



CIRCLE

The Center for Information & Research on
Civic Learning & Engagement

Volunteering Among Young People

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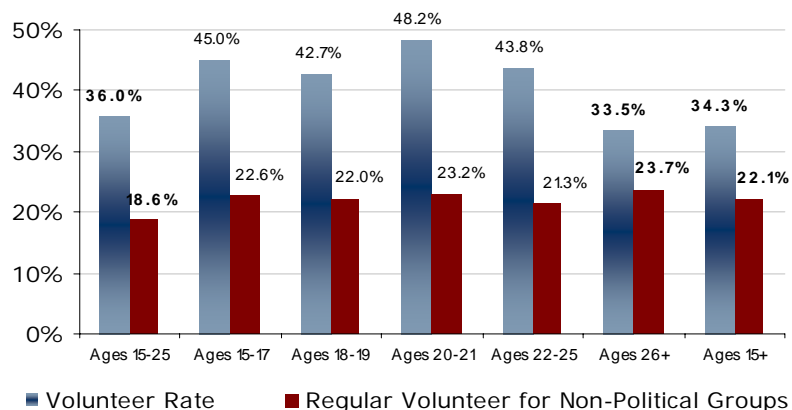
This fact sheet presents information on the frequency of volunteering, trends in volunteering, and the organizations for which young people volunteer, utilizing data from many sources. It shows that volunteering rates among young people are generally higher than they are among adults 26 and older.

However, most surveys suggest a decline in volunteering among young people in recent years, after substantial increases during the 1990s. The 2006 Civic and Political Health of the Nation Report found an eight-percentage point decrease in the volunteer rate among 15-25 year olds from 2002 to 2006.² Similarly, while youth volunteering grew from 2002 to 2005, according to the Corporation for National and Community Service's analysis of the Current Population Survey (CPS) Volunteering data found a decrease in the volunteer rate from 2005 to 2006 among all respondents ages 16 and older.³ Also, the Monitoring the Future (MTF) surveys of twelfth, tenth, and eighth graders all show declines in reported volunteering in recent years.

Please note that while most volunteering surveys show similar trends over time and similar differences among demographic groups, they do not agree on the *volunteering rate*.⁴ Thus, there is no precise measure of volunteering available. This is partly

because different survey questions about and surveys that explore volunteering behavior differently elicit different responses about volunteering. For example, the Bureau of Labor Statistics' CPS estimated the national volunteer rate among adults 16 and older at 26.7 percent in the year

≡ **Figure 1: 2006 Volunteering by Age Group**



Source: Author's tabulations from the 2006 Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey (CIRCLE)

prior to September 2006.⁵ But the 2006 Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey (CPHS) found that 34 percent of adults 16 and older had volunteered in the year prior to June 2006.

While young people ages 16 to 24 volunteer at a rate of 23.4 percent according to the 2006 CPS September Supplement, volunteering varies tremendously across states. In 2005, for example, according to the CPS, volunteering was highest in Wisconsin (59 percent) among 16-19 year olds, and highest in North Dakota (38 percent) among college-aged adults.⁶

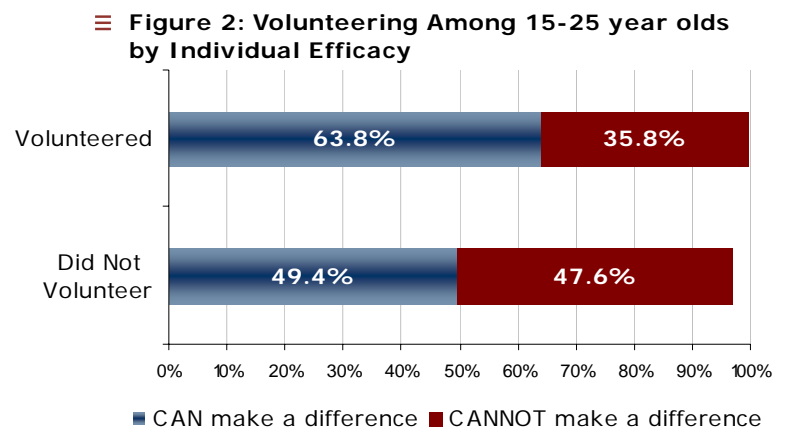
Frequency of Volunteering

As shown in Figure 1, young people generally report greater levels of volunteering than their adult counterparts. According to the 2006 CPHS, during the year prior to June 2006, 15-25 year olds reported volunteering at the rate of 36.0 percent compared to 33.5 percent for adults 26 and older. For young people, this volunteering rate, while higher than adults, was down from 40.2 percent in 2002.⁷

While over one-third of young people and adults had reported engaging in a volunteer activity, a smaller percentage reported that their volunteering was something that they do regularly. Using this metric, 23.7 percent of adults 26 and older reported regular volunteering while 18.6 percent of young people reported being a regular volunteer. This finding suggests that young people engage in episodic volunteering more often than their older counterparts.

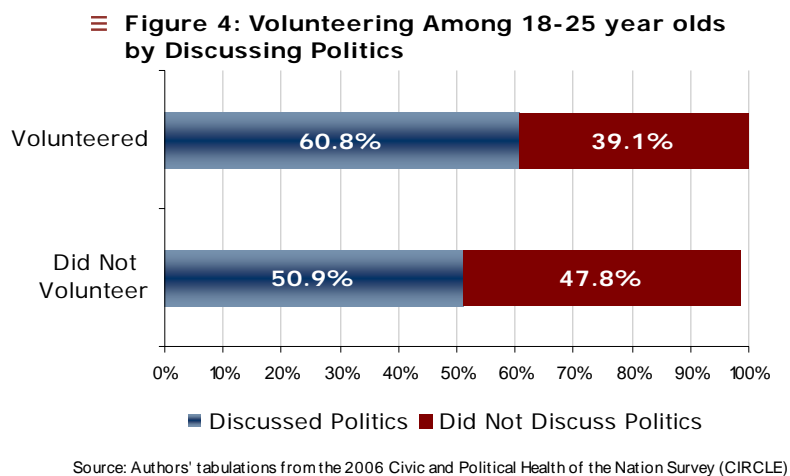
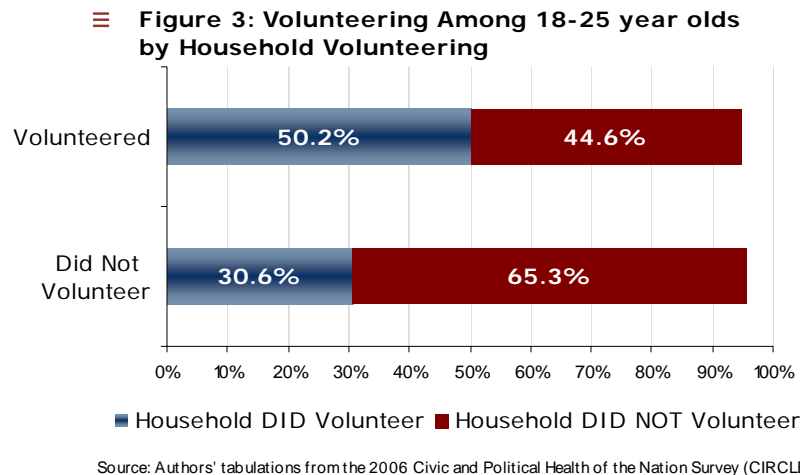
Indicators of Volunteering

The 2006 CPHS asks a host of demographic, behavioral, and attitudinal questions. One of these questions asks about the individual efficacy of the survey respondent: "Thinking about the problems in your community, how much difference do you believe YOU can personally make in working to solve problems you see?" Figure 2 shows the responses to this question by volunteering status.⁸ Young people who volunteered are more likely to believe that they can make a difference in their community.



Another indicator of volunteering is found in the home. Previous research has found that young people are more likely to volunteer if someone in their family has volunteered.⁹ The 2006 CPHS asks respondents: "From what you remember growing up, did anyone in your household spend time volunteering, or not?" Figure 3 shows that young volunteers were more likely to grow up in households where someone spent time volunteering than young people who did not volunteer (50.2 percent versus 30.6 percent).¹⁰ This difference is large and statistically significant.

Discussing politics in the home is also correlated with higher levels of civic engagement. The 2006 CPHS asks respondents: "When you were growing up, how often was politics discussed around your house?" Figure 4 shows that young volunteers were more likely to come from a household where politics was discussed than young people who did not volunteer (60.8 percent versus 50.9 percent).¹¹



Trends in Volunteering

8th, 10th, and 12th graders, 1976 to 2005

There are two primary sources of information for trends in volunteering among young people. The first is Monitoring the Future (MTF), a data collection conducted annually among 8th, 10th, and 12th graders nationally by the University of Michigan's Survey Research Center in the Institute for Social Research. The MTF is designed to measure the lifestyle behaviors of over 50,000 high school students. One of the many questions in the MTF's large survey effort asks about participation "in community affairs or voluntary activities." The trend in volunteering among high school seniors, 10th graders, and 8th graders is shown in Figure 5. Since the initial survey years for each cohort, volunteering was up for 12th and 10th graders, but unchanged for 8th graders despite an increase in volunteering between 1994 and 1997. From 1976 to 2005, high school seniors increased their volunteer rate by 10.6 percentage points. 10th graders have not reported as large an increase—a 2.7 percentage point increase from 1991 to 2005. The volunteering rate rises as people reach higher grade levels; 8th graders volunteered the least, while 12th graders volunteered the most. Since 2001, the apogee in volunteering for all cohorts, volunteering has dropped though most sharply among 8th graders.

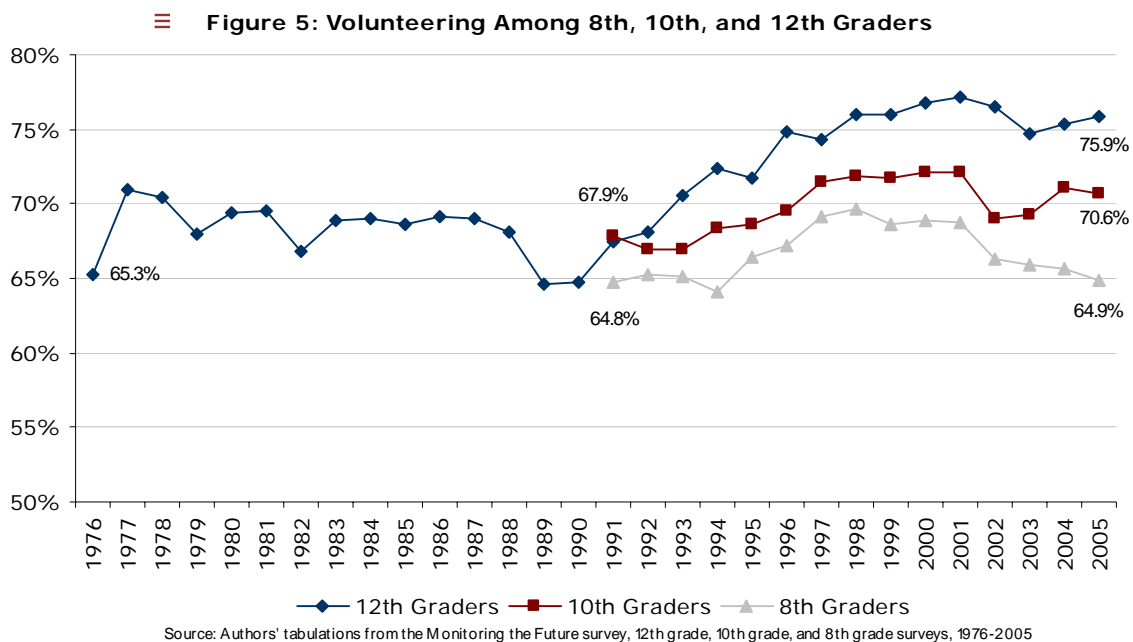
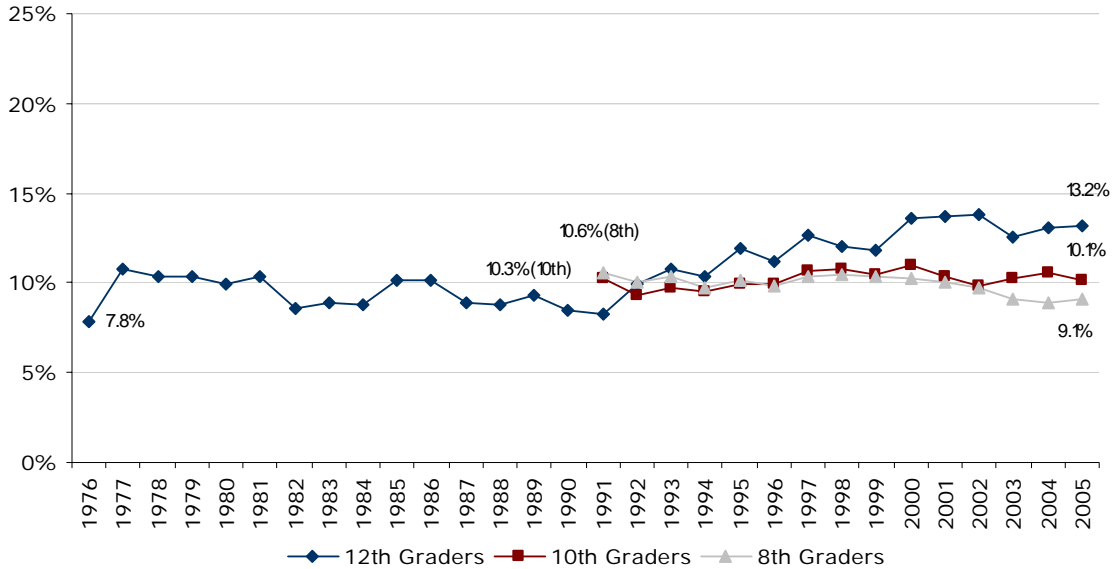


Figure 6 shows the trend in regular volunteering among 12th, 10th, and 8th graders. Regular volunteering is defined as participating in volunteering activities at least monthly. While large percentages of students reported volunteering over the last 10 to 15 years, a large majority is engaged in episodic, or one-time volunteering activities. For example, among 12th graders, 75.9 percent reported volunteering in 2005, while 13.2 percent reported being a regular volunteer. Thus the vast majority of 12th grade volunteers had engaged in one-time volunteer activities.

Overall, regular volunteering is up among 12th graders (5.4 percentage points since 1976), though it is relatively flat for 10th graders and slightly down for 8th graders in recent years.

Figure 6: Regular Volunteering Among 8th, 10th, and 12th Graders

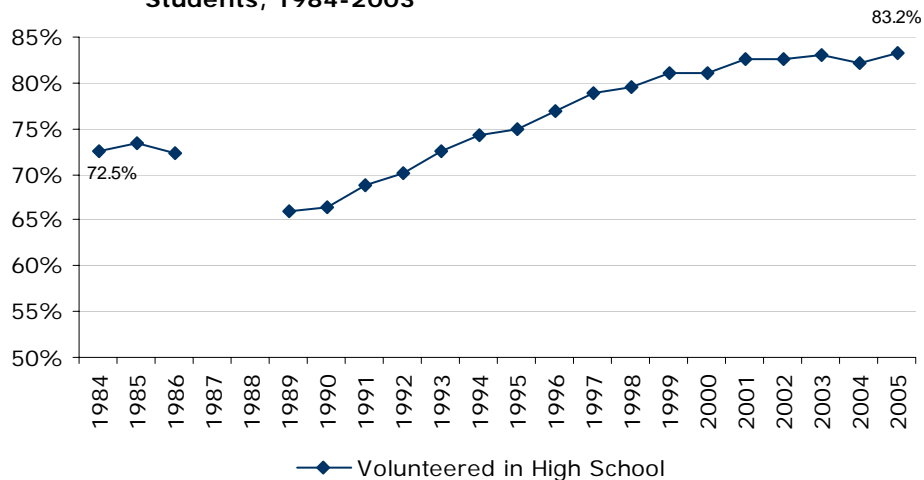


Source: Authors' tabulations from the Monitoring the Future survey, 12th grade, 10th grade, and 8th grade surveys, 1976-2005

College Freshman, 1984 to 2005

As shown in Figure 7, the Higher Education Research Institute's (HERI) annual survey of incoming first-year college students suggests that volunteering rates have been rising since 1990, with over 83 percent of college first-year students in 2005 reporting that they had volunteered while in high school. The MTF data suggest, however, that this rise in volunteering is mostly an increase in episodic, rather than regular, activity, though we cannot verify this for college freshmen.

Figure 7: Volunteering Among First-Year College Students, 1984-2003



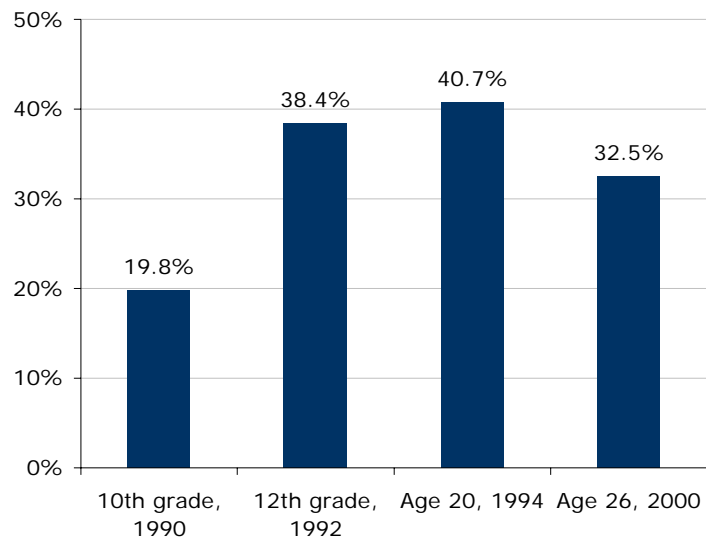
Source: HERI/UCLA College Freshmen Survey, 1984-2005

When Does Volunteering Occur?

Measuring volunteering at a point in time, as is done in the 2006 CPHS, allows for a comparison of volunteering rates across age cohorts. It is also instructive to see changes over time for a single cohort. The Department of Education's National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 followed a single cohort of 8th graders from 1988 through 1999-2000. Data were initially collected on over 10,000 students from grades 8, 10, and 12, and into college and beyond. In 2000, the majority of students were 25 or 26 years of age.

During the first decades of the life cycle, volunteering rates change substantially. Figure 8 displays volunteering rates from the high school class of 1992 as these young people progressed from 10th grade through the age of 26. As indicated, volunteering among the class of 1992 peaked at the age of 20, when a large number of these students were in college.

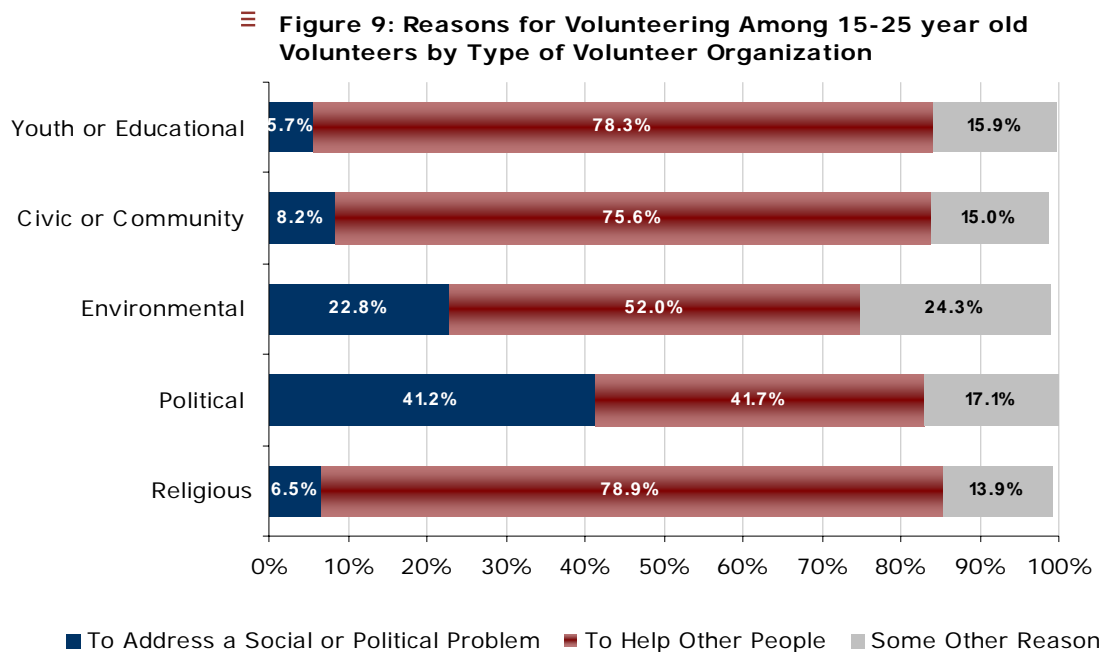
≡ **Figure 8: Volunteering as a Young Adult, High School Class of 1992**



Source: National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988.

Reasons for Volunteering

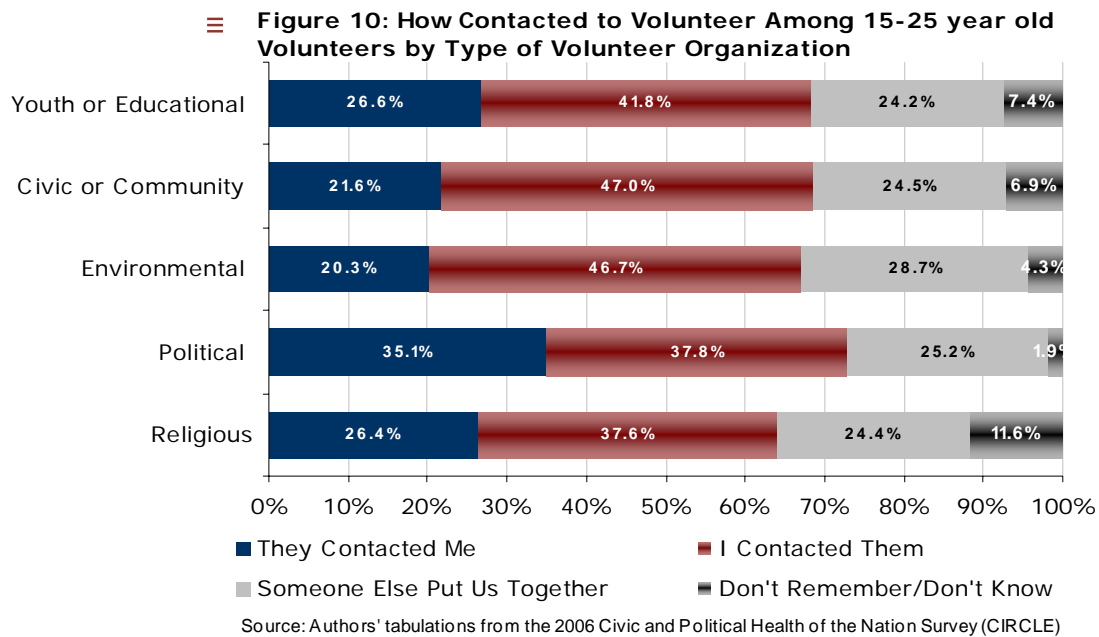
Young people volunteer for different reasons as shown in Figure 9.¹² However, regardless of the type of organizations young people volunteer for, the single most common reason cited for volunteering is “to help other people.” Young people that volunteered for political and environmental organizations appear to have different motivations from young people who volunteered for other types of organizations. Among young political volunteers, 41.2 percent volunteered “to address a social or political problem.” Those who volunteered for environmental organizations were the most diverse in their reasons—22.8 percent volunteered “to address a social or political problem” and 24.3 percent volunteered for “some other reason.”



Source: Authors' tabulations from the 2006 Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey (CIRCLE)

How Volunteers are Contacted

Figure 10 shows different ways in which youth connected with organizations to volunteer. Overall, the single most common way young people report getting in contact with an organization is to contact an organization directly themselves. Overall, political organizations are the most likely to recruit young people to volunteer (35.1 percent). Environmental organizations most heavily relied upon having someone else put the volunteer together with the organization (28.7 percent). Volunteers for civic or community groups and environmental groups were the most likely to report that they contacted the organization themselves (47.0 and 46.7 percent, respectively).

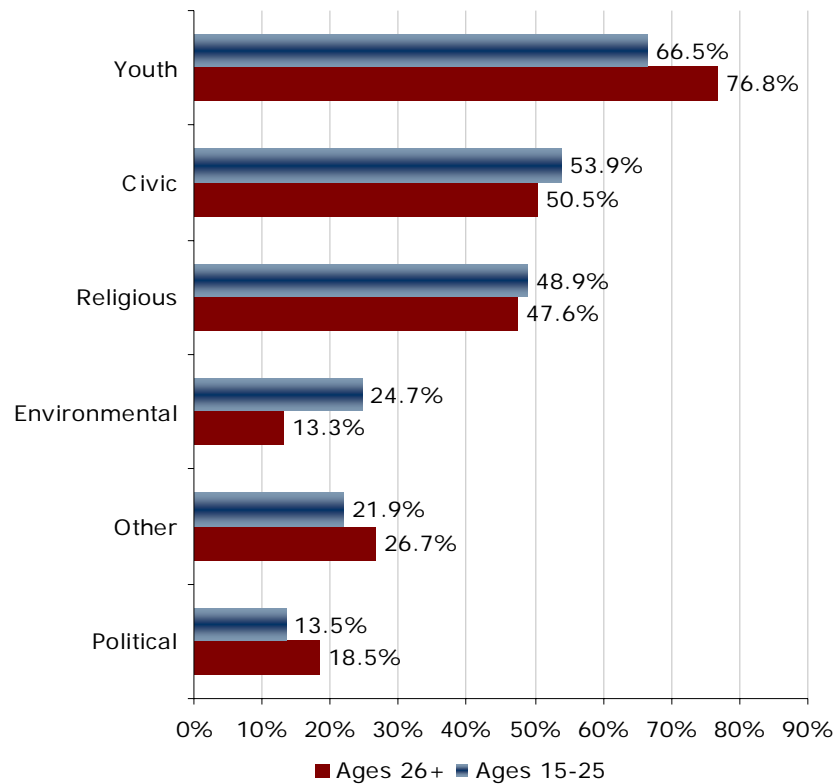


Volunteering for Organizations

Figure 11 shows, among volunteers, which organizations young people are most likely to volunteer with, based on data collected for the 2006 Civic and Political Health of the Nation survey (CPHS).

According to Figure 11, 66.5 percent of young volunteers volunteered for youth organizations. The next most common venue for youth volunteering was a civic or community group such as a health service organization or social service organization; collectively, they drew 53.9 percent of young volunteers. Compared to their older counterparts, young people are more likely to volunteer at an environmental organization, but are less likely to volunteer at a political organization or for a political candidate and for youth organizations.

≡ **Figure 11: 2006 Volunteering by Organization**



Source: Authors' tabulations from the 2006 Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey (CIRCLE)

APPENDIX

Table A – Characteristics of Volunteers and Non-Volunteers by Age Group

	Ages 15-25		Ages 26 and older	
	Volunteer	Non-Volunteer	Volunteer	Non-Volunteer
Sex				
Male	47.9%	52.3%	42.9%	49.0%
Female	52.1%	47.7%	57.1%	51.0%
Race and Ethnicity				
White	63.0%	57.4%	80.9%	73.6%
Black	13.1%	13.4%	7.5%	7.0%
Latino	13.3%	17.9%	5.1%	12.3%
Asian	6.3%	3.0%	*	*
Individual Efficacy				
CAN make a difference	63.8%	49.4%	65.2%	36.0%
CANNOT make a difference	34.8%	47.6%	33.1%	58.9%
Discuss Politics with Family				
Discussed Politics	60.8%	39.1%	57.5%	45.2%
Did Not Discuss Politics	50.9%	47.8%	40.3%	55.2%
Household Volunteering				
Household Did Volunteer	50.2%	44.6%	47.6%	30.3%
Household Did Not Volunteer	30.6%	65.3%	49.0%	64.9%
Mother's Highest Level of Education				
Bachelor's or higher	37.2%	24.8%	15.0%	10.5%
Some college	24.0%	19.3%	13.2%	7.8%
High school	23.4%	27.4%	38.3%	36.3%
Less than high school	11.5%	17.8%	25.6%	30.3%
Region				
Northeast	17.1%	18.9%	21.6%	18.7%
Midwest	25.0%	20.8%	24.9%	23.6%
South	32.8%	37.0%	35.1%	33.6%
West	25.2%	23.3%	18.4%	24.2%
Student Status				
High school student	44.3%	28.0%	***	***
College student	29.7%	22.1%	***	***
Not a student	25.8%	49.3%	***	***
Nativity status				
U.S.-born to U.S.-born parents	78.6%	72.6%	88.3%	78.7%
U.S.-born to Foreign-born parents	13.2%	7.8%	4.9%	7.7%
Foreign-born to Foreign-born parents	4.9%	12.5%	5.9%	9.7%

Source: Authors' tabulations from the 2006 Civic and Political Health of the Nation Survey (CIRCLE) *** Sample size is too small. ***** Not applicable. Values do not always add up to 100 percent, because "other" responses were not included.

Table B – Volunteering Rates Among 12th, 10th, and 8th Grade Students

	12th Graders	10th Graders	8th Graders
1976	65.3%	***	***
1977	71.0%	***	***
1978	70.5%	***	***
1979	68.0%	***	***
1980	69.4%	***	***
1981	69.5%	***	***
1982	66.8%	***	***
1983	68.9%	***	***
1984	69.0%	***	***
1985	68.7%	***	***
1986	69.1%	***	***
1987	69.0%	***	***
1988	68.0%	***	***
1989	64.6%	***	***
1990	64.7%	***	***
1991	67.5%	67.9%	64.8%
1992	68.0%	67.0%	65.3%
1993	70.6%	66.9%	65.2%
1994	72.4%	68.3%	64.1%
1995	71.7%	68.7%	66.4%
1996	74.9%	69.5%	67.2%
1997	74.3%	71.4%	69.2%
1998	76.0%	71.8%	69.6%
1999	76.0%	71.8%	68.6%
2000	76.8%	72.2%	68.9%
2001	77.1%	72.1%	68.7%
2002	76.5%	69.0%	66.3%
2003	74.7%	69.3%	65.9%
2004	75.4%	71.0%	65.7%
2005	75.9%	70.6%	64.9%

Source: Authors' tabulations from Monitoring the Future, 1976-2005. "****" Not applicable.

Table C – Regular Volunteering Rates Among 12th, 10th, and 8th Grade Students

	12th Graders	10th Graders	8th Graders
1976	7.8%	***	***
1977	10.7%	***	***
1978	10.4%	***	***
1979	10.3%	***	***
1980	9.9%	***	***
1981	10.4%	***	***
1982	8.6%	***	***
1983	8.9%	***	***
1984	8.8%	***	***
1985	10.1%	***	***
1986	10.2%	***	***
1987	8.9%	***	***
1988	8.8%	***	***
1989	9.3%	***	***
1990	8.5%	***	***
1991	8.3%	10.3%	10.6%
1992	9.9%	9.3%	10.1%
1993	10.8%	9.7%	10.3%
1994	10.3%	9.5%	9.7%
1995	11.9%	9.9%	10.2%
1996	11.2%	10.0%	9.8%
1997	12.6%	10.7%	10.4%
1998	12.1%	10.7%	10.5%
1999	11.9%	10.5%	10.3%
2000	13.6%	11.0%	10.3%
2001	13.7%	10.3%	10.1%
2002	13.8%	9.8%	9.7%
2003	12.6%	10.2%	9.1%
2004	13.1%	10.5%	8.9%
2005	13.2%	10.1%	9.1%

Source: Authors' tabulations from Monitoring the Future, 1976-2005. "***" Not applicable.

NOTES

¹ Research Director and Research Associate, respectively. We thank Peter Levine and Emily Kirby for helpful comments on previous drafts of this fact sheet. All errors in fact or interpretation are our own.

² Lopez, M.H., Levine, P., Both, D., Kiesa, A., Kirby, E., and Marcelo, K. *The 2006 Civic and Political Health of the Nation: A Detailed Look at How Youth Participate in Politics and Communities*. October 2006. Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement. www.civicyouth.org

³ The volunteer rate in 2006 among those 16 and older was 26.7 percent, down from 28.8 percent in 2005 according to an analysis of the CPS, September Supplement, 2006, performed by the Corporation for National and Community Service. For more information, see "Volunteering in America: 2007 State Trends and Rankings in Civic Life," by Robert Grimm, Jr. et. al., Corporation for National and Community Service, April 2007.

⁴ Difficulties with measuring volunteering rates stem from two measurement issues. First, survey participants often have difficulty remembering or classifying activities as volunteer activities. Second, surveys employ different methods to acquire information on volunteering rates from survey participants. For more information and discussion of issues surrounding the measurement of volunteering, see the following:

Toppe, C. "CIRCLE Working Paper 43: Measuring Volunteering: A Behavioral Approach," (2006) Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement. www.civicyouth.org

Toppe, C. and Galaskiewicz, J. "Measuring Volunteering: Committee Report." (2006) The Points of Light Foundation. <http://www.pointsoflight.org/downloads/pdf/resources/research/CommitteeReport.pdf>

Steinberg, K., Rooney, P., and Chin, W. "Measuring of Volunteering: A Methodological Study Using Indiana as a Test Case," in the *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, Volume 31, Issue 4, 2002.

⁵ See "Volunteering in the United States," January 2007 from the Bureau of Labor Statistics for a summary of the September 2006 Current Population Survey Volunteering supplement. This summary is available at <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/volun.nr0.htm>

⁶ For more information on volunteering rates by state, including the District of Columbia, see our "Fact Sheet: Youth Volunteering in the States: 2002 to 2005," which can be accessed from the CIRCLE website at www.civicyouth.org

⁷ Keeter, S., Zukin, C., Andolina, M., and Jenkins, K. (September 2002) *Civic and Political Health of the Nation: A Generational Portrait*. Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement. www.civicyouth.org

⁸ For Figure 2, the categories of "a lot" and "some" were collapsed into "CAN make a difference", and the categories "little" and "no difference" were collapsed into

"CANNOT make a difference." Values do not add up to 100 percent, because other responses were not included.

⁹ Keeter, S., Zukin, C., Andolina, M., and Jenkins, K. (September 2002) *Civic and Political Health of the Nation: A Generational Portrait*. Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement. www.civicyouth.org

¹⁰ Values in Figure 3 do not add up to 100 percent, because other responses were not included.

¹¹ For Figure 4, the categories of "very often" and "sometimes" were collapsed into "Discussed Politics", and the categories "rarely" and "never" were collapsed into "Did Not Discuss Politics." Values do not add up to 100 percent, because other responses were not included.

¹² Values in Figure 8 do not add up to 100 percent, because other responses were not included.