

Who Will Show Up?

*Rethinking Recruitment and Volunteerism
for Today's Public Health Challenges*



ABOUT US

Serve Virginia aspires to build a culture of service and volunteerism by inspiring individuals and organizations to engage, connecting them with the resources they need to make a difference, and celebrating the tremendous impacts we make together.

- Convening partners statewide to support and promote volunteerism
- Overseeing AmeriCorps State funds and cultivating a culture of national service
- Amplifying the impact of service in Virginia's communities

A PATH FORWARD

We believe increased community capacity is a solution to addressing critical community needs.



The Virginia Community Engagement Index

- A statewide survey that collects a pulse check of how engaged Virginians perceive community needs, engage in community with others, and insights to mobilize more Virginians to serve.



The SERVE Framework

- A data-informed strategy to build a stronger service, volunteerism, and civic engagement ecosystem to meet the needs of our communities



Today's Goals

- 1 What do we know about volunteerism in Virginia today?
- 2 Who is volunteering?
- 3 How do I engage more volunteers?



What do we know about volunteerism in today's context?

4 Key Insights and Takeaways from the Virginia Community Engagement Index



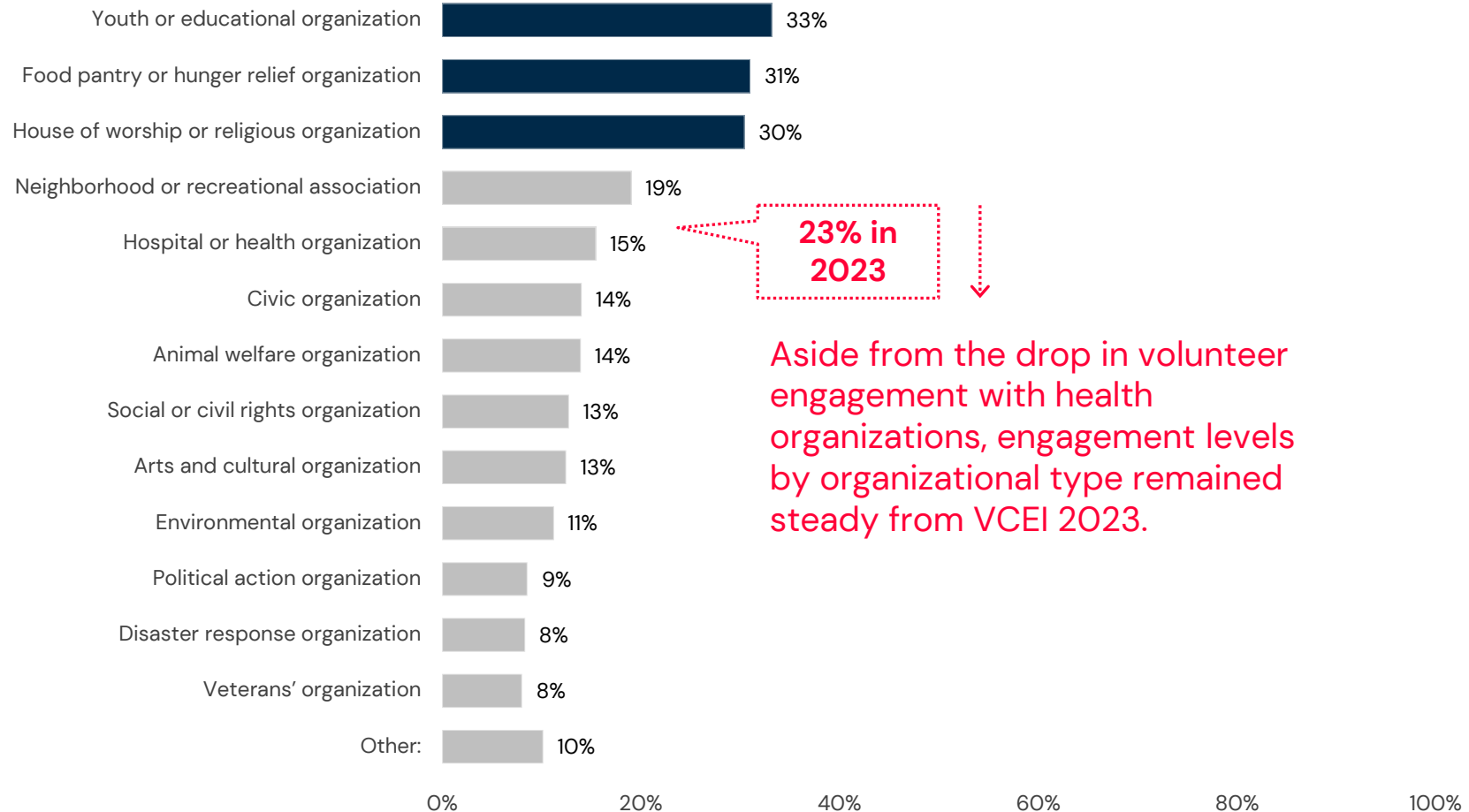
Engagement Holds Steady.

Reported levels of service, volunteerism, and civic engagement in 2025 fall mostly in line with those from 2023, though there are a few directional shifts worth monitoring.



Where they Volunteer

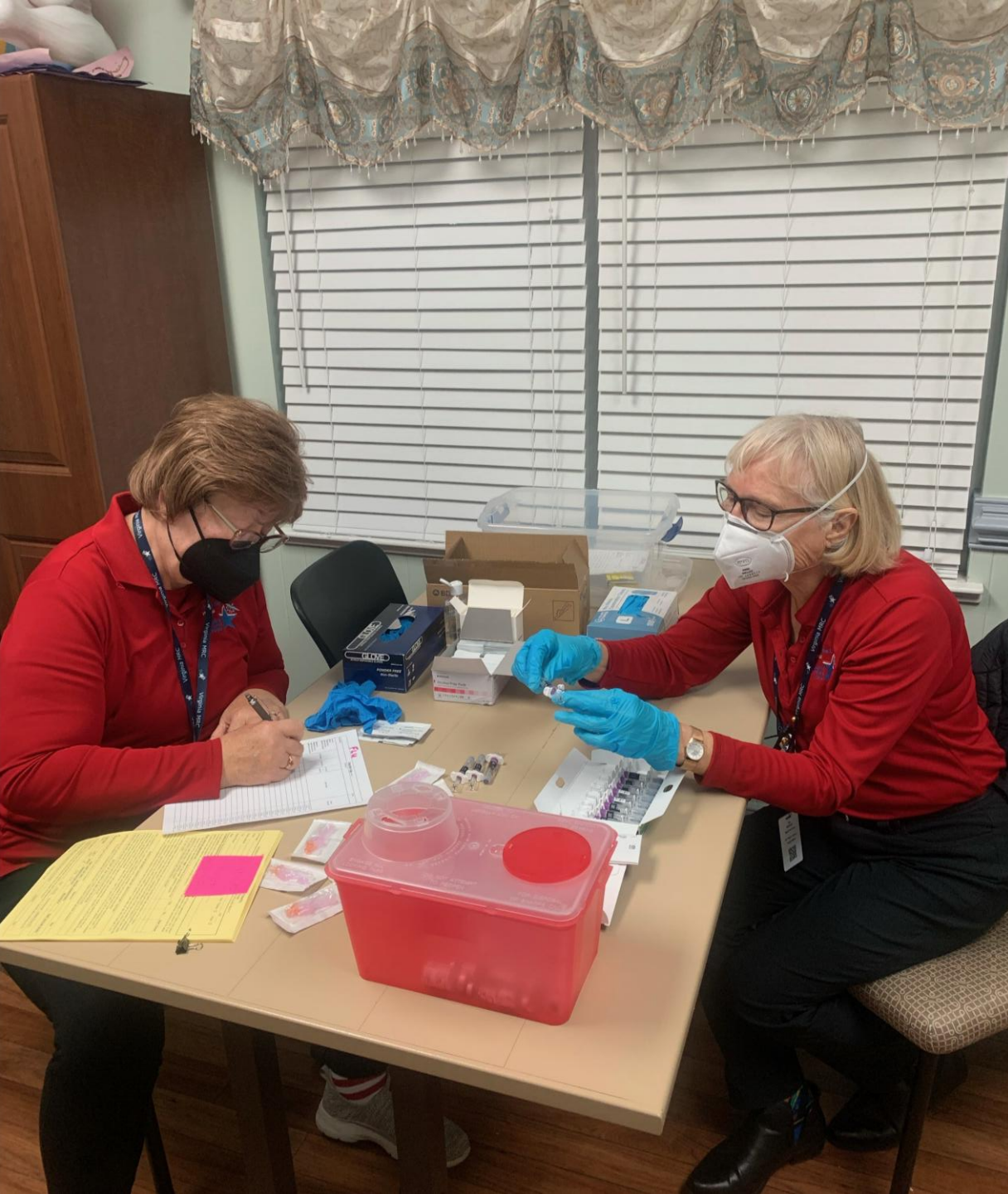
Three clear organizational “types” emerge in terms of where volunteers most typically engage, with youth or educational organizations, hunger relief organizations, and houses of worship seeing nearly a third of volunteer traffic.



23% in 2023

Aside from the drop in volunteer engagement with health organizations, engagement levels by organizational type remained steady from VCEI 2023.





Why did volunteerism at hospital or health related organizations drop from 2023 to 2025?

- Urgency decreased as communities stopped focusing on the impact of the COVID19 pandemic
- Other community needs became more prominent with changing social landscape
- Other thoughts?

Community Needs and Key Actions Come into Sharper Focus.

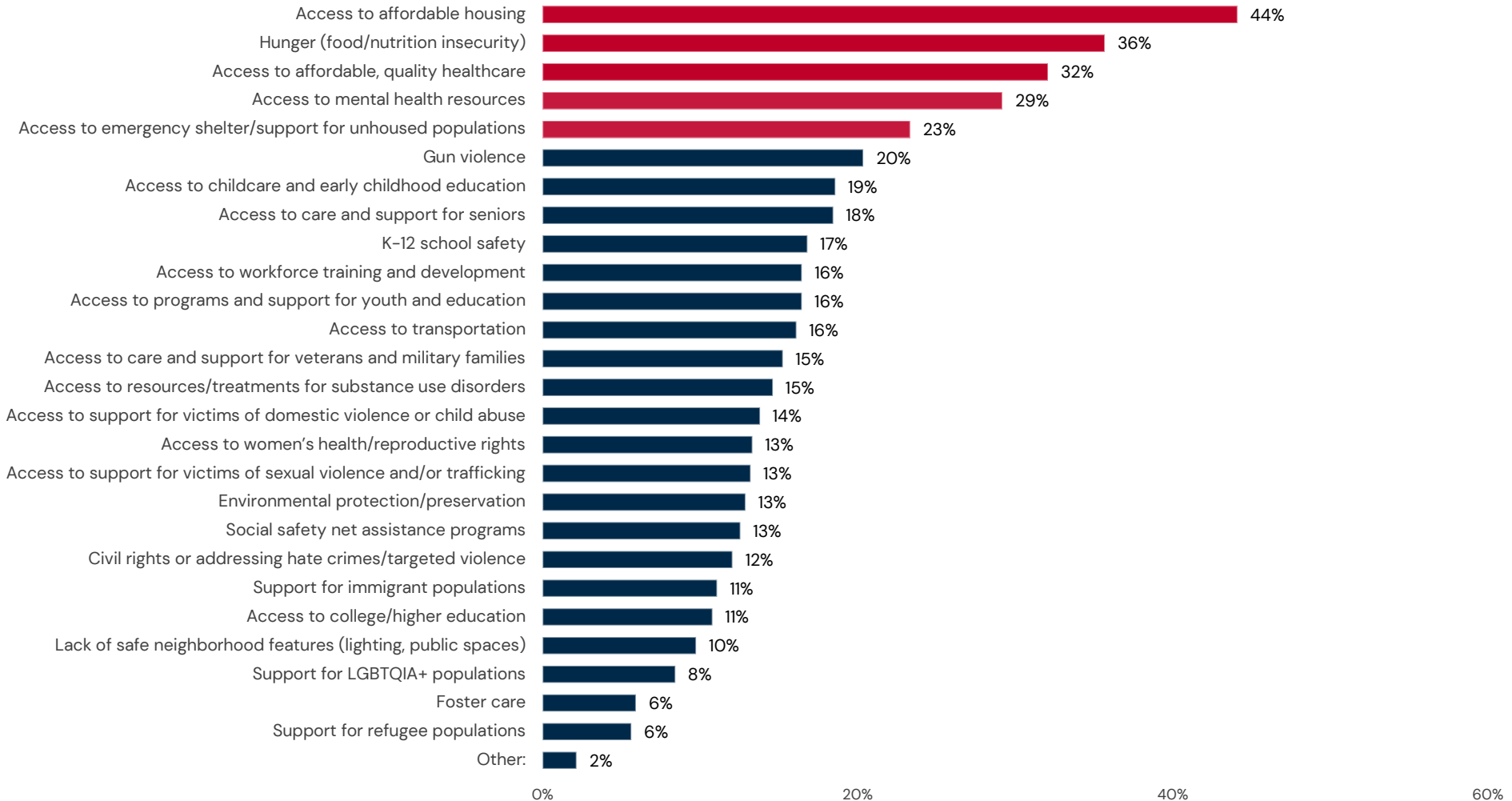
The new approach to assessing community needs presents a starker hierarchy in what people are prioritizing, with affordable housing leading the pack by a fair margin.

Similarly, the sort and rank approach to measuring what they feel will be most effective at addressing these needs offers a more compelling argument for the role of volunteerism, while also painting a more balanced picture of how people feel change can be made/needs can be met.



Community Needs & Priorities

Respondents identified affordable housing, hunger, healthcare accessibility, mental health, and support for unhoused populations as the top five priorities to address in their communities, with the highest emphasis being placed on affordable housing.

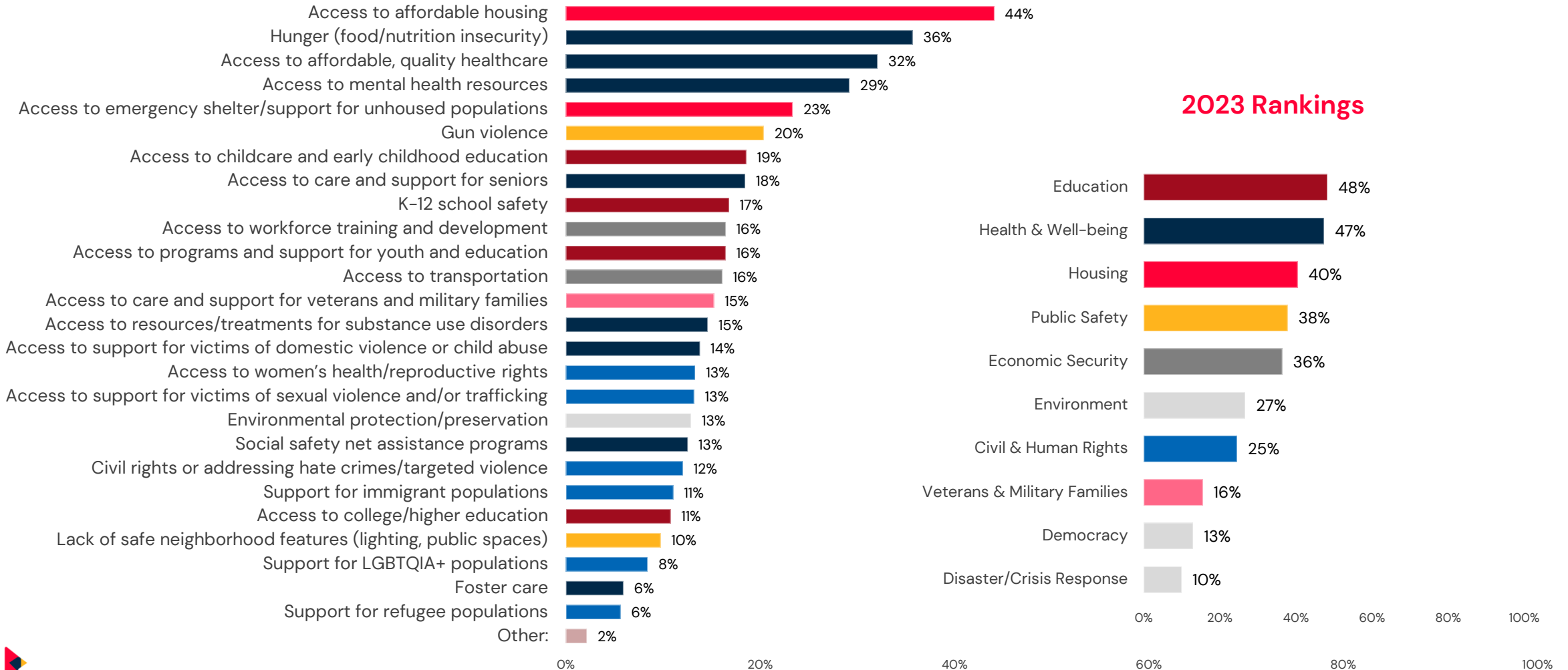


Q19. Of the following options, what do you feel are the top 5 needs or priorities to address in your community today? *Select up to five.*

n = 3,263

Community Needs & Priorities

VCEI 2023 Comparison: When faced with specific needs rather than broad focus areas, respondents de-emphasized education-related needs in 2025 and elevated those related to housing. Meanwhile, health-related priorities remained high, and hunger, when pulled from the context of “health and well-being,” was highly recognized as a pressing need.



Q19. Of the following options, what do you feel are the top 5 needs or priorities to address in your community today? *Select up to five.*

n = 3,263



Trust Declines.

Trust in institutions fell from 2023 in several key areas, most notably health care organizations and government, and the perceived effectiveness of engaging with elected officials remains low.

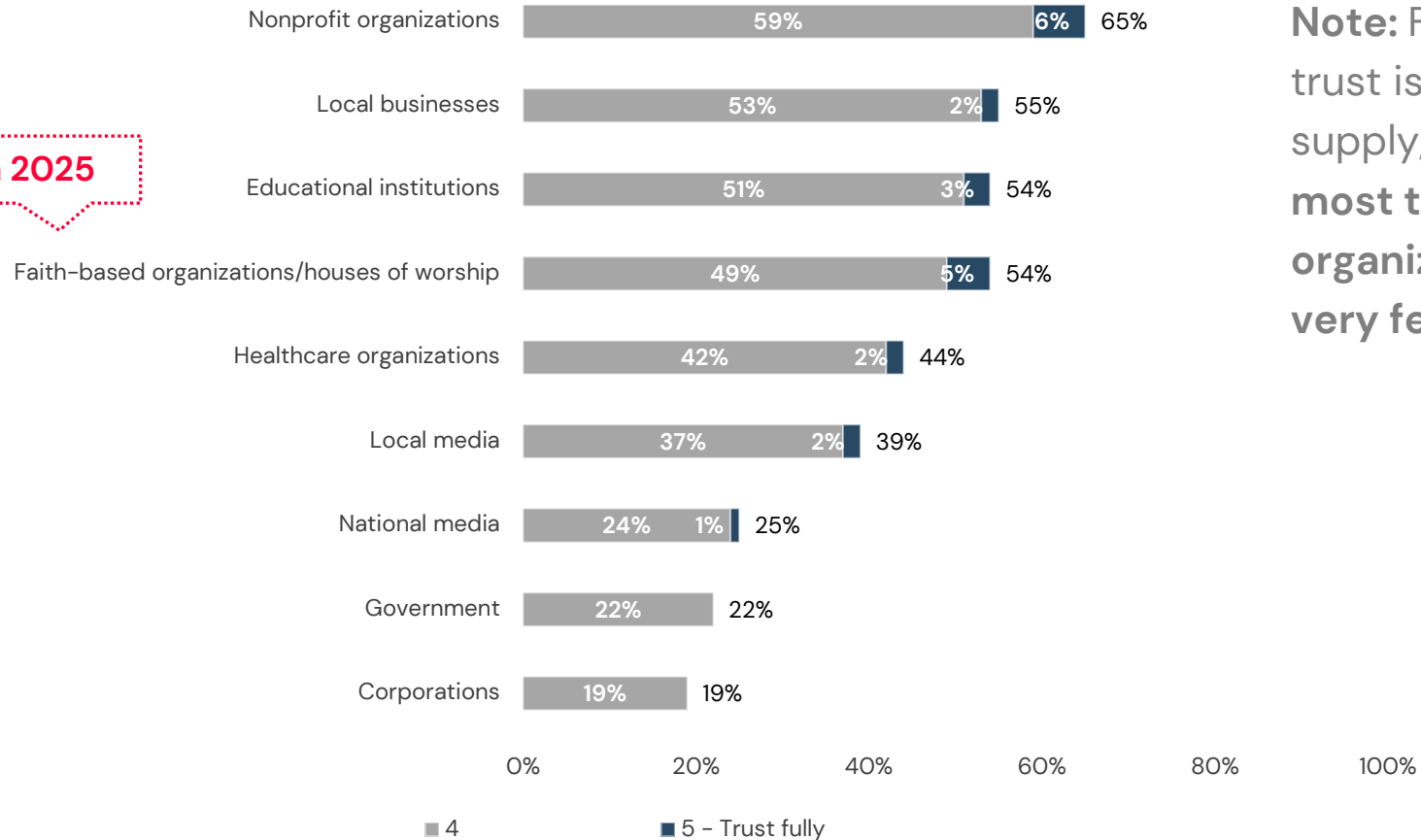
As in 2023, these measures present a clear dichotomy in terms of what people feel will be effective (outreach, educating others, advocating for policies) and the mechanisms through which they can engage.



Institutional TRUST

Fewer than one-quarter of respondents say they trust the government to do what is right, and less than one percent say they trust the government fully. Meanwhile, nonprofits garnered the highest trust ratings, with local businesses, educational institutions, and faith-based organizations rounding out the top four.

New in 2025

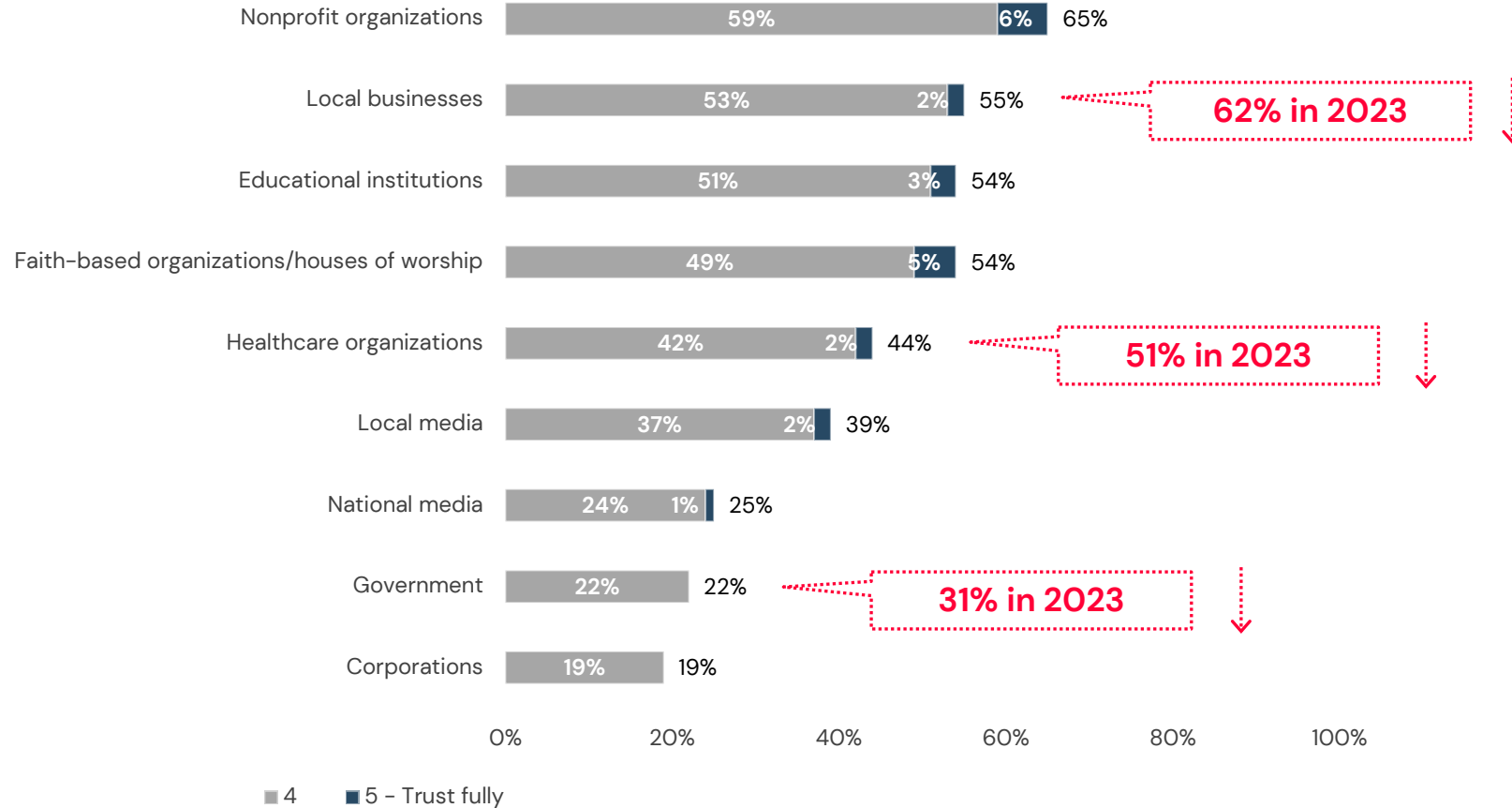


Note: Fully earned trust is in short supply, as **even the most trusted organizations earned very few “5” ratings.**



Institutional TRUST

VCEI 2023 Comparison: Government and healthcare organizations experienced the most precipitous declines in trust. Trust in local businesses also dipped. However, as an institution, it remains the second most trusted in Virginia.



Institutional Trust

	Gen Z [A] (n = 371)	Millennials [B] (n = 756)	Gen X [C] (n = 892)	Boomers [D] (n = 1,153)	Silent Gen. [E] (n = 89)	Total (n = 3,263)
Nonprofit organizations	62%	63%	64%	70% ^{ABC}	61%	65%
Local businesses	60% ^{BCDE}	54%	54%	53%	47%	55%
Educational institutions	52%	54%	55%	56%	53%	54%
Faith-based organizations/houses of worship	43%	49% ^A	58% ^{AB}	66% ^{ABC}	75% ^{ABC}	54%
Healthcare organizations	36%	43% ^A	41% ^A	53% ^{ABC}	53% ^{AC}	44%
Local media	35%	37%	40% ^A	41% ^A	41%	39%
National media	23%	26%	22%	27% ^C	30%	25%
Government	17%	24% ^A	23% ^A	26% ^A	28% ^A	22%
Corporations	17%	21% ^A	19%	19%	27% ^A	19%

% 4, 5 – Trust fully

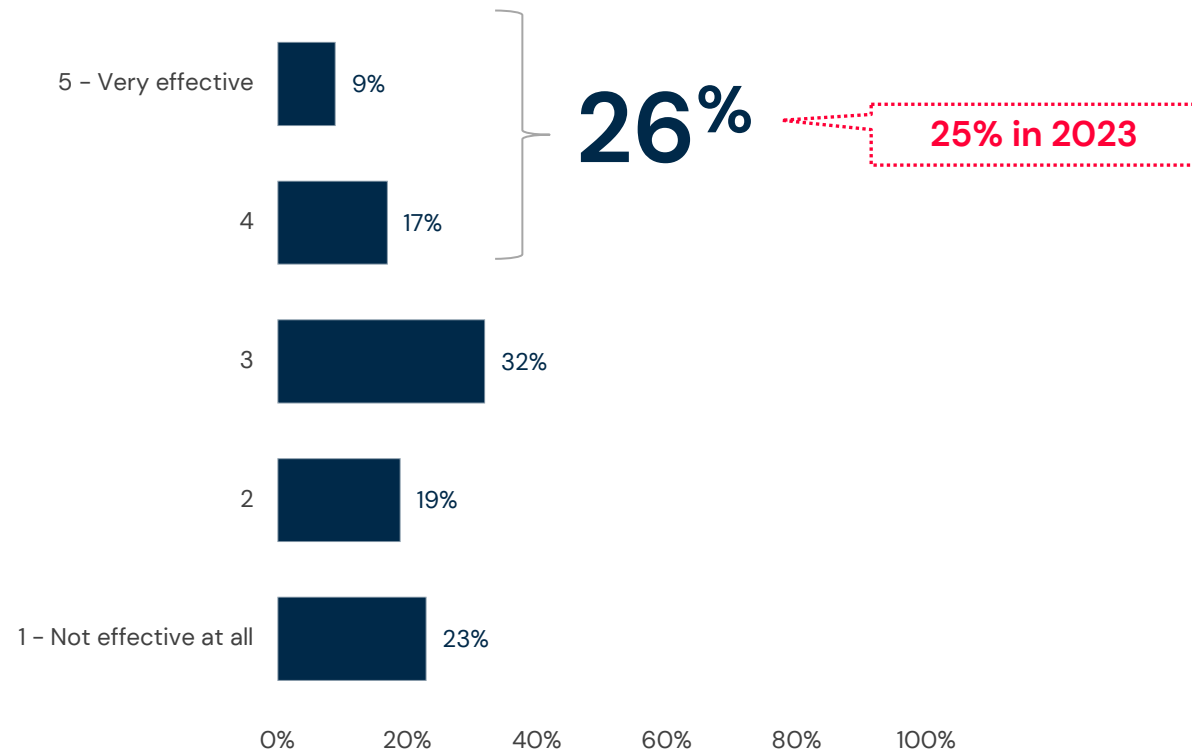
Trust in FBOs is highest among the oldest population and decreases steadily for each generation afterward.

Gen Z trusts local business more than another generation, and distrusts government and corporations more than any other.



Perceived Agency

Roughly one in four respondents feel it would be effective bringing a concern or idea to a member of their local government, though nearly one-third sit "in the middle" at a rating of "3."

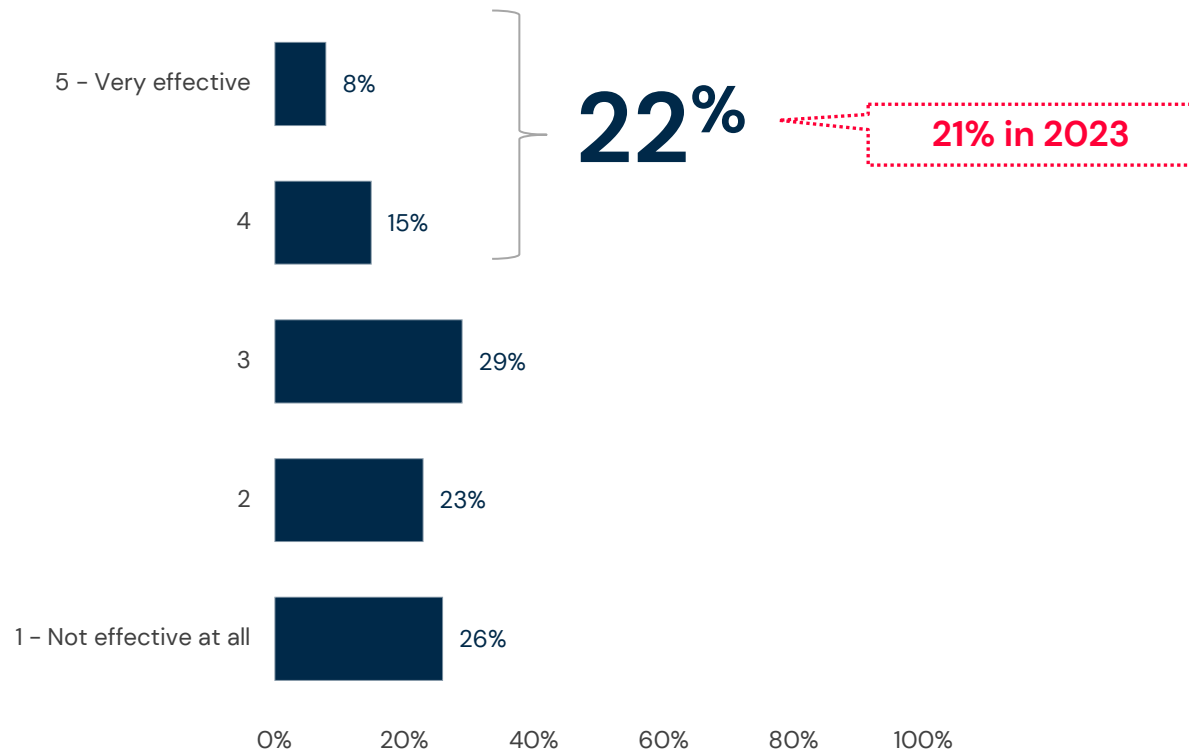


Q22. How effective do you think it would be for you to present a concern or idea to a member of the local government?
*Significantly higher, $p < .05$

n = 3,263

Perceived Agency

Roughly one in five respondents feel it would be effective bringing a concern or idea to a member of their state government, while more than a quarter say it would not be effective at all.



Q23. How effective do you think it would be for you to present a concern or idea to a member of the state government?
*Significantly higher, $p < .05$

n = 3,263



How do you build trust with communities and volunteers?

- Strategies to strengthen community outreach
- Empowering volunteers as leaders
- Other thoughts?

Clearer distinctions emerge for targeted engagement.

Beyond demographic insights, several distinct persona segments are emerging that can help organizations throughout the ecosystem better communicate with, recruit, and continually engage members of their communities in advancing their missions.

As previously stated, and as we will come to see, the VCEI 2025 findings point to the continued need for, and benefits of, targeted engagement strategies.

How we target — and the degree to which that targeting is successful — depends on how distinct a portrait we can paint of “who’s out there.”



Faithful Stewards

You “have” them in good supply now, but they’re aging and somewhat confined to their faith communities as conduits. They give highly of their treasure as well.

How do you plan for a future without them?

Intentional Contributors

Driven and receptive to what you offer, they are your most mobilized – and your most effective mobilizers. This is a “trust-given” group that hasn’t lost institutional faith.

How do you cultivate them and bring others to their level?

Quiet Supporters

Unconcerned with fanfare, service is a part of life and something they embrace. However, that sense of duty doesn’t manifest in civic spaces as often

How do you convince them that their voice will be heard and is as effective as their actions?

Weary Realists

Disenfranchised by the perceived ineffectiveness of the system, their belief in the social contract can be a powerful asset when harnessed. But trust is slowly earned; quickly lost.

How do you reignite the passion and channel it to places that haven’t let them down?

Habitual Helpers

Younger on the whole, their worldview and experiences haven’t convinced them meaningful change is being made. They are most likely not to have found their cause yet.

How do you demonstrate that it all matters? Are they worth the effort?



Who is volunteering?

A Profile of Virginia's Volunteers

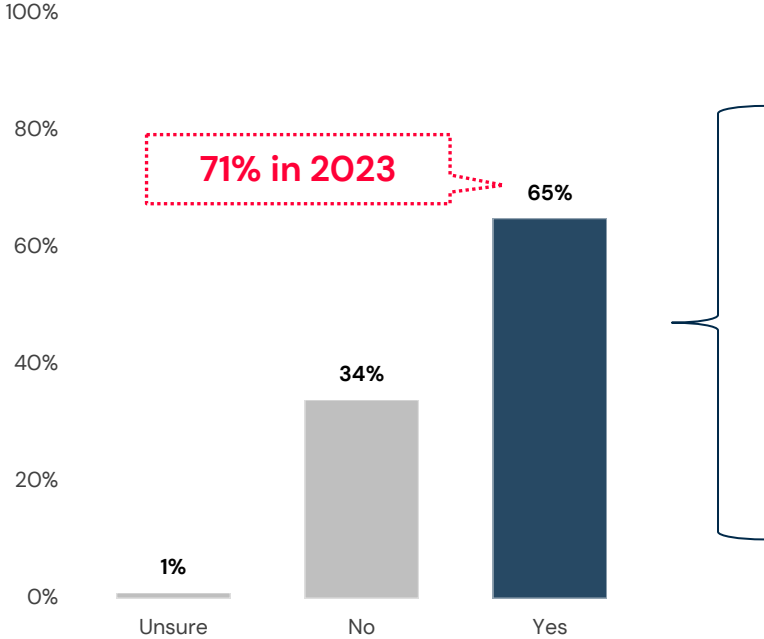


Neighbors Helping Neighbors...

Roughly two-thirds of respondents embraced “informal” forms of helping their neighbors...

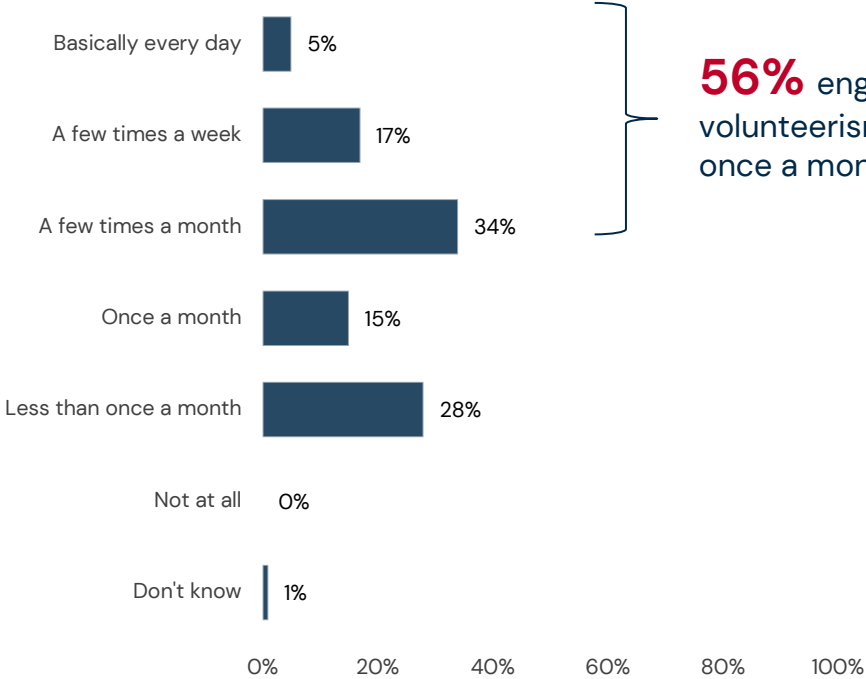


...and more than half of those who engaged in “informal” service said they do so more than once a month.



Q5. In the past 12 months, did you and your neighbors do favors for each other such as house-sitting, watching each other’s children, lending tools, and other things to help each other?

n = 3,263



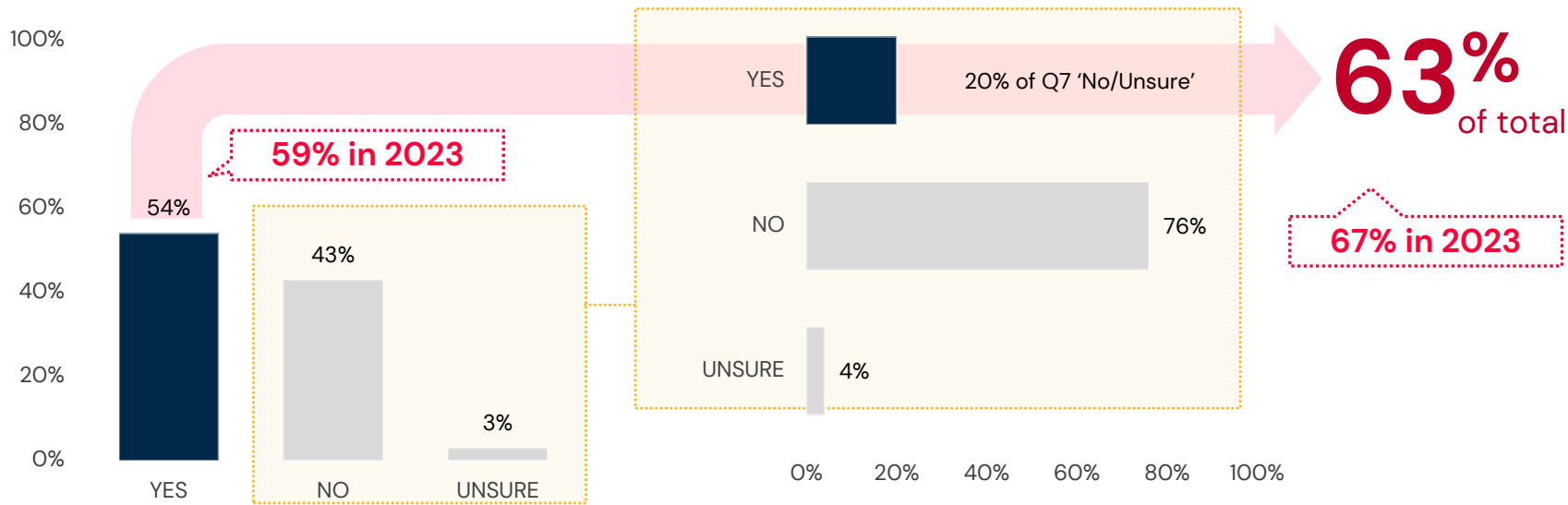
56% engaged in “informal volunteerism” more than once a month.

Q6. In the past 12 months, how often did you and your neighbors do favors for each other such as house-sitting, watching each other’s children, lending tools, and other things to help each other?

n = 2,230



Percentage of Respondents Who Have Volunteered in the Past 12 Months:



Q7. In the past 12 months, did you spend any time volunteering for any organization or association?

n = 3,263

Q8. Some people don't think of activities they do infrequently or for children's schools or youth organizations as volunteer activities. In the past 12 months, have you done any of these types of activities?

n = 1,360

Unaided, just more than half said they volunteered with an organization in the past 12 months.

However, when prompted to consider activities that may fly under the radar of traditionally held notions of "volunteering," an additional 20% self-identified as a volunteer.

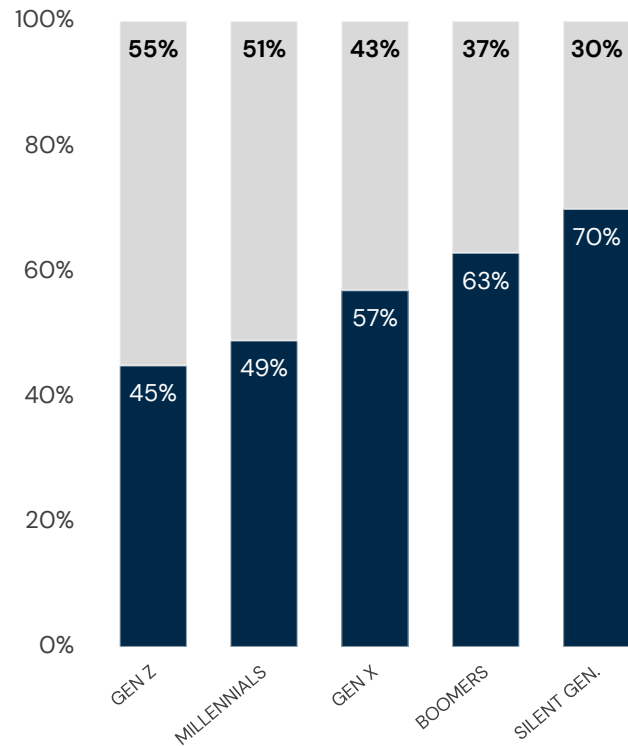


DEMOGRAPHIC FINDING

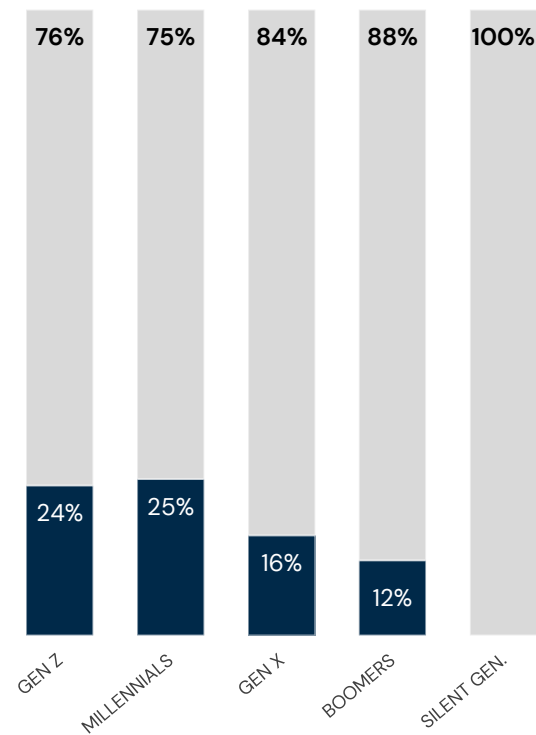
Gen Z (24%) and Millennials (25%) are more likely than Gen X (16%) or Boomers (12%) to change their answer to "yes" when prompted to broaden their definition of "volunteerism."

Percentage of Respondents Who Have Volunteered in the Past 12 Months:

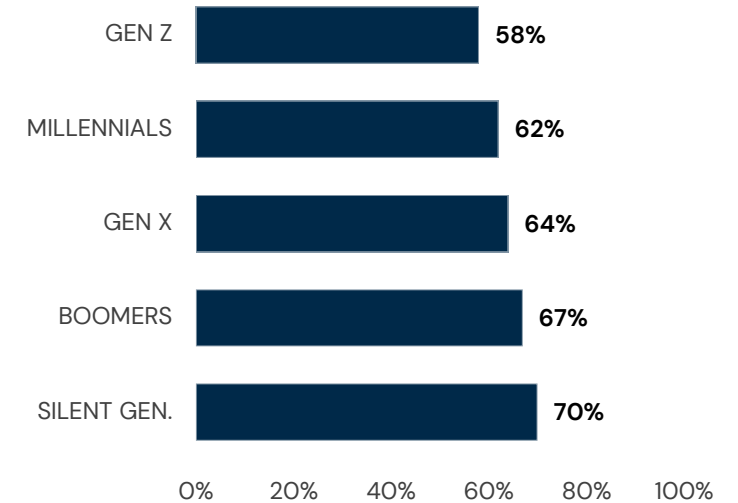
Did you spend any time volunteering for any organization or association?



Some people don't think of activities they do infrequently or for children's schools/youth orgs as volunteering... have you done any of these?



Total "formal" volunteers

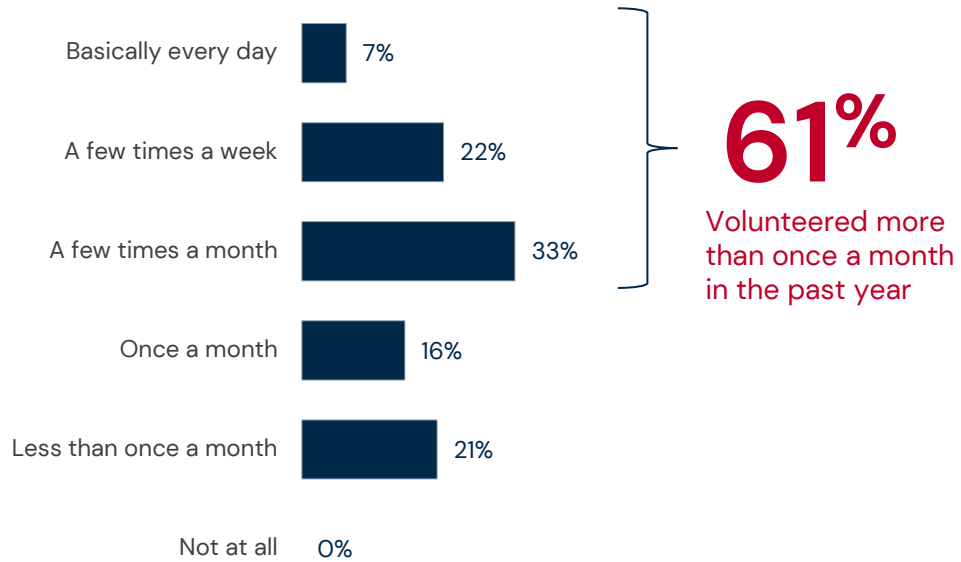


Q7. In the past 12 months, did you spend any time volunteering for any organization or association?
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Q7 n = 3,263
 Q8 n = 1,360

How often they volunteer

Roughly three out of five active volunteers volunteered more than once a month in the past year, with one-third identifying “a few times a month” as their cadence of engagement.

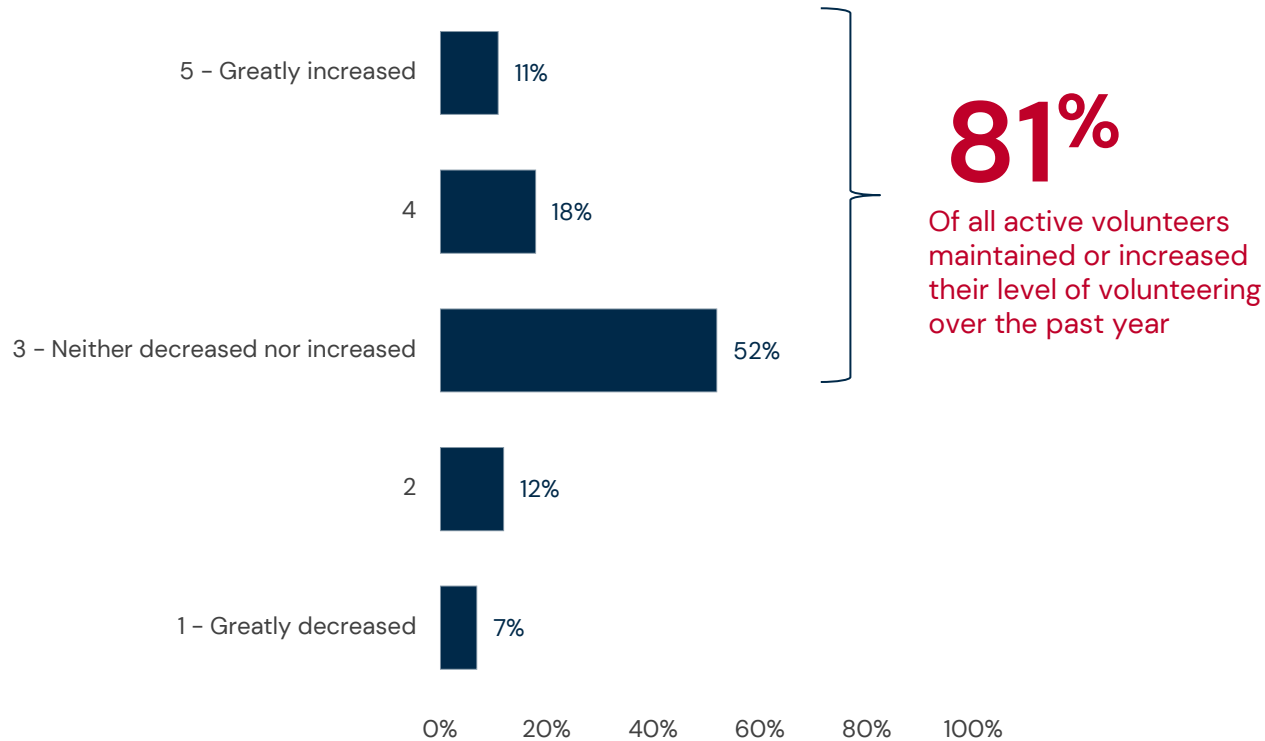


Q10. In the past 12 months, how often did you volunteer? *Significantly higher, p<.05

n = 2,159

How often they volunteer

Though more people increased their level of volunteering (29%) than decreased (19%), the majority maintained their level of volunteerism from the previous year.

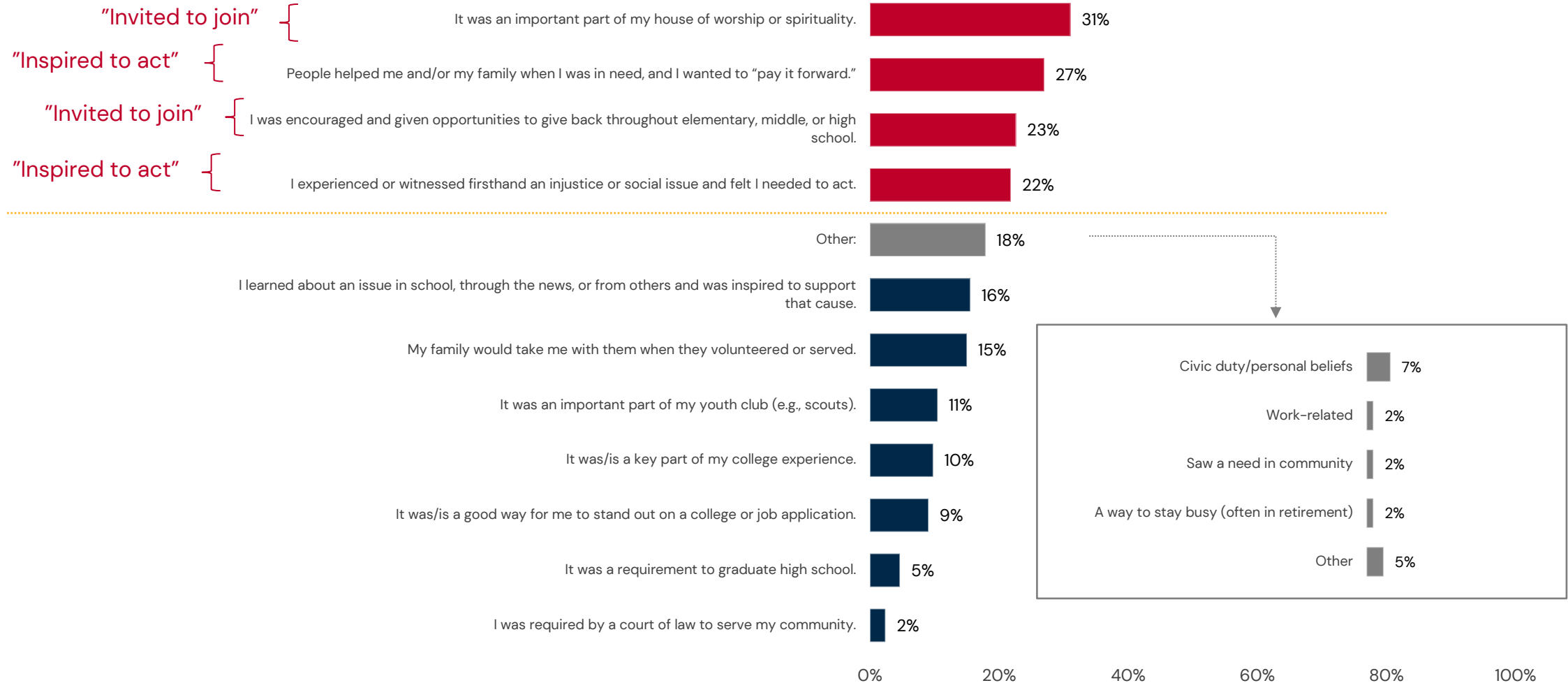


Q11. Has your level of volunteering or service increased or decreased in the past 12 months? *Significantly higher, $p < .05$

n = 2,159

Why They Start Volunteering

Individuals most often express their earliest interest and exposure to service and volunteerism as a mix of being inspired (often through personal experience and learning) and invited (often through houses of worship and schools).



Motivations to Begin

	Gen Z (n = 239)	Millennials (n = 486)	Gen X (n = 572)	Boomers (n = 799)	Silent Gen. (n = 62)	Total (n = 2,158)
It was an important part of my house of worship or spirituality	20%	30%	30%	41%	45%	31%
People helped me and/or my family when I was in need, and I wanted to "pay it forward"	20%	34%	32%	22%	12%	27%
I was encouraged and given opportunities to give back throughout elementary, middle, or high school	35%	26%	19%	13%	7%	23%
I experienced or witness firsthand and injustice or social issue and felt I needed to act	16%	27%	22%	21%	24%	22%
I learned about an issue in school, through the news, or from others and was inspired to support that cause	15%	16%	17%	15%	10%	16%
My family would take me with them when they volunteered or served	18%	17%	17%	9%	9%	15%
It was an important part of my youth club	9%	13%	12%	8%	9%	11%
It was/is a key part of my college experience	18%	8%	9%	6%	3%	10%
It was/is a good way for me to stand out on a college or job application	28%	7%	4%	1%	0%	9%
It was a requirement to graduate high school	10%	7%	2%	0%	0%	5%
I was required by a court of law to serve my community	5%	4%	1%	0%	0%	2%
Other	6%	9%	18%	35%	42%	18%

Gen Z: School factors heavily into their motivations, and using volunteerism to "stand out" is the second highest motivation.

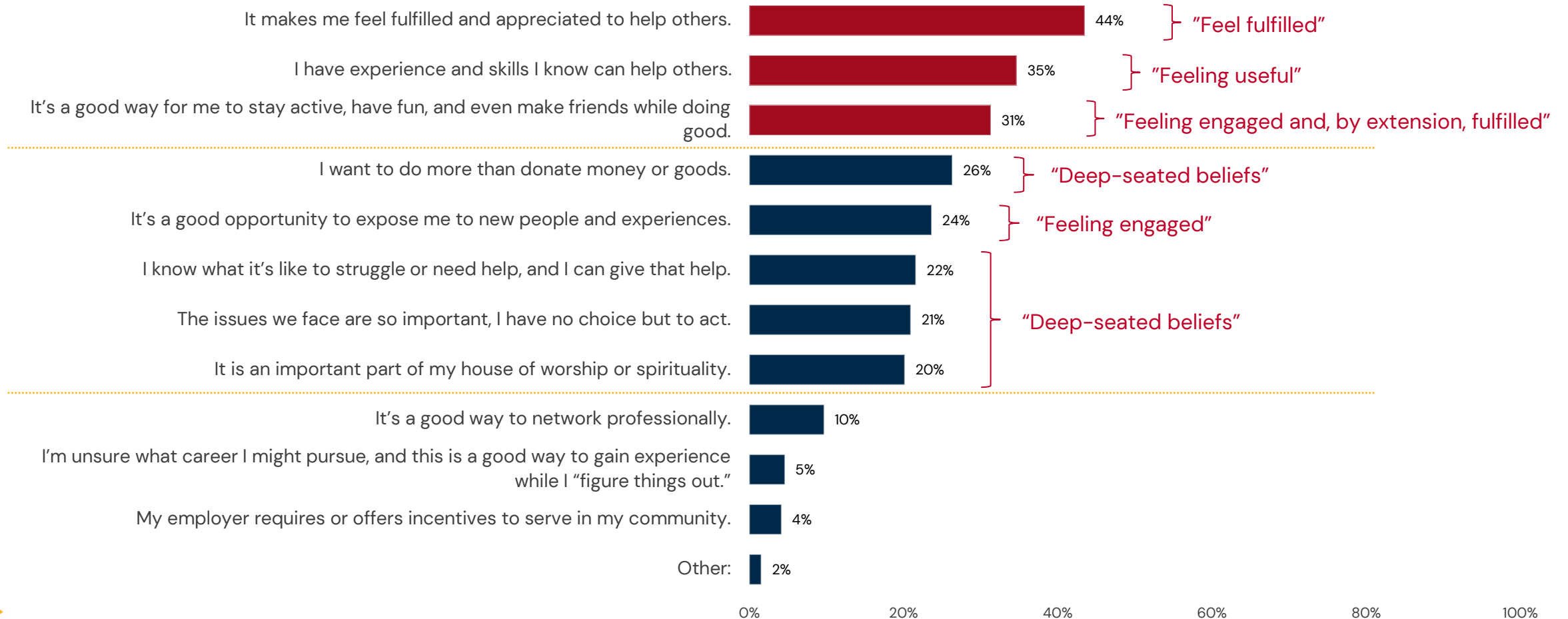
Millennials: Along with Gen Z, they're the school-based crowd and share a desire to pay it forward with the Gen X neighbors.

Boomer/Silent: The role of faith is not surprising. However, the lack of family instillment compared to other generations is interesting, especially since respondents in their children's age demographic report much higher levels of family volunteerism.



Why They Keep Volunteering

Fulfillment and appreciation, most often by way of contributing skills and experience, keep people engaged. However, the social aspects of volunteering, and the exposure it brings to new people and experiences, often motivate as strongly as intrinsic belief that their help is needed in the world.



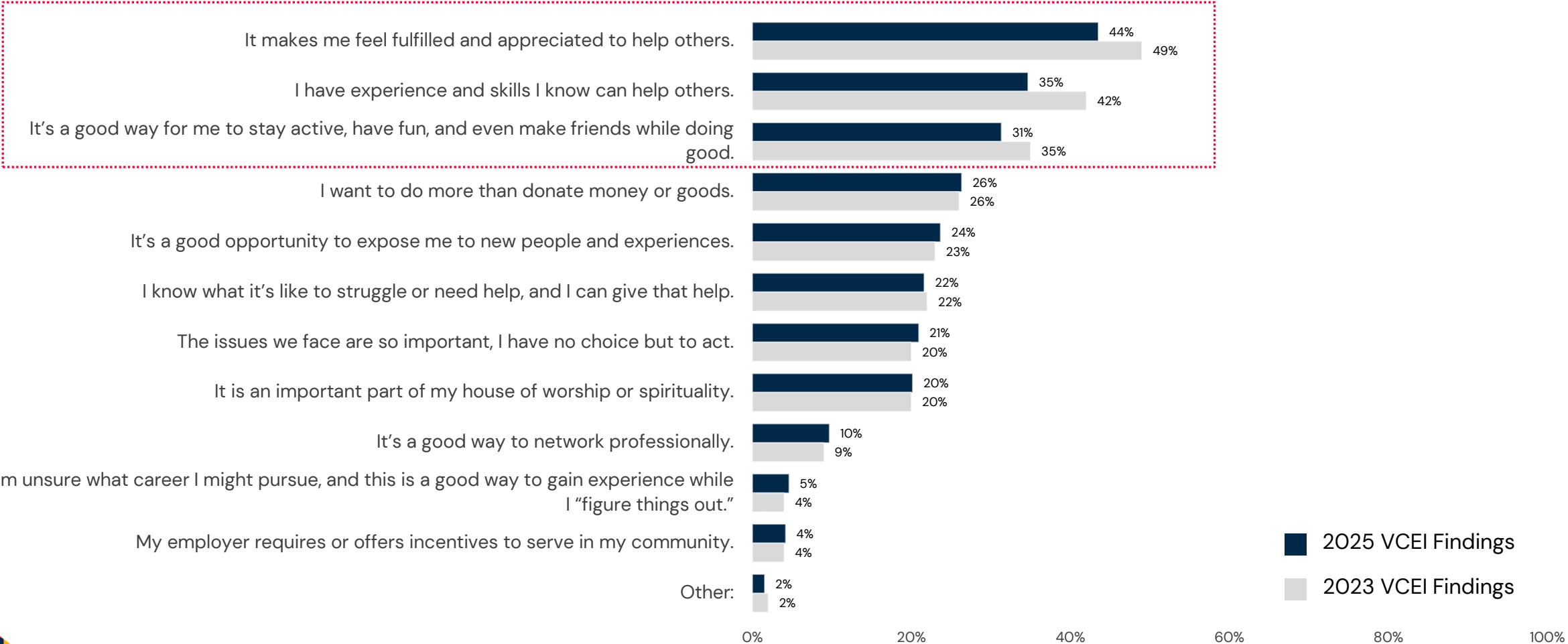
Q13. Why do you continue to volunteer or give back? *Select up to three descriptions that best match your experiences.*

n = 2,159



Why They Keep Volunteering

VCEI 2023 Comparison: The continuing benefits and motivations individuals express fall mostly in line with 2023 findings, though there are slight drops in the top three attributes that keep people coming back.



Q13. Why do you continue to volunteer or give back? *Select up to three descriptions that best match your experiences.*

n = 2,159

Motivations to Continue

	Gen Z (n = 239)	Millennials (n = 486)	Gen X (n = 572)	Boomers (n = 799)	Silent Gen. (n = 62)	Total (n = 2,158)
It makes me feel fulfilled and appreciated to help others	38%	42%	44%	50%	47%	44%
I have experience and skills I know can help others	28%	31%	33%	44%	51%	35%
It's a good way for me to stay active, have fun, and even make friends while doing good	24%	25%	28%	46%	47%	31%
I want to do more than donate money or goods	23%	18%	29%	33%	58%	26%
It's a good opportunity to expose me to new people and experiences	32%	23%	22%	21%	12%	24%
I know what it's like to struggle or need help, and I can give that help	21%	26%	26%	14%	8%	22%
The issues we face are so important, I have no choice but to act	23%	21%	20%	20%	13%	21%
It's an important part of my house of worship or spirituality	15%	18%	21%	25%	20%	20%
It's a good way to network professionally	14%	13%	10%	3%	1%	10%
I'm unsure what career I might pursue, and this is a good way to gain experience while I "figure things out"	9%	7%	3%	0%	0%	5%
My employer requires or offers incentives to serve in my community	5%	6%	4%	2%	2%	4%

Career Development: For those still predominantly in professional settings where networking is critical, those benefits rate higher, especially for Gen Z looking to gain exposure and experience.

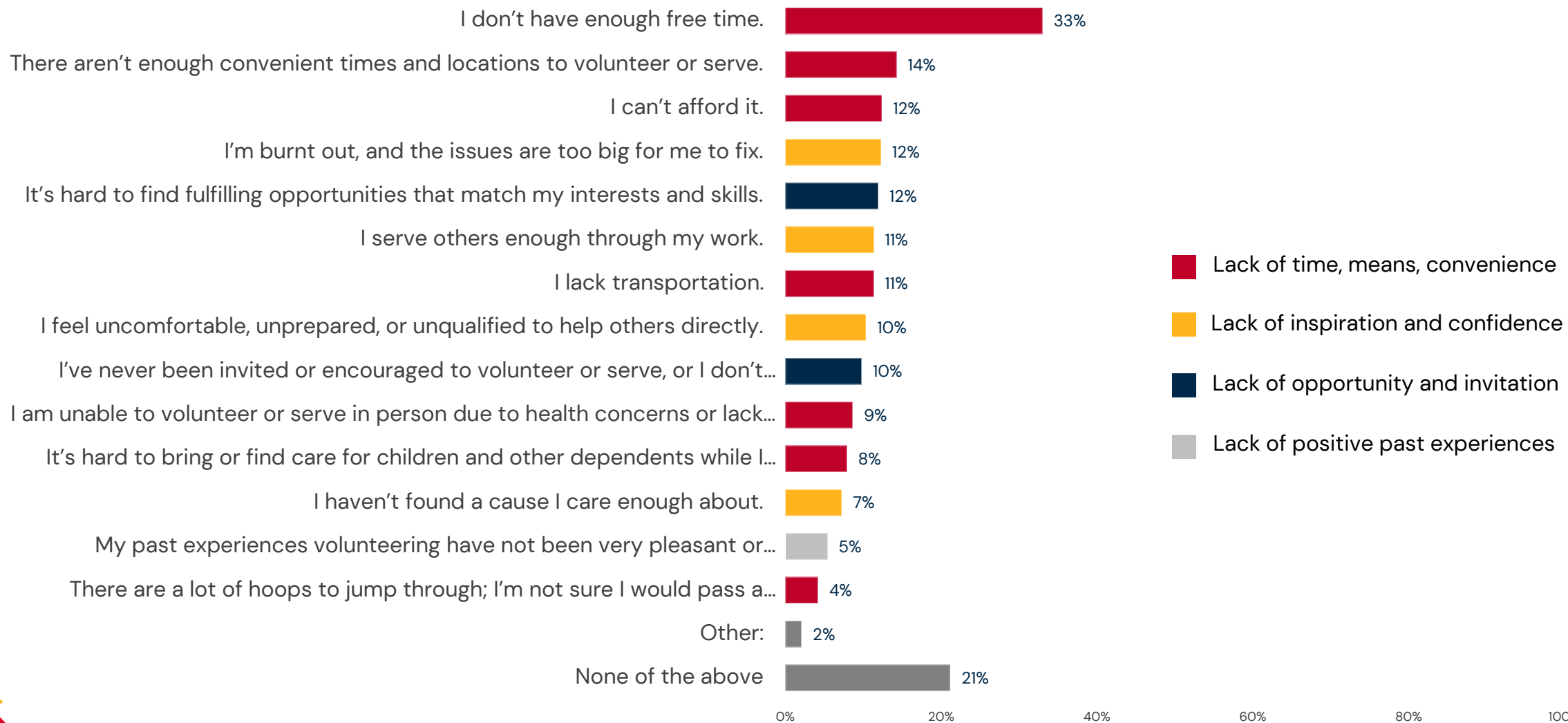
The Struggle is Real: The younger generation demonstrates a keener sense of shared hardship that drives them.

Gravity of the Moment: Apart from Silent, there is a shared sense of gravity and importance of the issues we face.



What stands in their way?

A lack of free time remains the overwhelming barrier to engagement, while most other barriers are not as keenly felt and relatively evenly dispersed among the survey pool.

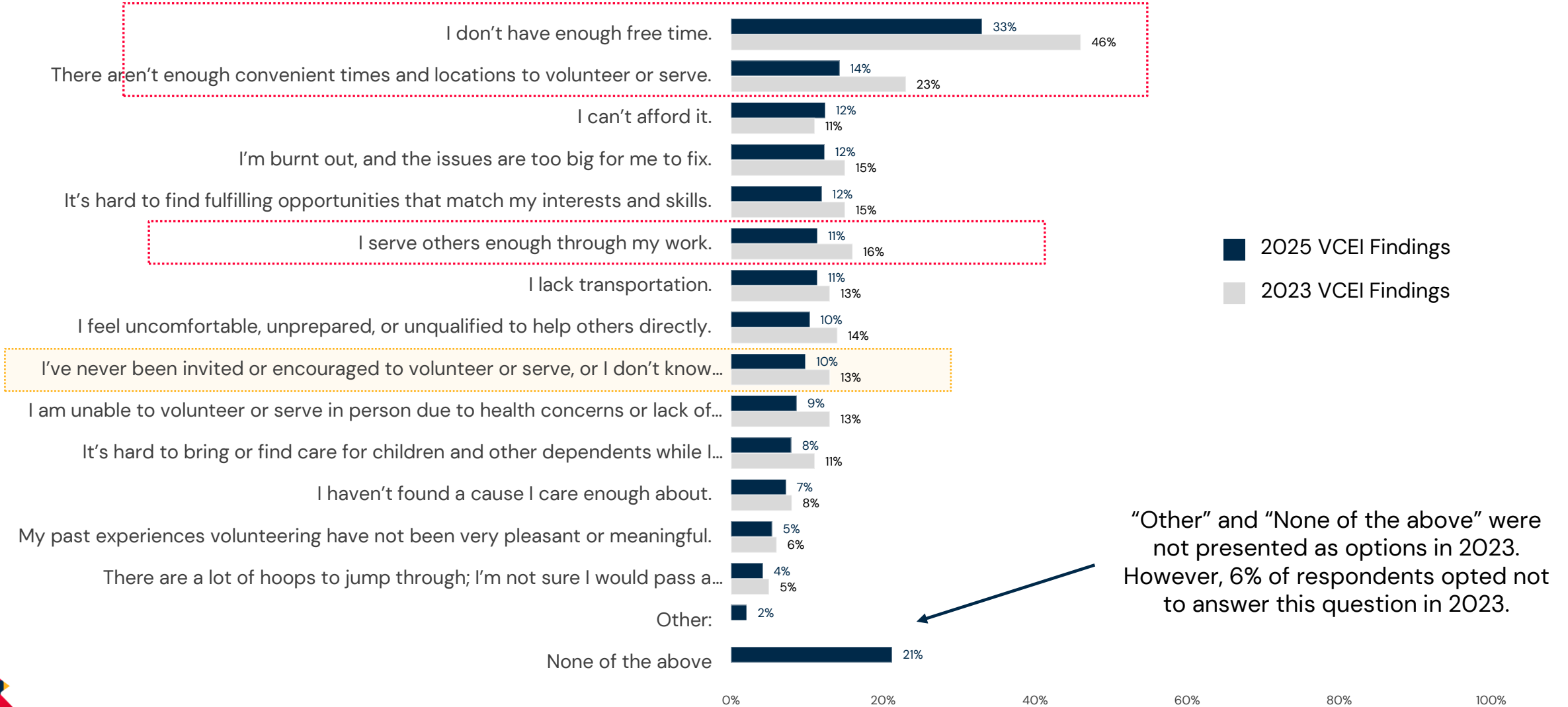


Q15. Below are some potential reasons why someone may be unable to volunteer or may choose not to serve or contribute to causes. *Select up to three descriptions that best match your experience.*

n = 3,263

What stands in their way?

While lack of free time and lack of convenient times and locations remain top-two barriers, they were not as widely reported in 2025. Burnout remains a top-five barrier; however, feeling as though they serve others enough through their work has dropped from third most identified in 2023 to sixth in 2025.



Q15. Below are some potential reasons why someone may be unable to volunteer or may choose not to serve or contribute to causes. *Select up to three descriptions that best match your experience.*

n = 3,263

How do I engage more volunteers?

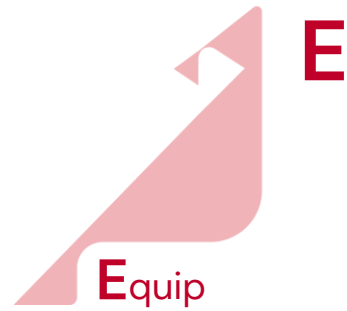
The SERVE Framework



Five Key Pillars to Building a Stronger Service, Volunteerism, and Civic Engagement Ecosystem in Virginia



Strengthen and expand faith-driven, education-based, and employee/er service efforts.



Equip nonprofits through convening, training, and resources.



Leverage national service (e.g., AmeriCorps) as part of community solutions.



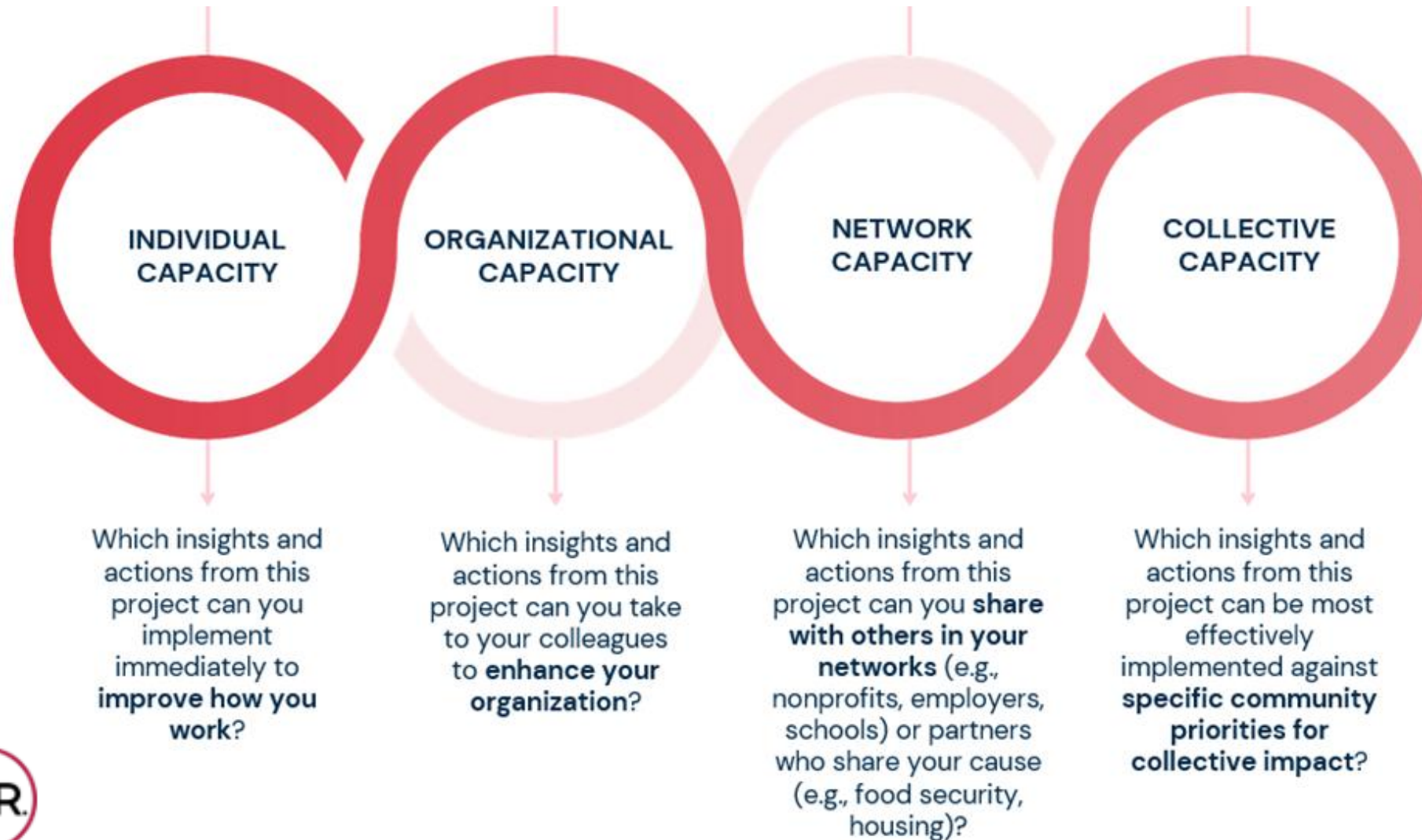
Enable individuals and organizations to influence policies and increase awareness of community needs.



Enhance the experience of volunteering and serving in communities.



Leveraging the SERVE Framework



Focus Area 1: Key Spaces

Meeting people where they work,
where they go to school, and where
they worship.



Using VCEI Data to Plan & Strategize

Why does Key Spaces Emerge as a Priority?

- **TRUST:** Local businesses, educational institutions, and FBOs/houses of worship make up 3 of the top four most trusted institutions in Virginia, behind only nonprofits.

■ 73% believe our educational system has a duty to nurture and produce caring, informed, and engaged individuals.

■ 67% believe businesses have an obligation to contribute to the betterment of their communities.

■ No. 1 and No. 3 reasons individuals cite for why they started volunteering their houses of worship and have opportunities to give back throughout elementary, middle, and high school.

■ The No. 1 barrier to service and volunteerism is not having enough free time, and 62% think more people would volunteer if they were able to take a day off work to do so.



Focus Area 2: Equip

Equipping nonprofits with the tools they need to recruit, train, and retain volunteers.



Using VCEI Data to Plan & Strategize

Why does Equipping Nonprofits Emerge as a Priority?

- **TRUST:** Nonprofits are the most trusted institution in Virginia to do “what is right.”
- **AGENCY:** When asked to consider the what would be the most effective way for them to address the challenges they see in their communities, “Educating others on important issues, community needs, and ways to get involved” and “volunteering my time to help organizations and people directly” rate the highest.

■ 70% believe individuals have the ability to make meaningful change in their communities and the world.

■ 69% believe service and volunteerism have a clear and measurable impact on communities and organizations.

■ 66% say nonprofits and community-based organizations are essential for addressing critical social issues and community needs.

■ 65% say they trust nonprofits to do what is right, making them the most trusted institution in Virginia.



Focus Area 3: AmeriCorps

Leveraging national service in partnership with other service and volunteerism strategies.



Using VCEI Data to Plan & Strategize

Why does Leveraging AmeriCorps and National Service Emerge as a Priority?

- **DUAL BENEFITS:** Both in theory and in practice, respondents recognize the unique role AmeriCorps plays in uplifting both the individuals who serve and the communities in which they serve.

■ 64% say they like the idea of a state or national program that encourages young people to provide community service for a year and offers attractive benefits or incentives to do so.

■ 69% believe more people would serve or volunteer if they knew how it could benefit their own lives as well as those they serve.

■ 68% feel service is a good way for people to learn skills that can help them start or further careers in high-need fields.

■ 60% feel national service programs are effective resources for organizations addressing community challenges.



Focus Area 4: Voice

Enabling individuals and organizations to use their voice to advocate for stronger policies and resources to meet community needs.



Why does Voice Emerge as a Priority?

- **TRUST & EXPECTATIONS:** Government remains the second least trusted institution in Virginia, placing it well short of the expectations people have.
- **ENGAGEMENT:** While 66% report voting in the past 12 months, no other civic engagement indicator tops 33%.

■ 73% believe the government has a responsibility to help those in need. But only 22% trust the government to do what is right.

■ 70% believe governmental policy should reflect the views expressed by the community.

■ Only 1 out of 4 feel it would be effective for them to present a concern or an idea to a member of their local government. The level drops to 1 out of 5 for members of their state government.

■ 54% think more people would voice their opinions with public leaders and policymakers if forums were more accessible or frequently held.



Focus Area 5: Experience

Enhancing volunteer experiences by helping volunteers feel connected to the impact they make and the populations they are serving.



Using VCEI Data to Plan & Strategize

Why does Enhancing the Volunteer Experience Emerge as a Priority?

- **WHAT KEEPS THEM COMING BACK?** The Top 3 reasons people continue to volunteer related directly to their experience itself:
 - “It makes me feel fulfilled and appreciated to help others.”
 - “I have experience and skills I know can help others.”
 - “It’s a good way for me to stay active, have fun, and even make friends while doing good.”

■ 72% say they like to know what impact their actions will have when they volunteer.

■ 61% say they prefer volunteering with the same organization consistently over time.

■ 59% prefer volunteering for a few hours with nonprofits in person.

■ 55% say they are more likely to volunteer if they can interact directly with the people they are helping.



The GOAL Before Us

How do we build a stronger service, volunteerism, and civic engagement ecosystem to meet the needs of our communities?



Meeting Needs through Volunteerism

- 1 Re-engage community members around health priorities
- 2 Build trust with your volunteers (and your community)
- 3 Target outreach to attract the volunteers you need to accomplish your goals
- 4 Explore pillars of the SERVE Framework to strengthen your partnerships





2026 Virginia Volunteerism Summit

Reflecting on the Past and Innovating the Future
of service at Virginia's Volunteerism Summit

Register today for the
Commonwealth's leading event for
organizations and individuals
making a difference in their
communities, featuring keynotes,
hands-on workshops & networking!

 May 13-15, 2026



ServeVirginia.org/Summit



UPCOMING EVENTS

2026 Virginia Volunteerism Summit

- May 13-14: VIRTUAL
- May 15: Social Impact
Professionals Day in Richmond,
VA

Featuring sessions on: engaging faith partners in
service and volunteerism, coalition building,
cultivating volunteers with lived experience,
volunteer recruitment, utilizing new volunteer
technology, and more!



Thank you



Visit us at [ServeVirginia.org](https://www.ServeVirginia.org)

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