

# THE POWER OF VOLUNTEERING

Findings on connection, unity, and health of  
volunteers in NYC Survey

**NYC** Service



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the 2024 – 2025 NYC Service strategic plan, service and volunteerism are presented as solutions to build stronger communities, address the loneliness epidemic, and bolster the nonprofit sector's volunteer force. The goal of the *The Power of Volunteering: Findings on connection, unity, and health of volunteers in NYC Survey* was to dive deeper into the impact volunteering has on New Yorkers, including volunteering frequency and habits, and how these affect human-to-human connection and connection to the city. Survey questions examined experience volunteering, personal impact of volunteering, and impact on community.

## Methodology and Sample

A total of 8,156 respondents in New York City were recruited online between December 2024 and January 2025 using targeted ads on various platforms as well as online survey panels. Using data from the US Census Bureau, this survey employed quotas to match the distribution of race, ethnicity, age, and gender in New York City, ensuring that the sample represents the entire population of the city.

*The Power of Volunteering: Findings on connection, unity, and health of volunteers in NYC* data can be found on the City of New York's Open Data website in its aggregate form. Visit [nycservice.org/power-of-volunteering](https://nycservice.org/power-of-volunteering) for more information.

This survey considered responses on formal volunteering on behalf of an organization or association, and did not ask questions about informal acts of service (i.e. helping a neighbor, clearing neighborhood storm drains, helping someone get to a doctor's appointment).

**8,156**  
respondents

**5 boroughs**  
represented

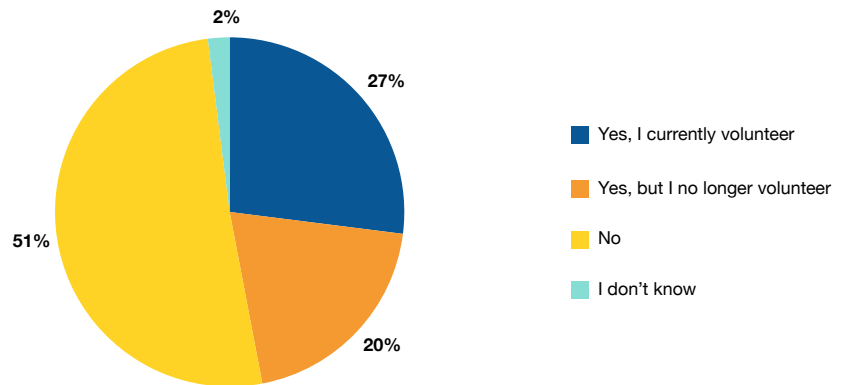
**Surveyed**  
Dec 2024- Jan 2025

# KEY INSIGHTS

**Volunteer participation is higher than previous reports suggest.**

**Q: In the past 12 months, did you spend any time volunteering for any organization or association?**

Approximately half of the NYC respondents currently volunteer or have volunteered in the past 12 months, which is double the rate reported at the NY State and national levels<sup>[1]</sup>. Volunteers are primarily volunteering locally in the borough they live in, suggesting that offering opportunities near where residents live and work are key.



**Q: Which borough do you/did you volunteer in?**

*[Only respondents who said they have volunteered in the past 12 months, N = 4184]*



Borough	% Volunteer locally
Bronx	77%
Brooklyn	78%
Manhattan	82%
Queens	76%
Staten Island	77%

Volunteering is also seen consistently in high numbers across racial and ethnic groups. White respondents and those with higher incomes tend to volunteer more and have been with their current organization longer, and Black, Hispanic/Latino, and low-income respondents are more likely to volunteer frequently. Volunteers are serving where they live and to meet needs where they are in many forms.

**Volunteering Participation and Frequency:** The majority of respondents volunteer in their **own borough**, with **Manhattan** having the **highest percentage of local volunteers**.

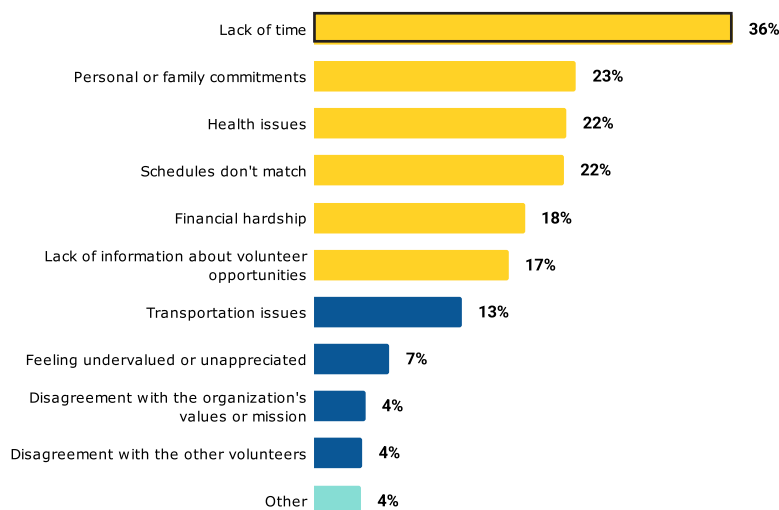
<sup>[1]</sup> Volunteering and Civic Life in America: <https://americorps.gov/about/our-impact/volunteering-civic-life>

## The most frequent and consistent barrier volunteers experience is a lack of time.

**Q: Have any of the following challenges prevented you from volunteering as much as you like?**

The primary reason for not volunteering is lack of time, and those who don't volunteer are more likely to indicate a lack of information about volunteer opportunities.

Additionally, in open-text comments the most common reason for stopping volunteering was scheduling conflicts – whether the need to pick up more work hours to increase income, family obligations, or other life circumstances. New Yorkers are constantly balancing life and responsibilities, and mixed with the second longest commute times in the country<sup>[2]</sup>, are in need of opportunities close to home and easy to access.

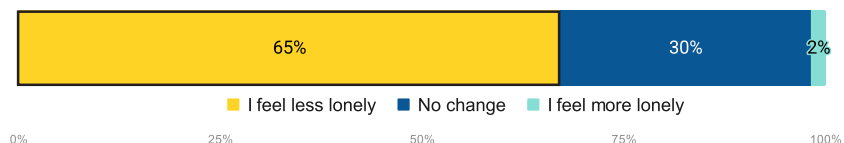


## Volunteering is a source of healing and connection among individuals, including connection between individuals who hold different views.

Most volunteers feel less lonely and build friendships through volunteering. Approximately half of those who indicated they volunteered in the last year engaged with people holding different political views, and more than 78% of respondents said they were able to build positive, trusting relationships with people who hold very different political views – and was seen consistently across all racial and ethnic groups, age brackets, and genders. In an era of polarization, volunteering is an act helping diverse city residents build bonds and connection.

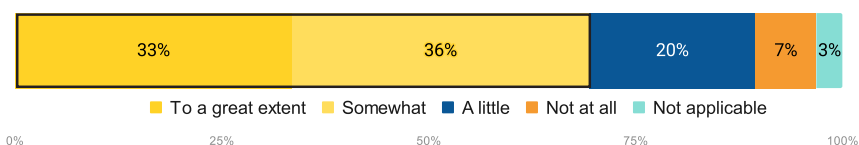
**Q: Overall, to what extent has volunteering affected your feelings of loneliness?**

*[Only respondents who said they have volunteered in the past 12 months, N = 4184]*



**Q: Overall, has volunteering helped you gain friendships and other support networks?**

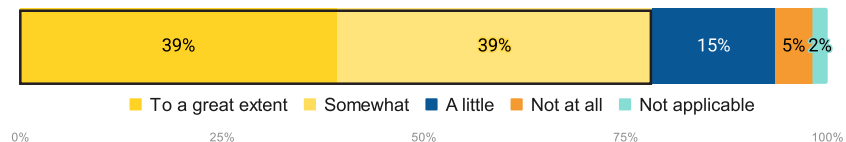
*[Only respondents who said they have volunteered in the past 12 months, N = 4184]*



<sup>[2]</sup> US Census: Average One-Way Commuting Time by Metropolitan Areas: <https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/interactive/travel-time.html>

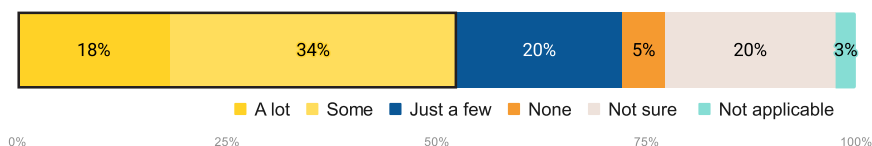
## Q: Through volunteering, to what extent have you been able to build positive, trusting relationships with people who hold very different political views?

[Only respondents who said they have volunteered in the past 12 months & Q17 = A lot, Some, Just a Few, N = 1886]



## Q: How many of the people you volunteer with have different political views than you do?

[Only respondents who said they have volunteered in the past 12 months, N = 4184]

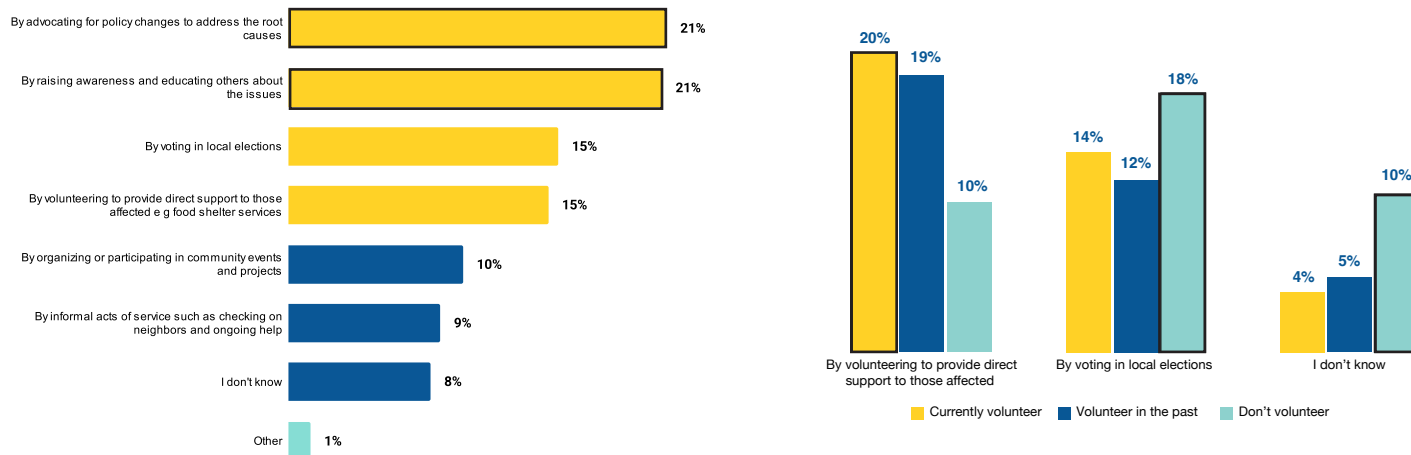


**Those who have volunteered are more likely to see how service can play a higher purpose and seek to make an impact on the local community through their efforts.**

For all respondents – those who volunteer and do not volunteer -- the highest ranked selections for the most effective way to address systemic issues were (in order of ranking): advocating for policy changes, raising awareness about issues, voting in local elections, and

volunteering to provide direct support. However, for those who are currently volunteering or had volunteered in the past, volunteering emerged as their leading approach to address systemic problems.

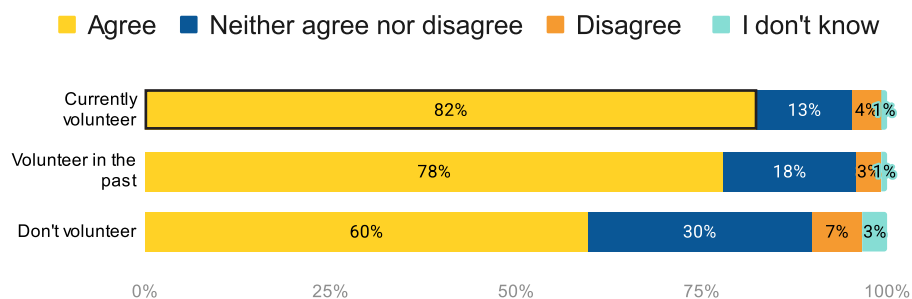
## Q: What do you think is the most effective way people can help address long-term, systemic problems in your community?



Additionally, when asked to what extent they agreed whether volunteering improves equity and justice in their community, 82% of respondents currently volunteering and 78% of those who had volunteered in the past agreed – and even almost two-thirds of those who don't volunteer saw the value of volunteering for community equity and

justice. While other civic actions like voting and policy advocacy are widely viewed as effective to address long-term, systemic problems, once people volunteer they see service as a critical action for community change. In short, participating in service allows volunteers to see the critical support their actions provide to the larger good.

## Q: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Volunteering improves equity and justice in my community.



# IMPACT FINDINGS

In 2024, NYC Service released an updated strategic plan detailing four critical factors necessitating service as a response to the current moment in NYC's history. As a global entity, international and national ties are felt deeply within our diverse and interconnected city, and we look to situate service as a solution to both support critical and immediate needs across NYC as well as address current local and national concerns around loneliness and division. As such, we used the survey results from *The Power of Volunteering: Findings on connection, unity, and health of volunteers in NYC* to assess current conditions and perceptions around the four factors:

1. Using service as a tool to heal the loneliness epidemic and transform mental health and well-being.
2. Recovering capacity for the NYC nonprofit sector that saw a drop in volunteers as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. Bridging across political polarization, restoring trust, and strengthening democracy.
4. Tackling cross-cutting city issues using service as a tool for equity and justice.

The following section details survey findings around these four conditions, revealing both the importance of service as a solution within a municipal toolbox as well as key insights from New Yorkers and their experiences with volunteerism and service.

## Finding 01

### Volunteering can be a powerful tool in healing the loneliness epidemic

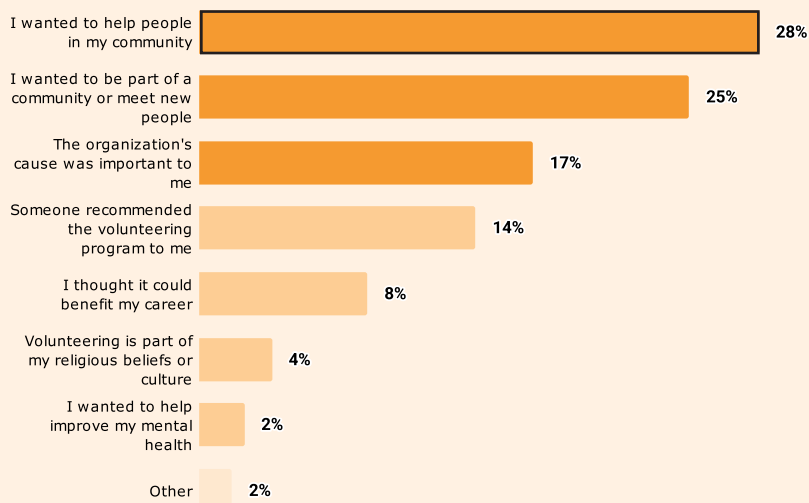
New York City was disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and saw high rates of mental health issues impact residents across ages. In addition, the Surgeon General's 2024 report stated a "loneliness epidemic" was leading to high rates of mental health issues and claimed volunteering was one solution to healing the loneliness epidemic.

**What we asked:** We examined how volunteering has influenced respondents' feelings of loneliness and overall mental health, highlighting the emotional benefits of volunteering.

**What we heard:** The findings from *The Power of Volunteering: Findings on connection, unity, and health of volunteers in NYC* survey powerfully affirm that volunteering isn't just about giving back—it's also about belonging, connection, and emotional well-being. The data underscores how volunteering helps heal loneliness and strengthens mental health, offering insight into the deeply human benefits of service.

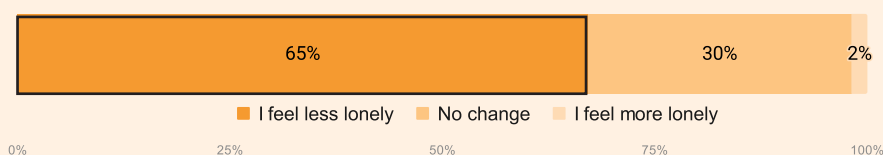
We found that volunteers are often seeking relationships and connection, and when they volunteer they gain the community they desire, overcome feelings of loneliness, and are motivated to be involved for the purpose of supporting causes and communities. People who volunteer recognize the potential volunteering has to develop relationships and grow support networks.

## Q: What is the primary motivation for choosing a volunteer role? What is the main reason you chose to volunteer in that role?



## Q: Overall, to what extent has volunteering affected your feelings of loneliness?

[Only respondents who said they have volunteered in the past 12 months, N = 4184]



In all, these findings confirm what many volunteers already know: helping others helps us, too. Volunteering is a bridge out of loneliness and a path toward mental well-being, especially when it's rooted in community and

shared purpose. With this knowledge, we can further shape volunteer programs to foster deeper connection, inclusion, and healing.

## Finding 02

## Localized volunteer opportunities are a key strategy to recover volunteer capacity for New York City's nonprofit sector

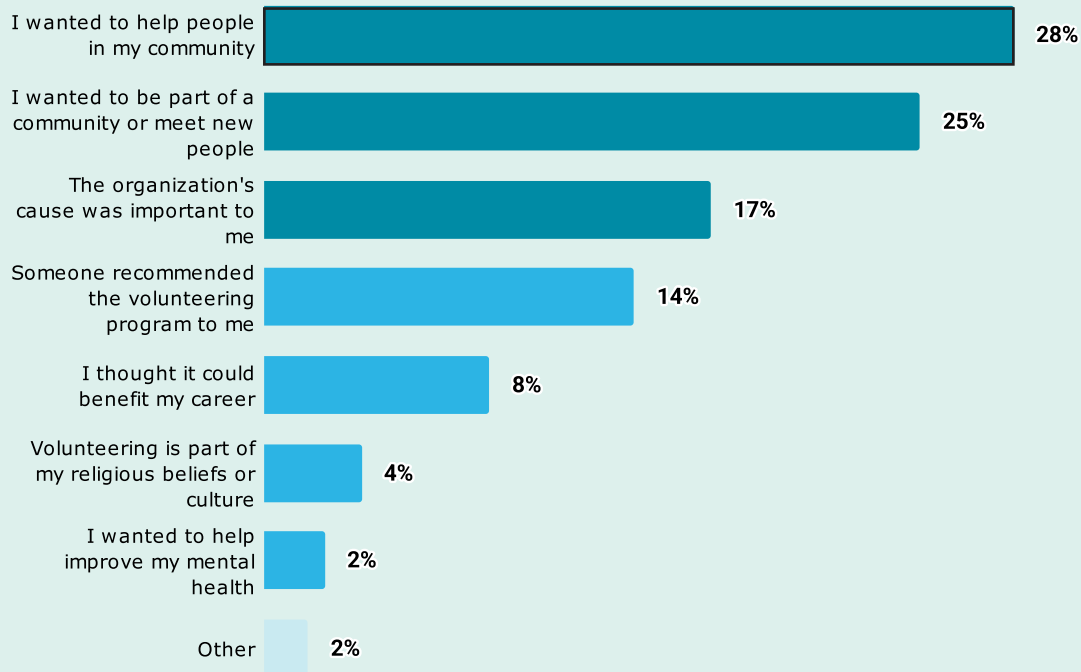
As of April 2024, the nonprofit sector had experienced a significant decrease in formal volunteer engagement with a reported seven percentage point drop in formal volunteering as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is a deep cut to New York City's nonprofit organizations that provide essential cultural, educational, health, and social services to communities throughout the five boroughs. Recovering the volunteer force is key to supporting the diverse needs of New Yorkers and ensuring services provided to residents by the nonprofit sector are readily available in all neighborhoods.

**What we asked:** We explored how often NYC residents

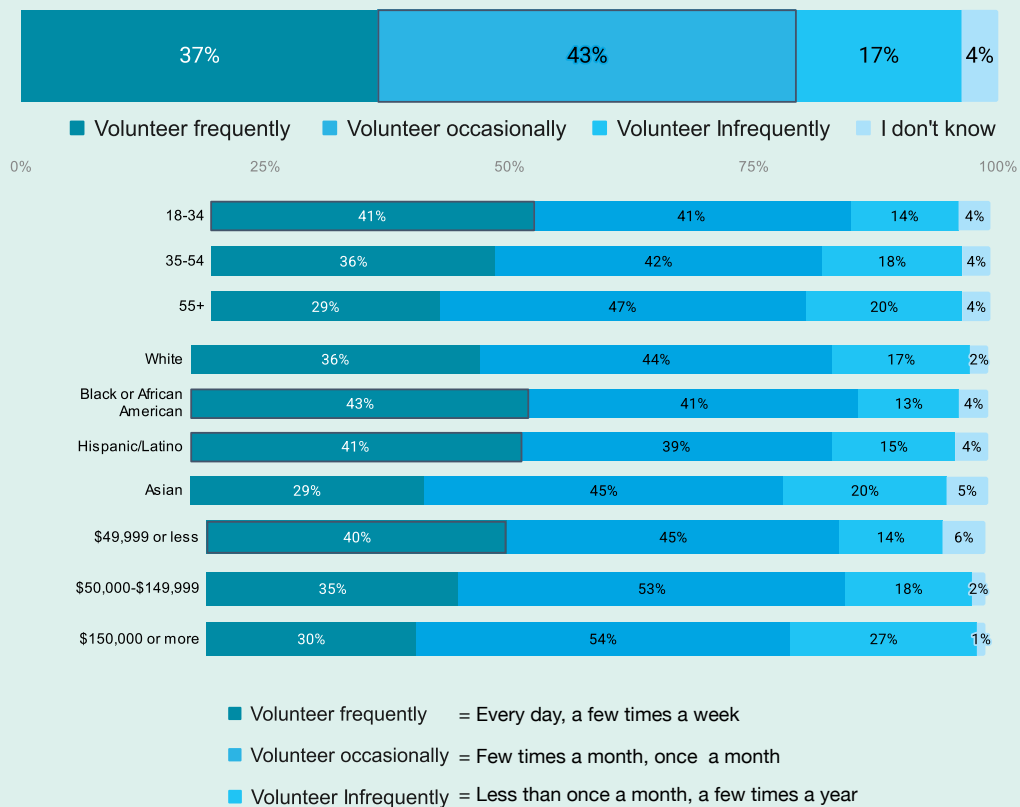
volunteer and the locations where they are most active in volunteering. We examined the types of organizations respondents are involved with, how long they have been volunteering, and how they discovered these opportunities. This section looks at the volunteering habits of NYC residents, including their reasons for volunteering or not volunteering.

**What we heard:** These survey findings offer encouraging signs that volunteer capacity is recovering in the nonprofit sector in New York City, reflecting volunteers who are community-driven, diverse, and frequently engaged.

## Q: What is the main reason you chose to volunteer in that role?

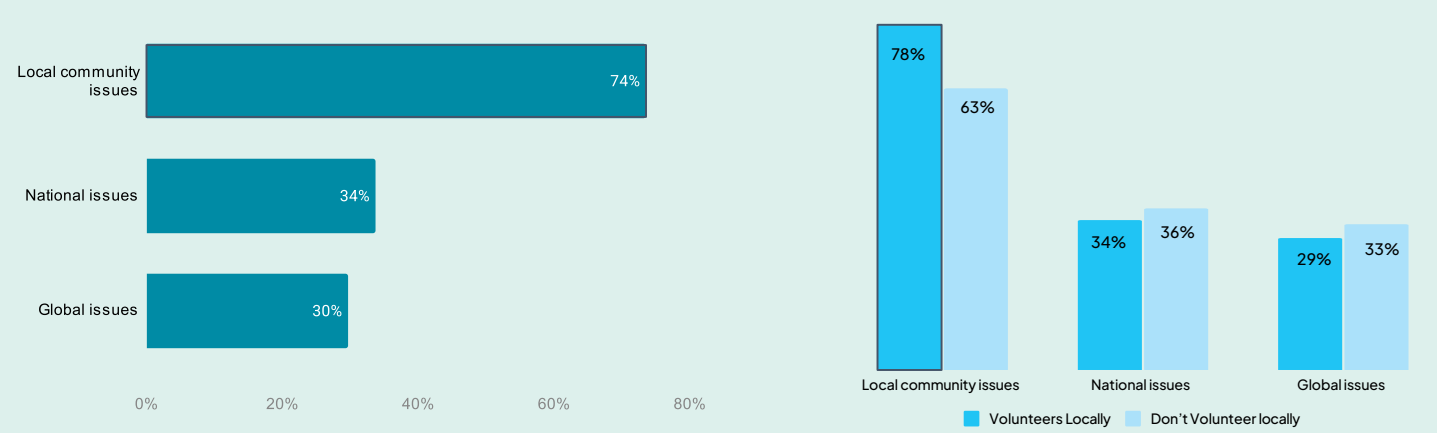


## Q: In the past 12 months, did you spend any time volunteering for any organization or association?

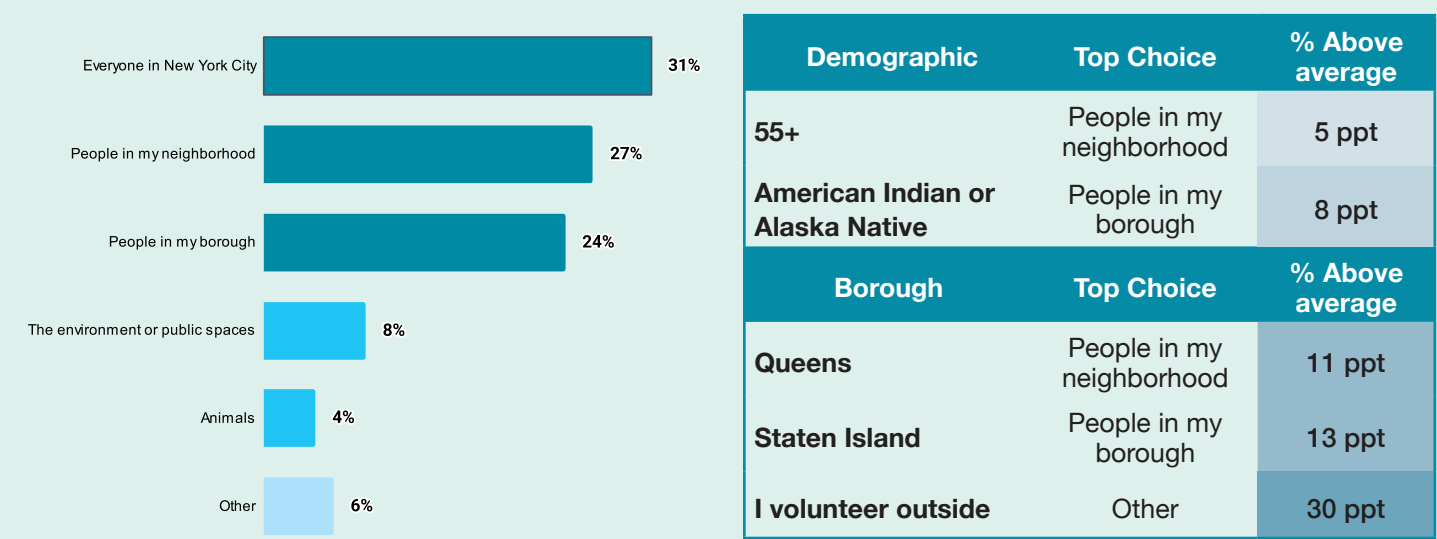


Nearly two thirds of respondents were as willing or more willing to volunteer than they were prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, which aligns with recent national formal volunteer data that indicates increased volunteer activity with nonprofit organizations<sup>[3]</sup>. In addition, survey respondents indicated they primarily volunteered to have an impact locally (74%) and had a vested interest in helping people. For New Yorkers who aren't actively volunteering or stopped volunteering, it's usually because of time constraints, primarily scheduling conflicts.

Q: Do you volunteer to have an impact globally, nationally, and/or locally?



Q: Who or what is primarily impacted by your volunteer efforts?

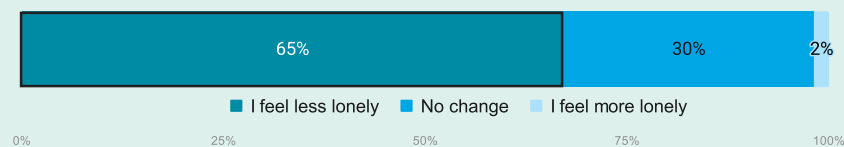


<sup>[3]</sup> Renewed Engagement in American Civic Life: [https://americorps.gov/sites/default/files/document/2025-01/CEV2023\\_HheadlineReport\\_12192024\\_508.pdf](https://americorps.gov/sites/default/files/document/2025-01/CEV2023_HheadlineReport_12192024_508.pdf)

## Q5: Why did you stop volunteering?



## Q: Have any of the following challenges prevented you from volunteering as much as you like?



Taken together, these results potentially indicate negative trends of engagement may be due to a lack of local volunteer opportunities. Local and easily accessible volunteer engagement is essential for nonprofit sustainability and impact as community-based organizations and nonprofits are often those most directly involved in taking action on local needs. As we continue to build on the foundation of frequent and local volunteerism, we can also further unlock the full potential of a motivated volunteer force by lowering barriers to engage residents where they are and identifying new groups to engage based on geography.

## Finding 03

# Volunteerism is a powerful connector to bridge across political polarization, restore trust, and strengthen democracy

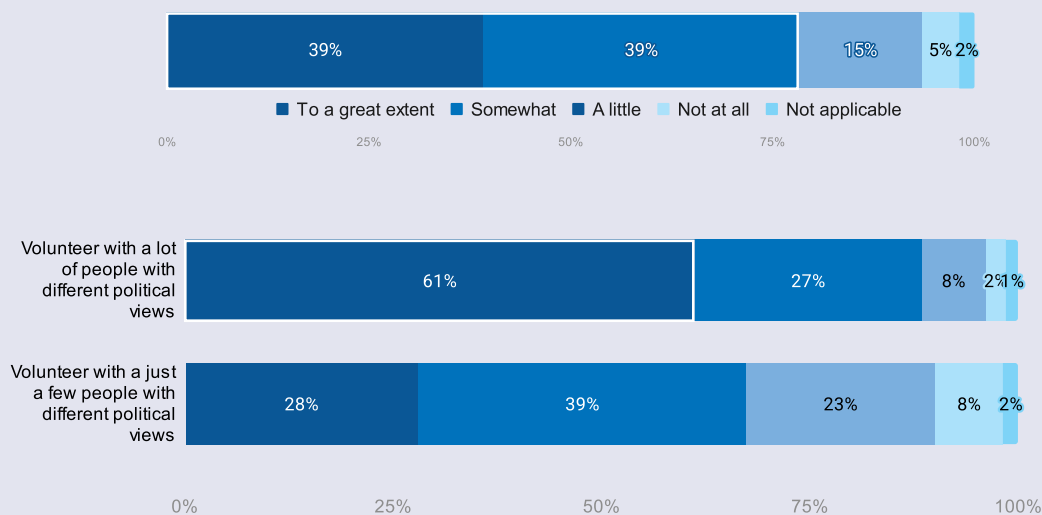
Political polarization has been increasing nationally, leading to historic apathy and distrust towards civic processes, and disconnection within communities<sup>[4]</sup>. Finding common ground and reaffirming our commitment to our fellow New Yorkers' success are vital to strengthening our democracy and civic processes. Service gives a path to unite New Yorkers under common hopes for their communities and give them points of action to build relationships and trust outside of political processes.

**What we asked:** We explored whether respondents are volunteering with individuals who share similar political views or engaging with diverse groups, shedding light on the role of diversity in volunteer experiences.

**What we heard:** These findings support the idea that volunteering is one of the most accessible and impactful tools we have for bridging divides, rebuilding trust, and engaging people in democratic life. The survey demonstrates strong evidence to support the idea that volunteers are forming connections that transcend political viewpoints.

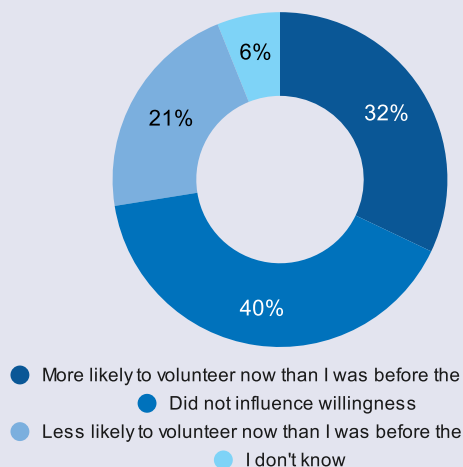
The survey found that most volunteers feel they have developed positive and trusting relationships with individuals from different political backgrounds through their volunteer experience. Moreover, the findings show that volunteers who serve with many people with different political views tend to be more likely to have built trusting relationships with people from different political views through volunteering. The survey also discovered a correlation between those individuals who have built trusting relations with people of different political views: they are notably more likely to volunteer now than before the pandemic.

### Q: Through volunteering, to what extent have you been able to build positive, trusting relationships with people who hold very different political views?

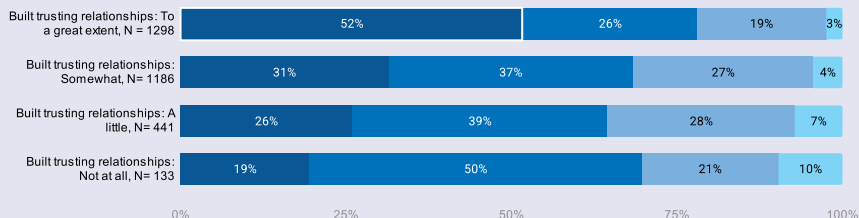


<sup>[4]</sup> Pew Research Center, Americans' Dismal Views of the Nation's Politics: <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2023/09/19/americans-feelings-about-politics-polarization-and-the-tone-of-political-discourse/>

## Q: Did the COVID-19 pandemic affect your willingness to volunteer?



**Volunteers who are able to build trusting relationships with people from different political views are more likely to report being more willing to volunteer since the COVID-19 pandemic.**



By creating spaces where people from all backgrounds can come together with respect and shared purpose, volunteer engagement groups are doing more than delivering services—they are restoring the social fabric of our democracy. When New Yorkers can connect over shared experiences and interests, work together toward a common goal, and feel the positive social connection effects from the act of volunteering, they develop trust in others – a key component to establishing cooperative connections and sustained civic actions.

### Finding 04

## Exposure to volunteerism and service allows deeper connection to community and the ability for everyday New Yorkers to feel they are tackling cross-cutting issues with equity and justice

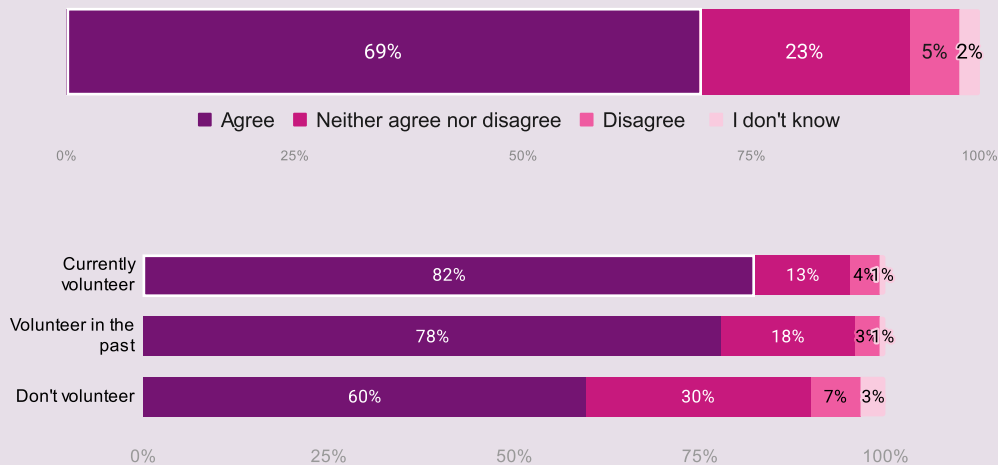
From workforce development and climate to immigration and education, the issues impacting New Yorkers are diverse and broad. Global, national, and local events disproportionality harm communities of color, which represent approximately 70% of the city's population, and exacerbates deeply rooted racial and economic disparities, as well as negatively impacts communities that have a high percentage of other health and socioeconomic disparities. The need for a whole city activation is central to get New Yorkers involved to work towards community solutions that will improve physical environments and access to services, ultimately leading to equity and justice for all New Yorkers.

**What we asked:** This section explored how respondents believe systemic problems should be addressed and the role volunteering plays in solving these issues, respondents' views on how volunteering can address equity and justice in their communities, and their perspectives on the most effective ways to tackle long-term, systemic issues in general. This section also examined the causes respondents focus on when volunteering, which communities are perceived to be in most need of support, and where respondents are actively volunteering.

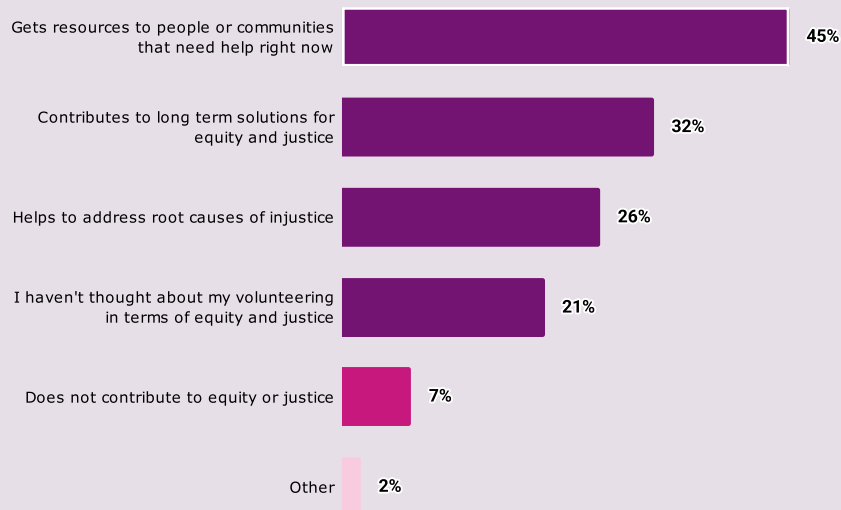
**What we heard:** The majority of respondents reported their belief that volunteering improves equity and justice within their communities. When New Yorkers volunteer, they believe their efforts contribute to equity and justice, and they know they can both address immediate issues and systemic community issues as well. We found that most volunteers believe their efforts contribute to equity and justice and attribute this impact to providing immediate resources to those in need. Though most respondents see policy, advocacy, and raising awareness as the best ways to address systemic community issues, those who currently volunteer are more likely to consider volunteering as the best approach to addressing systemic issues.

The highest percentage of respondents who volunteer are involved in people-focused services (e.g., eliminating hunger/poverty, working with youth through mentoring and tutoring, and health and wellbeing) and was the top choice across all demographic groups. Most respondents believe the NYC communities most in need of volunteers are low-income populations, people with disabilities, and youth, including children and teens.

**Q3: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement:  
Volunteering improves equity and justice in my community.**

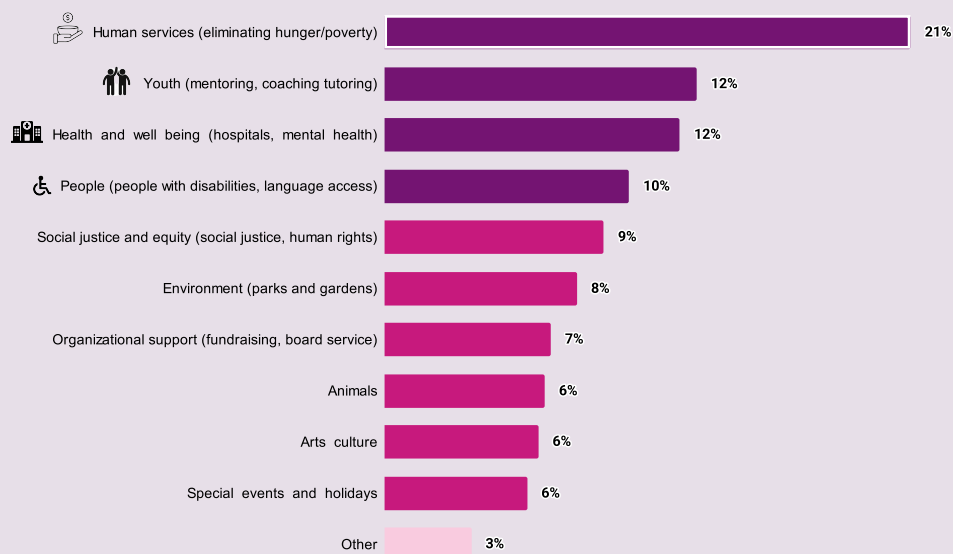


**Q: Please describe how you believe your volunteer time contributes to equity and justice.**



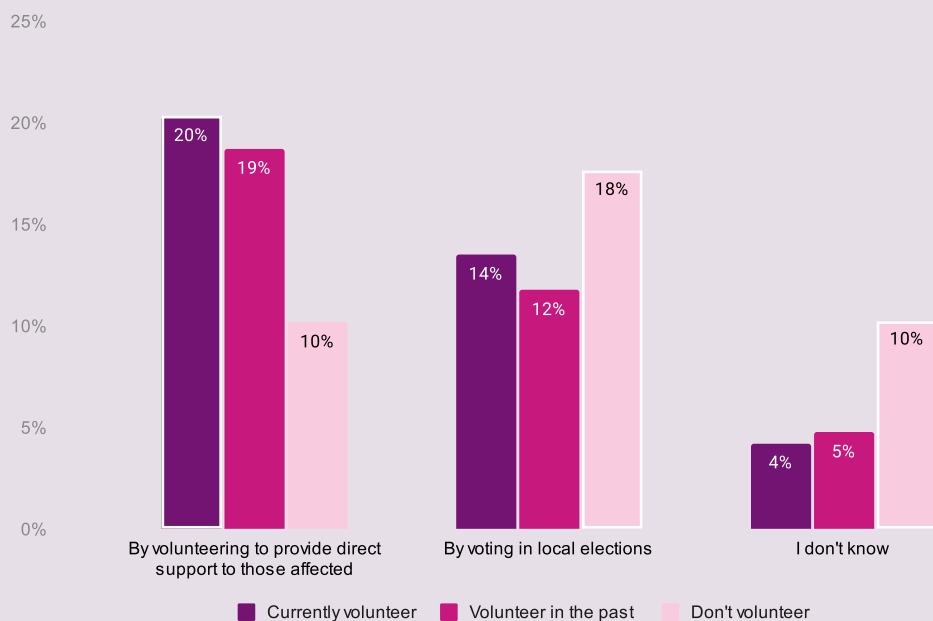
## Q: What is the main cause or issue you focus on when volunteering in this role?

[Only respondents who said they have volunteered in the past 12 months, N = 4184]

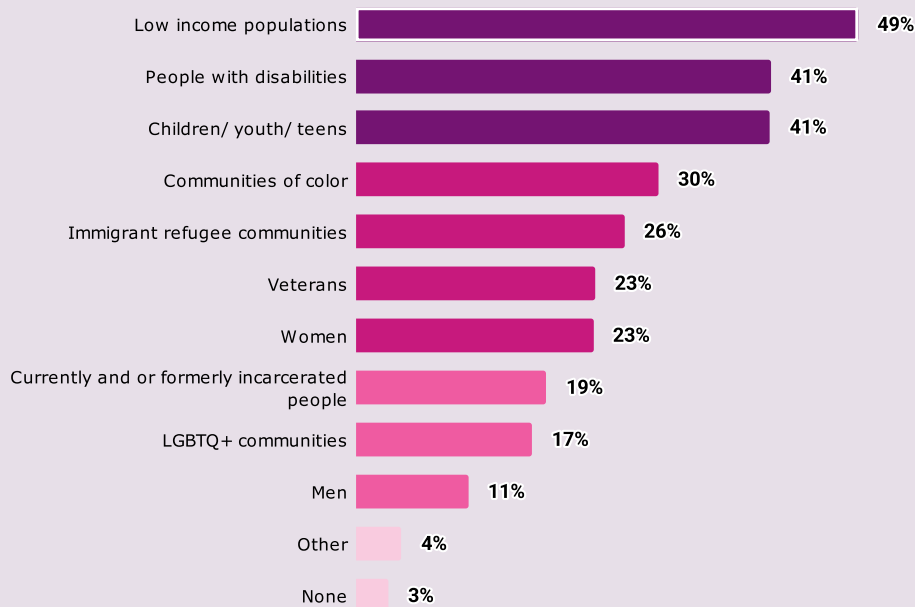


## Q: What do you think is the most effective way people can help address long-term, systemic problems in your community?

Does the most effective approach to addressing systemic problems differ between those who currently volunteer and those who do not?



## Q: Which communities in New York City do you believe needs the most support from volunteers?



Taken together, these findings show that volunteering has evolved into a more conscious, justice-oriented form of civic engagement. It's an ongoing way New Yorkers support underrepresented groups and address systemic challenges. Volunteer engagement organizations have

a powerful role to play in nurturing this momentum—by framing volunteer opportunities as part of the broader movement for equity, empowering all volunteers to see themselves as agents of lasting change, and by inviting people in to take part in their mission.

# CONCLUSION

This survey from New Yorkers across the five boroughs affirms the power of service to bridge people to solutions and further underscores the many ways in which volunteerism strengthens both individuals and communities. NYC Service will continue to provide meaningful access, opportunity, and resources for communities to come together and answer the call to

serve in the city. The survey indicates we are on track to achieving our vision of New York City where residents are united by service, and together, build a culture where New Yorkers uplift one another and take responsibility for the success of our city. We will continue to understand and identify where service and volunteerism are needed most to address needs and to build stronger communities.

# THANK YOU

Thousands of New Yorkers participated in this survey and gave their time to help us further understand the power of service and volunteerism. We are grateful for their time, their service, and their dedication to contributing to the greatest city in the world.

Many partners helped develop and execute this survey. Our gratitude and appreciate to our colleagues and partners:

- **NYC Service Staff**
- **Mayor's Office of Civic Engagement**
- **Mayor's Office of Operations**
- **Open Data and Office of Technology and Innovation**
- **ZenCity**
- **Creative Jugos**

Download this report and find more information at  
[nycservice.org/power-of-volunteering](https://nycservice.org/power-of-volunteering)