



CASE STUDY

Volunteer Generation Fund Evaluation: Nevada Volunteers



BUNDLED EVALUATION AND CAPACITY BUILDING PROJECT

The Nevada state service commission, Nevada Volunteers, participated in the AmeriCorps Volunteer Generation Fund (VGF) evaluation through several different phases, including interviews with commission staff 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 and 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, Nevada Volunteers, 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 an 83 percent response rate with a total of 5 individual respondents representing 4 unique organizations. Across survey participants, half (50 percent) of survey respondents reported an average of 50–100 volunteers, 25 percent reported an average of 21–30 volunteers, and 25 percent reported an average of fewer than 10 volunteers.

EXHIBIT 1.—Overview of data sources

Data Source	Participant Count	Date Collected
Grant Application	–	May 2020
Fiscal year (FY)2021 and FY2022 VGF Progress Reports	–	December 2021 and November 2022
AmeriCorps Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement	–	September 2017, 2019, and 2021
Commission Interview – Nevada Volunteers	1	February 2022
Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey	5	January 2023
Commission Document Review – Nevada Volunteers	1	September 2023

Overview of Grant Structure and Goals

The initial focus of Nevada Volunteers’ (VGF) grant was to implement three interventions to increase the capacity of Nevada organizations to effectively manage volunteers and increase volunteerism across the state. According to their 2020 VGF grant application, the proposed interventions included the following: (1) expand the reach of the statewide website to connect organizations with diverse volunteers; (2) provide capacity building mini-grants to organizations interested in implementing new evidence-based volunteer management best practices; and (3) provide training and technical assistance to organizations on evidence-based volunteer management best practices. Nevada Volunteers focused on increasing volunteer infrastructure and organizational capacity, based on previous research that found it to be a barrier to volunteering. The following nine best practices—which are part of the Human Resource Management (HRM) model of volunteer management—were noted by Nevada Volunteers in order to successfully meet their objectives:

- Clearly defined volunteer roles;
- Volunteer recruitment strategy;
- Volunteer screening and matching procedures;
- Volunteer orientation and ongoing training plans;
- Liability insurance;
- Volunteer supervision and communication plans;
- Volunteer recognition plan;
- Volunteer evaluation and goal setting; and
- Reflection practice.

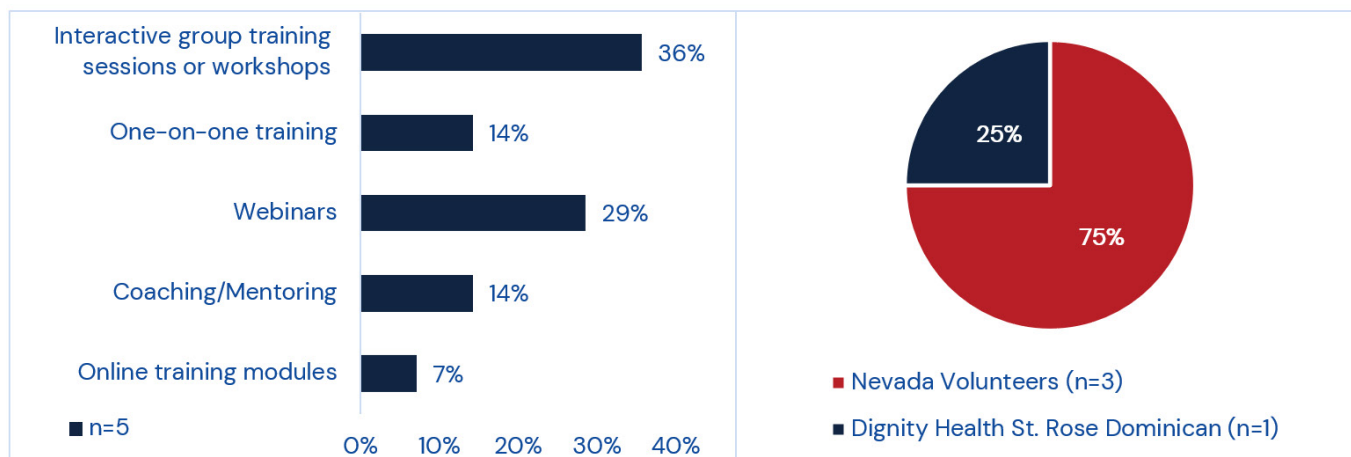
A Note on Program Beneficiaries

In the context of this case study, “program beneficiaries” include organizations that took part in Nevada Volunteers’ initiatives, including mini-grants and training, and technical assistance.

Using the indicated strategies, Nevada Volunteers reported in their grant application that they planned to provide capacity building services to 30 organizations—providing 10 mini-grants to organizations and providing capacity building training and technical assistance (TTA) to an additional 20 organizations. For Nevada Volunteers to count mini-grantees as having received capacity building services, the organization had to have attended at least one virtual or in-person training and attend a monthly call with their VGF program officer. For mini-grantees to be counted as having increased their effectiveness, they must have developed and implemented at least one new volunteer management best practice noted previously.

Based on the survey data from training participants, the most frequently reported volunteer training and capacity building activities were interactive group training sessions or workshops and webinars, with the three-quarters (75 percent) reporting having received training by Nevada Volunteers. Exhibit 2 provides additional details on the types of activities respondents noted were available to their organization through VGF grant activities.

EXHIBIT 2.—Volunteer training and capacity building activities and providers



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

An overview of the status of each key intervention is included below, as described by the state service commission, through which the majority of initiatives were provided.

NVVolunteerConnect.org: Nevada Volunteers launched the website in 2019 to serve as a low barrier website to easily connect long- or short-term volunteers and organizations seeking to recruit volunteers. As reported in Nevada Volunteers’ grant application, approximately 1,000 individuals accessed the site monthly, and 1,375 organizations had active volunteer positions across the state. To enhance use of the website, Nevada Volunteers used VGF funds to develop a statewide multilingual public service announcement (PSA) with the intention of increasing the number of organizations accessing the site to 2,000 and individuals accessing the site to 1,500 per month. Additionally, Nevada Volunteers also planned to use VGF funds to add additional search filters to the website in response to emerging needs, such as the need for virtual volunteers during COVID-19.

Mini-Grants: Nevada Volunteers provided mini-grants of \$5,000–\$25,000 for up to ten organizations interested in increasing organizational capacity to manage, retain and recognize volunteers. Ultimately, nine mini-grants were funded. Mini-grant funds were used to increase their organizational capacity in one of the nine identified best practices outlined in the Overview of Grant Structure and Goals section. Key staff from the Nevada Volunteers, including the VGF Program Officer, conducted monthly calls with each mini-grantee to review their progress and develop individualized TTA.

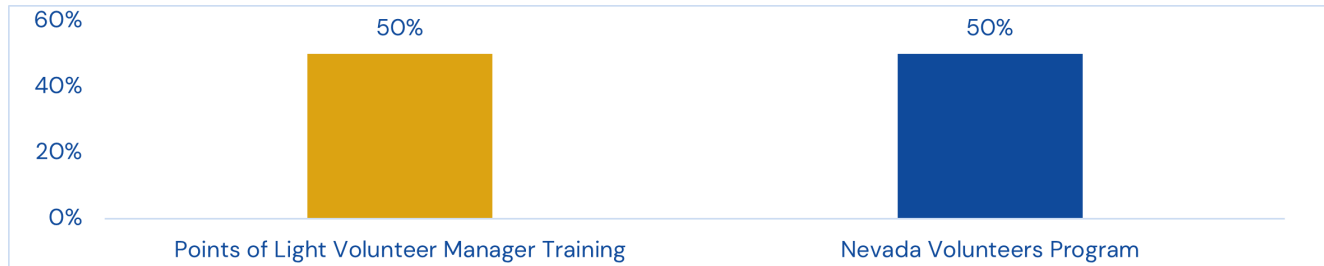
Additionally, Nevada Volunteers provided a micro grant to 32 subgrantees for 2-months, July and August 2021, focused on volunteer recognition. As part of the micro grant, Nevada Volunteers held one training for grant recipients.

Training & Technical Assistance (TTA): In addition to the capacity building TTA provided to mini-grant recipients, Nevada Volunteers developed and provided support and services to other organizations across the state. TTA provided to organizations included live webinars, in-person trainings, print resources and on-demand online courses focused on the nine evidence-based best practices for volunteer management. Each

year, Nevada Volunteers provided at least one live-webinar per quarter and five in-person training opportunities located across the state.

In terms of training curricula, in January 2023, training participants participated in a Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey. As seen in exhibit 3, half of the survey respondents reported they participated in training that utilized the Points of Light Volunteer Manager Training and half reported participating in a training that used the Nevada Volunteers program.

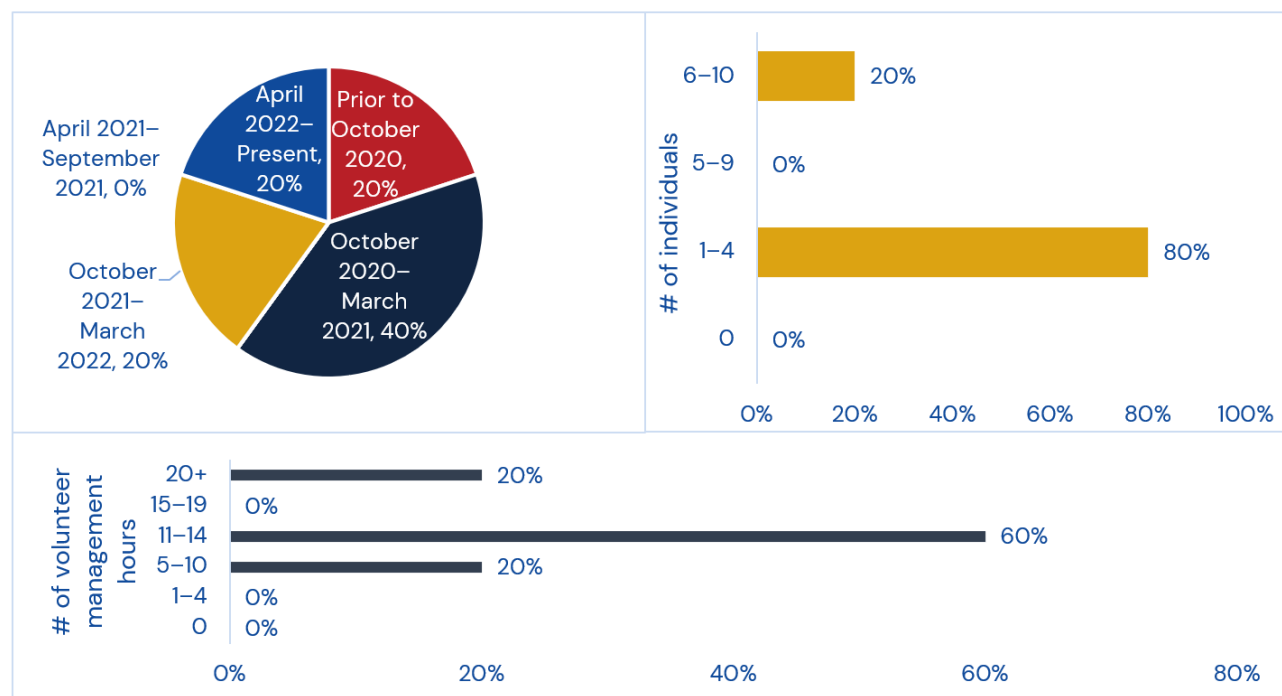
EXHIBIT 3.—Types of curriculum used (n=2)



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

The time in which survey respondents reported first participating in a Nevada Volunteers training varied, with 20 percent of respondents noting their organization first participated prior to October 2020, while 40 percent noted their organization first participated October 2020–March 2021, and 20 percent noted they did not first participate until more recently (April 2022–Present). Since October 2020, the majority (80 percent) of survey respondents noted that 1–4 individuals from their organization participated in a training or capacity building activity through VGF and 20 percent noted 10 or more individuals participated. Overall, 80 percent of respondents participated in 11 or more volunteer management hours. Exhibit 4 provides an overview of the time frame in which participating organizations reported they first participated in training and the range of individuals who participated.

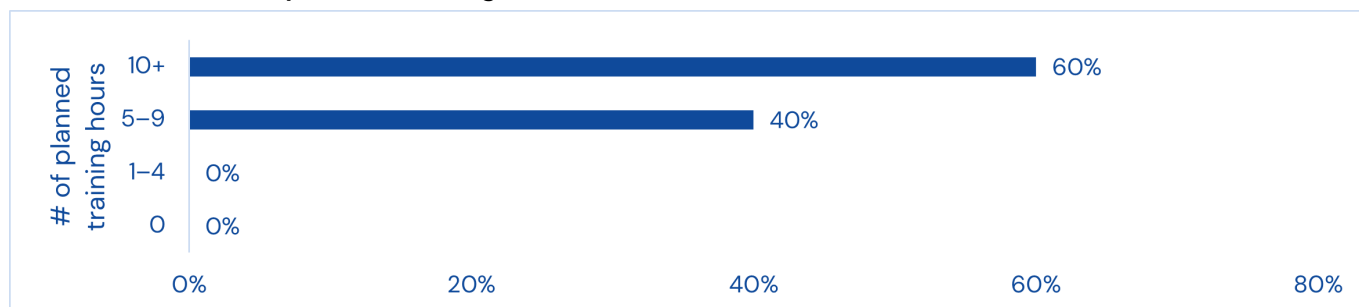
EXHIBIT 4.—Organization’s participation time frame, range, and number of hours (n=5)



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

Survey participants were also asked to report on the organization’s plans for future training. All respondents indicated they intended to complete additional training through VGF, with respondents noting they planned to complete 10 or more additional training hours (60 percent) or 5–9 more hours (40 percent), as seen in exhibit 5.

EXHIBIT 5.—Additional planned training hours (n=5)



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

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

According to the 2021 AmeriCorps Current Population Survey Civic Engagement and Volunteering Supplement, fewer than one-fifth (17 percent) of Nevada residents formally volunteered through organizations, 6 percentage points lower than the national rate (23 percent) of individuals who formally volunteered. Additionally, 21 percent of residents reported belonging to an organization. Longitudinally, in Nevada, there has been a decline in formal volunteering rates since 2017, with formal volunteering at 24 percent in 2017, 22 percent in 2019, and 17 percent in 2021. The steepest decline occurred following the onset of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, which mirrors trends occurring nationwide. Across the state, formal volunteering contributed 31.5 million hours of service, worth an estimated \$824.6 million. Alternatively, informal volunteering increased slightly in 2019 and declined again in 2021. Over one-third (37 percent) of residents noted they informally helped others by exchanging favors with their neighbors, compared to previous informal volunteering rates of 43 percent in 2017 and 45 percent in 2019.

Additionally, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Nevada Volunteers had to slightly alter their initial plans for capacity building and TTA. During the Nevada commission interview in February 2022, staff noted that some sessions initially planned for in-person transitioned to virtual due to concerns regarding the spread of COVID-19. Additionally, at the time of the commission interview, Nevada Volunteers shared they had intended to complete at least one site visit per grantee; however, due to the rise of the COVID-19 omicron variant, site visits had not yet been scheduled.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Broadly, Nevada Volunteers described diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in volunteer management as very important, especially in the recruitment of diverse and representative volunteers. At the time of the commission interview, Nevada Volunteers shared they were planning to provide a training focused on DEI issues in volunteer recruitment, and noted,

That’s really important when you talk about recruitment and looking at your volunteer base and who you have and who you’re lacking based on the demographics of your community ... the main part is ensuring that your volunteer base is representative of the community that you’re in ... [Nevada Volunteers] learned that language is very important, the word volunteer

isn't a good word to use when working with our community. And so those are things I will address in the recruitment portion of the training.

Strategies Used and/or Learned

For the capacity building and TTA provided through the VGF program, Nevada Volunteers noted they ultimately decided to go with a lunch-and-learn series around the nine best practices. The lunch-and-learn training session would include a 1-hour presentation on the topic, followed by a 30-minute discussion for participants to learn from each other's experiences and network with other organizations. The lunch-and-learn series was planned to contain in part the following session topics: volunteer recognition, utilizing court-appointed volunteers, and volunteer orientation and recruitment. Nevada Volunteers shared they intended to focus on utilizing court-appointed volunteers, as it was a topic that they regularly received questions on, explaining,

Nevada Volunteers receives a ton of phone calls from people who have been assigned [and] have to get court-appointed hours ... we don't know where to direct them. So, we actually have an intern in the office right now who is reaching out to all of our organizations that are signed up on NV Volunteer Connect to see which ones utilize court-appointed volunteers and which ones do not. And then my goal is to interview them and have them speak at our training.

The state service commission also identified volunteer orientation and recruitment as a topic area for the lunch-and-learn based on feedback from mini-grant recipients. Following the award of the mini-grants, Nevada Volunteers sent out a survey through which grantees ranked the nine best practices in order of which they felt they needed the most help with—the top practice being volunteer orientation and recruitment.

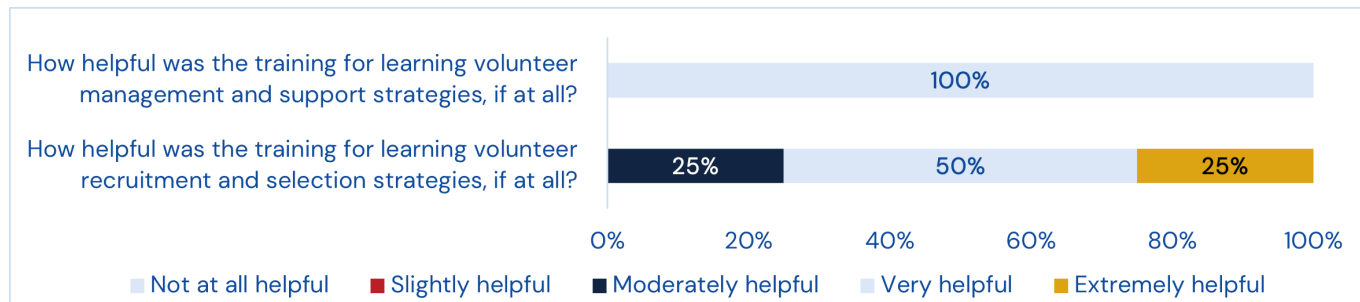
Across survey respondents, there was a variation in the types of practices respondents noted receiving training on through the VGF grant. The most frequently reported training practices included Recognition and Volunteer Development (20 percent), Recruiting and Marketing to Prospective Volunteers (20 percent), Orienting and Training Volunteers (15 percent), and Strategic Planning to Maximize Volunteer Impact (15 percent). Exhibit 6 provides additional details on the types of practices reported by respondents.

EXHIBIT 6.—Volunteer management practices learned about in trainings (n=4)



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

Across survey participants, the majority noted that the training for learning volunteer management and support strategies (100 percent) and recruitment and selection strategies (75 percent) were very helpful or extremely helpful, as seen in exhibit 7.

EXHIBIT 7.—Reported helpfulness of training (n=4)

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

Collecting and Tracking Data

Nevada Volunteers collects a variety of data through pre- and post-test assessments for training participants, monthly progress reports, and grantee applications. In the commission's 2021 progress report, staff noted the pre- and post- assessments were administered in Google Forms, which would be reviewed by commission staff for inconsistencies and returned to subgrantees if additional clarification was needed. Mini-grant recipients were required to submit a monthly progress report to Nevada Volunteers. Nevada Volunteers staff shared,

Originally, we were going to do a mid and end progress report and have people send in two larger reports. My problem was I noticed in the last one I wasn't able to catch things fast enough. ... And because of risk assessments and all these [grantees] are brand new so they're considered high risk because they're new. So, I just came up with a very small progress report for each month so that I could gauge where people were at.

As part of the data collected in monthly progress reports, Nevada Volunteers collected the number of volunteers managed, the number of hours volunteers served, and narrative descriptions of how the grantees utilized VGF funds and the programs impact the organizations and communities. As outlined in the 2021 progress report, Nevada Volunteers used past data collection to inform planning and development of the 2021 TTA schedule, guided by the areas of greatest need among subgrantees. This same process was used to develop and plan for the 2022 TTA schedule, as noted in the 2022 progress report. As part of the pre- and post-test assessments, Nevada Volunteers reported they planned to use an online survey administered before and after training participation to evaluate the success of their program and successful implementation of one or more of the nine evidence-based best practices.

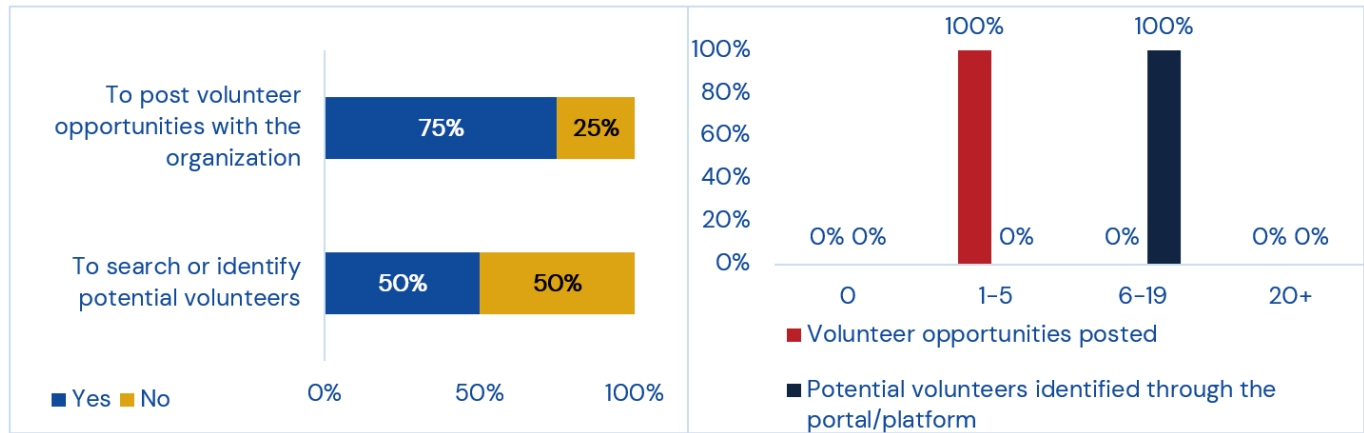
Volunteer Platform

As previously noted, VGF funds were intended to be used to develop a statewide public service announcement (PSA) to increase platform use and to create additional search filters in response to emerging needs with the pandemic. The PSA ran from September to November 2021 and sought to increase general traffic to the website for volunteers to increase awareness. At the time of the state service commission interview, in February 2022, Nevada Volunteers had almost doubled the number of organizations that were signed up on the platform. Additionally, during the site commission interview, Nevada Volunteers described they also added NV Broad Connect in October 2021, which matches individuals to open board member positions that are a good fit based on the description of the open position and the noted skills and expertise of the individual.

As seen in exhibit 8, three-quarters (75 percent) of survey respondents reported using the platform to post volunteer opportunities and half (50 percent) used the platform to search or identify potential volunteers.

Exhibit 8 also shows the range of volunteer opportunities posted by survey respondents and the range of volunteers identified through the platform.

EXHIBIT 8.—Use of state service commission portal/platform (n=4)



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

Outcomes

Overall, training recipients who participated in the survey reported satisfaction with the training and capacity building provided through the VGF grant program.³

Nevada Volunteers’ Outcomes

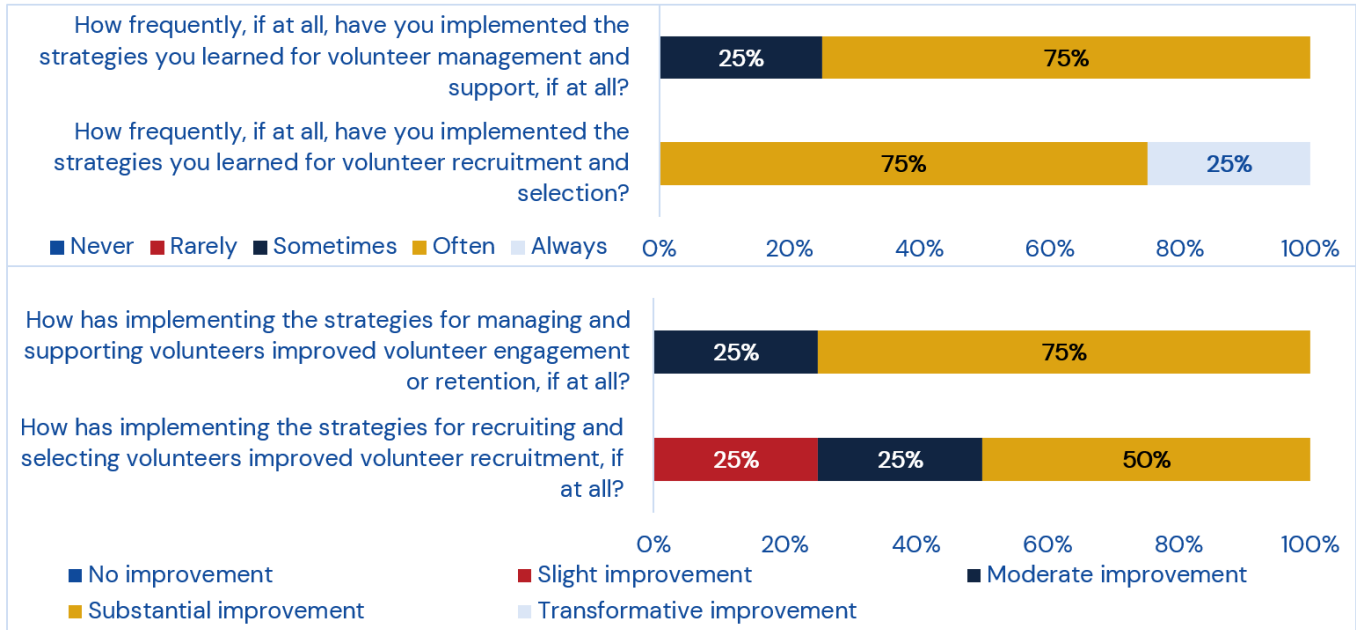
As of September of 2023, Nevada Volunteers was still in the early implementation phases of VGF activities and initiatives and therefore, had minimal perceptions or feedback regarding capacity building and TTA outcomes. Nevada Volunteers noted outcomes related to the volunteer platform, as reported in the previous section. Final project data and outcomes will be available by the end of December 2023.

Program Beneficiaries’ Outcomes

Three-quarters (75 percent) of survey respondents shared that they Often implement the strategies they learned for volunteer management and support. Additionally, all respondents (100 percent) noted they implemented volunteer recruitment and selection strategies Often or Always, as seen in exhibit 9. Regarding the outcomes of implementation, at least half of respondents noted that the implementation of the strategies led to a substantial improvement in volunteer management and support (75 percent) and volunteer recruitment (50 percent).

³ Survey respondents were asked to indicate if they or their organization received any certifications since October 2020 and/or were planning to receive by September 2023 as part of their involvement in the VGF program. Respondents indicated neither their organization nor their staff received or planned to receive any certifications.

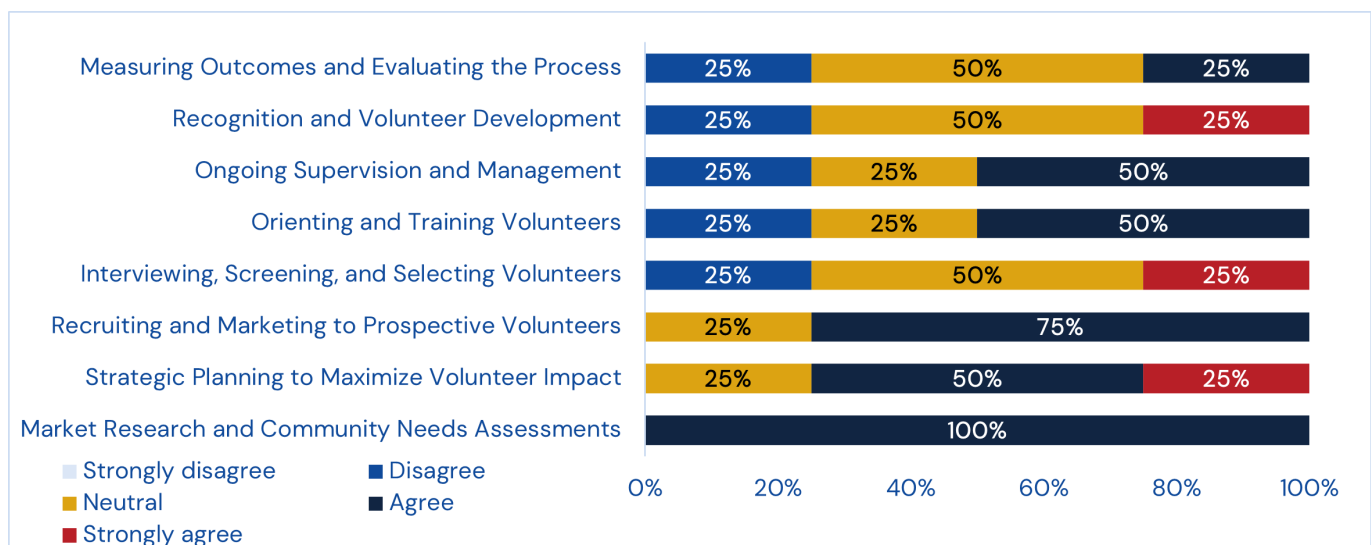
EXHIBIT 9.—Frequency of implementation & improvement in recruitment, engagement, and retention (n=4)



Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 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 10. The topics with the highest agreement on need were Market Research and Community Needs Assessments (100 percent), Recruiting and Marketing to Prospective Volunteers (75 percent), and Strategic Planning to Maximize Volunteer Impact (75 percent). Alternatively, the topics in which respondents noted the lowest needs were Measuring Outcomes and Evaluating the Process (25 percent); Recognition and Volunteer Development (25 percent); and Interviewing, Screening, and Selecting Volunteers (25 percent).

EXHIBIT 10.—Agreement with organizational need for additional training by topic (n=4)

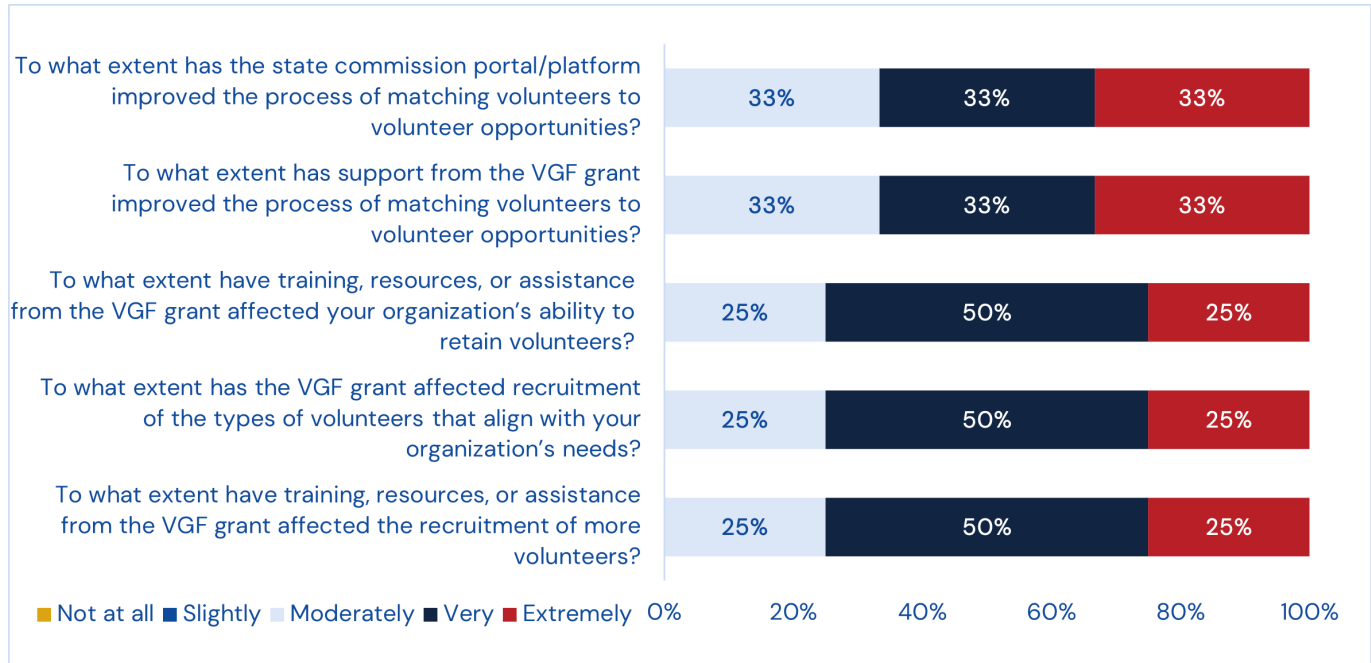


Source: Volunteer Management Training & Capacity Building Survey collected in January 2023.

Lastly, survey respondents shared their perspectives on the effect of the VGF grant on various volunteer outcomes, presented in exhibit 11. As reported by survey respondents, the outcomes with the largest effect

were volunteer retention (75 percent), recruitment of volunteers that aligned with organizational needs (75 percent), and increased recruitment (75 percent).

EXHIBIT 11.—Effect of VGF grant on volunteer outcomes (n=4)



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

Conclusion

Overall, through Nevada Volunteers’ key initiatives, the online platform, mini-grants, and the capacity building TTA, Nevada Volunteers was able to support organizations’ volunteer management, recruitment, and retention across the state. While the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a continued decline in formal volunteering within the state, Nevada Volunteers was able to shift TTA offerings to virtual and provide additional support through their website to deliver increased access and awareness for virtual volunteer opportunities in the state. In general, Nevada Volunteers was still early in their planning and implementation of the VGF grant, planning to provide TTA on volunteer recognition, orientation, and recruitment, court-appointed volunteers, and DEI topics in volunteer management. Among survey respondents, training recipients are generally implementing the learned strategies and seeing positive improvements in volunteer management.

Acknowledgements

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