



2024

The State of Gen Z Volunteerism

POWERED BY



**American
Red Cross**

X

DoSomething Strategic

In an era where youth attention is more fragmented than ever, one thing remains certain: the need for youth volunteering **remains tremendous.**

Executive Summary

American Red Cross partnered with DoSomething Strategic (DSS) to develop The State of Gen Z Volunteerism Report which identifies the preferences and behaviors of this emerging generation. Understanding the volunteer behavior of Gen Z is crucial for nonprofits to sustain and grow their volunteer bases.

The goal of this research is to enable the American Red Cross and other youth-serving organizations to leverage these insights to innovate in their approach to engaging youth, build the next generation of leaders, and diversify their volunteer base. Some of the challenges nonprofits have shared that they face are effective recruitment, engagement, and retention of Gen Z volunteers. Furthermore, the sector must navigate the transition and attrition of members from high school to college, which often results in a drop in volunteer engagement, lack of awareness about the variety of volunteer opportunities available, difficulties in engaging young people consistently, and the need for alignment and effective communication across lines of service within their organization.



By analyzing over 1,300 survey responses from Gen Z and Gen Alpha (13-year-olds), DoSomething Strategic analyzed what creates a successful youth volunteerism experience—from **awareness to ambassador.**

The report covers general trends, age-specific differences between 13-17-year-olds and 18-25-year-olds, distinctions between regular and non-regular volunteers, and actionable recommendations that can be implemented nationally and regionally.

SIGNIFICANT TAKEAWAYS:

Speak to the importance of connection & belonging

Gen Z is facing a [loneliness epidemic](#). This explains why nearly eighty percent of young people shared that finding a sense of community and belonging through volunteering is important and eighty-five percent agreed volunteering gives them a chance to make new friends and build connections. However, only forty-five percent of young people said they have forged close connections through volunteer experiences.

Focus on transitional years is critical

13-17-year-olds were significantly more likely to be actively volunteering compared to 18-25-year-olds. Younger respondents also perceived more benefits of volunteering — from career opportunities to scholarships to addressing feelings of loneliness.

Build awareness in schools, on social media & online

Nearly sixty percent of respondents reported discovering volunteering opportunities at school. Online search came in second at forty-eight percent and social media at forty-five percent. For those that used social media, eighty percent found the opportunities through Instagram; TikTok came in second at thirty-six percent. More respondents find opportunities through Instagram than they do through family, friends, community events and work.

To read more about our methodology, visit the [end of the report](#).

How do you capture & sustain the attention of this digital native generation?

This report provides actionable recommendations that organizations can use to strengthen the volunteer experience at every stage. By focusing on building a strong youth volunteerism pipeline and identifying critical areas to keep volunteers engaged, the organization can foster ongoing dedication and lasting involvement.



1. AWARENESS Capturing their imagination

The most frequent places Gen Z discover volunteer opportunities are at school (fifty-eight percent), online search (forty-eight percent), social media (forty-four percent), and via email (forty-two percent). Peer-to-peer and word-of-mouth rank at thirty-five percent. Among those who find opportunities through social media, Instagram leads as the most effective platform with eighty percent citing the app. TikTok and Facebook followed at thirty-six percent and thirty-three percent, respectively. Religious institutions, places of worship, YouTube, and LinkedIn were honorable mentions that were frequently referenced in the “Other” section.

2. CONSIDERATION Meeting them where they are

Once you’ve captured a prospective volunteer’s attention, it’s essential to understand what drives them to commit their time. The “Three C’s” of consideration include the desire to impact their **community** (ninety-three percent), build **connections** (eighty-five percent), and explore/advance in their **careers** (seventy-seven percent). Keeping volunteers informed is another challenge. This chronically online generation wants to be engaged in volunteer opportunities via email (seventy-six percent), texting (fifty-two percent) and volunteer website portals (forty-four percent). In the overly saturated attention economy, every message to them matters and it can often require multiple touchpoints to break through.

3. ENGAGEMENT Retaining their interest

To retain volunteers, offering flexible hours, better communication, and inclusive spaces is essential. Today’s young adults spend 1,000 fewer hours in-person with friends annually. While the desire to make an impact may be central to what draws them in, emphasizing the need for social connection may be what keeps them. Organizations should focus on promoting social connection at local and global levels, and strengthening community and belonging among young volunteers. What’s driving volunteers away? Inconvenient hours, poor communication, and places they feel a lack of inclusivity.

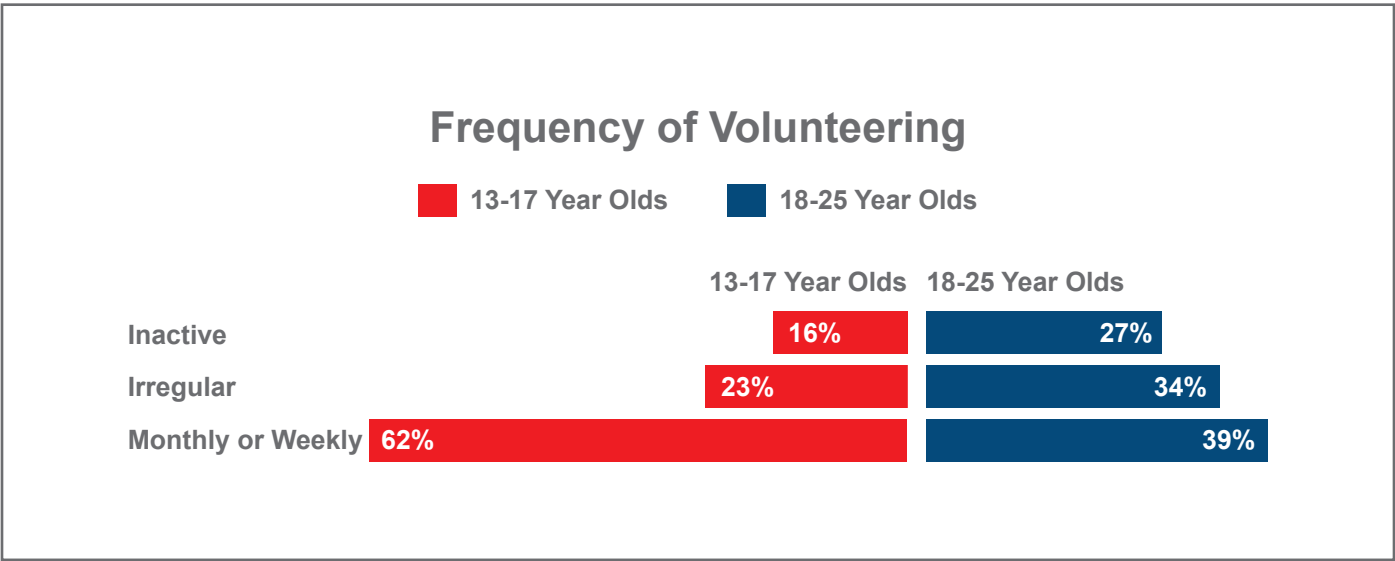


4. AMBASSADOR Spreading the passion

Reward ambassadors as the megaphone of your youth offering. The one percent of your members who go above and beyond can yield significant returns as they promote the mission, share their story of growth and bring others along for the journey. These are program co-creators and future workforce—make sure to invest in their success and arm them to be ambassadors.

Bridging the transitional gap across age groups

One of the major challenges shared by youth-serving organizations is keeping volunteers engaged after high school. These transitional years pose a problem. The number of opportunities available to high-school graduates traditionally multiplies if they have moved away from home and/or enrolled at a college or university. With greater independence, new organizations vying for their attention, and a new emphasis on finding a viable career path, 18+ year-olds begin trying on new identities. Their civic identity is evolving and growing, and, with that, comes new causes and commitments that occupy their time. The research found clear differences in the preferences and behaviors of 13-17 year olds and 18-25 year olds. Though, there were no differences in the reasons they discontinued their volunteering.



13-17 Year Olds

Young teenagers are more likely to hear about volunteer opportunities through school leaders, friends and online searches. This demographic seeks growth, mentorship and scholarships from volunteer opportunities. Engagement is notably high among this group, with 62 percent reporting that they volunteer weekly or monthly. They preferred being informed about volunteer opportunities through email and texting. However, across every communication method we surveyed, they expressed a stronger desire to be kept informed and engaged through these channels compared to older respondents.

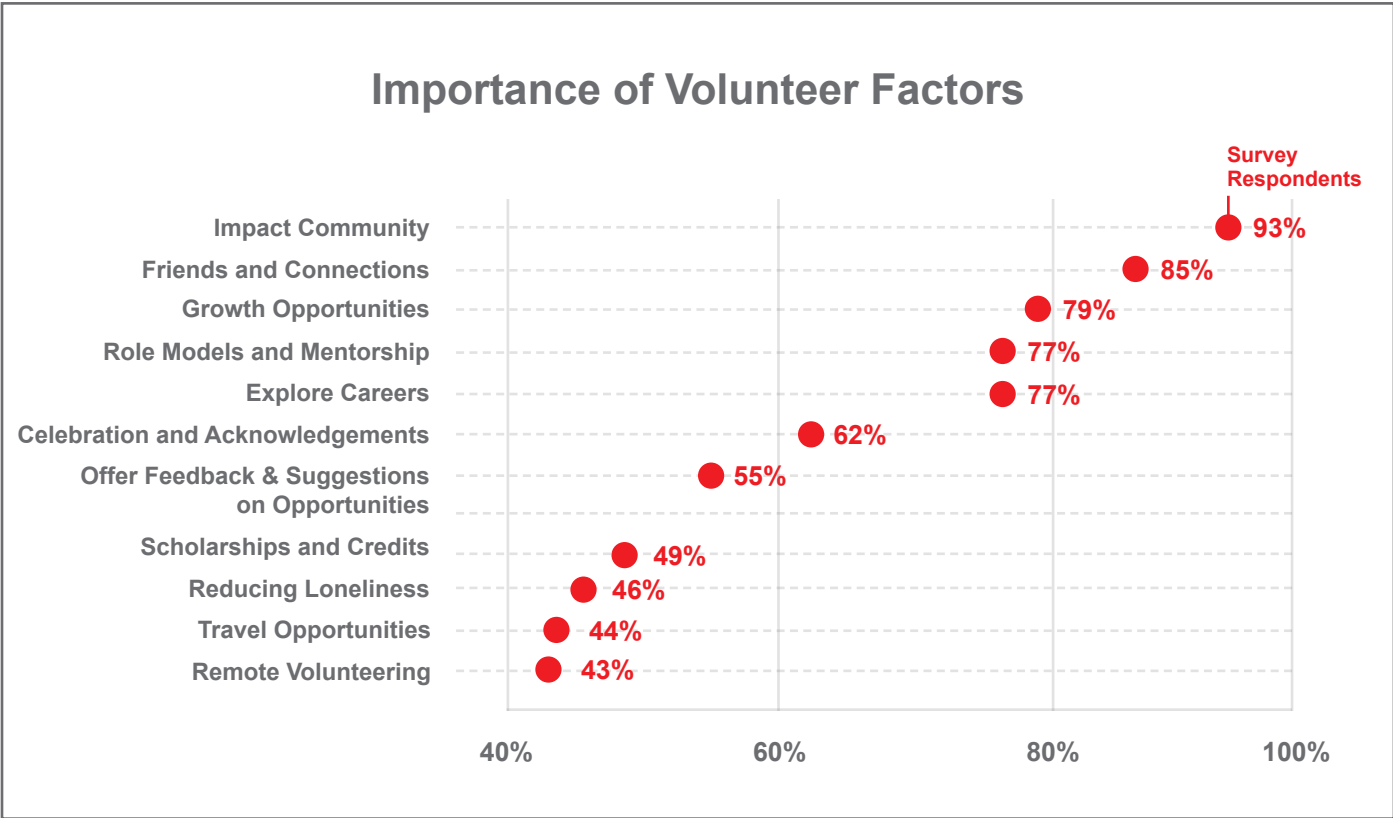
18-25 Year Olds

In contrast, 18-25-year-olds are more likely to discover volunteer opportunities through work and social media. They discovered volunteer opportunities on all social media platforms at higher percentages, perhaps reflecting a more passive discovery of opportunities rather than actively seeking them out. However, they are much less engaged in weekly or monthly volunteering. This group showed more interest in volunteering to enjoy travel experiences. And, they were less likely to have forged close connections through volunteering. Unlike younger teenagers, they are much less likely to be actively considering volunteering as a means to earn scholarships or credit hours.

The three C's of volunteer consideration: community, connections and careers

In understanding what drives Generation Z to consider volunteering, three key factors stand out: Community, Connections, and Careers. These “Three C’s” encapsulate the primary motivations and considerations for young people when deciding whether to volunteer.

Community Impact tops the list, with 93% of respondents emphasizing its importance. For Gen Z, volunteering is driven by a desire to make a tangible difference, making community contribution a core motivator. **Connections** are key, with 85% citing working with existing friends or making new ones as major motivators. Volunteering offers a chance to meet like-minded peers, fostering belonging and reducing isolation. **Careers and Growth Opportunities** are crucial, with 79% valuing advancement within the organization they volunteer for. Notably, 77% are also keen on using volunteerism to explore careers, showing that Gen Z views volunteering as a path to gaining skills and insights for their future.



Additional factors like reducing loneliness (46%), receiving feedback and suggestions (55%), and the presence of role models and mentorship (77%) further underscore the multifaceted nature of Gen Z’s approach to volunteerism. Celebrating achievements (62%), offering scholarships and credits (49%), and providing travel (44%) and remote opportunities (43%) are also significant, though they play a secondary role in the decision-making process.



Going Deeper on Connections

When unpacking how respondents value community, connections and belonging, stark differences arose. They were asked, “Is finding a sense of community and belonging through volunteering important to you?” Among regular volunteers, 88 percent said yes while 75 percent of non-regular volunteers also agreed. Additionally, 70 percent of regular volunteers reported forming close connections through volunteering, compared to just 36 percent of non-regular volunteers.

This presents an opportunity for volunteer-based organizations: to focus on the uncertain, non-regular volunteers. There is significant potential for the organization to build opportunities for meaningful connection through volunteering and externally communicate the possibility of finding community and belonging. The message should be clear: committing to service with others not only feels good but could also lead to discovering a new social group, a best friend, or even a future partner.

Finding Community, Connections & Belonging



Regular Volunteers



Non-Regular Volunteers

Finding a Sense of Community and Belonging Through Volunteering is Important to Them



Have Forged Close Connections Through Their Volunteer Experience



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My ideal vision for the future of volunteering is a globally integrated, tech-enabled ecosystem where volunteering opportunities are accessible to everyone.

In this vision, virtual and in-person volunteering are blended, allowing people to contribute based on their skills and interests, regardless of their location.”

-American Red Cross survey respondent

In Conclusion

By understanding the preferences, motivations, and challenges faced by Gen Z volunteers, the American Red Cross and other youth-serving organizations can enhance their volunteer programs to attract and retain a diverse, committed, and engaged volunteer base. Implementing these recommendations will not only address current challenges but also position organizations to future-proof their volunteer engagement.

Methodology

In May of 2024, DoSomething Strategic conducted this survey targeting DoSomething members, American Red Cross members and non-affiliated Gen Zers and Gen Alpha aged 13-25. We reached these individuals through DoSomething and Red Cross newsletters, as well as through social media promotion. Of the respondents, thirty-two percent were DoSomething members, twenty-two percent were American Red Cross members, five percent were both and forty-one percent were neither.

There were 1,424 responses and 114 were excluded due to being outside of our age parameters. This left 1,310 to be analyzed. Participants were randomly selected for \$50 gift card giveaways as a thank-you for their responses.

The data collection phase included not only responses to the main questions, but also the gathering of demographic data. Information on age, gender, race, ethnicity and state of residence were collected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the participant pool.

The DoSomething Discovery Lab analyzed the data. Descriptive analyses were performed to describe the pattern of responses. Overall frequencies and percentages were calculated for all survey responses.

Participants

Gender distribution showed a predominant representation of female-identifying respondents at sixty-nine percent, male-identifying respondents at twenty percent, and the remaining eleven percent identifying as non-binary, transgender, or choosing not to disclose. In terms of race and ethnicity, the distribution was as follows: thirty-eight percent White or Caucasian, fourteen percent Hispanic or Latiné, fifteen percent Black or African American, eighteen percent Asian or Pacific Islander, two percent Native American or Alaskan Native, and the remaining twelve percent identifying as biracial or preferring not to answer. Regarding age demographics, thirty-five percent fell within the 13-17 range, and sixty-five percent were between 18-25.

We defined regular volunteers as those who self-reported volunteering frequently and/or encouraging others to join. We defined non-regular volunteers as those who self-reported being new to volunteering or undecided about how to spend their time. We also wanted to know how often they volunteered. Eighteen percent are volunteering weekly, twenty-nine percent are volunteering monthly, thirty percent are volunteering a few times a year, five percent are volunteering once a year or less, and eighteen percent are not currently volunteering.