

# First Report of the National Evaluation of RSVP Volunteers



# **First Report of the National Evaluation of RSVP Volunteers**

October 2015

## **Authors**

This study was conducted by researchers from JBS International in Burlingame, CA, pursuant to a contract between the Corporation for National and Community Service, a federal agency of the United States Government, and JBS International:

Annie Georges, Ph.D., Senior Research Associate

Susan Gabbard, Ph.D., Vice President

Ashley Wendell Kranjac, M.A., Research Assistant

## **Acknowledgements**

We would like to thank all the project directors, staff, and volunteers who made this study possible.

## **Citation**

Georges, A., Gabbard, S., & Kranjac, A.W. (2015). First Report of the National Evaluation of RSVP Volunteers. North Bethesda, MD: JBS International, Inc.

This report is in the public domain. Authorization to reproduce it in whole or in part is granted. Upon request, this material will be made available in alternative formats for people with disabilities.

# First Report of the National Evaluation of RSVP Volunteers

October 2015

## Contents

Executive Summary .....	6
Background of the RSVP Program .....	8
Objective of the RSVP Volunteer Study.....	9
Evaluation Questions.....	9
Methods .....	9
Findings.....	11
Characteristics of Volunteers .....	11
Length of Service and Types of Service Activities .....	16
Differences by Gender .....	21
Differences by Age .....	21
Differences by Length of Service.....	23
Summary and Discussion.....	24
Future Research.....	24

## List of Figures

Figure 1 Distribution of RSVP Volunteers by Age .....	11
Figure 2 Gender Distribution of RSVP Volunteers .....	12
Figure 3 . Educational Attainment of RSVP Volunteers .....	13
Figure 4 Marital Status of RSVP Volunteers.....	14
Figure 5 Veteran Status of RSVP Volunteers.....	15
Figure 6 Average Length of Service with RSVP .....	17

---

## List of Tables

Table 1 Race and Ethnic Composition of RSVP Volunteers.....	12
Table 2 Income of RSVP Volunteers.....	13
Table 3 Employment Status of RSVP Volunteers .....	15
Table 4 RSVP Volunteers with more than One Employment Status.....	16
Table 5 Average Number of Years of Service as a RSVP Volunteer .....	16
Table 6 Primary Service Activity of RSVP Volunteers.....	17
Table 7 Average Number of Hours Engaged in the Primary Service Activity.....	18
Table 8 Distribution of Hours in Primary Service Activity .....	20
Table 9 Average Age and Length of Service with RSVP by Gender.....	21
Table 10 Primary Service Activity, by Gender .....	21
Table 11 Average Length of Service and Primary Service Activity, by Age .....	22
Table 12 Distribution of Volunteers across Performance Measure Categories, Volunteers Serving 1 to 2 Years.....	23
Table 13 Distribution of Volunteers across Performance Measure Categories, Volunteers Serving 3 to 5 Years.....	23
Table 14 Distribution of Volunteers across Performance Measure Categories, Volunteers Serving 6 to 9 Years.....	23
Table 15 Distribution of Volunteers across Performance Measure Categories, Volunteers Serving 9 or more Years .....	23

---

# Executive Summary

In 2013, the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) initiated a national evaluation of the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP). The national evaluation was intended to collect the necessary information to better guide the RSVP program and to address three objectives: 1) describe the characteristics of RSVP volunteers, including how volunteers are distributed across CNCS's performance measure categories, and how volunteers allocated their time to different service activities across the performance measure categories; 2) measure the relationship between volunteer characteristics, service activities, and volunteers' psychosocial health; and 3) measure the impact of RSVP national service participation on volunteers' psychosocial health compared to similar adult volunteers and non-volunteers in the Health and Retirement Study (HRS).

The 2014 RSVP Volunteer Study consisted of a cross-sectional survey of current volunteers. The survey was developed with input from a Field Working Group (FWG) comprised of RSVP project directors, Office of Senior Corps, and Research and Evaluation Office staff. The FWG reviewed preliminary drafts of the survey instrument and was instrumental in developing survey items to measure service activities as classified in CNCS's performance measure categories. The three categories of performance measure classification are: Primary Focus Area, Capacity Building, and Community Priorities. The Primary Focus Area consists of six activities that CNCS considers to be of national priority. These six activities are: Disaster Services, Education, Environmental Stewardship, Economic Opportunity, Healthy Futures, and Veterans and Military Families.

A sample of 1,499 volunteers was drawn from 33 RSVP grantees that reported Periodic Progress Report (PPR) data in April 2013. The sample of volunteers was selected using a two-stage stratified probability proportionate to size (PPS) method. The size measure was based on the number of unduplicated RSVP volunteers. The first stage sampled the 33 grantees using PPS within three strata, which was based on the number of unduplicated volunteers in that stratum. All 33 RSVP grantees participated in the study. The second stage sampled the 1,499 volunteers drawn from the lists of volunteers provided by the 33 grantees. There were 849 volunteers that completed the survey, yielding an overall response rate of 57 percent. Data collection began in December 2014 and ended in July 2015.

The current report focuses on the first objective, which is to describe the characteristics of RSVP volunteers, including how volunteers are distributed across CNCS's performance measure categories, and how volunteers allocated their time to the service activities across the performance measure categories. Specifically this report addresses the following questions:

- 1) What are the demographic and background characteristics of RSVP volunteers?
- 2) What types of service activities do RSVP volunteers engaged in?
- 3) How much time do RSVP volunteers dedicate to their primary service activity?
- 4) Are there differences in volunteers' engagement in service activities by gender, age, and length of service in the RSVP program?

The results from the RSVP Volunteer Survey shows:

- The majority of RSVP volunteers are white, non-veteran, retired, women, with an income between \$20,000 and \$40,000, and have earned a Bachelor's degree.
- RSVP volunteers served, on average, 8 years. Volunteers who are older than 76 have served with the RSVP program, on average, 11 years.
- Approximately 42 percent of RSVP volunteers engaged in national priority service activities such as support older adults maintain independent living in their home or in group care settings, help young children in an educational setting, or assist in adult education. Another 13 percent engaged in Capacity Building activities (see Table 6).
- Men volunteers younger than 65 years of age were more likely than women to engage in national priority service activities as were volunteers younger than 65 years of age.
- Approximately 42 percent of the volunteers engaged in service activities that directly support their communities such as, for example, neighborhood watch or crocheting and sewing to give to the community.
- RSVP volunteers spent approximately 22 hours in the month prior to the survey engaged in their primary service activity.

In future research, the data can be used to fully examine different types of service activities and their relationship to health outcomes. It is well established in the existing literature that volunteering improves health outcomes; however it is not yet well understood whether certain service activities have a stronger relationship with health outcomes. The data collected can begin to shed light on this important question.

# First Report of the National Evaluation of RSVP Volunteers

---

## Background of the RSVP Program

The Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) is a national initiative that engages persons 55 and older in volunteer service to meet critical community needs and to provide a high quality experience that will enrich the lives of the volunteers. RSVP is an outgrowth of efforts by private groups, gerontologists, and government agencies to address the needs of retired persons in America.<sup>1</sup> RSVP was authorized in 1969 under Title VI, Part A, of the Older Americans Act, as amended, and was launched in 1971. RSVP currently operates under Title II, Part A, Section 201, of the Domestic Volunteer Service Act of 1973 which was enacted on October 1, 1973, as amended. During Fiscal Year 2013, RSVP included 210 grantees with over 150,000 volunteers. Funds for the program are used to promote the engagement of older persons as community resources in planning for community improvement and in delivery of volunteer services.<sup>2</sup> The types of services that RSVP volunteers engage in include, for example, organizing neighborhood watch programs, tutoring children and teenagers, renovating homes, teaching English to immigrants, providing companionship to other seniors, helping veterans, teach computer software applications, helping people recover from natural disasters, and serving as museum docents.<sup>3</sup>

In its 2011-2015 Strategic Plan, the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) shifted toward a system where the RSVP grantees organize volunteer services by work plans that are linked to performance measure categories. A work plan is a logically related combination of an activity that leads to an output and a desired outcome. An example of a work plan could be to provide companionship (activity) to individuals needing independent living services (output) to increase the individuals' level of social support (outcome). RSVP has three categories of work plan or performance measure classification: Primary Focus Area, Capacity Building, and Community Priorities. The Primary Focus Area consists of six activities that CNCS considers to be of national priority. These six activities are: Disaster Services, Education, Environmental Stewardship, Economic Opportunity, Healthy Futures, and Veterans and Military Families. CNCS performance measurement requirements set targets for volunteer effort that call for at least 25 percent of volunteers to be working in a Primary Focus Area, and no more than 30 percent working in Community Priorities, and the remainder may be involved in other (non-primary) Capacity Building. CNCS requires grantees to have ten percent of volunteers engage in a work plan that results in outcomes.

Through its Strategic Plan, CNCS identified and developed a set of performance measures for each service activity under the Primary Focus Area as well as for Capacity Building. CNCS has agency-wide priority output and outcome measures for the Primary Focus Area, though other measures are permitted for several objectives. Grantees selecting work plans in Community Priorities (not in the six activities within

---

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/rsvp\\_handbook.pdf](http://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/rsvp_handbook.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.



Primary Focus Area or Capacity Building) are asked to report on their success or failure to achieve self-determined targets.

## **Objective of the RSVP Volunteer Study**

In order to better guide the RSVP program, CNCS needed information on the volunteers' service activities and outcomes. In 2013, CNCS initiated a national evaluation to address three objectives: 1) describe the characteristics of RSVP volunteers, including how volunteers are distributed across the three performance measure categories, and how volunteers allocated their time to their primary service activity across the three performance measure categories; 2) measure the relationship between volunteer characteristics, service activities, and volunteers' psychosocial health; and 3) measure the impact of RSVP national service participation on volunteers' psychosocial health compared to similar adult volunteers and non-volunteers in the Health and Retirement Study (HRS).

This exploratory evaluation, the RSVP Volunteer Study, supports Goals 1 and 2 of CNCS' 2011-2015 Strategic Plan. Goal 1 of the Strategic Plan calls for CNCS to increase the impact of national service in communities served by CNCS-supported programs. Goal 2 calls for CNCS to "strengthen national service so that participants engaged in CNCS-supported programs consistently find satisfaction, meaning, and opportunity."

## **Evaluation Questions**

This report, funded by CNCS, describes the volunteers' characteristics, types of service activities, and hours volunteers engaged in various service activities across the three performance measure categories. The report addresses three primary evaluation questions and one supplementary question:

- 1) What are the demographic and background characteristics of RSVP volunteers?
- 2) What types of service activities do RSVP volunteers engaged in?
- 3) How much do RSVP volunteers allocate to their primary service activity?
- 4) Are there differences in volunteers' engagement in service activities by gender, age, and length of service in the RSVP program?

## **Methods**

The RSVP Volunteer Survey instrument was developed with input from a Field Working Group (FWG) comprised of RSVP project directors, Office of Senior Corps, and Research and Evaluation Office staff. The FWG reviewed preliminary drafts of the survey and was instrumental in developing survey items to measure service activities in the RSVP program.

The respondent universe consisted of volunteers from 33 RSVP grantees that reported Periodic Progress Report (PPR) data in April 2013. A sample of volunteers was selected using a stratified probability proportionate to size (PPS) method. The size measure was based on the number of unduplicated RSVP volunteers. Grantees were stratified into three groups based on their estimated number of unduplicated

volunteers. Large Grantees consisted of those with more than 900 unduplicated volunteers, Medium Grantees consisted of 501-900 volunteers, and Small Grantees consisted of fewer than 500 volunteers. At the first stage of sampling, 33 grantees were selected using PPS within each of the three strata, which was based on the number of unduplicated volunteers in that stratum. All 33 RSVP grantees participated in the study. At the second stage, a random sample of 1,499 volunteers was drawn from the lists of volunteers provided by the sampled grantees. Among the sampled volunteers, grantees provided contact information for 1,336 volunteers. There were 849 volunteers that completed the survey, yielding an overall response rate of 57 percent. Data collection began in December 2014 and ended in July 2015.

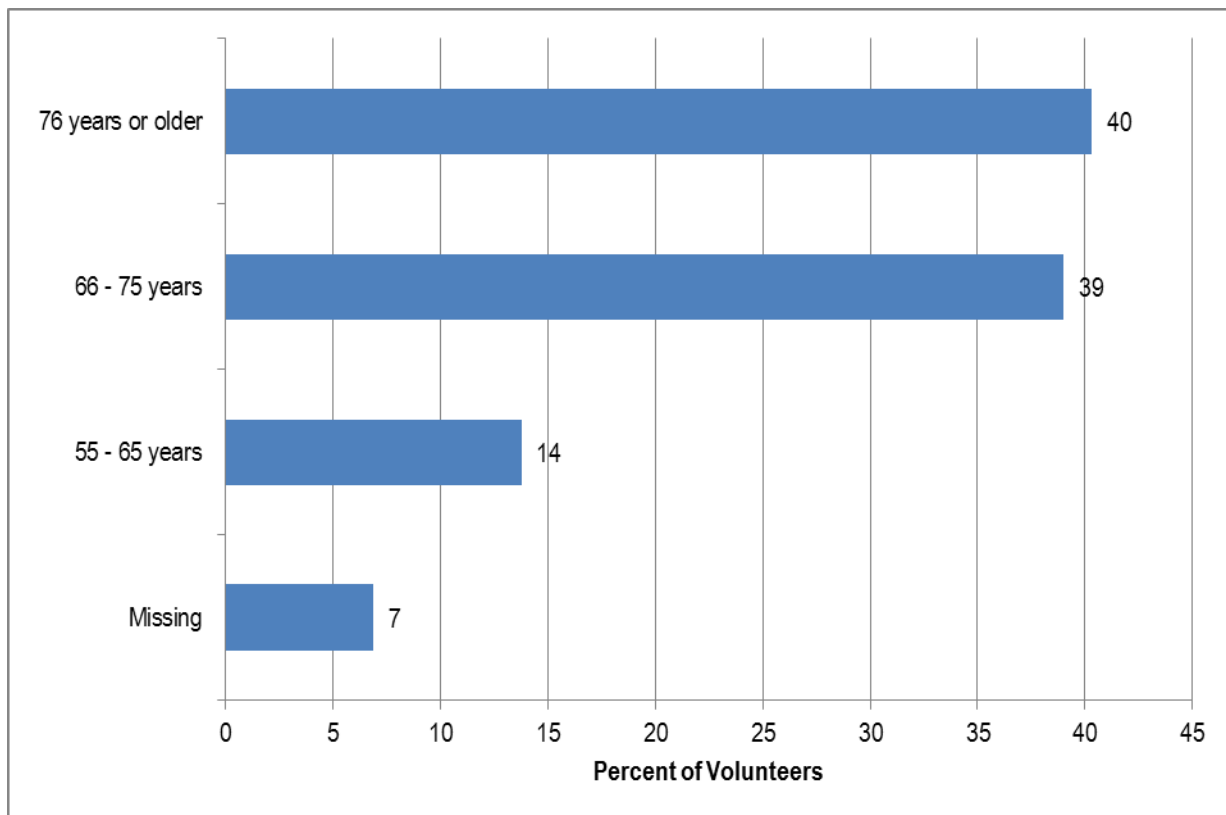
# Findings

## Characteristics of Volunteers

The average age of an RSVP volunteer is 74 years old; the youngest is 55 and the oldest is 102. The majority of volunteers are white, non-veteran, retired, women, with an income between \$20,000 and \$40,000, and have earned Bachelor's degrees.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of RSVP volunteers by age. About 40 percent of the volunteers are 76 years or older; 39 percent are between 66 and 75 years old; and 14 percent are between 55 and 65 years old.

Figure 1 Distribution of RSVP Volunteers by Age



The majority of volunteers are female. Seventy-two percent of the volunteers are female and 25 percent are male (Figure 2).

**Figure 2 Gender Distribution of RSVP Volunteers**

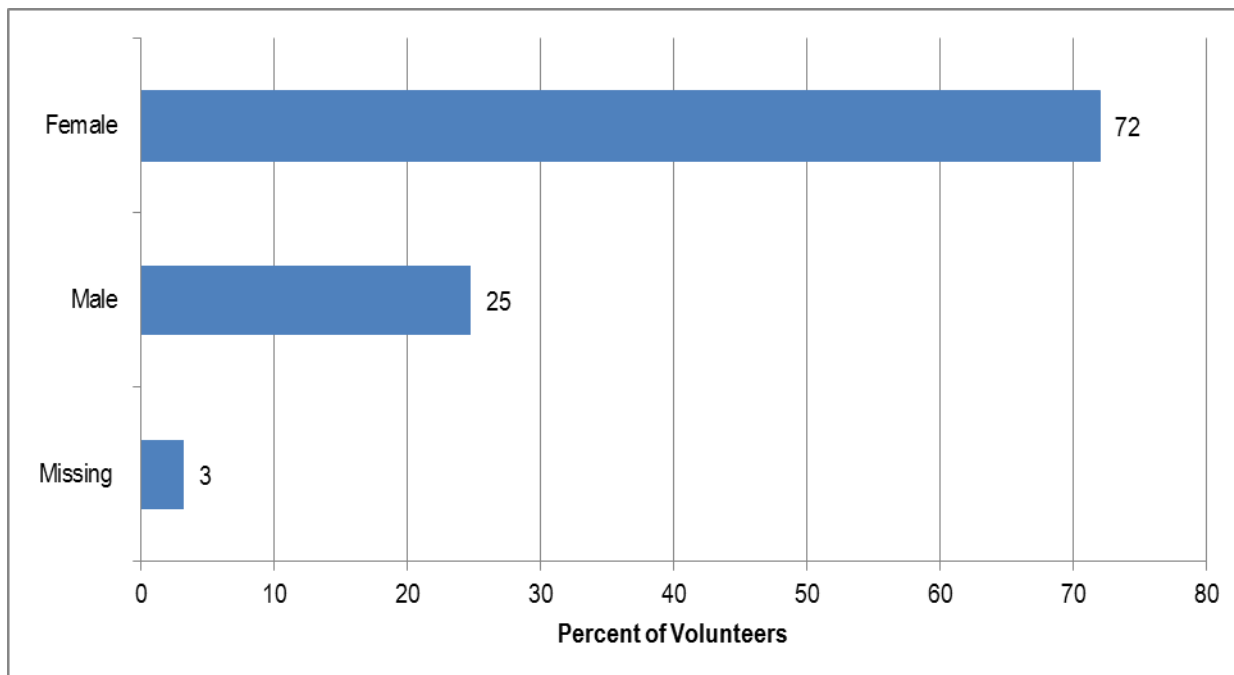


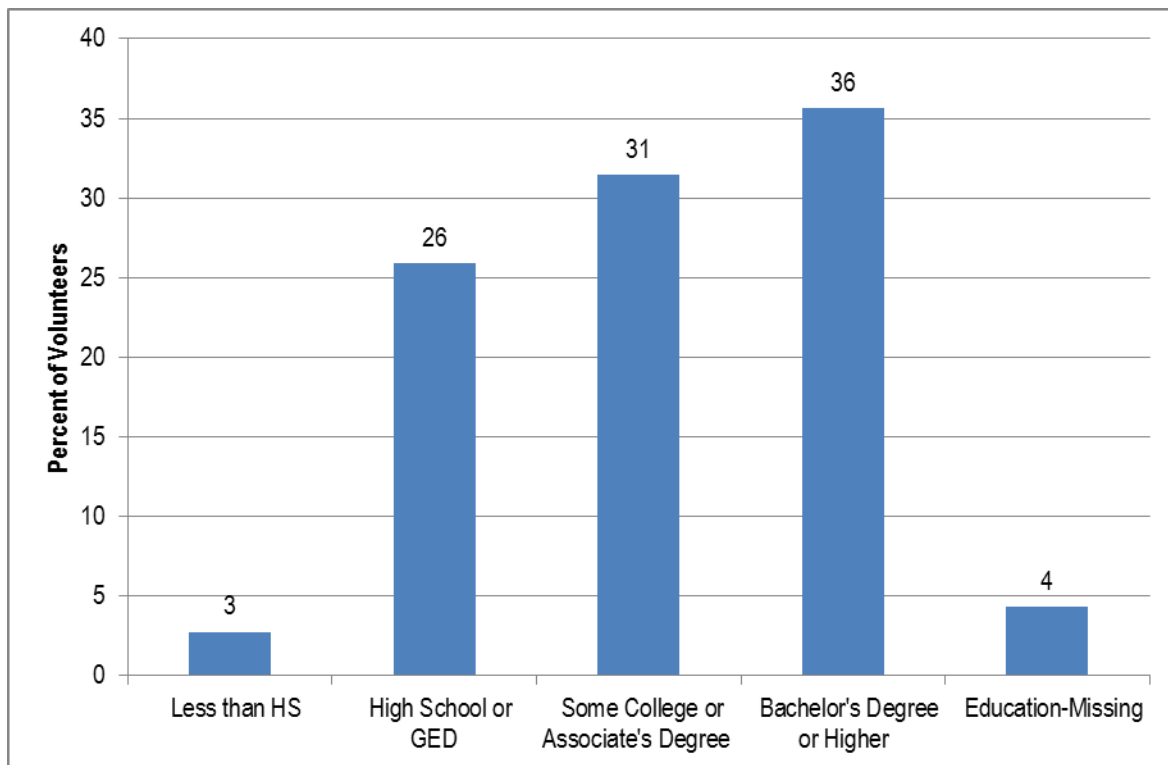
Table 1 shows the race and ethnic composition of RSVP volunteers. About 87 percent of volunteers are white, 4 percent are African American, less than 1 percent are Asian, Native American, or self-identify as “Other race.” Three percent of volunteers are Pacific Islanders, 2 percent chose more than one race, and 3 percent are of Hispanic descent.

**Table 1 Race and Ethnic Composition of RSVP Volunteers**

Race	Percent (%)
<b>White</b>	86.7
<b>African-American</b>	4.1
<b>Asian</b>	0.3
<b>Pacific Islander</b>	2.7
<b>Native American</b>	0.7
<b>Multi-Race</b>	2.2
<b>Other Race</b>	0.8
<b>Race-Missing</b>	2.5
Ethnicity	
<b>Hispanic</b>	2.9
<b>Non-Hispanic</b>	92.8
<b>Ethnicity-Missing</b>	4.2

RSVP volunteers have high levels of educational attainment; more than two-thirds (67%) have completed some college. As shown in Figure 3, three percent of volunteers have less than a high school education, 26 percent graduated from high school, 31 percent have some college or an Associate’s degree but no Bachelor’s degree, and about 36 percent of volunteers graduated from college or earned an advanced degree.

**Figure 3 . Educational Attainment of RSVP Volunteers**



The majority of RSVP volunteers reported their current income to be less than \$60,000. As shown in Table 2, 14 percent of volunteers earned less than \$20,000 in the year prior to the survey. Almost one-third earned more than \$20,000 but less than \$60,000 in the year prior to the survey. Approximately 10 percent earned more than \$60,000 but less than \$100,000, and 6 percent earned more than \$100,000 in the year prior to the survey. Sixteen percent earned more than \$20,000 but did not specify an amount. About 23 percent of the volunteers did not report their income.

**Table 2 Income of RSVP Volunteers**

Income Range	Percent (%)
Less than \$20,000	14.44
More than \$20,000	
Above \$20,000 (Not Specified)	15.89
Between \$20,000 but less than \$40,000	18.50
Between \$40,000 but less than \$60,000	13.42
Between \$60,000 but less than \$80,000	6.06
Between \$80,000 but less than \$100,000	3.46
Above \$100,000	5.50
Income-Missing	22.72

As shown in Figure 4, slightly more than half (51%) of the volunteers are married; 29 percent are widowed; 11 percent are separated or divorced; 5 percent of volunteers are single; and 4 percent either did not respond or did not classify themselves in any of the marital status categories.

**Figure 4 Marital Status of RSVP Volunteers**

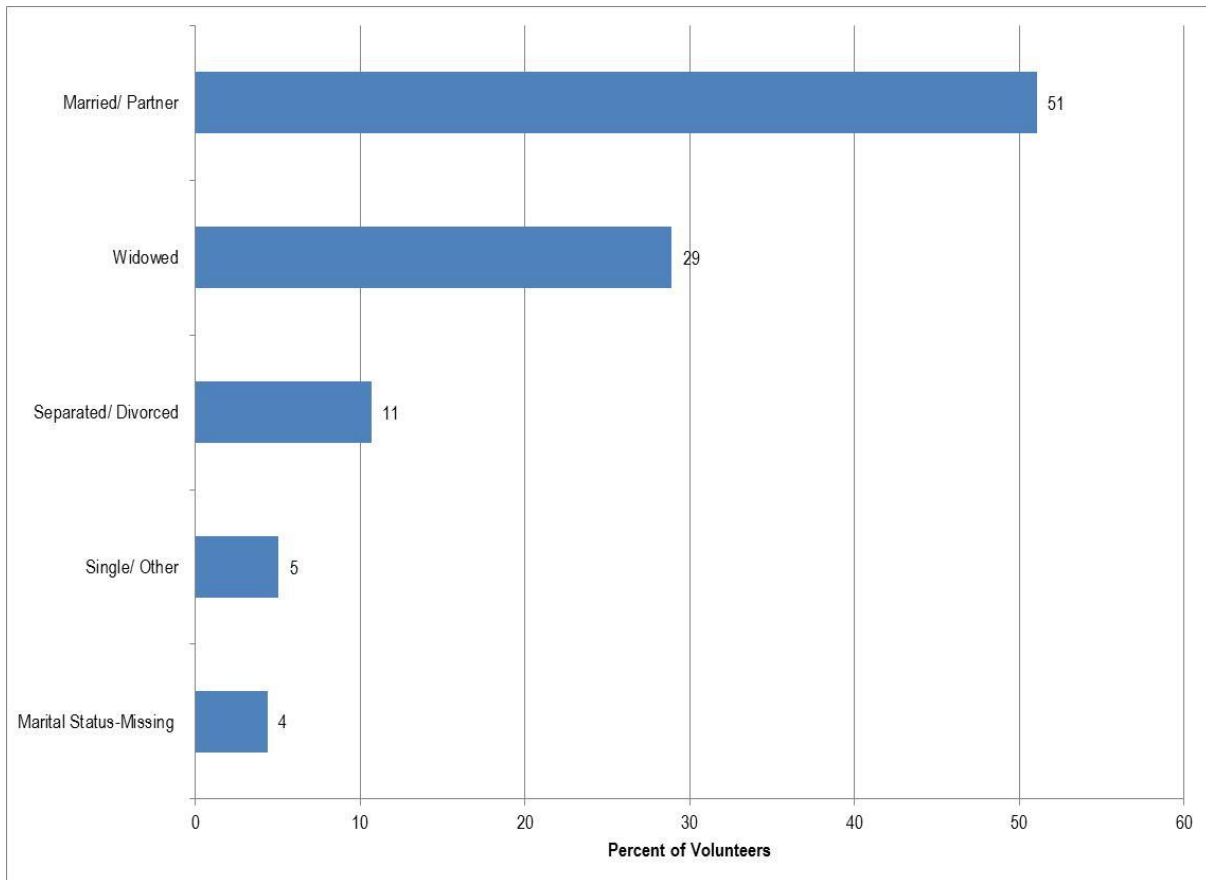
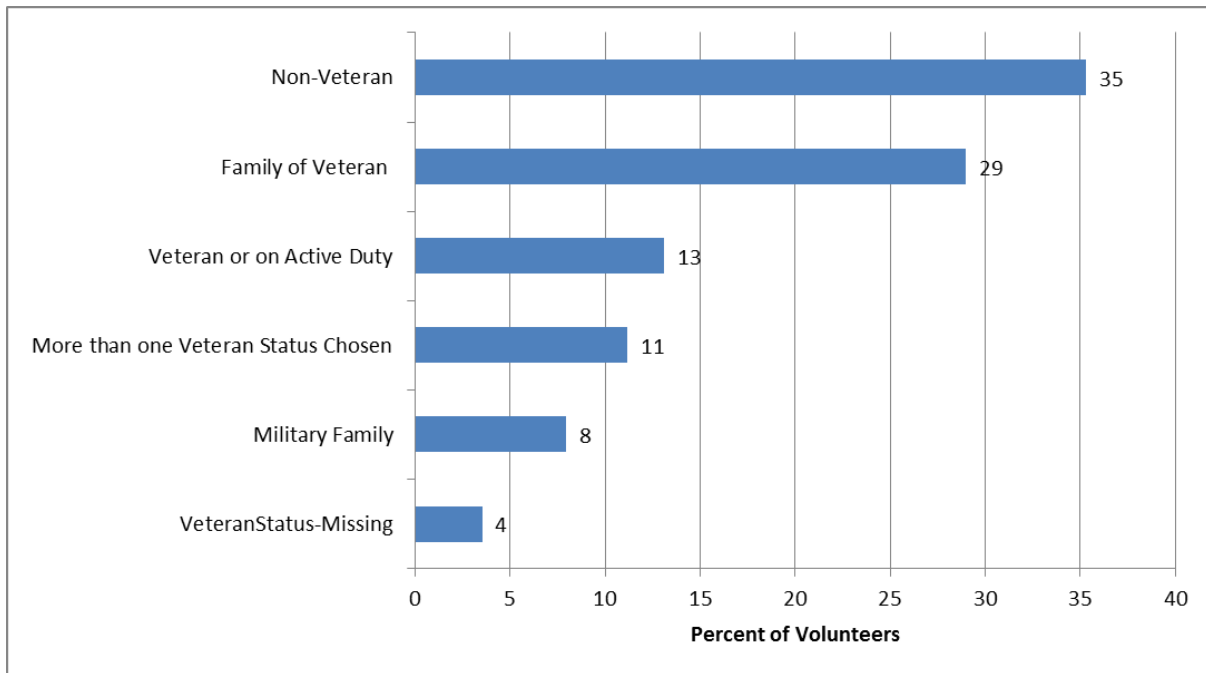


Figure 5 shows the veteran status of volunteers. More than 60 percent of RSVP volunteers have either a family member who is a veteran or are veterans themselves. Thirty-five percent reported they are not veterans, 29 percent are family members of a veteran, 13 percent are veterans or on active duty, 8 percent reported they are a military family, and 11 percent chose more than one veteran status.

**Figure 5 Veteran Status of RSVP Volunteers**



The RSVP Volunteer Survey collected information on employment status (see Tables 3 and 4). As shown in Table 3, 31 percent are retired, 3 percent are currently employed, and another 3 percent reported they are homemakers. Approximately 60 percent of the volunteers reported more than one employment status.

**Table 3 Employment Status of RSVP Volunteers**

Employment Status	Percent (%)
Currently Employed	3.3
Retired	30.8
Homemaker	2.8
Employment Status- Missing	3.4
More than one Employment Status	59.7

As shown in Table 4, among the volunteers that chose more than one employment status, many are retired and combined their retirement with work or being a homemaker. Seventy-three percent of volunteers who reported more than one employment status reported being both retired and a homemaker. Approximately 4 percent of volunteers reported being disabled and retired.

**Table 4 RSVP Volunteers with more than One Employment Status**

<b>Employment Status</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
<b>Working</b>	
<b>Working and Retired and Homemaker</b>	3.8
<b>Working and Retired</b>	3.9
<b>Working and Homemaker</b>	2.7
<b>Disabled</b>	
<b>Disabled and Retired and Homemaker</b>	12.2
<b>Disabled and Retired</b>	4.4
<b>Retired</b>	
<b>Retired and Homemaker</b>	72.9

## **Length of Service and Types of Service Activities**

This section discusses findings on the volunteers' length of service with RSVP, the volunteers' primary service activity with RSVP, as well as the amount of time they spent engaged in their primary service activity.

### ***Length of Service with RSVP***

The average length of service for an RSVP volunteer is 8 years (see Table 5). The longest year of service is 29 years.

**Table 5 Average Number of Years of Service as a RSVP Volunteer**

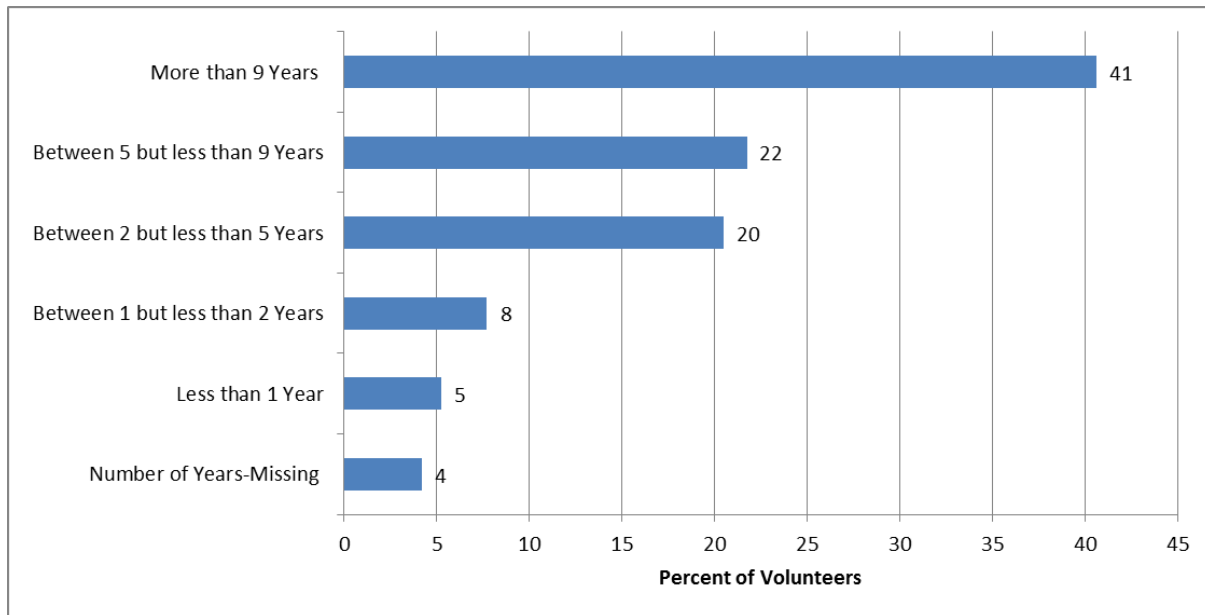
	<b>Average</b>
<b>Average Number of Years of Service</b>	8.2
<b>Range of Years</b>	0-29
<b>Number of Years of Service – Missing</b>	4.2

*Note: 0 years of RSVP volunteer experience indicates less than 1 year of service.*

As shown in Figure 6, about 5 percent have been serving for less than one year. Eight percent have been serving for at least one year, but less than two years; and about 41 percent have served for more than 9 years.



**Figure 6 Average Length of Service with RSVP**



The RSVP Volunteer Survey collected information on all service activities in each of the three performance measure categories. The Primary Focus Area consists of six focus areas: Healthy Futures, Education, Environmental Stewardship, Economic Opportunity, Veterans and Military Families, and Disaster Services. The other two performance measure categories and remaining two focus areas are Capacity Building and Community Priorities.

The RSVP Volunteer Survey asked volunteers about the service activity in which they spent the most amount of time in the month prior to the survey. This activity is considered as the volunteers' primary service activity. Table 6 shows the volunteers' primary service activity.

**Table 6 Primary Service Activity of RSVP Volunteers**

	Percent (%)
<b>National Priority Service Activities (Primary Focus Area)</b>	
Healthy Futures: Access to Care	7.9
Healthy Futures: Aging in Place	18.4
Education: School Readiness	1.2
Education: K-12 Success	7.2
Economic Opportunity	4.4
Veterans and Military Families	1.7
Disaster Services Assistance	1.5
Capacity Building	13.2
Community Priorities	41.9
Primary Service Activity-Missing	2.6

Approximately 42 percent of RSVP volunteers engaged in national priority service activities such as support older adults to maintain independent living in their own home or in group care settings, help young children in an educational setting, and support other volunteers at social service and volunteer agencies.

As shown in Table 6, within the Primary Focus Area, 18 percent of volunteers spent the most amount of time in Healthy Futures: Aging in Place, and another 8 percent spent the most amount of time in Healthy Futures: Access to Care. Seven percent reported Education: K-12 Success activities; and about one percent of volunteers reported School Readiness. Another eight percent reported Disaster Service Assistance, Economic Opportunity, or Veterans and Military Families Served as their primary volunteer activity. Thirteen percent reported spending the most amount of time in Capacity Building activities. About 42 percent spent the most amount of time in Community Priorities service activities. Approximately 35 percent of the volunteers engaged solely in activities classified as Community Priorities; 7 percent of the volunteers engaged in Community Priorities also engaged in a national priority activity or Capacity Building as a secondary activity.

### ***Hours Engaged in Primary Service Activity***

Volunteers reported the number of hours they spent in the month prior to the survey engaged in their primary service activity.

As shown in Table 7, RSVP volunteers that identified Healthy Futures: Access to Care spent about 21 hours, on average, volunteering with people living in group care situations. Similarly, volunteers that identified Healthy Futures: Aging in Place as their primary service activity spent, on average, 21 hours in the month prior to the survey engaged in that service activity. Volunteers in the Education: K-12 Success focus area spent about 17 hours helping children or youths with their academic skills. The volunteers that identified their primary service activity as Capacity Building spent, on average, 16 hours in that activity. Volunteers that primarily served under Community Priorities spent about 21 hours engaged in those activities.

**Table 7 Average Number of Hours Engaged in the Primary Service Activity**

	Range	Average
<b>Primary Focus Area</b>		
Healthy Futures: Access to Care	2-62	20.7
Healthy Futures: Aging in Place	1-111	21.4
Education K-12 Success	0-100	16.8
Capacity Building	0-80	16.3 <sup>a</sup>
Community Priorities	0-200	21.1

*Note: Not all activities are shown due to a high percentage of non-response for the questions on hours engaged in the primary service activity. A useful measure of an estimate's reliability is the relative standard error (RSE). RSE is calculated by dividing the standard error by the estimate; then multiplied by 100 to be expressed as a percentage. Some of the estimates should be interpreted with caution because they have RSE between 31 and 50 percent. Values to be interpreted with caution are identified with a superscript 'a'.*

While some respondents could recall the number of hours that they served with RSVP in the month prior to the survey, others could not remember exact hours and reported a range of hours (i.e., 1 hour, between 2

and 3 hours, between 4 and 5 hours, and more than 5 hours). Some categories of hours were subsequently collapsed due to a small number of responses for that category.

On average, irrespective of the primary service activity, RSVP volunteers engaged in national priority service activities spent at least 5 hours in that activity (Table 8). For example, more than half of volunteers in Aging in Place, Access to Care, and Education spent 5 hours or more in service.

**Table 8 Distribution of Hours in Primary Service Activity**

	Percent
<b><i>Aging in Place</i></b>	
<b><i>Between 1 but less than 5 Hours</i></b>	11.9
<b><i>More than 5 Hours</i></b>	70.9
<b><i>Number of Hours-Missing</i></b>	17.23
<b><i>Access to Care</i></b>	
<b><i>Between 1 but less than 5 Hours</i></b>	8.4
<b><i>More than 5 Hours</i></b>	51.1
<b><i>Number of Hours-Missing</i></b>	40.5
<b><i>Education: K-12 Success</i></b>	
<b><i>Between 1 but less than 3 Hours</i></b>	14.1
<b><i>Between 3 but less than 5 Hours</i></b>	8.4
<b><i>More than 5 Hours</i></b>	54.3
<b><i>Number of Hours-Missing</i></b>	24.2
<b><i>Capacity Building</i></b>	
<b><i>Between 1 but less than 3 Hours</i></b>	4.4
<b><i>Between 3 but less than 5 Hours</i></b>	9.7
<b><i>More than 5 Hours</i></b>	25.9
<b><i>Number of Hours-Missing</i></b>	59.9
<b><i>Community Priorities</i></b>	
<b><i>Between 1 but less than 3 Hours</i></b>	2.9
<b><i>Between 3 but less than 5 Hours</i></b>	4.1
<b><i>More than 5 Hours</i></b>	43.5
<b><i>Number of Hours-Missing</i></b>	49.5

*Note: Not all activities are shown due to a high percentage of item non-response.*

The supplementary question for this report is to describe the differences in volunteers' engagement in service activities by gender, age, and length of service with the RSVP program.

## Differences by Gender

As shown in Table 9, women and men did not differ significantly by age or length of service with RSVP. The average age is 74 years for women, and 73 years for men. On average, women have volunteered with RSVP for about 9 years compared to 7 years for men.

**Table 9 Average Age and Length of Service with RSVP by Gender**

	Male	Female	Significance
<b>Average Age</b>	73.3	73.8	0.3
<b>Average Length of Service (Years)</b>	7.3	8.5	0.3

Given the small number of men volunteers, comparison of engagement in specific service activity (e.g., Healthy Futures, Education) between women and men is limited. In order to have a large enough sample for comparison, the six national priority service activities were combined under one group as Primary Focus Area; the other two groups of service activities are Capacity Building and Community Priorities. Table 10 shows a significantly higher percentage of men engaged in national priority service activities compared to women (50% versus 41%). A significantly lower percentage of men compared to women engaged in Community Priorities as their primary service activity this activity.

**Table 10 Primary Service Activity, by Gender**

	Male (%)	Female (%)	Significance
<b>National Priority Service Activities (Primary Focus Area)</b>	50.2	41.5	0.02
<b>Capacity Building</b>	14.0	13.3	0.80
<b>Community Priorities</b>	35.8	45.2	0.02

## Differences by Age

Table 11 compares length of service with RSVP and engagement in service activities by volunteers' age. The youngest cohort (55-65 year olds) has, on average, the fewest number of years with RSVP, about 4 years. This is not unexpected given that the RSVP program requires volunteers to be at least 55 years old. Volunteers who are older than 76 years have been in service with RSVP, on average, 11 years; volunteers between 66 and 75 have remained in service for almost 7 years. Those estimates suggest that, on average, individuals begin service around age 65.

The distribution of volunteers across the three performance measure categories does differ by age. A significantly higher proportion of the youngest volunteer cohort (55-65 year olds) served in national priority such as education and support older adults maintain independent living in their own home; and a significantly lower proportion of the youngest cohort engaged in Community Priorities activities compared to

older volunteers. Conversely, a significantly lower proportion of the older volunteer cohort (76 years of age and older) engaged in national priority service activities, and a significantly higher proportion of the older cohort engaged in Community Priorities. Further examination of the youngest cohort showed that while they were not significantly different in their background characteristics (e.g., race, gender, education, marital status) they did, on average, report significantly higher incomes relative to RSVP volunteers older than age 65 (results not shown).

**Table 11 Average Length of Service and Primary Service Activity, by Age**

	Age 55-65		Age 66-75		Age 76 and Older	
	Mean	Significance	Mean	Significance	Mean	Significance
<b>Average Length of Service (Years)</b>	4.4	<0.001	6.6	<0.001	10.9	<0.001
<b>Primary Service Activity</b>						
<b>National Priority Service Activities (Primary Focus Area)</b>	0.57	0.01	0.46	0.49	0.39	0.01
<b>Capacity Building</b>	0.14	0.81	0.12	0.48	0.14	0.61
<b>Community Priorities</b>	0.29	0.002	0.42	0.84	0.47	0.02

## Differences by Length of Service

Tables 12 to 14 compares service activities by length of service with RSVP. Volunteers who have served between 1 and 2 years are significantly more likely to engage in national priority service activities (see Table 12). The volunteers that have served less than 2 years are also the youngest cohort between age 55 and 65. On the other hand, those in service for 9 years or more were significantly less likely to engage in national priority service activities and more likely to engage in Community Priorities, as shown in Table 14.

**Table 12 Distribution of Volunteers across Performance Measure Categories, Volunteers Serving 1 to 2 Years**

	Mean	Significance
<b>National Priority Service (Primary Focus Area)</b>	0.55	0.002
<b>Capacity Building</b>	0.09 <sup>a</sup>	0.08
<b>Community Priorities</b>	0.36	0.03

**Table 13 Distribution of Volunteers across Performance Measure Categories, Volunteers Serving 3 to 5 Years**

	Mean	Significance
<b>National Priority Service (Primary Focus Area)</b>	0.45	0.69
<b>Capacity Building</b>	0.1 <sup>a</sup>	0.35
<b>Community Priorities</b>	0.45	0.84

**Table 14 Distribution of Volunteers across Performance Measure Categories, Volunteers Serving 6 to 9 Years**

No. of Years in RSVP	Mean	Significance
<b>National Priority Service (Primary Focus Area)</b>	0.41	0.57
<b>Capacity Building</b>	0.13 <sup>a</sup>	0.97
<b>Community Priorities</b>	0.46	0.59

**Table 15 Distribution of Volunteers across Performance Measure Categories, Volunteers Serving 9 or more Years**

	Mean	Significance
<b>National Priority Service (Primary Focus Area)</b>	0.34	<0.0001
<b>Capacity Building</b>	0.16	0.03
<b>Community Priorities</b>	0.5	0.02

*Note: A useful measure of an estimate's reliability is the relative standard error (RSE). RSE is calculated by dividing the standard error by the estimate; then multiplied by 100 to be expressed as a percentage. Some of the estimates should be interpreted with caution because they have RSE between 31 and 50 percent. Values to be interpreted with caution are identified with a superscript 'a'.*

## Summary and Discussion

CNCS's goal is to increase the impact of national service in communities served by CNCS-supported programs. The RSVP Volunteer Study contributes to CNCS's efforts to assess the effectiveness of Senior Corps Programs and to build grantee capacity to contribute to the evidence base for informed decision-making and allocation of resources. The RSVP Volunteer Study will assist CNCS to assess the performance of RSVP at the national level.

This report was guided by three primary evaluation questions. The first question examined the demographic and background characteristics of RSVP volunteers. The results showed that the majority of RSVP volunteers are white, non-veteran, retired, women, with an income between \$20,000 and \$40,000, and have earned a bachelor's degree.

The second question examined RSVP volunteers' length of service with RSVP, the type of service activities volunteers engaged in, and the amount of time volunteers spent in their primary service activity. The results showed that RSVP volunteers tended to remain in service for a long time, serving on average 8 years. In particular, volunteers who are older than 76 have been serving with the RSVP program an average of 11 years. These estimates suggest that on average volunteers begin national service with RSVP around age 65, or perhaps once they retire.

The analysis showed that more than two-fifth (42%) of RSVP volunteers engaged in national priority service activities (Healthy Futures where volunteers support older adults maintain independent living in their home or in group care settings, Education where volunteers help young children in an educational setting or assist adult education such teach English). Men were more likely than women to engage in national priority service activities those types of service activities, as were volunteers younger than 65 years of age. An additional 13 percent of RSVP volunteers served in activities classified as Capacity Building.

An additional 42 percent of the volunteers engaged in service activities that directly support their communities but do not necessarily lead to other national performance measures as defined by CNCS. These activities classified as Community Priorities activities may include, for example, neighborhood watch program or crocheting and sewing to give to the community.

The last question examined the amount of time volunteers engaged in their primary service activity. On average, RSVP volunteers spent approximately 22 hours in the month prior to the survey engaged in their service activity.

## Future Research

The strength of the data used for this analysis is that it allows for future research to measure the association between types of service activities and their relationship to the volunteers' health outcomes. It is well established in the existing literature that volunteering improves health outcomes; however, it is not



yet well understood whether certain volunteer activities have a stronger relationship with health outcomes. The RSVP Volunteer Study can begin to shed light on this important question.



Corporation for National and Community Service  
1201 New York Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20525

TEL: (202) 606-5000  
TTY: (202) 606-3472

[info@cns.gov](mailto:info@cns.gov)

[NationalService.gov](http://NationalService.gov)