

Comparing Volunteering Data Before and After the COVID-19 Pandemic

Lawrence Stevens, UNC Charlotte

Jaclyn Piatak, Political Science and Public Administration



Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic affected volunteer management and nonprofit organizations nationwide. In this study, I will examine volunteering before and after the pandemic to offer several solutions to manage the growing need for volunteers better. This study draws upon recent literature and examines trends in volunteering. Volunteering is essential for several reasons, including for those of lower social and socioeconomic backgrounds who often rely on volunteer organizations to help with food costs and distribution. For instance, as with many others, those relying on volunteers or volunteer management would have experienced a delay or no help during the COVID-19 pandemic. From a social perspective, volunteering and volunteering management bring the community together with even the most minor tasks or goals. Like other critical components in American society, volunteering management was devastated by COVID-19. This research aims to understand better how volunteering management can improve for future generations.

Objectives

- This study aims to understand how the pandemic affected volunteering in North Carolina, comparing volunteer rates before and after the pandemic.

Literature Review

- Effective volunteer management helps to ensure that volunteers are engaged and motivated to contribute their time and skills, which can lead to increased productivity, improved outcomes, and a stronger relationship between the organization and its supporters. (Brudney & Meijs, 2014)
- By providing volunteers with the resources, support, and recognition they need, organizations can build strong relationships with their volunteers, which can encourage them to continue their involvement with the organization over the long-term. Volunteer management is impactful because it enables organizations to leverage the power of volunteers to achieve their mission and goals, and build stronger relationships with their communities. (Safrit, 2011)
- Effective communication is critical for successful volunteer management, but it can be challenging to keep volunteers informed and engaged, particularly if they are not physically present in the same location as the organization's staff. (Liao-Troth, 2008)

Method

In addition to a literature review, this study draws upon data from AmeriCorps to examine trends in volunteering in North Carolina before and after the pandemic as well as compared to overall trends across the United States.

Results

My results for the project indicated that the pandemic led to a decrease in volunteering within the state of North Carolina; there are several factors to explain why volunteering was down compared to previous years. One of the reasons is the fact lockdown played a part. In response to the pandemic, many organizations shifted their volunteering efforts to virtual opportunities that could be done remotely. This allowed people to contribute to causes and organizations from the safety of their homes but also required a shift in how organizations engaged with volunteers. Many volunteers are older adults who may have been at higher risk for COVID-19. As a result, some volunteers may have had to step back from their usual activities or limit their involvement, which could have reduced overall volunteer capacity.

North Carolina volunteer data from 2017-19 shows that volunteering for the state of North Carolina was up compared to the later years. The availability and accessibility of volunteer opportunities may have differed between 2017 and 2021. In some years, more volunteer opportunities may be available or more outreach to potential volunteers, which could impact the overall volunteering rate. One key factor consistent with this is COVID-19. The COVID-19 pandemic began in early 2020 and has since impacted volunteering rates worldwide.

However North Carolina data from 2020-21 compared to the United States shows that volunteering was down due to the pandemic. The pandemic has significantly impacted the economy, with many people experiencing job losses or financial strain. This may have led some individuals to prioritize paid work over volunteer work. For the United States, the COVID-19 pandemic created an unprecedented demand for volunteers in many areas, including healthcare, food banks, and other essential services. This demand may have been greater in other states than North Carolina, increasing overall volunteering in those areas. Another factor is virtual volunteering; with social distancing measures in place, many organizations shifted to virtual volunteer opportunities, allowing people to contribute from their homes. This made it easier for people across the country to volunteer, contributing to an overall increase in volunteering in the United States. Due to the pandemic virtual volunteering played a significant role with in-person volunteering to decrease the need for virtual volunteering like tutoring or social work was evident.

VOLUNTEER



Conclusions

My conclusion for this study is that there are different ways that North Carolina can improve volunteer management for post-COVID 19; the pandemic has created new needs and challenges that require volunteers' support. North Carolina organizations can expand their volunteer opportunities to address these unique needs and engage volunteers with broader interests and skills. Hiring and retaining volunteers can be a challenge, particularly during times of crisis. North Carolina organizations can improve volunteer engagement strategies by providing clear expectations and regular communication, recognizing volunteers' contributions, and offering training and professional development opportunities. Volunteer management can provide access to resources that lower-income folks may not have. For example, volunteers can help provide food and clothing to those in need or provide transportation to job interviews and medical appointments. Volunteer management can also help lower-income folks build their social networks, which can be essential for finding job opportunities and accessing resources. Volunteers can introduce individuals to others in their community who can help them.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank you, Professor Piatak, and the faculty and staff of the Office of Undergraduate Research at The University of North Carolina at Charlotte for the opportunity to work on this project for the spring semester of 2023.

Data Graphs

AmeriCorps North Carolina Vs United States Volunteer Data 2017,2019,2021

