead of stopping their volunteer engagement, and some now report an increase in volunteers compared to before the pandemic.

**Recruiting the next generation of volunteers.** One volunteer center participant described providing training for nonprofit organizations on how to modify existing recruitment materials to recruit younger volunteers more effectively.

**Supporting easy entry for volunteers.** One volunteer center participant shared they offered a training to organizations focused on how to create easy entryway activities to support streamlined onboarding of volunteers who may be “on the fence” about volunteering or are too busy to commit a significant portion of time.

**Engaging volunteers during the pandemic.** During the pandemic, in-person volunteering was not always feasible. Therefore, one volunteer center participant noted they provided training for organizations on how to engage volunteers during the pandemic, especially through the use of virtual volunteer opportunities and skills-based volunteering.

**Speaking about volunteerism.** At the intersection of DEI and volunteer engagement, one volunteer center participant shared how they provided training to nonprofits on the language used in volunteer recruitment and how to make that language more inclusive to diverse populations. For example, one participant noted the term “volunteer” was not cross-culturally recognized.

Survey respondents who had participated in Volunteer Iowa’s Volunteer Engagement Training Program and/or the Skills Based Volunteering Bootcamp Webinar Series also reported specific volunteer management practices that they learned about through the training as well as the helpfulness of strategies about which they learned. The most frequently reported training practices included recognition and volunteer development (100 percent), ongoing supervision and management (100 percent), and recruiting and marketing to prospective volunteers (100 percent). Exhibit B.39 provides additional details on the types of practices reported by respondents.

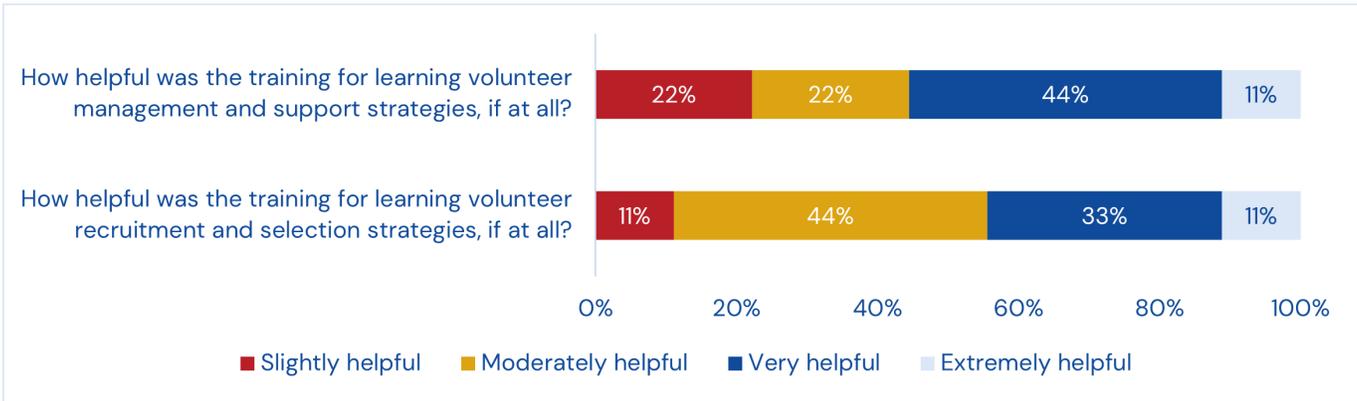
**EXHIBIT B.39.—Volunteer management practices learned about in volunteer engagement training and/or skills based volunteer bootcamp (n=9)**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in April 2023.

Across survey respondents, over three-quarters noted that the training for learning volunteer management and support strategies (77 percent), and recruitment and selection strategies (88 percent) were Moderately, Very, or Extremely helpful, as seen in exhibit B.40.

**EXHIBIT B.40.—Reported helpfulness of training (n=9)**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in April 2023.

**Collecting and Tracking Data**

Volunteer Iowa staff noted the most extensive reporting occurs with the commission’s subgrantees who are required to submit quarterly reports to Volunteer Iowa. In reports, subgrantees provide an update on the key components of their grant, highlighting successes and challenges. For example, subgrantees report on how they are connecting volunteers with opportunities to serve, increasing the capacity of nonprofits, doing volunteer recognition and Day of Service, and leveraging volunteerism to meet community needs. Subgrantees also report on any technical assistance needed from the commission. To understand subgrantees’ own data collection processes, they report on how the data presented in the quarterly reports were collected, verified, and used. Lastly, subgrantees provide updates on their performance measures, including the number of organizations that received capacity building services, the number of organizations implementing three or more effective volunteer management practices as a result of those services, the number of volunteers

leveraged, and the number of hours served by leveraged volunteers. To assess how many organizations were implementing three or more effective practices, subgrantees were required to use a pre- and post-retrospective survey based on the practices outlined in Service Enterprise. Organizations rate how they did before they received the capacity building service and how they did after they received the capacity building service. A Volunteer Iowa staff member noted the reason for a pre- and post-retrospective survey over a traditional pre- and post-test survey:

*We found that often time people took [the pre-survey] and then in the process of the training or the support provided they realized they didn't know what they didn't know. They didn't have a good reference when they took it to start to know how well they were doing. After, they realized they were doing a lot less [well] than they thought they were. So that was one challenge with doing it before and after. And then, collection [is] always harder when you have to collect the information at two points of time and match up the survey for both. We wouldn't always get the same people to do it before and after.*

Overall, Volunteer Iowa staff described the questions included in the quarterly reports aligned with the AmeriCorps Grantee Progress Report.

Additionally, during their previous VGF grant cycle (2010–2014), Volunteer Iowa funded an impact evaluation to assess the direct value and impact of the VGF grant on the volunteer centers and communities. Key findings from the impact evaluation noted communities were better positioned to support volunteerism as volunteers were connected to meaningful experiences, were responding to critical community needs, and were having an impact on their community. Volunteer Iowa commission staff said that to support continuous improvement, as a result of the findings presented in the 2014 impact report, they made several modifications including:

- Shifting grants from a 1-year cycle to a 3-year cycle to align with the federal grant funding cycle.
- Identifying how to support rural and urban communities while acknowledging their differences, such as utilizing a sliding fee match scale to support philanthropically underserved rural communities and working with consultants to ensure curriculum addresses differences among the two types of communities.
- Discussing with funders at the state level how a form of capacity building is investing in volunteer engagement.
- Constantly striving to improve messaging, through partnerships with public relations (PR)/marketing consultants and Iowa Department of Health and Human Services to incorporate health impacts of volunteering.

Subgrantees who participated in the site visit—a volunteer center and a volunteer center/Service Enterprise Hub, noted the types of data they collected from the nonprofit organizations they served. One participant said that they collected data through feedback surveys offered to participants after trainings. Examples of data collected in the feedback surveys included if the trainings led the organizations to be able to engage volunteers at a higher level, better retain volunteers, or learn a new tool or technique to help them accomplish a goal.

## **Volunteer Platform**

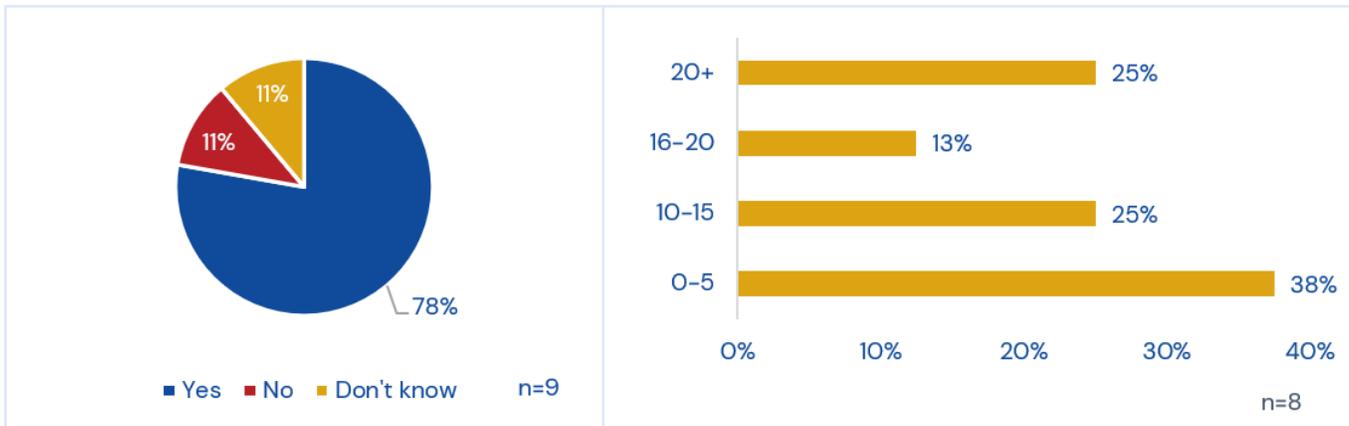
Volunteer Iowa's Get Connected online volunteer platform allows nonprofit organizations to post volunteer opportunities and potential volunteers to search for volunteer opportunities. Volunteer Iowa staff shared that volunteer centers across the state can have a sublicense for their own locally-branded volunteer platform that has all the local nonprofit organizations and associated volunteer opportunities. Anything posted on the local

websites would also automatically show up on the statewide site as it aggregates information across volunteer centers. A representative from Volunteer Iowa explained how the platform operates and how it can connect volunteers in response to disasters:

*Volunteer Centers can have their own local site, branded and reflecting priorities and interests for their community, but we're able to automatically collect that information at the state level. We can promote that to find a volunteer opportunity [users can] go to VolunteerIowa.org and it's a one-stop shop for the state, but it will still easily redirect them to their local community site. If there's a disaster, we can create an initiative so people who want to help with that particular disaster can click and search for the response activities across the state. Especially the statewide incidents where it's not just one community that's affected, it's multiple communities, they can search throughout the state to see where help is needed most.*

As seen in exhibit 5, over three-quarters (78 percent) of survey respondents used the platform to post volunteer opportunities. Exhibit B.41 also shows the range of volunteer opportunities posted by survey respondents, with 38 percent of respondents reporting posting zero to five volunteer opportunities.

**EXHIBIT B.41.—Use of state service commission portal/platform**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in April 2023.

## Outcomes

Overall, Volunteer Iowa, representatives from the volunteer centers, and participants of the Volunteer Engagement Training Program and Skills Based Volunteering Bootcamp Webinar Series shared positive feedback regarding the services and support provided through the VGF grant program. Specific outcomes cited by each of the groups are described below.

### Volunteer Iowa's Outcomes

Volunteer Iowa shared one of their biggest successes during this VGF grant cycle was the ability of the volunteer centers to continue to provide support to their individual communities during uncertain times. A Volunteer Iowa staff member reported that volunteer centers were able to pivot to meet the local needs of their communities directly:

*We've seen that the communities that have really strong volunteer centers were able to weather things better than other communities because they had that support. I would say we also saw just the critical nature of having plans for volunteers in times of disaster. ... We've*

*seen that when there is that infrastructure in place, they're able to more readily and easily respond.*

In addition to Volunteer Iowa's work within the state, they are also connecting with other states regarding their initiatives and programs to mentor and support those newer to the process or those who previously had VGF funds a while ago. In citing the value of the VGF grant, a Volunteer Iowa staff member shared:

*I'd say just the flexibility of VGF funding—that we're able to pilot these new ideas, see what works, if things don't work, adjust and change, if things are working, expand them tell other states about them. It's one of the only funding sources that's [not for] the national service members, but for the day-to-day ... people out in the community, which that's most Americans. This is a fantastic tool to get more people out there volunteering and to get nonprofits thinking about what people can do and providing really high-quality experiences to increase that volunteerism. ... I think VGF is such a powerful tool and that I would love to see expanded. So all commissions have access to it, that it's consistent funding, and that hopefully additional nonprofits and national organizations can access too. I think it is a powerful tool that not a lot of people are aware of and I don't think it's successes have always been really shown and shouted from the rooftops.*

*We have one volunteer coordinator who does most of the volunteer engagement. Service Enterprise got more staff and board members involved in actively thinking about how we all engage volunteers.*

*I think that we have opened our eyes to new partnerships and collaborations that we didn't think about prior to SE.*

*Service Enterprise (SE)  
Participants*

In the FY2020 progress report, Volunteer Iowa described how due to the transition to virtual trainings—while they were able to increase the number of organizations trained—it was more challenging to encourage survey completion and thus they had less data to assess the effectiveness of offerings.

Volunteer Iowa also shared outcomes they had observed from other initiatives included in the VGF, such as Service Enterprise and the City Volunteer Engagement pilot program. Through the VGF grant and participating in Service Enterprise, Volunteer Iowa noted they had also looked inward to consider how as a commission they could use/better use volunteers to support the work. Examples of how the commission utilized volunteers included getting PR firms to support aspects of the commission's work pro bono, having volunteer grant reviewers, incorporating volunteer centers from other states, and providing training/coaching to VISTA members.

Lastly, during their final commission interview, Volunteer Iowa staff noted they have seen some preliminary outcomes from the implementation of the City Volunteer Engagement pilot program. While the commission had not yet received the final reports from participants, they noted they had received preliminary positive feedback from participants in post training surveys. Participant feedback focused on gratitude for the opportunity to connect with other departments across the city who all utilize volunteers.

*Overall, this was one of the most succinct and purpose-driven trainings I have been involved in professionally.*

*Until this program, I had never thought how we all use volunteers and could pool resources. We are so used to running our own rogue operation, this was a wonderful reminder about the resources available as a city.*

*City Engagement Participants*

### **Volunteer Centers' Outcomes**

Among the participating volunteer centers, they shared positive sentiments regarding their participation in the VGF program, noting it provided them with the opportunity and time to think strategically. One comment that exemplified these sentiments:

*It's provided us [with a] strategic direction for the way our organization operates or the direction we want to go with engaging both volunteers as well as organizations. ... I actually think that VGF, the work provided, [and] the direction that's provided by Volunteer Iowa is one that's a really good fit here for our community. So, it's just provided a lot of success and financially allotted us to focus our time and our energy on things that are valuable.*

Subgrantees also highlighted outcomes that they or organizations they served were able to achieve as a result of their participation in the grant or training.

**Recognition as an asset to the community.** One participating volunteer center staff member noted they had established themselves as a leader in the county and state on volunteer engagement. One staff member noted that in a communitywide response to a disaster, such as the pandemic, they were proud they continue to be invited into strategic planning meetings and looked on as leaders of volunteer engagement efforts. The staff member shared:

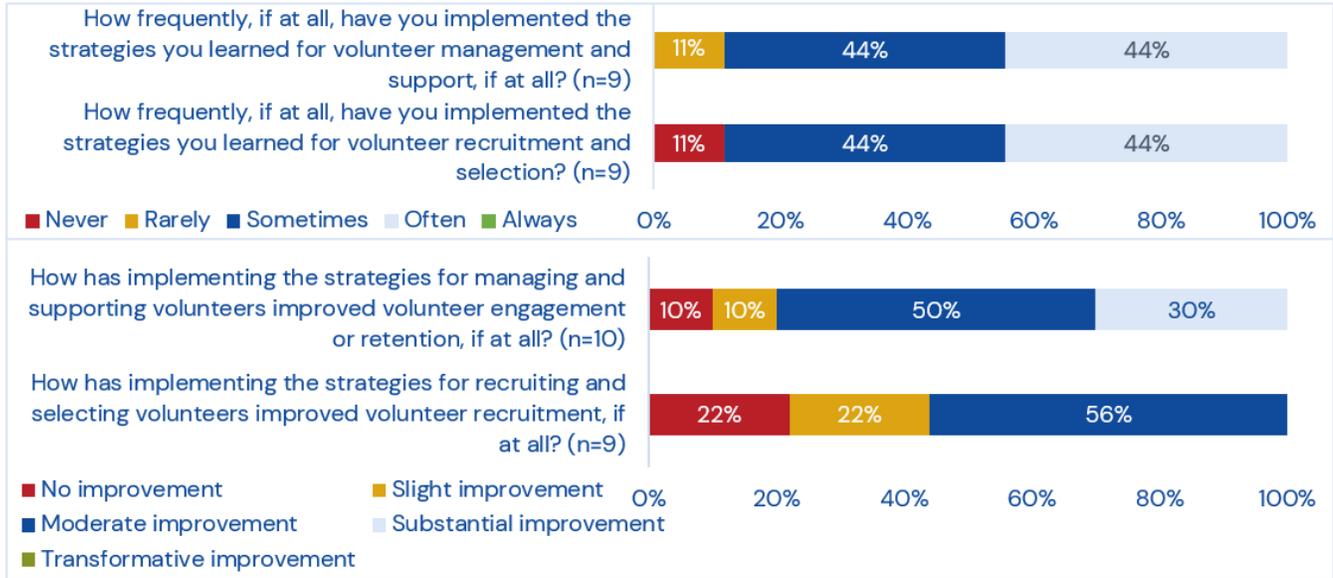
*When I look at the work that we do as an organization and success that we've had, I'm really proud of the fact that we not only locally are that place that people come to and that they know about and recognize for basic volunteer engagement efforts, but we're also seen as leaders across the state of Iowa for the work that we do. While we don't always focus on things outside of our community, it is nice to be able to show others the things we had success on to help support other volunteer connecting organizations.*

### **Training Participants' Outcomes**

Participants in the Volunteer Engagement Training Program and Skills Based Volunteering Bootcamp Webinar Series reported outcomes from their training experiences in a survey. Over two-fifths (44 percent) of survey respondents shared that they Often implemented the strategies they learned for volunteer management and support. Additionally, 44 percent of respondents noted they implemented volunteer recruitment and selection strategies Often, as seen in exhibit B.42. Regarding the outcomes of implementation, over three-quarters (80 percent) of respondents noted that strategies for managing and supporting volunteers led to Moderate or Substantial improvement in volunteer engagement or retention and over half (56 percent) of respondents

reported the implementation of strategies for recruiting or selecting volunteers resulted in Moderate improvement on volunteer recruitment.

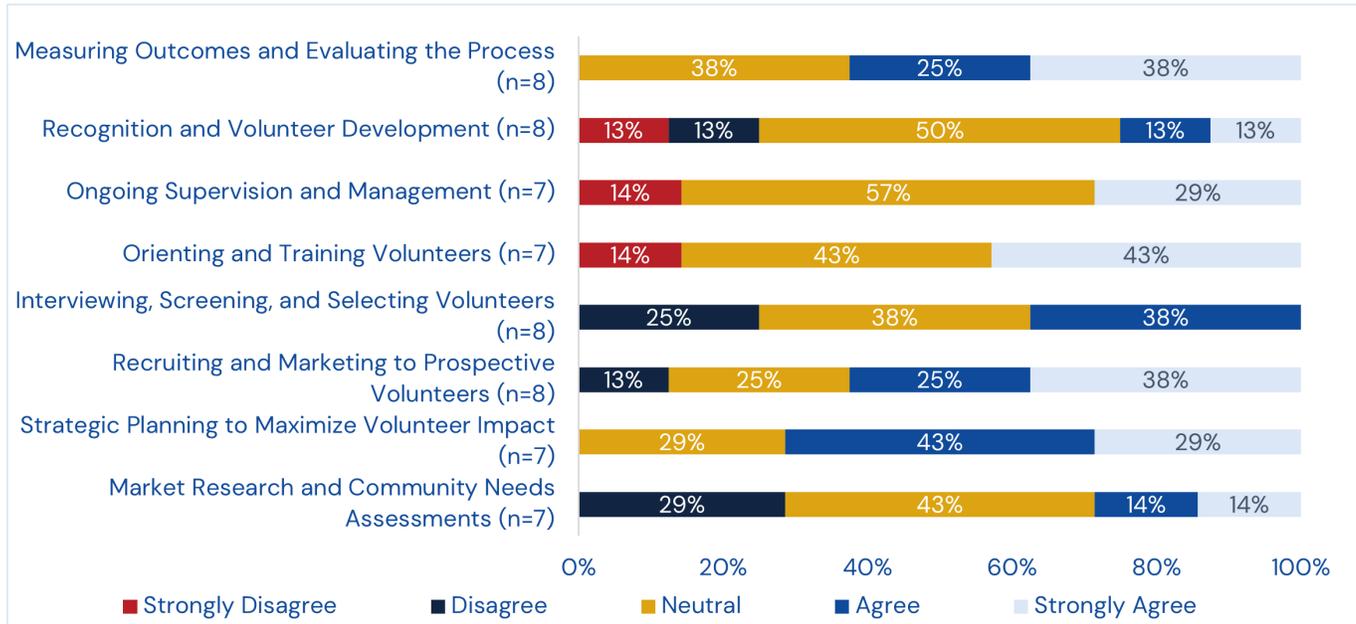
**EXHIBIT B.42.—Frequency of implementation & improvement in recruitment, engagement, and retention**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in April 2023.

Survey respondents were also asked to share their agreement regarding their and/or their organization’s need for additional training or support on various topics, as seen in exhibit B.43. The topics with the highest agreement on need were Strategic Planning to Maximize Volunteer Impact (72 percent), Measuring Outcomes and Evaluating the Process (63 percent), and Recruiting and Marketing to Prospective Volunteers (63 percent). Alternatively, the topics in which respondents noted the lowest needs were on Market Research and Community Needs Assessments (29%) and Recognition and Volunteer Development (26%).

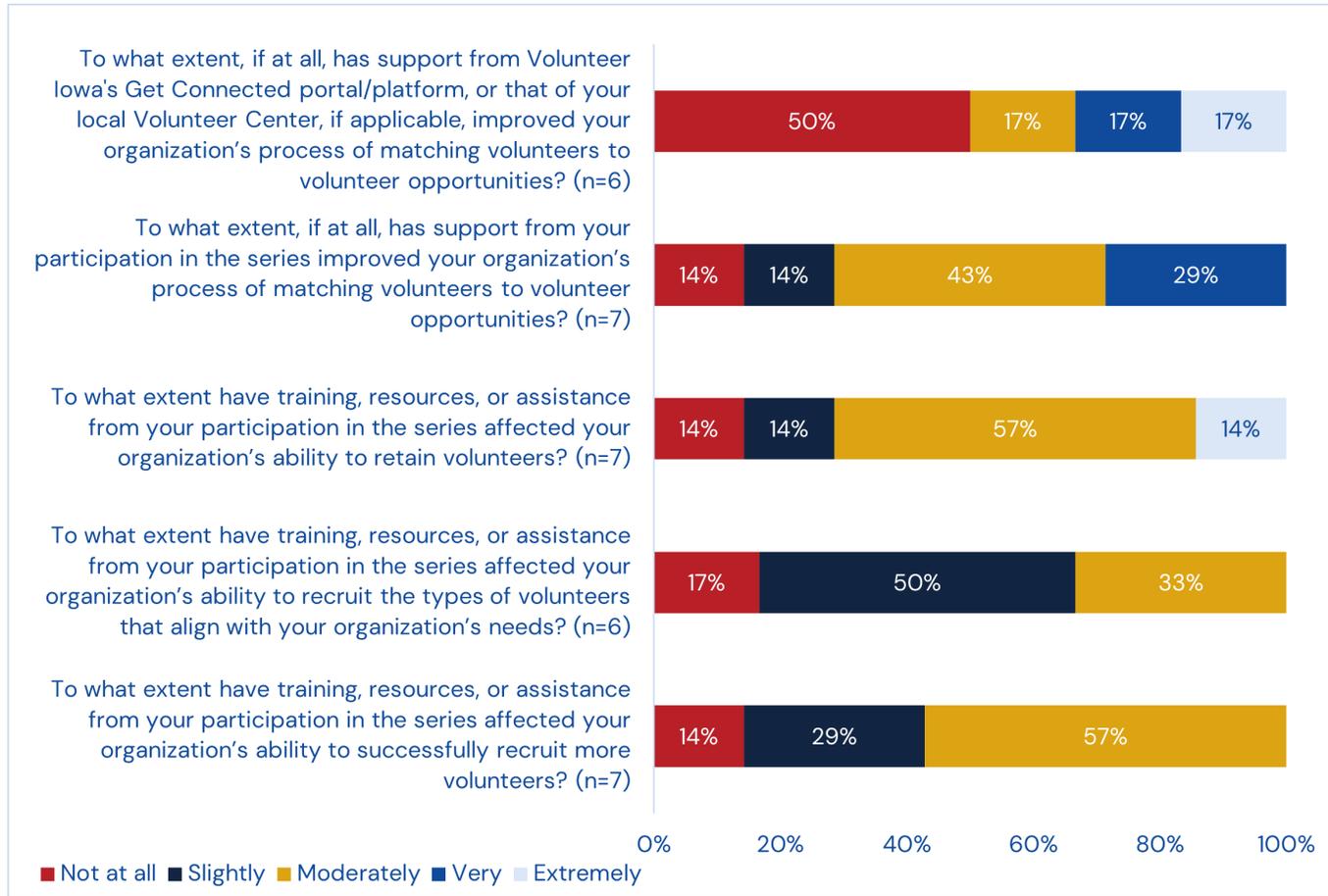
**EXHIBIT B.43.—Agreement with organizational need for additional training by topic**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in April 2023.

Lastly, survey respondents shared their perspectives on the effect of the VGF grant on various volunteer outcomes, presented in exhibit B.44. As reported by survey respondents, the outcomes with the largest effect were improving the process of matching volunteers to volunteer opportunities and retaining volunteers (29 percent and 14 percent, respectively).

**EXHIBIT B.44.—Effect of VGF grant on volunteer outcomes**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in April 2023.

**Conclusion**

Overall, through Volunteer Iowa’s initiatives, they were able to successfully support Volunteer Centers, and thus nonprofit organizations’ volunteer management, recruitment, and retention across the state. While the COVID-19 pandemic impacted Volunteer Iowa’s and the volunteer centers’ ability to provide planned initiatives and services, organizations were able to adapt to the emerging community needs pertaining to the pandemic, especially due to the community-based approach of volunteer centers. Training and services provided to nonprofit organizations emphasized incorporating inclusive practices, easing barriers to entry for volunteers including youth volunteers, and leveraging virtual volunteer opportunities. Participants expressed gratitude for the VGF funding and the flexibility it provided. Additionally, Volunteer Iowa and participating volunteer centers shared they were able to establish or affirm their positions as leaders in their community, state, or field on volunteer engagement as they supported other organizations to strengthen volunteerism. Volunteer Iowa staff also said they are continuing to provide capacity building services and supports to organizations across the state, with new Service Enterprise and volunteer center cohorts starting soon after the final commission interview to continue to promote volunteerism in their communities.

## New Hampshire Volunteer Generation Fund Case Study

The New Hampshire state service commission, Volunteer NH, participated in the AmeriCorps Volunteer Generation Fund (VGF) evaluation through several different phases, including interviews with commission staff and program implementers, and a program beneficiaries survey.<sup>39,40</sup> This survey was sent to all VGF program grantees only, who may have had a wide range of experiences with the grant, with their participation in the grant being as little as 2 weeks, and as much as 1, 2, or 3 years spent in the cohort; participants may have also had members of their organization take grant activities that they themselves did not participate in, and therefore did not record in this survey.

In addition to the evaluation data collection activities noted, the following case study brief incorporates additional data sources from VGF grant applications and progress reports and longitudinal data from the AmeriCorps Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement. Exhibit B.45 provides an overview of each of the data sources that were used to inform the following brief.

### EXHIBIT B.45.—Overview of data sources

Data Source	Participant Count	Date Collected
Grant Application	–	May 2020
Fiscal Year (FY)2021 and FY2022 VGF Progress Reports	–	December 2021 and November 2022
AmeriCorps Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement	–	September 2017, 2019, and 2021
Commission Focus Group – Volunteer NH	2	February 2022
Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey	8	January 2023
Final Commission Focus Group – Volunteer NH	2	June 2023

### Overview of Grant Structure and Goals

The initial focus of Volunteer NH’s VGF grant was to “conduct a multi-approach statewide campaign to increase volunteer engagement and to expand volunteer opportunities,” according to their 2020 VGF grant application. Volunteer NH sought to achieve their goal through the expansion of the state’s volunteer opportunity database and by developing the capacity of nonprofits to work with skilled volunteers. They planned to pursue the two following initiatives.

- 1. Expand New Hampshire’s volunteer database, Get Connected, through increasing engagement from nonprofits across the state.** To increase the number of nonprofits using Get Connected to list volunteer opportunities, Volunteer NH proposed to hire a full-time VGF program officer to conduct

<sup>39</sup> The VGF grantee, Volunteer NH, also served as the primary program implementer for VGF programming and services.

<sup>40</sup> For the Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey, the state service commission had a 23% response rate with a total of seven individual respondents representing seven unique organizations.

outreach activities. To inform nonprofits and potential volunteers of the Get Connected platform, the VGF program officer planned to develop a public service announcement to broadcast on local television and radio outlets.

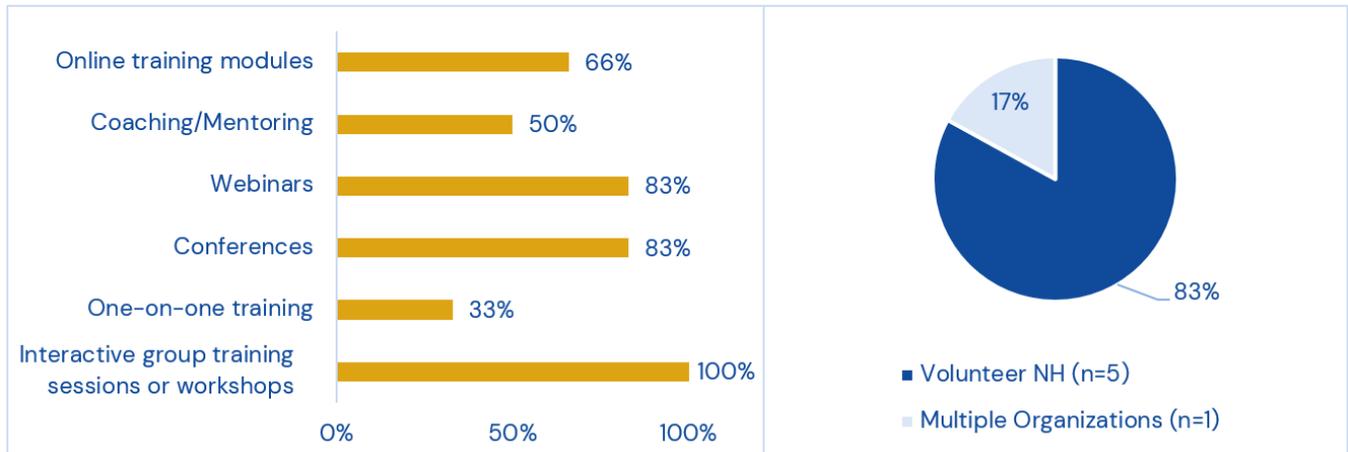
- 2. Increase the capacity of nonprofit organizations to recruit, manage, and retain skilled volunteers.** Based on a previous VGF grant initiative named High Impact Volunteer Engagement (HIVE), Volunteer NH planned to create a cohort of 10–15 organizations in need of skilled volunteers to provide training on volunteer management. Since the original grant application, this cohort structure has changed to operate for up to 3 years, with 5 organizations per year (totaling 15). Based on participant feedback from the previous VGF initiative, Volunteer NH proposed to provide subgrants (\$10,000–\$30,000) to the selected organizations to ensure the organizations’ projects could be implemented.

**A Note on Program Beneficiaries**

In the context of this case study, “program beneficiaries” include volunteer organizations that took part in Volunteer NH’s initiatives, including subgrantee and mini-grants recipients and participants in conferences and the New Hampshire Volunteer Engagement Network.

Based on the survey data from VGF cohort participants, the most frequently reported volunteer training and capacity building activities were interactive group training sessions or workshops, webinars, and conferences, with the majority (83 percent) of reported training provided by Volunteer NH. Exhibit B.46 provides additional details on the types of activities respondents noted were available to their organization through VGF grant activities.

**EXHIBIT B.46.—Volunteer training and capacity building activities and providers (n=6)**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

An overview of the status of each key initiative is included below, as described by the state service commission.

**VGF Program Officer:** In 2020, Volunteer NH transitioned an existing staff member to work on VGF grant efforts full-time. This position is supported entirely by the VGF grant. This employee’s time is spent primarily on the cohort of nonprofit organizations to which Volunteer NH provides subgrants. For this program, the role includes getting the word out to organizations potentially interested in funding, collecting application materials and facilitating the review process to determine the organizations to take on, supporting

organizations in their grant through individual assistance, and developing regular trainings and check-ins for this cohort. The VGF program officer has also developed an online volunteer resource center hosted on the Volunteer NH website, which includes content session recordings from conferences, toolkits, and other resources.

**Subgrantee Cohort:** In 2021, 13 subgrantees received training led by VQ Volunteer Strategies with consultation from the VGF program officer to customize the volunteer management content. The subgrantees received the training through monthly meetings and were given the opportunity to share any best practices or challenges during the meetings. In 2022, the training and technical assistance activities continued, with 8 of the previous subgrantees receiving a second subgrant among the 11 organizations that were awarded VGF funds in 2022. Additionally, Volunteer NH responded to subgrantee feedback in this year by decreasing the frequency and structure of their meetings, shifting from monthly trainings to quarterly meetings with multiple elements, including training presentations, as well as time for organizations to network, help, and cooperate with each other over issues they have with the grant or with volunteerism generally.

**Mini-Grants:** In addition to their main annual cohort of subgrantees, Volunteer NH identified many organizations that are unable to accept large grants with potentially strenuous federal funding requirements, and they have developed smaller mini-grants that are spread across many more organizations. This program was proposed as a continuation change in their Year 2 application and approved prior to implementation. Ranging from \$1,000 to \$4,000, these grants often go to organizations for one-time needs, such as purchasing volunteer management software or hosting a training session. Noted the VGF program manager, “[The mini-grant] will be focused around increasing the capacity of their volunteer program ... but simpler to apply for, simpler to manage, simpler to report on. We’re hoping it’ll be a stepping block for organizations that are not in a place to manage a larger grant.”

**Get Connected:** Volunteer NH is also expanding use of Get Connected, New Hampshire’s virtual volunteer connector. Efforts to do so have included airing advertisements for over 2 years on the local WMUR TV station for the service, holding a virtual volunteerism fair in partnership with New Hampshire Business for Social Responsibility, and directing organizations and individuals to the website.

Volunteer NH has changed and expanded their activities conducted through the grant significantly since their initial application. At the beginning of services, the cohort met regularly for training and received informal training from staff. Volunteer NH then received feedback from their cohort that the meetings were too frequent and too structured for their needs. Participants said they wanted more time to network with one another and support each other through common challenges. Many were volunteer managers or other staff who were working within small organizations and who had to perform many roles, and they wanted to compare notes and experiences. These both led to the development of the New Hampshire Volunteer Engagement Network, and Online Resource Center.

**Governor’s Conference:** Volunteer NH hosts an annual volunteer management conference for organizations across the state, including but not limited to members of their subgrantee cohort for that year. This event is not significantly funded through the VGF grant, other than supporting the VGF program manager’s time

there. As of 2022, Volunteer NH has operated the conference entirely online, and in summer 2023, the conference will take place in a hybrid format, with one day in-person, and one day virtual. The 2023 conference will also be the first one to include in-person elements since 2019. Volunteer NH staff noted that one advantage of maintaining the virtual setting includes being able to record conferences to share afterwards.

**New Hampshire Volunteer Engagement Network:** This network connects the volunteer manager population in New Hampshire, including all VGF grantees. Run by volunteer managers, it holds quarterly meetings where managers can share strategies they have learned and ask each other for support. Much of the activity of this network is run through the Basecamp program.

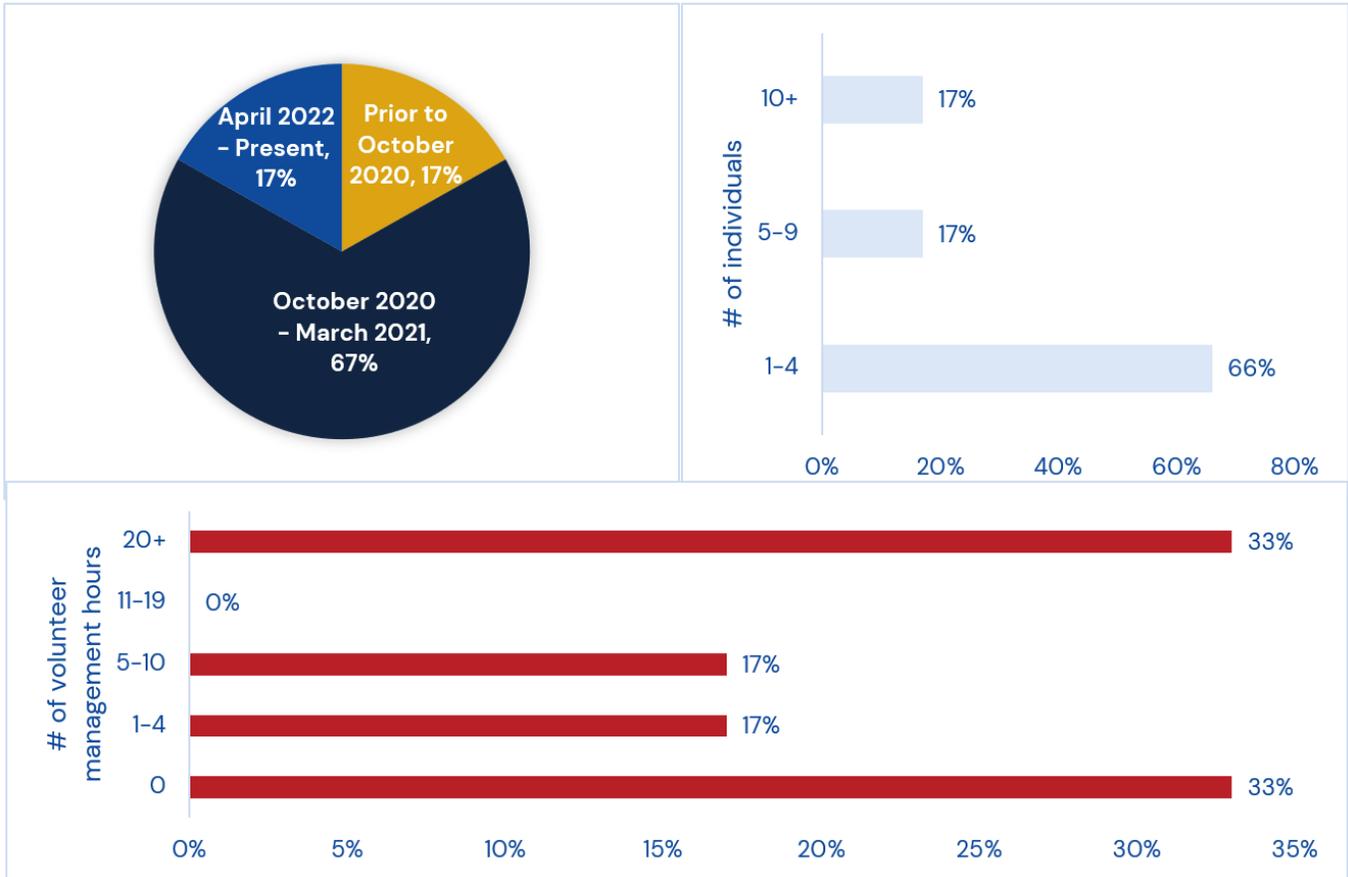
**Online Resource Center:** Volunteer NH has developed a free and freely accessible online resource center for volunteer managers with a wide range of resources. For example, program implementers shared materials for supporting volunteers during the pandemic when all activities were shifted online. All virtual Governor's Conference sessions were recorded and posted on this center to share widely. There are a large number of accessible trainings for anyone to choose from and participate in at any time.

Based on a January 2023 survey of program beneficiaries who had received training and capacity building services from Volunteer NH, the time at which respondents reported first participating in a Volunteer NH training varied. Specifically, 67 percent of respondents noted their organization first participated between October 2020 and March 2021, while 17 percent noted they did not first participate until more recently (April 2022–Present) and 17 percent first participated prior to October 2020. Since October 2020, the majority (66 percent) of survey respondents reported that 1–4 individuals from their organization participated in a training or capacity building activity through VGF, 17 percent reported that 5–9 individuals participated, and 17 percent reported that 10–plus participated. One-third of participants reported 20–plus volunteer management training hours. Exhibit B.47 provides an overview of the time frame in which participating organizations reported they first participated in training as well as the range of individuals who participated.

*We get a lot of phone calls from people who are looking to volunteer and don't know where to start. ... [We point] them to that database as a resource to search for active opportunities in their area or nonprofits in their area that they might want to reach out to and see if they might have something that's not listed there.*

*VGF Program Manager*

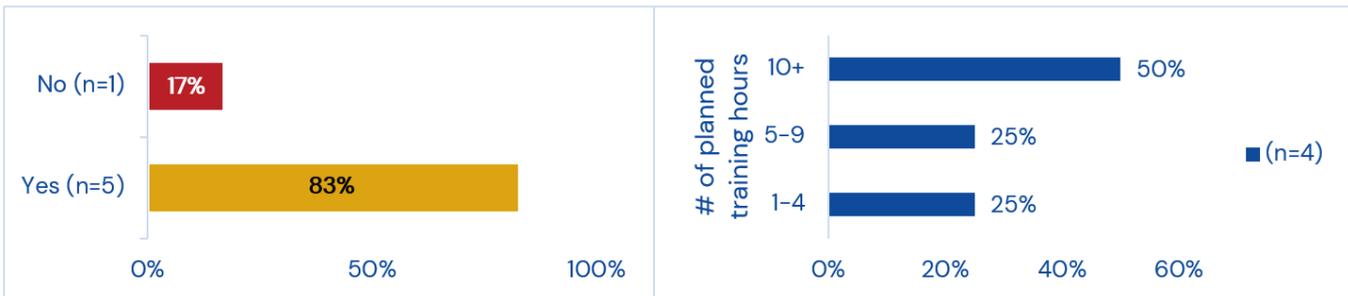
**EXHIBIT B.47.—Organization’s participation time frame, range and number of hours (n=6)**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

Survey respondents were also asked to report on their organization’s plans for additional training beyond January 2023. Exhibit B.48 reports the percentage of participants who said they intended to complete additional training through VGF, with 83 percent noting Yes and 17 percent noting No. The majority of survey respondents indicated they planned to complete 10-plus additional training hours.

**EXHIBIT B.48.—Organizational plans for additional training and planned hours**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

**Recent Volunteerism Trends in New Hampshire and Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic**

According to the 2021 AmeriCorps Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement, over two-fifths (27.9 percent) of New Hampshire residents formally volunteered through

organizations, exceeding the national rate (23.2 percent) of individuals who formally volunteered. However, in New Hampshire, this was a decline compared to the rates in 2017 and 2019 of 35.7 percent and 32.2 percent, respectively. The rate of formal volunteering has declined since 2017, however the largest drop occurred between 2019 and 2021, following the onset of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. In the state, formal volunteering contributed \$692 million in economic value in 2021. Informally, over half (52.4 percent) of residents noted they helped others by exchanging favors with their neighbors, which is comparable to 2017 and 2019 rates of 54.3 percent and 58.5 percent, respectively.

Volunteer NH identified a significant shift in the needs of volunteer organizations during the pandemic. For many organizations, the ability to focus on volunteer programs was significantly reduced, and some organizations that had a primary volunteer population made of vulnerable populations, such as seniors, were not able to use their old model of volunteerism at all. However, according to the VGF program manager, this was a symptom of a larger issue:

*The pandemic only served to highlight what was already an underlying issue with a lot of nonprofits. That is, after collecting data and seeing how organizations participate in the HIVE project, we've learned that nonprofits prioritize their volunteer programs below other organizational projects. It seems that year after year, nonprofits join the HIVE program with great goals and then—due to staff turnover, internal issues, or a pandemic—have to leave them off to go handle other issues, even when they report that the project has increased their capacity.*

To support volunteerism despite the pandemic, Volunteer NH has offered several resources to organizations within the state, including subgrantees, to pay for organizational staff time to work on volunteer-related projects, an online resource center regarding virtual volunteer management, and peer support time through their Volunteer Engagement Network.

Volunteer NH identified a major benefit in the shift to virtual activities during the pandemic. For the Volunteer NH cohort, trainings were conducted virtually, and as a result, many were recorded and are now available for more groups to use, hosted on Volunteer NH's Online Resource Center. Additionally, the Volunteer NH conference grew exponentially after it became a virtual event; over 500 participants attended in 2021, which was a much higher count than in previous years.

### **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**

Volunteer NH staff reported issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) to be very important to their organization and their board. At the time of ICF's second project director interview in June of 2023, Volunteer NH staff were working with a contractor to perform a complete analysis of how to make their work more accessible. They also developed a Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) committee within their organization, that has expanded programming within the Governor's Conference and is currently evaluating their grantmaking process. The committee's members have diverse lived experiences that contribute to their work, and the committee has multiple grantee members present.

Volunteer NH's Governor's Conference has a large number of sessions on issues of diversity. For example, in 2021, their keynote speaker's address was focused on community and inclusion, and during the main conference section, multiple sessions on diversity and inclusion were the only sessions offered at specific times, and were therefore highly attended and praised by participants. Additionally, all members of their subgrantee cohort receive diversity training by attending sessions at the conference.

## Strategies Used and/or Learned

Volunteer NH grantees have accessed trainings in multiple ways. This has included regular monthly trainings in past cohorts as well as through their online resource center and during conferences. Trainings are available to VGF grantees through a menu of options, some of which from the past 3 years have included:

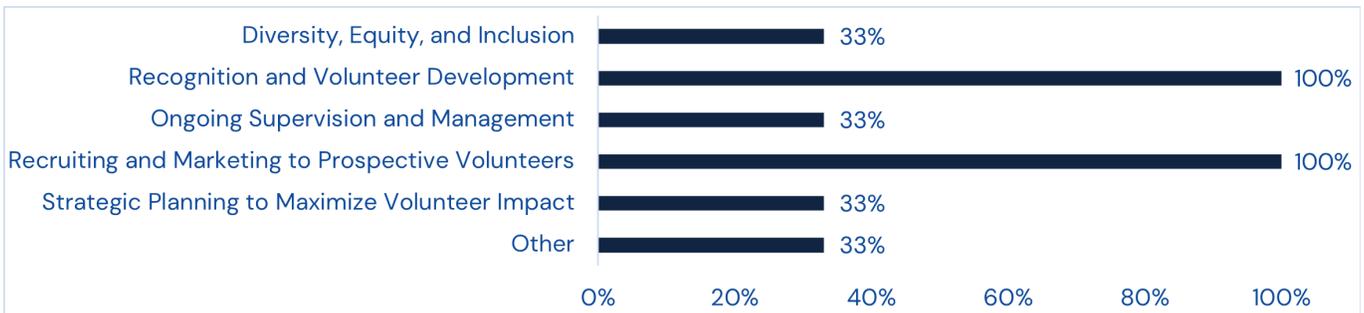
- Volunteer appreciation and recognition
- Accessible, inclusive volunteer management
- Recruitment
- Volunteer engagement
- Providing feedback to volunteers
- Strategic planning for volunteer programs
- Volunteer management software (resource sharing)
- Federal grants management (provided to all subgrantees at startup)

This menu is developed annually based on feedback received from midyear and final progress reports taken by grantees. This list does not include topics covered at the Governor’s Conference, which typically include a host of specific topics under more general categories, including volunteer management, professional development, organizational management, and DEI. The Volunteer Resource Center also has a large number of trainings available.

Volunteer NH also highlighted the value of the networking time provided by their cohort program to help organizations learn new strategies. “There are tons of small nonprofits where there’s one volunteer director entirely responsible for the volunteer program,” a Volunteer NH staff member said. “They have no experience or people to ask questions [of] within their organization ... so [the cohort members have] gotten support from one another. Getting feedback, learning about each other’s program models. I think they’re very thirsty for more education about how a small nonprofit runs.”

Across survey respondents, there was a wide variation in the types of practices respondents noted receiving training on through the VGF grant. The most frequently reported training practices included Recognition and Volunteer Development (100 percent) and Recruiting and Marketing to Prospective Volunteers (100 percent). Exhibit B.49 provides additional details on the types of practices reported by respondents.

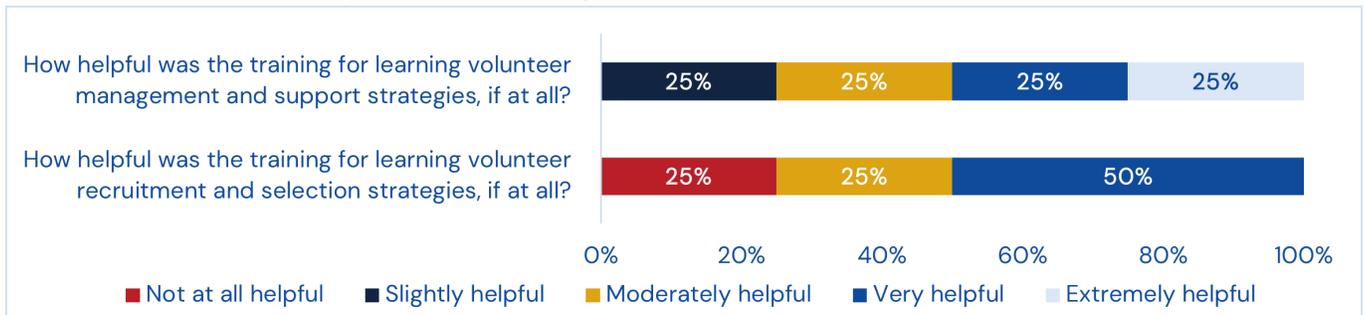
**EXHIBIT B.49.—Volunteer management practices learned about in trainings (n=3)**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

Across survey participants, half (50 percent) noted the training for learning volunteer management and support strategies and recruitment and selection strategies were very helpful or extremely helpful, as seen in exhibit B.50.

**EXHIBIT B.50.—Reported helpfulness of training (n=4)**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

**Collecting and Tracking Data**

Cohort members take pre- and post-tests, rating their organization’s competencies in all areas of volunteer management, answer questions on how the grant increased their capacity, as well as report the organization’s volunteer numbers and hours. As mentioned above, members also suggest trainings they would like to have available to them in the next year. According to these metrics, all cohort members reported having either a Good or Excellent experience this year as a recipient of their subgrant, though this result does not necessarily speak to an objective increase in their competencies.

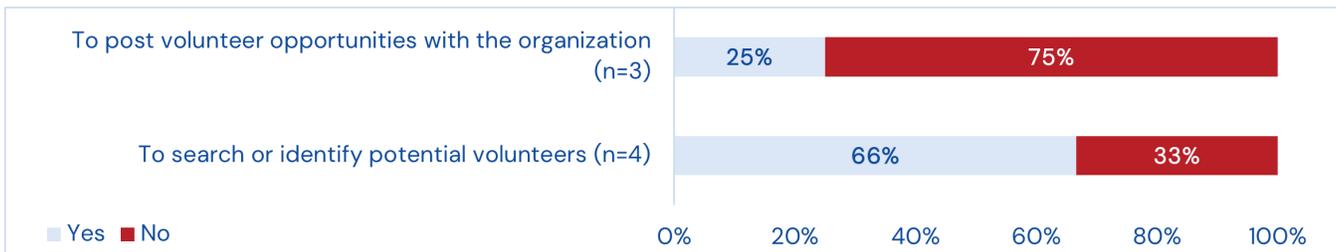
Grantees also take separate progress and final reports to track their own internal benchmarks, including data such as numbers of volunteers and volunteer hours, as well as unique indicators such as pounds of food collected or new volunteers retained, depending on their own targets. These targets allow grantees to increase competency in their specific organizational contexts.

**Volunteer Platform**

Volunteer NH reported experiencing a large increase in users on their volunteer connector platform, Get Connected, since the onset of the pandemic. In the spring of 2020, the governor of New Hampshire made a public announcement advertising the website, during a period in which many people had been laid off and therefore had time available to volunteer and either use or develop employable skills. From the time of the grant application to the project director interview date in February 2022, the number of registered users on Get Connected had risen from 14,000 to approximately 16,000 users, surpassing the grant’s goal of increasing the number of users by 1,000. In that time, 525 active opportunities had been posted to the website, and 80 percent of opportunities were responded to in the previous year. Although Volunteer NH staff noted they had not conducted a survey with users on the effectiveness of Get Connected, they planned to do so in the future.

As seen in exhibit B.51, while three-quarters (75 percent) of survey respondents reported that they did not use the platform to post volunteer opportunities, two-thirds (66 percent) did use the platform to search or identify potential volunteers.

**EXHIBIT B.51.—Use of state service commission portal/platform**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

**Outcomes**

**Volunteer NH’s Outcomes**

Volunteer NH staff noted VGF supports volunteer organizations in the state who have several ongoing challenges. Organizations in the state were generally under-resourced and under-staffed, particularly following the pandemic, so it was a challenge for cohort members to stick to their training schedules. In the first year, many cohort subgrantees were unable to draw funds for the first quarter due to the AmeriCorps required National Service Criminal History Checks taking a long time. Since, Volunteer NH has updated the model so that first year subgrantees receive funds for nine months, they can use those pre-award months to complete the checks compliantly. Finally, while Volunteer NH has a stated goal of supporting under-resourced organizations, it has been difficult to identify these groups and support them through a long, cohort-based model.

Volunteer NH staff has reported the use of their VGF grant to be a success overall. Staff noted that the challenges are actively being addressed by the VGF grant, which has allowed Volunteer NH and their cohort organizations to grow capacity in a way that hasn’t been possible before, “like an oasis,” where challenges have become opportunities. For example, while organizations face the challenge of being under-resourced in many ways, the VGF grant has helped create awareness within these groups about the power of leveraging skills within their volunteer base to cover weak spots and meet their missions. Based on a priority focus from their JEDI committee to reduce the barrier to entry for organizations to access grant monies, Volunteer NH also addressed the difficulty of supporting organizations through a long, large cohort model by creating their mini-grants. In their 2021 and 2022 reports to AmeriCorps, Volunteer NH cited combined across the two years, over 11,000 volunteers were recruited or managed, with those volunteers serving over 600,000 hours total.

Additionally, Volunteer NH staff reported less quantifiable successes, including their development into a major volunteer connector across the state. Staff celebrated the ability the grant gives them to partner with smaller nonprofits that wouldn’t be able to traditionally receive AmeriCorps funds because they wouldn’t have the infrastructure. Funds are flexible, and Volunteer NH is more easily able to meet organizations where they are. As two Volunteer NH staff said:

*The funds have been so incredibly elevating for our whole state. And I don’t know how we evaluate that. And that’s one of the things that I am challenged with is how do we really show the impact, because it is a tremendous impact. It’s just hard to get our hands around exactly how we do that.*

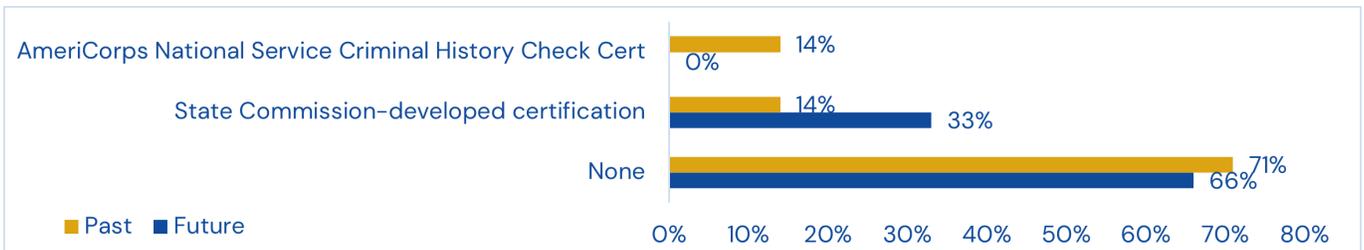
*We have conversations with United Way, with the Center for Nonprofits, with the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation, with New Hampshire Business for Social Responsibility—*

*the key players who work with volunteers and volunteer organizations. And we can be a convener of conversations across those groups to see where the gaps are.*

**Program Beneficiaries’ Outcomes**

Overall, both Volunteer NH and training recipients reported high satisfaction with the training and capacity building provided through the VGF grant program. As seen in exhibit B.52, survey respondents indicated the certifications their organizations had received since October 2020 and/or were planning to receive by September 2023. As of October 2020, nearly three-quarters (71 percent) of respondents had not received any certifications, while 14 percent had received an AmeriCorps criminal history certification and 14 percent had received a state service commission-developed certification, though program staff noted they do not currently award certifications, and these organizations may be referring to one they received from HIVE, an earlier grant model. All survey participants were from the VGF cohort, all of which are required to take the AmeriCorps criminal history certification, so this reported data is likely inaccurate as well. One-third (33 percent) of survey respondents reported intending to acquire a state service commission-developed certification in the future. In terms of individual staff, only one staff member reported receiving a certification, created by the state service commission.

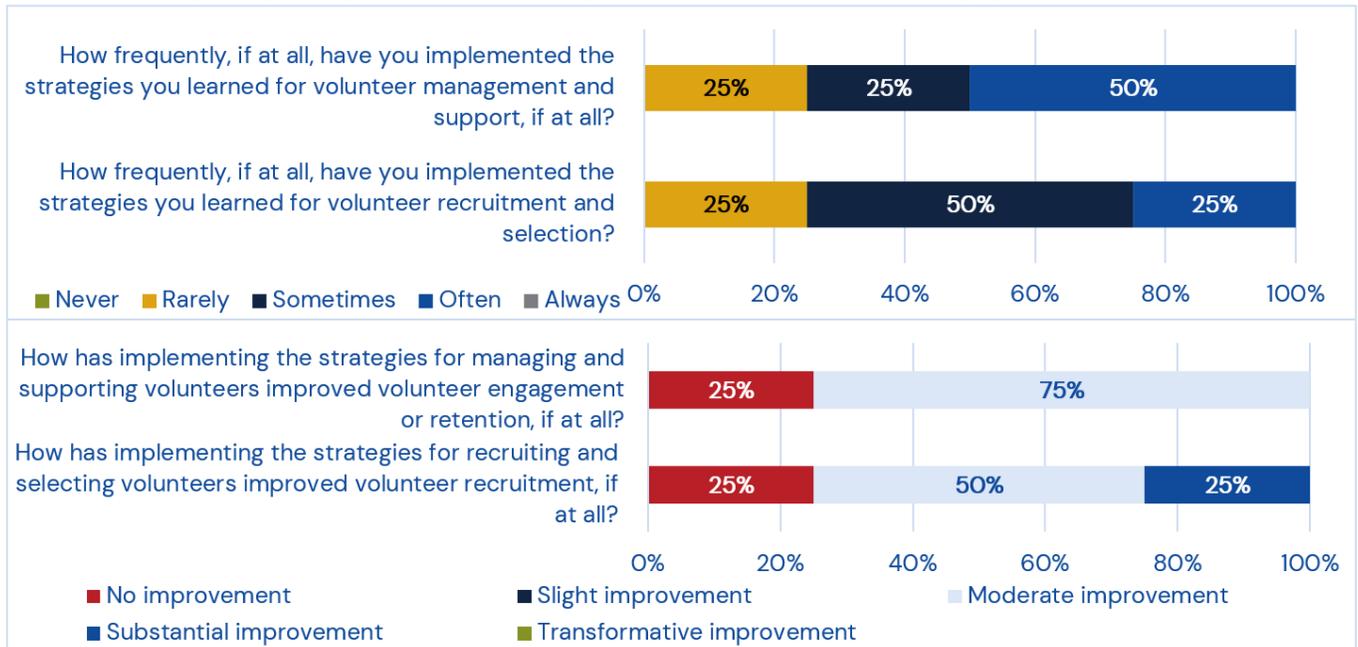
**EXHIBIT B.52.—Certifications organizations received as of October 2020 and/or planned to receive by September 2023 (n=7)**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

Half (50 percent) of survey respondents shared that they Often implement the strategies they learned for volunteer management and support. Additionally, 25 percent of respondents noted they implemented volunteer recruitment and selection strategies Often or Always, as seen in exhibit B.53. Regarding the outcomes of implementation, three-quarters of respondents noted that the implementation of the strategies led to a moderate or substantial improvement in volunteer management and support (75 percent) and volunteer recruitment (75 percent).

**EXHIBIT B.53.—Frequency of implementation & improvement in recruitment, engagement, and retention (n=4)**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

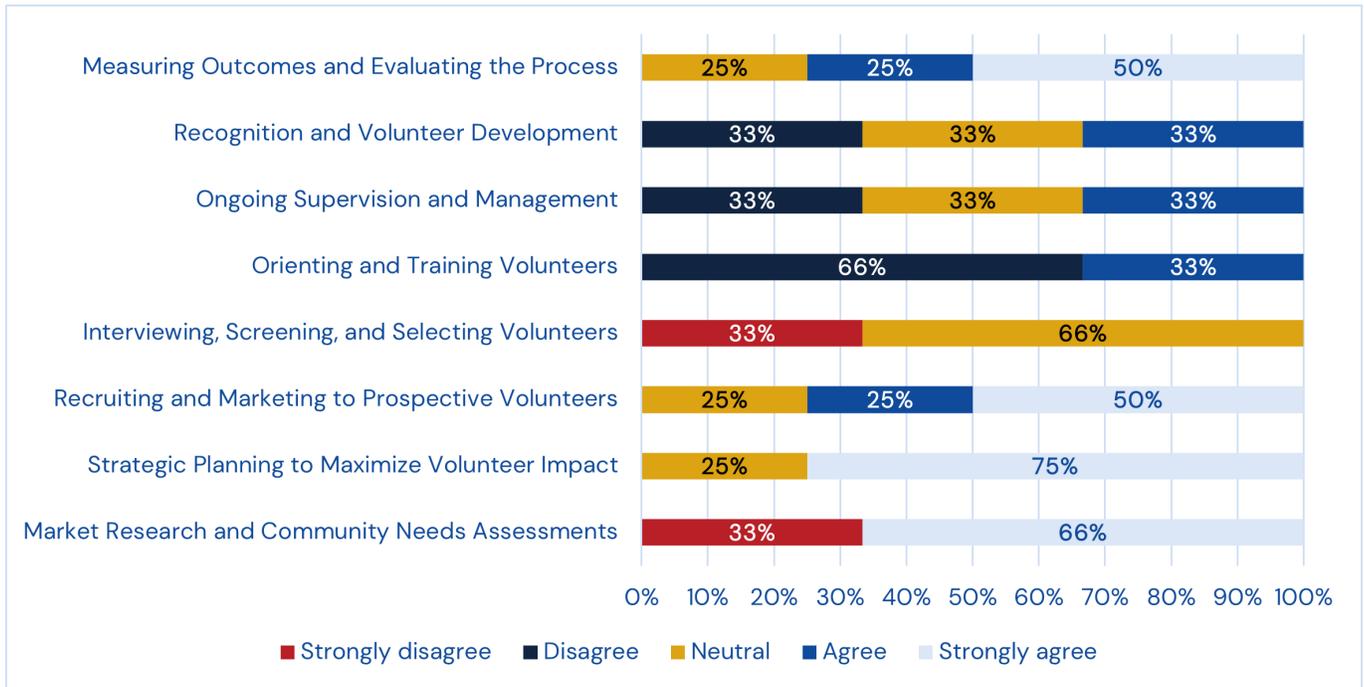
VGF participants also shared specific personal experiences with grant activities with program implementers, which were shared with ICF. One participant reporting using VGF funds to revive their volunteer program, enhance training offerings, invest in tracking software, and grow recruitment efforts—especially efforts to build a more diverse volunteer pool. Multiple participants echoed this sentiment, sharing how they were able to hire more staff, recruit more volunteers, and establish skilled volunteer positions. Participants also appreciated the opportunity to network with each other. See below for illustrative quotes from participants.

*Over the past 3 years, VGF funds have helped us recruit hundreds of new volunteers who have given thousands of hours to our organization, and we have established new skilled volunteer positions, which has further enhanced our capacity to accomplish our mission of reducing food waste and increasing food security in the Upper Valley.*

*I think the most important takeaway is that there is a network or resources out there and we ... do not need to reinvent the wheel. What we are learning is that what we need to do better is to look for the wheel that will best fit our need and use it, inflating the tire pressure as needed to get the job done.*

Survey respondents were also asked to share their agreement regarding their and/or their organization’s need for additional training or support on various topics, as seen in exhibit B.54. The topics with the highest agreement on need were Measuring Outcomes and Evaluating the Process (75 percent) and Strategic Planning to Maximize Volunteer Impact (75 percent). Alternatively, the topics in which respondents noted the lowest needs were Recognition and Volunteer Development (33 percent), Orienting and Training Volunteers (33 percent), and Ongoing Supervision and Management (33 percent).

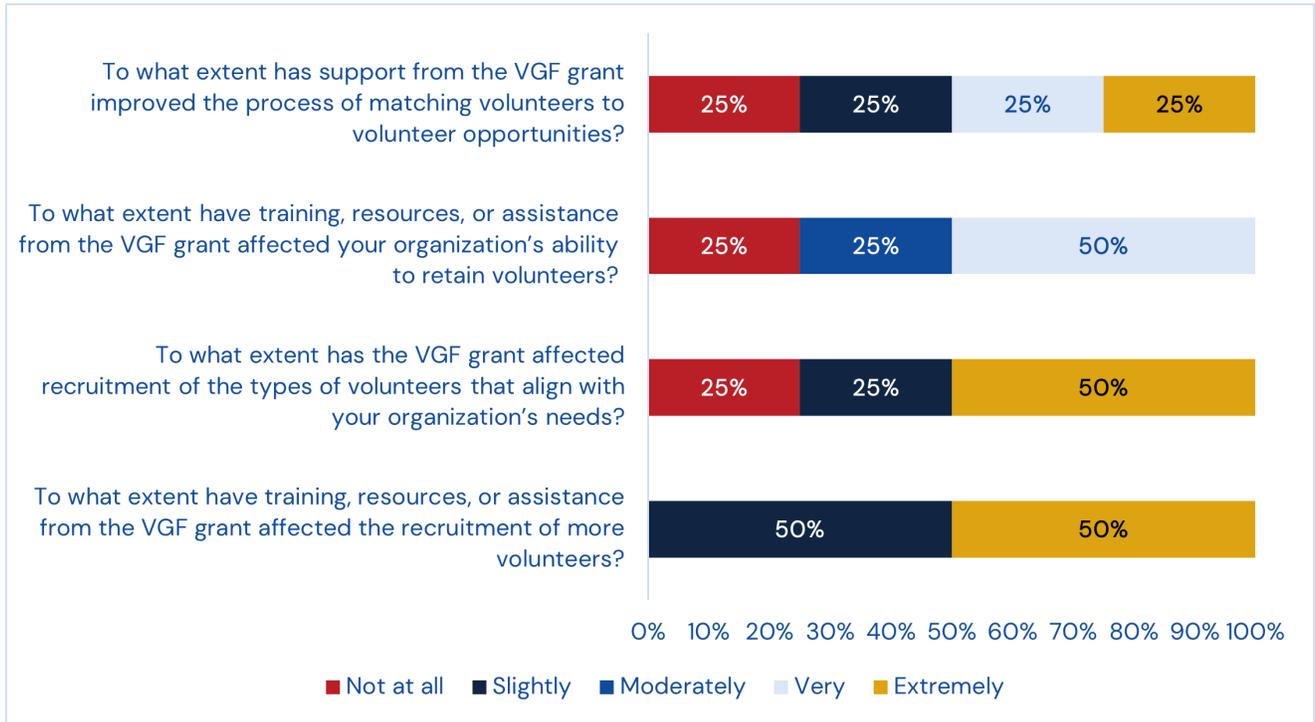
**EXHIBIT B.54.—Agreement with organizational need for additional training by topic (n=4)**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

Lastly, survey respondents shared their perspectives on the effect of the VGF grant on various volunteer outcomes, presented in exhibit B.55. As reported by survey respondents, the outcomes with the greatest effects were improving the process for recruiting the types of volunteers that aligned with organizational needs and recruiting one or more volunteers.

**EXHIBIT B.55.—Effect of VGF grant on volunteer outcomes (n=4)**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

**Conclusion**

Volunteer NH is well on its way to achieving success in both of its primary goals for the VGF grant—expanding the use of its volunteer connector platform, Get Connected, and increasing capacity of volunteer organizations to recruit and retain skilled volunteers. Volunteer NH has had to navigate the many challenges the volunteer connector organizations they serve have had to face in the pandemic, including high levels of staff turnover among subgrantees and a de-prioritization of volunteer programs at nonprofits. Nevertheless, the pandemic presented an opportunity for Volunteer NH to reach more volunteer organizations through its conference by pivoting to a virtual format. Overall, the VGF grant has impacted Volunteer NH’s capacity to connect volunteers to volunteer opportunities through Get Connected and to support volunteer organizations in recruiting volunteers.

## Nevada Volunteer Generation Fund Case Study

The Nevada state service commission, Nevada Volunteers, participated in the AmeriCorps Volunteer Generation Fund (VGF) evaluation through several different phases, including interviews with commission staff and a program beneficiaries survey.<sup>41,42</sup> In addition to the evaluation data collection activities noted, the following case study brief incorporates additional data sources from VGF grant applications and progress reports and longitudinal data from the AmeriCorps Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement. Exhibit B.56 provides an overview of each of the data sources that were used to inform the following brief.

**EXHIBIT B.56.—Overview of data sources**

Data Source	Participant Count	Date Collected
Grant Application	–	May 2020
Fiscal year (FY)2021 and FY2022 VGF Progress Reports	–	December 2021 and November 2022
AmeriCorps Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement	–	September 2017, 2019, and 2021
Commission Interview – Nevada Volunteers	1	February 2022
Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey	5	January 2023
Commission Document Review – Nevada Volunteers	1	September 2023

### Overview of Grant Structure and Goals

The initial focus of Nevada Volunteers’ (VGF) grant was to implement three interventions to increase the capacity of Nevada organizations to effectively manage volunteers and increase volunteerism across the state. According to their 2020 VGF grant application, the proposed interventions included the following: (1) expand the reach of the statewide website to connect organizations with diverse volunteers; (2) provide capacity building mini-grants to organizations interested in implementing new evidence-based volunteer management best practices; and (3) provide training and technical assistance to organizations on evidence-based volunteer management best practices. Nevada Volunteers focused on increasing volunteer infrastructure and organizational capacity, based on previous research that found it to be a barrier to

#### A Note on Program Beneficiaries

In the context of this case study, “program beneficiaries” include organizations that took part in Nevada Volunteers’ initiatives, including mini-grants and training, and technical assistance.

<sup>41</sup> The VGF grantee, Nevada Volunteers, also served as the primary program implementer for VGF programming and services.

<sup>42</sup> For the Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey, the state service commission had an 83 percent response rate with a total of 5 individual respondents representing 4 unique organizations. Across survey participants, half (50 percent) of survey respondents reported an average of 50–100 volunteers, 25 percent reported an average of 21–30 volunteers, and 25 percent reported an average of fewer than 10 volunteers.

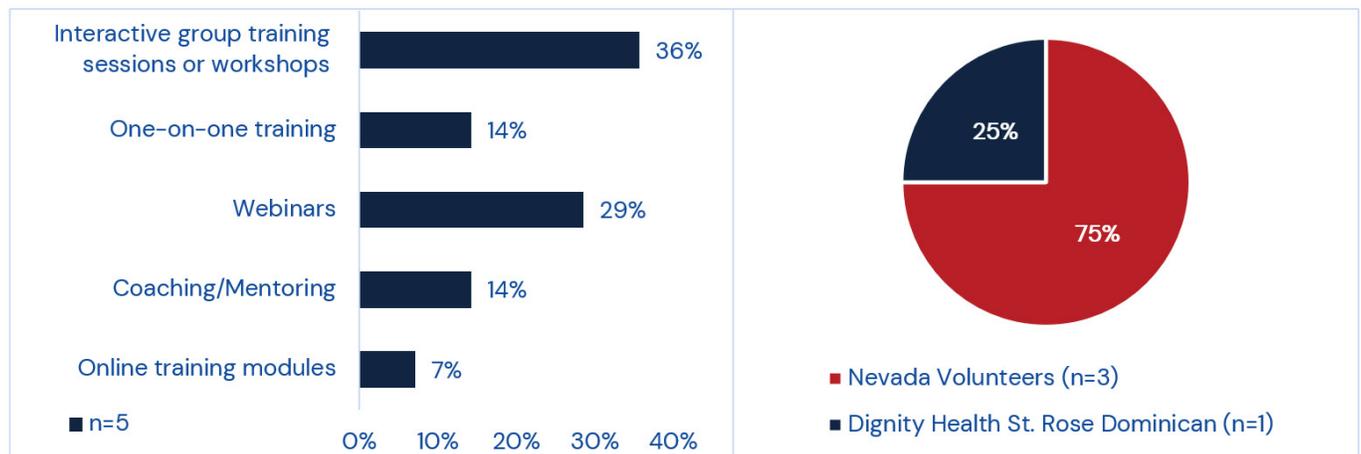
volunteering. The following nine best practices—which are part of the Human Resource Management (HRM) model of volunteer management—were noted by Nevada Volunteers in order to successfully meet their objectives:

- Clearly defined volunteer roles;
- Volunteer recruitment strategy;
- Volunteer screening and matching procedures;
- Volunteer orientation and ongoing training plans;
- Liability insurance;
- Volunteer supervision and communication plans;
- Volunteer recognition plan;
- Volunteer evaluation and goal setting; and
- Reflection practice.

Using the indicated strategies, Nevada Volunteers reported in their grant application that they planned to provide capacity building services to 30 organizations—providing 10 mini-grants to organizations and providing capacity building training and technical assistance (TTA) to an additional 20 organizations. For Nevada Volunteers to count mini-grantees as having received capacity building services, the organization had to have attended at least one virtual or in-person training and attend a monthly call with their VGF program officer. For mini-grantees to be counted as having increased their effectiveness, they must have developed and implemented at least one new volunteer management best practice noted previously.

Based on the survey data from training participants, the most frequently reported volunteer training and capacity building activities were interactive group training sessions or workshops and webinars, with the three-quarters (75 percent) reporting having received training by Nevada Volunteers. Exhibit B.57 provides additional details on the types of activities respondents noted were available to their organization through VGF grant activities.

**EXHIBIT B.57.—Volunteer training and capacity building activities and providers**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

An overview of the status of each key intervention is included below, as described by the state service commission, through which the majority of initiatives were provided.

**NVVolunteerConnect.org:** Nevada Volunteers launched the website in 2019 to serve as a low barrier website to easily connect long- or short-term volunteers and organizations seeking to recruit volunteers. As reported in Nevada Volunteers’ grant application, approximately 1,000 individuals accessed the site monthly, and 1,375 organizations had active volunteer positions across the state. To enhance use of the website, Nevada Volunteers used VGF funds to develop a statewide multilingual public service announcement (PSA) with the intention of increasing the number of organizations accessing the site to 2,000 and individuals accessing the site to 1,500 per month. Additionally, Nevada Volunteers also planned to use VGF funds to add additional search filters to the website in response to emerging needs, such as the need for virtual volunteers during COVID-19.

**Mini-Grants:** Nevada Volunteers provided mini-grants of \$5,000–\$25,000 for up to ten organizations interested in increasing organizational capacity to manage, retain and recognize volunteers. Ultimately, nine mini-grants were funded. Mini-grant funds were used to increase their organizational capacity in one of the nine identified best practices outlined in the Overview of Grant Structure and Goals section. Key staff from the Nevada Volunteers, including the VGF Program Officer, conducted monthly calls with each mini-grantee to review their progress and develop individualized TTA.

Additionally, Nevada Volunteers provided a micro grant to 32 subgrantees for 2-months, July and August 2021, focused on volunteer recognition. As part of the micro grant, Nevada Volunteers held one training for grant recipients.

**Training & Technical Assistance (TTA):** In addition to the capacity building TTA provided to mini-grant recipients, Nevada Volunteers developed and provided support and services to other organizations across the state. TTA provided to organizations included live webinars, in-person trainings, print resources and on-demand online courses focused on the nine evidence-based best practices for volunteer management. Each year, Nevada Volunteers provided at least one live-webinar per quarter and five in-person training opportunities located across the state.

In terms of training curricula, in January 2023, training participants participated in a Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey. As seen in exhibit B.58, half of the survey respondents reported they participated in training that utilized the Points of Light Volunteer Manager Training and half reported participating in a training that used the Nevada Volunteers program.

**EXHIBIT B.58.—Types of curriculum used (n=2)**

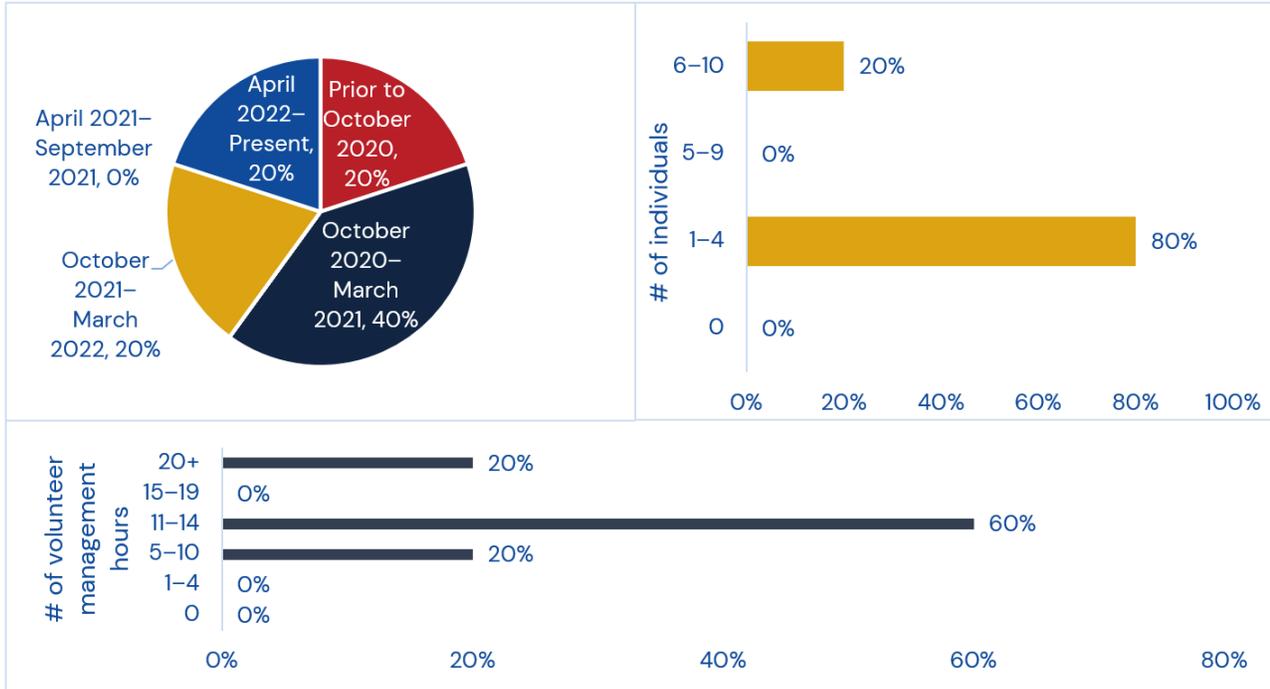


Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

The time in which survey respondents reported first participating in a Nevada Volunteers training varied, with 20 percent of respondents noting their organization first participated prior to October 2020, while 40 percent noted their organization first participated October 2020–March 2021, and 20 percent noted they did not first participate until more recently (April 2022–Present). Since October 2020, the majority (80

percent) of survey respondents noted that 1–4 individuals from their organization participated in a training or capacity building activity through VGF and 20 percent noted 10 or more individuals participated. Overall, 80 percent of respondents participated in 11 or more volunteer management hours. Exhibit B.59 provides an overview of the time frame in which participating organizations reported they first participated in training and the range of individuals who participated.

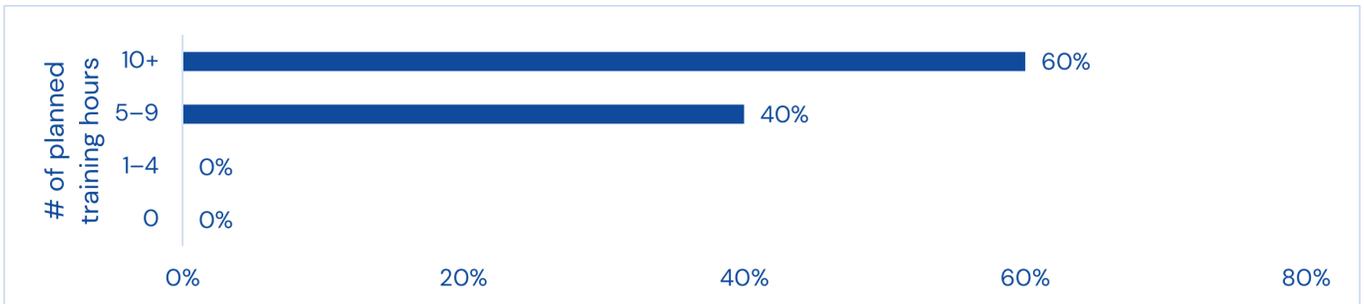
**EXHIBIT B.59.—Organization’s participation time frame, range, and number of hours (n=5)**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

Survey participants were also asked to report on the organization’s plans for future training. All respondents indicated they intended to complete additional training through VGF, with respondents noting they planned to complete 10 or more additional training hours (60 percent) or 5–9 more hours (40 percent), as seen in exhibit B.60.

**EXHIBIT B.60.—Additional planned training hours (n=5)**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

## Recent Volunteerism Trends in Nevada and Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic

According to the 2021 AmeriCorps Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement, fewer than one-fifth (17 percent) of Nevada residents formally volunteered through organizations, 6 percentage points lower than the national rate (23 percent) of individuals who formally volunteered. Additionally, 21 percent of residents reported belonging to an organization. Longitudinally, in Nevada, there has been a decline in formal volunteering rates since 2017, with formal volunteering at 24 percent in 2017, 22 percent in 2019, and 17 percent in 2021. The steepest decline occurred following the onset of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, which mirrors trends occurring nationwide. Across the state, formal volunteering contributed 31.5 million hours of service, worth an estimated \$824.6 million. Alternatively, informal volunteering increased slightly in 2019 and declined again in 2021. Over one-third (37 percent) of residents noted they informally helped others by exchanging favors with their neighbors, compared to previous informal volunteering rates of 43 percent in 2017 and 45 percent in 2019.

Additionally, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Nevada Volunteers had to slightly alter their initial plans for capacity building and TTA. During the Nevada commission interview in February 2022, staff noted that some sessions initially planned for in-person transitioned to virtual due to concerns regarding the spread of COVID-19. Additionally, at the time of the commission interview, Nevada Volunteers shared they had intended to complete at least one site visit per grantee; however, due to the rise of the COVID-19 omicron variant, site visits had not yet been scheduled.

## Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Broadly, Nevada Volunteers described diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in volunteer management as very important, especially in the recruitment of diverse and representative volunteers. At the time of the commission interview, Nevada Volunteers shared they were planning to provide a training focused on DEI issues in volunteer recruitment, and noted,

*That's really important when you talk about recruitment and looking at your volunteer base and who you have and who you're lacking based on the demographics of your community ... the main part is ensuring that your volunteer base is representative of the community that you're in ... [Nevada Volunteers] learned that language is very important, the word volunteer isn't a good word to use when working with our community. And so those are things I will address in the recruitment portion of the training.*

## Strategies Used and/or Learned

For the capacity building and TTA provided through the VGF program, Nevada Volunteers noted they ultimately decided to go with a lunch-and-learn series around the nine best practices. The lunch-and-learn training session would include a 1-hour presentation on the topic, followed by a 30-minute discussion for participants to learn from each other's experiences and network with other organizations. The lunch-and-learn series was planned to contain in part the following session topics: volunteer recognition, utilizing court-appointed volunteers, and volunteer orientation and recruitment. Nevada Volunteers shared they intended to focus on utilizing court-appointed volunteers, as it was a topic that they regularly received questions on, explaining,

*Nevada Volunteers receives a ton of phone calls from people who have been assigned [and] have to get court-appointed hours ... we don't know where to direct them. So, we actually have an intern in the office right now who is reaching out to all of our organizations that are signed up on NV Volunteer Connect to see which ones utilize court-appointed*

*volunteers and which ones do not. And then my goal is to interview them and have them speak at our training.*

The state service commission also identified volunteer orientation and recruitment as a topic area for the lunch-and-learn based on feedback from mini-grant recipients. Following the award of the mini-grants, Nevada Volunteers sent out a survey through which grantees ranked the nine best practices in order of which they felt they needed the most help with—the top practice being volunteer orientation and recruitment.

Across survey respondents, there was a variation in the types of practices respondents noted receiving training on through the VGF grant. The most frequently reported training practices included Recognition and Volunteer Development (20 percent), Recruiting and Marketing to Prospective Volunteers (20 percent), Orienting and Training Volunteers (15 percent), and Strategic Planning to Maximize Volunteer Impact (15 percent). Exhibit B.61 provides additional details on the types of practices reported by respondents.

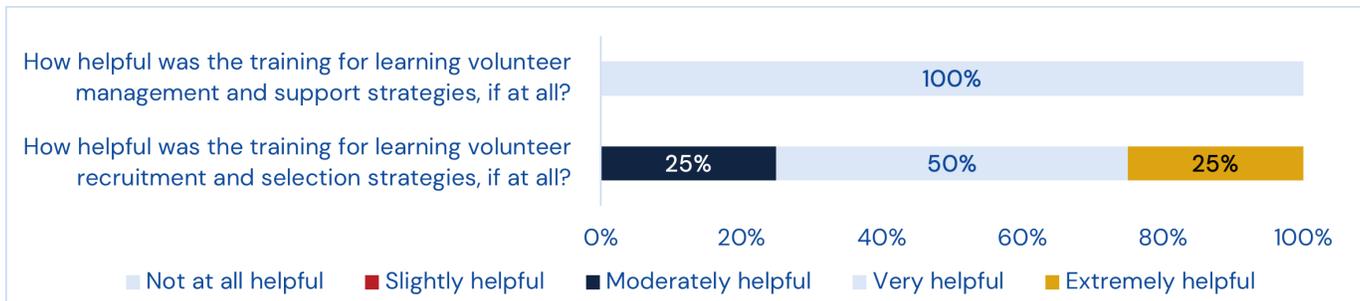
**EXHIBIT B.61.—Volunteer management practices learned about in trainings (n=4)**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

Across survey participants, the majority noted that the training for learning volunteer management and support strategies (100 percent) and recruitment and selection strategies (75 percent) were very helpful or extremely helpful, as seen in exhibit B.62.

**EXHIBIT B.62.—Reported helpfulness of training (n=4)**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

## Collecting and Tracking Data

Nevada Volunteers collects a variety of data through pre- and post-test assessments for training participants, monthly progress reports, and grantee applications. In the commission’s 2021 progress report,

staff noted the pre- and post- assessments were administered in Google Forms, which would be reviewed by commission staff for inconsistencies and returned to subgrantees if additional clarifications were needed. Mini-grant recipients were required to submit a monthly progress report to Nevada Volunteers. Nevada Volunteers staff shared,

*Originally, we were going to do a mid and end progress report and have people send in two larger reports. My problem was I noticed in the last one I wasn't able to catch things fast enough. ... And because of risk assessments and all these [grantees] are brand new so they're considered high risk because they're new. So, I just came up with a very small progress report for each month so that I could gauge where people were at.*

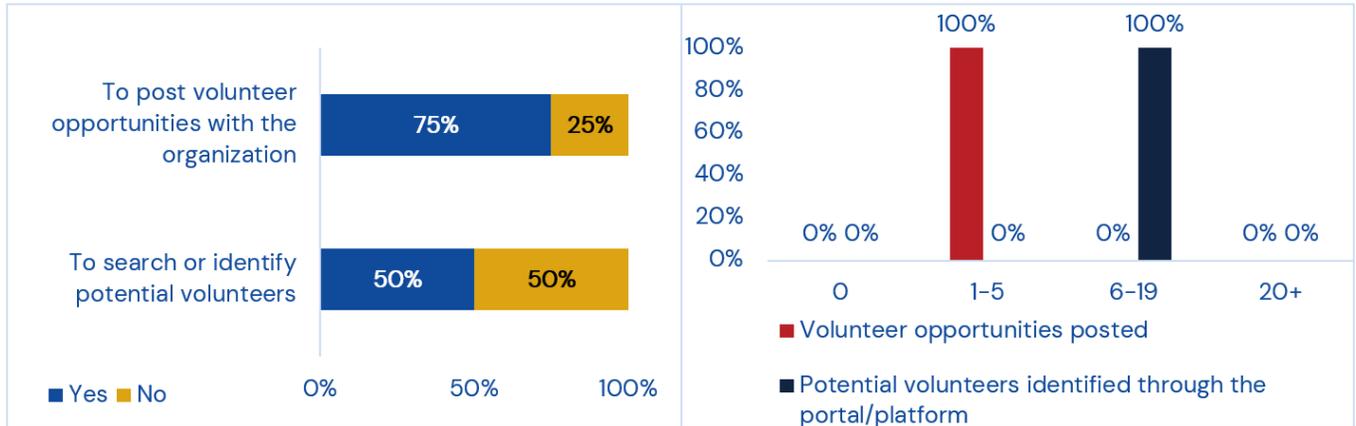
As part of the data collected in monthly progress reports, Nevada Volunteers collected the number of volunteers managed, the number of hours volunteers served, and narrative descriptions of how the grantees utilized VGF funds and the programs impact the organizations and communities. As outlined in the 2021 progress report, Nevada Volunteers used past data collection to inform planning and development of the 2021 TTA schedule, guided by the areas of greatest need among subgrantees. This same process was used to develop and plan for the 2022 TTA schedule, as noted in the 2022 progress report. As part of the pre- and post-test assessments, Nevada Volunteers reported they planned to use an online survey administered before and after training participation to evaluate the success of their program and successful implementation of one or more of the nine evidence-based best practices.

### **Volunteer Platform**

As previously noted, VGF funds were intended to be used to develop a statewide public service announcement (PSA) to increase platform use and to create additional search filters in response to emerging needs with the pandemic. The PSA ran from September to November 2021 and sought to increase general traffic to the website for volunteers to increase awareness. At the time of the state service commission interview, in February 2022, Nevada Volunteers had almost doubled the number of organizations that were signed up on the platform. Additionally, during the site commission interview, Nevada Volunteers described they also added NV Broad Connect in October 2021, which matches individuals to open board member positions that are a good fit based on the description of the open position and the noted skills and expertise of the individual.

As seen in exhibit 8, three-quarters (75 percent) of survey respondents reported using the platform to post volunteer opportunities and half (50 percent) used the platform to search or identify potential volunteers. Exhibit B.63 also shows the range of volunteer opportunities posted by survey respondents and the range of volunteers identified through the platform.

**EXHIBIT B.63.—Use of state service commission portal/platform (n=4)**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

**Outcomes**

Overall, training recipients who participated in the survey reported satisfaction with the training and capacity building provided through the VGF grant program.<sup>43</sup>

**Nevada Volunteers’ Outcomes**

As of September of 2023, Nevada Volunteers was still in the early implementation phases of VGF activities and initiatives and therefore, had minimal perceptions or feedback regarding capacity building and TTA outcomes. Nevada Volunteers noted outcomes related to the volunteer platform, as reported in the previous section. Final project data and outcomes will be available by the end of December 2023.

**Program Beneficiaries’ Outcomes**

Three-quarters (75 percent) of survey respondents shared that they Often implement the strategies they learned for volunteer management and support. Additionally, all respondents (100 percent) noted they implemented volunteer recruitment and selection strategies Often or Always, as seen in exhibit B.64. Regarding the outcomes of implementation, at least half of respondents noted that the implementation of the strategies led to a substantial improvement in volunteer management and support (75 percent) and volunteer recruitment (50 percent).

<sup>43</sup> Survey respondents were asked to indicate if they or their organization received any certifications since October 2020 and/or were planning to receive by September 2023 as part of their involvement in the VGF program. Respondents indicated neither their organization nor their staff received or planned to receive any certifications.

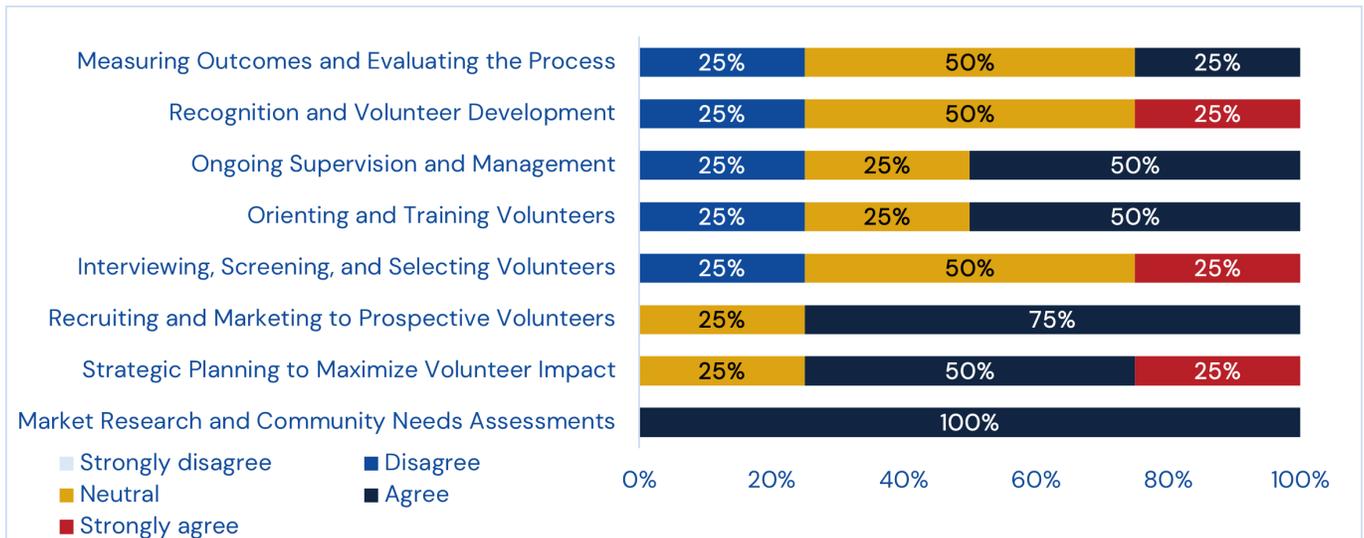
**EXHIBIT B.64.—Frequency of implementation & improvement in recruitment, engagement, and retention (n=4)**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

Survey respondents were also asked to share their agreement regarding their and/or their organization’s need for additional training or support on various topics, as seen in exhibit B.65. The topics with the highest agreement on need were Market Research and Community Needs Assessments (100 percent), Recruiting and Marketing to Prospective Volunteers (75 percent), and Strategic Planning to Maximize Volunteer Impact (75 percent). Alternatively, the topics in which respondents noted the lowest needs were Measuring Outcomes and Evaluating the Process (25 percent); Recognition and Volunteer Development (25 percent); and Interviewing, Screening, and Selecting Volunteers (25 percent).

**EXHIBIT B.65.—Agreement with organizational need for additional training by topic (n=4)**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

Lastly, survey respondents shared their perspectives on the effect of the VGF grant on various volunteer outcomes, presented in exhibit B.66. As reported by survey respondents, the outcomes with the largest effect were volunteer retention (75 percent), recruitment of volunteers that aligned with organizational needs (75 percent), and increased recruitment (75 percent).

**EXHIBIT B.66.—Effect of VGF grant on volunteer outcomes (n=4)**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

## Conclusion

Overall, through Nevada Volunteers’ key initiatives, the online platform, mini-grants, and the capacity building TTA, Nevada Volunteers was able to support organizations’ volunteer management, recruitment, and retention across the state. While the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a continued decline in formal volunteering within the state, Nevada Volunteers was able to shift TTA offerings to virtual and provide additional support through their website to deliver increased access and awareness for virtual volunteer opportunities in the state. In general, Nevada Volunteers was still early in their planning and implementation of the VGF grant, planning to provide TTA on volunteer recognition, orientation, and recruitment, court-appointed volunteers, and DEI topics in volunteer management. Among survey respondents, training recipients are generally implementing the learned strategies and seeing positive improvements in volunteer management.

## New Jersey Volunteer Generation Fund Case Study

The New Jersey Commission on National and Community Service (NJ Commission) participated in the AmeriCorps Volunteer Generation Fund (VGF) evaluation through several different phases, including focus groups/interviews with commission staff, and a program beneficiaries survey.<sup>44,45</sup> In addition to the evaluation data collection activities noted, the following case study brief incorporates additional data sources from VGF grant applications and progress reports and longitudinal data from the AmeriCorps Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement. Exhibit B.67 provides an overview of each of the data sources that were used to inform the following brief.

**EXHIBIT B.67.—Overview of data sources**

Data Source	Participant Count	Date Collected
Grant Application	–	May 2020
FY2020, FY2021, and FY2022 VGF Progress Reports	–	December 2020 and 2021, November 2022
AmeriCorps Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplements	–	September 2017, 2019, and 2021
Commission Interview – NJ Commission	1	March 2022
Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey	6	April 2023
Final Commission Interview – NJ Commission	1	September 2023

### Overview of Grant Structure and Goals

The NJ Commission VGF grant sought to support four key elements, with tweaks implemented in Years 2 and 3 in response to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic:

- Support community-based entities that recruit, manage, and support volunteers refocusing their missions to COVID-19 response and safety protocols.
- Deploy skilled-based volunteers to strengthen the capacity of nonprofits in responding to COVID-19.
- Expand the capacity of connector organizations to recruit, manage, support, and retain volunteers in high quality assignments
- Assist in recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Through the implementation of the VGF grant, the NJ Commission piloted training and capacity building initiatives with five organizations that served various regions. Within the 5 pilot organizations, 1 served New

<sup>44</sup> The VGF grantee, the NJ Commission, also served as the primary program implementer for VGF programming and services.

<sup>45</sup> For the Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey, the state service commission had a 67 percent response rate with a total of 6 individual respondents representing 6 unique organizations. Across survey participants, there was substantial variation in reported average number of volunteers recruited and total average number of volunteers per month; 17 percent reported recruiting fewer than 10 volunteers per month; 17 percent reported recruiting 10–20 volunteers; 33 percent reported recruiting 30–50 volunteers; 17 percent reported recruiting 50–100 volunteers; and 17 percent reported recruiting 100 or more volunteers. On average two-fifths (40 percent) of respondents reported their recruited volunteers served fewer than 10 hours per month.

Jersey statewide, 2 covered regions spanning 5–7 counties, 1 served multiple colleges across 7 urban regions, and 1 served the largest county in the state. Therefore, across the indicated strategies the NJ Commission reported in the grant application, the grant would support the recruitment of 5,000 new volunteers and over 150,000 hours of direct service each year—goals that were ultimately surpassed as of September 2023. Additionally, using VGF funds the NJ Commission developed a media strategy, “Jersey Strong: I Am a Volunteer,” to increase potential volunteers’ use of the Volunteer NJ! volunteer portal. The plan outlined by the NJ Commission was in response to the findings from the Volunteering in America survey, which are outlined later in the report. Following the annual review of the Volunteering in America survey, directors of New Jersey volunteer centers and connector organizations believed volunteers were not considering their service as “volunteerism,” but saw it more as family- or faith-based service. The Jersey Strong media strategy sought to address this concern and increase statewide volunteerism.

### A Note on Program Beneficiaries

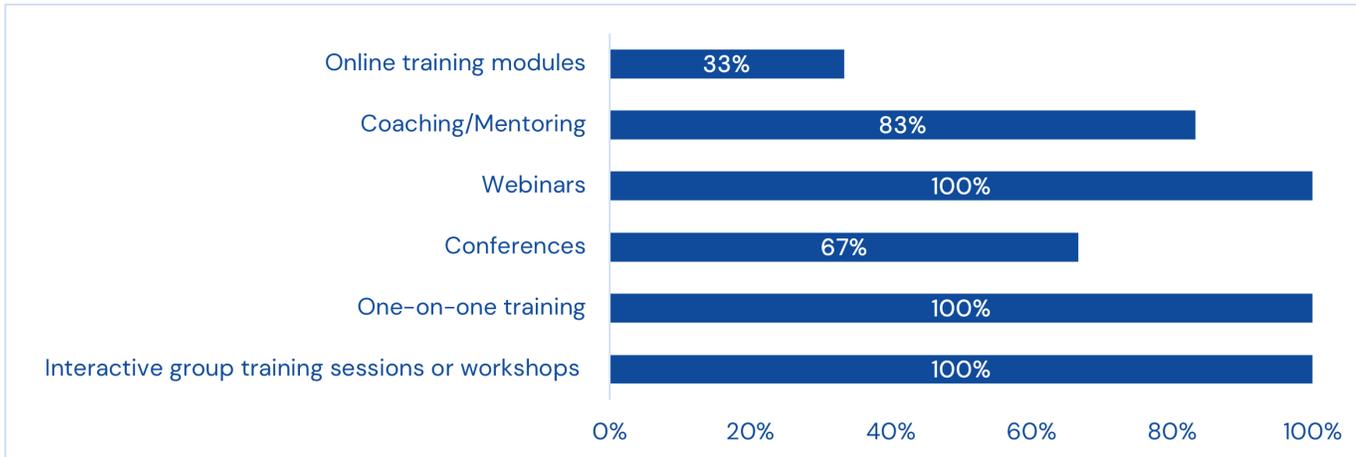
In the context of this case study, “program beneficiaries” include organizations and participants that took part in the NJ Commission’s initiatives, including subgrants, training and technical assistance, and the volunteerism conference.

In April 2023, the NJ Commission training participants took part in a Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey.<sup>46</sup> The most frequently reported volunteer training and capacity building activities were interactive group training sessions or workshops, one-on-one training, and webinars, which all respondents reported were available to their organization through VGF grant activities. Survey respondents also noted six different organizations who provided training, with the most common entity being New Jersey Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster.<sup>47</sup> Exhibit B.68 provides additional details on the types of activities respondents noted were available to their organization through VGF grant activities.

<sup>46</sup> Of the organizations to participate in the Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey, two-fifths reported on average their organization had 21–30 volunteers (40 percent) and individually those volunteers served 10–20 hours each month (40 percent).

<sup>47</sup> Survey respondents noted the following organizations provided training: Bergen Volunteers, New Jersey Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster, Governor’s Office on Volunteerism, AmeriCorps, and The Center for Research and Evaluation on Education and Human Services Montclair State University.

**EXHIBIT B.68.—Volunteer training and capacity building activities (n=6)**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in April 2023.

An overview of the status of the key initiatives is included below, as described by the state service commission.

**Jersey Strong: I Am a Volunteer.** Through the development of a media strategy, the NJ Commission sought to not only encourage individuals to volunteer, but also to identify their existing service as volunteerism. For example, as part of the media strategy statements included, “I am a coach for my daughter’s soccer team—I am a volunteer.” As shared by the project director, the program is “encouraging people to understand that they are volunteers and not just a coach ... getting the definition of volunteerism out there and letting them know that they are volunteers and they’re part of this huge family in New Jersey of volunteers.”

The NJ Commission noted they would assess the success of the new media strategy by comparing registration levels on Volunteer NJ! prior to the launch of the new media strategy and subsequently each year of the program cycle. As of the September 2023 interview with the commission’s director, the commission was still actively pursuing this media strategy in various avenues such as through social media, exhibitions at fairs, and volunteer manager forum meetings.

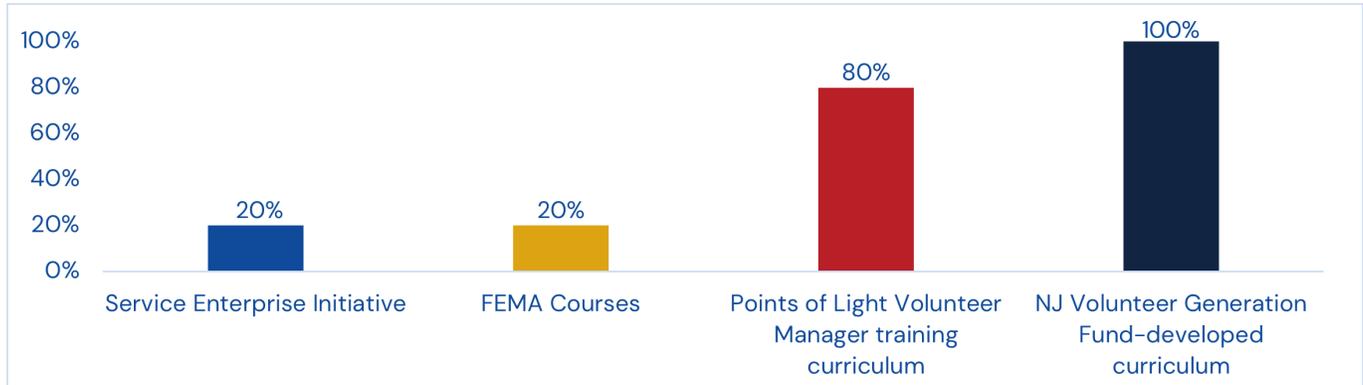
**Subgrants.** While the commission had intended to fund 11 subgrantees, 5 of which received support through the commission’s previous subgrants, only 10 were funded in Year 1. In Year 2, 10 were funded. In Year 3, 10 were initially funded, but 1 dropped out due to them completing their mission a year head of their goal. In addition to one-on-one training, subgrantees also participate in monthly training and monthly conference calls with the NJ Commission and Center for Research and Evaluation on Education and Human Services (CREEHS).

**Volunteerism Conference.** As the VGF grant is also connected with the Governor’s Office of Volunteerism, the VGF grant supports the Volunteerism Conference to provide training and technical assistance to volunteers, volunteer managers, and volunteer agencies within the state. Due to the pandemic, the conference had transitioned to virtual in April 2021 and served over 800 participants. In 2022, the conference remained virtual with over 600 participants, and, as of September 2023, the conference had paused for a year, and was set to resume in person in April 2024.

As seen in exhibit B.69, all of the survey respondents reported they participated in training that utilized a NJ VGF-developed curriculum and four-fifths (80 percent) noted the training they received used the Points of

Light Volunteer Manager training curriculum. A few participants also noted they participated in other training curricula, such as Service Enterprise Initiative and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) courses.

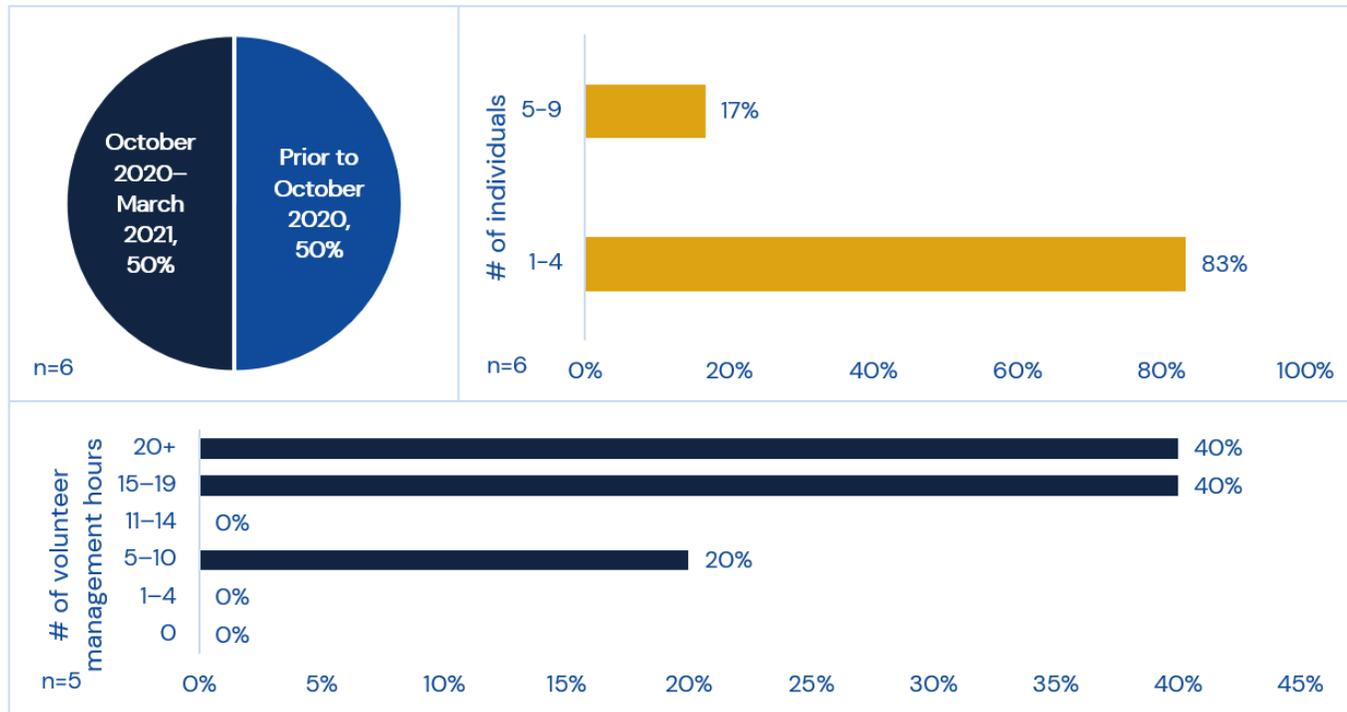
**EXHIBIT B.69.—Types of curriculum used (n=5)**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in April 2023.

The time in which survey respondents reported first participating in a VGF training varied; half (50 percent) of respondents noted their organization first participated prior to October 2020, while the other half (50 percent) noted they did not first participate until October 2020–March 2021. Since October 2020, the majority (83 percent) of survey respondents noted that 1–4 individuals from their organization participated in a training or capacity building activity through NJ VGF grant and fewer than a fifth (17 percent) noted 5–9 individuals participated. The majority (80 percent) of respondents participated in 15 or more volunteer management hours. Exhibit B.70 provides an overview of the time frame in which organizations reported they first participated in training, the range of individuals who participated, and an estimate of hours of training received.

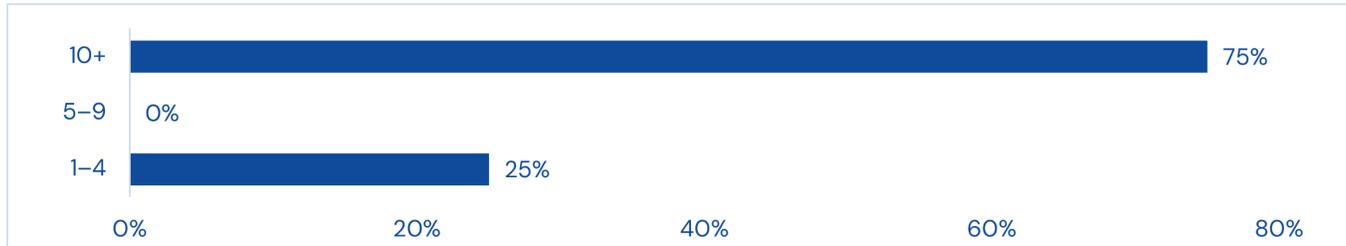
**EXHIBIT B.70.—Organization’s participation time frame, range and number of hours**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in April 2023.

As grant programming continued following the data collection, survey participants were also asked to report on their organization’s plans for additional training. Overall, half (50 percent) of survey respondents noted their organization intended to complete additional training, while the other half reported that they were unsure. Of those who reported planning to complete additional training, exhibit B.71 reports the number of additional training hours they intended to complete, with three-fourths (75 percent) indicating they planned to complete 10 or more additional training hours.

**EXHIBIT B.71.—Additional planned training hours (n=3)**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in April 2023.

### Recent Volunteerism Trends in New Jersey and Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic

According to the 2021 AmeriCorps Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement, two-fifths (20 percent) of New Jersey residents formally volunteered through organizations, slightly less than the national rate (23 percent) of individuals who formally volunteered. However, in New Jersey, this was a decline compared to the 2017 and 2019 rate of 26 percent. In the state, formal volunteering contributed \$3.4 billion in economic value. Alternatively, informal volunteering has declined slightly across the 3 surveyed years. Informally, over two-fifths (47 percent) of residents noted they helped others by exchanging favors with their neighbors, compared to 49 percent in 2017 and 2019.

As previously noted, some of the initiatives were modified due to the pandemic, including the conference transitioning to virtual. Additionally, subgrantee monitoring visits were transitioned to virtual “desk audits” or virtual conference calls. While the pandemic reduced some organization’s abilities to recruit volunteers, it also forced organizations to pivot their services to virtual formats.

*So, a lot of the agencies lost volunteers, where some agencies ended up recruiting more volunteers like [New Jersey Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster] because those volunteers wanted to work in the emergency preparedness field. It was a little bit of a catch-22 for both of them, for all the grantees. While it was more difficult for them to provide training, they pivoted, and started providing training online.*

*One of our agencies ... they would do volunteer fairs for the volunteers in their county. The volunteer fairs were held in person at the local library. Partnering organizations would set up tables. In COVID the governor had shut us down, nobody could do anything. So, what was developed was an online Zoom volunteer fair and they have continued with this, because they realized that everyone was basically stuck at home in front of a computer. They had to find ways for their volunteers to still feel as though they were doing something and making a difference.*

Partway through their VGF grant, the NJ Commission secured additional COVID-19 relief funds from sources outside of AmeriCorps for their grantees to enhance VGF programming, with the caveat that they continued the same mission.

Additionally, based on the emerging needs of communities during the pandemic, organizations utilized volunteers in new methods to address those needs. For example, one program realized there was no food delivery system in place in their community for senior citizens who were at high risk during the pandemic. To address this need within the community, the organization created one using their VGF funds. This program still exists as of September 2023, even as most pandemic-related restrictions have expired.

### **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**

At the time of the second program director interview, the NJ Commission reported multiple diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts that were either being implemented or were in development.

In partnership with CREEHS, the commission planned a one-time training focused on diversity and inclusion in volunteer management. The commission had also developed a DEI committee, which grantees and program managers are invited to attend on a monthly basis. Guest speakers are invited by this committee to speak on a range of rotating topics.

The commission also, at the time of their September 2023 interview, was working with various Chambers of Commerce within their state government to see if they could connect volunteer opportunities, explaining:

*We're currently working with different Chambers of Commerce ... the LGBTQA+ Chamber of Commerce, the African American Chamber of Commerce in New Jersey, and the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of New Jersey ... different types of groups within New Jersey, to see if there [are] connections that they can formulate with the grantees and with the volunteer centers.*

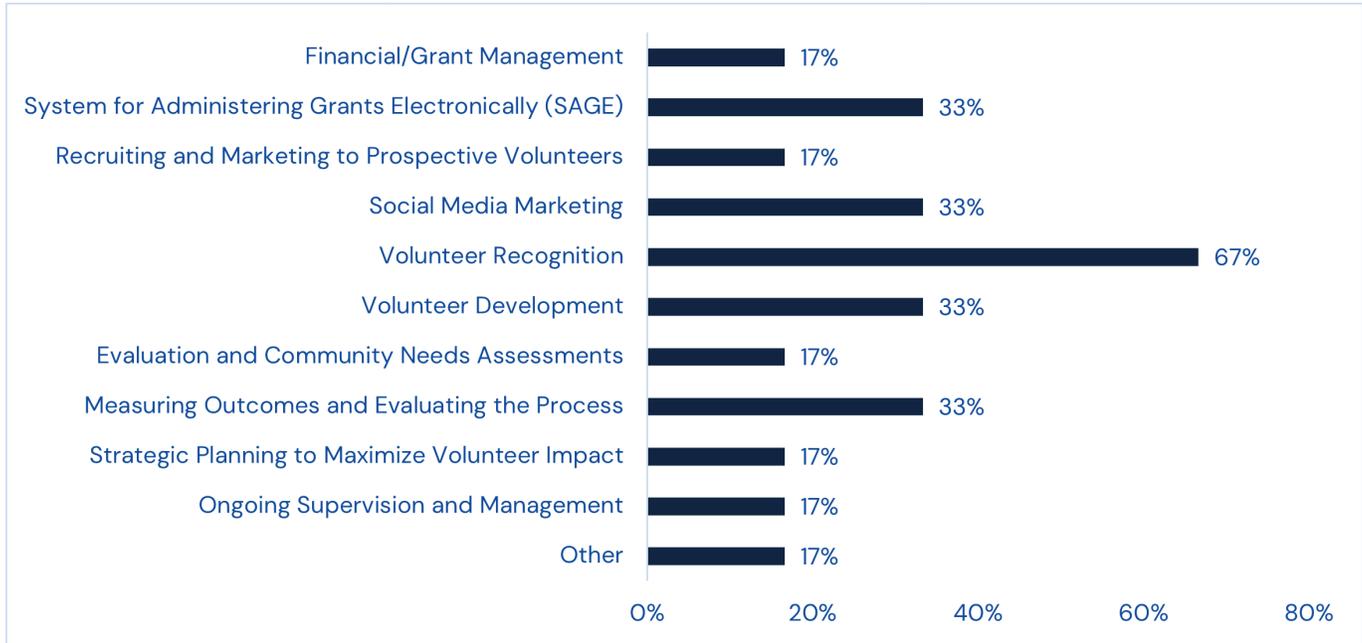
While qualitative data regarding subgrantees inclusion of DEI in their training offerings was not collected, staff overseeing the VGF grant shared that of the 10 subgrantees, there were aware of 1 organization that had reported to the commission that they included DEI components in their training.

### **Strategies Used and/or Learned**

The NJ Commission reported subgrantees were provided with an initial orientation and monthly meetings that incorporated various training components. During the initial orientation, the NJ Commission provided information on data collection, quality, and reporting, as reported in the fiscal year (FY)2020 progress report. Training topics included training on volunteer recruitment, volunteer retention, volunteer promotion, volunteer marketing, and evaluation. As noted, training was provided in combination from the NJ Commission and CREEHS for VGF subgrantees, with participation from additional guest speakers from different agencies.

Across survey respondents, there was a wide variation in the types of practices respondents noted receiving training on through the VGF grant. The most frequently reported training practice included volunteer recognition (67 percent), followed by System for Administering Grants Electronically (SAGE), social media marketing, volunteer development, and measuring outcomes and evaluating the process, all of which a third (33 percent) of respondents reported. Exhibit B.72 provides additional details on the types of practices reported by respondents.

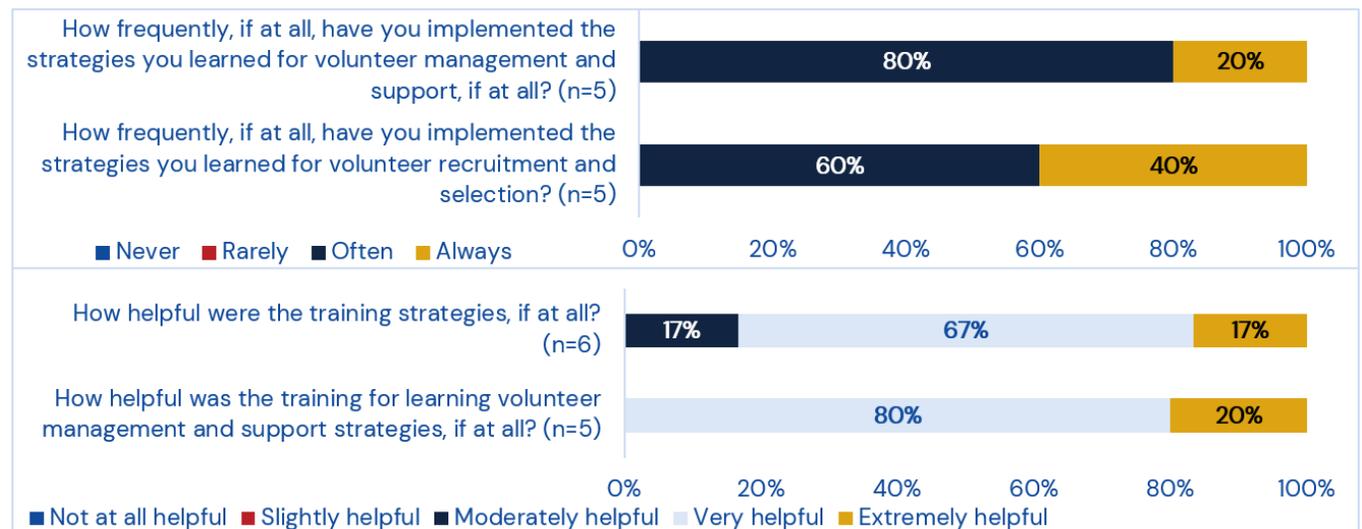
**EXHIBIT B.72.—Volunteer management practices learned about in trainings (n=6)**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in April 2023.

Across survey participants, all respondents reported they Often or Always implemented the strategies learned for volunteer management and support and volunteer recruitment and selection. Overall, over four-fifths (84 percent) of survey respondents noted the training strategies were Very helpful or Extremely helpful. More specifically, all survey respondents reported the training for learning volunteer management and support strategies were Very helpful or Extremely helpful, as seen in exhibit B.73.

**EXHIBIT B.73.—Reported helpfulness of training and frequency of strategy implementation**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in April 2023.

## Collecting and Tracking Data

The NJ Commission in partnership with CREEHS developed pre- and post-assessments to collect data from subgrantees to assess performance measures. In 2023, the NJ Commission did not end up administering a pre-test, but they had administered a post-test and were planning on administering both for their next round of subgrantees. The following data was collected from subgrantees:

- **Demographic Data.** Subgrantees report on volunteer recruitment activities, volunteer service hours, and partnership activities (e.g., schools, community-based organizations, faith-based organizations), and gender data.
- **Training Held by the VGF Grantee.** The number of events, whether it's a service event or a training event, and the number of people who have attended the events.
- **Narrative Data.** Subgrantees include narrative descriptions on their progress, accomplishments, primary challenges, solutions identified, and needs from the commission.

The noted data is reported through quarterly reports, as described by participating VGF staff.

## Volunteer Platform

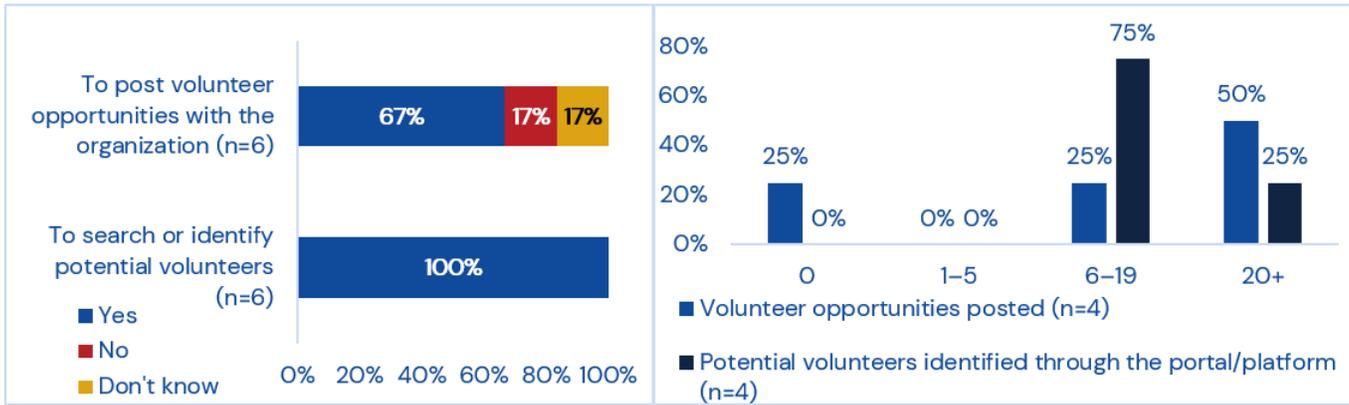
The NJ Commission partnered with their United Ways and Volunteer Centers to link the individual platforms with the larger state portal. With this connection between the local and state sites, no additional maintenance was needed and everything is populated based on the inputs from the partner agencies. As of September of 2023, the website is live and connects to volunteer centers that all have the same portal.

As part of the VGF grant, two United Ways were able to have their own local platform. VGF staff explained the implications of this for one United Way, saying:

*The United Way of [a state county], because of their VGF grant, was able to start a platform. ... They were able to utilize this as a way to recruit volunteers within their United Way programming, which they love. So, it's just been a way to connect all 21 counties. We have a page on our Get Connected site that actually has a map of the State of New Jersey and all the counties. If you click on one of the counties and it doesn't have a Galaxy Digital program, it'll go directly to the Volunteer Center in that county. It actually works both ways for us, where it can direct you to volunteer opportunities within that county or we can direct you to the Volunteer Center in that county. It's been great for us, so when we get to use it again it'll be even better!*

As seen in exhibit B.74, all of the survey respondents reported using the platform to search or identify potential volunteers and over two-thirds (67 percent) used the platform to post volunteer opportunities. Exhibit 8 also shows the range of volunteer opportunities posted by survey respondents and the range of volunteers identified through the platform. Half (50 percent) of survey respondents noted they posted 20 or more volunteer opportunities on the platform, with four-quarters (75 percent) identifying 6–19 volunteers were identified through the platform.

**EXHIBIT B.74.—Use of state service commission portal/platform**

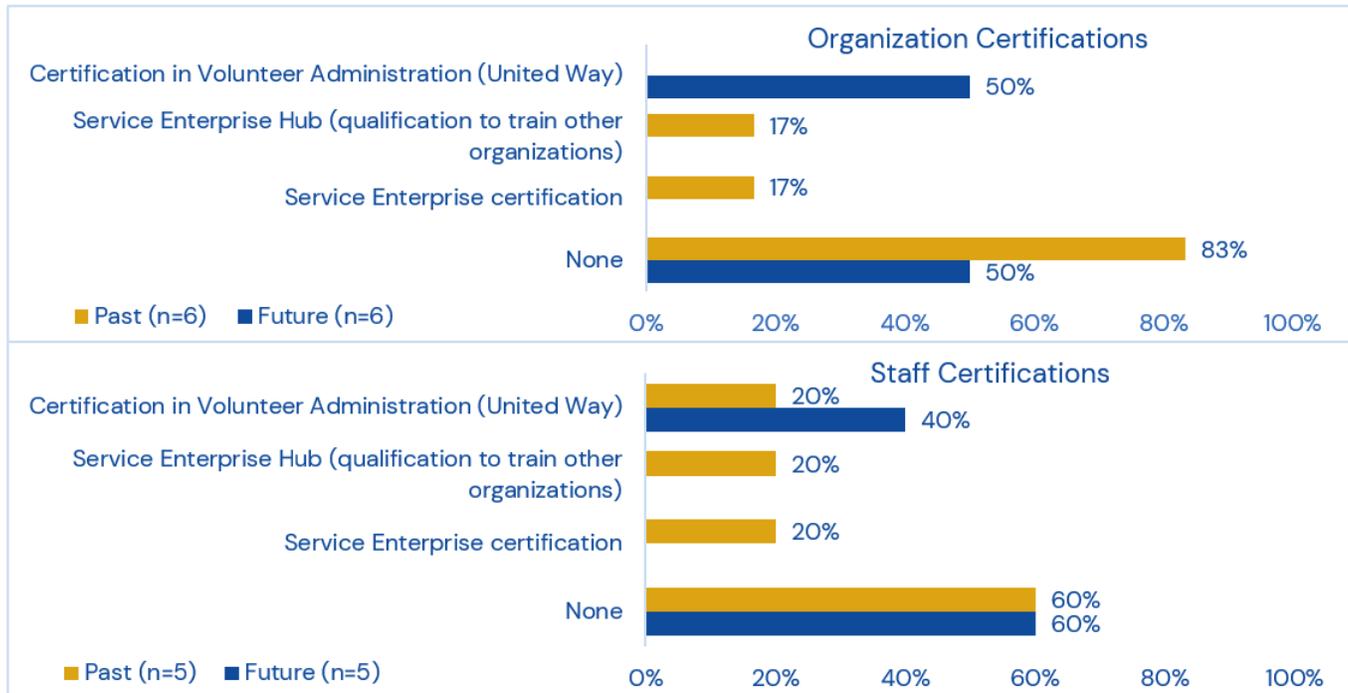


Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in April 2023.

**Outcomes**

As seen in exhibit B.75, survey respondents indicated the certifications their organizations had received since October 2020 and/or were planning to receive by September 2023. As of October 2020, over four-fifths (83 percent) of respondents had not received any certifications at the organizational level and three-fifths (60 percent) had also not received any at the staff level. The most frequently reported certification organizations and staff noted they planned to receive by September 2023 was the United Way Certification in Volunteer Administration, for which 50 percent of organizations and 40 percent of staff reported.

**EXHIBIT B.75.—Certifications organizations and staff received as of October 2020 and/or planned to receive by September 2023**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in April 2023.

### NJ Commission’s Outcomes

In the FY2021 progress report, the NJ Commission described the key outcomes from the 10 subgrantees. Across the 10 grantees, over 500 training and technical assistance sessions/webinars were held with over 12,000 participants collectively. Even though the commission had anticipated the pandemic would create great challenges to reaching their goals, VGF grantees were still able to collectively meet and surpass the goal of offering at least 500 trainings.

In a September 2023 interview, NJ Commission staff shared their latest data from 2022 to early 2023. As of early 2023, the 10 VGF subgrantees have held 534 training and technical assistance sessions/webinars to recruit, retain, and train volunteers and volunteer agencies in their communities. A total of 6,307 participants received trainings, 1,446 of which were volunteers. With these 534 trainings, subgrantees provided capacity building services to 1,009 agencies.

The 10 VGF grantees overall recruited 8,066 volunteers, 2,278 of whom have contributed over 30 hours of service to their communities. VGF also provided services to 5,567 at-risk youth and 4,139 senior citizens.

### Program Beneficiaries’ Outcomes

Regarding the outcomes of implementation, the overwhelming majority (80 percent) of survey respondents shared that the implementation of the strategies for managing and supporting volunteers had a Substantial improvement on volunteer engagement or retention. Additionally, the majority (80 percent) of respondents noted the implementation of strategies for recruiting and selecting volunteers had a Substantial or Transformative improvement, as seen in exhibit B.76.

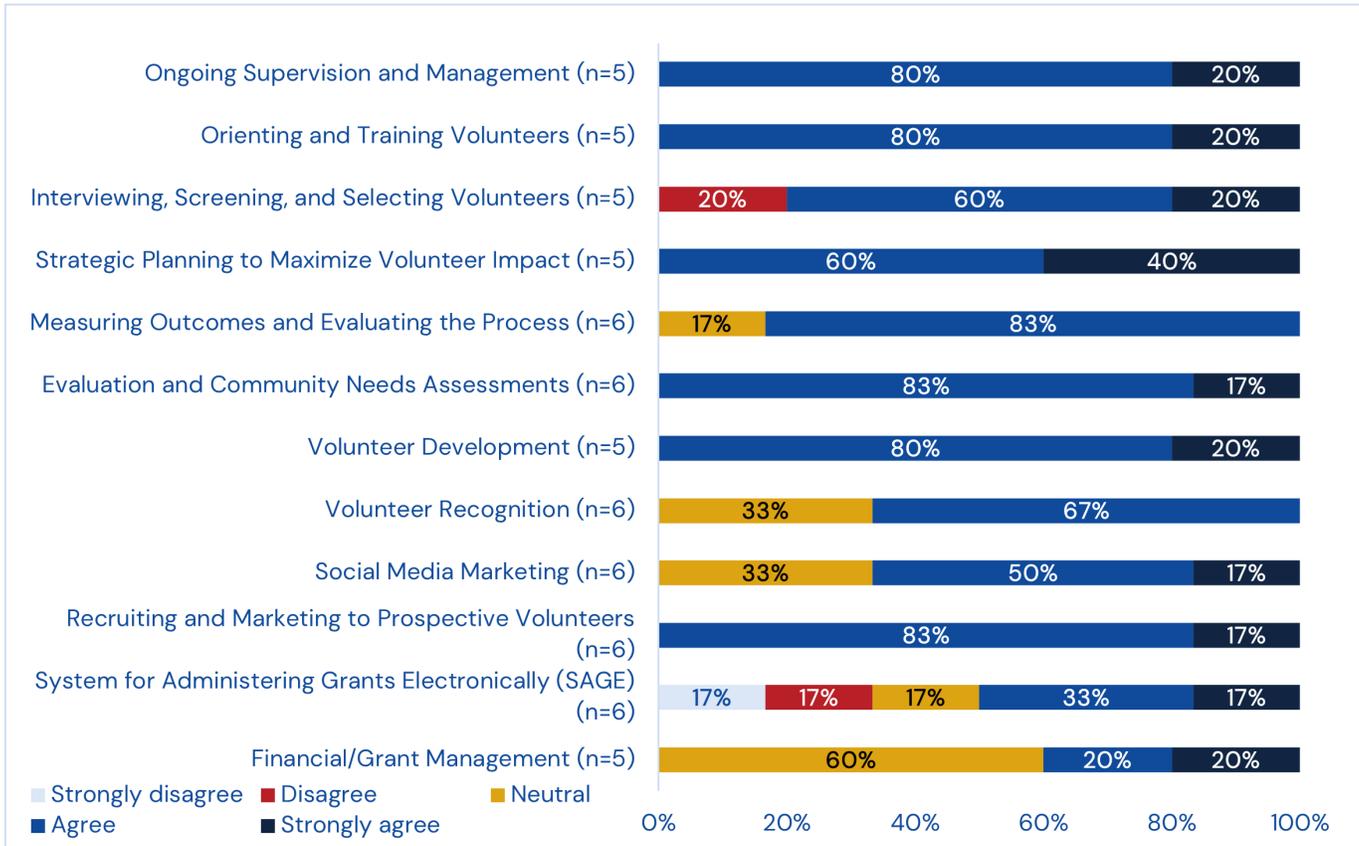
**EXHIBIT B.76.—Frequency of implementation & improvement in recruitment, engagement, and retention (n=5)**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in April 2023.

Survey respondents were also asked to share their agreement regarding their and/or their organization’s need for additional training or support on various topics. As seen in exhibit B.77, the topics with the highest agreement on need were (1) Ongoing Supervision and Management, (2) Orienting and Training Volunteers, (3) Strategic Planning to Maximize Volunteer Impact, (4) Evaluation and Community Needs Assessments, (5) Volunteer Development, and (6) Recruiting and Marketing to Prospective Volunteers, all of which all respondents Agreed or Strongly Agreed their organization needed additional training on. Alternatively, the topics in which respondents noted the lowest needs were (1) Financial/Grants Management and (2) System for Administering Grants Electronically (SAGE), of which 40 percent and 50 percent of respondents Agreed or Strongly Agreed their organization needed additional training, respectively.

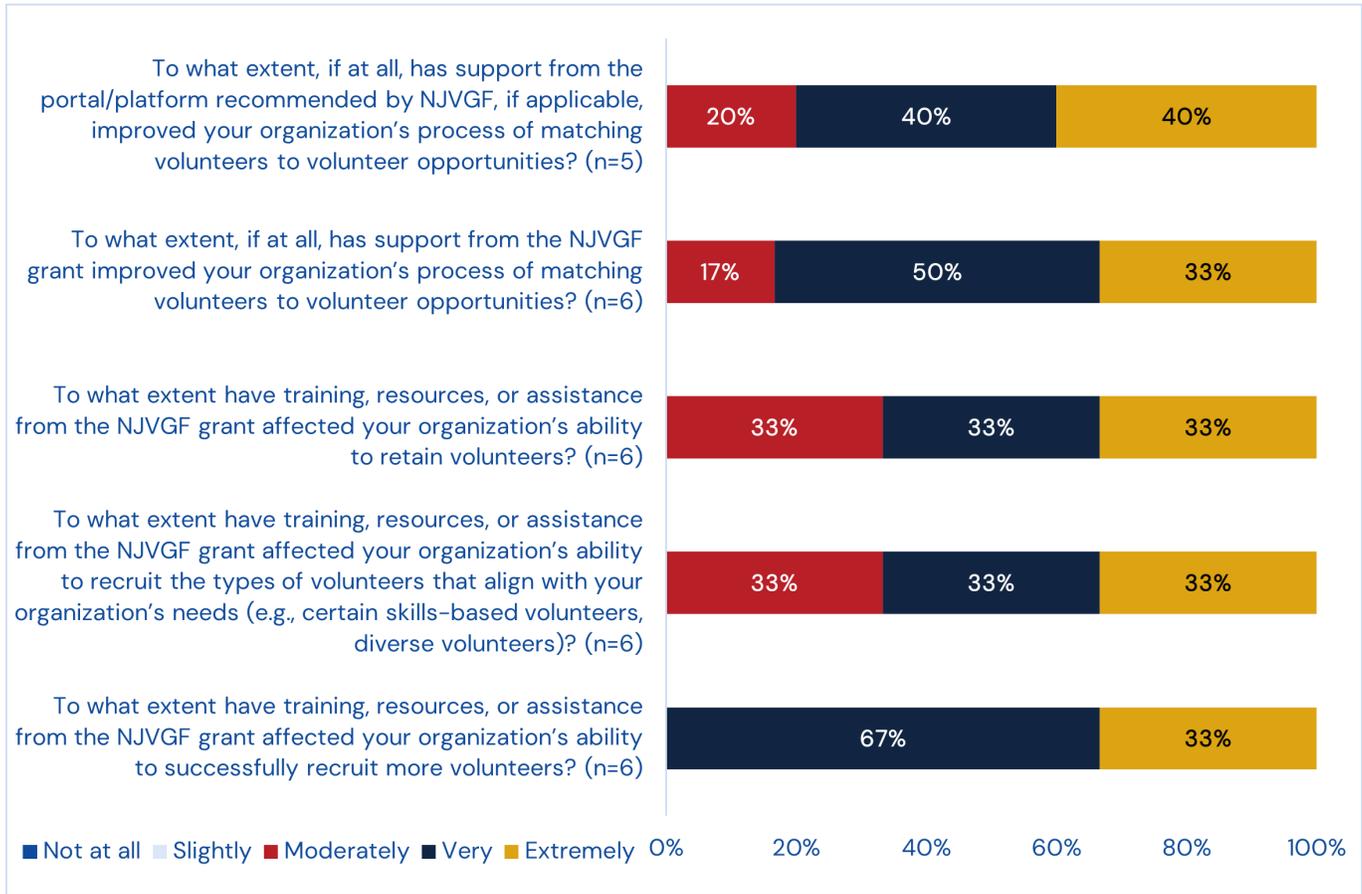
**EXHIBIT B.77.—Agreement with organizational need for additional training by topic**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in April 2023.

Lastly, survey respondents shared their perspectives on the effect of the VGF grant on various volunteer outcomes, presented in exhibit B.78. As reported by survey respondents, the outcomes with the greatest effect were the organizations’ ability to recruit more volunteers and improve the process of matching volunteers to volunteer opportunities, both from New Jersey VGF grant support and the portal/platform recommended by New Jersey VGF.

**EXHIBIT B.78.—Effect of VGF grant on volunteer outcomes**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in April 2023.

**Conclusion**

Overall, through the NJ Commissions key initiatives and VGF’s support of the subgrantees, statewide volunteerism conference, and media campaign, the NJ Commission was able to successfully support organizations’ volunteer management, recruitment, and retention across the state. Even though the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in some modifications, such as the transition to virtual training and services and the removal of monitoring visits with subgrantees, the NJ Commission and program beneficiary organizations were able to continue to provide training and support amid the pandemic. Beneficiary subgrantee organizations in particular were able to greatly support volunteers and volunteerism with significant amounts of direct work and volunteer connection. Based on the emerging needs of the state and communities, the commission and subgrantees successfully pivoted to provide additional support wherever needed.

## Utah Volunteer Generation Fund Case Study

The Utah state service commission, the Utah Commission on Service & Volunteerism (UServeUtah), participated in the AmeriCorps Volunteer Generation Fund (VGF) evaluation through several different phases, including focus groups/interviews with commission staff, program implementers, program beneficiaries, and a program beneficiaries survey.<sup>48,49</sup> In addition to the evaluation data collection activities noted, the following case study brief incorporates additional data sources from VGF grant applications and progress reports and longitudinal data from the AmeriCorps Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement. Exhibit B.79 provides an overview of each of the data sources that were used to inform the following brief.

### EXHIBIT B.79.—Overview of data sources

Data Source	Participant Count	Date Collected
Grant Application	–	May 2020
AmeriCorps Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplements	–	September 2017, 2019, and 2021
FY2020 and FY2021 VGF Progress Reports	–	December 2020 and 2021
Project Director Interview – UServeUtah	1	March 2022
Program Implementer Interview – UServeUtah	3	October 2022
Beneficiaries Focus Group – Community Engagement Grant	5	October 2022
Beneficiaries Focus Group – Volunteer Management Training	4	October 2022
Beneficiaries Focus Group – Volunteer Programming for Maximum Impact	2	October 2022
Beneficiaries Focus Group – Youth Council	1	October 2022
Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey	57	April 2022
Final Commission Interview – UServeUtah	1	August 2023

### Overview of Grant Structure and Goals

UServeUtah is the central coordinating body for volunteerism in the state of Utah, which receives the VGF grant from AmeriCorps. According to UServeUtah, the broad goals of the grant are to expand and implement Stanford University’s Pathways of Public Service and Civic Engagement framework to engage nonprofit

<sup>48</sup> The VGF grantee, UServeUtah, also served as the primary program implementer for VGF programming and services.

<sup>49</sup> For the Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey, the state service commission had a 19 percent response rate with a total of 75 individual respondents representing 63 unique organizations.

organizations, businesses, and individuals in increasing their impact in the community through volunteerism.<sup>50</sup> UServeUtah set out to accomplish these goals through the incorporation of the pathways framework in:

1. A suite of training courses for nonprofits and businesses to reimagine their volunteer practices;
2. Capacity building and social change mentorship for youth; and
3. Community engagement grants focused on creating and realizing sustainable impact for a community.

UServeUtah is additionally incorporating the framework through their Community Engagement Pathways Profile Tool. The broad implementation, reach, and subsequent impacts of these activities are allowed by the VGF grant.

The Pathways of Public Service and Civic Engagement framework is an approach to community engagement developed by Stanford University that is primarily used in higher education. UServeUtah is the only non-higher education institution on their working board and development team to implement this framework. The commission was given permission to adopt and modify the framework. The framework includes six pathways, including direct service, social entrepreneurship, corporate social responsibility, community engaged learning and research, policy and governance, and philanthropy and community organizing/activism.

An overview of each key initiative supporting these objectives is included below, as described by UServeUtah.

### **Volunteer Management Training Suite**

UServeUtah currently offers two primary in-house training courses funded through VGF, with multiple others in development, as well as an Active Engagement Retreat training experience. UServeUtah staff described aspects of the trainings as being similar to the Service Enterprise model for volunteer management, but also with key differences. The curricula were developed in 2009 using consultant input. As of fall 2022, UServeUtah reported training slightly under 300 organizations and over 300 individuals through their fiscal year (FY)2020 VGF grant. The types of organizations who participate in training are wide-ranging and include nonprofits, government entities, community organizations, and religious organizations—anyone who engages with or uses volunteers is invited. Trainings are delivered by UServeUtah staff as well as partners, including nonprofit leaders, commissioners, and AmeriCorps program directors.

- Recruitment for trainings is done through outreach across social media, with existing partners and corporate partners that have volunteer programs. Details on the specific trainings being used and those under development are as follows:
- **Volunteer Management Training (VMT).** Originally developed in 2010, the VMT is for individuals, including volunteer managers, executives, or anyone else with day-to-day responsibilities with volunteers. The commission conducts approximately three of these trainings per year in areas across Utah. As part of the training, organizations that meet certain requirements receive a certification from UServeUtah. To obtain the certificate, trainees receive a prediagnostic survey to see what their skill levels were before training, and later they complete another survey 6 months after the training; if they have shown improvement, they receive the certificate.

---

<sup>50</sup> The Stanford University Pathways of Public Service and Civic Engagement is a framework/approach to community engagement—in the broad sense. This model is primarily used in higher education. It conceptualizes community engagement through six pathways -- direct service is one of those pathways but other pathways include topics such as community organizing and philanthropy. For information, visit [Pathways of Public Service and Civic Engagement](#).

- **Volunteer Programming for Maximum Impact (VPMI).** This training, hosted once per year, is focused on change management for organizations, as opposed to the VMT, which is focused on individual development. VPMI was created after UServeUtah heard feedback from organizations that had staff members that took the VMT training but left their organizations, effectively taking their knowledge with them. The VPMI training therefore changes volunteer management systems and processes within organizations to make effects larger than any one staff member. Usually, 20 organizations participate in VPMI. Before the trainings, the commission conducts one-on-one consultations with organizations, at which point they can receive a bronze, silver, or gold certificate based on their level of competency with volunteer management. The training consists of 2 full days of training with 8 training modules. After the training is complete, organizations hold a meeting with UServeUtah staff to select among the 12 training elements to focus on improvement in the future. Organizations then can gather evidence demonstrating improvement in the elements they selected, and after a review, they can receive a certificate for the next 5 years. Organizations can also submit evidence to upgrade their certificate if it is lower than gold level. The training is a larger commitment for an organization than the VMT, as it is more expensive and requires more staff members to participate, and for longer.
- **Training Courses Under Development.** The commission hired a consultant who developed the first iteration of the VMT curriculum to develop two new training courses—one for nonprofit executives and another for businesses and for-profit organizations. Both are estimated to take approximately 6 months, with a 1-day-per-month commitment. The Nonprofit Executive Training is aimed at addressing and providing training to nonprofit executives and upper-level management, while the Business/For-Profit Training is focused on how to train businesses and for-profit organizations on how to collaborate with nonprofits most effectively.
- **Active Engagement Retreat.** Another training component supported through their VGF grant is UServeUtah’s Active Engagement Retreat, also considered one of their youth initiatives (defined as activities supporting those from ages 18 to 30). This retreat, usually performed in person, includes AmeriCorps members, higher education students, early professionals, and others, and it is a training component specific to providing resources and knowledge/awareness for youth about community engagement. The VGF grant supports retreat materials and provides financial assistance for presenters and small group facilitators. VGF has also helped support some curriculum modifications. The retreat includes a pre- and post-survey similar to the one performed in the VMT training to assess overall knowledge, as well as overall satisfaction. The retreat curriculum includes the development of action goals, with follow-ups conducted on these goals after 1 month, 3 months, and 6 months following the retreat.

In January 2023, ICF worked with UServeUtah to develop and administer a survey regarding volunteer management training and capacity building activities provided by UServeUtah. Most of the respondents were volunteer managers/coordinators (43 percent), however the respondents also included Youth Council members (16 percent); executive directors/CEOs/presidents (4 percent); and others (32 percent), including educators, health specialists, and “others” (as written in by respondents). Approximately two-thirds (62 percent) were from organizations that engaged 10 or more volunteers on average per month (the remaining 38 percent

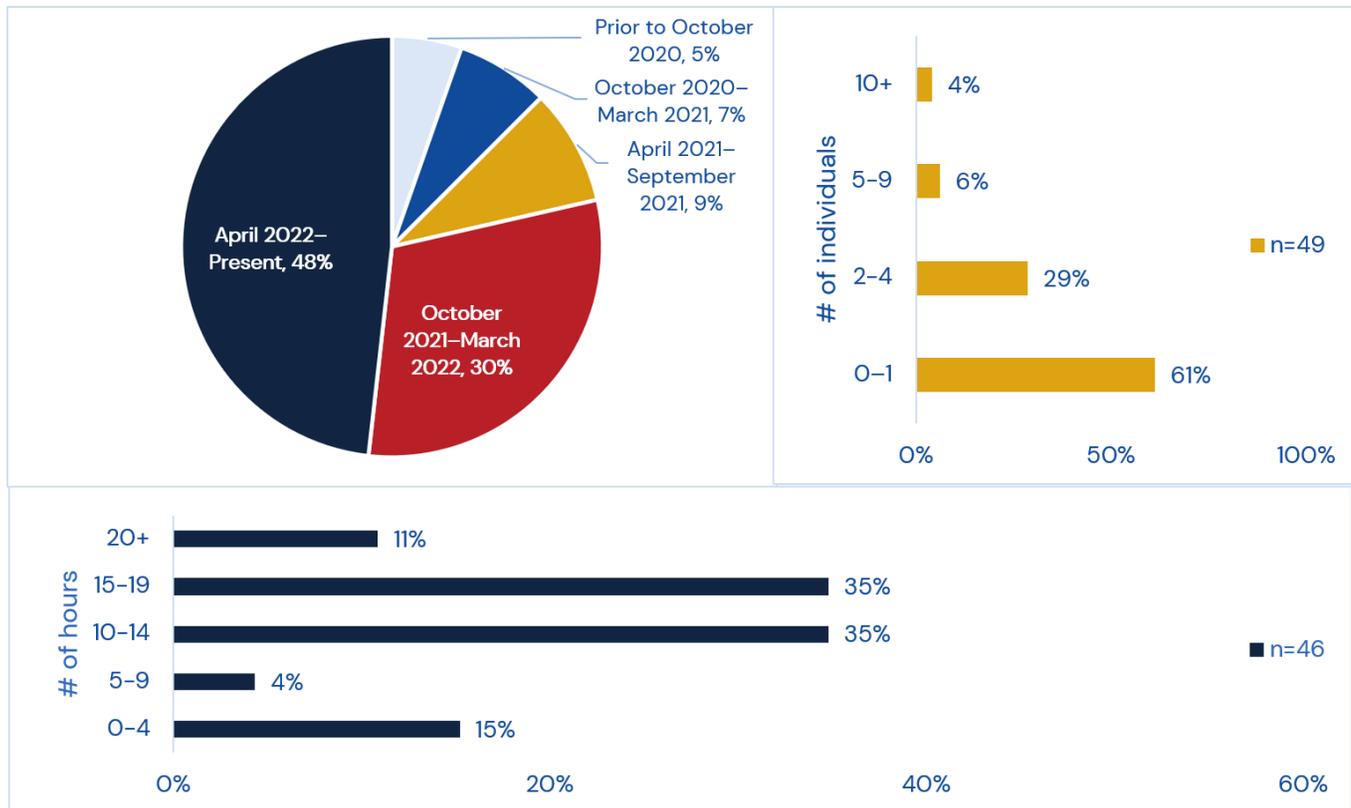
### A Note on Program Beneficiaries

In the context of this case study, “program beneficiaries” include organizations and participants that took part in UServeUtah’s initiatives, including Volunteer Management Training, Volunteer Programming for Maximum Impact training, retreats, Community Engagement grant, and youth council.

reported engaging fewer than 10 volunteers per month). Over three-quarters (76 percent) of respondents reported participating in one or more UServeUtah training activities, including the VMT, VPMI, or the Active Engagement Retreat. A plurality of respondents (38 percent) reported that fewer than 10 people volunteer for their organizations on average; in addition, 17 percent reported that 10–20 people volunteer monthly, 12 percent reported that 21–30 volunteers volunteer monthly, and 34 percent reported that 31 or more people volunteer monthly.

As shown in exhibit B.80, the time in which survey respondents reported first participating in a UServeUtah training varied; 5 percent of respondents noted their organization first participated prior to October 2020, while 48 percent noted they did not first participate until more recently (April 2022–Present). Since October 2020, the majority (61 percent) of survey respondents noted that 0–1 individuals from their organization participated in a training or capacity building activity through VGF. The majority (81 percent) of respondents participated in more than 10 hours of volunteer management training.

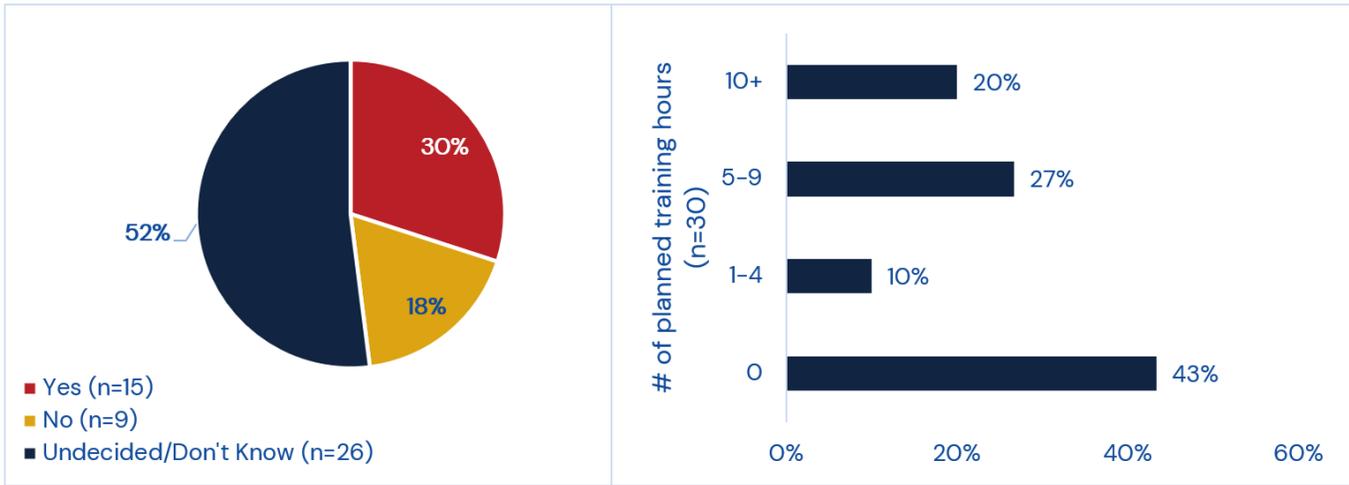
**EXHIBIT B.80.—Organization’s participation time frame, range and number of hours**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey administered in January 2023.

As grant programming continued following the data collection, survey participants were also asked to report on the organizations’ plans for additional training. Exhibit B.81 shows that 30 percent of respondents reported they intended to complete additional training and 52 percent were undecided. In addition, nearly half (47 percent) of survey respondents indicated they planned to complete 5 or more additional hours of training.

**EXHIBIT B.81. —Organizational plans for additional training and additional planned hours**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey administered in January 2023.

**Youth Initiatives**

Beyond trainings, UServeUtah supports two key youth initiatives, the Youth Council and a high school honors program. The Youth Council is comprised of high school and college students who represent all geographic regions of Utah. Historically, there was a single council for both high school and college students, however there are now two separate councils for each group. These councils form as annual cohorts aligned to the academic year. Students receive monthly training from UServeUtah’s VGF team, with subjects including logic models, needs assessments, stakeholders, and finding those who already exist within communities to address issues.

As a group, Youth Council members engage in a research project to better understand the current landscape of youth volunteerism in the state. Members also conduct a capstone project in their geographic region, often partnering with local nonprofits or educational institutions. Example capstone projects included connecting recent Afghan refugees to local communities in Utah or creating a neuroscience fair at an elementary school.

In addition, the commission piloted a high school volunteer recognition award in the 2022–2023 academic year. Originally, a statewide rollout was planned for academic year 2023–2024, but it is now on pause dependent on further VGF grant funding, with the exception of students in the pilot program, who the commission plans to continue to work with through their graduation.

**Community Engagement Grants**

UServeUtah also uses their VGF grant to fund 1-year Community Engagement Grants, supporting nonprofits and public entities, such as public universities, with the aim of increasing Utahans’ awareness and/or participation in community and civic engagement. The commission provided 14 awards during the 2021–2022 project period, worth roughly \$200,000 total, using both VGF and state funding.

In addition to award monies, the commission also provides two educational sessions for awardees: Logic Models & Tracking Outcomes and Community Engagement Pathways. Awardees must also participate in midyear check-ins with the commission and create a final report.

**Community Engagement Pathways Profile Tool**

The commission hired a VGF consultant and created a public tool/assessment that allows the Utah public to find their “pathway” (which of the Six pathways best fits them). The results of this assessment include a toolkit

on how to make sense of or utilize that pathway. The consultant conducted a focus group with 800 people who used the tool and provided feedback. A UServeUtah staff member described the tool, saying...

*“It indicates through an online assessment what type of person they are. Are they a leader, an elected official, on the city council, a participant that they can lend a signature, a worker bee? [It] lists out all these different ways they can engage. But then it also gets into what are your issues, what are your passions? What are the issues of public concern that have a sticking point for you.”*

The tool entered a soft launch on January 1, 2022, with a formal launch in April 2022 to coincide with National Volunteer Month. As part of the launch, the governor of Utah created a public service announcement video that was embedded in an email to all 25,000 Utah state employees encouraging them to use the new tool.

No participants interviewed from either VMT or VPML trainings recalled using the pathways profile, but a member of the Youth Council did recall using the tool to help determine their goals. However, commission staff described how they have widely rolled out the pathways profile and now include it in all trainings. UServeUtah is currently the only state service commission with this toolkit in public use. However, staff described how they have presented the pathways profile to a national conference, where it received significant interest. The commission intends to develop this kit for use by other states; at the moment, however, development has been paused due to a lack of further funding.

### **Recent Volunteerism Trends in Utah and Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic**

According to the 2021 AmeriCorps Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement, 40.7 percent of Utah residents formally volunteered through an organization in 2021. This was 28.4 percentage points higher than the national rate of 23.2 percent, but also 8.8 percentage points lower than Utah’s pre-pandemic rate of 49.5 percent in 2019, and 9.3 percentage points lower than its 2017 rate of 50.0 percent.

As in other states, the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic had profound impacts on volunteerism in general as well as volunteer training specifically. Program implementer staff reported a number of challenges their recipients experienced during the pandemic, including extra strain on staff who were often already stretched thin, volunteerism decreasing generally, and funding sources drying up. UServeUtah reported incorporating some COVID-specific training, such as on how to engage volunteers remotely and what policies and practices to implement at any given time based on regulations from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. UServeUtah also provided an open forum about responding to the pandemic, which was attended by up to 250 participants. The pandemic also taught the commission, and the state government generally, how to quickly switch to online services if the situation requires it.

Training participants noted significant impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on volunteer programs. One organization that participated in VPML only started to accept volunteers again in the first half of 2022, while another started their volunteer plan because they needed more support after the onset of the pandemic. A participant in the VMT that had volunteers working at multiple locations found it challenging to provide more than virtual support to them and encountered difficulties when certain sites would have outbreaks of the virus or would stop accepting volunteers suddenly. A Youth Council member interviewed by ICF reported virtual participation on the council during the pandemic; they found it easy to adapt to working on Zoom, but also noticed difficulty focusing and felt that they didn’t form relationships with other members of the council.

## Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Commission staff interviewed described that both VMI and VPMI have a module about diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), but participant feedback suggested the commission increase DEI's presence. As of a fall 2022 interview, UServeUtah staff were expanding that module and being strategic about implementing DEI aspects into every other module, such as including training on making recruitment accessible and reducing language barriers for volunteers, sharing:

*We've added a piece in every element [of our program]... we wanted to make sure that it wasn't just a one-off. It wasn't thrown in there as lip service but it was something that was strategically placed in every single module.*

Participants in the VMI and VPMI training courses noted challenges they experienced in recruiting and retaining diverse volunteers in their organizations. One focused on how being able to volunteer at all is a privilege that not all can participate in, and that even though their organization targets diverse groups of people it is hard to get a diverse group of volunteers to show up. A second participant echoed this, noting how volunteerism often requires participants to take off work and provide their own transportation, which limits possible participation. Another finds it difficult to focus on DEI efforts because they currently don't have a dedicated volunteer coordinator and therefore don't have the time or staff capacity to develop a strategy to do so. The nature of their organization also requires volunteers to work between the hours of 8 a.m. and 5 p.m., and the groups who can take the time to do so are limited.

When asked to recall strategies to recruit or retain diverse volunteers, VMT and VPMI participants highlighted a few different strategies. One participant recalled a training discussing how to maximize inclusion in recruitment messaging. Another remembered learning how to recruit volunteers across different generations.

The Youth Council participant interviewed did not find the council to be particularly racially or ethnically diverse, which they noted reflected the overall racial homogeneity of the state, though they did describe the council as being geographically diverse—with members from across Utah—as well as diverse in terms of the type of project each council member was working on. They also noted how participation in the council provides members with a stipend to supplement the opportunity cost of not working, though the participant did not know if that supplement had affected diversity yet.

## Strategies Used and/or Learned

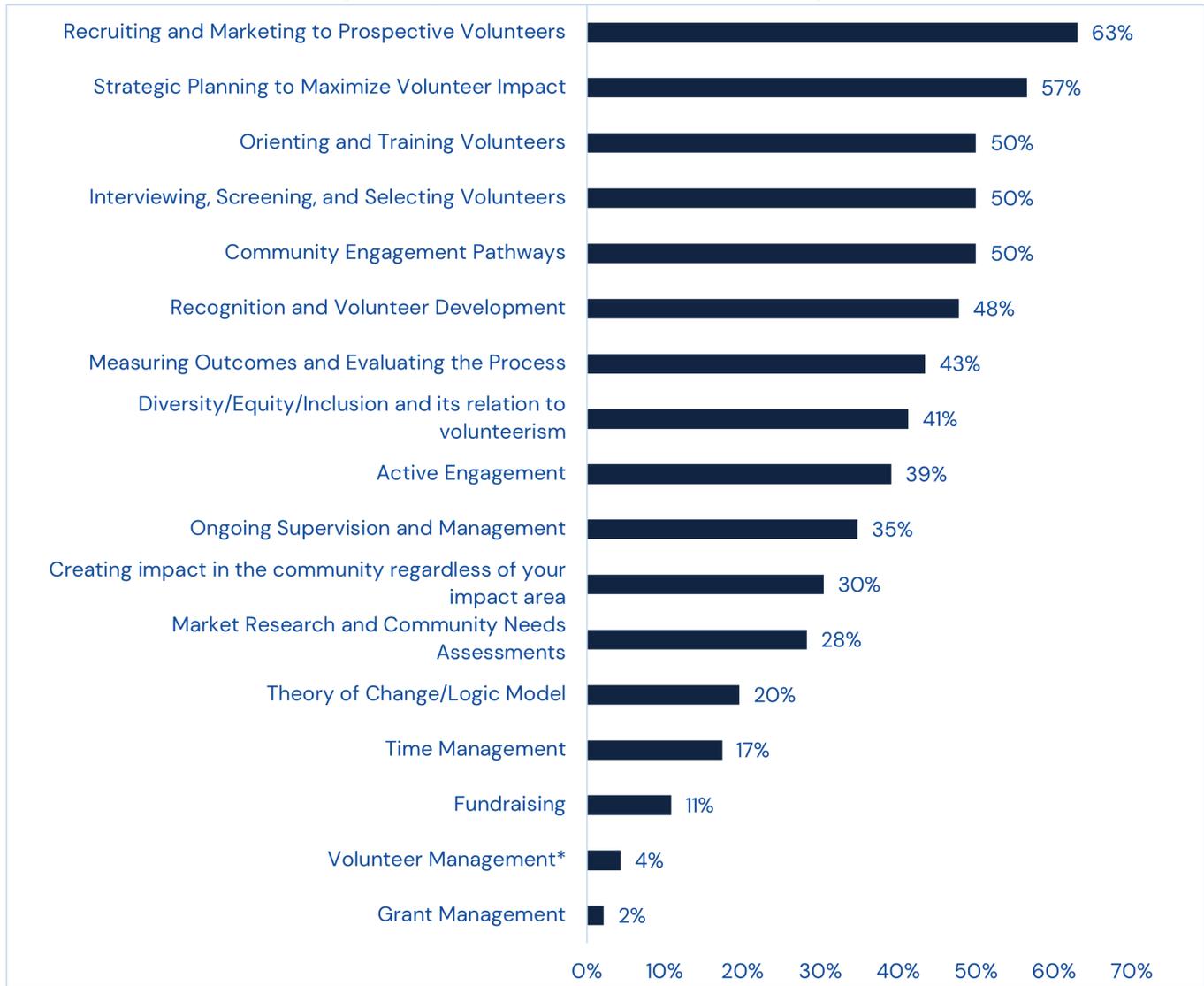
VMT and VPMI participants described during site visits several volunteer management strategies they learned during training sessions, including the following:

- **Segmenting Out Volunteers.** Participants learned to figure out in what capacity different groups can volunteer, and then learned how to make sure those volunteers are targeted.
- **Developing Clear Volunteer Job Descriptions.** Making volunteers aware of what tasks they are and are not expected to perform. This allows volunteers to identify which roles they are interested in, as well.
- **Recognizing Volunteers.** To drive volunteer retention, making sure volunteers are recognized for their efforts. Examples include tracking when volunteers began volunteering and giving them small gifts at certain thresholds.
- **Identifying Volunteer Motivations.** This includes tracking why volunteers are motivated to volunteer with your organization through methods such as surveys, and seeing how those motivations change over time.
- **Identifying the Return on Investment for Volunteers.** Measuring the impact of volunteers on an organization, including monetarily, to share with staff, leaders, and volunteers.

- **Aiming to Attract Long-Term Volunteers.** One organization had been only aiming to attract volunteers for one-time opportunities, and learned to instead focus on retaining volunteers through appeals to the mission of the organization.
- **Conducting Regular Evaluations.** Regularly evaluating their program to see what is working and what could be improved.
- **Mutual Selection Process.** The realization that volunteer recruitment is as much selection for volunteers about what organizations they want to spend their time on as it is organizations identifying what volunteers they are looking for.
- **Following up.** After reaching out to recruit volunteers, following up to see if they're still interested.
- **Attracting Volunteers Across Generations.** Volunteers learned different motivations and practices to attract volunteers of various ages.
- **Inclusion in Messaging.** One volunteer recalled learning inclusive recruitment messaging.

Across survey respondents, there was a wide variation in the types of practices respondents noted receiving training on through UServeUtah's training and capacity building activities. The most frequently reported training practices included Recruiting and Marketing to Prospective Volunteers (63 percent) and Strategic Planning to Maximize Volunteer Impact (57 percent). Exhibit B.82 provides additional details on the types of practices survey respondents reported learning about through training activities.

**EXHIBIT B.82.—Volunteer management practices learned about in trainings (n=46)**

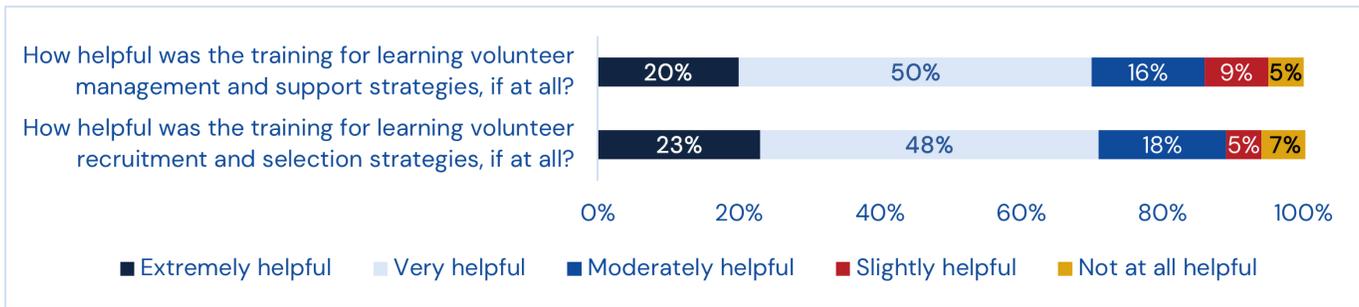


Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

\*This survey question originally contained an “Other” response with a write-in option. The two participants who answered “Other” both wrote in “Volunteer Management.”

Over two-thirds of survey respondents reported that the trainings were very or extremely helpful for learning volunteer management and support strategies (70 percent), and recruitment and selection strategies (71 percent), as seen in exhibit B.83.

**EXHIBIT B.83.—Reported helpfulness of training (n=44)**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

**Collecting and Tracking Data**

UServeUtah requires participants across trainings, its grant program, and in the Youth Council to collect data on performance indicators. For example, the VMT and VPMI both require participants to provide evidence as part of receiving a certificate. The VMT as well as the Active Engagement Retreat administer a pre- and post-survey as part of the training experience. Finally, Community Engagement Grant recipients are required to submit an annual report as part of their grant.

VMT and VPMI participants also noted multiple types of volunteer data their organizations collect from volunteers. The amount of data collected varied: one VPMI participant currently collects demographic data, availability, records of service, and driver’s license information, while another collects much fewer data due to the lack of a robust volunteer tracking system. Organizations also reported collecting hours, participation numbers at classes and events, satisfaction surveys, and qualitative data toward key performance indicators. A VMT participant noted how they use their historical data to demonstrate impact to volunteers in order to make volunteers feel valued and improve their retention.

**Outcomes**

**UServeUtah’s Outcomes**

UServeUtah staff were asked to reflect on their program’s biggest successes and challenges since October 2020. The largest challenge overall, according to staff, has been responding to the pandemic. UServeUtah applied for this grant just before the onset of COVID-19, and they experienced some challenges pivoting to virtual services, but from their perspective, were mostly successful in this transition. From the fall of 2020 through the end of 2022, participation numbers were below pre-COVID levels. Engagement during virtual sessions was down, and staff had difficulty convincing trainees to actively participate through turning on webcams. In the transition away from virtual sessions, UServeUtah has also seen some difficulty getting participation at in-person trainings, as participants have been skeptical of the safety and became used to the convenience that Zoom trainings offered. However, staff have noted that since January of 2023 numbers have rebounded and participation levels in all VGF activities are back to pre-COVID numbers or beyond, with some trainings fully selling out.

An additional challenge is the difficulty staff find in writing applications for grants such as VGF that require them to innovate, when from UServeUtah’s perspective, their needs are to obtain sustained funds that continue programs in the same forms they’ve existed in. Just three state service commissions were awarded in the last funding notification (in 2023 at time of writing), and the VGF program generally seems to be shifting away from state service commissions and toward nonprofits. UServeUtah staff shared their perspective that

impactful initiatives like theirs take time to build, and many are just gaining traction now—right as they will have to sunset 3 years after they were initially awarded.

In terms of successes, staff were satisfied with their impact across programs and populations, even if that success is difficult to measure. One staff member compared programs to dropping pebbles in a body of water, where their program creates ripples that move far away from view, but still have an effect on others. Staff members highlighted the success of their Community Engagement Grant program, where the large sum of grant money given out has large and measurable impacts on grantees. For example, staff shared the example of the Better Utah Institute, which used grant money to develop a nonpartisan online tool devoted to increasing political participation in the state. Staff also highlighted the impacts of their various youth initiatives, in particular, the Youth Council, where students are given the opportunity to work on passion projects for multiple months and develop their skills. However, staff also qualified these successes by again citing the lack of sustained funding from VGF, as the improvements highlighted here, such as enhancements to training to build VGF into all modules, will likely sunset after the loss of funding.

### **Program Beneficiaries' Outcomes**

Program beneficiaries across VMT, VPML, the Community Engagement Grant, and the Youth Council reflected on the outcomes of programs on them and their organizations.

#### **VMT**

VMT participants highlighted numerous positive aspects of their experiences with training. Specifically, participants described:

- VMT as laying a positive foundation for volunteer management skills, which they could use in future to expand their skills;
- How they had learned the importance of reflecting on and becoming mindful of the volunteer experience to better serve them;
- How they found their management and utilization of volunteers to now be defter and more efficient; and
- The value of networking opportunities with other volunteer managers and the value that VMT offers as a foundational training for VPML.

VMT trainees who ICF spoke with all reported receiving a certification at the end of their process, and did not offer any major suggestions for improvement. One participant in particular shared how their organization was voted the second-best place to volunteer in southern Utah, which they attributed to the training they received with the UServeUtah VMT.

#### **VPML**

VPML participants shared many successes and helpful aspects as a result of their participation in training, listed here.

- Participants began incorporating statements of need, job descriptions, and making organizational charts available for volunteers.
- Multiple organizations began to step up their volunteer recognition as well as clarifying their messaging to volunteers about their roles and responsibilities.
- One organization that began with a very poor orientation for volunteers clarified their training immensely as a result of training and began to make it much easier for volunteers to understand who to go to with questions.

- Many participants at the time of the interview had plans in place to integrate volunteer position descriptions in their messaging and ways to target new volunteer populations they hadn't identified before.
- A volunteer manager felt that training made them equipped to rely on volunteers for more tasks, sharing that the training has increased their capacity by providing "ideas for me to be like, 'Okay, I don't need to do this all alone. I can rely on volunteers as well do to all sorts of jobs for us.'"

Participants liked multiple aspects of the structure of the training itself. VPML participants received physical booklets with lessons, and participants reported referencing those lessons often. They also enjoyed the six-module framework of training, as well as the clear roadmap of how to implement a volunteer program from start to finish. The training itself was also seen as very engaging, as was being able to network with other volunteer managers and share ideas. Participants also highlighted the affordability of trainings as a huge benefit.

VPML participants also shared a few recommendations for improvement and additional supports they needed. VPML participants who had also attended VMT seemed to be a step ahead of others who had not, and some of the latter wished for more support to align the two groups. Some elements of the training booklet were seen as requiring more detail. Additionally, the time required to obtain certification levels was seen by some participants as burdensome with their otherwise busy schedule. Additional training elements wanted by participants included database management, gaining staff buy-in, and being able to retain an ongoing community of training participants.

### **Community Engagement Grant**

Grantees found the program to be very positively impactful for their organizations. Grantees highlighted the value of UServeUtah's pipeline to existing volunteers, new ideas provided on how to recruit volunteers, feedback on their existing programs, help with survey development, and more. One participant who trains grad students to be staff members in their organization also found the grant to be key in developing the skills of these students in areas such as volunteer management and grant writing.

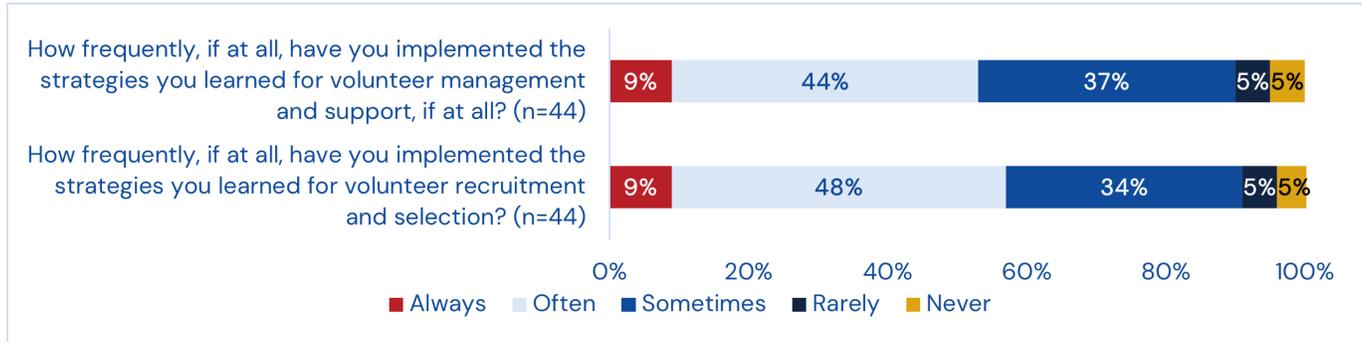
### **Youth Council**

The member of the Youth Council interviewed described themselves as being "pretty satisfied" with their experience. They were appreciative of the mentorship opportunities available—both for themselves from project staff and for the high school council from the college council.

They also had a few points of feedback. They appreciated the ability to experience mentorship themselves within the program, and they wanted the council to, in future, provide mentorship opportunities for the students they volunteer with as well. The participant also found few ongoing connections with members of the council after their time on it ended, and they suggested creating, at the very least, a text chat of former council members.

Overall, both UServeUtah and training recipients reported moderate to strong positive effects from the training and capacity building provided through the VGF grant program. Regarding the outcomes of implementation, as shown in exhibit B.84, the majority (53 percent) of survey respondents shared that they Often or Always implement the strategies they learned for volunteer management and support. Additionally, 57 percent of respondents noted they implemented volunteer recruitment and selection strategies Often or Always.

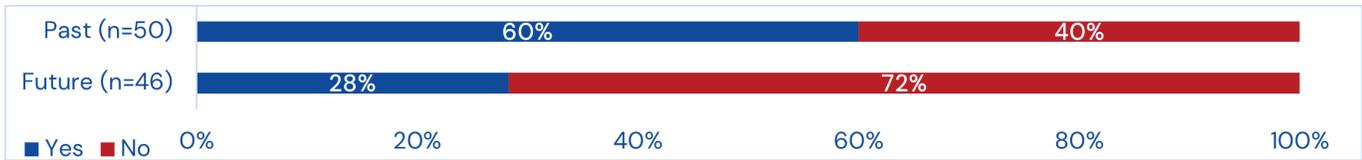
**EXHIBIT B.84.—Frequency of implementation**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

As seen in exhibit B.85, survey respondents reported on the certifications their organizations had received at the time of survey administration since October 2020 and/or were planning to receive by September 2023. As of October 2020, nearly two-thirds (60 percent) of respondents had received a certification. Nearly one-third (28 percent) noted their organization might receive a certification by September 2023.

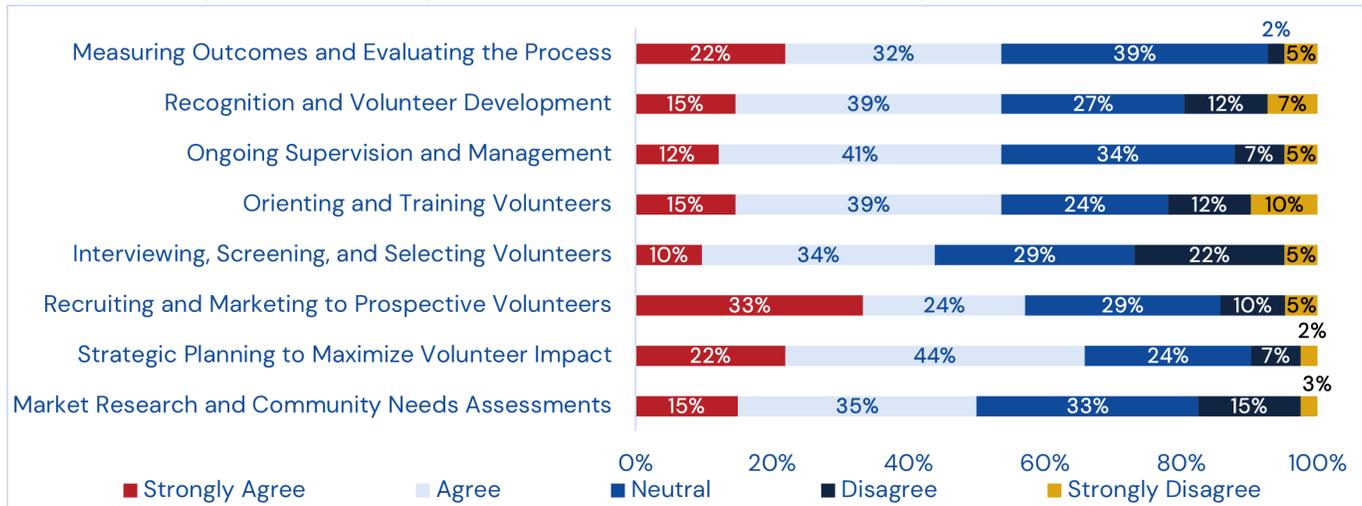
**EXHIBIT B.85.—Certifications organizations and staff received as of October 2020 and/or planned to receive by September 2023**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

Survey respondents were also asked to share their agreement regarding their and/or their organization’s need for additional training or support on various topics, as seen in exhibit B.86. The topics with the highest agreement on need were Strategic Planning to Maximize Volunteer Impact (70 percent) and Recruiting and Marketing to Prospective Volunteers (57 percent). The topics with the lowest agreement were Market Research and Community Needs Assessments (50 percent) and Interviewing, Training, and Screening Volunteers (44 percent).

**EXHIBIT B.86.—Agreement with organizational need for additional training by topic**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

Lastly, survey respondents shared their perspectives on the effect of the VGF grant on various volunteer outcomes, presented in exhibits B.87 and B.88.

As seen in exhibit B.87, while just under one-third of survey respondents reported *Substantial* or *Transformative* improvements in volunteer engagement/retention and in volunteer recruitment after implementing strategies they learned (33 percent and 30 percent, respectively), the majority of survey respondents noted at least *Moderate* improvement in both (75 percent and 64 percent, respectively).

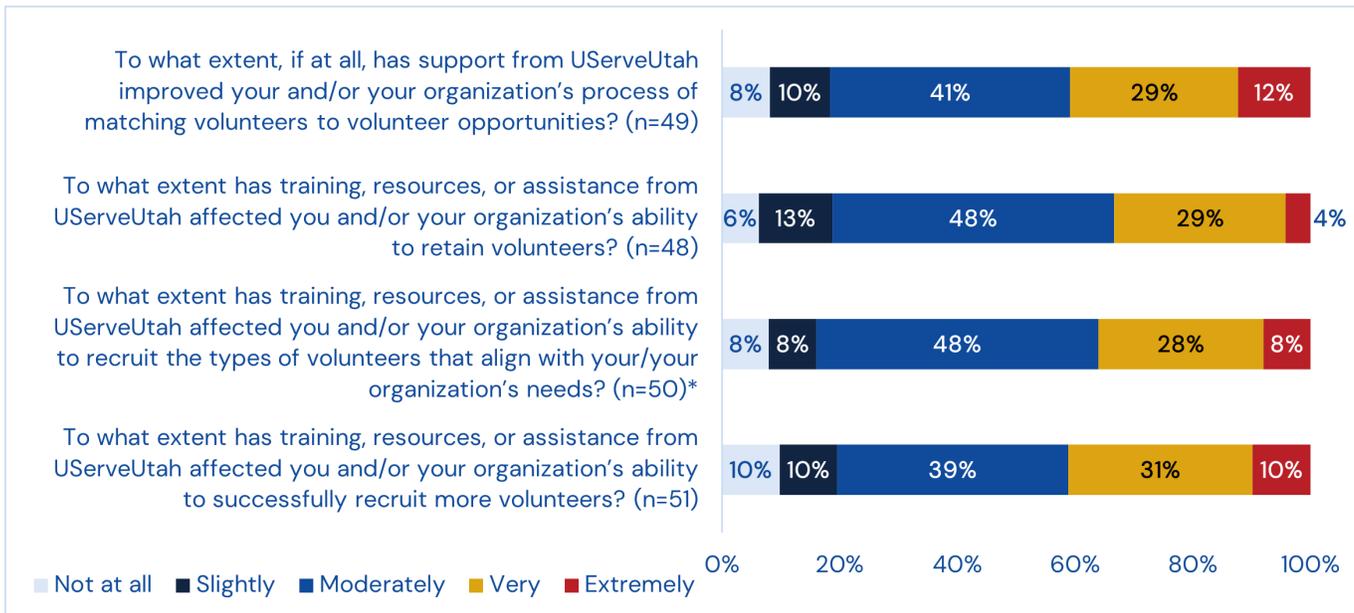
**EXHIBIT B.87.—Improvement in recruitment, engagement, and retention**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

Respondents also reported positive changes to specific volunteer outcomes because of the VGF grant. Overall, a minority of respondents reporting *Very* or *Extremely* significant effects (ranging from 33 percent to 41 percent), but a large majority of respondents reported at least *Moderately* significant ones (ranging from 80 percent to 84 percent total). The most supported improvement was organizations’ ability to recruit the types of volunteers that align with the organization’s needs (e.g., certain **skills-based** volunteers, **diverse** volunteers), followed by the process of **matching** volunteers to volunteer opportunities, the ability to **retain** volunteers, and to successfully **recruit** more volunteers.

**EXHIBIT B.88.—Effect of VGF grant on volunteer outcomes**



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

\*The full text of this question was "To what extent has training, resources, or assistance from UServeUtah affected you and/or your organization's ability to recruit the types of volunteers that align with your/your organization's needs (e.g., certain skills-based volunteers, diverse volunteers)?"

**Conclusion**

Overall, UServeUtah has been providing praised and effective volunteer capacity building to organizations within their state. As is the case across states, UServeUtah has struggled with the lingering effects of the pandemic, including lower training participation. However, training numbers have significantly rebounded in the past year, and UServeUtah has continued to support a wide range of capacity building activities, including VMT and VPMT trainings, the Community Engagement Grant, and the Youth Council. The majority of participants have found capacity building activities very effective, and UServeUtah has had impacts across populations within the state—though many of these improved initiatives will likely sunset without access to further VGF funding.

## Appendix C: Tables

EXHIBIT C.1.—VGF-funded capacity building activities

VGF-Funded Capacity Building Activities									
Grantee	Training: Cohort	Training: One-off	Subgrants	Mini-Grants	Youth	Conferences	Disaster Recovery	Online Resources	Other
FL	✓		✓				✓		
IA	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓		
MA	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	
MN	✓	✓	✓			✓			✓
NC	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		
NH	✓		✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
NJ	✓		✓			✓			✓
NV	✓			✓				✓	
UT	✓		✓		✓			✓	
<b>Total</b>	9	3	7	4	4	4	3	4	3

## Appendix D: Evaluation Protocols

### Volunteer Management Training/Capacity Building Beneficiary Survey

You are invited to complete a survey regarding volunteer management training/capacity building activity (supported by AmeriCorps Volunteer Generation Fund [VGF]) that you received sometime between October 2020 and the present. Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. ICF, a research and evaluation organization, is partnering with AmeriCorps to understand the impact of their VGF Grant. In this survey, we will be asking about ways in which you and your organization have participated in volunteer management training and capacity building activities and support. Your response will help AmeriCorps to improve its VGF grant program. The survey will take approximately **15 minutes**.

#### Risks

Filling out this survey is voluntary—you do not have to do it if you do not want to. You can skip questions or stop taking the survey at any time. There are no consequences if you do not take the survey or finish the survey.

#### Sharing of Information

Your answers to the survey questions will be kept private to the extent permitted by law. Your name will not be collected with the survey. We will summarize answers to short-answer or multiple-choice questions across respondents in study reports. Your individual answers to open-ended questions could be shared anonymously in study reports.

Key findings from this survey will be summarized in a report that we will provide to AmeriCorps. AmeriCorps may use this information to help improve the VGF grant program. Your name will not be included in our report.

#### Questions

Should you have any questions about the survey, you may contact Dr. Samantha Spinney, the study director, at [Samantha.Spinney@icf.com](mailto:Samantha.Spinney@icf.com) or (703) 272-6681. For questions regarding your rights related to this evaluation, you can contact ICF's Institutional Review Board at [IRB@icf.com](mailto:IRB@icf.com).

We thank you for your time and participation.

By selecting "I agree to take this survey," you are indicating that you agree to the terms as described and agree to take the survey.

- I agree to take this survey.
- I do not agree to take this survey. (Skip to the end of the survey.)

1. In which state do you work? (*drop-down*)
2. What organization do you work for? (*write-in*)
3. What is your current role at your organization?
  - a. Executive Director/CEO/president
  - b. Volunteer manager/coordinator
  - c. Other (please specify) (*write-in*)

### **Volunteer Management Training**

4. What type of volunteer management training/capacity building activities are available to your organization through VGF grant activities? (*matrix; Yes/No/Don't know*)
  - a. Interactive group training sessions or workshops (in-person or virtual; training included staff from other organizations)
  - b. One-on-one training (in-person or virtual; training included only your organization staff with program implementer trainers)
  - c. Conferences (in-person or virtual)
  - d. Webinars
  - e. Coaching and/or mentoring
  - f. Online training modules (asynchronous)
  - g. Other (please specify) (*write-in*)
5. What organization(s) in [state name] provided training?
6. When did your organization first participate in training through VGF grant activities?
  - a. Prior to October 2020
  - b. October 2020 – March 2021
  - c. April 2021 – September 2021
  - d. October 2021 – March 2022
  - e. April 2022 – Present
7. Since October 2020, how many other individuals at your organization have participated in training/capacity building activities through the VGF grant? (*drop-down 0-10+*)
8. Since October 2020, approximately how many hours of volunteer management training have you received? (*drop-down 0-20+*)
9. Do you or members of your organization still plan to complete additional training through the VGF grant?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Undecided/Don't know
10. How many more hours of training do you or members of your organization plan to complete through the VGF grant in total? (*drop-down 0-10+*) (*Display if answer to question 9 is 'Yes' or 'Undecided/Don't know'*)
11. What training curriculum was used for your training? (*Select all that apply*)
  - a. Service Enterprise Initiative
  - b. Pathways of Public Service and Civic Engagement

- c. FEMA Courses
  - d. California Specialized Training Institute courses
  - e. Points of Light Volunteer Manager training curriculum
  - f. State Commission–developed curriculum
  - g. Other (Please specify) (*write-in*)
  - h. Don't know
12. What certification(s) has your organization received since October 2020, if any? (*Select all that apply*)
- a. Service Enterprise certification
  - b. Service Enterprise Hub (qualification to train other organizations)
  - c. State Commission–developed certification
  - d. Other (Please specify) (*write-in*)
  - e. My organization has not received certification(s) since October 2020.
13. What certification(s) might your organization receive by September 2023, if any? (*Select all that apply*)
- a. Service Enterprise certification
  - b. Service Enterprise Hub (qualification to train other organizations)
  - c. State Commission–developed certification
  - d. Other (Please specify) (*write-in*)
  - e. My organization will not receive certification(s) by September 2023.
14. What certification(s) did you or one of your staff members receive, if any, since October 2020? (*Select all that apply*)
- a. Certification in Volunteer Administration (United Way)
  - b. State Commission–developed certification
  - c. Other (Please specify) (*write-in*)
  - d. I did not receive certification(s).
15. What certification(s) do you expect that you or one of your staff members will receive by September 2023, if any? (*Select all that apply*)
- a. Certification in Volunteer Administration (United Way)
  - b. State Commission–developed certification
  - c. Other (Please specify) (*write-in*)
  - d. I will not receive any certification(s) by September 2023.
16. Since October 2020, for which of the following practices did you receive training through the VGF grant? (*Select all that apply*)
- a. Market Research and Community Needs Assessments
  - b. Strategic Planning to Maximize Volunteer Impact
  - c. Recruiting and Marketing to Prospective Volunteers
  - d. Interviewing, Screening, and Selecting Volunteers
  - e. Orienting and Training Volunteers
  - f. Ongoing Supervision and Management
  - g. Recognition and Volunteer Development
  - h. Measuring Outcomes and Evaluating the Process
  - i. Other (*write in*)

17. How helpful was the training for learning volunteer recruitment and selection strategies, if at all? (*Likert-type 5-point scale; unipolar; "not at all helpful", "slightly helpful", "moderately helpful", "very helpful", "extremely helpful"*)
18. How frequently, if at all, have you implemented the strategies you learned for volunteer recruitment and selection? (*Likert-type 5-point scale; unipolar; "never", "rarely", "sometimes", "often", "always"*)
19. How has implementing the strategies for recruiting and selecting volunteers improved volunteer recruitment, if at all? (*Likert-type 5-point scale; unipolar; "no improvement", "slight improvement", "moderate improvement", "substantial improvement", "transformative improvement"*)
20. How helpful was the training for learning volunteer management and support strategies, if at all? (*Likert-type 5-point scale; unipolar; "not at all helpful", "slightly helpful", "moderately helpful", "very helpful", "extremely helpful"*)
21. How frequently, if at all, have you implemented the strategies you learned for volunteer management and support, if at all? (*Likert-type 5-point scale; unipolar; "never", "rarely", "sometimes", "often", "always"*)
22. How has implementing the strategies for managing and supporting volunteers improved volunteer engagement or retention, if at all? (*Likert-type 5-point scale; unipolar; "no improvement", "slight improvement", "moderate improvement", "substantial improvement", "transformative improvement"*)
23. Please rate your level of agreement with the following statement: "I need and/or my organization needs additional training or support on..." (*Likert-type 5-point scale; unipolar; "strongly disagree", "disagree", "neutral", "agree", "strongly agree", "not applicable"*)
  - a. Market Research and Community Needs Assessments
  - b. Strategic Planning to Maximize Volunteer Impact
  - c. Recruiting and Marketing to Prospective Volunteers
  - d. Interviewing, Screening, and Selecting Volunteers
  - e. Orienting and Training Volunteers
  - f. Ongoing Supervision and Management
  - g. Recognition and Volunteer Development
  - h. Measuring Outcomes and Evaluating the Process
24. How many individuals volunteer with your organization every month, on average?
  - a. Fewer than 10 persons
  - b. 10-20
  - c. 21-30
  - d. 30-50
  - e. 50-100
  - f. 100+
25. Have you or anyone at your organization used a state commission portal/platform to help search or identify potential volunteers? (*Skip to 27. If 'No'*)
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Don't know
26. How many potential volunteers did you identify through the portal/platform? (*drop-down 0-20+*)

27. Have you or anyone at your organization used a state commission portal/platform to post volunteer opportunities with your organization? (Skip to 29. If 'No')
- a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Don't know
28. How many volunteer opportunities did you (or someone at your organization) post? (drop-down 0-20+)
29. Please review each question regarding outcomes of training, resources, or assistance from the VGF grant and rate the degree to which your organization experienced the outcomes. If you have not utilized the type of support, please select "Not applicable." (Matrix; Likert-type 6-point scale; unipolar; "not at all", "slightly", "moderately", "very", "extremely", "not applicable")
- a. To what extent have training, resources, or assistance from the VGF grant affected your organization's ability to successfully recruit more volunteers?
  - b. To what extent have training, resources, or assistance from the VGF grant affected your organization's ability to recruit the types of volunteers that align with your organization's needs (e.g., certain skills-based volunteers, diverse volunteers)?
  - c. To what extent have training, resources, or assistance from the VGF grant affected your organization's ability to retain volunteers?
  - d. To what extent, if at all, has support from the VGF grant improved your organization's process of matching volunteers to volunteer opportunities?
  - e. To what extent, if at all, has support from the state commission portal/platform, if applicable, improved your organization's process of matching volunteers to volunteer opportunities?
30. What additional feedback or insights you would like to share with us regarding your participation in the VGF grant-funded program?

(Enter response)

Thank you for your responses. There is a raffle for a \$25 Amazon gift card for survey respondents. Five winners from your state will be selected. To enter into the raffle, please select the following link. Your raffle information will be disconnected from your survey responses.

## AmeriCorps Volunteer Generation Fund Grantee Site Visits Stakeholder Interview/Focus Groups Consent

### Participation

Thank you again for taking the time to participate in today's interview/focus group. This interview/focus group is part of a research study being conducted by ICF, a research and evaluation organization, to help AmeriCorps better understand how its Volunteer Generation Fund (VGF) grant program is working. More specifically, we are interested in VGF grantees' use of VGF funds to develop and/or support community-based entities to recruit, manage, and support volunteers. Accordingly, we are speaking to various individuals involved in implementing or participating in these different activities or those who have benefited from them. Today's discussion will cover topics such as your perceptions of volunteer capacity building and training activities. The interview/focus group will take approximately one hour.

### Risks

Participation in today's discussion is voluntary. You can decide that you do not want to answer any question we ask you, and you can stop participating in the discussion at any time. You can also decide not to participate at all and leave the interview/focus group at any point.

### Sharing of Information

The ICF research and evaluation team will handle all data collected as part of this study in a confidential manner. In order to capture the discussion, we will record the session. Only ICF study team members will have access to the recording and the transcripts.

Key findings from this discussion and other interviews and focus groups will be summarized in a report that we will provide to AmeriCorps. AmeriCorps may use this information to help improve the VGF grant program. Your name will not be included in our report. It is possible that AmeriCorps may be able to attribute the comments from program implementers to particular staff, however, if there are not many program implementation staff from a particular state.

### Questions

Should you have any questions about the interview, you may contact Dr. Samantha Spinney, the study director, at [Samantha.Spinney@icf.com](mailto:Samantha.Spinney@icf.com) or (703) 272-6681. For questions regarding your rights related to this evaluation, you can contact ICF's Institutional Review Board at [IRB@icf.com](mailto:IRB@icf.com).

We thank you for your time and participation.

## Program Implementer Interview Protocol

Hello! Thank you for meeting with me today. My name is XX, and I'm with ICF, a research and evaluation organization working with AmeriCorps to understand the impacts of their Volunteer Generation Fund grant program. Today, we will be asking about ways in which this funding has been used by [state commission name and/or program implementer organization name] to engage in [VGF-funded activity, e.g., capacity-building services] to support community-based entities to recruit, manage, and support volunteers. Your response will help AmeriCorps to improve its VGF grant program.

1. Let's begin with some background information. Please tell me a little bit about your role at [program implementer] and your role as it relates to the Volunteer Generation Fund grant activity, [main activity of program implementer].
  - a. Who are the other staff that are involved in the VGF funded capacity-building activities, if any, and what are their roles?
2. How do you select volunteer organizations to participate in the volunteer management training/capacity building?
  - a. How competitive is the process to be able to participate, if at all?
  - b. What type of model do you use for training one or more organizations? (e.g., cohort model)
  - c. How many volunteer organizations have you trained as part of this VGF grant to-date (since October 2020)?
  - d. How many more volunteer organizations do you plan to train by September 2023, as part of this VGF grant?
3. Please describe the organizations that participate in the training, and any requirements these organizations must meet. (e.g., volunteer connector organizations, government entities, volunteer organizations, non-profits, community-based organizations, corporations)
4. Please describe the capacity building or training that you provide these organizations.
  - a. What curriculum or program do you use?
  - b. Who or what organization developed the curriculum/training?
    - i. Did your organization develop the curriculum/training?
    - ii. If so, did your organization work with any others to develop the curriculum/training? Was the curriculum/training as part of the current VGF grant?
  - c. How many capacity-building practices do you typically cover in the training?
    - i. How many practices or strategies do you generally cover in each training session?
  - d. What materials do you provide to training participants?
  - e. How many sessions/trainings does each organization participate in?
    - i. What are requirements related to training?
      1. How many sessions or hours are participants required to attend, if there are any requirements?
      2. How many staff from each organization are required to attend, if there are any requirements?
  - f. What other expectations do you have for the training participants (e.g., do they have to outline a plan for implementing capacity-building practices?)
  - g. What certifications, if any, do participants or organizations receive?
    - i. What are the requirements for certification?
5. What partners, if any, do you work with to provide training or capacity building?

- a. What is the role of your partners?
  - b. Does your program use the train-the-trainer model?
    - i. If yes, please describe.
6. (Since October 2020) What are the greatest needs of the organizations with regards to capacity-building?
- a. To what extent do volunteer organizations need help with recruitment strategies? (Finding more volunteers, finding skill-based volunteers, etc.)
  - b. To what extent do volunteer organizations need help with volunteer engagement or retention strategies?
7. How, if at all, have you incorporated COVID-19 specific volunteer management training or capacity building in the training you provide organizations?
8. How, if at all, have you incorporated diversity and inclusion into your volunteer management training or capacity building with the training you provide organizations?
9. (Since October 2020) What data do you collect from the volunteer organizations prior to their participation in the program, if any? (e.g., information about their needs, what they are hoping to learn from the training)
- a. How do you collect this data?
10. (Since October 2020) What data do you collect from the volunteer organizations after they participate in the training, if any?
- a. How do you collect feedback regarding participant experiences with the program?
    - i. What have they liked about the training?
    - ii. What suggestions do they have for improvement?
  - b. Do you collect data on the extent to which they implement volunteer management practices?
    - i. What strategies do organizations report successfully implementing?
    - ii. What strategies do organizations find challenging?
  - c. What data do you collect from volunteer organizations as it relates to their recruitment and/or retention? (e.g., number of volunteers before participating in training and then tracking volunteer numbers overtime)
11. How did your organization become involved in this grant? Has your organization worked with the state commission before? If so, for how long and in what area?
12. (Since October 2020) How often do you communicate with the state commission regarding your progress?
- a. To what extent do you share your successes, challenges, and lessons learned with the state commission, if at all?
13. (Since October 2020) What data or reports do you provide to the state commission as it relates to capacity-building outputs and outcomes?
- a. How often do you provide the state commission with data?
14. What other data from training participants/organization do you collect, if any?
15. How do you work with a 3<sup>rd</sup> party or an internal evaluator to evaluate your program, if at all?
- a. Please describe your evaluation design and activities.
16. What do you see as the biggest success of your program since October 2020 – to present)?

17. What are the biggest challenges of your program (since October 2020 – to present) to-date?
  - a. What are some lessons learned?
18. What are some of the successes related to program beneficiaries implementing volunteer management strategies learned through the training/capacity building?
19. What are some of the challenges related to program beneficiaries implementing volunteer management strategies learned through the training/capacity building?
  - a. What are some lessons learned?
20. What challenges, if any, have program beneficiaries encountered as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic?
21. [If a program is responsible for creating/expanding a network – What is your role in building a volunteer network with the state? How does your organization participate in the state’s volunteer network?]
22. [If a state has a volunteer portal or platform, how does your organization utilize the volunteer platform/portal? ]
23. In what ways, if any, has the [program implementer’s activities] improved volunteer organization’s capacity to utilize volunteers?
24. What additional feedback or insights, if any would you like to share with us regarding the VGF program?

## State Commission (Grantee) Interview Protocol

Hello! Thank you for meeting with me today. My name is XX, and I'm with ICF, a research and evaluation organization working with AmeriCorps to understand the how states utilize the Volunteer Generation Fund grant. Today, we will be asking about ways in which this funding has been used by [state commission name] to engage in [VGF-funded activity, e.g., capacity-building services] to support organizations in your state to recruit, manage, and support volunteers. Your response will help AmeriCorps to improve its VGF grant program.

### Commission Role and Model

1. Let's begin with some background information. Please tell me a little bit about your role with the [state name] Commission and your role as it relates to the Volunteer Generation Fund grant.
  - a. Who are other key commission staff who help manage VGF grant activities, and what are their roles as it relates to the VGF grant?
2. Can you please share the overarching approach that your state commission is implementing to develop or support community-based entities to recruit, manage, and support volunteers and increase the number of volunteers in your state? [Note: interviewer should have a good understanding of the Commission's VGF program components and model and should probe if any of these components are not mentioned]
  - a. What approach does your state use to *build capacity* of volunteer connector organizations (or other entities) to increase volunteer recruitment, retention, and support of volunteers?
  - b. What approach does your state use to *create and improve volunteer networks* within the state?
  - c. What are other components of your state's model are aimed at improving volunteer recruitment? (or increasing the number of volunteers in your state)
  - d. What approaches does your state use to engage targeted populations in volunteer opportunities (e.g., corporate employees, students/youth, seniors/retirees, skilled volunteers in disaster management or other professions)?
3. Did the Commission previously receive a VGF grant ?
  - a. If yes, when ? What activities were implemented during previous grant cycles?
  - b. If no, what components of the model were implemented prior to receiving the FY2020 VGF grant?
4. What are the main goals and objectives that the Commission is trying to achieve during the current VGF grant term, as it relates to capacity-building and increasing the number of volunteers in your state? (If not discussed previously)
  - a. What changes, if any, have been made since your FY2020 application?
    - i. What prompted these changes?
  - b. How, if at all, have you made changes based on the COVID-19 pandemic?
  - c. How if at all, have you made changes to your approach to be address diversity and inclusion?
  - d. What changes, if any, have been made to the timeline of VGF-funded activities since your FY2020 application?
    - i. What prompted these changes?
  - e. What VGF activities, if any, have been accomplished to-date since receiving the FY2020 grant?
  - f. What are the key VGF-funded activities, if any, that will take place over FY2022 year?
5. What data do you collect to assess your performance measures outputs and outcomes as it relates to capacity-building or number of volunteers in your state?
  - a. How do you collect this data?

- b. What other data do you collect, if any?
6. Are you working with a 3<sup>rd</sup> party evaluator or an internal evaluator to evaluate your program model?
- a. If yes, please describe your evaluation design/activities to date, as well as future plans for evaluation activities.

### **Program Implementers**

*Note: These questions focus on role of program implementers which may include commission staff, program partners, grantees, consultants or other entities)*

7. What is the Commission's role, if any, in implementing components of the model? *(Interviewer should have some idea if the commission plays a role; if commission is the implementer, skip questions about program partners)*
8. Please tell me about your program partners that are responsible for implementing [VGF role/activity], if you have any.
9. How many program partners do you work with in implementing [VGF role/activity]? *(if not already stated)*
10. How were these program partners selected?
- a. *(If RFP)* Can you tell me a little about the RFP process to select your partners/grantees?
  - b. How long have you worked with your partners? *(e.g., were partnerships established prior to the VGF grant)*
11. What model do program implementers utilize to provide the training
- a. Please describe the role of the program implementers (or partners) in developing the program activities. *(and timeline)*
    - i. Please describe the role of the participants (beneficiaries/volunteer organizations)
  - b. If program implementers utilize a train-the-trainer model. please describe who provides the training to the trainer.
    - i. Please describe the role of the trainer and who participates in their training sessions.
12. Are program implementers developing the curriculum, training, or capacity building activities as part of the VGF grant, or are they implementing an already existing program?
- a. Please describe what aspects of the current program were developed prior to this grant. *(if not previously discussed)*
13. What VGF-funded activities do your program implementers do to increase volunteer networks in your state, if any? *(if not already discussed)*
14. How do program implementers work with other targeted populations? *(e.g., corporations, schools, community-based youth organizations, skilled-volunteers)* *(if not already discussed)* *(This may not be relevant to all grantees)*
15. How, if at all, have program implementers' activities/trainings, been impacted by COVID-19?
- a. What COVID-19 specific volunteer management training, if any, has been provided?
  - b. What challenges, if any, have program implementers' encountered due to the pandemic?

16. How, if at all, have any program implementers' activities/volunteer management trainings included a focus on diversity and inclusion as it relates to volunteer management?
17. Are program implementers required to collect to assess VGF goals/objectives, outputs and outcomes?
  - a. If yes, what type of data do they collect?
  - b. Are program implementers required to report on any performance measures? Which ones?
18. What data or reports do program implementers submit to the commission? How often do program implementers submit data or reports?

**Program Beneficiaries**

19. How, if at all, do Commission staff interact with VGF-funded program recipients such as volunteer organizations, corporations, schools, community-based organizations?
20. What feedback, if any, have you received from program recipients about their experiences working with the program implementers?
21. What types of data do program beneficiaries collect to help either program implementers or the state commission assess VGF goals/objectives, outputs, and outcomes, if any?
  - a. How do they collect this data?
22. *(If the state commission implements other program components (e.g., platform/portal) related to volunteer recruitment or retention, in addition to capacity building/training we can ask about the state commission's perceived awareness of how program beneficiaries utilize these other components)*
23. We'd like to speak to 1-2 program implementers. Do you have any recommendations?
24. What additional feedback or insights, if any, would you like to share with us regarding the VGF program?

Thank you!

## State Commission (Grantee) Follow-up Interview Protocol

Hello! Thank you for meeting with me today. My name is XX, and I'm with ICF, a research and evaluation organization working with AmeriCorps to understand the impacts of their Volunteer Generation Fund grant program. We appreciate the time you have already taken to meet with us previously and tell us about [state commission name's] VGF grant-funded activities. Today, we will be asking follow-up questions about ways in which this funding has been used by [state commission name] to engage in [VGF-funded activity, e.g., capacity-building services] to support organizations in your state to recruit, manage, and support volunteer and any initial outcomes. Your response will help AmeriCorps to improve its VGF grant program.

1. Let's begin with some background information. We last spoke on [insert date]. At that time you noted that your role was [role with Commission and role with VGF from previous interview]. How, if at all, has your role changed?
  - a. You noted that there are also key staff who are responsible for [Commission and VGF roles]. How, if at all, have those staff roles changed?
2. What changes, if any, have been made to the model since we last spoke?
  - a. What prompted these changes?
3. What are the key activities that took place since we last spoke?
4. What changes, if any, have been made to the timeline of VFG grant activities?
  - a. What prompted these changes?
5. How would you describe the overall impact of the VGF grant –to-date?
6. What are some of the successes you've had at the commission level related to the VFG grant and capacity-building? What about other VGF-funded activities?  
(Probe: how successes might shape remaining grant activities or activities beyond the grant)
7. What are some of the challenges you've had at the commission level related to the VGF grant and capacity-building? What about challenges related to other VGF-funded activities?
  - a. What are some lessons learned?
8. (If the state proposed an evaluation in their proposal) Please provide an update of your evaluation activities conducted-to-date.
9. What type of data do you (or your program implementers) collect related to outputs and outcomes associated with volunteer management practices?
  - a. What other reports, if any, have you received from program implementers related to program activities and outcomes?
  - b. What have been the key outcomes to-date?
10. What are some of the successes related to program implementers' [insert program implementer names] VGF-funded grant activities, if any?
11. What are some of the challenges related to program implementers' [insert program implementer names] VGF-funded grant activities, if any?

- a. What are some lessons learned?
12. What are some of the successes related to program beneficiaries implementing volunteer management strategies learned through the training/capacity building, if any?
13. What are some of the challenges related to program beneficiaries implementing volunteer management strategies learned through the training/capacity building, if any?
  - a. What are some lessons learned?
14. To what extent are program beneficiaries engaged in volunteer networks, if at all? *(if the state has one, and if not already discussed)*
15. To what extent are program beneficiaries utilizing the volunteer portal/platform, if at all? *(if the state has one, and if not already discussed)*
16. To what extent have you (the state commission) met your goals related to:
  - a. Number of volunteers (or new volunteers)
  - b. Volunteer organizations receiving capacity-building services
  - c. Volunteer organizations increasing effectiveness or efficiency in volunteer management
  - d. Retaining volunteers
  - e. Establishing or expanding volunteer networking
  - f. Implementing programs with targeted populations (e.g., schools, corporations, youth programs)
17. What challenges, if any, do you foresee in meeting your (the state commission's) capacity-building and volunteer goals by the end of the grant term? *(if not already discussed)*
18. Over the past year, how, if at all, has the pandemic impacted any of your programming?
  - a. What challenges, if any have program implementers reports?
19. Over the past year, how if at all, have you incorporated diversity and inclusion into your programming?
20. Based on the state commission's model, we may ask additional questions related to outcomes.
21. In what ways, if any, has your VGF grant improved volunteer organization's capacity to utilize volunteers?
22. What else can the State Commission do to better support volunteer organizations with regards to volunteer recruitment, management and retention?
23. What additional feedback or insights, if any, would you like to share with us regarding the VGF program?

Thank you!

## Volunteer Management/Capacity Building Beneficiary Focus Group Protocol

Hi, everyone. Thank you for being with us today. My name is XX, and I'm with ICF, a research and evaluation organization working with AmeriCorps to understand the impacts of their Volunteer Generation Fund grant. Today, we will be asking about ways in which this funding has been used by the [state name] State Commission and/or [program implementer] to support your organizations by increasing volunteer recruitment and/or improving volunteer management practices. Your response will help AmeriCorps to improve its VGF grant program.

### Let's begin with some brief introductions.

1. Please tell me your role in your organization, your role in [VGF training activity], and how long you've been with your organization.
2. Please describe how your organization has participated in [VGF training activity].
  - a. How many staff from your organization participated in training? (*e.g., just the focus group participant or several staff*)
3. What are the different components of [VGF training activity]? (*Probe: webinars, workshops, conferences, online modules, lectures, etc.*)
  - a. How many hours was each training/session?
  - b. How often did your organization attend trainings/sessions? (*Probe: intensity of the training*)
  - c. What resources or training materials have you received, if any? (*Probe: slide decks, training manuals, etc.*)
4. What training program or curriculum was used, if any? (*e.g., Service Enterprise certification, Volunteer Impact Leadership Training certification*)
  - a. Did you, one of your colleagues, or your organization receive certification as a result of training? What did this certification entail?

### Volunteer Recruitment and Selection

5. What training or capacity building did you receive on volunteer recruitment and selection?
  - a. What aspects of volunteer recruitment and selection training, if any, were helpful?
  - b. What aspects of volunteer recruitment and selection training, if any, could be improved?
6. What volunteer recruitment strategies have you learned, if any, that focus on recruiting volunteers during the beginning of the pandemic?
7. What challenges, if any have you faced with regards to recruiting volunteers during the pandemic?
8. What Volunteer Management strategies have you learned, if any, that focus on recruiting diverse volunteers (or strategies related to diversity and inclusion)?
9. What challenges, if any, have you faced with regards to recruiting diverse volunteers ( or what challenges do you face with develop strategies that focus on recruiting diverse volunteers) ?
10. What were the most important volunteer recruitment strategies you learned, if any, through your participation in training?
  - a. What strategies, if any, worked particularly well for your organization?

11. What were the least important volunteer recruitment strategies you learned, if any, through your participation in training?
  - a. What strategies, if any, didn't work for your organization?
12. How has your organization's volunteer recruitment and selection processes changed since the training, if at all?
  - a. How has training improved your organization's ability to recruit volunteer applicants and select volunteers, if at all?
  - b. What changes, if any, have you noticed in the number of volunteers recruited?
  - c. What changes, if any, have you noticed in the characteristics of volunteers recruited and selected? (*Probe: demographics, quality, and/or matching of skillsets*)

### **Volunteer Training and Management**

13. What training or capacity building did you receive on volunteer management and retention?
  - a. What aspects of volunteer management training, if any, were helpful?
  - b. What aspects of volunteer management training, if any, could be improved?
14. What were the most important volunteer management strategies you learned, if any, through your participation in training?
  - a. What strategies, if any, worked particularly well for your organization?
15. What were the least important volunteer management strategies you learned, if any, through your participation in training?
  - a. What strategies, if any, didn't work for your organization?
16. How has your organization's volunteer management processes changed, if at all, since the training?
  - a. How has training improved your organization's ability to manage volunteers, if at all?
  - b. What changes, if any, have you noticed in volunteer engagement and satisfaction?
  - c. What changes, if any, have you noticed in volunteer retention?
    - i. What about the changes in the characteristics of volunteers retained?
17. What Volunteer Management strategies have you learned, if any, that focus on manage volunteers during the beginning of the pandemic?
18. What challenges, if any have you faced with regards to managing, supporting or retaining volunteers during the pandemic?
19. What Volunteer Management strategies have you learned, if any, that focus on managing diverse volunteers?
20. What challenges, if any, have you face with regards to managing, supporting or retraining diverse volunteers?

### **Data, Platforms, and Networks**

21. What type of volunteer data, if any, does your organization collect? (*Probe: hours worked, satisfaction, retention*)

- a. How does your organization use data to make decisions with regards to volunteer management?
- b. What type of data, if any, does your organization collect on volunteer recruitment?

If the state has an online volunteer platform or portal funded by VGF:

22. What is your awareness for [name of state volunteer platform]?
23. To what extent does your organization utilize this platform for recruitment?
24. How helpful, if at all, has this platform been for recruiting volunteers?

If state uses VGF funds to create or enhance a Volunteer Networks:

25. What is your awareness for [name of state volunteer organization network]?
26. To what extent does your organization participate in this network?
27. How has this network supported your organizations' volunteer management efforts?
  - a. What support was effective? In what ways?
  - b. What could be improved? In what ways?

#### **Concluding Topics**

28. In what ways, if any, has the support from [program implementer's activities, and if applicable, volunteer portal/platform and/or the state's VGF funded volunteer network] improved your organization's capacity to utilize volunteers?
29. What additional support do you need with regards to volunteer recruitment, management or support?
30. What additional feedback or insights you would like to share with us regarding your participation in [program implementer's activities, and if applicable, volunteer portal/platform, and/or the state's VGF funded volunteer network]?

Thank you!

## Volunteer Management/Capacity Building Beneficiary Focus Group Protocol – Volunteers

Hi, everyone. Thank you for being with us today. My name is XX, and I'm with ICF, a research and evaluation organization working with AmeriCorps to understand the impacts of their Volunteer Generation Fund grant. Today, we will be asking about your experiences as a volunteer with [organization]. In particular how your [organization] recruited you as a volunteer and how their staff currently engage with you as a volunteer. Your response will help AmeriCorps to improve its VGF grant program and how they support the training provided to organizations that utilize volunteers.

### Let's begin with some brief introductions.

1. Please tell me how long you have been a volunteer with [organization] and what your role is as a volunteer.

### Volunteer Recruitment and Selection

2. How did you hear about the volunteer opportunity?
  - a. Did you look for opportunities in your states portal or platform?
  - b. Did you see a PSA on your local TV or radio about volunteering in general?
  - c. Did you hear about opportunities through an event? (Was it virtual or in-person?)
3. What were you looking for with regards to a volunteer opportunity?
4. What were the various reasons that contributed to your decision to volunteer with [organization]?

### Volunteer Management

5. When you first became a volunteer, what training did [organization] provide?
  - a. What were other onboarding activities?
6. What were your initial volunteer activities?
  - a. How often did you volunteer (e.g., hours/day per week)
  - b. How have your volunteer activities changes, if any?
  - c. To what extent did your volunteer activities align with what you were expecting?
    - i. (Were you matched for a specific volunteer position based on your skillset?)
    - ii. To what extent was your role clearly defined? How clearly defined is your role now?
7. When you first became a volunteer, who oversaw your volunteer activities?
  - a. How often did you meet with your volunteer manager?
  - b. How has this changed, if any?
8. To what extent were you able to provide feedback to your volunteer manager about your experience as a volunteer?
  - a. How has this changed, if any?
9. What mentorship opportunities, if any, did your [organization] provide (when you first started)?
  - a. How as this changed, if any?
10. To what extent have you developed relationships with others at [organization]?
  - a. How has [organization] promoted relationship building among volunteers or volunteers and employees?

11. When you started with [organization], to what extent did [organization] provide support professional and/or emotional support?
  - a. How has this change, if at all?
12. What learning activities, if any, have been provided through [organization]?
  - a. Probe for examples.
13. To what extent has [organization] recognized contributions of volunteers?
  - a. How has [organization] recognized your contributions?
14. How has COVID-19 impacted your volunteer duties?
  - a. Probe for examples
15. How has COVID-19 impacted how you engage with [organization]?
  - a. Probe for examples
16. What type of support has [organization] provided since the beginning of COVID-19?
  - a. Probe for examples
17. To what extent does [organization] promote diversity and inclusion among volunteers and employees?
  - a. Probe for examples
18. How would describe your overall satisfaction with volunteering with [organization]?
19. How long do you plan to continue to volunteer with [organization]?
  - a. [If plan to stay] What factors contribute to your decision to want to stay with [organization]?
  - b. [If plan to leave in near future] What factors contribute to your decision to want to leave [organization]? What if anything could [organization] do to make you change your mind to stay?

**Concluding Topics**

20. What additional support do you need from [organization]?
21. In what ways could [organization] improve how they recruit volunteers?
22. In what ways could [organization] improve how they train and/or support volunteers?
23. What additional feedback or insights you would like to share with us regarding your experience volunteering with [organization]?

Thank you!

### About AmeriCorps

AmeriCorps, the federal agency for national service and volunteerism, provides opportunities for Americans to serve their country domestically, address the nation's most pressing challenges, improve lives and communities, and strengthen civic engagement. Each year, the agency places more than 200,000 AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers in intensive service roles and empowers millions more to serve as long-term, short-term, or one-time volunteers. Learn more at [AmeriCorps.gov](https://www.americorps.gov).

### About the Office of Research and Evaluation

The [AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation](#) assists AmeriCorps and its partners in collecting, analyzing, and disseminating data and insights about AmeriCorps programs and civic life in America.

### About ICF

ICF (NASDAQ:ICFI) is a global consulting and digital services company with over 7,000 full- and part-time employees, but we are not your typical consultants. At ICF, business analysts and policy specialists work together with digital strategists, data scientists and creatives. We combine unmatched industry expertise with cutting-edge engagement capabilities to help organizations solve their most complex challenges. Since 1969, public and private sector clients have worked with ICF to navigate change and shape the future. Learn more at [icf.com](https://www.icf.com).

For additional information about ICF, please contact:

ICF

1902 Reston Metro Plaza

Reston, VA 20190

Phone: 703-934-3603 or 1-800-532-4783

Fax: 703-934-3740

Email: [info@icf.com](mailto:info@icf.com)



[linkedin.com/company/icf-international](https://www.linkedin.com/company/icf-international)



[facebook.com/ThisIsICF](https://www.facebook.com/ThisIsICF)



[#thisisicf](https://www.instagram.com/thisisicf)