

Volunteerism and Civic Engagement

Summary of Significant Trends:

A reduction in civic involvement is widely noted as a trend of the last 10 years. While more youth are volunteering, largely due to community service requirements for high school graduation and college admissions, voting participation, interest in social concerns, and interest in public affairs have all declined (The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, 2002). Also, the nature of public involvement has changed. People were once largely involved in formal community organizations, now they prefer more individualized, less formal mediums for involvement.

Volunteerism and engagement is important for building strong communities. Fisher and Cole (1993) found that through increasing volunteer participation, the community became stronger and special links between volunteers and the community were created. As communities change from communities of place to now communities of purpose (be it face to face like the workplace community to online communities that have never met), we must rethink how we continue to mobilize volunteers and reap the benefits of volunteer efforts.

In addition, volunteerism is an important source of cost reduction for many community capacity building efforts. Currently 83.9 million American adults (44% of the population) volunteer. This represents the equivalent of over 9 million full-time employees at a value of \$239 billion (Independent Sector).

Relevance of Trends to County Programs:

Solving community problems requires the talents and resources of all community members. Cooperative Extension has a long tradition of developing programs for volunteer development, volunteer management, and involvement. The cost savings realized through the volunteer development efforts of Extension will always be critical. Volunteer training will be a continued important component of program development and implementation. Extension agents have seen their jobs become increasingly involved in volunteer management and this trend will continue.

Sources of Supporting Data:

CYFERnet: <http://www.cyfernet.org/>

U.S. Census Bureau: <http://www.census.gov/>

Sustainable Measures

<http://www.sustainablemeasures.com/>

Office of State Planning:

<http://www.ospl.state.nc.us/>

Pew Partnership

<http://www.pew-partnership.org>

National Issues Forum <http://www.nifi.org/>

Kettering Foundation <http://www.kettering.org>

Independent Sector <http://www.indepsec.org>

The Center for Information and Research on
Civic Learning and Engagement

[http://www.civicyouthy.org/research/
products/youth_index.htm](http://www.civicyouthy.org/research/products/youth_index.htm)

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