

August 18, 2011

The Use of Volunteers in State Agencies on Aging and Disabilities

*State Health Insurance Assistance Program
(SHIP)*

Background

Engaging Volunteers in the Aging Network: A National Resource Center is a project funded by an Administration on Aging (AoA) grant to the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a). This three-year project is designed to enhance the engagement of volunteers in the Aging Network, with an emphasis on increasing volunteer participation of the Baby Boom generation¹. In addition to AoA and n4a, the project partners include: the National Association of States United for Aging and Disabilities (NASUAD); the AARP Foundation; Senior Service America, Inc. (SSAI); the University of Michigan; and The Council on Certification for Volunteer Administration (CCVA). The National Council on Aging (NCOA) and the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) are also working on the project in a collaborative role.

The primary goal of the project is to develop a national volunteer resource center to provide technical assistance for organizations and agencies to establish AoA and the National Aging Network as leaders in civic engagement. An additional aim of the project is to facilitate enlistment of Baby Boomers in civic engagement to fill a service gap created by budget constraints and a growing number of older adults who seek assistance from the Aging Network.

Given the recent economic downturn, states are looking for ways to cut spending, while maintaining as many services as possible. Enlistment of volunteers, especially Boomers, in the delivery of Aging Network services represents an opportunity for states to continue serving older adults despite the declining budget, as the population of older adults steadily grows. Through assessment, collaboration and coordination of resources, project partners aim to develop a national resource center that will assist state and local organizations in utilizing volunteers to overcome economic barriers.

In order to establish a baseline for the level of civic engagement in the Aging Network, NASUAD and n4a conducted both quantitative and qualitative assessments of current state and local programs, which rely on a volunteer

¹ The large cohort of people that make up the Baby Boom generation, or “Baby Boomers,” are currently ages 47-65, nearing or recently beginning retirement. The population of Baby Boomers is viewed by project partners as an important target for volunteer recruitment due to their numbers, professional skills and possible free time to devote to volunteerism.

workforce. The assessments drew information on volunteer program details such as funding sources; volunteer demographics and participation numbers; program management; screening; training; and the value programs place on their volunteer programs. The assessment results will help inform the partners on areas of focus throughout the development of a national resource center.

Methodology

The NASUAD assessment was performed in two parts: an online scan², and three follow-up conference calls with program directors. The online scan was sent to 204 state-level directors of four programs on March 2, 2011: 1) 51 directors of State Health Insurance Programs (SHIP); 2) 51 directors of Senior Medicare Patrol programs (SMP); 3) 51 directors of State Long Term Care (LTC) Ombudsman programs; and 4) 51 directors of Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRC). In the first phase of the assessment, NASUAD's online scan was comprised of both 'core questions' (questions included both in NASUAD and n4a scans), and supplemental questions including in-depth state program-specific questions about current volunteer program details and techniques for recruitment and retention. The purpose of the assessment was to establish a baseline for the level of civic engagement in the programs reviewed, and to gain a broader understanding of how programs recruit, retain, coordinate, and utilize their volunteer base.

The State Health Insurance Program (SHIP) is a state-based program that provides local one-on-one counseling and assistance to Medicare beneficiaries and their families on Medicare and other health insurance issues. The goal of the program is provide beneficiaries with accurate, understandable, and objective health insurance information so they can make informed coverage decisions and understand their rights and protections³.

The NASUAD assessment aimed to capture only state-level programs, however many states also have similar volunteer programs at the local level which are generally administered by Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs). Details regarding local volunteer programs were captured through n4a's assessment of the AAAs. Eight states and the District of Columbia do not have Area Agencies on Aging: Alaska,

² See Appendix 2 for full NASUAD online scan

³ State Health Insurance Assistance Program: <http://www.nasuad.org/ship/ship.html>

Delaware, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Rhode Island, South Dakota, and Wyoming. For these states and the District of Columbia, the State Agencies on Aging and Disability function as both the state and local agency, and details regarding their volunteer programs are captured in a separate NASUAD assessment of State Agencies on Aging and Disability.

The second phase of the assessment was a series of three program-specific conference calls held with the state directors of the SHIP, SMP, and state LTC Ombudsman programs. The SHIP call was one hour in length and was held on April 7, 2011. Approximately 17 directors, one representative from the Administration on Aging, and three NASUAD staff members participated in the call. During the call, NASUAD presented program-specific findings from the online scan, and asked the SHIP directors follow-up questions to gain a more in-depth understanding of the individual program data collected in the online scan. NASUAD also elicited suggestions for the new national volunteer resource center.

Key Findings

SHIP responses from the scan differed from the other state program responses in several ways. SHIPs are the most likely to have a volunteer program; 95 percent of SHIPs have a volunteer program, compared to 74 percent overall. SHIPs have the largest volunteer programs; 32 percent of SHIPs have programs with over 300 volunteers, compared to 18 percent overall. Volunteers in SHIPs maintain the most “intensive” volunteer schedules (regularly scheduled or flexible weekly activities with 12 to 15 hours or more commitment); 53 percent of SHIPs have committed to intensive volunteer schedules, compared to 27 percent overall. SHIPs also have the highest number of local volunteer coordinators; 75 percent of SHIPs have a local coordinator, compared to 45 percent overall. Local volunteer coordinators are integral to this program due to the high level of coordination needed for both training and volunteer assistance. Scan results show that SHIP volunteers are highly trained and skilled, maintaining a detailed knowledge base about the range of insurance options for clients. SHIP training requires intensive time commitment by both the volunteers and the staff.

The conference call with SHIP directors elicited important information on both the strengths and challenges SHIPs volunteer programs face. The strengths and challenges regarding Boomer volunteers were discussed, as well as ideas for altering programs to encourage participation of Boomer volunteers. Boomers, according to

one SHIP director, have higher expectations of their volunteer work than other volunteers, and expect a more detailed and set job description. They want a job that allows for capacity building, but also flexibility. Many Boomers want to spend much of their early retirement travelling, and need a flexible schedule for volunteering. They also possess more computer and technology skills, which could allow for online, or computer-based training or activities.

The recruitment of Boomers also differs from the recruitment of older generations of volunteers. Many Boomers' first experiences with SHIP are as caregivers for aging parents, followed by a transition into the role of SHIP volunteer. One director commented that after the implementation of Medicare Part D, many Boomer caregivers and older adults sought assistance from SHIP volunteers and were inspired to complete the SHIP volunteer training themselves in order to help others navigate their medical insurance options. One state hired temporary employees after the implementation of Medicare Part D to help with the volume of inquiries, several of whom later became volunteers.

The economic downturn has affected state volunteer programs in many ways. The SHIP directors discussed one unexpected effect of the recession; some people who were laid off but are job hunting become SHIP volunteers in order to gain skills, network and enhance their resumes to help with finding non-volunteer permanent employment. Several directors expressed their frustrations with this type of temporary SHIP volunteer, whom they believed wastes training time on temporary volunteers. To address this challenge, one director reported that her SHIP requires a one year commitment from volunteer recruits prior to beginning the intensive training, a practice that has served to weed out any potential volunteers who do not intend to volunteer long-term. Another SHIP director reported that those volunteers who were not interested in at least a one year commitment were asked to participate in short-term or simpler projects that do not require as much training.

SHIP programs have faced significant budget cuts in recent years. SHIPs currently have a program-specific national resource center, SHIPTalk. The new national volunteer resource center is not meant to replace or compete with SHIPTalk, rather, it is meant to use a broader base of national volunteer programs to strengthen volunteerism throughout the aging network. In the conference call, participants were asked what the new national volunteer resource center could do to benefit SHIPs. One director said that advocating for SHIP resources would be easier if there were a feature developed that could estimate a dollar amount for the in-kind assets that volunteers provide. While some in-kind asset calculations exist, it is important

to take into account the highly trained nature of SHIP volunteer hours. The directors reported the need for an estimate that takes into account the training and advanced level of work involved in programs like the SHIP program. They suggested a national volunteer resource center could help by ensuring that this estimate reflects the intensive training and work of SHIP volunteers. This would help advocates put forth a consistent message about the value of time people are committing toward volunteerism and the individual role they are playing. Two currently utilized in-kind asset calculator resources were discussed: independentsector.org, and a calculator offered by the Corporation for National and Community Service.

Recruitment is another challenge SHIP directors reported, especially because so many SHIP programs are understaffed. Several SHIP directors requested help with advertising from the national resource center including a national campaign for volunteering in the aging network, and/or a national campaign directed at Boomers. This large-scale advertising effort could provide a cohesive national message, prevent duplication of effort throughout state and local organizations, and allow SHIPs to focus on other programmatic elements. Several SHIP directors reported difficulty defining roles for volunteers and volunteer coordinators. They suggested a national library of job descriptions and operations manuals would be useful to directors in defining job roles, building the capacity of the program and providing a tool for SHIPs to better manage volunteers. Directors suggested this feature also include a forum for inter-program correspondence and exchange of best practices, that would help programs learn from each other.

Another challenge many SHIPs face is the cost and often time-consuming process of performing background checks. Directors noted that since volunteers work directly with disadvantaged individuals, it is important to perform rigorous background checks on every potential volunteer. However, background checks are generally expensive and difficult to arrange. One director asked if the national resource center could arrange for a common vendor to perform background checks for multiple states at a reasonable rate. Another director suggested a survey to gather best practices on how all state volunteer programs conduct background checks.

Conclusions

Overall, the SHIP programs have been negatively affected by the economic downturn. However, most programs have been able to retain volunteer

coordinators at the local level and to support volunteers. Other consequences of the recession include an effect on their volunteer base, their clients, and the program itself. The greatest reported strength of the SHIP program is its robust base of trained, dedicated volunteers who use their knowledge of health insurance plans to help their clients make the best decisions. SHIPs are also well-supported by SHIPTalk, the SHIP national resource center. However, SHIP directors note that there are still ways the program could be further supported, allowing them to serve clients better and save money and time; including assistance with in-kind asset calculation, national advertising campaigns, assistance with background checks, and a library of job descriptions and operations manuals.

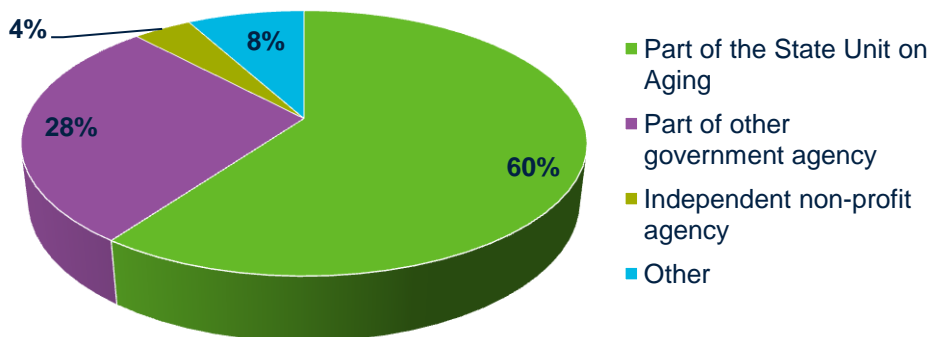
Appendix 1: Aggregate SHIP Program Results

Participating States

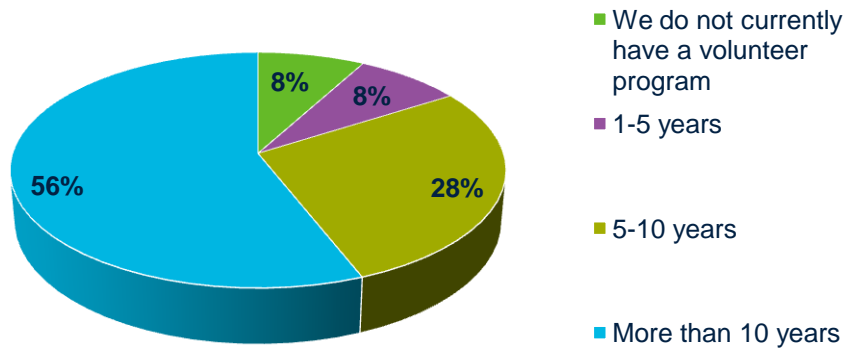
Total Responses: 24

- | | | |
|----------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Alabama | Kansas | North Dakota |
| California | Louisiana | Oklahoma |
| Connecticut | Maryland | Oregon |
| Delaware | Michigan | Rhode Island |
| District of Columbia | Mississippi | South Carolina |
| Florida | Montana | Tennessee |
| Guam | Nevada | Wisconsin |
| Hawaii | New Hampshire | Wyoming |

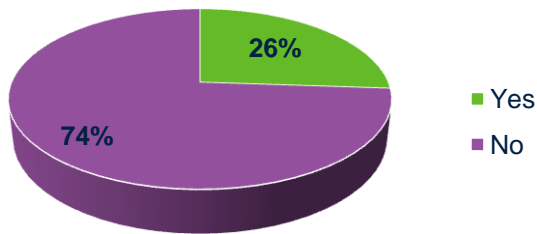
Type of Agency Housing SHIP Program



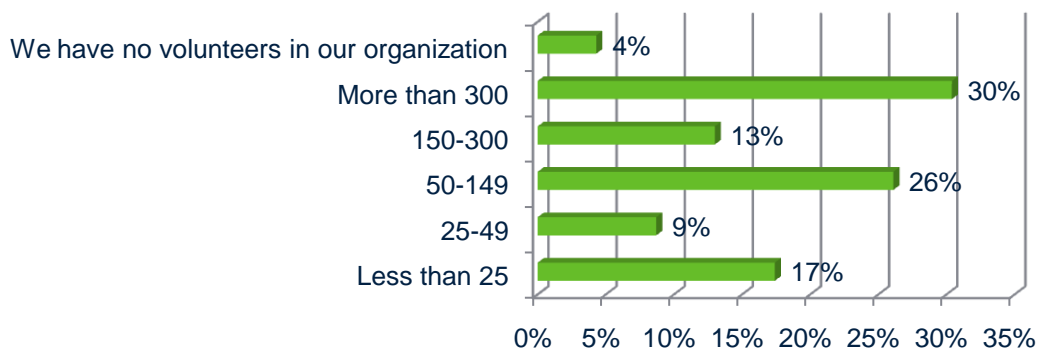
How long has your state had a SHIP volunteer program?



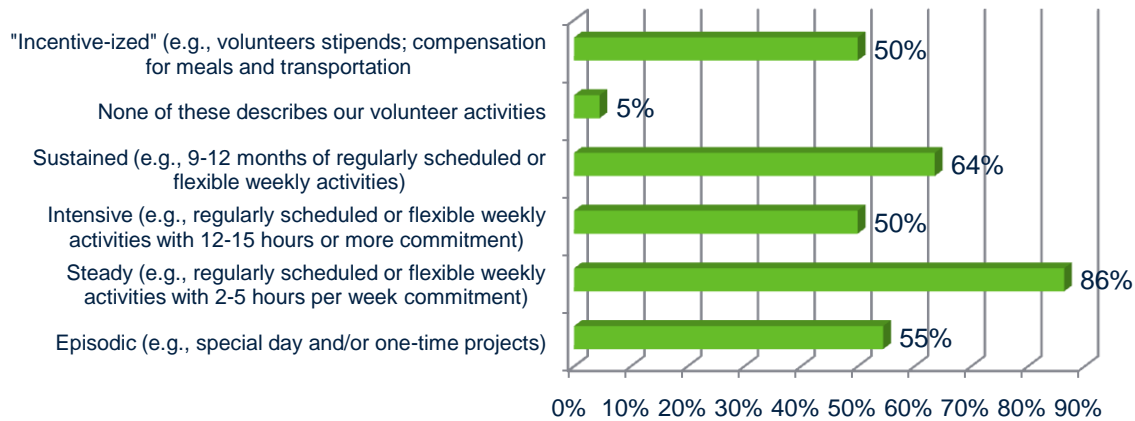
Is your state's volunteer program required by state or federal law?



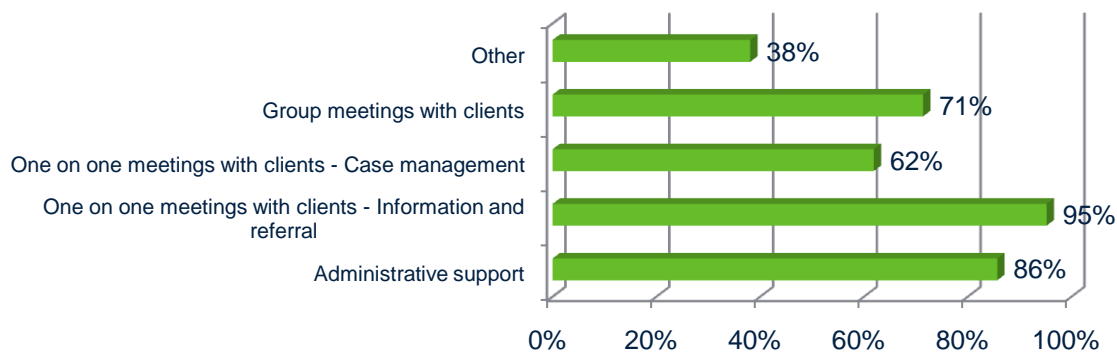
How many active volunteers does your organization currently have?



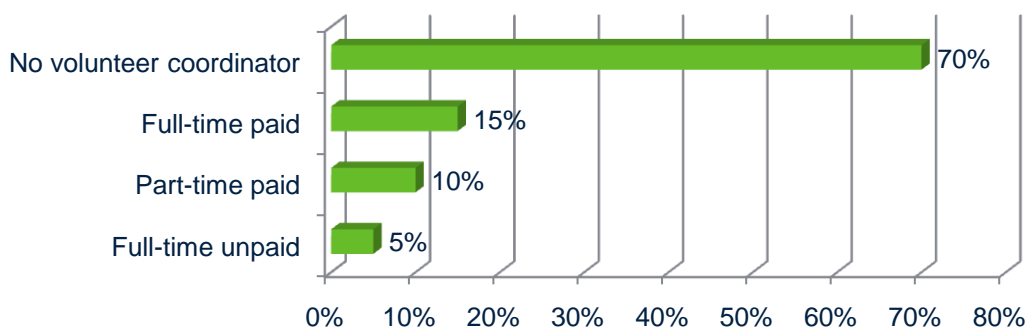
Which among the following choices represent volunteer opportunities within your organization? (Check all that apply.)



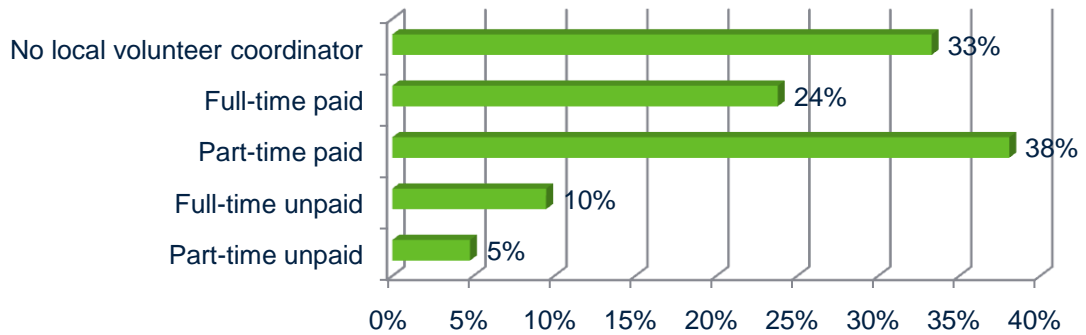
In what tasks do your volunteers in your organization (or program) participate?



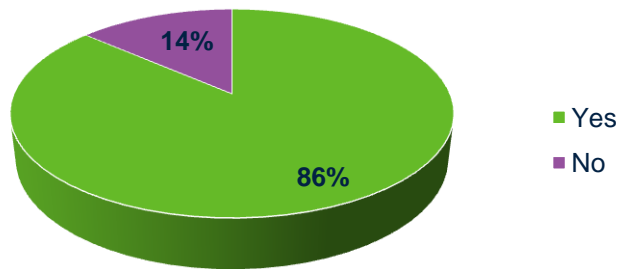
Does your organization have a statewide volunteer coordinator?



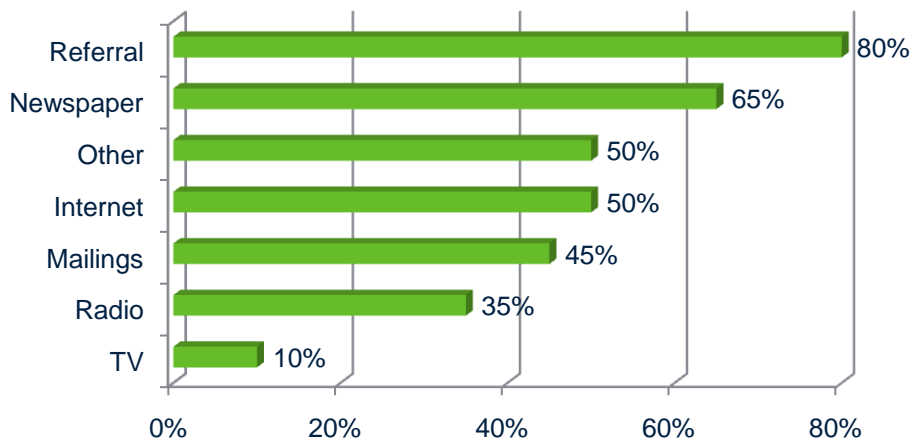
Does your organization have a local volunteer coordinator?



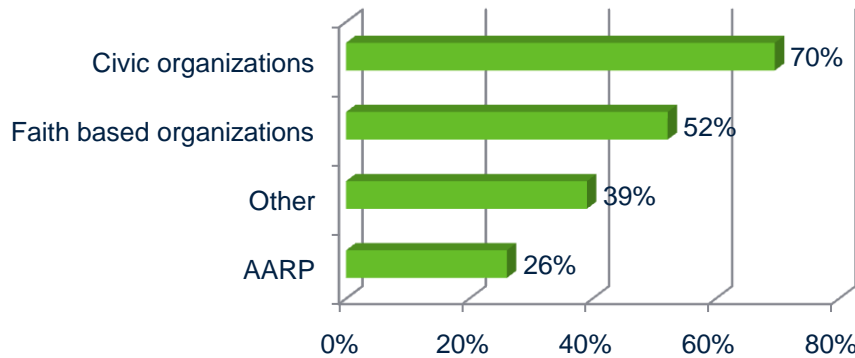
Does your organization advertise to recruit new volunteers?



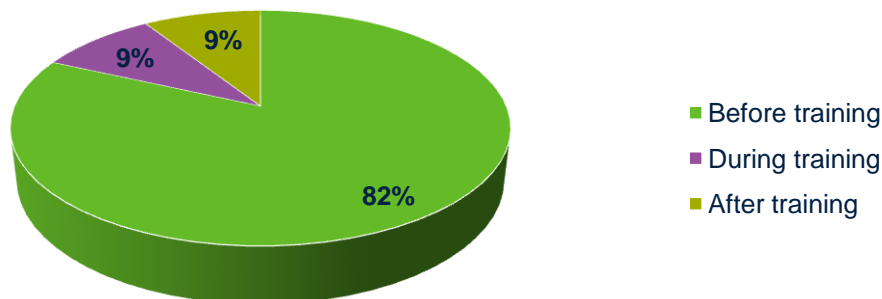
What medium do you use to advertise? (Check all that apply)



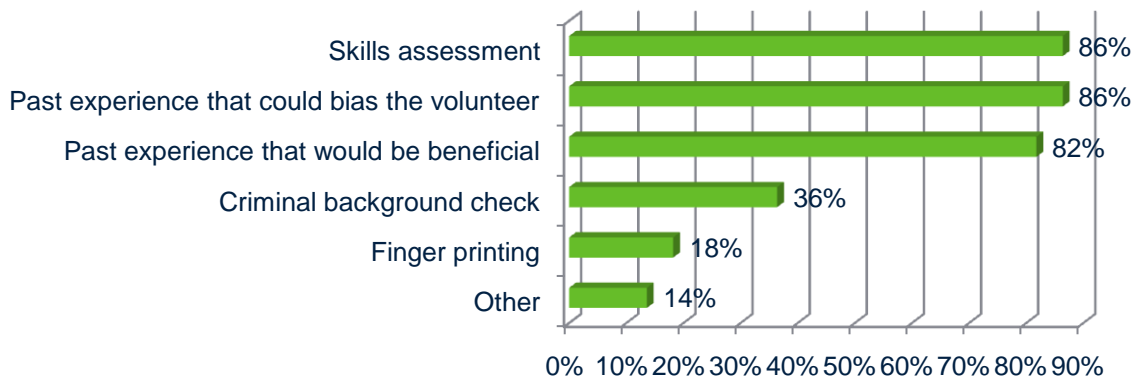
What other organizations does your organization use to recruit new volunteers? (Check all that apply)



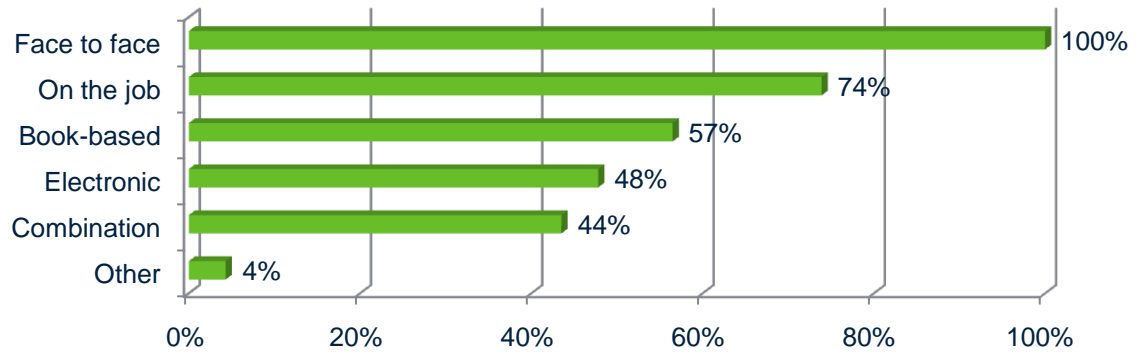
When does your organization screen potential volunteers?



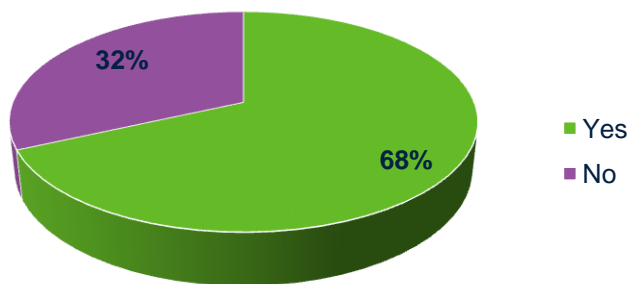
For what does your organization screen volunteers?



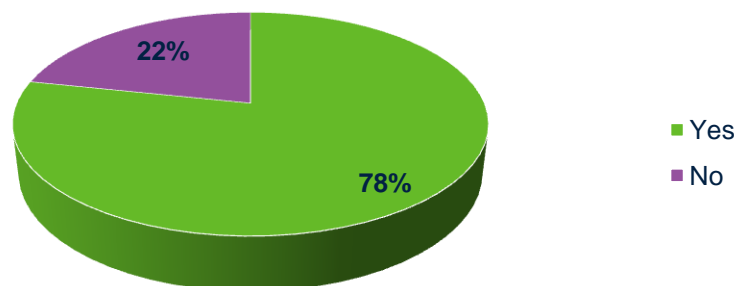
What kind of training does your organization provide?



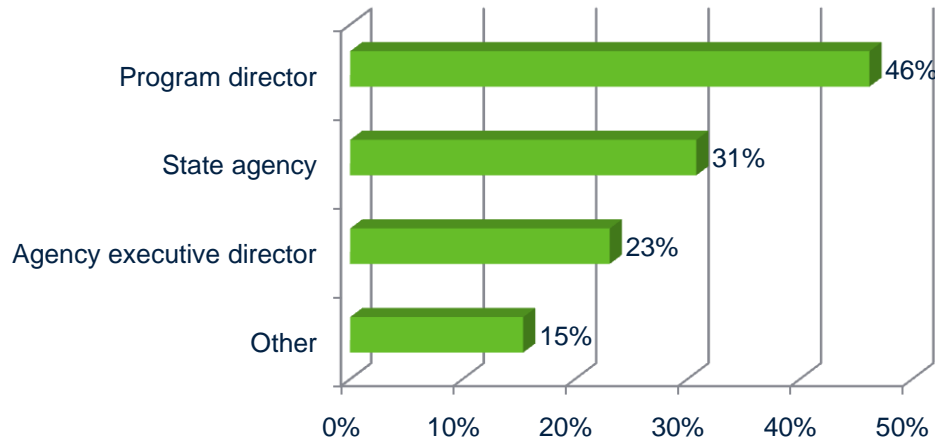
Is there a mentorship component of your organization's training program?



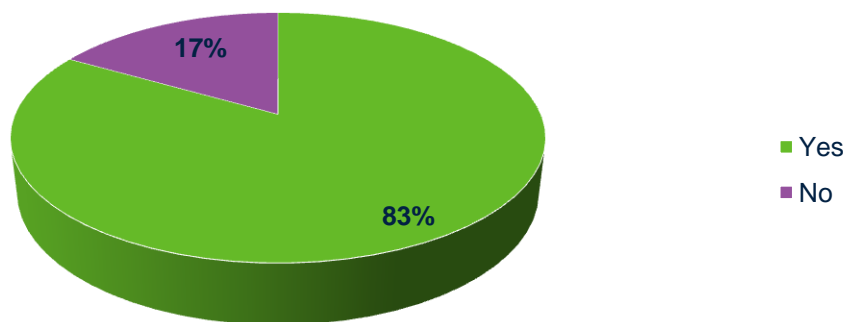
Does your organization certify volunteers after training is complete?



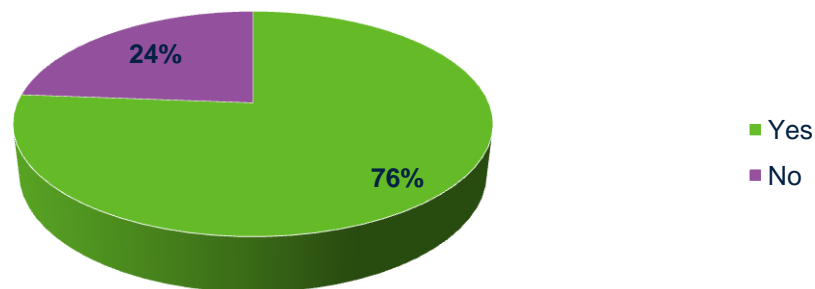
Who certifies your organization's volunteers?



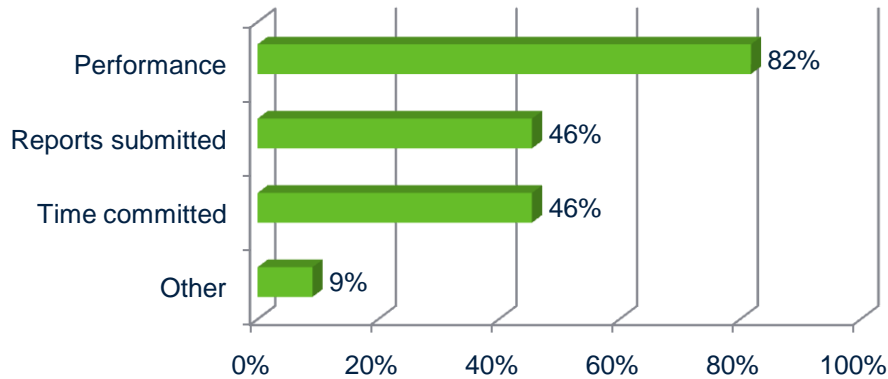
Can volunteers be de-certified if they are no longer meeting the standards of certification?



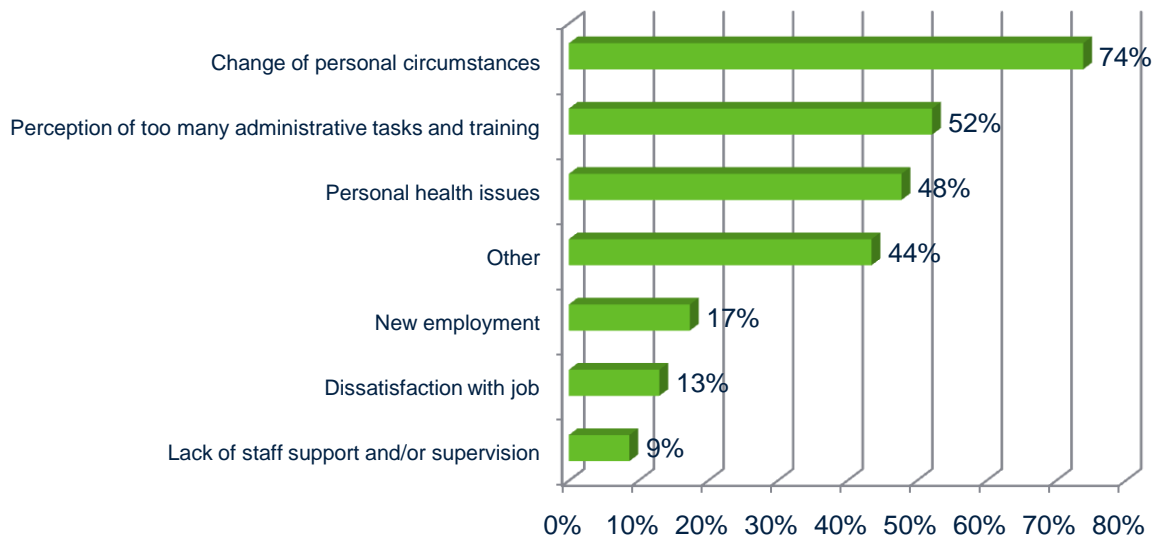
Do you evaluate your volunteers?



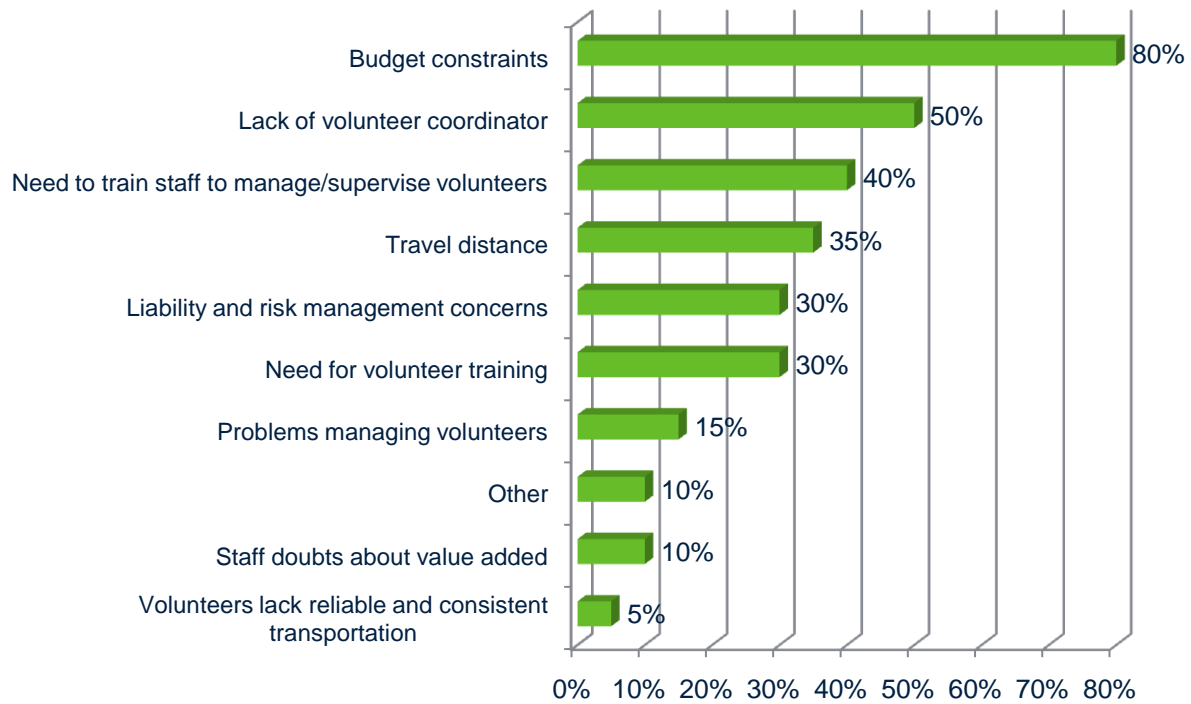
On what are volunteers within your organization evaluated?



What are the top reasons why volunteers leave your program? (Check all that apply)



Which of the following barriers, if any, prevent your organization from developing service opportunities and roles for older adult volunteers? (Check all that apply)



Appendix 2: NASUAD Environmental Scan – Civic Engagement

1.) Your organizational level (select the best answer):

- Administrator/executive level
- Program director
- Volunteer coordinator

2.) Your name:

3.) Select your program

- Ombudsman
- SHIP
- SMP
- ADRC
- Other (Please describe)

4.) Your state

5.) Type of agency

- Part of the State Unit on Aging
- Part of other government agency
- Independent government agency
- Independent non-profit agency
- Other (Please explain)

6.) How long have you had a volunteer program?

- We do not currently have a volunteer program
(If you do not have a volunteer program, please stop here.)
- Less than 6 months
- 6 months – 1 year
- 1-5 years
- 5-10 years
- More than 10 years

7.) Is your volunteer program required by state or federal law?

- Yes
 No

8.) What is the funding source for your volunteer coordinator?

9.) What funding is available for your program?

10.) What agency funds your volunteer program?

11.) How many active volunteers does your organization currently have? *

- Less than 25
 25-49
 50-149
 150-300
 More than 300
 We have no volunteers in our organization

12.) Approximately, what percentage of your volunteers fall into each of the following age categories? (Percentages must equal 100%) *

18-39 years of age:

40-54 years of age:

55-64 years of age:

65-74 years of age:

75+ years of age:

13.) Since Baby Boomers overlap two of the above categories, can you estimate what percentage of your volunteers are between the ages of 47 and 65?*

14.) What percentage of your volunteers are male and female?

Male:

Female:

15.) Which among the following represent your volunteer opportunities? (Check all that apply.)*

- Episodic (e.g., special day and/or one-time projects)
 Steady (e.g., regularly scheduled or flexible weekly activities with 2-5 hours per week commitment)

* Part of the core questions developed by the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging

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- Intensive (e.g., regularly scheduled or flexible weekly activities with 12-15 hours or more commitment)
- Sustained (e.g., 9-12 months of regularly scheduled or flexible weekly activities)
- "Incentive-ized" (e.g., volunteers stipends; compensation for meals and transportation)
- None of these describes our volunteer activities

16.) In what tasks do your volunteers participate?

- Administrative support
- One on one meetings with clients - Information and referral
- One on one meetings with clients - Case management
- Group meetings with clients
- Other (Please Describe)

17.) Does your organization have a statewide volunteer coordinator?*

- Part-time unpaid
- Full-time unpaid
- Part-time paid
- Full-time paid
- No statewide volunteer coordinator

If part-time, what percentage of their time is spent as volunteer coordinator?

18.) Does your organization have a local volunteer coordinator?*

- Part-time unpaid
- Full-time unpaid
- Part-time paid
- Full-time paid
- No local volunteer coordinator

If part-time, what percentage of their time is spent as volunteer coordinator?

19.) We are interested in finding out about the infrastructure you provide or are thinking about providing for your volunteers. Please read the following ten statements and tell us to what degree the policy/practice has or has not been implemented.*

	Not implemented	Partially implemented	Fully implemented
a.) Regular supervision and communication with volunteers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b.) Liability coverage or insurance protection for	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

* Part of the core questions developed by the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging

volunteers			
c.) Regular collection of information on volunteer hours or numbers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d.) Screening procedures to identify suitable volunteers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e.) Written policies and job descriptions for volunteers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f.) Recognition activities such as award ceremonies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g.) Annual measurements of impact/value of volunteer service	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
h.) Training and professional development for volunteers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
i.) Training for paid staff in working with volunteers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
j.) Resource allocation to support volunteer programs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

20.) To what degree do your older adult (60+) volunteers... *

	Not at all (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	Very much so (5)
...help you fulfill your mission and meet your goals?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
...allow you to offer services you could not otherwise provide or fill gaps in service you already provide?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

* Part of the core questions developed by the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging

...save staff time and allow your staff to perform other duties?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
...help you reduce the costs of providing services?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
...increase visibility, build community understanding, and strengthen outreach?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
...have the necessary experience and training to participate on your leadership teams, lead programs, and spearhead new initiatives?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

21.) Do you advertise to recruit new volunteers?

- Yes
- No

22.) What medium do you use to advertise? (Check all that apply)

- Newspaper
- Radio
- TV
- Referral
- Mailings
- Internet
- Other (Please explain)

23.) What other organizations do you use to recruit new volunteers? (Check all that apply)

- AARP
- Civic organizations
- Faith based organizations
- Other (Please explain)

24.) When do you screen potential volunteers?

- We do not screen
- Before training
- During training
- After training (Please describe)

25.) For what do you screen?

- Past experience that could bias the volunteer
- Past experience that would be beneficial
- Skills assessment
- Criminal background check

- Finger printing
- Other (Please explain)

26.) What kind of training do you provide?

- Face to face
- Electronic
- Book-based
- On the job
- Other
- Combination (Please describe)

27.) How many hours of training are required?

28.) Is there a mentorship component of your training program?

- Yes
- No

29.) Do you certify volunteers after training is complete?

- Yes
- No

If so, who certifies volunteers?

- Agency executive director
- Program director
- State agency
- Governor's office
- Other (Please explain)

Can volunteers be de-certified if they are no longer meeting the standards of certification?

- Yes
- No

30.) Do you evaluate your volunteers?

- Yes
- No

If so, on what are your volunteers evaluated?

- Performance
- Time committed
- Reports submitted
- Other (Please explain)

31.) Do volunteers submit reports?

- Yes
- No

If yes, are the volunteer reports the same as paid employee reports?

- Yes
- No

32.) What are the top three reasons why volunteers leave your program?

- Personal health issues
- Lack of reliable transportation
- Change of personal circumstances
- Lack of staff support and/or supervision
- Dissatisfaction with job
- Lack of training
- Lack of recognition
- New employment
- Perception of too many administrative tasks and training
- Other (Please explain)

33.) Which of the following barriers, if any, prevent your organization from developing service opportunities and roles for older adult volunteers? (Check all that apply.)

- Lack of volunteer coordinator
- Budget constraints
- Staff doubts about value added
- Need to train staff to manage/supervise volunteers
- Need for volunteer training
- Problems managing volunteers
- Liability and risk management concerns
- Volunteers lack reliable and consistent transportation
- Travel distance
- Other (Please specify)

34.) Does your agency have a cost analysis of volunteer work?

- Yes
- No

If yes, would you share your cost analysis model as an example with other organizations?

- Yes
- No

35.) What plans, if any, do you have to add to your volunteer base in order to capitalize on the assets and opportunities of the aging of the Boomers?

36.) How can the National Resource Center be helpful to you?



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