



Spotlighting the CEV Series: Formal Volunteering and Informal Helping in America

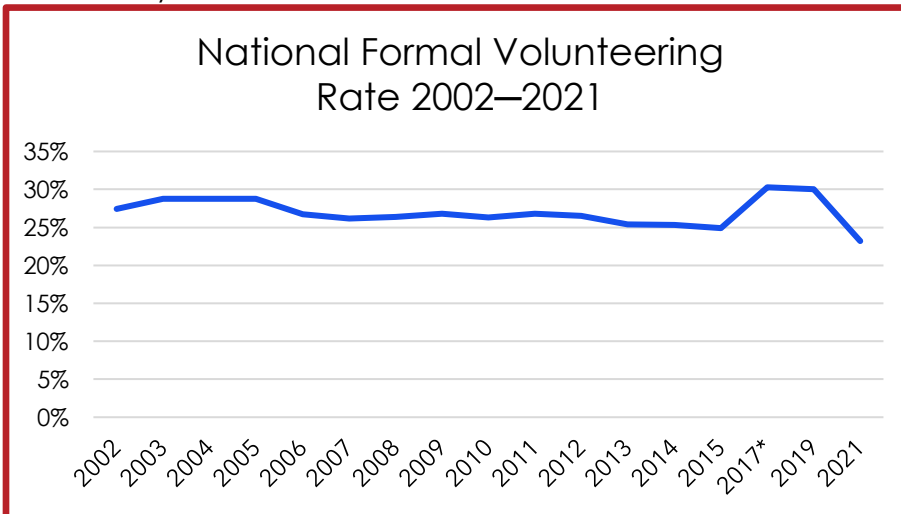
Giving time to help others creates stronger, more vibrant communities.

Formal volunteering and informal helping are key indicators of civic health and ways individuals can give their time to others. Data and evidence about these behaviors allow researchers to examine trends in how people make a difference in their communities and provide policymakers and funders with essential information they need to support those efforts.

As part of the "Spotlighting the CEV" series, this key findings brief explores national trends in formal volunteering and informal helping from 2019 to 2021.

The national formal volunteering rate experienced its largest decline on record during the COVID-19 pandemic.

People can formally volunteer by giving their time through an organization. Between 2019 and 2021, almost one quarter of Americans volunteered through an organization. Formal volunteering rates were steady between 2002 and 2019 before declining in 2021, the largest change in at least two decades. This decline occurred across states and individual demographic characteristics such as age, gender, and race/ethnicity.



Source for figures: Analysis conducted by the Office of Research and Evaluation, AmeriCorps, on the Volunteering (2002-15) and Civic Engagement and Volunteering (2017-21) Supplement data, U.S. Census Bureau.

* In 2017, AmeriCorps and the U.S. Census Bureau changed the way they collected data on formal volunteering by moving the survey question from the beginning to the end of the questionnaire. The change in the formal volunteering rate from 25% in 2015 to 30% in 2017 is at least partially due to "order effects," the fact that earlier questions in a questionnaire get more responses. The true rate of formal volunteering likely stayed relatively constant from 2015 to 2017.

About the Series

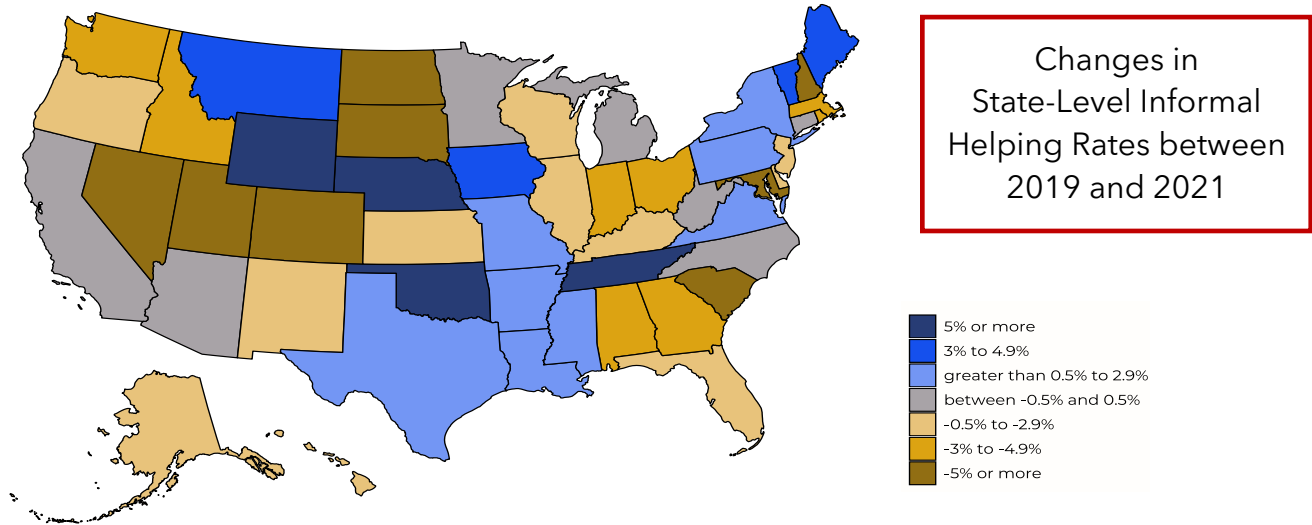
Spotlighting the CEV Series explores important findings from the Civic Engagement and Volunteering (CEV) Supplement of the Current Population Survey. Conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau in partnership with AmeriCorps, the CEV is a nationally representative, valuable resource for understanding various types of civic engagement over time. It has been administered biennially since 2017 with related datasets going as far back as 2002. CEV data can support actionable insights and data-driven decision making.

This series will explore six key constructs from the 2021 CEV: Organizational Engagement, Informal Helping and Conversation, Local Collective Action, Engaging with Issues, Economic Engagement, and Political Engagement.



Informal helping rates during the pandemic remained steady overall but varied by geography.

People can also informally help others outside of an organizational context, such as by exchanging favors with neighbors. Between 2019 and 2021, the national rate of informal helping remained stable: about half of Americans exchanged favors with their neighbors. This trend held regardless of individual demographic characteristics. State-level informal helping rates, however, dropped by more than three percentage points in fourteen states and grew by more than three percentage points in eight states during this period.



Explore the Data

The CEV data is available for public use. Visit the AmeriCorps Open Data portal at <https://data.americorps.gov>. For more information about the CEV data and findings, please reach out to the AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation at AmeriCorpsCEV@cns.gov.

What's Next?

The AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation and its partners are exploring the CEV data's implications for AmeriCorps programming and civic engagement in America more broadly. Ongoing research is examining the various ways people make a difference in their communities, the impact of COVID-19 on the civic engagement of individuals and organizations, and how national service impacts volunteering in the long term. By situating the data within broader scholarship and policy conversations the CEV can help strengthen our nation's civic infrastructure.

About the Office of Research and Evaluation

The [AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation \(ORE\)](#) assists AmeriCorps and its partners in collecting, analyzing, and disseminating data and insights about AmeriCorps programs and civic life in America.

About AmeriCorps

AmeriCorps, the federal agency for national service and volunteerism, provides opportunities for Americans to serve their country domestically, address the nation's most pressing challenges, improve lives and communities, and strengthen civic engagement. Each year, the agency places more than 250,000 AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers in intensive service roles; and empowers millions more to serve as long-term, short-term, or one-time volunteers. Learn more at <https://americorps.gov/>.