



Change the World: Volunteerism and Advocacy At Work

*Part of a series exploring issues
from The Community Foundation's
Aspire Arkansas report.*

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Volunteering Improves Our Communities



We all lead busy lives. Sometimes it is hard to find time for volunteer activities. But when we do, we reap big benefits for ourselves, our families and our communities. In addition to helping those in need and supporting worthwhile causes, getting involved can give us a sense of purpose and identity.

Volunteering can help us reduce stress, expand friend networks and learn new skills. According to *Simple Changes, Big Rewards: A Practical, Easy Guide for Healthy, Happy Living*, volunteering is good for our minds and bodies, can advance our careers and brings fun and fulfillment to our lives.

Beyond personal benefits, the 2011 Points of Light Institute Report found that:

- Volunteering helps build more cohesive, safer and stronger communities.
- Volunteering enhances the social connections between different sectors; it builds bridges for governments, enterprises and employees.
- Volunteering makes a significant contribution to the global economy.
- Volunteering promotes people to be more active in civic engagement and become more concerned citizens.

The time I spend as a volunteer board member, church member, advocate and all-around extra hand enriches my life while it improves my community. Don't miss the benefits of volunteerism and advocacy. Get involved today!

Heather Larkin

Heather Larkin
President and CEO

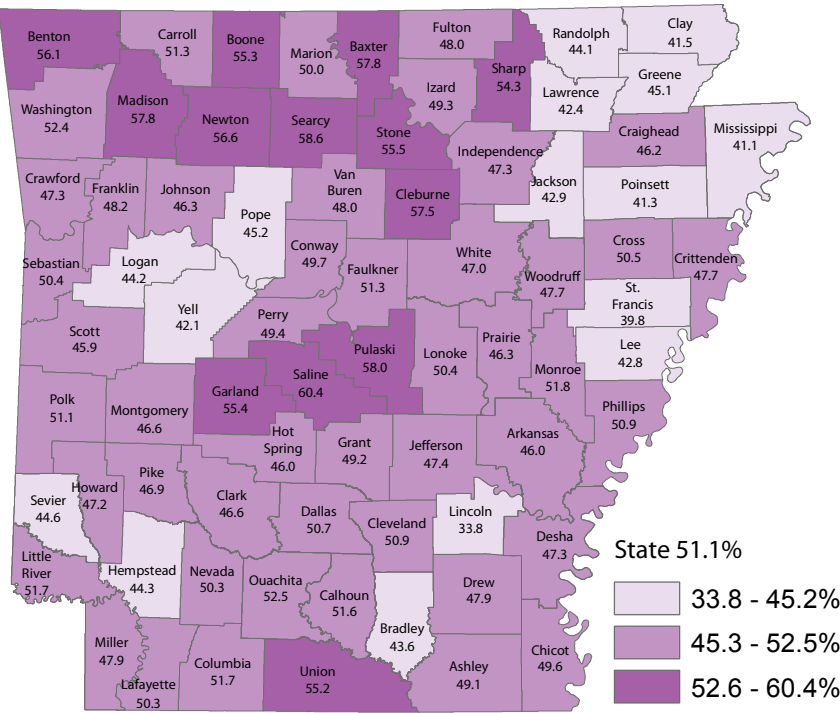
On the cover: Linda Stiles of Calhoun Animal Rescue Effort gives the beagle she and other volunteers named Grace a snuggle before putting her on a transport van bound for Minnesota. Calhoun Animal Rescue Effort rescues animals in Calhoun, Bradley, Ouachita and Dallas counties.

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voter participation

General Election number of ballots cast divided by estimated population of citizens 18 years of age or older; Arkansas by County, 2012



Sources: Arkansas Secretary of State's Office; and U.S. Census Bureau, 2007-2011 American Community Survey, Citizen Voting Age Population Special Tabulation



Jennifer Pinson and other volunteers operate H & P Animal Alliance in Magnolia, awarding spay/neuter grants, fostering and adopting out dogs, and coordinating their transportation from Arkansas to areas where they are more likely to find permanent homes.

Passionate Volunteers are the Soul of Arkansas Nonprofits

By Kimberly Dishongh

There was a flurry of activity on a rural road outside of Fordyce on a recent Wednesday afternoon – cars and pickup trucks rolled down the long driveway, people climbed out and called instructions to each other across the yard, and dogs barked — there were lots of dogs and lots of barking.

Gina Smith of Stephens, a volunteer with H & P Animal Alliance and Columbia County Animal Protection Services, arrived from Magnolia with five dogs in crates and she met up with volunteers

from several other nonprofits — Calhoun Animal Rescue Effort, Flash of Hope and a couple of others — who also had dogs to load into the Morning Meadow Animal Rescue (MMAR) transport van.

Mandy Noles from MMAR was gearing up for an overnight drive to Brooklyn Park, Minn., home of Midwest Animal Rescue & Services, where all of the 70 dogs she took are expected to find homes. Her own dogs, Popcorn and Auggie, were a happy part of the melee, knowing they would get to ride shotgun for the whole



Mandy Noles of Morning Meadow Animal Rescue drove her rescue organization's transport van overnight from Fordyce to Brooklyn Park, Minn., where dogs like this one will be made available for adoption.

"We don't consider animal rescue to be hard work. This is my happy place."

— Paula Robinson
Morning Meadow Animal Rescue



1,600 miles there and back.

Rescue groups depend on volunteers to do tasks ranging from raising money to cleaning kennels. Smith's chosen role is driving animals on the first legs of their journeys, though she has the utmost respect for folks who give temporary homes to animals awaiting adoption.

"The fosters look at it in a way that's very healthy. For every one they foster, that's a life saved out of a shelter," says Smith. "That would be harder for me, though. But I can transport them anywhere."

Smith has been driving dogs for H&P for about a year, usually two or three at a time to Little Rock or Mountain Home to meet other drivers who would take them to Kansas City to meet yet another driver who would move them closer to their final destinations. She once loaded 26 into her stock trailer for a trip. Driving to Fordyce is easier, she says.

Paula Robinson started MMAR in 2010 and Noles, then Fordyce's parks and recreation director, joined her a month later after they met at a city board meeting where the rescue was to be discussed. Robinson has since gone back to working full-time but still takes time to clean kennels at Morning Meadow, housed on land that has been in Noles' family for several generations.

Robinson's full-time career with abused and neglected children is stressful but she relishes the effort she puts forth at Morning Meadow. "We don't consider animal rescue to be hard work," Robinson says. "This is my happy place."

Volunteers like these committed animal welfare workers play crucial roles in the missions of nonprofits throughout Arkansas. They work in hospitals, teach reading and do hundreds of other jobs that positively impact our communities.

Diana Stensland of Russellville joined the Saint Mary's Regional Health Center's Volunteer Auxiliary six years ago after retiring from the corporate world. She had been a part of the auxiliary for a year when she was asked to serve as vice president. After two years in that role, she served two more as president, and she is now on an advisory board to the organization's new leadership.

During her time with the auxiliary she has helped the group further the "Look Before You Lock" campaign to make sure children are not left in locked cars by passing out hangtags and clear stickers for outside mirrors, and has championed several fundraisers to raise money for scholarships for hospital employees. The auxiliary has awarded about 15 \$500 scholarships in the last two years.

Stensland says her volunteer work has had some surprising benefits. "Most of our volunteers are over 65 and a lot of the ladies who work with us are widows," she says. "We really support each other and check on each other."

Her weekly duties at the hospital include greeting patients and families and taking them to the parts of the hospital where they need to go. That, too, has brought unexpected rewards. She remembers helping a woman whose husband had recently died look for his misplaced hearing aids.



Saint Mary's Regional Health Center Volunteer Diana Steensland brightens a patient's day with a colorful delivery.

"In that time she told me all about her life story and about what her husband meant to her. I like hearing about people's stories. I think she went out feeling that we had really tried to help her and for a few minutes she was outside her grief," she says.

"I can tell you story after story about people who have come in and they've been distraught and we have been able to help them in whatever way God puts before us. It's a personal touch and there's no amount of money that can be put on that."

Stacy Lindsey of Greenbrier also reaps the rewards of volunteering. For the past year, she has tutored two students for the past year through Literacy Action of Arkansas.

"I really wanted to volunteer for a literacy council for a long time because I think that illiteracy is one of the biggest handicaps in our society and one that we can overcome more readily than others," says Lindsey, who homeschooled her sons, now 17 and 20, including teaching them both to read.

She was trained through Literacy Action and uses the organizations detailed curriculum to help her students — a 21-year-old and a 77-year-old — learn and improve their reading and writing skills. "They are without a doubt the most fulfilling

two hours that I spend all week long," she says. "I absolutely love it, especially with the older lady and knowing that she's starting with almost nothing and learning the letter sounds and how they're all put together to make a word. It's incredible." Lindsey works part time and sometimes has to rearrange her schedule so she can meet regularly with her students, but she considers that time well-spent.

"If you find something that you're passionate about and you're volunteering for two hours or however long every week," she says, "the reward that you get far outweighs whatever inconvenience that you may struggle through. It's worth it."



Diana Steensland of Russellville has been a volunteer for Saint Mary's for six years.



Ask What You Can Do for Your City and State

What can one person, one neighborhood or one community possibly do to influence public policy? More than you may think.

A few years back, a group of volunteers from one small town changed their representative's mind on a much contested Pre-Kindergarten education bill in the Arkansas General Assembly. Because the people he represented felt strongly about the bill, the legislator reversed his vote and Pre-K education in Arkansas was enhanced.

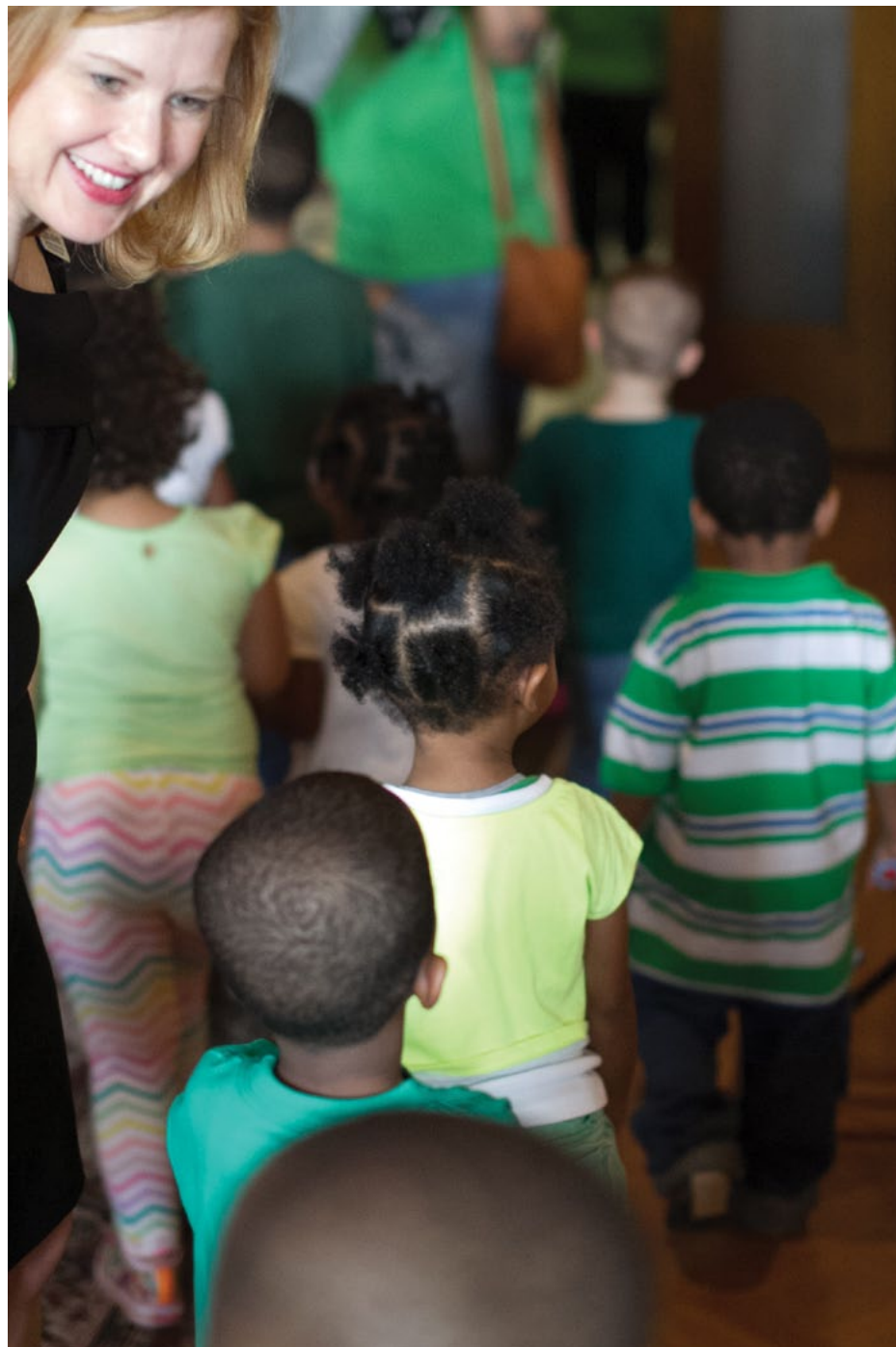
Community members met with the chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee in his district on a rainy Saturday. The bill to create an Arkansas Department of Agriculture passed after he responded to their concerns.

Both Kerri Sernel, Outreach Director of Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families, and Bill Kopsky, Executive Director of the Arkansas Public Policy Panel, represent non-partisan organizations that spend much of their time and resources educating the public about the power of advocacy and the steps everyday citizens can take to begin advocating for policy goals.

Public policy affects our lives in many ways, large and small. It governs, for example, the water we use to brush our teeth, the road we drive on to get to work, the schools our children attend and access to healthcare. To advance policy goals, advocates must develop relationships with city council members, state legislators and members of Congress.

"It is important that citizens realize that they are the experts in their sphere of influence. For example, I tell Pre-K teachers and administrators that no one knows more about Pre-K needs than they do," Sernel said. "When advocates provide their experience and knowledge, they become partners with the law makers to ensure policy decisions reflect the everyday reality of the people impacted by those bills."

Kopsky believes that because not enough people have been willing to become involved in policy making, there are long-standing problems in Arkansas that have not changed, even though policy makers have had generations to eliminate them. "Our main strategy



Even preschoolers can be advocates! This group of kiddos met with the Governor during AACF Pre-K Day at the Capitol.

is to get more people involved in the process so that they can have a voice in what is needed for their neighborhood, school district, city or county," he said.

Groups can take actions like holding town hall meetings, mobilizing volunteers to speak at city council or school board



Grassroots leader Alyce Love calls on lawmakers to focus on research-proven education reform, rather than failing privatizations schemes during the 2017 legislative session. The advocacy day events bring Citizens First Congress members from across the state to see the legislature in action and talk to their lawmakers face to face.

meetings and initiating letter-writing campaigns to local officials. They can seek allies across all political lines to achieve the policy goals important to their community. Both organizations report strong bi-partisan successes and say that advocacy is about issues, not ideology.

"Communities need a voice so that they are not overlooked," Kopsky said. "It takes building relationships throughout our very diverse state, regardless of geography, race and political affiliations. When people are engaged and advocate together, they are smarter and more effective."

Arkansas Advocates is a 40-year-old nonprofit that addresses public policy effects on children through research, analysis of policy and work with policy makers. It is non-partisan and receives no government funding. Arkansas Advocates believes there are solid economic reasons for public policy that supports children and families who represent the future and current workforce. Over the

years the organization's major successes include helping shape laws that govern juvenile justice, child welfare, pre-K programs and healthcare.

The Public Policy Panel was founded in 1963 by mothers of school-age children working on the desegregation issue. Today, the community is in charge; when invited, the Panel helps create a sustainable infrastructure and leadership that results in effective strategies for the issues important to the community. The Panel connects local groups through an advocacy coalition called Citizens First Congress, and that body votes on an agenda to push at the state level. Currently, the long-term issues being addressed include improving education, accessible healthcare, prison reform, clean water and clean energy.

Both Kopsky and Sernel agree that good advocacy strategy is based in research. Advocates should do their homework by collecting and analyzing data so that their positions are grounded in facts, and

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they must understand the tax and budgeting system of their city, county and state. The budget reflects the priorities of the elected officials who approve it.

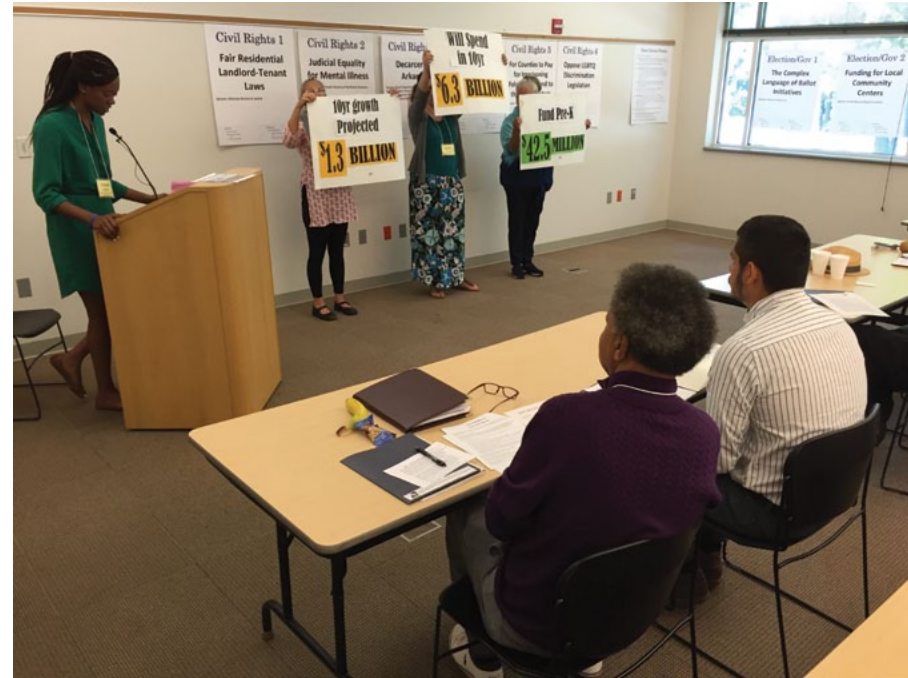
“You can’t pigeon-hole the response you will get when you advocate in the spirit of partnership,” Sernel said. “Come in with a solid case, data and a compelling story, and you will be amazed at how much you can accomplish.”

Right Now, You Can:

- Make sure you are registered to vote. Vote every time you have the chance.
- Find out the names, phone numbers and emails of your city council members, state legislators and Congressional representatives. Contact them to tell them your views.
- Talk to the people you know about your views on policy decisions. You never know who may be an influencer or when you might create a group that can make meaningful change.
- Donate online or attend events that support advocacy groups you want to support. Visit aradvocates.org or arpanel.org to learn more.

“It is important that citizens realize that they are the experts in their sphere of influence. When advocates provide their experience and knowledge, they become partners with the law makers to ensure policy decisions reflect the everyday reality of the people impacted by those bills.”

— Kerri Sernel



Prison reform group DecARcerate presents a resolution at the 2016 Citizens First Congress Legislative Convention. The convention is modeled on Arkansas’ legislative process to help people understand how bills are passed at the Capitol. Member organizations bring proposals to their caucuses to have a discussion, debate and elect priorities to recommend to the full convention.



CFC members elect the “10 Priorities for a Better Arkansas,” a legislative platform which guides the CFC’s work during the next session. The CFC helps the priority sponsors build a campaign plan to push for progressive reform. The CFC also uses the platform as a guide during the session to support or oppose bills related to each issue.



VolunteerAR Helps Match Interests with Nonprofit Needs

Arkansans looking for volunteer opportunities can log on to **VolunteerAR.org** to enter their location, preferences, skills, professional capabilities and hours of availability. A list of matching volunteer opportunities with links to the website of the nonprofits who have requested help is provided immediately. After they are matched, volunteers can use the portal to log volunteer time and print reports of their volunteer commitments.

The Arkansas Department of Human Services launched the VolunteerAR web portal to match volunteer interests and availability with the needs of Arkansas nonprofits during National/Arkansas Volunteer Week, April 23- 29.

“Eventually, we’d like to have 175 or more nonprofits participate, and we feel good about reaching that number. What we want to do now is drive the citizens of Arkansas to the portal and get them to use it,” said Shana H. Chaplin, DHS Deputy Chief of Community Engagement and Faith-based Partnerships.

Existing research shows Arkansas somewhere between seventh and fourth in the nation in charitable giving. But the state is listed between 50th and 45th in volunteer engagement. Chaplin believes that the engagement numbers are flawed because there has not been a good mechanism to capture volunteerism in our state.

“Clearly Arkansans are showing with their money that they are compassionate and aware of social issues,” she said. “We hope to use the VolunteerAR portal as a way to capture more of the volunteer work that is currently going on and to encourage additional engagement.”

The portal is administered by Hands On Connect, a division of the national nonprofit Points of Light. The organization has used the same software in other states to successfully match volunteers and nonprofits. Volunteer requests from nonprofits are reviewed by DHS and nonprofits receive a log-in upon approval for the program. To keep the site timely, opportunities stay up only three months before they must be revised and reposted by the nonprofits to stay on the system.

“The volunteer and nonprofit support functions of our agency have been reorganized under the Office of Communication,” said Amy Webb, DHS Chief of Communications and Community

Engagement. “We’ve taken this chance to rethink what we do and to create a new way for our government agency to connect with volunteers and promote volunteerism to drive outcomes that address social needs.”

DHS touches a third of the lives in Arkansas directly — a huge segment of the population that receives essential services. “But the government can’t and should not do it alone. Lots of people want to make a difference for others, and they can do it through volunteering for nonprofits,” Webb said.

In addition to their coordination of VolunteerAR, DHS will present the Community Service Awards in partnership with KARK on June 3. Another program the department administers under the leadership of the Governor’s Commission on National Service and Volunteerism is the Corporation for National and Community Service AmeriCorps program. The funding administered allows local organizations to put AmeriCorps members to work in schools and nonprofits.

The agency also promotes national days of service, like the September 11 National Day of Service and Remembrance. DHS is planning a conference in partnership with several other organizations that will help nonprofits and volunteers learn how best to collaborate to impact social issues.

“Government provides the system and processes for people to access the assistance they need,” Chaplin said. “But it is the personal contact provided by volunteers in the nonprofit and the faith community that helps transform the lives of those who need help. Our office is fitting those puzzle pieces together.”





ARKANSAS VIEWPOINTS

“What can Arkansans do to become more engaged in their communities?”



By Robin E. Bowen
President
Arkansas Tech University

One of the most inspiring aspects of serving as president at Arkansas Tech University is witnessing the philanthropic nature of the people on our campuses.

Regardless of whether it is a volunteer effort to apply a fresh coat of paint to a building, our Helping Halls program to provide meals for the food insecure during the holiday season, the Greeks Give Back effort to distribute nourishment to area elementary school children over the summer or one of countless other programs large and small, Arkansas Tech University students help people they don't even know throughout the year.

If one organization at ATU represents our spirit of giving it is Because We Can. This group of students and faculty defines what it means to be engaged in the community.

Because We Can recovered 19,220 pounds of food from Chambers Cafeteria at ATU and delivered it to local service organizations last year. They have taken steps to establish a food pantry on campus, and they led a 2016 effort to collect personal hygiene items for school children that gathered 49,000 items at an approximate retail value of more than \$72,000.

If ATU students are any indication ... and I believe they are ... the future is in good hands.



By Nathan Keltch
Program Director
Recycle Bikes for Kids

Arkansas is rich with opportunities to help your fellow citizens. Volunteering is not only for the greater good, but for your good. A retiree who regularly volunteers at my organization, Recycle Bikes for Kids, put it best, “When I worked I had two families: my family at home and my family at work. People need that, and I found that here at Recycle Bikes.” Volunteering is not only about giving, it is about building community together.

Recycle Bikes for Kids is a majority volunteer-run organization. We give away 2,000 bicycles a year: 1,500 kid's bikes and 500 adult bikes. We pride ourselves on providing an opportunity for every child to get a bike free of cost, and for every adult to earn a bike. Through our adult program, we have given the homeless population a pathway out of poverty. Volunteers spend their time fixing bicycles for children, organizing the shop and helping build our program to reach our community better.

Join us today to help us continue providing our community with a free access to a safe and healthy form of transportation and empowerment. We would not be able to reach our community without the support of volunteers and donors. To work with us, please reach me at nate@recyclebikesforkids.org or 501-563-8264.



Tips on Boosting Your Volunteer Program

In 2013, the National Center of Charitable Statistics reported that there were more than 12,000 nonprofit organizations in the state of Arkansas alone. With the wide range of services provided by these organizations, there is sure to be a need for dedicated volunteers to provide critical support in achieving their missions.

These volunteers play an important role in leading nonprofits, embracing their missions and bearing their brands. Whether the term “volunteer” means a shelf-stocker at a local foodbank or a long-standing board member who advises financial operations, the title clearly bears much significance when considering the success of our state's nonprofit sector.

So often, volunteers become burned out from lack of program planning, increased boredom or poor internal communication practices. Below are some tips nonprofits can consider as they begin refreshing or rebuilding their volunteer programs:

1 Consider whether volunteers fit into your strategic plan.

Often, volunteers are thought of as free labor. While this may be true and very beneficial to most organizations, volunteers must have the support from someone on staff. Most often, nonprofit staff already have several items on their to-do list. Make sure you have plenty of staff time to ensure the volunteer program's success.

2 Recruit to retain.

Consider carefully the kind of work that you need from your volunteers. After you've identified the positions you need filled, consider writing a full job description for each position and take it as seriously as hiring a paid staff position. The clearer you are in the beginning, the more likely your volunteers won't be surprised when it comes to time requirements or work intensity.

3 Be responsive.

When a volunteer signs up to participate, make sure you respond to their request in a reasonable time frame. Responding two weeks after a request is made could potentially cost you a volunteer who has moved on to a more responsive nonprofit. Not only should you be responsive as new volunteers come on board with your organization, you should also remain open to new thoughts, ideas and suggestions for streamlining certain processes. There's always room for improvement, and fresh perspectives are a value-added when it comes to bringing in new faces.

4 Communicate wisely.

How do your volunteers receive information? Consider the age, location, experience and availability of your volunteers. Are they employed full-time? Are they retired? Are they students with flexible, but odd schedules? Consider your volunteers as a specific audience for your organization and build a strategic plan around how you engage them. They need to know that you're willing to work with their unique situations to make volunteering for your organization a positive experience.



5 Consider a “thank you” strategy.

Saying “thanks” could be as simple as writing a personal note on their volunteer anniversary or maybe hosting a volunteer luncheon. Whatever you do, making a volunteer feel valued and their time appreciated, is important for making your relationship with them last. If volunteers are a crucial part of your organization, they should receive as much, if not more, attention as your donors!

Volunteers can quickly become the most useful tool in your toolbox. They're sharing your brand, seeing how your organization operates “behind the scenes” and most importantly, they're at the frontlines of serving your community.

According to the Corporation of National and Community Service, the top volunteer positions for Arkansas in 2015 were related to providing food, fundraising, tutoring and engaging in general labor. More than 487,000 volunteers clocked 54.5 million hours of service and the value of that service falls around \$1.14 billion. Consider carefully how you engage them so that they can be a strong pillar in your organization's success.



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Compared with people who never volunteered, the odds of being "very happy" rose 7 percent among those who volunteer monthly and 12 percent for people who volunteer every two to four weeks. Among weekly volunteers, 16 percent felt very happy.
— *Social Science and Medicine, London School of Economics*

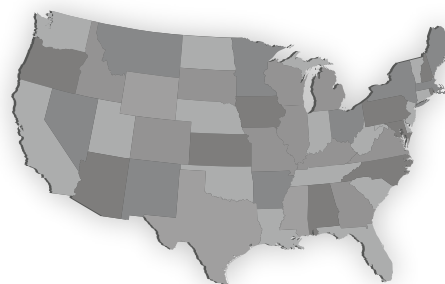
Approximately 140 million people in the 37 countries studied engage in volunteer work in a typical year. If those 140 million volunteers comprised the population of a country, it would be the ninth largest country in the world.

— *Johns Hopkins Center for Civil Society Studies 2011*



In the U.S, volunteers produce services worth \$113 billion to \$161 billion annually.

— *Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action, 2012*



About 62.6 million people in the U.S. volunteered through or for an organization at least once between September 2014 and September 2015.

— *U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015*

The volunteer rate of 16- to 19-year-olds more than doubled between 1989 and 2005. The 2015 teenage volunteer rate of 25.2 percent is still larger than it was in 1974 and 1989, though the rate has declined since 2005.

— *nonprofitquarterly.org 2016*



Arkansas Community Foundation thanks all 14,968 Arkansans who gave to the nonprofits they care about during the third ArkansasGives day April 6. Thanks to you, nonprofits will receive more than \$6.1 million to further their missions. And we applaud the 930 plus nonprofits who worked hard to let the community know their needs. Arkansans are indeed a generous people.

Visit arkansasgives.org to see more results!

