Doing Good by the Young and Old: Forty Years of American Volunteering

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Every year, millions of Americans—on college campuses, through religious congregations, at schools, and in social service organizations—are participating in a wide range of volunteer activities. Whether teaching and mentoring children, helping seniors to live independently, or aiding families and individuals to recover from hurricanes and other disasters, volunteering is a way for people to help their neighbors and enhance their communities; it also provides opportunities for youth to develop valuable skills, adults to share their professional expertise, and older individuals to remain healthy by staying active and connected to their community.

But how has volunteering changed over the last forty years in the United States? Our research shows that volunteering has increased dramatically for certain age groups, particularly the oldest (sixty-five and over) and the youngest (sixteen to nineteen). Meanwhile, some important volunteering patterns have never changed: for example, people ages thirty-five to forty-four tend to volunteer more than younger adults and older adults, because they tend to have stronger connections to their communities. Overall, the long-term trends we outline will disappoint those who expected that national crises such as 9/11 and the Great Recession would spark a new golden age of sustained high levels of volunteering.
Background: Historical Data on Volunteering

In 2006, we (the authors of this article, along with our coauthors) published a research brief, *Volunteer Growth in America: A Review of Trends Since 1974*, while working for the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). This brief presented a historical review of volunteering through an analysis of data collected in 1974, 1989, and 2003 to 2005 via the Current Population Survey (CPS). The CPS, conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau for the Bureau of Labor Statistics, is the source of official government statistics on employment and unemployment. Each month for over fifty years, the CPS has collected data from around one hundred thousand adults in approximately fifty-six thousand households across the United States. (See the Methodological Note on Survey Comparisons sidebar at the end of this article for more details about the historical CPS data.)

Each September since 2002, the CPS monthly survey has included a supplemental survey on volunteering, sponsored by CNCS. These supplements have provided researchers with annual data on volunteering that have served as the data source for several CNCS research reports. Our approach offers a broader historical view by including data not just from the 2002 to 2015 supplement but also earlier supplements (1974 and 1989), in order to track historical changes in volunteering.

In our 2006 brief, we included CPS survey data from 1974 and 1989. Now, we add data from CPS’s 2015 supplement, so that we can take an in-depth look at volunteering during four different periods in American history.

Volunteering Hit a Forty-Year High After 9/11 and Then Declined Substantially

When the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, occurred, many observers speculated that the nation was entering one of those historical moments that would serve as a catalyst for a new age of citizen engagement. Prior to 9/11, substantial research found that individuals’ involvement with their community had significantly declined over the last half-century. Shortly after that, signs began to emerge that volunteering and other forms of civic participation in America were beginning to undergo a renewal. And this has been borne out: Americans’ engagement in politics, for one noteworthy example, has been increasing—with voter participation in presidential elections rising between 1996 and 2012, and peaking in 2008.

The immediate post-9/11 years were a high-water mark for volunteering, too—as Figure 1, which looks at volunteer rates across a forty-year period, demonstrates. When volunteer rates are calculated in a time-consistent way, the adult volunteer rate measured in September 2015 was virtually identical to the volunteer rate measured in April 1974. This is mainly a consequence of recent declines in the national volunteer rate: the 2015 rate is the lowest rate measured since the CPS began conducting annual volunteer surveys in 2002. Still, over sixty-two million adults reported in 2015 that they did at least some volunteer work over the previous year.

It appears that 9/11 had a relatively short-lived impact on volunteer rates on a national level. The decline is disappointing given our hope that 9/11 might help reverse long-term declines in community engagement. The decline is also surprising given that one would expect there to have been an increased demand for volunteers from nonprofit organizations: the Urban Institute’s National Center for Charitable Statistics estimates that between 2003 and 2013, the number of public charities increased by almost twenty percent. While many of these new nonprofits may be primarily staffed by professionals, nonprofit organizations continue to rely on volunteers to help them run their internal operations and provide services to the community (a national study of nonprofit volunteer management in 2003 indicated that 81 percent of nonprofit organizations in America use volunteers). The Great Recession, which started in 2007, didn’t stimulate any lasting outpouring of new volunteering by Americans—nor greater recruitment of volunteers by nonprofits, either—as Figure 1 suggests.
While the volunteering rate has risen and fallen over the last forty years, Americans have consistently volunteered more with some types of organizations than with others. Figure 2 shows the places where Americans spend the most time volunteering and how these patterns have changed since 1989 (the first time that the CPS supplement collected data on the main organization of volunteers). In all three time periods (1989, 2005, and 2015), religious organizations have been the most commonly reported main volunteer organization type. Meanwhile, civic, political, professional, or international organizations, sport, hobby, cultural, or art organizations, and hospital or other health organizations continued to lose market share in the volunteer workforce, while the percentage of volunteers who served primarily with education or youth services and with social and community service organizations continued to increase. In the “Other” category, historically less popular main-organization types (such as environmental, animal care, and public safety organizations) continued to grow in popularity between 2005 and 2015.

Volunteering among Teenagers (Ages Sixteen to Nineteen) Has Dramatically Increased in the Last Twenty-Five Years

The most striking change since the late 1980s is the dramatic increase in volunteering related to educational and youth services organizations, as Figure 2 shows. This trend parallels one of the biggest changes over the last forty years: a rising volunteer rate among teenagers.

As Figure 3 shows, the volunteer rates of teenagers (ages sixteen to nineteen) were quite low in 1974 and 1989 but more than doubled between 1989 and 2005—to a rate that exceeds the national volunteer rate (27.0 percent in 2005). The 2015 teenage volunteer rate of 25.2 percent is still larger today than it was in 1974 and 1989, though the rate has declined since 2005.
What exactly is driving young people’s increased engagement in volunteering? One factor seems to be the growth of school-based service efforts (outside and inside the classroom). We conducted a national survey of school principals in 2008 that found that 86 percent of high schools organized community service opportunities. This compares to only 27 percent of public high schools in 1984, an indication that America’s schools have placed substantially more emphasis on engaging youth in service. A number of other long-term studies of youth corroborate our findings by reporting all-time highs in youth civic attitudes and behaviors over the last two decades. The Higher Education Research Institute’s (HERI) 2015 CIRP Freshman Survey found an all-time high in the percentage of first-year college students who said that helping others in difficulty was a “very important” or “essential” personal objective. The University of Michigan’s “Monitoring the Future” study also finds that volunteering among tenth and twelfth graders has risen steadily over the past fifteen years.

Along with a high level of volunteering, young adults are increasingly likely to discuss politics—reversing the downward trend in political engagement since 1994. This interest in political events is matched by increases in the voting rate among young adults in recent years, with turnout among voters ages eighteen to twenty-nine peaking at 51 percent in the 2008 presidential election. As reported by UCLA Newsroom, the survey found that “interest in political and civic engagement [among entering college students] has reached the highest levels since the study began 50 years ago.” We are witnessing a historic group of highly motivated young people.

For Over Forty Years, the Life Cycle of Volunteering Has Remained Largely Consistent

In every time period, the CPS supplement shows that teenagers volunteer at higher rates on average than young adults ages twenty to twenty-four. Figure 4 illustrates the life cycle of volunteering. In all four decades, the results show that volunteer rates tend to rise after age twenty, reach their highest point at ages thirty-five to forty-four, and then begin to decline. The rise in volunteer rates at midlife can be attributed to adults settling into their community, building and strengthening their social networks and career, and interacting with more community institutions after having children. The decline in volunteer rates tends to be associated with retirement, diminished physical capabilities, and loss of connections with established social networks. Over the last two decades, however, the decline in volunteer rates after ages thirty-five to forty-four has been less sharp, suggesting that the peak volunteering period now includes a slightly older age group.

Today, the volunteer rates of individuals ages thirty-five to forty-four and forty-five to fifty-four are largely the same. Delays in marriage and childbearing among many adults are likely two of the driving forces behind these trends. The presence of children under the age of eighteen is an important predictor of volunteering, due partly to the demand for parents to serve in organizations related to their children’s educational and social involvement. Between 1989 and 2015, the rate of adults ages forty-five to sixty-four with children younger than eighteen years of age in their household increased significantly from 19.1 percent in 1989 to 21.6 percent in 2015. Over this same time period, volunteers in this age group are more than twice as likely to serve primarily with educational and youth service organizations. These trends support the contention that adults ages forty-five to sixty-four are more likely than ever to engage with their communities through the activities of their school-age children.
One of the most notable changes in volunteering over the last forty years came from adults ages sixty-five and over. As Figure 5 shows, the volunteer rate for these older Americans increased by 64 percent between 1974 and 2005 (from 14.3 percent in 1974 to 23.5 percent in 2005) and hardly changed at all between 2005 and 2015. Although the national volunteer rate for all adults declined substantially between 2005 and 2015 (from 27.0 percent in 2005 to 23.5 percent in 2015), the volunteer rate for older adults has dropped by less than a percentage point—the smallest decline of any age group.

In recent years, the older adult volunteer rate has been growing closer to the rate for midlife adults. The drop-off in volunteer rates between adults in midlife and older adults—which is a standard feature of the life-cycle pattern of volunteer rates—seems to be shrinking in size (see Figure 4). The difference in volunteer rates was over five percentage points in 2005 but had decreased to 1.3 percentage points by 2015. This trend points toward today's sixty-five-and-over age group being more likely to stay strongly engaged with volunteering than earlier generations.

Why has the volunteering rate increased so much among people ages sixty-five and over? While life expectancy in America has increased substantially since 1970, the position that older Americans are healthier today than they ever have been is more difficult to establish with certitude. In 2002, we found that poor health was the most common reason that older Americans did not volunteer. Yet, research also suggests that regular volunteering improves physical and mental health and may even lengthen life expectancy—especially if people develop the habit of volunteer service when they are younger. As researcher John Wilson notes, “Good health is preserved by volunteering; it keeps healthy volunteers healthy”—and this may be particularly true for seniors, who are most likely to experience significant health improvements from such activities.

Demographic evidence also suggests that today’s older adults have more resources to bring to volunteering than their predecessors. The proportion of adults ages sixty-five and older without a high school diploma has dropped more than fifty percentage points since 1974, and older Americans with college degrees are also volunteering at a higher rate than in the past. Shifts in education levels and wealth among older Americans may have also led to increased recruitment by nonprofits as they recognized the rising potential of older volunteers. Volunteering may also be higher among older adults because more of them are staying in the workforce, whether out of financial necessity or personal desire. Labor force participation rates for adults ages sixty-five and older have increased sharply in the last ten years, from 14.3 percent in 2005 to 18.4 percent in 2015. Older adults who continue to work are more likely to retain strong social networks and to be exposed and invited to more volunteer opportunities.

In Volunteer Growth in America, the 2006 report discussed earlier, we concluded that “…over the last 30 years...there has been a real increase in volunteering since 1974.” Ten years later, the U.S. volunteer rate has declined significantly, and today’s volunteer rate is not very different from that of 1974. The post-9/11 volunteer rates, which were the highest rates ever recorded, have steadily declined, especially over the past few years. Nonetheless, there is a real opportunity for nonprofits and other organizations to invest in approaches that capitalize on the wave of historically high volunteering going on today among teenagers and older adults.

The authors thank the original coauthors of the 2006 report—John Foster-Bey, David Reingold, and Becky Nesbit—as well as all of their former colleagues acknowledged in that brief. The original report is available here.
Methodological Note on Survey Comparisons

Each year since 2002, the Current Population Survey’s (CPS) September monthly edition has included a supplemental survey on volunteering, administered by the U.S. Census Bureau and sponsored by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). While many of CNCS’s volunteering research reports have relied on data from the modern-day (2002–2015) CPS supplements, both our 2006 report Volunteer Growth in America and this article offer a broader historical view of American volunteering by using data from two earlier CPS volunteer supplements, conducted in April 1974 and May 1989.

In order to arrive at definitions and measurements of key concepts that are consistent across all surveys, researchers must harmonize the data. For the 2006 report, we needed to develop a consistent definition of an “adult volunteer” that would allow us to compare volunteer statistics across survey periods. In all four survey periods, adult volunteers are defined as people ages sixteen or older who did work through an organization in the previous twelve months for which they were not paid.

The April 1974 survey collected volunteering data from respondents ages fourteen and older. To make the definition of adult consistent with present-day use, we excluded respondents ages fourteen and fifteen from our analysis, which causes the volunteer rate to differ from the results previously published from the 1974 survey. The results from the 1989 survey match the ones reported in previously published research by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), which also uses the sixteen-and-over definition. The 2005 results use this CPS definition of adult, too, but the results we reported were generated from a pooled CPS dataset that combines responses from the 2003, 2004, and 2005 volunteer surveys. For this reason, the 2005 results will differ from some previously published BLS data.

To create a fair historical comparison, we modified the calculation of the 2005 and 2015 volunteer rate so that it differs from the rate used in most previous reports. For this article, we used responses to the initial volunteer prompt on the CPS survey instrument (“Since September 1st of last year, [have you] done any volunteer activities through or for an organization?”) to calculate the 2005 volunteer rate. This calculation excludes a relatively small number of responses to the second volunteer prompt (“Sometimes people don’t think of activities they do infrequently or activities they do for children’s schools or youth organizations as volunteer activities. Since September last year, [have you] done any of these types of volunteer activities?”). Since the Census surveys of 1989 and 1974 did not include a follow-up question, we excluded those respondents who responded positively to the second prompt in 2005, in order to prevent an overinflation of the volunteering rate in 2005.

To update the volunteer trends we originally reported in the 2006 brief, we used the same formula to calculate volunteer statistics for 2015. Because of this change, the volunteer results we discuss in this article will differ slightly from numbers previously reported—especially those published in the annual U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics brief, “Volunteering in the United States (http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/volun.pdf).”

Notes

1. We analyzed CPS data from 1974, 1989, and 2005. The 2005 data are an aggregate of data from 2003 to 2005, and from this point on, these aggregate data will be referred to as 2005 data. The data collected in September 2002 include volunteering activities performed between September 2001 to September 2002, thus capturing volunteering that occurred in the year immediately after the September 11 attacks. The 2003 to 2005 data reflect the eventual rise in post-9/11 volunteering rates; however, the 2005 results do not include many of the volunteering activities that might have occurred following Hurricane Katrina, which hit the Gulf Coast at the end of August 2005. The 1989 and 2003 to 2005 surveys asked individuals not only if they volunteer but also where they volunteer, how they volunteer, and how often they volunteer. The 1974 survey did ask some volunteers where they volunteer and how often—
but only about volunteering they did during the week the survey was administered.

2. The **Volunteering in America** series includes:  *Volunteering in America: State Trends and Rankings* (2006), which is the first report with detailed information about adult volunteering by state;  *College Students Helping America* (2006), which identifies trends in college student volunteering; and the **Youth Helping America series** (2005–2008), which analyzes teenager volunteering through school and school-based service-learning projects, religious congregations, and community associations, as well as volunteering experiences with their family.

3. CPS supplements after 1989 are referred to as “modern day” supplements to differentiate them from the earlier surveys, which were conducted on an irregular basis and with no attempt at using standard definitions or wording of questions.


6. The decline in volunteer rates between 1974 and 1989 could be due to many factors, including (but not limited to) changes in population demographics, national socioeconomic trends, and the increase in demand for volunteers among nonprofit organizations. For additional details about the 1974, 1989, and “modern-day” CPS supplements, and how the data were used for this analysis, please see the Methodological Note on Survey Comparisons sidebar at the end of this article, or visit this site (http://www.nationalservice.gov/pdf/06_1203_volunteer_growth_methodology.pdf) for more information.

7. We follow the Bureau of Labor Statistics convention of designating everyone ages 16 and older “adults,” because that’s when they can enter the workforce without parental consent.


11. The rate for eighth graders has declined over the past five years, but it rose steadily over the ten years before that. See “Monitoring the Future” study results in *Volunteering: Indicators on Children and Youth*, Child Trends Data Bank, December 2015.


15. Authors’ calculations are from 1989 and 2015 CPS data.


18. Ibid.

19. Authors’ calculations are from 2005 and 2015 CPS data.
3-2006

Youth Helping America - Educating for Active Citizenship: Service-Learning, School-Based Service and Youth Civic Engagement

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YOUTH HELPING AMERICA

Educating for Active Citizenship: Service-Learning, School-Based Service and Youth Civic Engagement

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THE YOUTH HELPING AMERICA SERIES

BUILDING ACTIVE CITIZENS: The Role of Social Institutions in Teen Volunteering
November 2005

EDUCATING FOR ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP  Service-Learning, School-Based Service, and Civic Engagement
March 2006


The Corporation for National and Community Service provides opportunities for Americans of all ages and backgrounds to serve their communities and country through three programs: Senior Corps, AmeriCorps, and Learn and Serve America. Together with USA Freedom Corps, the Corporation is working to foster a culture of citizenship, service, and responsibility in America.

Learn and Serve America supports service-learning programs in schools and community organizations that help nearly 1 million students from kindergarten through college meet community needs, while improving their academic skills and learning the habits of good citizenship. Learn and Serve America grants are used to create new programs or replicate existing programs, as well as to provide training and development to staff, faculty, and volunteers. For more information, please visit www.nationalservice.gov.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

This brief is the second in the *Youth Helping America Series*, a series of reports based on data from the Youth Volunteering and Civic Engagement Survey, a national survey of 3,178 American youth between the ages of 12 and 18 that was conducted by the Corporation for National and Community Service in 2005 in collaboration with the U.S. Census Bureau and the nonprofit coalition Independent Sector.

The survey collected information on teen volunteering habits, experiences with school-based service-learning, and other forms of civic engagement. While the first brief in the *Youth Helping America Series* focused on youth volunteering and social institutions, this brief focuses on participation in school-based service — service opportunities made available or required by schools — among middle school and high school aged youth. We pay particular attention to the extent to which youth participate in service-learning courses, which integrate school-based service opportunities into the academic curriculum such as those programs supported by Learn and Serve America.

By approaching school-based service from the perspectives of youth, it is possible to identify: 1) who among youth participate in school-based service; 2) their perceptions of what they accomplished in the experience; and 3) the relationship between this school-based service and their attitudes and behaviors toward other forms of civic engagement.

According to the survey, 38 percent of youth — or an estimated 10.6 million students nationwide — report current or past participation in community service as part of a school activity or requirement. Of these students, 74 percent, or approximately 7.8 million, are either currently enrolled or were enrolled within the previous year in a course that contains a service component, while 26 percent participated in such a course at some time in the past. High school students are more likely than middle school students to have participated in at least one school-based service experience.

Of all school-based service experiences, more than three-quarters — or 77 percent — take place as part of a course that contains one or more of the generally accepted elements of high-quality service-learning. These elements include:

1. Planning the service activity (36 percent of all courses)
2. Participating in regular service for a semester or longer (36 percent of all courses)
3. Writing or reflecting on the service experience in class (51 percent of all courses)

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This brief is the second in the *Youth Helping America Series*, a series of reports based on the 2005 Youth Volunteering and Civic Engagement Survey.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

To determine whether youth participated in service-learning, as opposed to simply school-based service, we developed a service-learning quality index that counts the number of high-quality elements associated with the school-based service experience. Among the students who participate in school-based service, whether currently or some time in the past, we found that 10 percent — or an estimated 1.1 million — participate in service-learning with all three of the quality elements, 26 percent with two of the elements, and 41 percent with one of the elements.

While the majority of students report that their experience with school-based service had a positive impact on them, we found that students who report current or past participation in service-learning that includes reflection, planning, and service that lasts at least one semester, are more than twice as likely than students who participate in school-based service with none of the three quality elements to report that their experience had a very positive impact on them.

The study also found that the likelihood of a student's participation in school-based service, as well as in courses that involve one or more quality elements of service-learning, is related to several school factors:

- High school students (defined as grades 9 - 12) are more than 30 percent more likely than middle school students (defined as grades 6-8) to participate in school-based service, whether the participation occurred within the previous year or some time in the past.

- Students in private schools are more than 50 percent more likely to engage in school-based service than students in public schools. They also are more likely to engage in service-learning courses that include reflection, planning, and/or service that lasts at least one semester.

- Participation in school-based service is higher among students with grade-point averages of B+ or higher (43 percent) than among students with grade-point averages of B or lower (35 percent), as is participation in service-learning courses with one or more of the quality elements.

- Among youth who have participated in school-based service, high school students (80 percent) are more likely than middle school students (68 percent) to have participated in service that contains at least one of the three elements of quality service-learning.

In addition, the study found that youth coming from families where their parents and/or siblings volunteer are more likely to report current or past participation in school-based service, as well as service-learning courses that contain planning, reflection, and/or regular service that lasts at least one semester.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

Participation in school-based volunteer service, and especially service-learning courses with several quality elements, also was found to have a strong positive relationship with several measures of civic engagement, including their stated likelihood of future volunteering, their sense of personal efficacy, and their interest in current events and politics. Indeed, the strongest of these relationships are around future civic behaviors and attitudes. For example, we found that:

- Youth who report past participation in school-based service are more likely to have volunteered through an organization in the past twelve months than those youth who have never participated in school-based service, 59 percent to 48 percent, respectively.

- Students who report current or previous participation in a service-learning course that includes reflection, planning, and service that lasts at least one semester are 40 percent more likely than school-based service participants to say they are very likely to volunteer in the upcoming year, and 71 percent more likely than individuals who have never engaged in school-based service.

- Youth who report current or past participation in service-learning courses that include reflection, planning, and service that lasts at least one semester are 63 percent more likely than those who have never engaged in school-based service to say that they take a good deal of interest in world events.

- Participants in school-based service talk about politics with their friends and parents more often than non-participants do — and even more so when the service is part of a service-learning course that includes reflection, planning, and service that lasts at least one semester.

- Youth who report current or past participation in service-learning courses that include reflection, planning, and service that lasts at least one semester are almost three times as likely to believe they can make a great deal of difference in their community than youth who participated in school-based service without any of the quality elements of service-learning.

- Finally, youth from affluent families are more likely to participate in both school-based service and service-learning courses that include quality elements. However, youth from low-income families who participate in school-based service and service-learning demonstrate many positive relationships to civic attitudes and behaviors, highlighting the importance of making school-based service and service-learning courses accessible to students of all backgrounds.
Philanthropy

The New Volunteer Workforce

Nonprofits rely heavily on volunteers, but most CEOs do a poor job of managing them. As a result, more than one-third of those who volunteer one year do not donate their time the next year—at any nonprofit. That adds up to an estimated $38 billion in lost labor. To remedy this situation, nonprofit leaders must develop a more strategic approach to managing this overlooked and undervalued talent pool. The good news is that new waves of retiring baby boomers and energetic young people are ready to fill the gap.


Most nonprofit CEOs would love to have a person like Jim working for them. Jim has 13 years of financial experience at General Electric Co. and 28 years at J.P. Morgan, and he currently works for the March of Dimes Foundation doing strategic planning, marketing, information technology, training, and research. Jim is not, however, a full-time employee. Rather, Jim is a 77-year-old volunteer. Jim enjoyed his volunteer work at the March of Dimes so much that his wife, Sari, joined him. Her volunteer position includes recruiting other volunteers—and she's pretty good at it. In 2007, she helped recruit 42 volunteers who donated a total of more than 11,000 hours (valued at an estimated $200,000 of in-kind services). In addition to volunteering, Jim and Sari are donors—members of the March of Dimes' President's Society—and have convinced the rest of their family to participate. Their daughter, Beth, raised $3,000 over two years through the March of Dimes' March for Babies walkathon, and Beth's 12-year-old son is now forming his own walking team. Already into their third year of service, Jim and his family are creating a large amount of value for the March of Dimes. And the March of Dimes is just one of the organizations where they volunteer.
As Jim and Sari illustrate, volunteering, when channeled correctly, can be a highly valuable asset. The March of Dimes, however, is one of the few organizations that use volunteers effectively. Sadly, most nonprofits do not view their volunteers as strategic assets and have not developed ways to take full advantage of them. In fact, most nonprofits are losing staggering numbers of volunteers every year. Of the 61.2 million people who volunteered in 2006, 21.7 million—more than one-third—did not donate any time to a charitable cause the following year.3 Because these volunteers gave about 1.9 billion hours in 2006, and the value of their donated time was about $20 per hour4—that calculates to about $38 billion in lost volunteer time in one year.

As impressive as the $38 billion figure is, the actual lost value might be even greater. If a nonprofit were paying someone to handle the jobs that Jim and Sari do, the cost would be much more than $20 an hour. Volunteers can do much more than stuff envelopes.

A few nonprofits have grasped this concept and are taking what we call a talent management approach—investing in the infrastructure to recruit, develop, place, recognize, and retain volunteer talent. These are the savvy managers who recognize that there is a new national momentum and opportunity to engage more Americans to help solve America’s intensifying social and environmental problems. Despite the recent national attention generated by the first-ever ServiceNation Presidential Candidates Forum, a new bipartisan legislative proposal to expand support for volunteering and service, and the emergence of cabinet-level positions on volunteering in two states, most nonprofits are still letting volunteer talent slip away like water through a leaky bucket.

Nonprofits Need More Talent

The nonprofit sector desperately needs the professional skills offered by volunteers. The nation’s nonprofits are under strain from the current economic crisis, a leadership drain as older executives retire, and high turnover among younger nonprofit staff. Volunteers are an undervalued and underused resource for tackling these challenges.
Volunteers, for example, can help nonprofits save money by providing technology services, developing programs, training staff, and conducting strategic planning, all without being paid a salary. Volunteers can also ease financial pressures by helping nonprofits raise money. Volunteers are effective fundraisers because their personal commitment to the organization’s mission makes them convincing advocates for the cause. In addition, volunteers are likely to donate to the organization at which they serve. Despite these benefits, few nonprofits use wide-scale volunteer mobilization as a principal funding strategy.

And it’s not just money that’s tight. The nonprofit sector is also facing a leadership crisis. Research has found that nonprofits can expect to lose more than 50 percent of their current leadership by 2010. Nonprofits also face high turnover rates among mid-level and entry-level professional staff. A 2007 study by the Young Nonprofit Professionals Network found that 45 percent of nonprofit workers predict that their next job will not be at a nonprofit. These young staffers cited burnout among the top reasons for leaving.

To alleviate staff burnout, nonprofits can bring in older, experienced volunteers. Retired baby boomer volunteers can mentor young nonprofit professionals, leading to improved staff morale and lower turnover. Volunteers can also take on leadership roles formerly performed by paid staff. In some instances, volunteers can even manage paid staff.

Some work is simply best performed by volunteers. Local volunteers may know their community’s assets, important players, and underlying challenges better than any paid staff person, helping the nonprofit stay connected to the community. Volunteers can also serve as evangelists to the larger community, helping to promote the nonprofit and its mission.

**Why Volunteer Talent Leaves**

National volunteer rates are declining. Between 2005 and 2006, the percent of volunteers who did not do any volunteering the following year increased from 32 percent to 36 percent.
Although nonprofits can expect, and in some cases even desire, some attrition, losing more than one out of three volunteers from one year to the next is clearly a problem.

Why are volunteers opting out? The 2003 Volunteer Management Capacity Study conducted by the Corporation for National and Community Service (http://www.nationalservice.org/) (CNCS, the organization we are affiliated with), the Urban Institute, and the UPS Foundation provides some clues. The study concludes that fewer than half of nonprofits that manage volunteers have adopted a significant number of important volunteer management practices. Here are five of the main reasons why volunteers are not returning.

**Not Matching Volunteers’ Skills with Assignments.** Volunteers with valuable and specialized skills are often dispatched to do manual labor rather than tasks that use their professional talents. The prime goals of corporate volunteer programs, for example, are building teams and increasing morale, which are most easily accomplished by groups of people doing manual labor. For example, every spring in cities across the country, hundreds of professionals turn out to paint walls and plant flowers at local schools. Although this has its time and place, most community organizations really need an ongoing involvement that taps volunteers’ professional skills rather than a one-time project that uses their manual labor. Volunteers often don’t get much out of the experience, either. Many of these volunteers get an empty feeling when they know that the job they’ve been given is make-work or a photo op.

**Failing to Recognize Volunteers’ Contributions.** Nonprofits need to recognize volunteers both through an organizational culture that values them and through specific appreciation ceremonies and events. In their annual reports, most nonprofits list all individual donors categorized by the amount of money they have donated. Very few nonprofits, however, do the same for people who donate their time. Naming individual volunteers with the number of hours they have contributed (and perhaps the dollar value) is one way to demonstrate a culture that values volunteers. The Capital Area Food Bank of Texas (http://www.austinfoodbank.org/) does this and also profiles individual volunteers in its annual report.

**Not Measuring the Value of Volunteers.** Most nonprofits do not measure the dollar value that volunteers provide to their organization. This reflects the lack of seriousness with which
many organizations view volunteers and tends to compound the problem. If nonprofit leaders had hard data demonstrating the value of volunteers, as the March of Dimes does, they would be more likely to invest more time and money in developing volunteer talent.

**Failing to Train and Invest in Volunteers and Staff.** Volunteers need training to understand the organizations with which they are working, and employees need to be trained to work with volunteers. Nonprofits rarely invest substantial amounts of time or money in volunteer recruiters and managers. For example, a youth service organization in Florida reported that at one time it had a busy receptionist managing several hundred volunteers. Unfortunately, the receptionist model of volunteer management is all too common. Nationally, one-third of paid nonprofit staff who manage volunteers have never had “any formal training in volunteer administration, such as coursework, workshops, or attendance at conferences that focus on volunteer management.”

**Failing to Provide Strong Leadership.** Most nonprofit leaders are simply not taking the time to develop or support volunteer talent adequately—resulting in a poor or bland experience that leads to an unmotivated volunteer who has little reason to return. Most nonprofit leaders do not place a high value on volunteer talent. If they did, they would dedicate more resources to the task—not assign it to a receptionist. When told of this article, the CEO of a large national youth service organization said, “I think you're on to something: 90 percent of our labor is performed by volunteers, yet our strategic plan makes no mention of them.”

Why isn’t volunteering more respected? Why aren’t more organizations investing in volunteering? One problem may lie with the term itself. The word “volunteer” doesn’t say anything about the nature of the service provided, except implying that it is free. It is often assumed that something free is not valuable. Maybe we should use different words—like fundraiser, project manager, or legal counsel—that describe the work performed and help erode outdated ideas about the value of the volunteer workforce.

Volunteerism also suffers from being thought of as something that is nice, but not necessary. When people think of volunteers, they often envision people spending a day cleaning up trash or planting flowers—projects that are helpful, but not essential. If the volunteer had not planted those flowers, would the nonprofit have paid someone else to do it? When nonprofit
leaders see that volunteers can do highly skilled work that the organization would have otherwise paid for, volunteering will begin to get some respect.

**Capitalizing on Volunteer Talent**

To capitalize on the opportunity presented by volunteer talent, nonprofit leaders need to expand their vision of volunteering, integrate volunteers into their strategic planning, and reinvent the way that their organizations support and manage volunteer talent.

If nonprofit leaders want highly skilled volunteers to come and stay, they need to expand their vision of volunteering by creating an experience that is meaningful for the volunteer, develops skills, demonstrates impact, and taps into volunteers’ abilities and interests. More people need to understand that people will make time to volunteer if they are stimulated and engaged. Our research shows that the primary difference between volunteers and non-volunteers, when measuring what they do with their time, is the amount of television they watch. People who do not volunteer watch hundreds of hours of additional TV a year compared to people who do volunteer. It’s not that people don’t have enough time to volunteer. People do not volunteer because nonprofits do not provide them with volunteer opportunities that interest them enough to pull them away from their television sets.

**Rethinking Work Roles.** To create compelling opportunities for volunteers, a nonprofit’s management team should begin by evaluating the degree to which important roles could be performed by volunteers. Some organizations are elevating the roles of volunteers and blurring the distinctions between paid and nonpaid staff. (See “Filling Important Roles” on p. 36.) At the American Red Cross (http://www.redcross.org/) , for example, a volunteer chairperson runs the volunteer division and supervises paid staff. At the March of Dimes, people often move back and forth from senior paid positions to volunteer positions. Nonprofits also need to explore hybrid models of work and volunteering such as Experience Corps (http://www.experiencecorps.org/index.cfm) and ReServe (http://www.reserveinc.org/) . In these programs, people receive a modest stipend for their sustained and high-impact service, ensuring that people of varying income levels can participate.
Assigning Appropriate Tasks. Nonprofits must assign volunteers jobs that make the most of their skills and talents. For example, marketing experts from the consulting firm Deloitte (https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en.html) were preparing for a traditional volunteer project—taking stock of donated inventory at a thrift store operated by Catholic Charities (http://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/NetCommunity/Page.aspx?pid=1174) USA. But the Deloitte workers saw ways the thrift store could employ new merchandising techniques and offered pro bono consulting services to help make the changes. The changes the Deloitte volunteers suggested produced strong results: Average monthly revenue at the store rose 20 percent. Catholic Charities was planning to use Deloitte employees to sort pants and shirts, which would have returned a value close to minimum wage. Instead, Deloitte employees put their analytic and consulting skills to work and returned a value of approximately $150 per hour. Not only do nonprofits get more value from using highly skilled volunteers to perform highly skilled functions, but these volunteers are also more likely to offer their services again. CNCS research found that volunteers who engage in less challenging activities tend to be less likely to continue volunteering the following year. Only 53 percent of volunteers who did “general labor” activities or supplied transportation continued volunteering the following year. By contrast, 74 percent of volunteers performing professional or management activities continued volunteering.

Creating Bonding Experiences. One of the best ways that nonprofits can engage volunteers is to create experiences that develop strong attachments between the volunteer and the organization. The March of Dimes, for example, is constantly thinking about how to channel the interest of a onetime volunteer into a more sustained commitment. A volunteer might walk in the March for Babies two years in a row and then drop out. That person has not necessarily lost her passion for helping babies, she just needs a new challenge and more opportunities to stay involved. To keep her engaged, the March of Dimes might ask her to speak with groups of expectant moms on the importance of folic acid and prenatal checkups. That could lead to her managing a local fundraising event or recruiting corporate sponsors. The March of Dimes has found that by increasing responsibility, tailoring assignments to volunteer interests, and providing training and in-person networking opportunities, they are able to hang on to more volunteers.
**Supporting and Training Volunteers.** Nonprofits also need to support their volunteers. The American Cancer Society, for example, respects and cares for volunteers in the same manner that the organization cares for its own staff. Their chief talent officer ensures that staff and volunteers participate together in orientation and training classes and work together on important projects such as creating curriculum, delivering quality of life programs to cancer patients and their families, and serving as community health liaisons. The American Cancer Society (http://www.cancer.org/docroot/home/index.asp) also expects its staff to recruit and work with community volunteers, and it enforces this through performance reviews that measure volunteer engagement.

**Using New Technology.** New technologies allow nonprofits to communicate with volunteers inexpensively and to build social networks that connect volunteers with one another and with the nonprofit. Organizations like VolunteerMatch (http://www.volunteermatch.org/) and Zazengo (http://www.zazengo.com/) have developed technology that makes it easy for volunteers to find opportunities based on their needs, interests, and skills. With this technology, volunteers no longer need to go to a Web site to search for opportunities; the right ones come to them. Technology also allows people to volunteer without having to leave their homes. One of our colleagues, for example, develops and maintains Web sites pro bono without leaving her home.

**Developing Strategic Plans.** To make effective use of volunteer talent, nonprofit leaders must integrate volunteers into their strategic plans. In 2007, the leaders of 11 major nonprofit organizations and the authors of this article met to discuss ways to engage volunteers and laid out the ingredients for this process. Nonprofit participants such as Goodwill Industries (http://www.goodwill.org/page/guest/about) , United Way of America (http://www.liveunited.org/) , and Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (http://www.bbbs.org/site/c.dijKKYPLJvH/b.1539751/k.BDB6/Home.htm) zeroed in on strategic planning as the most critical and neglected step in managing volunteers. By treating volunteers as the valuable resource they are, nonprofits get more challenging work done, reap the benefit of more volunteer hours, and incur fewer costs associated with having to replace lost volunteers each year.

**Attracting a New Wave of Volunteering Talent**
Even with the best planning and management, nonprofits will always need to recruit new volunteers to support new or expanded programs and to replace those volunteers who inevitably stop coming. The most promising places for nonprofits to recruit new volunteer talent are among retired baby boomers, young people (millennials), businesses, and religious organizations.

Retiring baby boomers offer nonprofits experience, management skills, and vast numbers. Older American volunteers will increase 50 percent by 2020. Boomers are also healthier and more educated, and they are predicted to live longer than their parents. Perhaps half of these people will continue working into their 70s, which should ultimately encourage more volunteering later in life. Although one might assume that older people with jobs are less likely to volunteer, working appears to encourage people to stay more connected with their community and maintain social networks that promote volunteering.  

At the other end of the age spectrum, America’s young people are increasingly interested in making a difference. One recent study revealed that 68 percent of people between the ages of 18 and 26 prefer to work for a company that provides professional volunteer opportunities.  

This trend is likely to continue. The UCLA Higher Education Research Institute reported in 2005 a 25-year high in first-year students’ belief that it is “essential or important to help others.”

Pro bono business services are another emerging source of talent. In February 2008, CNCS joined with the President's Council on Service and Civic Participation to bring together more than 150 business, government, and nonprofit leaders in a summit on pro bono services. The summit identified the benefits to companies of providing pro bono services and sought to expand the pro bono ethic (typically identified with the legal profession) throughout the corporate community. Summit participants kicked off “A Billion + Change,” a three-year campaign to leverage $1 billion in skilled volunteering and pro bono services from the corporate community. To date, more than 23 companies have pledged more than $400 million in professional services.
Religious partnerships are a largely untapped area of volunteer talent: 85 percent of nonprofits with secular missions report that they do not have one partnership with a religious group. This religious-secular divide is all the more troubling when one considers the tremendous opportunity religious organizations offer: More people volunteer through religious organizations than any other kind of organization, and religious volunteers often engage in substantial work outside their congregation.

Former Philadelphia mayor Reverend W. Wilson Goode Sr.’s Amachi program spearheaded an effective secular-religious partnership that included Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, AmeriCorps VISTA, and local religious congregations across the country. Amachi had the kids who need mentoring, Big Brothers Big Sisters of America had the mentoring expertise, the congregations had people who want to mentor, and VISTA coordinated the collaboration.

Nonprofits can also use religious organizations to expand their reach into the African-American, Hispanic, and Asian communities. Each group does more than one-third of all their volunteering with religious groups. It is particularly important for nonprofits to tap into these communities, because racial minority populations are growing as a percentage of the overall U.S. population.

**Thriving With Volunteer Talent**

Sari (the March of Dimes volunteer we profiled at the beginning of this article) helped produce the equivalent of $200,000 worth of labor in one year. What was March of Dimes’ investment in Sari? About $13,000 a year. That represents a return of more than 15 times the organization’s investment. And Sari is just one volunteer in the March of Dimes’ offices.

Older, educated volunteers like Sari and Jim have the potential to perform valuable and highly skilled work, donate money, and activate social networks that multiply the impact of their individual contributions. By 2020, there will be millions more like them, thanks to the coming wave of retiring baby boomers. Simultaneously, companies are providing more
opportunities for working professionals to engage in pro bono and volunteer work, as part of the company’s efforts to recruit and retain the most talented people.

This surge in professional people interested in putting their skills to good use creates a tremendous opportunity for nonprofits. The sector can’t squander that opportunity by assigning these volunteers to nice, but non-mission-critical work. Social entrepreneurs, nonprofit executives, and other public service leaders need to modernize their understanding of the value of unpaid work and embrace volunteer talent of all ages as an important way to fulfill their mission.

A new wave of volunteer talent is building. Some nonprofit leaders will take advantage of this opportunity and exponentially grow their impact; the rest will be left behind trying to make do the old way.

Notes

1 Jim and his family are real people and these are their real first names. The family’s last name has been withheld to protect their privacy.
2 March of Dimes estimate created by multiplying 11,000 hours by Independent Sector’s 2007 average value of a volunteer’s time, $18.77. Independent Sector, 2007 Value of Volunteer Time.
4 Urban Institute with CNCS and UPS Foundation, Volunteer Management Capacity in America’s Charities and Congregations, 2004. In 2003, this national survey asked nonprofit staff who manage volunteers how much they would pay for their typical volunteer’s time. They reported a median value of about $20 per hour. The figure is close to Independent Sector’s frequently cited average hourly value of volunteer time ($18.77).
6 The Urban Institute, Volunteer Management Capacity in America’s Charities and Congregations, 2004.
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IBM Corporate Service Corps impacts communities through engaged employees and strategic partnerships

Making a difference through citizen diplomacy

In March of 2016, a team of a dozen IBMers from IBM’s Corporate Service Corps visited schools in villages in Ghana and spoke to teen-age girls and boys. The goal was to help build on Ghana’s 25-plus year history of promoting education and empowerment for girls.

The team, comprised of experts from across IBM, representing eight countries, knew that before they contributed their skills, they needed to hear first-hand about the progress that had been made in Ghana and the challenges that remain. So they listened to important parties in the ecosystem of support for girls’ education: the community, the government, social enterprises and international development agencies.

When visiting the villages, the IBMers learned about the obstacles many families face. Often, girls are required to stay at home to help their families, causing absences from school. Also, it’s difficult for families that are short of funds to pay school expenses. Yet the young women who told their stories were determined to overcome their challenges and get an education.

A few weeks later, the CSC team made a series of recommendations, including strategies for a national mentoring program for girls and for a portable device, called ASANKA, for providing lessons and empowerment skills for girls when they’re unable to attend school. “Information is power,” says Louise Hemond-Wilson, one of the CSC team members. “Through the device and the mentoring program we’re helping girls make better decisions so they can live better. This is important to all Ghanaians because economic progress for a nation tends to follow the poverty or prosperity of its women.”

Highlights

• Since 2008, the IBM Corporate Service Corps has deployed over 3,000 IBM volunteers from over 60 countries on over 1,000 projects in 37 countries, donating over $70 million in market value consulting services.

• A public-private partnership with the Peace Corps brought the best of both programs to improving access to girls’ education in Ghana.

• In Ethiopia, teams working with International Medical Corps helped 46,000 Ethiopians become more resilient through improved water, sanitation and hygiene practices.

• Working together with Becton, Dickinson and Company (BD) in Peru, indigenous women have increased access to critical cervical cancer screening services.

• With The Global Food Banking Network, the CSC doubled down on a single need — helping food banks across Latin America increase donations and improve the efficiencies of their operations.

The engagement in Ghana was the first project in a groundbreaking partnership between the CSC and the Peace Corps, which the CSC program is modeled after. Other essential partners in the project included two Ghanaian government ministries, the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection (MoGCSP) and the Girls Education Unit (GEU) of the Ghana Education Service (GES), and a local social enterprise, TechAide. It also included the U.S. government’s Let Girls Learn initiative; launched by the President and First Lady, Let Girls Learn strives to eliminate the barriers 62 million girls worldwide face when trying to receive and complete secondary education. Since the launch of Let Girls Learn, the Peace Corps has launched Let Girls Learn programs in 35 countries throughout Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe and Central America. The guiding principle was that by combining forces with others, the CSC could accomplish more than IBM’s teams could have done on their own. It’s part of a larger shift for the organization: Increasingly, the CSC seeks strategic partnerships with other resourceful organizations to amplify the program’s social impact all around the world.

“\textit{It is the best experience I ever had, one I will never forget and that enriched my life in so many ways, both personally and professionally.}”

Bernell Geldenhuys, CSC team member in China

IBM launched the pro bono CSC in 2008 primarily as a vehicle for global leadership development. Teams of from eight to 15 members partner with government, business and civic leaders in emerging markets to address high-priority issues such as education, health and economic development. In each case, the CSC program management team works with one of four NGO partners to plan the engagements. The teams spend three months learning about the communities and the problems they’ll address before departure. Then after four weeks of working with the local organization and other relevant local stakeholders, they issue recommendations—typically a combination of short-term and long-term actions. The program has achieved its primary goal—equipping IBMers for the challenges of working and leading in a global organization. Many of them on return call their deployments life changing. “It is the best experience I ever had, one I will never forget and that enriched my life in so many ways, both personally and professionally,” says Bernell Geldenhuys, from Amsterdam, who served with a team in China.

But, the impacts of the CSC are multidimensional. It has improved IBM’s standing in communities around the world, which helps power market expansion. And, based on feedback from partners and recipient organizations in the field, it’s clearly making a difference. Organizations the CSC supported since 2008 estimated that more than 40 million people would benefit if the team’s recommendations were successfully implemented. In Turkey alone, a series of earlier engagements are credited with creating business cases and long term roadmaps plans that have help organizations raise $14.4 million from other sources to deliver on health, education and economic development initiatives in communities.

So there’s a triple benefit: for the IBMer, for IBM, and for communities where the teams serve.

Since its launch, the CSC has emerged as a new model for leadership development and social engagement in the 21st Century. It’s a living laboratory for experiments and learning at a time when corporations are under incredible pressure to transform the way they operate because of globalization and technology shifts, and when economic challenges and social instability threaten to slow human progress.

Partnerships of all types help amplify the CSC’s impact. IBM has now helped dozens of other companies put together similar programs, including FedEx, John Deere and JPMorgan Chase. It has collaborated on engagements with other corporations, including GSK, Dow Chemical and BD. And it has formed strategic partnerships with such notable organizations as USAID, International Medical Corps, The
“We send out 500 IBMers per year. What if 100 other companies did the same? It would change the view about what corporations can do for society.”

Stanley Litow, Vice President, IBM Corporate Citizenship & Corporate Affairs

Nature Conservancy, and The Global FoodBanking Network, in addition to the Peace Corps. Some of those organizations are now seeking similar alliances with other corporations. “We send out 500 IBMers per year. What if 100 other companies did the same?” says Stanley Litow, IBM Vice President for Corporate Citizenship & Corporate Affairs. “It would change the view about what corporations can do for society.”

A Track Record of Success

The Corporate Service Corps was launched at a time of rapid change and considerable social tension. With the growth of emerging markets and the spread of outsourcing, the globalization of business had reached a crescendo. Also, as a result of the international financial crisis, it had become abundantly clear that we are all connected in so many ways, and that disruptions that happen in one place often spread worldwide.

Since the start, 275 teams made up of over 3,000 IBM volunteers from all over the world have been deployed in 37 countries—heavily concentrated in China, India, African nations and Brazil and as far reaching as Cambodia, Croatia and Uzbekistan. Because each team typically takes on several projects, more than 1,000 have been completed, with an estimated value of $70 million in donated intellectual capital.

In the early days, the projects typically had modest goals—such as helping a crafts collective set up a Web site or a tourist agency create a new brochure. But, as time went on, they became more ambitious and more tightly aligned to national and global priorities. For instance, a succession of teams helped the government of Kenya design its Open Data Initiative, a free Internet service that displays information about the country and government services that’s aimed at strengthening democratic institutions and economy. In Brazil, a CSC team worked with The Nature Conservancy to improve a tool it had created to enable municipal, state and the central government to monitor tree cutting activities—with a goal of slowing illegal deforestation in the Amazon basin and helping to address climate change.

At the same time, the CSC is able to measure impact on the local level. For instance, working with The Global FoodBanking Network, a team assigned to Toluca, Mexico, helped increase the number of food donors by 41% and the number of people fed by 15,000 each month. A CSC team in Kenya helped enable the Women’s Enterprise Fund to deliver entrepreneurial training to 89,000 women and to launch 25 new business clubs. In Ethiopia, teams working with International Medical Corps helped 46,000 Ethiopians become more resilient through improved water, sanitation and hygiene practices.

Client organizations surveyed last year showed a high level of satisfaction with the program. Ninety-seven percent said they were satisfied with the overall experience; and 94% said they were satisfied with teams’ performance in meeting the project objectives. “IBM has been a valued partner in helping International Medical Corps serve our constituencies better,” says Rebecca Milner, vice president of Institutional Advancement at IMC. “Together, we are leveraging our expertise to improve the effectiveness of responses to global crises.”

One of the key contributions IBMers make to local organizations and communities, of course, is their technical abilities. Many IBMers have deep experience and skills in analytics, mobile technologies, cloud computing and social business. Often, the teams reach out to technical experts elsewhere in the company for help on particularly thorny problems. For instance, a team in Kenya called on researchers...
from IBM’s Haifa and Nairobi labs to help with analysis of cervical cancer screening and care. That research was later applied to a project in Ghana concerning mother-to-child HIV transmissions.

It might be surprising, though, to learn the greatest impact on communities comes from IBMers’ consulting and problem-solving skills. Frequently, local leaders already have great ideas for changes they want to make, and the IBMers help them shape strategies and create detailed plans. In addition, the teams often bring business disciplines and efficiencies to non-profits and government agencies that are short of funds and staff.

The CSC is closely aligned with IBM's product and service strategies, including cloud computing, data analytics, and mobile computing. Cloud computing is especially relevant in growth markets because of the money-saving aspects of using shared services. Data analytics helps city leaders provide superior services to citizens. And mobile technologies enable citizens to gain access to banking and healthcare services. The CSC recommendations regularly include such technologies—though the teams are not permitted to suggest that their host organizations purchase products or services from IBM.

In a number of cases, however, CSC engagements have led to commercial discussions. A CSC team in Kenya was a launch pad for IBM's Bluemix cloud development platform in Africa. CSC deployments in Davao, Philippines in 2008 and 2010, contributed to IBM being hired in 2012 to provide technology for the Davao Intelligent Operations Center, with a contract valued at $2.6 million. Today, IBM is engaged in the consultation process by the Ghanaian government and donors as they assess technology for nationwide electronic medical records system in Ghana—which was based in part on recommendations from a CSC team and partners from Yale University School of Medicine.

The power of partnerships
Peru has one of the world's highest rates of cervical cancer: 115 cases per 100,000 women, which is 10 times the rate in the United States. Hardest hit are indigenous women living in remote villages surrounding Cusco, an ancient city perched at 11,200 feet in the Andes. In 2008, Dr. Daron Ferris, Director of the Gynecologic Cancer Prevention Center at Georgia Regents University, established a non-profit clinic, CerviCusco, dedicated to screening, diagnosis and treatment in the region.

With a staff of fewer than 10 people, he needs volunteers. Medical students from the United States cycle through as clinicians. BD, a New Jersey-based medical technology company, donated 75,000 of its cervical cancer screening kits and committed to sending teams of healthcare experts to help out. At the same time, in 2014, IBM planned on deploying a CSC team in Cusco. After the two companies learned of each other’s plans, they decided to combine forces. BD wanted to learn from the CSC, and both companies saw the potential in combining forces to help CerviCusco become more sustainable.

The skills offered by the two companies meshed perfectly. Two volunteers from BD brought expertise in EMR databases, marketing and a deep knowledge of medical technology and process for cervical cancer screening. They were matched up with four IBMers who had IT, general business and marketing skills. The combined teams worked on an EMR system, developed a plan for increasing donations and suggested an upgrade to their diagnostic laboratory services. “Because this was a first-time collaborative effort for both companies. BD associates and the IBM team worked well together, optimizing their skill sets and performance, affording a unique opportunity for the CerviCusco clinic,” says Jennifer Farrington, Director of Social Investing and BD’s Volunteer Service Trip program.

Dr. Ferris took the recommendations to heart. The testing lab opened in March. He’s hired a business development officer. And, inspired by BD’s and IBM’s work, Dr. Ferris says, pharmaceutical giant Merck is donating vaccine to treat 20,000 children for HPV, which can lead to cervical cancer. BD has sent a follow up team of volunteers to help execute on the plan. “We knew how to save lives, but we didn’t know how to make a strategic plan,” Dr. Ferris says. “Everything has cascaded down from that engagement.”
A number of corporations are now forging partnerships with other like-minded companies, government agencies and NGOs to take on the world’s problems. While the corporations bring different skills and knowledge bases to the projects, they are all committed to having a direct impact on communities—rather than just writing checks. “The reason for these partnerships is simple: to increase impact,” says Gina Tesla, director of the CSC program since 2010.

The CSC’s first major partnership was with US Agency for International Development and an NGO focused on international service, PYXERA Global. Leaders from the three organizations handpicked projects where their priorities were aligned, and IBM sent 94 employees on 31 projects in nine countries over a period of two years. For example, in 2012, a team of IBMers helped the East Africa Power Pool to design an IT platform to manage energy trading within the East African region.

“We’re investing a lot of time on the front end to get these models right, but we think it will pay off in impact.”

Kate Beale, director of Peace Corps Response

So, according to Chris Rebstock, The Global FoodBanking Network’s vice president of network development, a critical element of the alliance with IBM is the strategic business advice that the teams bring to local food bank operators. In most cases, the managers who interact with the CSC teams take what they have learned and share it with other food banks in their countries. “We copy and replicate. It has a multiplier effect,” says Rebstock.

The goal with the Peace Corps partnership is to create more sustained engagements producing larger and more lasting impacts. In the fall of 2014, IBM and the Peace Corps started to explore how the two agencies might work together and shortly thereafter a formal partnership was formed between IBM’s CSC and the Peace Corps Response program. Ultimately, they decided to deploy an IBMer as a Peace Corps Response volunteer to help set up projects for a CSC team and to stay on after they leave to help convert their recommendations into actions. In the first joint engagement, in Ghana, Louise Hemond-Wilson, who told the story of the village school girls, served in that role.

Hemond-Wilson spent two months in Ghana getting her Peace Corps Response training, meeting with the local government and NGO leaders, and refining the projects. Her work included writing the curriculum for life skills and empowerment that was to be included in the ASANKA devices distributed to rural schools. Once the rest of the CSC team arrived, they all visited village schools and collaborated with people from the Peace Corps’ Let Girls Learn program, the ministries and TechAide.

The Peace Corps brought 27 girls from rural villages to the capital city of Accra for a day of workshops and mentoring sessions. The girls were showered with attention. They heard testimonials from successful women, including Angela Kyeremateng-Jimoh, IBM’s country general manager for Ghana and the first female IBM country general manager in Africa. One of the girls, a member of a group that had suggested an idea for encouraging parents to support their
daughters’ yearning for education, beamed when she was introduced and, later, cast off her shyness and approached a government minister to learn what the government plans on doing to help turn the idea into a reality.

Kyeremat-Jimoh, who spent her early years in a small village in Ghana, praised the Ghanaian ministries for making girls’ empowerment a priority, and praised the girls for their positive attitudes and determination. “The girls want to improve themselves,” she says. “They see that they can be better. The sky is the limit. But they need somebody to guide them.”

The CSC and Peace Corps Response plan on learning from this first engagement and applying those lessons to deployments later in 2016 in Mexico and the Philippines. “The Peace Corps and IBM teams are investing a great deal of time on the front end of the program design to get these models right, and we think this effort will pay off in the ultimate impact of our volunteers,” says Kate Beale, director of Peace Corps Response.

As often as possible, the Corporate Service Corps seeks longer-term partnerships with IBM’s own clients. As with the Peace Corps, this approach enables the two organizations to learn together and get better at doing what they do. JPMorgan Chase didn’t have a corporate service volunteer program when it teamed up with the CSC in 2014. The first joint engagement, in Brazil, where employees from the two companies worked on different projects, was a “learning expedition,” according to Tara Cardone, the executive director and head of employee engagement and volunteerism with JPMorgan Chase. Later, on another joint engagement in India, IBM and JPMorgan Chase employees were fully integrated across the projects. JPMorgan Chase has gone on to manage engagements on its own — starting with Detroit, New Orleans and Johannesburg. “It’s due to IBM that we explored this model, adapted it to align with the skills and expertise of our employees around the globe, and are now expanding to send 100 employees to various markets in 2017,” Cardone says.

The corporate volunteer service trend is spreading—but not fast enough. Deirdre White, CEO of PYXERA Global, an NGO that works with IBM and other corporations to help manage their global pro bono programs, says 27 corporations are now involved. Altogether, the companies send out an estimated 2,000 volunteers per year. “It’s a drop in the bucket,” she says. “The drops do add up, but the needs far outstrip the resources that are available.”

**A life-changing experience**

Marina Tanaka Takahashi, one of the IBMers who worked with counterparts from JPMorgan Chase in Mumbai, went to India as a hard-working but happy-go-lucky 28-year-old and returned home to Brazil four weeks later a changed person. Her group’s task in Mumbai was to help Akshara Center, a women’s rights organization, raise awareness in the community, including among police, about a rising tide of assaults on women and girls. During a meeting with a group of young women, she was impressed with their determination to change attitudes. “I really started to understand how big the problem is, not just in India but all around the world,” she says. Back in Brazil, she became an advocate for gender equality. Her experience also gave her a renewed appreciation for IBM, where, she believes, women have equal opportunities to be heard, rewarded and promoted.

A 2016 survey of CSC participants shows that the program is having a strong positive effect on their skills, confidence, ability to work with teams, and commitment to IBM.

- Ninety-six percent said the CSC program helped bolster their ability to lead a global team.
- Ninety-five percent said they acquired or improved their teamwork and collaboration skills.
- Eighty-eight percent said that after their CSC experience they were extremely satisfied with IBM as a place to work.

Some CSC participants keep in touch with the organizations they worked to help their recommendations come to fruition. For instance, Sonya Favretto, an IBMer from Ontario,
Canada, was so dedicated to the sponsor organization, Casa da Crianca, in Recife, Brazil, that she remained engaged for two years after her return and helped them create the cloud collaboration portal that her CSC team had recommended. The portal has been instrumental in helping Casa da Crianca manage building projects—including health clinics and daycare facilities—for children in disadvantaged communities.

Others stay in touch with people they met during their deployments who weren’t connected to the program. Mark Frederick, for instance, who served in Ethiopia in 2015, got to know a server at a coffee shop across from the hotel where the team stayed. He still chats with him via Facebook Messenger. The program builds empathy with people who live very different lives. “We fell in love with people. They aren’t a statistic,” he says.

CSC experiences inspire IBMers to engage in public service. In last year’s survey of participants, 93 percent said the program prompted them to look for other ways to get involved in local or international volunteer efforts. For instance, after participating in engagements with The Global FoodBanking Network in Latin America, two IBMers asked to be put in touch with food banks in their home cities of Bangalore, India, and Istanbul, Turkey, so they could continue to help out.

Sujoy Sen, one of the IBMers from Singapore who helped CerviCusco in Peru, can’t forget the five-hour van rides he took up narrow, twisting roads in remote mountain villages, where clinic staff performed diagnostic tests on indigenous women who waited patiently in line. Some of the women had walked for hours on rocky paths above the clouds to meet the van. The experience spurred him and his colleagues to help make the clinic more sustainable so it could serve more of these women. And it inspired him to do more once he returned home. “One day I would like to spend a lot of time working with NGOs to help drive the impact of what they’re doing,” Sen says. “There’s an unfinished part of me that wants to achieve that.”

For 100 years, IBM has made engagement with the communities it does business in a priority. In recent years, IBM has stood out winning awards such as the Civic 50 and several corporate philanthropy awards for the success it has had in engaging its entire workforce value of service in their communities. The Corporate Service Corps stands out in corporate world as a striking example of success in community engagement that also develops employees and makes them better people and leaders in an increasingly interconnected and complex world.

Moving forward

IBM has survived more than 100 years in the rapidly-changing information technology industry because it continually reinvents itself. The Corporate Service Corps takes the same approach. Its partnership strategy and the new alliance with the Peace Corps are just the latest twists in an 8-year journey of restless experimentation.

As the organization expands its collaboration with Peace Corps Response in the Philippines and Mexico, it’s committed to carefully measuring the impact of the engagements, recording the lessons learned, and surfacing unexpected discoveries. This is the path to evolving a sustainable design.

At the same time, its leaders are acutely aware that IBM’s efforts alone won’t have the kind of positive impact on the world that’s needed to accelerate progress. So the organization is committed also to evangelizing, inspiring other corporations to launch similar programs, and helping them learn the ropes. “We believe in partnerships for a better world,” says Tesla. “And we have the proof that it works—our results.”