



CASE STUDY

Volunteer Generation Fund Evaluation: Volunteer Iowa



BUNDLED EVALUATION AND CAPACITY BUILDING PROJECT

The Iowa state service commission, the Iowa Commission on Volunteer Service (Volunteer Iowa), participated in the AmeriCorps Volunteer Generation Fund (VGF) evaluation through several different phases, including focus groups/interviews with commission staff, program implementers, and program beneficiaries; and a program beneficiaries survey.^{1,2} In addition to the evaluation data collection activities noted, the following case study brief incorporates additional data sources from VGF grant applications and progress reports as well as longitudinal data from the AmeriCorps Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement. Exhibit 1 provides an overview of each of the data sources that were used to inform the following brief.

¹ The VGF grantee, Volunteer Iowa, also served as the primary program implementer for VGF programming and services.

² For the Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey, the state service commission had a 29% response rate with a total of 12 individual respondents representing 10 unique organizations. Across survey participants, there was substantial variation in reported average number of volunteers; 11% reported fewer than 10 volunteers; 11% reported 10–20 volunteers; 11% reported 21–30 volunteers; 33% reported 30–50 volunteers; 11% reported 50–100 volunteers; and 22% reported 100 or more volunteers.

EXHIBIT 1.—Overview of data sources

Data Source	Participant Count	Date Collected
Grant Application	–	May 2020
Fiscal Year (FY)2020 and FY2021 VGF Progress Reports	–	July 2021 and December 2021
AmeriCorps Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement	–	September 2017, 2019, and 2021
Program Director Interview – Volunteer Iowa	1	February 2022
Program Implementer Interview – Volunteer Iowa	1	October 2022
Beneficiaries Focus Group – Service Enterprise Hub and Volunteer Center	1	October 2022
Beneficiaries Focus Group – Volunteer Center	1	October 2022
Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey – Volunteer Engagement Training Program and Skills Based Volunteering Bootcamp Webinar Series	12	April 2023
Final Commission Interview – Volunteer Iowa	1	July 2023

Overview of Grant Structure and Goals

Volunteer Iowa is using the VGF grant to accomplish two primary objectives as outlined below:

- Strengthening Iowa's volunteer infrastructure by enhancing and expanding statewide and local resources for increasing volunteer engagement capacity. Volunteer Iowa is supporting volunteer centers of Iowa³ and other local institutions to connect citizens with opportunities to serve, increase capacity of local organizations to engage volunteers in meaningful service, promote volunteering, develop local programming that leverages volunteers to meet community needs, and strengthen the network of Service Enterprise Hubs.
- Piloting new initiatives to meet emerging needs around disaster response, strengthening rural cities, and empowering youth as Iowa's newest volunteer force. Volunteer Iowa is supporting emerging needs around disaster response and youth volunteering by developing toolkits, hosting workshops paired with ongoing learning cohorts, and providing implementation funding.

An overview of the status of each key initiative supporting these objectives is included below, as described by Volunteer Iowa.

Volunteer Centers: Volunteer Iowa planned to fund 5–10 continuing and new volunteer centers, with 6 centers ultimately funded. Volunteer centers were expected to partner with local emergency management to support volunteerism in times of disaster; identify programming in an AmeriCorps focus area to address community need; offer volunteer management training; engage employers in creating skills-based volunteer opportunities; support community volunteer recognition; conduct Day of Service projects; build relationships

³ Volunteer Centers of Iowa is a statewide network of volunteer centers located in communities across the state. For more information, please visit <https://www.volunteeriowa.org/organizations/volunteer-centers-iowa#:~:text=If%20you%20are%20interested%20in,your%20community%2C%20contact%20Volunteer%20Iowa.>

with local nonprofits, schools, and governments to learn about volunteer needs and refer volunteers; and utilize the statewide online volunteer connector site Get Connected.

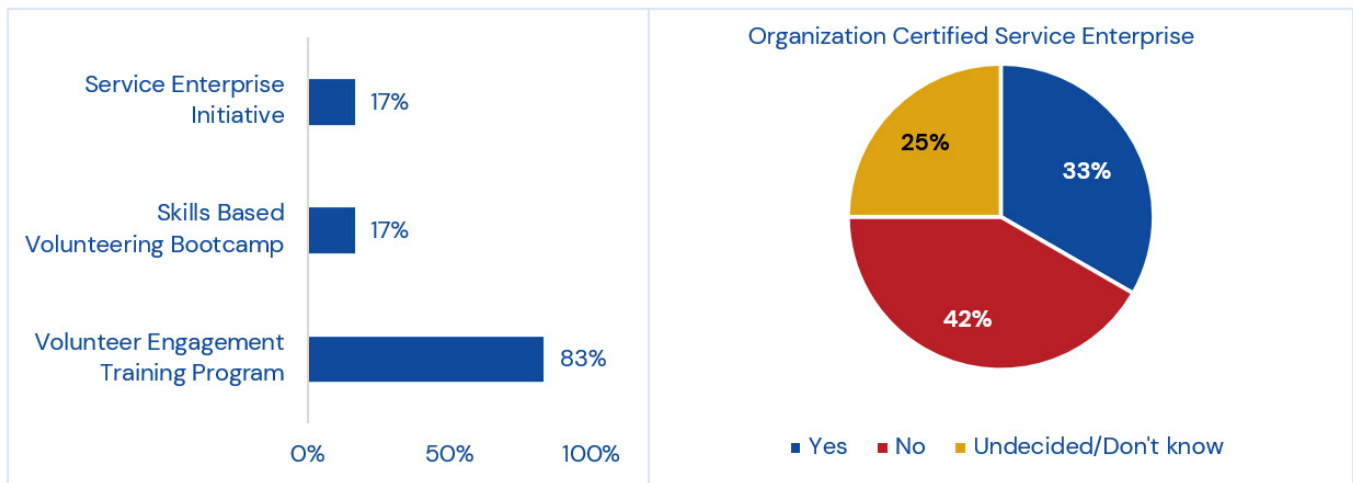
Statewide Training and Resources: Volunteer Iowa planned to provide additional training, technical assistance, and resources statewide in partnership with volunteer centers. Through the partnership, Volunteer Iowa and the volunteer centers supported regular networking and professional development opportunities for volunteer centers and other organizations within the state. Volunteer Iowa utilized a “train the trainer” approach to provide these organizations with the skills and knowledge needed to provide volunteer management training and technical assistance to the local organizations they served. Offered trainings were intentionally structured to meet participants where they were and create a pipeline for gaining more advanced knowledge of volunteer management. The Volunteer Engagement Training Program served as an introduction for participants who are in the beginning stages of volunteer engagement. The Skills Based Volunteering Bootcamp Webinar Series was geared towards serving those with more intermediate knowledge of volunteer management. The goal for this pipeline was that Volunteer Engagement Training Program participants could next participate in the bootcamp series, culminating in organizational participation in Service Enterprise. Volunteer Iowa staff shared that through this structure they were able to help connect training participants to the next level of training opportunity.

Volunteer Center Partnerships & Practices

- Facilitates a board member matching program to provide support for organizations seeking university representation on their boards.
- Provides free registration for community education courses to volunteers in recognition of their service.
- Host “Draft Day” to help local community events and festivals recruit new volunteers.

Additionally, statewide online training was available for organizations without access to a local volunteer center. ICF and Volunteer Iowa administered a survey to individuals who had participated in at least one of two training initiatives—the Volunteer Engagement Training Program and the Skills Based Volunteering Bootcamp Webinar Series. Most respondents (83 percent) indicated they had participated in the Volunteer Engagement Training Program; one-third (33 percent) of respondents were from organizations who were Service Enterprise certified. Exhibit 2 provides additional details on the types of activities respondents participated in through VGF grant activities.

EXHIBIT 2.—Volunteer training participation & Service Enterprise certification (n=12)



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in April 2023.

A Note on Program Beneficiaries

In the context of this case study, “program beneficiaries” include volunteer centers (VCs) and organizations that took part in Volunteer Iowa’s initiatives, including receiving funding for expanding capacity and coverage of VCs, and participating in the Service Enterprise program, youth service-learning programs, city volunteer pilot, the Volunteer Management in Disaster Infrastructure Development Project, and additional statewide trainings.

Service Enterprise: Volunteer Iowa and five volunteer centers serve as Service Enterprise Hubs. VGF funds were used to support costs of licensing, applications, and other associated fees. Participating Service Enterprise Hubs received \$2,500 to be used for costs associated with the program (e.g., traveling, supplies, staff). VGF funds were to be matched by the hubs using non-federal funds. Over the 3-year VGF cycle, Volunteer Iowa anticipated supporting over 60 organizations in achieving their Service Enterprise certifications.

School Service-Learning: At 10 schools across the state, Volunteer Iowa had planned to pilot an evidence informed School Service-Learning program, providing grants and trainings to recipients. However, Volunteer Iowa staff noted it quickly became apparent schools were struggling with the impacts of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and the proposed model was not well-suited for the current needs and context of the schools. To expand the quality of youth service-learning in Iowa, Volunteer Iowa established stakeholder committees comprising nonprofit

partners, out-of-school time programs, K-12 schools, and youth and youth-serving organizations or clubs. Within these committees, barriers to service-learning were identified and findings were utilized to direct work moving forward. Statewide webinars and related toolkits were shared with the goal of fostering an awareness and interest in youth service-learning across the many different sectors that serve youth and are impacted by service-learning.

City Volunteer Engagement: In partnership with the Iowa League of Cities, Volunteer Iowa was planning to pilot an evidence informed model intended to leverage citizens as volunteers to solve local problems, but this initiative was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. When the pilot was implemented in 2023, nine local governments participated in the pilot in teams of three, at minimum. Teams attended four virtual sessions and one in-person session, followed by four coaching calls to support the implementation of action plans. Participants developed new volunteer position descriptions, gained new recruitment and recognition ideas, and learned how to measure volunteer impact. A train-the-trainer program for future facilitators was held concurrently with the training, building statewide capacity to expand offerings in the future.

Disaster Response: As part of the Volunteer Management in Disaster Infrastructure Development Project, Volunteer Iowa collaborated with state Emergency Management and Iowa’s Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters to recruit and train Volunteer Reception Center trainers across the state. Additionally, the project developed resource guides and “go kits” for the community, encouraged public pre-registration on Get Connected for disaster volunteers, and provided trainings on how to utilize the Get Connected platform and resources during a disaster.

Recent Volunteerism Trends in Iowa and Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic

According to the 2021 AmeriCorps Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement, almost one-third (30 percent) of Iowa residents formally volunteered through organizations, substantially higher than the national rate (23 percent) of individuals who formally volunteered. However, in Iowa, this was a decline compared to the 2017 and 2019 rates of 42 percent and 33 percent, respectively. In the state, formal volunteering contributed \$1.3 billion in economic value. Alternatively, informal volunteering

has increased over time. Informally, over half (60 percent) of residents noted they helped others by exchanging favors with their neighbors, a slight increase from 2017 (57 percent) and 2019 (57 percent). Additionally, Volunteer Iowa partnered with the Iowa Healthiest State Initiative to include a question in the statewide annual Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey (BRFSS) focused on volunteerism. Volunteer Iowa staff noted this provided annual representative data of volunteer rates within the state as well as correlations with volunteerism and health and behaviors, such as TV viewing. Comparing 2019 pre-COVID numbers to 2021, Volunteer Iowa saw a significant decrease in volunteer rates, especially among women, those without a high school diploma, and those 75–84 years old. Volunteer Iowa staff said information from the BRFSS informed the development of Iowa's State Service Plan and was being used to identify potential barriers and inform programming and resources developed.

Volunteer Iowa also stressed the impact the pandemic has had on volunteerism in the state as 37 percent of the state's volunteers were 55 years or older, and therefore more at risk from severe impacts of COVID-19. Volunteers were also often supporting food pantries, which saw an increase in need for volunteers during the pandemic. At the commission level, some planned initiatives were put on pause due to the pandemic, such as the City Volunteer Engagement initiative. Similarly, Volunteer Iowa staff noted with the service-learning initiative, it became clear during the pandemic that community members were overwhelmed; staff noted it was challenging to ask people to start a new task when they already had too much on their plates. Therefore, Volunteer Iowa was "monitoring to see, is now the best time to do [the service-learning initiative] because we want to make sure that when we do it, it's something that will be successful and be given its best chance to do well." From the perspective of one participating volunteer center, they noted during the pandemic that they focused their supports on helping organizations understand best practices for virtually engaging volunteers and incorporating safety protocols within volunteering.

Volunteer Iowa staff also noted that they heard that the pandemic also caused many of their subgrantees to modify their approach. For example, one of their subgrantees leads a volunteer tax assistance program. During the pandemic, they transitioned to a curbside drop-off and pick-up model as a social distancing measure. This model ended up being more efficient than their previous processes and preferred by both volunteers and clients. The subgrantee is continuing to use this process even as the effects of the pandemic have subsided.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Broadly, Volunteer Iowa incorporated diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) into all of the commission programs, predominantly through regional trainings in which all commission programs participated. A Volunteer Iowa staff member described:

We invited not just our VGF subgrants but also our AmeriCorps programs ... all of our program partners. The past year the focus was on equity, inclusion, and volunteer engagement. This provided an opportunity to both learn and discuss with peers in their regions how to put into action what they were learning. We also hosted the Iowa Nonprofit Summit, and had multiple sessions on equity and inclusion both related to volunteer engagement and, more broadly, nonprofit focused.

A participant from one of the Service Enterprise Hubs said they were trying to learn more about how to incorporate DEI components, but they did not feel as though they had "figured out a plan for Service Enterprise." In contrast, a participant from one of the volunteer centers shared they utilized a resource created by the Minnesota Alliance for Volunteer Advancement that highlighted the eight steps to engaging volunteers from diverse backgrounds or populations, which they used as the foundation of their eight-part training series. Overall, the volunteer center representative emphasized how their entire community was prioritizing diversity, equity, and inclusion work:

Making sure that we are bringing in equity into all the things we talk about with volunteer engagement. ... Our community, specifically, has been very focused on how we make this a more inclusive and better place for people of all backgrounds and abilities to be able to live, work, and play. We've been hyper-focused on this throughout the [local] community and one [thing] that I think has really hit home, and volunteer engagement is no different, is the way that we're speaking to our populations in the community—it has certainly been impacted.

The volunteer center representative shared that through their focus on DEI, they have seen positive transformations from participating volunteer organizations they supported.

Strategies Used and/or Learned

During the site visit, representatives from two volunteer centers talked about the various volunteer management and engagement strategies that they used in working with volunteer organizations in their communities. A summary of those strategies is listed below:

Building relationships with nonprofit organizations and volunteers. One volunteer center participant highlighted the importance of establishing relationships. One of the biggest successes noted by the participant was how building and maintaining relationships through phone calls or messaging with volunteer coordinators kept all staff up to date and informed. The volunteer center participant described how through these communications, they sought to:

[Make] sure everybody knew that the volunteer center was still here and that we cared about the work that was happening in our community and that we could be an organization for those volunteer coordinators to lean on if they needed that support.

The continued emphasis on relationship building was a particularly useful strategy during the pandemic. Another volunteer center representative noted that as they were using VGF funds to set up a new volunteer center in their area, they were still early in their work. However, thus far, their volunteer engagement and capacity building had begun by establishing relationships with local nonprofits to grow their services and support.

Gaining Senior Leadership Buy-In. Volunteer Iowa staff shared that through their work with organizations, especially Service Enterprise, participating organizations were able to gain executive and senior leadership buy-in and support, which has been a clear future indicator for success. Volunteer Iowa staff noted volunteer centers reported that organizations whose senior leaders were active participants in creating a strategy for volunteer engagement weathered the pandemic better. These organizations pivoted to engage volunteers in new ways instead of stopping their volunteer engagement, and some now report an increase in volunteers compared to before the pandemic.

Recruiting the next generation of volunteers. One volunteer center participant described providing training for nonprofit organizations on how to modify existing recruitment materials to more effectively recruit younger volunteers.

Supporting easy entry for volunteers. One volunteer center participant shared they offered a training to organizations focused on how to create easy entryway activities to support streamlined onboarding of volunteers who may be “on the fence” about volunteering or are too busy to commit a significant portion of time.

Engaging volunteers during the pandemic. During the pandemic, in-person volunteering was not always feasible. Therefore, one volunteer center participant noted they provided training for organizations on how to

engage volunteers during the pandemic, especially through the use of virtual volunteer opportunities and skills-based volunteering.

Speaking about volunteerism. At the intersection of DEI and volunteer engagement, one volunteer center participant shared how they provided training to nonprofits on the language used in volunteer recruitment and how to make that language more inclusive to diverse populations. For example, one participant noted the term “volunteer” was not cross-culturally recognized.

Survey respondents who had participated in Volunteer Iowa’s Volunteer Engagement Training Program and/or the Skills Based Volunteering Bootcamp Webinar Series also reported specific volunteer management practices that they learned about through the training as well as the helpfulness of strategies about which they learned. The most frequently reported training practices included recognition and volunteer development (100 percent), ongoing supervision and management (100 percent), and recruiting and marketing to prospective volunteers (100 percent). Exhibit 3 provides additional details on the types of practices reported by respondents.

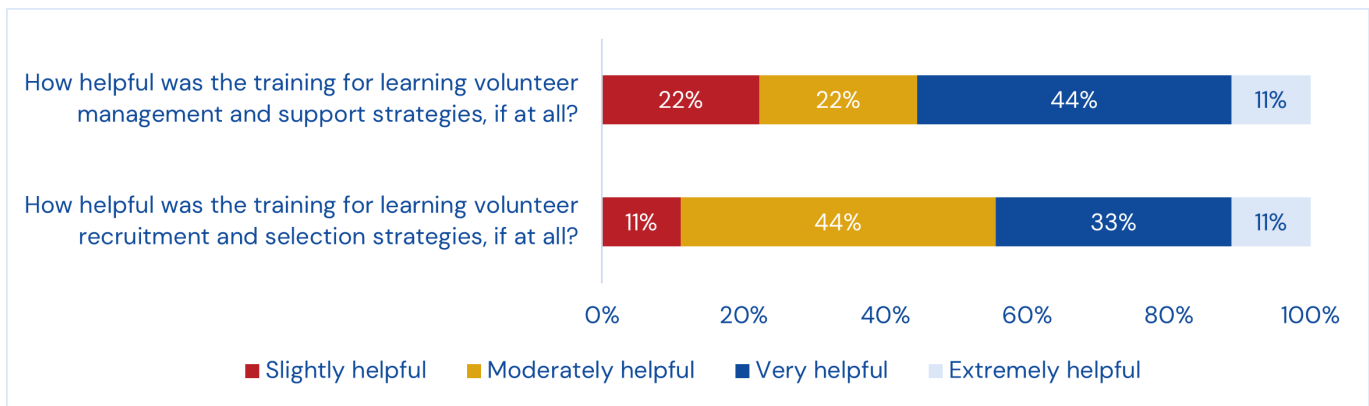
EXHIBIT 3.—Volunteer management practices learned about in volunteer engagement training and/or skills based volunteer bootcamp (n=9)



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in April 2023.

Across survey respondents, over three-quarters noted that the training for learning volunteer management and support strategies (77 percent), and recruitment and selection strategies (88 percent) were Moderately, Very, or Extremely helpful, as seen in exhibit 4.

EXHIBIT 4.—Reported helpfulness of training (n=9)



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in April 2023.

Collecting and Tracking Data

Volunteer Iowa staff noted the most extensive reporting occurs with the commission's subgrantees who are required to submit quarterly reports to Volunteer Iowa. In reports, subgrantees provide an update on the key components of their grant, highlighting successes and challenges. For example, subgrantees report on how they are connecting volunteers with opportunities to serve, increasing the capacity of nonprofits, doing volunteer recognition and Day of Service, and leveraging volunteerism to meet community needs. Subgrantees also report on any technical assistance needed from the commission. To understand subgrantees' own data collection processes, they report on how the data presented in the quarterly reports were collected, verified, and used. Lastly, subgrantees provide updates on their performance measures, including the number of organizations that received capacity building services, the number of organizations implementing three or more effective volunteer management practices as a result of those services, the number of volunteers leveraged, and the number of hours served by leveraged volunteers. To assess how many organizations were implementing three or more effective practices, subgrantees were required to use a pre- and post-retrospective survey based on the practices outlined in Service Enterprise. Organizations rate how they did before they received the capacity building service and how they did after they received the capacity building service. A Volunteer Iowa staff member noted the reason for a pre- and post-retrospective survey over a traditional pre- and post-test survey:

We found that often time people took [the pre-survey] and then in the process of the training or the support provided they realized they didn't know what they didn't know. They didn't have a good reference when they took it to start to know how well they were doing. After, they realized they were doing a lot less [well] than they thought they were. So that was one challenge with doing it before and after. And then, collection [is] always harder when you have to collect the information at two points of time and match up the survey for both. We wouldn't always get the same people to do it before and after.

Overall, Volunteer Iowa staff described the questions included in the quarterly reports aligned with the AmeriCorps Grantee Progress Report.

Additionally, during their previous VGF grant cycle (2010–2014), Volunteer Iowa funded an impact evaluation to assess the direct value and impact of the VGF grant on the volunteer centers and communities. Key findings from the impact evaluation noted communities were better positioned to support volunteerism as volunteers were connected to meaningful experiences, were responding to critical community needs, and were having an impact on their community. Volunteer Iowa commission staff said that to support continuous improvement, as a result of the findings presented in the 2014 impact report, they made several modifications including:

- Shifting grants from a 1-year cycle to a 3-year cycle to align with the federal grant funding cycle.
- Identifying how to support rural and urban communities while acknowledging their differences, such as utilizing a sliding fee match scale to support philanthropically underserved rural communities and working with consultants to ensure curriculum addresses differences among the two types of communities.
- Discussing with funders at the state level how a form of capacity building is investing in volunteer engagement.
- Constantly striving to improve messaging, through partnerships with public relations (PR)/marketing consultants and Iowa Department of Health and Human Services to incorporate health impacts of volunteering.

Subgrantees who participated in the site visit—a volunteer center and a volunteer center/Service Enterprise Hub, noted the types of data they collected from the nonprofit organizations they served. One participant said that they collected data through feedback surveys offered to participants after trainings. Examples of data collected in the feedback surveys included if the trainings led the organizations to be able to engage volunteers at a higher level, better retain volunteers, or learn a new tool or technique to help them accomplish a goal.

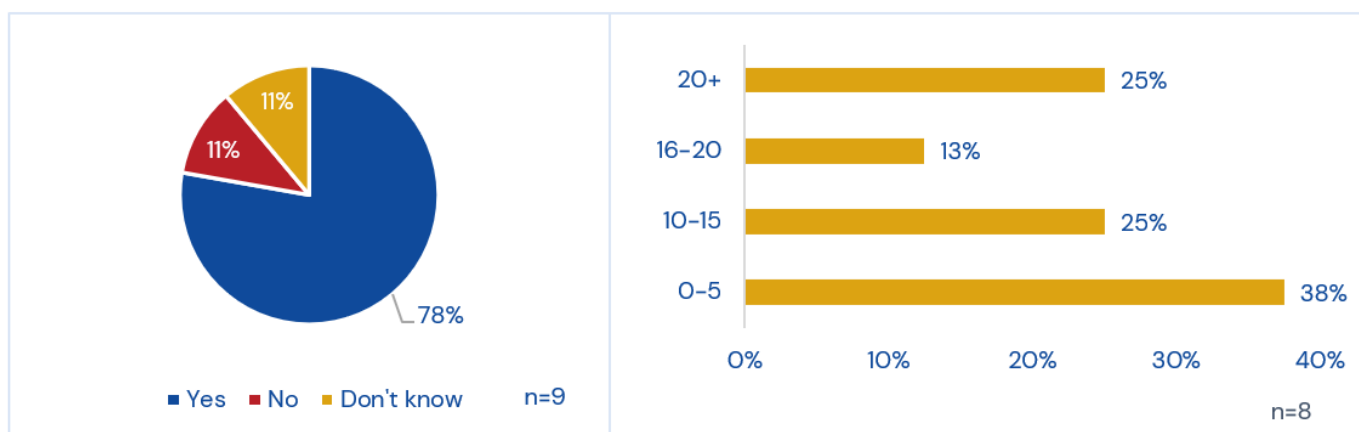
Volunteer Platform

Volunteer Iowa’s Get Connected online volunteer platform allows nonprofit organizations to post volunteer opportunities and potential volunteers to search for volunteer opportunities. Volunteer Iowa staff shared that volunteer centers across the state can have a sublicense for their own locally-branded volunteer platform that has all the local nonprofit organizations and associated volunteer opportunities. Anything posted on the local websites would also automatically show up on the statewide site as it aggregates information across volunteer centers. A representative from Volunteer Iowa explained how the platform operates and how it can connect volunteers in response to disasters:

Volunteer Centers can have their own local site, branded and reflecting priorities and interests for their community, but we’re able to automatically collect that information at the state level. We can promote that to find a volunteer opportunity [users can] go to VolunteerIowa.org and it’s a one-stop shop for the state, but it will still easily redirect them to their local community site. If there’s a disaster, we can create an initiative so people who want to help with that particular disaster can click and search for the response activities across the state. Especially the statewide incidents where it’s not just one community that’s affected, it’s multiple communities, they can search throughout the state to see where help is needed most.

As seen in exhibit 5, over three-quarters (78 percent) of survey respondents used the platform to post volunteer opportunities. Exhibit 5 also shows the range of volunteer opportunities posted by survey respondents, with 38 percent of respondents reporting posting zero to five volunteer opportunities.

EXHIBIT 5.—Use of state service commission portal/platform



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in April 2023.

Outcomes

Overall, Volunteer Iowa, representatives from the volunteer centers, and participants of the Volunteer Engagement Training Program and Skills Based Volunteering Bootcamp Webinar Series shared positive

feedback regarding the services and support provided through the VGF grant program. Specific outcomes cited by each of the groups are described below.

Volunteer Iowa's Outcomes

Volunteer Iowa shared one of their biggest successes during this VGF grant cycle was the ability of the volunteer centers to continue to provide support to their individual communities during uncertain times. A Volunteer Iowa staff member reported that volunteer centers were able to pivot to meet the local needs of their communities directly:

We've seen that the communities that have really strong volunteer centers were able to weather things better than other communities because they had that support. I would say we also saw just the critical nature of having plans for volunteers in times of disaster. ... We've seen that when there is that infrastructure in place, they're able to more readily and easily respond.

In addition to Volunteer Iowa's work within the state, they are also connecting with other states regarding their initiatives and programs to mentor and support those newer to the process or those who previously had VGF funds a while ago. In citing the value of the VGF grant, a Volunteer Iowa staff member shared:

I'd say just the flexibility of VGF funding—that we're able to pilot these new ideas, see what works, if things don't work, adjust and change, if things are working, expand them tell other states about them. It's one of the only funding sources that's [not for] the national service members, but for the day-to-day ... people out in the community, which that's most Americans. This is a fantastic tool to get more people out there volunteering and to get nonprofits thinking about what people can do and providing really high-quality experiences to increase that volunteerism. ... I think VGF is such a powerful tool and that I would love to see expanded. So all commissions have access to it, that it's consistent funding, and that hopefully additional nonprofits and national organizations can access too. I think it is a powerful tool that not a lot of people are aware of and I don't think it's successes have always been really shown and shouted from the rooftops.

We have one volunteer coordinator who does most of the volunteer engagement. Service Enterprise got more staff and board members involved in actively thinking about how we all engage volunteers.

I think that we have opened our eyes to new partnerships and collaborations that we didn't think about prior to SE.

Service Enterprise (SE)
Participants

In the FY2020 progress report, Volunteer Iowa described how due to the transition to virtual trainings—while they were able to increase the number of organizations trained—it was more challenging to encourage survey completion and thus they had less data to assess the effectiveness of offerings.

Volunteer Iowa also shared outcomes they had observed from other initiatives included in the VGF, such as Service Enterprise and the City Volunteer Engagement pilot program. Through the VGF grant and participating in Service Enterprise, Volunteer Iowa noted they had also looked inward to consider how as a commission they could use/better use volunteers to support the work. Examples of how the commission utilized volunteers included getting PR firms to support aspects of the commission's work pro bono, having volunteer grant reviewers, incorporating volunteer centers from other states, and providing training/coaching to VISTA members.

Lastly, during their final commission interview, Volunteer Iowa staff noted they have seen some preliminary outcomes from the implementation of the City Volunteer Engagement pilot program. While the commission had not yet received the final reports from participants, they noted they had received preliminary positive feedback from participants in post training surveys. Participant feedback focused on gratitude for the opportunity to connect with other departments across the city who all utilize volunteers.

Overall, this was one of the most succinct and purpose-driven trainings I have been involved in professionally.

Until this program, I had never thought how we all use volunteers and could pool resources. We are so used to running our own rogue operation, this was a wonderful reminder about the resources available as a city.

City Engagement Participants

Volunteer Centers' Outcomes

Among the participating volunteer centers, they shared positive sentiments regarding their participation in the VGF program, noting it provided them with the opportunity and time to think strategically. One comment that exemplified these sentiments:

It's provided us [with a] strategic direction for the way our organization operates or the direction we want to go with engaging both volunteers as well as organizations. ... I actually think that VGF, the work provided, [and] the direction that's provided by Volunteer Iowa is one that's a really good fit here for our community. So, it's just provided a lot of success and financially allotted us to focus our time and our energy on things that are valuable.

Subgrantees also highlighted outcomes that they or organizations they served were able to achieve as a result of their participation in the grant or training.

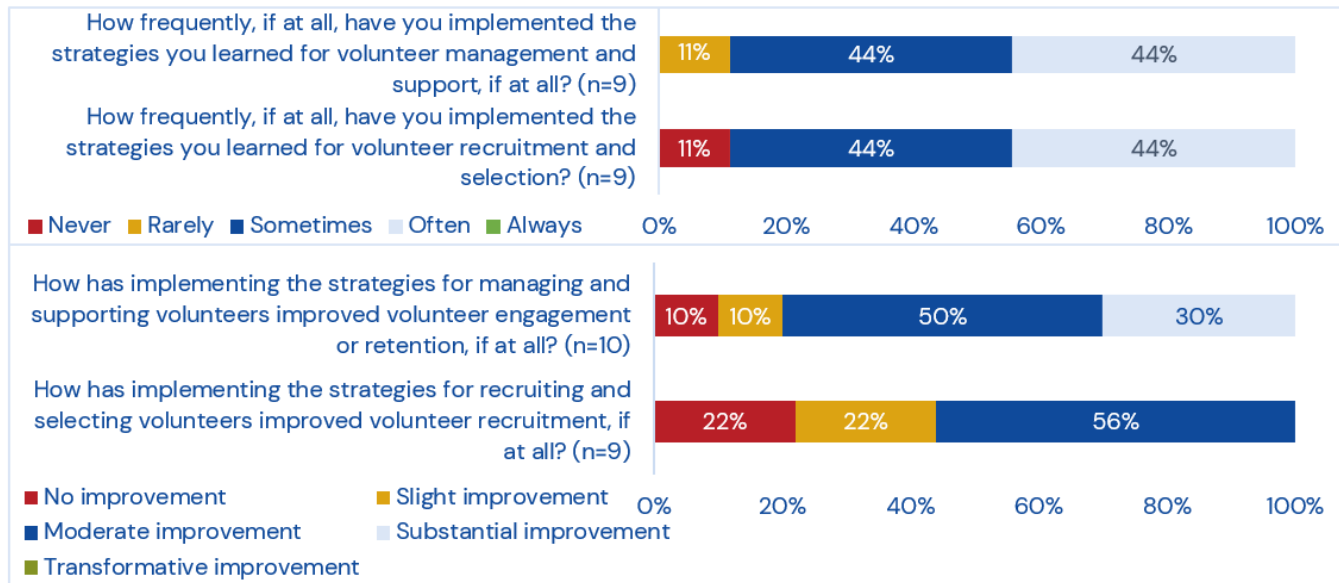
Recognition as an asset to the community. One participating volunteer center staff member noted they had established themselves as a leader in the county and state on volunteer engagement. One staff member noted that in a communitywide response to a disaster, such as the pandemic, they were proud they continue to be invited into strategic planning meetings and looked on as leaders of volunteer engagement efforts. The staff member shared:

When I look at the work that we do as an organization and success that we've had, I'm really proud of the fact that we not only locally are that place that people come to and that they know about and recognize for basic volunteer engagement efforts, but we're also seen as leaders across the state of Iowa for the work that we do. While we don't always focus on things outside of our community, it is nice to be able to show others the things we had success on to help support other volunteer connecting organizations.

Training Participants' Outcomes

Participants in the Volunteer Engagement Training Program and Skills Based Volunteering Bootcamp Webinar Series reported outcomes from their training experiences in a survey. Over two-fifths (44 percent) of survey respondents shared that they Often implemented the strategies they learned for volunteer management and support. Additionally, 44 percent of respondents noted they implemented volunteer recruitment and selection strategies Often, as seen in exhibit 6. Regarding the outcomes of implementation, over three-quarters (80 percent) of respondents noted that strategies for managing and supporting volunteers led to Moderate or Substantial improvement in volunteer engagement or retention and over half (56 percent) of respondents reported the implementation of strategies for recruiting or selecting volunteers resulted in Moderate improvement on volunteer recruitment.

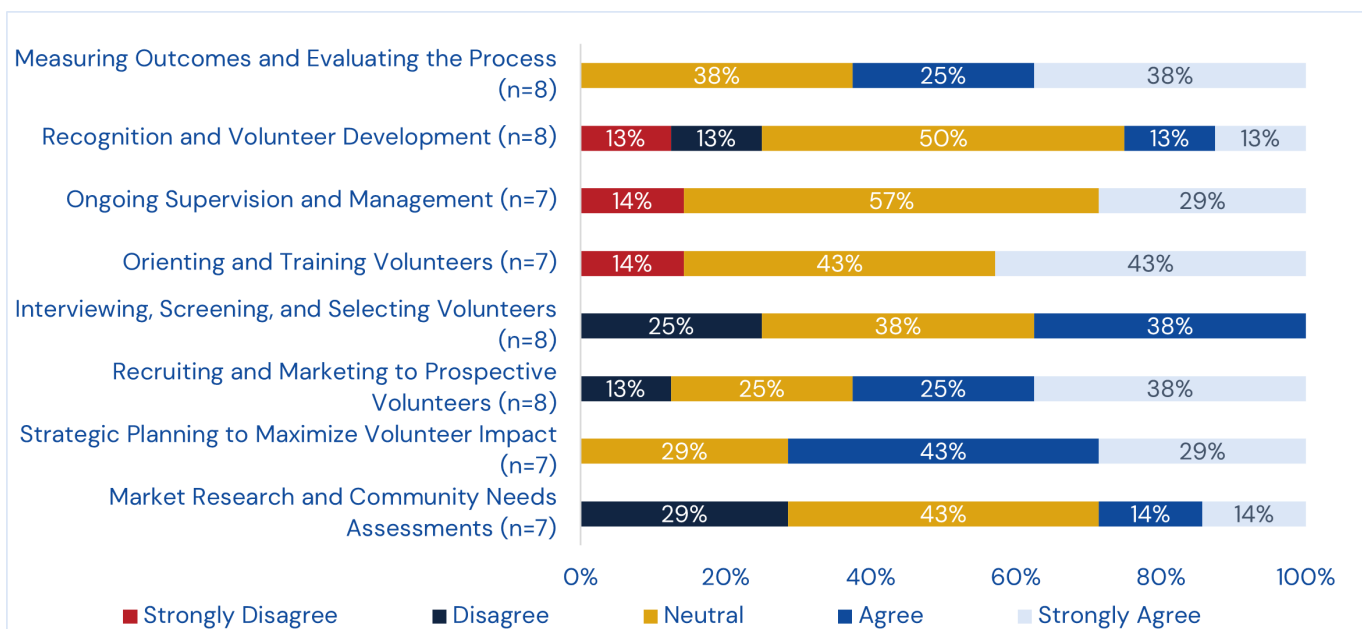
EXHIBIT 6.—Frequency of implementation & improvement in recruitment, engagement, and retention



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in April 2023.

Survey respondents were also asked to share their agreement regarding their and/or their organization’s need for additional training or support on various topics, as seen in exhibit 7. The topics with the highest agreement on need were Strategic Planning to Maximize Volunteer Impact (72 percent), Measuring Outcomes and Evaluating the Process (63 percent), and Recruiting and Marketing to Prospective Volunteers (63 percent). Alternatively, the topics in which respondents noted the lowest needs were on Market Research and Community Needs Assessments (29%) and Recognition and Volunteer Development (26%).

EXHIBIT 7.—Agreement with organizational need for additional training by topic

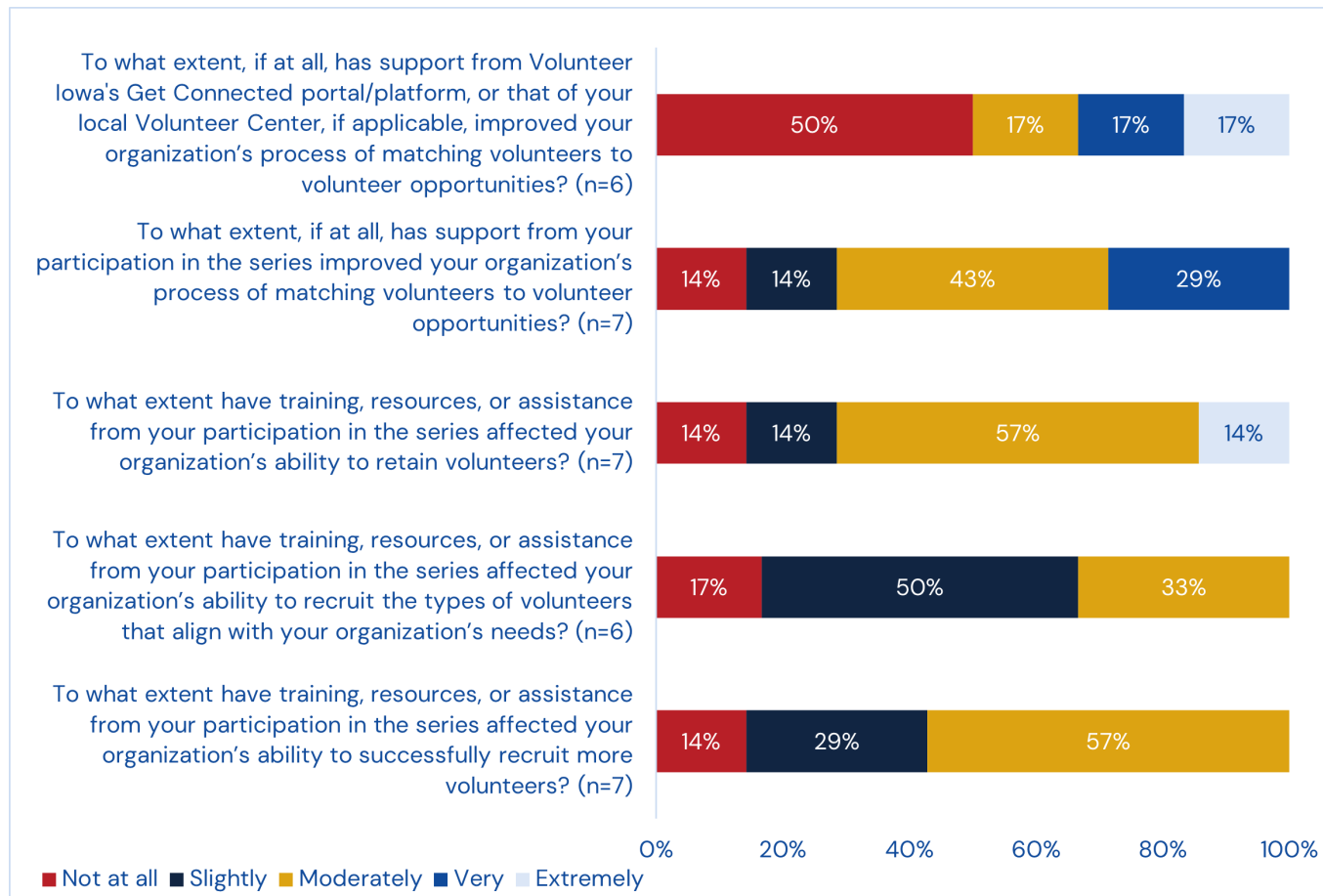


Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in April 2023.

Lastly, survey respondents shared their perspectives on the effect of the VGF grant on various volunteer outcomes, presented in exhibit 8. As reported by survey respondents, the outcomes with the largest effect

were improving the process of matching volunteers to volunteer opportunities and retaining volunteers (29 percent and 14 percent, respectively).

EXHIBIT 8.—Effect of VGF grant on volunteer outcomes



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in April 2023.

Conclusion

Overall, through Volunteer Iowa’s initiatives, they were able to successfully support Volunteer Centers, and thus nonprofit organizations’ volunteer management, recruitment, and retention across the state. While the COVID-19 pandemic impacted Volunteer Iowa’s and the volunteer centers’ ability to provide planned initiatives and services, organizations were able to adapt to the emerging community needs pertaining to the pandemic, especially due to the community-based approach of volunteer centers. Training and services provided to nonprofit organizations emphasized incorporating inclusive practices, easing barriers to entry for volunteers including youth volunteers, and leveraging virtual volunteer opportunities. Participants expressed gratitude for the VGF funding and the flexibility it provided. Additionally, Volunteer Iowa and participating volunteer centers shared they were able to establish or affirm their positions as leaders in their community, state, or field on volunteer engagement as they supported other organizations to strengthen volunteerism. Volunteer Iowa staff also said they are continuing to provide capacity building services and supports to organizations across the state, with new Service Enterprise and volunteer center cohorts starting soon after the final commission interview to continue to promote volunteerism in their communities.

Acknowledgements

The ICF evaluation team would like to acknowledge the many members of the AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation (ORE) and the participating state service commissions that contributed to the evaluation of the Volunteer Generation Fund. They provided valuable information and feedback to ensure the ICF evaluation team was able to fully capture the unique Volunteer Generation Fund-supported programming and how this programming was able to leverage AmeriCorps support to tackle a critical priority. The evaluation team looks forward to continued collaboration with ORE on high-quality evaluation work that can inform policy and practice regarding how national service may be used to address national priorities. Finally, we would like to thank the esteemed members of the Technical Working Group—Rachel Bruns, Dr. Leslie Goodyear, Dr. Kathryn Newcomer, Gabriel Rhoads, Dr. Herbert Turner, Dr. Abraham Wandersman—who advised and provided feedback to improve the quality and clarity of this evaluation.

About AmeriCorps

AmeriCorps, the federal agency for national service and volunteerism, provides opportunities for Americans to serve their country domestically, address the nation's most pressing challenges, improve lives and communities, and strengthen civic engagement. Each year, the agency places more than 200,000 AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers in intensive service roles and empowers millions more to serve as long-term, short-term, or one-time volunteers. Learn more at [AmeriCorps.gov](https://www.americorps.gov).

About the Office of Research and Evaluation

The [AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation](https://www.americorps.gov/office-of-research-and-evaluation) assists AmeriCorps and its partners in collecting, analyzing, and disseminating data and insights about AmeriCorps programs and civic life in America.

This report was commissioned by AmeriCorps' Office of Research and Evaluation under Contract #GS00Q14OADU209 and Order #95332A20F0075. Information in this report is in the public domain.

Suggested Citation

Spinney, S., Kennedy, L., & Finkbeiner, L. (2023). *Case Study Volunteer Generation Fund Evaluation: Volunteer Iowa*. ICF.

Photo Credit

AmeriCorps

About ICF

ICF (NASDAQ:ICFI) is a global consulting and digital services company with over 7,000 full- and part-time employees, but we are not your typical consultants. At ICF, business analysts and policy specialists work together with digital strategists, data scientists and creatives. We combine unmatched industry expertise with cutting-edge engagement capabilities to help organizations solve their most complex challenges. Since 1969, public and private sector clients have worked with ICF to navigate change and shape the future. Learn more at [icf.com](https://www.icf.com). For additional information about ICF, please contact:

ICF

1902 Reston Metro Plaza, Reston, VA 20190


Phone: 703-934-3603 or 1-800-532-4783

Fax: 703-934-3740 Email: info@icf.com



 [linkedin.com/company/icf-international](https://www.linkedin.com/company/icf-international)

 [facebook.com/ThisIsICF](https://www.facebook.com/ThisIsICF)

 [#thisisicf](https://www.instagram.com/thisisicf)