

SOCIAL CAPITAL DATA BRIEF: VOLUNTEERISM

BACKGROUND

Social capital is having the networks, norms, and structures that promote upward economic mobility by increasing social stability and widening access to key resources.¹ In 2019, the UNC Charlotte Urban Institute partnered with Leading on Opportunity, Opportunity Insights, Foundation for the Carolinas, Communities In Schools, the YMCA of Greater Charlotte, and SHARE Charlotte, with additional funding support from the Gambrell Foundation, to conduct a new baseline measurement of social capital in Mecklenburg County. Volunteerism and participation in voluntary organizations are important avenues of connecting with people from different cross-sections of society, and are therefore one way of measuring social capital.² This data brief looks at the demographic trends in volunteerism, including barriers to volunteerism, in Mecklenburg County.

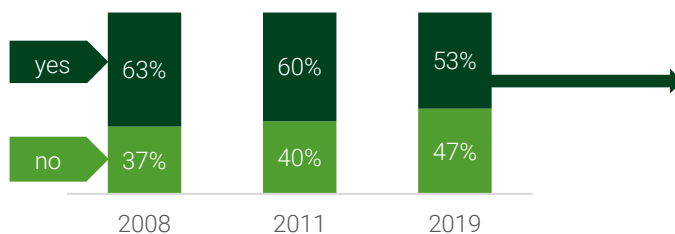


Social capital can create opportunities for upward economic mobility²

HISTORIC TRENDS

Volunteerism questions have been measured in Mecklenburg County intermittently since 2008. The question wording has changed slightly over time, from “About how many times in the past 12 months have you volunteered?” in 2008 and 2011 to “Have you volunteered in Mecklenburg County in the last 12 months?” in 2019. Those who reported zero times in 2008 and 2011 were recoded as “no” on the table below. Trends suggest that volunteerism has declined since 2008. This may be partially attributed to changes in the question wording. In 2019, 53% of respondents had volunteered in Mecklenburg County in the last 12 months, while 47% had not.

Have you volunteered in the last 12 months?



Respondents who:

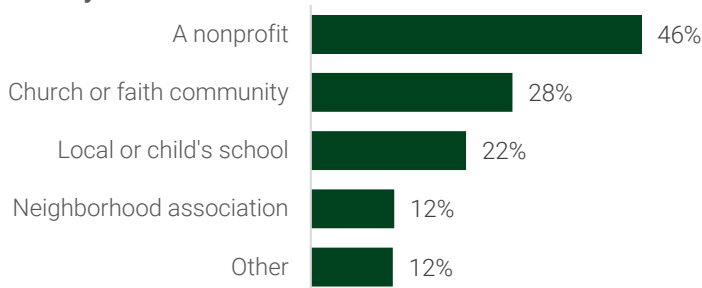
- had family incomes of \$60,000 or above; or
- were college graduates

were more likely to have volunteered in the 2019 survey.

2019 TRENDS

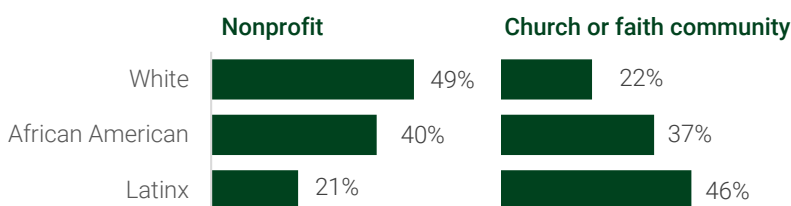
The 2019 Social Capital Survey consisted of a 400-person sample that was demographically representative of Mecklenburg County. The results for several volunteerism questions are presented below.

Where have you volunteered?³

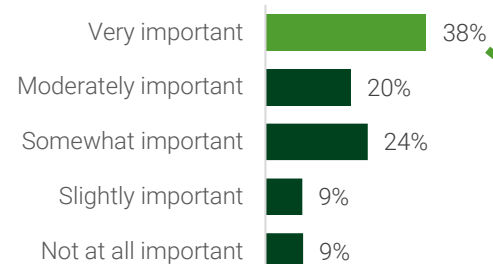


Volunteer locations by race/ethnicity

Of those who had volunteered in the last year, White respondents more often volunteered at a nonprofit (49%), while Latinx and African American respondents more often volunteered at a church or faith community (46% and 37% respectively).



How important is it that you volunteer in your community?



22% of those who said volunteering is “very important” had **not** volunteered in the last 12 months.

What were respondents’ barriers to volunteering?

1. This is the working definition of social capital developed by the Charlotte Social Capital Research Committee.; 2. Chetty, Raj, Nathaniel Hendren, Patrick Kline, and Emmanuel Saez. (2014).; 3. The question “Where have you volunteered?” allowed for multiple responses.

2019 TRENDS, BARRIERS TO VOLUNTEERING

More than half (57%) of all respondents said that time was a barrier to volunteering, while 21% said that they didn't know where to get started. Barriers to volunteering, and populations who are most impacted by those barriers, are shown below.

57% "don't have time"	57% of all respondents reported lack of time as a barrier to volunteering. This was a particular barrier for: ⁴ <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ages 18 to 34 (69%)• Employed individuals (63%)	21% "don't know where to get started"	21% of all respondents reported not knowing where to start a barrier to volunteering. This was a particular barrier for: ⁴ <ul style="list-style-type: none">• African Americans (29%)• Households earning less than \$40,000 (32%)• Mecklenburg resident for 5 years or less (34%)
11% "don't feel like I can contribute"	11% of all respondents reported not feeling like they can contribute as a barrier to volunteering. This was a particular barrier for: ⁴ <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ages 65 and over (21%)• High school degree or less (23%)	13% are "not interested in volunteering"	13% of all respondents reported lack of interest as a barrier to volunteering. This was a particular barrier for: ⁴ <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Age 65 and over (27%)• High school degree or less (23%)

EXPLAINING BARRIERS TO VOLUNTEERING

Nationally, individuals with higher human capital (e.g. income and education) more often volunteer and participate in community groups than those with lower human capital.⁵⁻⁶ This is evidenced in the current survey, where those with higher income and education volunteered more often and reported fewer barriers to volunteering. Volunteer behaviors are also impacted by personal traits such as stage of life. National data collected between 1974 and 2015 demonstrate that individuals are most active in volunteering with organizations during high school years and at ages 35 to 44, while those ages 20 to 24 and 65 and over are the least likely to volunteer.⁷ Racial and ethnic differences have been found to predict if and where people of different backgrounds volunteer. Latinx individuals are more likely to volunteer in informal or family settings than non-Latinx individuals, and Latinxs and African Americans who regularly attend religious services are more likely to volunteer than their White counterparts.⁸⁻⁹ This indicates that the church plays an important social role within minority communities and serves to mobilize volunteers within its network. Throughout volunteerism literature, the most commonly noted barrier to volunteering is lack of time. Scholars note that prospective volunteers are more likely to consider volunteering if they can create a flexible schedule or a flexible volunteer environment (e.g. from home).¹⁰

4. Only statistically significant demographic trends are reported. Statistical significance is determined by regression analysis, which controlled for variance caused by age, race, education, and (for "don't have time" only) employment status; 5. Niebuur, J., van Lente, L., Liefbroer, A. C., Steverink, N., & Smidt, N. (2018); 6. Sandstrom A. & Alper B.A. (2019); 7. Dietz N. and Grimm R.T. (2016); 8. Wang, L., Yoshioka, C. F., & Ashcraft, R. F. (2013); 9. Musick, M. A., Wilson, J., & Bynum Jr, W. B. (2000); 10. McGarvey A., Jochum V., Davies J., Dobbs J., Hornung L. (2019).

For more information on findings or methodology, contact Bridget Anderson at Bridget.Anderson@uncc.edu.