



## **NVTC Fact Sheet**

### **2015**

# **Volunteer Drivers**

## **A Great American Pastime**

### **Highlights**

- **Volunteering to Drive**  
Introduces volunteer driving and provides a profile of 714 volunteer drivers
- **What Volunteer Drivers Do**  
Describes what volunteer drivers do, where they go, how they get there, and the challenges they face in providing transportation to older adults
- **When They Drive**  
Details data on how long they volunteer to drive and the time they spend as drivers
- **What They Give And Get**  
Describes the roles they play and the satisfaction they receive
- **A Volunteer Driver Brief**  
Introduces the link to a full report on volunteer drivers in America

**(This fact sheet was modified from a 2008 Beverly Foundation publication)**

Volunteerism is valued in the United States and a way of life for many Americans. It also contributes significantly to the economy. According to a report by the Corporation for National and Community Service, in 2013, 62.6 million Americans (25.4% of the population) contributed 7.7 billion hours through organizations which the Independent Sector translated into \$173,000,000. In addition to volunteering through organizations, 138 million Americans engaged in informal volunteer activities.\*

#### **4 Primary Volunteer Activities**

- (1) fundraise or sell items to raise money**
- (2) collect, prepare, distribute, or serve food**
- (3) engage in general labor**
- (4) tutor or teach**

Volunteers most often are involved in their local communities, and quite often within their neighborhoods. Thus, a person's attachment and commitment to the neighborhood or community can impact on the willingness of people to volunteer for causes that support other neighbors and the community at large.

### **Volunteering to Drive**

Volunteering to drive a family member, neighbor, friend or even a stranger is a community-service activity that tends to fall in the broad category of general labor. While volunteering to drive often is an act of altruism, in many communities, organizations make it possible for people who drive to contribute their time and driving skills to older adults who require help to get where they need to go. In 2004 and 2005, the Beverly Foundation surveyed 714 volunteer drivers, all of whom provided transportation to older adults. Their responses provided considerable information on the background, experience, and attitude of volunteer drivers in America.

*\*Data from the Corporation for National & Community Service see [www.nationalservice.gov](http://www.nationalservice.gov)*

## **Volunteer Drivers: Who They Are\***

The accompanying chart provides a profile of the volunteer drivers surveyed by the Beverly Foundation

| <b>Profile of Volunteer Drivers</b> |                                 |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <b>Age</b>                          | <b>Marital Status</b>           |
| under age 65 <b>37%</b>             | Married <b>68%</b>              |
| age 65+ <b>63%</b>                  | Widowed <b>18%</b>              |
| <b>Gender</b>                       | <b>Household Income</b>         |
| female <b>51%</b>                   | Below \$30,000 <b>36%</b>       |
| male <b>49%</b>                     | \$30,000 to \$60,000 <b>36%</b> |
| <b>Education</b>                    | \$60,000 + <b>28%</b>           |
| graduated high school <b>40%</b>    | <b>Driving a Car</b>            |
| graduated college <b>51%</b>        | 50+ years <b>54%</b>            |

\* N=714

and discussed in this fact sheet. As the chart indicates, they have considerable experience in life and in driving. However, the chart does not tell the whole story. While the majority were age 65+, a large number (23%) could be called boomers (age 56-64). While the majority graduated college, the vast majority (91%) graduated high school or engaged in higher educational opportunities. While the majority indicated a household income of \$30,000 or more; a large number (19%) indicated a household income of \$75,000 or more. And, while the majority had driven 50 plus years, more

than 80% had driven 40 years or more.

### **Why They Drive**

A key word analysis of an open-ended survey question indicated that the survey respondents volunteered to drive for many of the same service reasons that they volunteer to do other activities (in response to a need, to help others, and to give back). However, their responses also indicated personal reasons for volunteer driving such as being tired of being bored, because they had time on their hands, and reasons associated with being retired from the work force. An enjoyment of driving, the desire to remain active, and a need to do something meaningful also were identified. Other responses to the multiple selection question are provided in the accompanying chart. They reinforce the notion that volunteer driving is more about doing something for others than for personal gain. Interestingly, only 12% of those responding to the survey associated their volunteer driving with “a sense of duty”.

| <b>Reasons for Driving</b>        |            |
|-----------------------------------|------------|
| <b>To help others</b>             | <b>89%</b> |
| <b>To do something meaningful</b> | <b>73%</b> |
| <b>To give back</b>               | <b>52%</b> |
| <b>To stay active</b>             | <b>29%</b> |
| <b>Because I was asked</b>        | <b>20%</b> |

Survey respondents provided transportation for neighbors, friends, or complete strangers. In addition to driving, some also participated in the

### **What They Do**

| <b>Assistance and Support</b> |                            |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <b>Door-to-door 93%</b>       | <b>Stay with Rider 77%</b> |
| <b>Hand-to-hand 89%</b>       | <b>Door-thru-door 67%</b>  |

activities of a transportation program with activities such as recruiting other drivers, becoming members of the board, and providing caregiver services. When driving older adults, quite often their most important role was to provide physical assistance. As the

accompanying chart indicates, a very high percentage provided assistance through the door and at the destination, while an even higher percent provided important physical assistance to and from the vehicle. The assistance provided by the volunteer drivers often is the very reason for the existence of volunteer driver programs. Why? Because public and paratransit services, and taxi and private services generally cannot make these types of labor intensive, time consuming assistance available.

\* The survey was undertaken in conjunction with the Beverly Foundation’s annual STAR Search. STAR Search was initiated in 2000 to identify and document STPs (Supplemental Transportation Programs for seniors) in America. In 2004 and 2005, STPs that responded to the survey were invited to include surveys of Volunteer Drivers.

## **Where They Go**

Volunteer drivers say their most frequent trips are related to medical services. And, while some only provide transportation to non-emergency medical services, others take their passengers grocery shopping, to the pharmacy, to the library, to the bank, to visit a friend, to volunteer activities, to church, and even to the barber shop and hairdresser. In rural areas, they are especially dedicated, as each trip may require many miles of driving and many hours of waiting. What is important is that volunteer drivers make it possible for older adults to travel to a variety of life sustaining and life enriching destinations, and quite often such destination travel is only possible because of the assistance and support they provide.



While some volunteer drivers use program owned vehicles, the majority drive their own vehicles. Potential liability and the need for insurance coverage for the driver, the passenger, and the automobile often are a point of discussion for prospective volunteer drivers. Programs that field volunteer drivers generally purchase an umbrella policy to provide coverage in the event of property damage or bodily injury, however, the volunteer driver's automobile insurance policy generally is the first line of coverage. And, although some people express concern that their automobile insurance rates will increase when they volunteer to drive, insurance is based on miles driven and not on who is riding in the vehicle.

## **How They Get There**

### **When They Drive**

As the accompanying chart indicates, the availability of volunteers to provide rides is much greater in the daytime and during the weekdays than in the evenings and on weekends. The fact that such a low percentage of the respondents drove in the evenings and on weekends suggests that people who are dependent on volunteer drivers for their transportation could find it difficult to participate in evening and weekend activities. And, although many of those surveyed drove for interfaith groups, the accompanying chart indicates that only a small percent provided transportation in evenings and weekends. According to many program administrators, providing Sunday transportation services often is not necessary because churches often provide rides to members of their congregations. Who need transportation.

|                 |            |                  |            |
|-----------------|------------|------------------|------------|
| <b>Daytime</b>  | <b>99%</b> | <b>Saturdays</b> | <b>37%</b> |
| <b>Weekdays</b> | <b>99%</b> | <b>Sundays</b>   | <b>27%</b> |
| <b>Evenings</b> | <b>32%</b> | <b>24/7</b>      | <b>10%</b> |

## **Challenges They Face**

### **Volunteer Driver Challenges Mean on 1-5 Scale**

#### **Driving/Helping People With...**

- incontinence (3.3)**
- dementia (3.2)**
- cognitive limitations (2.6)**
- assistive devices (2.1)**
- heavy loads (2.0)**
- limited visual acuity (1.9)**
- through the door assistance (1.6)**

To identify challenges in providing transportation. the survey asked respondents to rate seven specific challenges from 1 (least difficult) to 5 (most difficult). The accompanying chart indicates their top ratings for the seven challenges. The results suggest that none of the challenges appear to be viewed as severe. In addition to their ratings, the drivers also identified other challenges in providing transportation services. Included were passenger aggressiveness, mental health challenges, language barriers, hearing limitations, hygiene problems, helping people use wheelchairs, not getting enough personal information, and passengers who need help in addition to transportation. None of the challenges respondents identified

by respondents appeared to be severe enough to refuse to transport a passenger.

## ***How Long They Drive***

The vast majority of respondents to the survey (86%) reported their age as 56 or more which suggests that people who volunteer to drive tend to do so in their middle and later years. While there is evidence why they are difficult to recruit (perhaps it is because driving someone can be difficult), there also is evidence that their length of service is substantial.

***“Volunteer Drivers are the hardest volunteers to recruit, but once you’ve got them, you’ve got them.”***

Only 13% of the survey respondents had volunteered to drive for less than 1 year, 33% had volunteered for 1-3 years, 24% had volunteered for 4-6 years, and 30% had volunteered for 7 or more years.

Not only do they continue to drive for many years, volunteer drivers contribute considerable time. For example, when asked about their time commitment per week, 55% said they committed 1-5 hours, 19% 6-10 hours, 10% 11-20 hours, and 6% more than 20 hours a week. 10% indicated they committed less than 1 hour per week, were on call, or contributed on a weekly or monthly basis.

### ***Time They Spend***

## ***Roles They Play***

The chart below indicates the needs of older adults, roles of volunteer drivers, and examples of volunteer driver programs that enable volunteer drivers to meet transportation needs.

### ***Illustrative Needs, Roles and Programs***

| <b>Senior Needs</b>       | <b>Volunteer Driver Roles</b> | <b>Volunteer Driver Programs</b>              |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| getting to church         | driving on weekends           | Macomb Co. Interfaith Caregivers - Warren, MI |
| paying for transportation | helping raise funds           | Bedford Ride - Bedford, VA                    |
| help with wheelchairs     | wheelchair assistance         | COAST - Colfax, WA                            |
| getting to another city   | driving long distances        | YCCAC Vol. Driver Program - Sanford, ME       |
| help at residence         | going through the door        | West Austin Caregivers - Austin, TX           |
| help at destination       | staying at the destination    | Neighbor to Neighbor - Prescott, AZ           |

The reason volunteer drivers continue their involvement for long periods of time, and contribute so many

### ***What They Get***

***Greatest Satisfaction***

**Helping people (89%)**  
**Feeling Needed (89%)**  
**Getting to Know Riders (60%)**  
**Donating Time Rather Than Money (39%)**  
**Appreciation and Recognition (21%)**

hours may be related to the satisfaction they receive. The accompanying chart of “greatest satisfaction” was developed from volunteer drivers in responses to a list of 14 areas of satisfaction. Interestingly, they are similar to what volunteers in general identify as satisfiers. The selections that the respondents seldom identified were related to personal habits and logistics

such as having a regular schedule, being able to drive personal vehicle, getting out of the house, passengers being on time, and learning new driving skills.

For a more complete review of volunteers and volunteer drivers see:

***Volunteer Drivers: The Hope of the Future - A Brief***  
***The Beverly Foundation - 2008***