Mature Adults Are the Backbone of Volunteering in America

Giving Back: Attitudes and Behaviors Across the Lifespan

As volunteer mainstays, Americans ages 65 and older are supporting causes across the country with their time and skills. They are seeking a sense of community and looking to give back in a meaningful way. They are also more likely than younger adults to volunteer with their religious organizations and feel that issues such as health care and national security are important social issues. While this populace has the most available free time of any group surveyed, they are also the most likely to be hindered from giving back because of health issues.

Mature adults are the backbone of the volunteer community, but health issues can be a barrier.

Adults ages 65 and older are more likely than younger adults to volunteer frequently. Thirty-two percent volunteer on a weekly basis and this age group gives more hours of their time on a regular basis (an average of 10 hours per month) than younger age groups. They are more likely than other groups, though, to be kept from volunteering by health problems or other physical limitations.

A new study examines how and why American adults are giving back through volunteering or contributing to charities.

Mature adults are the backbone of volunteering.

Ages 18-34	Ages 35-49	Ages 50-64	Ages 65+
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Volunteer on a weekly basis

17% 16% 22% 32%

Average hours volunteered per month

9 hrs 8 hrs 8 hrs 10 hrs

Health problems limit volunteering

13% 10% 20% 24%

This experienced generation has free time to give and seeks both meaning and connection from volunteering.

Those ages 65 and over who volunteer with an organization are more likely to do so because they had free time. This group also most strongly felt a sense of fellowship from their most recent volunteer activity. And when they consider volunteer opportunities, they are more likely to look for positions that use their skills and experience in a meaningful way. Given these attitudes, it seems fitting that the volunteers in this age group are also more inclined to volunteer at their church or religious organization.

Meaning and Connection from Volunteering

Likelihood volunteer because of having free time

Ages 18-34 Ages 50-64
Ages 35-49 Ages 65+

Felt a strong sense of fellowship from recent volunteering

Ages 18-34 Ages 50-64
Ages 35-49 Ages 65+

Want to use skills or experiences meaningfully

Ages 18-34 Ages 50-64
Ages 35-49 Ages 65+

Volunteering at their church or religious organization

Ages 18-34 Ages 50-64
Ages 35-49 Ages 65+

Both younger and older volunteers agree that it is important to address social issues through volunteering. However, older volunteers tend to see health care and veterans' affairs as more important than younger volunteers do.

Considering the importance of social issues to individuals, those ages 65 and older place more importance on the following areas:

Implications

Causes and organizations that depend on volunteers are in essence depending on the mature American community. To recruit and retain them, organizations must recognize these volunteers' desire to create connections and give back in a meaningful way.

Source: Giving Back: Attitudes and Behavior Across Lifespan, 2019.
www.aarp.org/givingback
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