

Research Brief:

# Volunteering in America's Faith-Based Organizations

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Intrinsic in the spirit and purpose of many faith-based organizations is a sentiment that it is important to make a difference by serving others—it is only natural that faith-based organizations and other nonprofit organizations work together to achieve the good they wish to see in the community. This document reviews some of the research from the Corporation for National and Community Service on the nexus of these in order to help guide the process of forming more effective collaborations.

## Volunteer Participation and Retention

**Faith-based organizations are great resources for nonprofits seeking volunteers.**

Religious organizations are the most popular organizations through which volunteers serve. They were the *main* organization to serve with for 35.9 percent of America's volunteers between 2006 and 2008.<sup>1</sup>

**Faith-based organizations rarely go without volunteers for their social service programs and activities.**

Most of the country's congregations (83%) take part in or support social service, community development, or neighborhood organizing projects. The vast majority of these (91%) report that congregation members volunteer to serve for these programs and activities.<sup>2</sup>

**Volunteers who serve through faith-based organizations are the most likely to continue serving.**

Seventy percent of volunteers who serve primarily through faith-based organizations continue serving from one year to the next, the highest retention rate of any type of organization through which volunteers serve.<sup>3</sup>

## Partnerships

**Charities that partner with religious organizations have a greater scope of volunteer use.**

Charities that partner with religious organizations are more likely to use a large number of volunteers contributing many hours of service than are those organizations without this type of collaboration.<sup>4</sup>

**Nonprofits with secular missions are missing the opportunity for partnership.**

Despite the popularity of volunteering through faith-based organizations, only 15 percent of nonprofit charities with secular missions report partnerships with faith-based organizations. Nonprofits that do partner report greater benefits.<sup>5</sup>



## More Research Findings

### Faith-based organizations need volunteer managers.

Nearly half (46%) of congregations with social service activities report that a one-year, full-time volunteer with a living stipend who would have the responsibility of volunteer recruitment and management would be helpful “to a great extent.” Even more congregations are particularly interested in this type of volunteer than they are in additional funding for volunteer management.<sup>6</sup>

### Over 40 percent of mentors serve through faith-based organizations.

Mentors are even more likely to serve through faith-based organizations than volunteers in general are, with 42 percent of mentors serving through these organizations.<sup>7</sup>

### Older adults are more likely to serve through religious organizations.

Almost half (47.0%) of volunteers age 65 and older volunteer mainly through faith-based organizations, compared to less than a third (31.0%) of volunteers age 16-24.<sup>8</sup>

### Black/African American volunteers are the most likely to serve through faith-based organizations.

Almost half (47.1%) of Black/African American volunteers serve primarily through faith-based organizations, the largest proportion of any race or ethnicity. Still, all races and ethnicities are more likely to serve through faith-based organizations than any other type of organization.<sup>9</sup>

### Youth who attend religious services regularly are almost twice as likely to volunteer regularly.

While 14 percent of youth (ages 12-18) who do not attend religious services volunteer regularly (serving 12 or more hours in a year), 27 percent of youth who attend religious services about every week volunteer regularly.<sup>10</sup>

### Faith-based organizations set youth from disadvantaged circumstances on a pathway of service.

Youth from disadvantaged circumstances are less likely to volunteer than other youth, but when they do serve it is more likely to be through their religious congregation (39% versus 33%). They are also much more likely to report that they are motivated to serve by their religious or spiritual beliefs (48% compared to 36%).<sup>11</sup>

<sup>1</sup> From the Corporation's “Volunteering in America, 2009” study, released July 28, 2009. See [www.VolunteeringInAmerica.gov](http://www.VolunteeringInAmerica.gov).

<sup>2</sup> From the Corporation's “Volunteer Management in America's Religious Organizations,” released June, 2004. See [http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/vol\\_capacity\\_brief.pdf](http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/vol_capacity_brief.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Reported in the Corporation's “Issue Brief: Volunteer Retention,” released April, 2007. See [http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/VIA/VIA\\_brief\\_retention.pdf](http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/VIA/VIA_brief_retention.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> See endnote 2.

<sup>5</sup> See endnote 2.

<sup>6</sup> From the Corporation's “Volunteer Management Capacity in America's Charities and Congregations,” written with the Urban Institute, released February, 2004. See [http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/vol\\_capacity\\_brief.pdf](http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/vol_capacity_brief.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> From the Corporation's “Volunteers Mentoring Youth: Implications for Closing the Mentoring Gap,” released May, 2006. See [http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/06\\_0503\\_mentoring\\_report.pdf](http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/06_0503_mentoring_report.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> See endnote 1.

<sup>9</sup> See endnote 1.

<sup>10</sup> From the Corporation's “Building Active Citizens: The Role of Social Institutions in Teen Volunteering,” released November, 2005. See [http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/05\\_1130\\_LSA\\_YHA\\_study.pdf](http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/05_1130_LSA_YHA_study.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> From the Corporation's “Leveling the Path to Participation: Volunteering and Civic Engagement Among Youth From Disadvantaged Circumstances,” released March, 2007. See [http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/07\\_0406\\_disad\\_youth.pdf](http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/07_0406_disad_youth.pdf).