

Volunteering in West Virginia

West Virginia Social Survey Report

WVSS-20-07

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Background

In 2018, 77.3 million Americans volunteered, generating an estimated contribution of \$167 billion to the US economy as a result of their helping labor.¹

Volunteers often aid in providing crucial services to their communities, and volunteerism represents opportunities to be civically engaged.²

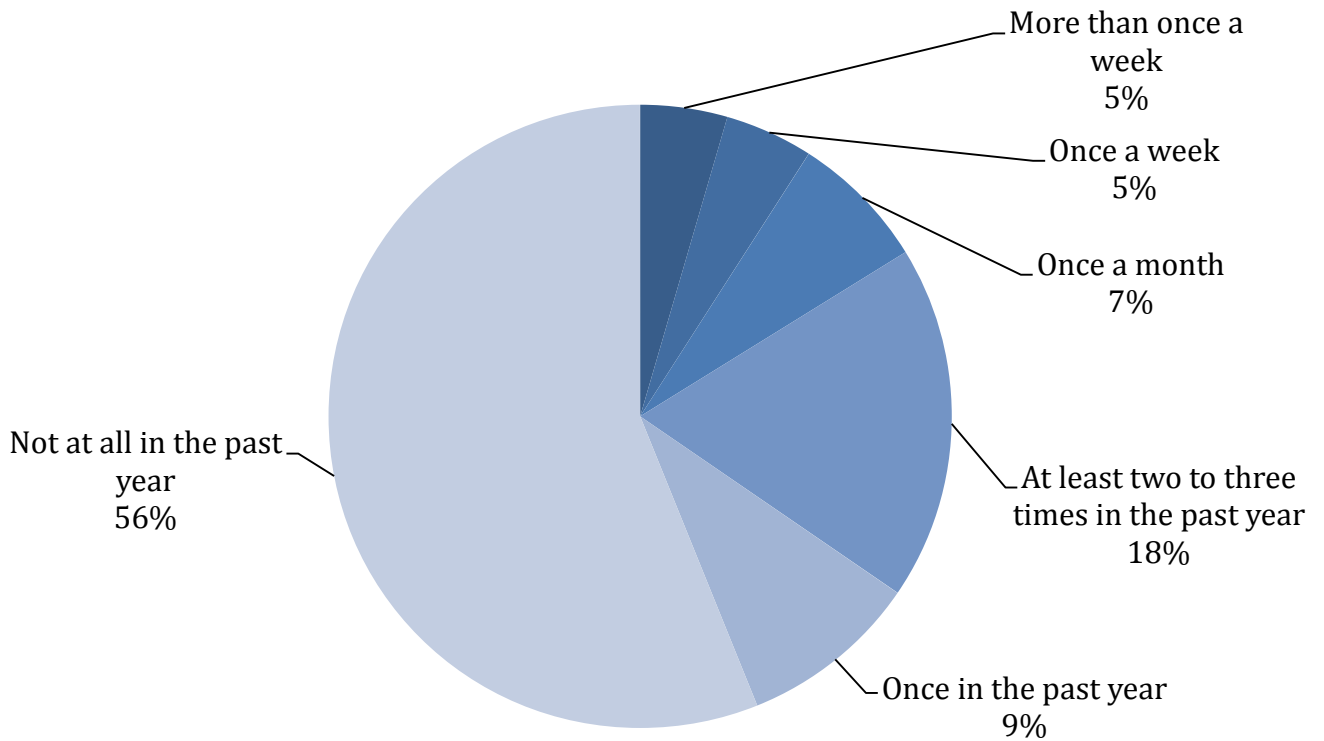
In general, US volunteers are usually middle-aged, white, female, married, well educated, of higher income, working full-time, regularly attend religious services, and have good functional health.³

With some exceptions, the recent West Virginia Social Survey (WVSS) showed West Virginia (WV) volunteers match these larger national trends.

Highlights

- WV's volunteerism rate is 43.8%, rising above the national average of 30.3%.
- The highest rate of volunteering in the past year was reported by those 18-24 years old at 62.4%.
- About 5% of West Virginia residents volunteered once per week.
- Those who attend religious services have higher rates of volunteering.
- Rates of volunteering vary considerably across West Virginia's counties.

Figure 1 - During the Past Twelve Months, How Often Have You Done Volunteer Work for a Charity?



Volunteering Rates in WV

The WVSS asked respondents “During the past twelve months, how often have you done volunteer work for a charity?” The WVSS shows that 44% of West Virginians have volunteered at least once in the past year. This compares to a national average of 30% of Americans.

Figure 1 reports the frequency of volunteering for West Virginians. About 5% of West Virginia residents volunteer once per week and another 5% volunteer more than once per week. Approximately 18 percent volunteer on at least

two to three occasions in the past year.

In line with national volunteerism trends, volunteers in West Virginia tend to be female, highly educated, of higher incomes, working full-time, and report good functional health.

However, higher rates of volunteerism were reported among those who have never been married (48%) than those who are married (45%).

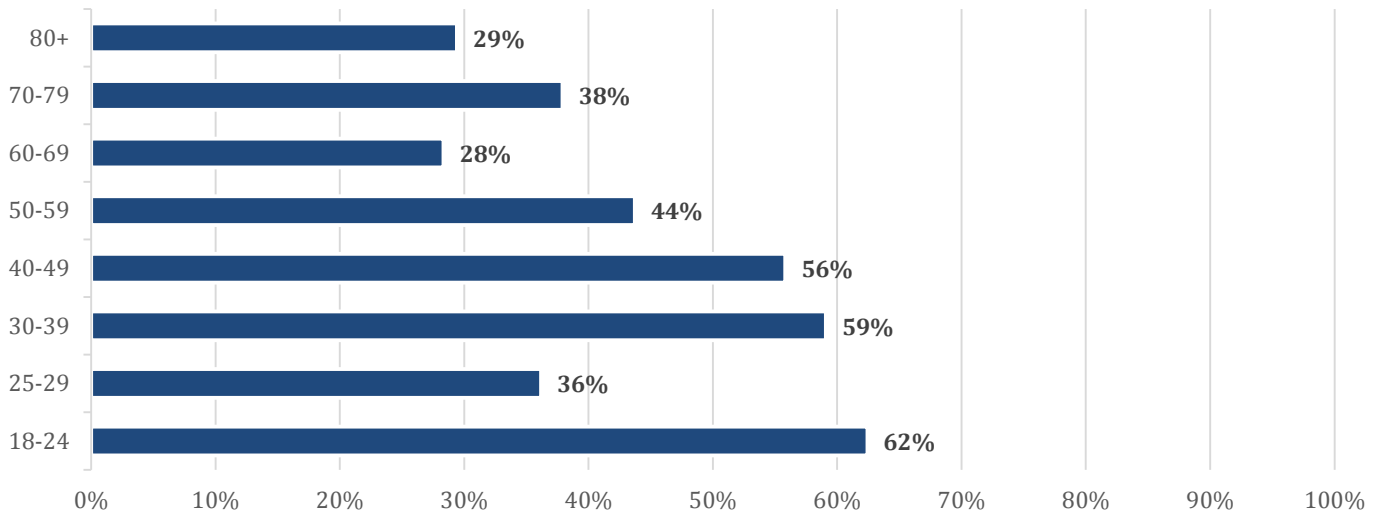
Young Adults and Volunteering

West Virginia also shows a unique trend for age and

volunteerism. Figure 2 presents the percentages for volunteering by age. Volunteers in the US are most commonly middle-aged,² but those volunteering in the state are younger.

The highest rate of volunteerism in West Virginia was reported by those 18-24 years old (62.4%), and this is in line with other data showing volunteerism to be twice as common among college students. The most prevalent frequency of volunteering among this age group was volunteering two to three times during the past year.

Figure 2 - Percentage of West Virginians Who Have Volunteered in the Past 12 Months by Age



Higher rates of volunteerism in this age group may be explained by opportunities to volunteer facilitated by colleges and universities and clubs or organizations within these institutions. Being affiliated with an organization or

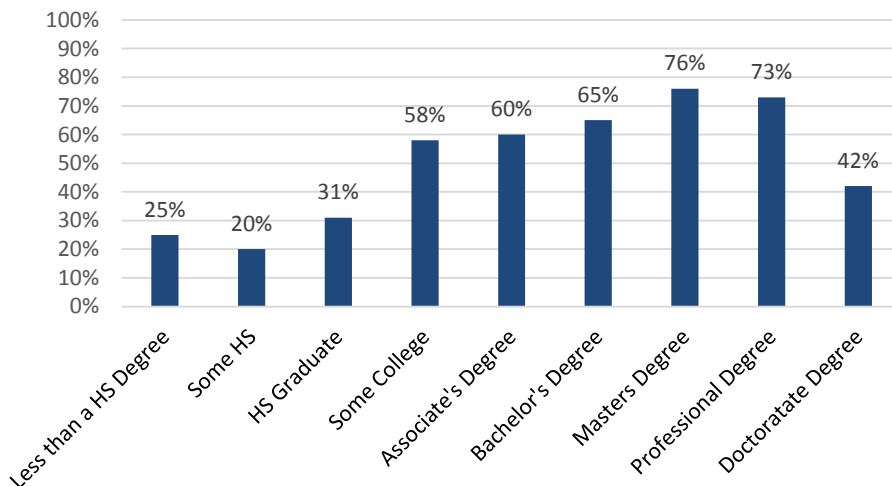
institution has been found to support voluntary behavior.

Volunteerism in West Virginia is second highest among those 30-39 years old, with 59% of individuals in this age group having volunteered in the past

year.

This higher rate of volunteerism may result from age group having a high percentage of children in their homes. Volunteerism is more likely among those with school-aged children, as parents often become involved in their children's extracurricular activities. In fact, WV is ranked 34th in the nation overall for rates of parent volunteerism.

Figure 3 - Percentage of West Virginians Who Have Volunteered in the Past 12 Months by Educational Attainment



Education and Volunteering

Education is strongly related to the likelihood of volunteering. Volunteering rates are low among those with lower educational attainment: 25% among those with less than a high school degree, 20% among

those with some high school, and 31% among those with a high school degree. Those with higher levels of educational attainment are more likely to volunteer: 60% of those with Associate degrees, 65% of those with a Bachelor’s degree, 76% of those with a Master’s degree and 73% of those with a professional degree. However, volunteering rates are lower among those with doctorate degrees at only 42%.

Religion and Volunteering

WVSS respondents were asked: “How often do you attend religious services at a place of worship?” Attending religious services is a strong predictor of volunteerism, see Figure 3. Those who more frequently attend religious services are more likely to report volunteering. Sixty percent of

those who attend religious services several times a week volunteer. Of those who attend religious services once a month, 73% volunteer.

West Virginians were asked “How religious do you consider yourself to be?” Fifty-one percent of those who said they are “very religious” volunteer compared to 41% of those who identified as “slightly religious” and 45% of those who identified as “not religious.”

West Virginia County and Volunteering

There is also variation in volunteering rates across West Virginia’s Counties. At 6%, Mingo County has the lowest rate of respondents reporting that they volunteered in the last year followed by Logan County at 18%. Over 70% of

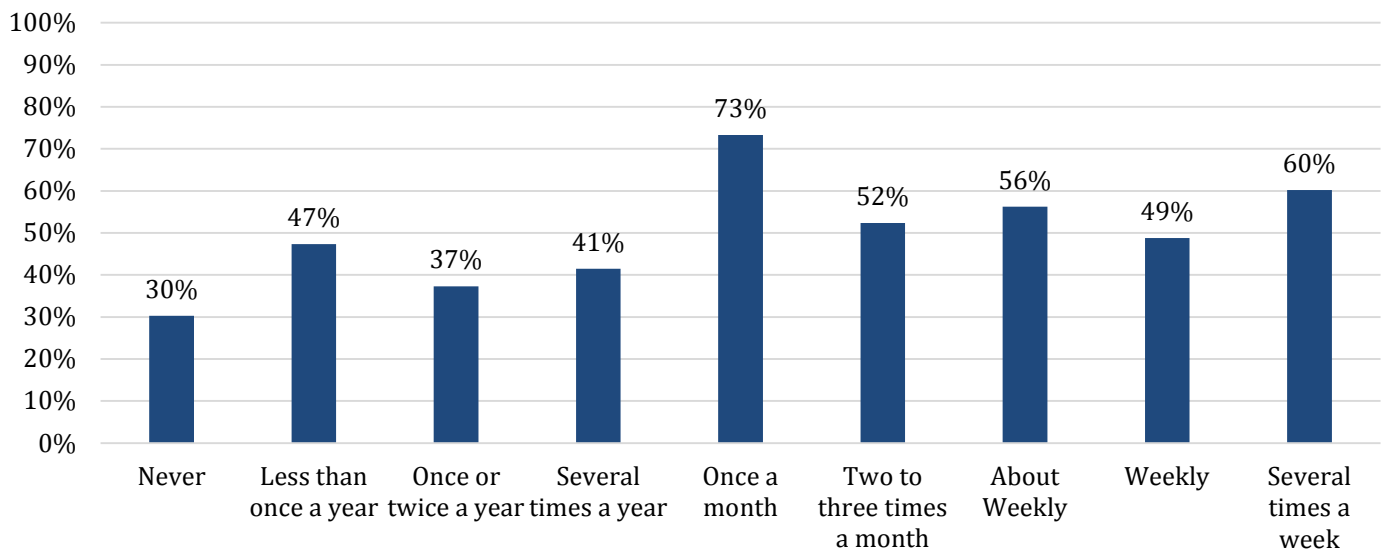
respondents in Putnam, Fayette, Roane, Gilmer, Ritchie, Doddridge, and Pleasant Counties identified having volunteered in the past 12 months, with Pleasant County having the highest rate at 83%.

Summary

The recent WVSS showed that volunteers in West Virginia match the average social profile of volunteers nationally, with some exceptions. First, WV volunteers are generally younger than the national average, and this is likely due to higher rates of volunteerism among college students.³

Since volunteerism has been shown to support wellbeing and social connections among people,³ the state may be further advantaged by finding ways to engage older residents

Figure 4 - Percentage of West Virginians Who Have Volunteered in the Past 12 Months by Frequency of Religious Service Attendance



in more volunteerism.

These partnerships may bring more volunteer engagement to a wider variety of voluntary causes, supporting community needs and possibly encouraging more organizational involvement from WV residents. Ultimately, this could increase volunteerism and other types of civic engagement in the state overall.

In 2018, WV volunteers contributed a total of \$888.4 million worth of labor to the state's economy.¹ In light of WV's economic challenges, increased volunteerism could mean the expansion of resources and programming that support positive social and economic outcomes in West Virginia communities.²

Data Source

The WVSS is produced by the Survey Research Center at West Virginia University. The purpose of the WVSS is to gather information on the attitudes, concerns, and challenges facing WV residents.

The WVSS is a mail survey utilizing an address-based sample of nearly 5,000 households across the state.

The 2020 WVSS received nearly 1,900 responses for a response

rate of 38.1% (American Association of Public Opinion Research Definition #3).

Suggested Citation

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References and Further Reading

- 1 Corporation for National and Community Service. 2018. *Volunteering in America*.
- 2 Brennan, Mark A. 2007. "Volunteerism and Community Development: A Comparison of Factors Shaping Volunteer Behavior in Irish and American Communities." *The International Journal of Volunteer Administration* 34(4):60–70.
- 3 Wilson, John. 2012. "Volunteerism Research: A Review Essay." *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 41(2):176–212