

# TECHNICAL NOTE

The purpose of this technical note is to document data sources and survey instruments, address issues of statistical reliability, and define terms used in the report.

This technical note contains information from the U.S. Census Bureau and the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reports on Volunteering in the United States, including state level estimates of volunteering and civic engagement. To date, the Current Population Survey (CPS) supplement volunteer data are available from 1974, 1989, and every year since 2002.

## Bureau of Labor Statistics Technical Notes

The data used in this report were collected through a supplement to the September 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, and 2006 CPS. The CPS is a monthly survey of about 60,000 households, (and approximately 100,000 adults), conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau for the Bureau of Labor Statistics. It focuses on obtaining information on employment and unemployment for the nation's civilian non-institutionalized population, ages 16 and older. The purpose of this supplement is to obtain information on the incidence of volunteering, the characteristics of volunteers, and civic life indicators in the United States.

Since 2002, the Census Bureau has introduced adjustments to the population controls for the CPS as part of its annual update of population estimates. In addition to the population control adjustments, new questions on race and ethnicity were introduced into the CPS in January 2003. For a discussion of the changes introduced into the CPS in January 2003, see "Revisions to the Current Population Survey Effective in January 2003," in the February 2003 issue of *Employment and Earnings*, available on the BLS website at <http://www.bls.gov/cps/rvcps03.pdf>. For a discussion of the changes introduced in January 2004, see "Adjustments to Household Survey Population Estimates in January 2004," in the February 2004 issue of *Employment and Earnings*, available on the BLS website at <http://www.bls.gov/cps/cps04adj.pdf>. For a discussion of the changes introduced in January 2005, see "Adjustments to Household Survey Population Estimates in January 2005," in the February 2005 issue of *Employment and Earnings*, available on the BLS website at <http://www.bls.gov/cps/cps05adj.pdf>. For a discussion of the changes introduced in January 2006, see "Adjustments to Household Survey Population Estimates in January 2006," in the February 2006 issue of *Employment and Earnings*, available on the BLS website at <http://www.bls.gov/cps/cps06adj.pdf>.

The CPS response rate at the household level varied between 92% and 94% between 2003 and 2005. For individuals in households that completed the basic CPS, the person-level response rate for the volunteer supplement varied between 86% and 88% over this time period. BLS and the Census Bureau no longer calculate the overall response rate for the CPS volunteer supplements. From the documentation for the September 2006 CPS (pages 16-3 and 16-4): "Since the basic CPS nonresponse rate is a household-level rate and the Volunteer Service supplement nonresponse rate is a person-level rate, we cannot combine these rates to derive an overall nonresponse rate. Since it is unlikely the nonresponding households to the basic CPS have the same number of persons as the households successfully interviewed, combining these rates would result in an overestimate of the "true" person-level overall nonresponse rate for the Volunteer Service supplement."

## Volunteer Questions and Concepts

Volunteers are defined as persons who performed unpaid volunteer activities at any point during the last 12 months, from September 1st of the prior year through the survey week in September of the survey year. The count of volunteers includes only persons who volunteered through or for an organization; the figures do not include persons who volunteered in a more informal manner.

The survey was introduced as follows: “This month, we are interested in volunteer activities, that is, activities for which people are not paid, except perhaps expenses. We only want you to include volunteer activities that you did through or for an organization, even if you only did them once in a while.”

Following this introduction, respondents were asked the first supplement question: “Since September 1st of last year, have you done any volunteer activities through or for an organization?”

If respondents did not answer “yes” to the first question, they were asked the following question: “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 1st of last year, have you done any of these types of volunteer activities?”

Respondents were considered volunteers if they answered “yes” to either of these questions. This is the same method of identifying volunteers as was used in each of the volunteer supplements since 2002.

Respondents classified as volunteers were asked further questions about the number and type of organizations for which they volunteered, total hours spent volunteering, how they became involved with the main organization for which they volunteered, the type of activities they performed for the main organization, and what their main activity was.

Organizations are associations, societies, or groups of people who share a common interest. Examples include churches, synagogues, and other religious institutions, youth groups, and civic organizations. For the purpose of this CPS supplement, organizations are grouped into major categories, including religious, youth, and social or community service organizations.

The main organization is the organization for which the volunteer worked the most hours during the year. If a respondent volunteered for only one organization, it was considered the main organization. Activities are the specific tasks the volunteer did for an organization. Examples include tutoring, fundraising, and serving food.

Starting in 2006, individuals were asked, “In the last year, have you worked with other people in your neighborhood to fix or improve something?” Individuals who answered “yes” to this question, but answered “no” to the volunteering questions, were classified as informal volunteers. Also in 2006, individuals were asked, “In the last year, have you attended any public meetings in which there was discussion of community affairs?”

## Reliability of the Estimates

Statistics based on the CPS are subject to both sampling and nonsampling error. When a sample, rather than the entire population, is surveyed, there is a chance that the sample estimates may differ from the “true” population values they represent. The exact difference, or sampling error, varies depending on the particular sample selected, and this variability is measured by the standard error of the estimate. There is about a 90% chance, or level of confidence, that an estimate based on a sample will differ by no more than 1.6 standard errors from the “true” population value because of sampling error. BLS analyses are generally conducted at the 90% level of confidence.

The CPS data also are affected by nonsampling error. Nonsampling error can occur for many reasons, including the failure to sample a segment of the population, inability to obtain information for all respondents in the sample, inability or unwillingness of respondents to provide correct information, and errors made in the collection or processing of the data. For a full discussion of the reliability of data from the CPS and for information on estimating standard errors, see the CPS “Explanatory Notes and Estimates of Error.”

## State Level Data and Rankings

The state ranking section of this report highlights key volunteering statistics for states and for specific subpopulations in the states. As single-year state-level estimates for small segments of the population may be unreliable, the results in this report are based on a three-year moving average that combines responses from the 2004, 2005, and 2006 volunteer surveys to increase the reliability of the estimates. While using three years of data increases the reliability of the estimates, caution should still be used when interpreting state rankings, as differences between some states may not be statistically significant.

In addition to basing the statistics in this report on three years of data, added checks were performed to ensure the reliability of the estimates in detailed state-level tables. Estimates based on small sample cell sizes or with a large variance were suppressed and are denoted by an asterisk “\*”.

In comparison with the BLS on Volunteering in the United States report, there are very small differences between the national estimates in the BLS reports and those in this report, attributable to restrictions placed on the public use data files.

## Data from 1974 and 1989

To enable comparisons across the volunteer supplements in 1974, 1989, and 2002-2006, a consistent definition of an “adult volunteer” has been developed using the CPS. For all three periods, we define an adult volunteer as someone aged 16 and older who did work through an organization in the previous 12 months for which they were not paid. This adult definition excludes respondents ages 14 and 15, consistent with the definition used by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) since 1989. The definition used in 1974 was based on all respondents ages 14 and older.

For determining organization information, the organizational type categories have remained relatively consistent between 1989 and the present. The 1974 survey did not ask respondents what organization they volunteered with. Therefore, we are not able to include organization type from 1974 in the report. When necessary, the labels of the 1989 categories have been revised to match the present-day category titles. The present-day BLS coding of organizational types includes two categories that were not available to respondents to the 1989 survey: “Environmental and animal care” and “Public safety.” These categories have been recoded as “Other” for comparability with 1989.

During the 1974, 1989, and current volunteer surveys, the survey instrument used a different number of prompt questions to determine the volunteer rate. The 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, and 2006 volunteer rates were calculated based on responses to two volunteer prompts in the volunteer survey instrument: “Since September 1st of last year, [have you] done any volunteer activities through or for an organization?” and “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 of last year, [have you] done any of these types of volunteer activities?”. The 1974 volunteer rate was based on responses to a question similar to the first volunteer prompt on the present September supplement. The 1989 volunteer rate was calculated based on responses to two volunteer questions: “Last week, [have you done] any unpaid volunteer work?” and “Even though [you] did not do any unpaid volunteer work last week, did you do any unpaid volunteer work over the last twelve months, that is since May 1, 1988?”

In 1974, some states did not have a sufficient sample size to determine the volunteer rate. In the state profiles, where there were insufficient data to generate a volunteer rate for 1974, there is an N/A in the column for 1974.

## Volunteer Retention

To measure volunteer retention among the states’ volunteers, we analyzed panel data from the CPS. Each September 50% of all households that participate in the CPS are also selected to participate the following September. Among members of these households, almost 90% of respondents who answer the questions about volunteering in the first year also answer the questions in the second year. We analyzed the changes in the responses to the volunteering questions from respondents in the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 volunteer supplements to develop the volunteer retention rate.

## Civic Life

The Civic Life Index is composed of 12 indicators that represent four distinct categories of civic life within the states: volunteering for an organization, neighborhood engagement, voting, and civic and nonprofit infrastructure. In the index, equal weight was given to each of the four categories of civic life described below. Within each of the four categories, equal weight was given to each indicator. The weighted index score for each

state represents a weighted average of the indicator scores from each of the civic life categories.<sup>1</sup> In 2006, the first year of the index, the score for the U.S was set to 100. All state scores were rescaled based on their weighted index score.

Volunteering for an organization is measured using three indicators from the CPS volunteering supplement from 2004 to 2006: the volunteer rate for adults ages 16 and older, total volunteer hours per capita, and the proportion of regular volunteers (volunteers who served with their main volunteer organization for 12 or more weeks a year).

Neighborhood engagement is measured using four indicators from the questions that were newly added to the CPS volunteering supplement in 2006: the proportion of adults who reported attending a public meeting in which community affairs were discussed within the past year, the mean number of public meetings attended by adults who participated in one or more meetings, the proportion of adults who reported working with other people in their neighborhood to fix or improve something within the past year, and the mean number of times adults reported working with their neighbors to fix or improve something.

Voting is measured by electoral participation figures from the last two national elections: the proportion of the state's voting-age population who voted in the 2004 presidential election, and the proportion of the state's voting-age population who voted for the highest office on the ballot in the 2006 Congressional midterm elections.<sup>2</sup>

Civic infrastructure is measured using three indicators: the number of nonprofit organizations in the state that are registered with the IRS as a tax-exempt organization, (which includes nonprofit and social service organizations, public charities, private foundations, social and recreational organizations, business leagues, and other tax-exempt organizations) the number of the registered nonprofit organizations located within the state that filed IRS Form 990, and the total number of religious institutions and congregations within the state.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Each of the 12 indicators of civic life was rescaled so that the highest value across all states received an item score of 100, and the lowest value received an item score of zero. To limit the impact of outliers on the item scores, in cases where the highest observed score was more than 20 points larger than the second-highest observed score, the item was rescaled so that the second-highest value received an item score of 100 and the lowest value received an item score of zero.

<sup>2</sup> The source for the data on voting is the United States Election Project (<http://elections.gmu.edu>). Vote totals for the 2006 elections are current as of December 22, 2006. Official vote totals for Congressional races, which are certified and published by the Clerk of the U.S. House of Representatives, are not yet available. The voting age population is the most widely used measure for reporting voting rates and represents members of the population 18 years of age and older. An alternate approach to measuring electoral participation is to use the voting eligible population, which excludes non-citizens and ineligible felons from the voting age population.

<sup>3</sup> The source for data on the number of nonprofit organizations in the state that are registered with the IRS as a tax-exempt organization and the number of registered nonprofit organizations located within the state that filed IRS Form 990 is the Urban Institute, National Center for Charitable Statistics (<http://nccsdataweb.urban.org>), Internal Revenue Service, Exempt Organizations Business Master File (2007). The source for data on the number of religious institutions and congregations is the Association of Religion Data Archive, Religious Congregations and Membership Study, 2000.