



Multicultural Study

2003

Time and Money:
An In-Depth Look at 45+
Volunteers and Donors

Executive Summary



Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Americans have received a tremendous gift in the past 100 years—the doubling of life expectancy. Currently, a person aged 50 can expect to live another 30 years. Because of advances in medical care, this “third age” of life is as productive as any other time. This longevity bonus means that Americans may work longer, and also remain productive to the nation in other ways. As Marc Freedman states in his work *Prime Time*, “America’s burgeoning older population is poised to become the new trustees of civic life in this country.”¹ In fact, one could reasonably argue that the 45 and older population have already assumed this role, and that one example of this stewardship is older persons’ contributions through community service and charitable giving.

This AARP survey represents a comprehensive assessment of the extent of the community service and charitable giving practices of the population aged 45 and over.²

We know from other surveys that substantial proportions of 45 and older Americans volunteer, however the specific incidence levels can vary depending on definition, question wording, data collection methodology, and sampling procedures.

Overall incidence of volunteering has ranged from 34 percent of all adults in the 2002 United Way national survey who said that they had “volunteered for any

type of service in the past 12 months,” to the 59 percent saying they have volunteered or done community service work in the past year in a recent Peter Hart survey for Civic Ventures.

Independent Sector’s *Giving and Volunteering in the United States 2001* indicates that 44% of people aged 50 and over volunteer, with significant differences by age group (58% among those 50 to 64 volunteer, while 42% among those 65+ do so).

In designing this survey, AARP wanted to include representative samples of African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, and Asian-Americans, and probe actual behavior among respondents that may be considered to have community impact, but might not be captured by traditional volunteering and giving questions.

This probing of behavior was suggested by the multicultural organizations that advised AARP in designing this study. Our advisors suggested that since many studies of volunteering and giving define these activities to be within organizations or other community structures, some of the community service and charitable giving *behaviors* among African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, and Asian-Americans might be missed by traditional survey questions.

This expansion of how community service and charitable giving is measured obviously results in a greater assessment of *informal volunteering*, or those community

¹ Marc Freedman. “Prime Time: How Baby Boomers will Revolutionize Retirement and Transform America” p.19.

² The survey was undertaken by telephone with 2,069 Americans aged 45 and older, July 2 through July 30, 2003. A total of n=1,027 interviews were obtained among a national random digit dial (RDD) sample. Three oversamples resulted in 420 interviews with African-Americans, 415 with Hispanic-Americans, and 402 Asian-Americans.

service activities performed outside of organizations. However, this expansion of measurement is not just an effort to cast a wider net. Rather, if a primary goal of community service and charitable giving is positive social impact, then one has to consider all behaviors that support better communities. Many of these behaviors will be through organizations, while others will be informal within groups, or interpersonal among relatives, friends, and neighbors.

By looking into not only how people contribute within charitable, non-profit organizations, but also what they do on their own and in their communities for relatives and others, we found that most people aged 45 and over take on some role as a volunteer and contributor. Specifically:

- About half (51%) the 45 and older population report volunteering when asked the traditional question about community service—that they volunteer for a non-profit, charity, school, hospital, religious organization, neighborhood association, civic or other group. This percentage is similar to that reported by Independent Sector.
- An additional 36% reported behaviors that were not captured by the traditional volunteering question but could be considered to be in service to communities or persons.
- Although there are differences in the distinct community service activities among members of racial and ethnic groups in our sample, our assumption that African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, and Asian-Americans are more likely to be involved in informal volunteering is not borne out by the survey. The questions designed to probe informal and individual volunteering reveal that members of *all races and ethnicities* are substantially involved in informal service to their communities.
- When questions measuring charitable giving are expanded to include non-organizational donations such as money given to family and non-family persons in need, we find that almost nine in 10 people have made charitable donations in the past year.
- Again, our assumption that members of racial and ethnic minorities are more likely to engage in informal donations to family or other persons is not borne out by the survey data. Members of all races/ethnicities do engage in this type of giving but are not more likely to do so than non-Hispanic whites.

FIGURE A: PERCENT OF ADULTS 45 AND OLDER SAYING THEY VOLUNTEERED IN TRADITIONAL QUESTION AND ADDITIONAL PERCENT FOUND VIA PROBING QUESTIONS

Q1. In the past 12 months, have you volunteered, that is given your time or skills, for a non-profit organization, a charity, school, hospital, religious organization, neighborhood association, civic or any other group? Q2. Now, aside from an organized group, in the last 12 months have you volunteered your time on your own to help your community or someone who was in need? That is, given your time without pay to help your community or to help someone who is not a member of your family? Q3–Q22. Did you volunteer in the last 12 months in some way to: ... [List of 14 specific types and activities]

Base: All adults 45 and older 1,027. Oversamples: African-Americans 420; Hispanic-Americans 415; Asian-Americans 402.

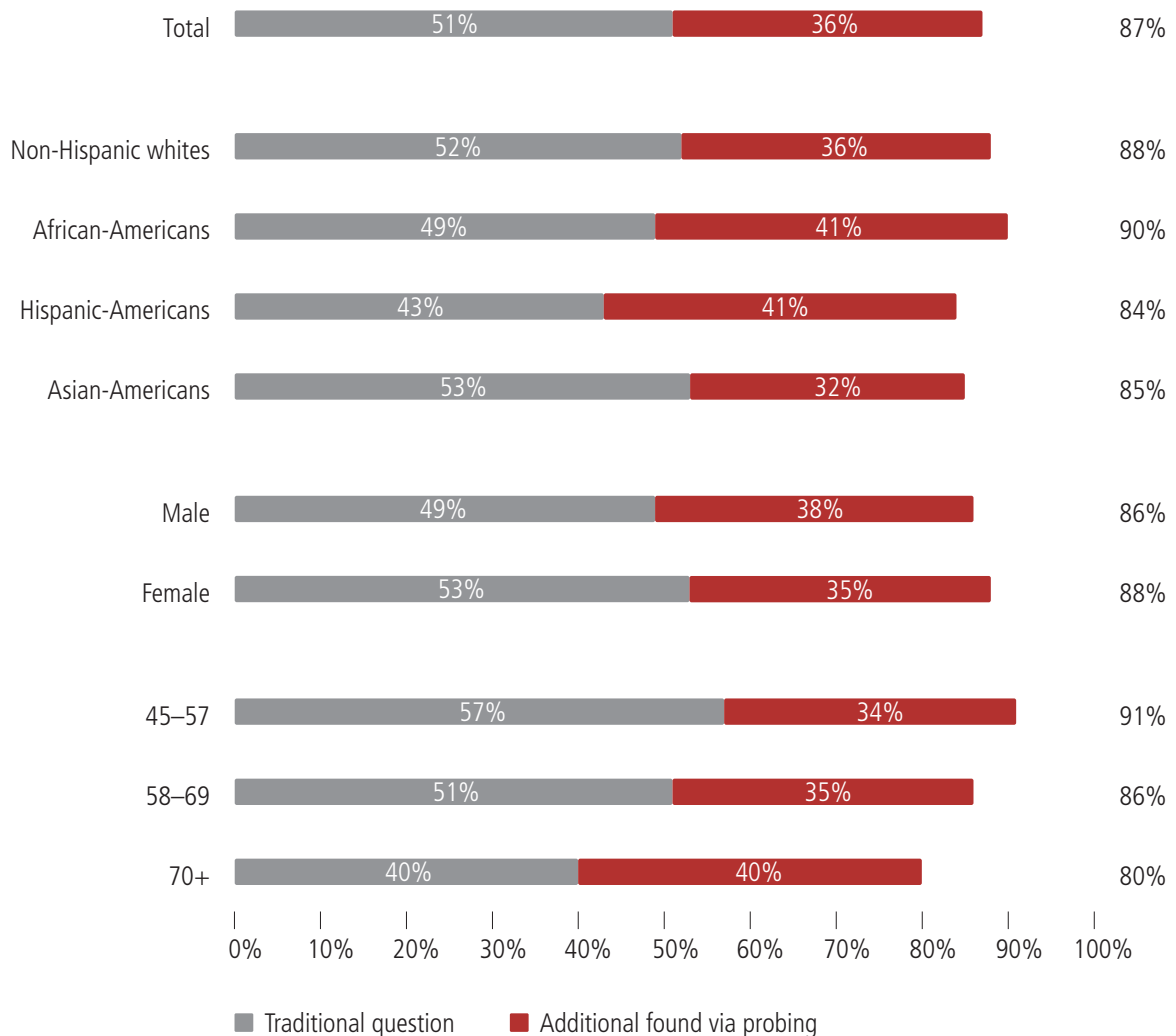
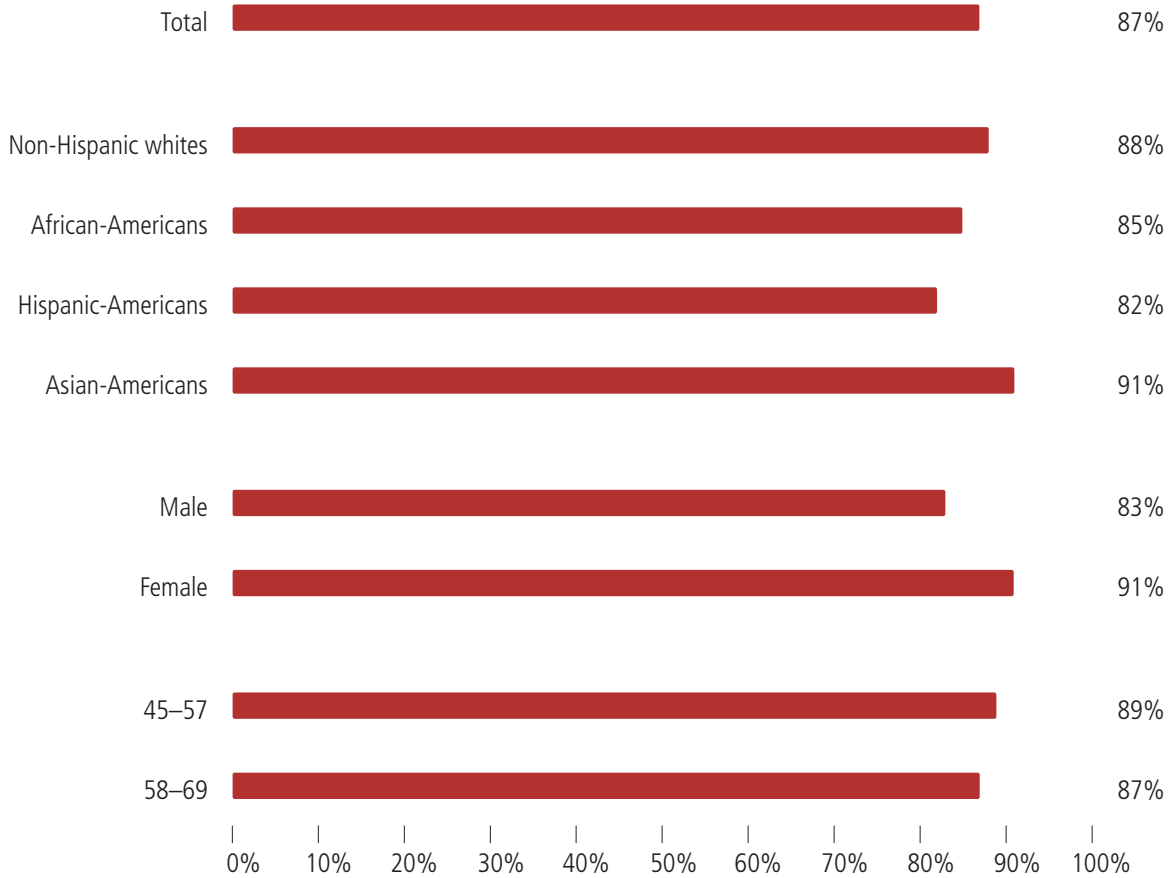


FIGURE B: PERCENT OF ADULTS 45 AND OLDER WHO PARTICIPATE IN GIVING

Q48–Q53. Since last July, have you given money or financial contributions to: ... [List of 6 organizations or individuals] **Q54. Have you donated money somewhere else or in some other way that I have not mentioned?**

Base: All adults 45 and older 1,027. Oversamples: African-Americans 420; Hispanic-Americans 415; Asian-Americans 402.



Summary of Findings

Level and Type of Volunteering

- 45 and older volunteers largely contribute their time sporadically—48% say they have no regular volunteer schedule, while 38% are regular volunteers, who pitch in each month.
- 45 and older volunteers average 15 hours of service per month. Of the different racial and ethnic groups surveyed, the most hours are reported by Hispanic-Americans—22 hours per month on average.
- Volunteers who are not employed average 19 hours per month compared to 12 hours by employed individuals, but the not employed are no more likely than the employed to be volunteers or to have regular volunteer commitments.
- The elderly and children are the most likely beneficiaries of 45 and older volunteers.
- Efforts to assist neighborhoods, disabled people, community and religious organizations, the environment, and animals are also popular causes of volunteers aged 45 and over.
- Volunteering independently—on one's own—is often more prevalent than volunteering through an organization. For example, about half of our sample reports that all of their efforts on behalf of the elderly are informal, while only 9% say they volunteer for organizations concerned with the elderly. Similarly, 26% report supporting

the environment on their own, whereas only 9% volunteer for environmental organizations.

- Organizational volunteering rises to a level similar to independent volunteering in only a few areas such as efforts for neighborhoods or communities, as well as supporting public servants, and helping homeless and hungry people.

The Scope of Charitable Giving

- Eight in 10 (87%) 45 and older persons have made donations to religious, public interest, educational, health, or arts organizations.
- About four in 10 (41%) of 45 and older persons donated to family members, while 32% gave money to non-related persons in need.
- About one quarter have given less than \$100, another quarter between \$100 and \$500, and one-third donated more than \$500 last year.

Motivations for Volunteering and Giving

- One of the top motivations among 45 and older volunteers and donors is a sense of personal responsibility to help others.
- In addition, 45 and older volunteers and donors want to be involved with organizations that have a good track record; they want to make a difference, and help the communities where they live. Affiliation with a religious organization is also a motivation for many volunteers and donors.
- Personal interests also play a role. Volunteering can make the lives of 45

and older volunteers more satisfying by keeping them active or employing their skills for community needs.

- Another important motivation among 45 and older volunteers and donors was a stronger need to do something since the tragedy of 9/11.

Civic Engagement

- Civic engagement can be considered a type of community service in that healthy communities depend on involved citizens. Among middle age and older persons, civic engagement is largely limited to voting, discussing issues, and community activities through their religious organizations. Less than a third of this population directly contact elected officials, attend neighborhood or local government meetings, write letters to media, or take part in demonstrations.
- There is an obvious link between civic engagement and likelihood to volunteer. Thirty-eight percent of volunteers fall into the “highly engaged” category (report involvement in four or more civic engagements), whereas only 7% of non-volunteers can be classified as “highly engaged.” Similarly, 38% of those who have donated money in the last 12 months are highly engaged civically, as opposed to 7% of non-donors.

Synergy between Volunteering and Giving

- People age 45 and older who volunteer almost always are donors as well. Fully 92% of volunteers report having made a donation or donations in the last 12 months.

- The level of giving also mirrors the *regularity* with which people participate as volunteers. For example, only 24% of people 45 and older who gave \$100 or less last year are regular monthly volunteers, but 63% of those giving over \$500 are regular volunteers.
- Participation as volunteers and as donors rises with socio-economic measures, health, and frequency of attending religious services. They are most likely to be well off financially, to be in better health, and to be affiliated with religious organizations—which are among the most likely recipients of their donations and volunteer efforts.

The Role of Race and Ethnicity in Volunteering and Giving

The results of the survey indicate that African-Americans, Asian-Americans, Hispanic-Americans and non-Hispanic whites are more similar than dissimilar in their actions and motivations to give of their time and money.

- African-Americans are among the most active volunteers, and are especially likely to report volunteering on their own, apart from organizations. Their efforts focus on homeless and hungry people, the rights of minorities, religious institutions, neighborhoods, and people who need tutoring.
- Asian-Americans are more likely to volunteer on occasion rather than regularly, and are most likely to support museums, theaters, libraries, or other cultural and arts organizations. On average they donate larger amounts of money to help others than do the other groups we queried.

- Hispanic-Americans volunteer the most hours per month. They are the most likely to provide help to other immigrants in this country and send money to help people in other countries.
- Non-Hispanic whites tend to donate more financially and are likely to volunteer to help animals, the environment and public servants.

Conclusion

Including many socially constructive activities performed outside of organizations in the expansion of how volunteering and charitable giving is measured is a cutting edge approach, and as such has problems as well as benefits. The primary benefit of this redefinition is the documentation of the many socially beneficial behaviors that help to make community life possible. But some have argued that this redefinition extends the character of volunteering to areas that may be regarded as just discrete acts of kindness or usual gestures witnessed among friends and neighbors.

Informal volunteering and giving has been recognized for years, but does inclusion of volunteer acts outside of organizations, and individual behaviors and donations that strengthen neighborhoods, broaden the concept of community service and charitable giving to the point where they are meaningless? No, the broadening of these concepts to include all behaviors that support better communities is required if the ultimate goal of community service and charitable giving is positive social change. The fact that probing informal and individual community service

behaviors resulted in the discovery of an additional one-third of volunteers indicates the value of this redefinition.

We believe this survey is a good start toward a more adequate understanding of the range of socially beneficial behaviors that create and sustain civil society. There is more work to do and a more refined definition of community service and charitable giving may result from this work, as well as a greater understanding of the impact of organizational, informal, and individual volunteering and giving. AARP welcomes this challenge and considers community service and charitable giving to be essential elements of *The Power to Make It Better*.™



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