

SECONDARY RESEARCH • FIELD BRIEF

Virtual Volunteering

Evidence, Models and Management Insights V 1.0

What 48 sources reveal about participation, access,
program design and the changing volunteer landscape



**A research brief for nonprofit leaders,
volunteer-engagement professionals,
funders, and innovators**

This study is V 1.0 and far from complete.

But we wanted to get the conversation started, and update periodically toward a comprehensive, actionable and productive report. Your contributions to this report are appreciated, welcome and will be shared.

Prepared pro bono for discussion across the volunteer-engagement community

July 2026

Dear Colleagues,

We are the founders of Virtual Volunteers, Inc. a **nonprofit initiative**, exploring how volunteering can become more accessible, flexible and meaningful *for more people*. Our work is still taking shape, and we believe the best ideas emerge through careful research, honest listening and collaboration with those who understand the field firsthand.

I'm pleased to share this report, *Virtual Volunteering: Evidence, Models and Management Insights*, a field brief examining how virtual volunteering is evolving—and what that evolution may mean for nonprofit organizations, volunteer-engagement professionals and the people who want to contribute.

We are sharing this inaugural report in that spirit. We hope it will be useful to you and your colleagues—and perhaps serve as a starting point for a broader conversation about the changing nature of participation and service, and what that means to your organization.

This report grew from a review of 48 sources representing a broad cross-section of the field: national research, volunteer-matching platforms, nonprofit and volunteer-management organizations, established virtual-service programs, practitioner guidance and articles written for prospective volunteers. We examined the sources individually and collectively, looking for credible data, recurring themes, emerging models, practical lessons and important gaps in current knowledge.

Our goal was not simply to compile a review of virtual volunteer opportunities. We wanted to better understand the larger landscape and trends:

- Who participates in volunteering—and who may still feel excluded
- What motivates or discourages participation
- How organizations design and manage effective virtual roles
- What virtual service can accomplish—and where its limitations remain
- Which questions deserve further research and discussion

We would greatly value your perspective. If any of the findings resonate with your experience, raise questions or suggest areas deserving further exploration, we would welcome the opportunity to discuss. We are also interested in learning about relevant research, programs or emerging practices that may not yet be reflected here. V2.0 will endeavor to grow the shared knowledge base.

Thank you for the work that you do to make volunteering possible and effective. We hope this report contributes something useful to support your mission.

Warmly,



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Why this review matters

The phrase “virtual volunteering” became widely visible during COVID-19, but the practice is broader and older than the pandemic. Today it spans professional consulting, tutoring, mentoring, advocacy, transcription, translation, citizen science, crisis support, digital content and administrative work. Understanding this varied landscape can help organizations distinguish durable participation shifts from pandemic-era improvisation.

This brief reviews 48 distinct resources compiled for analysis and traces important claims to stronger original sources when possible. It treats federal estimates, original studies, platform-reported metrics, vendor content, and lifestyle-media lists as different forms of evidence.

At a glance

Virtual participation is real, increasingly visible, and valued for its flexibility. Yet most formal volunteering still happens in person, and even remote service frequently requires specialized skills, screening, training, supervision, and sustained time.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau and AmeriCorps, 2023 Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement. The survey covered activity between September 2022 and September 2023.

Five findings

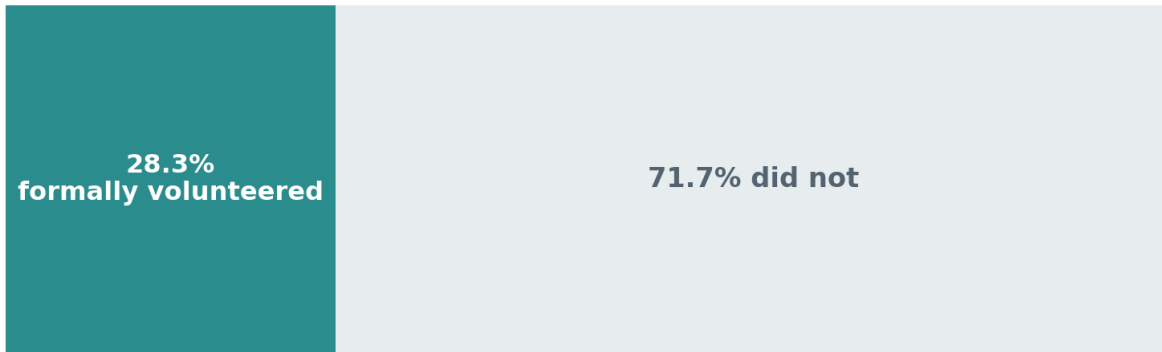
- Virtual participation is established, but it remains a minority mode within overall volunteering.
- Flexibility, access, and freedom from geography are the dominant motivations.
- Most credible remote programs still impose real participation and management requirements.
- The consumer market is fragmented, repetitive, and often organized around available roles—not desired outcomes.
- The field lacks a consistent vocabulary, common measures of quality, and comparable evidence about outcomes.

A USEFUL INTERPRETATION

“Virtual volunteering” is best understood as an umbrella term—not a single program type. The volunteer experience, management burden and likely outcomes vary dramatically across its many forms.

The strongest national evidence

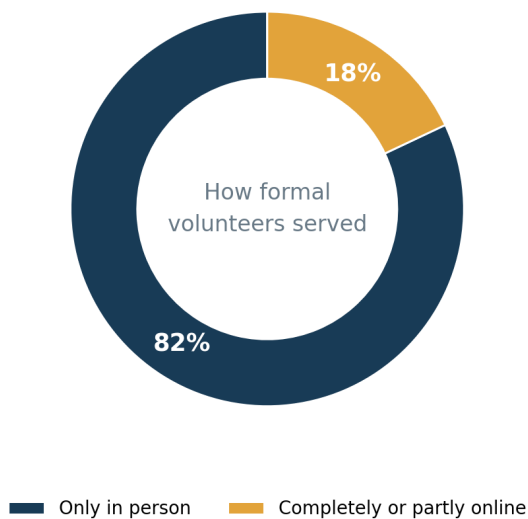
Formal volunteering rebounded in 2022-23



75.7 million Americans volunteered through an organization.

The 2023 federal survey found a substantial rebound from the pandemic-period formal volunteer rate of 23.2%. Half of formal volunteers served 24 hours or more during the year.

Virtual service is established—but still a minority mode



The virtual question was new in 2023, making this the strongest available U.S. benchmark but not yet a long-term trend line.

Primary source: <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2024/11/civic-engagement-and-volunteerism.html>

The mission of Virtual Volunteers, Inc. is—through research—to explore how nonprofits might motivate and facilitate participation among the 71.7% of Americans who did not formally volunteer through an organization. Would they like to contribute? Are there unconventional approaches that might better resonate with them? If so, what are they, and how might they be integrated into volunteer programs?

What “virtual volunteering” currently means

Across the reviewed sources, virtual volunteering almost always means that a person contributes unpaid labor remotely through a computer, telephone, app, or home-based activity.

Mode	Typical work	Illustrative sources
Professional expertise	Strategy, design, technology, finance, HR, marketing, writing, legal or business advice	Taproot, Catchafire, We Make Change
Human connection	Tutoring, mentoring, companionship calls, crisis response, visual assistance	AARP, Peace Corps, Be My Eyes, crisis programs
Digital production	Transcription, translation, research, mapping, data tagging, advocacy and content	Smithsonian, UNV, Red Cross, Missing Maps
Home-based fulfillment	Letters, care packages, crafts, baking or other items prepared remotely	Soldiers’ Angels and similar programs

The common thread is that the volunteer performs a task away from the organization’s primary service site—sometimes online, sometimes by telephone, and sometimes through home-based production.

WHY DEFINITIONS MATTER

Programs described by the same term may require five minutes or six months, no prior experience or advanced professional credentials, asynchronous activity or intensive live interaction. Comparisons are meaningful only when the underlying participation model is specified, and perhaps standardized.

A landscape of adjacent models

Model	Examples	Primary value
Opportunity marketplaces	Idealist/VolunteerMatch, Points of Light Engage, AARP Create the Good	Help people discover roles
Skills-based platforms	Taproot, Catchafire, We Make Change	Match expertise to nonprofit projects
Managed corporate programs	Goodera, Groundswell, Submittable	Package team participation and reporting
Institutional programs	UN Volunteers, Peace Corps, Smithsonian, Red Cross	Operate structured mission-specific roles
Fee-based international programs	United Planet, Volunteer World, Go Overseas	Sell placement, support and participant experience
Manager technology/guidance	VolunteerPro, Galaxy Digital, Golden, Rosterfy	Help organizations design and administer engagement

The opportunity: remove more barriers

Existing sources repeatedly celebrate remote participation because it removes travel and expands flexibility. Yet access is not automatic: role design, technology, digital confidence, language, screening requirements and scheduling can still exclude willing contributors.

Geography People can contribute across distance and connect with causes outside their immediate community.

Transportation and mobility Participation does not require travel to a service site.

Time and scheduling Asynchronous and modular roles can accommodate irregular availability.

Skills and screening A broad portfolio can include a range of entry-level tasks and highly specialized assignments.

Technology and confidence Simple tools, clear instructions and responsive support reduce digital friction.

Organizational capacity Well-scoped roles and appropriate systems can reduce avoidable coordination and supervision burdens.

IMPORTANT BALANCE

Remote participation can expand access, but it can also reduce informal contact, social connection and identification with an organization. Program design must deliberately create belonging, feedback and visibility into results.

What strong programs teach volunteer managers about structuring remote/virtual opportunities

Design the work before recruiting

Define the outcome, scope, skills, time, tools, communications and ownership.

Flexibility needs accountability

Use modular tasks, milestones, trial commitments and clear handoffs.

Match motivations—not only skills

Cause, place, identity, learning, connection and available time shape fit.

Training and support remain essential

Remote work can still require orientation, safeguarding, feedback and supervision.

Show the result

Communicating completion updates and aggregate progress help distant participants feel connected.

Design for accessibility

Remote access helps many people but still assumes devices, connectivity and digital confidence.

Six conclusions from the synthesis of 48 sources

1

Virtual volunteering is a portfolio, not a program

The term covers radically different assignments. Leaders should segment roles by task, time, skill, interaction and risk instead of treating all remote service alike.

2

Access expands—but unevenly

Removing travel can help people constrained by geography, mobility, health, caregiving or scheduling, while technology access and digital confidence can remain as barriers.

3

Convenience does not eliminate management

Effective programs still require scoping, screening where appropriate, orientation, communications, supervision, feedback and recognition.

4

Small tasks and deep relationships can coexist

The field ranges from five-minute microtasks to long-term mentoring and crisis support. Each creates a different volunteer promise and management obligation.

5

Evidence quality is inconsistent

Federal participation data are strong, but many benefit and impact claims rely on self-report, sponsored surveys, platform totals or repeated secondary citations.

6

Remote service should be designed for durability

The strongest models solve continuing participation and capacity needs rather than preserving temporary pandemic adaptations.

Questions for the next generation of research

- Which groups may be newly reached through virtual opportunities, rather than merely shifted from in-person roles?
- Which combinations of task length, flexibility, human interaction and cause alignment drive satisfaction and retention?
- How does virtual service affect belonging, volunteer identity and connection to the organization?
- Are an organization's volunteers more likely to become donors as well, and vice versa?
- Which management practices produce reliable completion without undermining flexibility or creating undue burden?
- What are the true staff and technology costs of creating and sustaining remote roles?
- How should organizations assess service quality, beneficiary outcomes and volunteer development?
- Which safeguards are necessary for remote work involving vulnerable people or sensitive data?
- How are artificial intelligence and automation likely to change appropriate virtual-volunteer work?
- What else...?

Organizations shaping the field

Organization or network	Perspective represented
VolunteerPro	Volunteer-manager research, recruitment challenges and professional practice.
Taproot Foundation	Project scoping, skills-based service, nonprofit capacity and funder programs.
Catchafire	Marketplace operations, foundations, completion and impact valuation.
AARP Create the Good	Older-adult engagement, accessibility and opportunity discovery.
Points of Light	Volunteer infrastructure, employer networks and field reach.
Idealist / VolunteerMatch	Marketplace consolidation, search behavior and nonprofit demand.
Regional volunteer centers	Local operating realities and nonprofit relationships.
Volunteer technology providers	Program administration, corporate engagement, data and reporting.

A FIELD-LEVEL OPPORTUNITY

These organizations represent complementary perspectives: volunteer management, opportunity discovery, skills-based service, older-adult participation, corporate engagement, local/remote infrastructure and program technology. Greater exchange among them could improve shared definitions, evidence and practice.

A disciplined approach to evidence

- Use Census/AmeriCorps for U.S. participation and virtual-volunteering prevalence.
- When appropriate, label platform impact metrics as self-reported.
- Trace health, motivation, retention and productivity claims to their original studies.
- Indicate sample, field dates, recruitment, weighting, sponsor and question wording when available.
- Distinguish correlation from causation.
- Treat repeated articles as one evidence chain—not independent confirmation.

The following pages of lists, notes and descriptions highlight each source's relevance to this report and are not intended as comprehensive evaluations of the organizations or their work. Our intent is that through independent research, collaboration and learning, every mission will be better enabled.

The lists are meant to be representative, not presented as a complete database.

Source notes: research and field leadership

VolunteerPro — Growth Mindset • **Manager guidance**

Its 2025 field survey offers potentially valuable insights; additional methodological detail would help readers interpret how broadly the findings may apply.

<https://volpro.net/pivot-to-growth-mindset/>

Taproot Foundation • **Skills-based platform**

Offers strong lessons in project scoping and capacity building, supported by impact results reported by the organization.

<https://taprootfoundation.org>

Catchafire • **Skills-based platform**

A close operational comparator for scoped projects, matching, foundation programs and value attribution, operating through the contribution of donated professional expertise.

<https://catchafire.org/>

Seniors in Service Nevada • **Regional nonprofit**

A valuable prospective local partner for understanding older volunteers, transportation and mobility barriers, companionship, and services that cannot be virtualized.

<https://seniorsinservicenevada.org>

Volunteer Canada • **National field resource**

A credible sector source for terminology and accessible virtual participation in a Canadian context.

<https://volunteer.ca/virtual-volunteering-opportunities/>

Galaxy Digital • **Manager technology/guidance**

Offers 30+ ideas for translating organizational needs into remote roles—useful evidence that managers need templates, coaching and examples.

<https://www.galaxydigital.com/blog/creative-remote-and-virtual-volunteer-opportunity-ideas>

Golden and Rosterfy • **Manager technology/guidance**

Their practitioner-oriented content provides useful operational perspectives that can be considered alongside independent research.

<https://www.goldenvolunteer.com/>

<https://www.rosterfy.com/>

Source notes: marketplaces and direct programs

Idealist / VolunteerMatch • Large marketplace

A major discovery platform. Idealist's consolidation with VolunteerMatch signals continuing change in the opportunity-listing landscape.

<https://www.idealist.org/volunteermatch>

Points of Light Engage • Large marketplace

Conventional opportunity supply model: publish roles and recruit people to perform them. Relevant for taxonomy, localization and partnership.

<https://engage.pointsoflight.org/>

AARP Create the Good • Marketplace and direct programs

Especially relevant audience overlap. AARP explicitly addresses limited time, mobility, transportation, health and home obligations.

<https://createthegood.aarp.org/>

United Nations Volunteers • Institutional global program

Authoritative example of structured cross-border online service and organizational eligibility. Still fundamentally labor-based.

<https://www.unv.org/become-online-volunteer>

Peace Corps Virtual Service Pilot • Institutional global program

Requires 5–15 hours weekly for 3–6 months, orientation, technology, a workplan and recurring collaboration—evidence that virtual does not necessarily mean low-friction.

<https://www.peacecorps.gov/ways-to-serve/serve-with-us/virtual-service-pilot/>

Smithsonian Digital Volunteers • Microvolunteering program

A leading model for modular, verifiable work, peer review and aggregate progress.

<https://www.si.edu/volunteer/digitalvolunteers>

Red Cross Digital Advocate • Advocacy program

Low-barrier digital participation whose principal outcome is public reach and awareness.

<https://www.redcross.org/volunteer/volunteer-opportunities/be-a-digital-advocate.html>

Soldiers' Angels • Home-based direct service

A useful hybrid: volunteers work remotely while physical items reach beneficiaries elsewhere. Relevant to fulfillment and emotional connection.

<https://soldiersangels.org/volunteer/virtual-volunteer/>

Marie Curie • Direct charity program

Shows how an established organization integrates remote roles into a broader volunteer portfolio, with role clarity and safeguarding.

<https://www.mariecurie.org.uk/get-involved/volunteer/remote-volunteering>

L.A. Works • Regional volunteer center

An example of how a local network can curate virtual roles and maintain trusted nonprofit relationships.

<https://www.laworks.com/volunteervirtually>

We Make Change • Global skills platform

Adjacent positioning—"anywhere, anytime"—but the exchange remains donated professional skills.

<https://www.wemakechange.org>

Source notes: corporate and fee-based models

Goodera • **Managed corporate volunteering**

Strong comparator for turnkey team activities, facilitation, campaign packaging and impact reporting.

<https://www.goodera.com/volunteer-opportunities/virtual>

Groundswell and Submittable • **Corporate social-impact vendors**

Support employer use cases: distributed teams, matching, location campaigns and reported outcomes. Reported outcomes provide useful industry perspectives and may benefit from additional independent context.

<https://www.groundswell.io/>

<https://www.submittable.com/solutions/volunteer>

teambuilding.com and SignUp.com • **Team/coordination guides**

Offer practical examples of campaign and group mechanics, primarily from a practitioner and service-provider perspective.

<https://teambuilding.com/blog/online-volunteering>

United Planet • **Fee-based international program**

Offers fee-based structured placements with training and support, demonstrating participant willingness to pay for a supported volunteer experience.

<https://unitedplanet.org/virtual-internships-virtual-volunteering>

Volunteer World and Go Overseas • **International marketplaces**

List free and fee-based programs. Their models invite consideration of fee transparency and how programs balance participant experience with community benefit.

<https://www.volunteerworld.com/en>

<https://www.gooverseas.com/volunteer-abroad>

Source notes: consumer discovery and audience signals

The following pages are useful for language, search behavior, repeated opportunity sets and audience segmentation. They are generally not positioning themselves as authorities for market sizing or causal claims.

Source	Primary signal	Representative URL
Idealist remote opportunities	General audience	https://www.idealist.org/en/volunteer-resources/remote-volunteer-opportunities
Good Housekeeping	Mainstream lifestyle; includes a nonrepresentative 2020 reader poll	https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/life/a34288060/virtual-volunteer-opportunities/
SignUpGenius	General/family organizers	https://www.signupgenius.com/resources/places-to-volunteer-online
DoSomething	Youth	https://dosomething.org/article/9-places-to-volunteer-online-and-make-a-real-impact
CareerAddict	Career and résumé motivation	https://www.careeraddict.com/online-volunteering-opportunities
PureWow and Oprah Daily	Lifestyle media	https://www.purewow.com/wellness/virtual-volunteer
SeniorsInfo and Second Wind Movement	Older adults; purpose, access and fit	https://secondwindmovement.com/virtual-volunteering/
Bold.org, Goodwall, NSHSS, University of the People	Students and young adults	https://bold.org/blog/virtual-volunteer-opportunities/
MATTER	Nonprofit explainer	https://www.matter.ngo/virtual-volunteering/
Volunteer World / Go Overseas	International-program discovery	https://www.volunteerworld.com/en/volunteer-abroad/virtual-volunteering

Selected authoritative references

U.S. Census Bureau — U.S. Volunteerism Rebounding After COVID-19 Pandemic

<https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2024/11/civic-engagement-and-volunteerism.html>

U.S. Census Bureau — 2023 Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement release

<https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2024/civic-engagement-volunteering-supplement.html>

AmeriCorps — Renewed Engagement in American Civic Life — 2023 headline report

https://data.americorps.gov/api/views/rhng-qtzw/files/c9d65645-a380-49b6-b2e4-b94639817f7b?download=true&filename=CEV2023_HeadlineReport_11052024_final_508.pdf

AmeriCorps — Spotlighting the CEV Series: Virtual Volunteering

https://data.americorps.gov/api/views/rhng-qtzw/files/800cb9bd-943f-495e-ba29-d70a19da6e4f?download=true&filename=CEV2023Spotlight_VirtualVolunteering_11012024_508_final.pdf

AmeriCorps — Engaging Volunteers: A Comprehensive Literature Review

https://www.americorps.gov/sites/default/files/document/Literature%20Review%20for%20Volunteer%20Management_0.pdf

UnitedHealth Group — Doing Good Is Good for You: 2013 Health and Volunteering Study

<https://www.unitedhealthgroup.com/content/dam/UHG/PDF/2013/UNH-Health-Volunteering-Study.pdf>

Professional associations and volunteer-engagement networks

These organizations and networks represent complementary perspectives: volunteer-engagement leadership, global and government-based volunteering, opportunity discovery, skills-based service, older-adult participation, corporate engagement, local and remote infrastructure, and program technology. Greater exchange among them could improve shared definitions, evidence and practice.

Association of Leaders in Volunteer Engagement (ALIVE) — Volunteer-engagement leadership, professional practice and development.

<https://www.volunteeralive.org/>

International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE) — Global volunteering, cross-sector leadership and international perspectives.

<https://www.iave.org/>

National Association of Volunteer Program Leaders in Government (NAVPLG) — Government volunteer programs and public-service engagement.

<https://www.navplg.org/>

FINAL ASSESSMENT

Virtual volunteering is now a durable part of the participation landscape, but the category remains under-defined and unevenly measured. Its greatest promise is not simply that familiar work can be moved online. It is that organizations can redesign participation around access, flexibility, skills, human connection and meaningful outcomes—while remaining honest about the management required to make that promise real.

Virtual Volunteers, Inc.

Meet the Co-Founder & Principal Researcher



Tom Roth founded Community Marketing & Insights in 1992. For over three decades he enjoyed helping organizations better understand the communities that they serve.

Tom and his team produced primary custom research and industry-leading educational conferences. Clients included the American Cancer Society, American Red Cross, AARP, Freddie Mac, Human Rights Campaign, International Fund for Animal Welfare and The United States Census Bureau, as well as major corporations including American Airlines, AT&T, Deloitte, Gilead, Google, Hulu, Johnson & Johnson, Prudential, REI, Target, Wells Fargo and UPS.

After selling the company in 2025, Tom—*himself passionate about volunteering*—founded Virtual Volunteers, Inc., a Nevada Nonprofit Corporation, to explore the future of volunteering through research, listening, and collaboration.

Tom is leading this study pro bono, bringing more 34 years of experience producing research and training programs for nonprofit, mission-driven, government, and corporate organizations.

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