

**Report for the American Red Cross, Oregon Pacific Chapter,
on the Motivations that Encourage Young Adults to Volunteer
for an Organization**

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Research Report
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Introduction

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to determine what motivates young adults to volunteer with an organization. Determining these motivations includes gathering information on what young adults are passionate about, what captures their interests, and what inspires young people to take action. Our research uncovered that young adults are a willing volunteer base and, though busy, are largely interested in increasing their volunteerism. However, they feel that they are frequently unaware of volunteer opportunities, especially those that fit well into their busy schedules.

This research also uncovers information pertaining to the target audience's lack of comprehensive knowledge about the American Red Cross. In order to find a solution to this problem, this research seeks to display what services young adults are familiar with, which services they associate with the American Red Cross, and where information gaps exist. Research found that young adults are aware of the organization's efforts in terms of disaster relief and blood donations, but lack information about what the American Red Cross does regularly on a local level.

Gathering this information is important in order to make recommendations to the Oregon Pacific Chapter about how it can secure volunteers from the young adult audience, which includes high school and college students living within the Oregon Pacific Chapter's

area of service.

Scope

Due to the timeframe allotted for the collection of research and the resources available for this project, the research conducted was performed primarily on students who currently attend the University of Oregon. Survey participants could be recruited most easily and in the highest numbers from the University of Oregon due to the campus' proximity to the researchers' location.

Data from college students were collected through an online survey, as this audience tends not to have cell phone numbers that are readily available in databases (and most do not have a landline); however, this audience's e-mail addresses are easily available. Furthermore, the Internet is an essential part of daily life for young adults, with the majority of young adults citing the Internet as their primary source of information and entertainment (Mintel, 2009). Thus, an online survey offers the opportunity to send out survey links via e-mail, and to send out participation requests on the social media Web sites frequented by the target audience, such as Facebook and Twitter.

Personal interviews were also conducted with University of Oregon students and area high school students. These were performed in person in order capture the full attention of respondents and offer more in-depth answers to open-ended questions.

Because of the resources available to the research team and the timeframe allowed for research, these interviews were conducted on high school students in the Eugene-Springfield area.

Background Information

This project was requested by the American Red Cross's Oregon Pacific Chapter to aid in its efforts to reach out to young adults. The Oregon Pacific Chapter has yet to find a way to recruit a new generation of volunteers to replenish its increasingly diminishing supply. The chapter serves approximately 750,000 people throughout seven Southwestern Oregon counties and provides crucial programs, including disaster relief, certified CPR, lifeguarding, and babysitting training courses, as well as medical services for the armed forces. The American Red Cross is a humanitarian organization led by volunteers. It is not a government agency, thus it relies entirely on community members for their generosity and support. Its fundamental principles are humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity, and universality.

The Oregon Pacific Chapter receives much of its support from older individuals. As volunteers from this audience diminish, the organization has a need to attract new volunteers. Older individuals who volunteer with the American Red Cross are often veterans who developed a relationship with the Red Cross while serving in a war: once they returned home, they became active with a local chapter.

The Oregon Pacific Chapter's most dire need is for volunteers to aid in disaster relief because it responds to all disasters, regardless of staffing or funding. The American Red Cross responds both to international disasters like the earthquake in Haiti, as well as local disasters like a house fire in Lane County.

The American Red Cross has an immense opportunity for growth among younger audiences who could become volunteers and supporters. The Red Cross's efforts in Haiti saw a large outpouring of support from young adults, demonstrating that this audience is willing and able to get involved with relief efforts. Much of the support received from young adults came from donations via text message, which shows that newer technologies can be an important avenue to connect with this audience.

A major challenge for the American Red Cross is that while its recognition as an organization is widespread, the depth understanding is very low. People are aware that the Red Cross exists, but few possess comprehensive knowledge of all that the Red Cross does. Many people associate the American Red Cross with blood donations, and while this is an important service, the general public has little understanding of the other important services provided by local Red Cross chapters.

The Oregon Pacific Chapter faces obstacles in connecting with young adults because it currently does not understand what motivates this audience and what it would take to get young adults involved with

the American Red Cross. The Oregon Pacific Chapter seeks to recruit new volunteers, but must first develop awareness among younger audiences. Specifically, the chapter seeks to connect with young adults who are middle school- through college-aged. Although the Red Cross's volunteers generally need to be 18 years of age or older, connecting with younger individuals will foster a relationship that will result in increased support of the organization and the potential for future volunteers.

Methods

The methodology for this research included an online survey administered via Survey Monkey (Appendix B) and personal interviews with members of the target audiences (Appendix C). The subjects of the online survey were college students currently enrolled at the University of Oregon. The personal interviews included both college students from the University of Oregon, as well as high school students from the Eugene-Springfield area. The personal interviews used questions similar to those used on the survey in order to collect a sample of more in-depth responses and to allow for follow-up questions about the data.

In order to gather survey respondents, e-mails containing a link to the survey were sent out to a number of University of Oregon organizations, including campus fraternities and sororities, the student faculty at the University of Oregon recreation center, and the Alpha Kappa

Psi Professional Business Fraternity. In order to reach students not involved in a campus organization, the survey link was also sent out to the entire student body of the School of Journalism and Communication as well as various other individuals with accessible e-mail addresses. A link to the survey was also sent out via Twitter and Facebook to reach students who had not been reached by e-mail.

Results: Data and Interpretation

I. Survey Results

Research found that 40.9 percent of college students surveyed currently volunteer with an organization on a regular basis. This shows that close to half of the college students surveyed are willing and able to volunteer.

The following chart shows the breakdown of how students responded in terms of agreement with the statement:

“I am happy with the amount of volunteer work that I do.”

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This graph shows that almost half of college students surveyed are unhappy with the amount of time they volunteer. This suggests that young adults are an audience that desires more outlets for volunteerism.

The next chart shows the distribution of how students responded in terms of agreement with the statement:

“I'd like to volunteer, but my schedule doesn't allow me to volunteer regularly”

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These responses show that young adults are time-poor. Over half said that they would volunteer more if their schedule allowed. However, approximately 38 percent responded that their schedule does not prevent them from volunteering. Furthermore, issues of scheduling take into consideration both time constraints and convenience. Providing convenient outlets to get involved could make volunteering more conducive to a student's schedule.

The following chart shows the distribution of how students responded in terms of agreement with the statement:

“I wish I knew of more outlets to get involved and volunteer with an organization.”

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These data again support the earlier findings that young adults are a willing and able audience that wants to be active in the community. It also shows that volunteer opportunities are not currently being communicated to this audience in a manner that generates an adequate amount of awareness.

Respondents were asked to determine their level of agreement with the following statement:

“It takes a major event or disaster to get me involved/passionate about a cause.”

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The above chart shows that it does not take a major event or disaster for the majority of young adults to get involved with a cause. This demonstrates that young adults may be interested in smaller-scale, community projects.

The survey asked participants to rank their primary sources of information. The weighted ranking of each medium are as follows:

1. Word of Mouth	7. Internet Television
2. Television	8. Radio
3. Facebook	9. Twitter

4. Online Newspapers	10. Blogs
5. Newspapers	11. YouTube
6. Magazines	12. Viral Videos

When asked what comes to mind when students think of the American Red Cross, 35.87 percent gave a response that mentioned “blood,” “blood donations,” “blood drives,” or “giving blood.” Another 31.91 percent responded “helping people” or “providing aid.” These responses show what young adults’ top-of-mind associations are for the American Red Cross.

The following percentages display which services respondents believed to be offered by the American Red Cross:

The Red Cross only offers services overseas	5.3%
Meals on Wheels	24.2%
CPR Classes	87.4%
Babysitting Courses	63.2%
Lifeguarding classes	74.7%
Support to the armed forces	53.7%
Local disasters	85.3%
International disasters	78.9%
Local house fires	27.4%
Support and housing during floods and natural disasters	89.5%
Food for Lane County	27.4%
Goodwill stores	13.7%
Toys for Tots	27.4%
Ownership of all public hospitals	7.4%
Responds to only the largest disasters	12.6%

These responses show that young adults are widely aware of the relief efforts provided by the American Red Cross. They are also highly

aware of the certification classes offered. What these data also show, however, is that young adults are not widely aware of the differentiation between such organizations as the American Red Cross, Food for Lane County, and Toys for Tots. There is also a low level awareness about what the American Red Cross does on a local level, for example only 27.4 percent of respondents are aware of the organization's efforts in terms of local house fires.

Respondents were later asked to determine their level of agreement with the following statement:

“I have a good understanding of all the services offered by the American Red Cross.”

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These data show that the majority of young adults do not strongly believe they have a firm understanding of the American Red Cross's operations. This presents an opportunity for increased understanding among this audience.

II. Personal Interview Results

All of the high school students we spoke to said they get most of their information on volunteerism from school, usually in the form of announcements and posters.

Each of the students we spoke to from area high schools also

expressed that they wish they knew of more opportunities to volunteer. One Sheldon High School senior explained that because she needs 100 hours of community service to graduate, she is “constantly searching for things to do.” A student at Marist High School responded that he gets his information primarily from school, but if he is in need of volunteer hours and does not know of any outlets, he asks at his church because he knows “there will always be something the church needs help with.”

College students consistently cited organizations they are involved with as outlets to volunteer. One member of Alpha Kappa Psi, a professional business fraternity on the University of Oregon campus, discussed the organization’s tie to the Boys and Girls Club of Emerald Valley and explained that a lot of her time spent volunteering and fundraising are efforts for the local youth center.

Recommendations

The research shows that the majority of young adults want more outlets to get involved with volunteer organizations. Almost half of the young adults surveyed currently volunteer regularly, showing that this is an audience that is willing and able to get involved with organizations. However, the majority of young adults range from dissatisfied to highly dissatisfied with the amount of volunteering they currently do. This group desires to know about more volunteer outlets, which suggests that they

wish volunteer opportunities were more accessible and widely publicized.

Over half of young adults express that they wish they could volunteer more, but their schedule prevents them. Rather than dismiss this group as “too busy” to volunteer, based on young adults’ desire to volunteer more frequently, it is recommended that volunteer opportunities be made available to young adults in manners and at times that are convenient for them. Campus events are a viable option to make volunteerism more convenient.

Young adults are largely aware of the American Red Cross, especially in terms of disaster relief efforts and its CPR, babysitting, and lifeguarding certification classes. They also associate the American Red Cross with blood donations and giving aid to the needy. It is recommended that the Oregon Pacific Chapter emphasizes its role in local disaster relief in order to demonstrate to young adults the impact that is made in the local community.

The data show that young adults are a willing group that wants to volunteer in the community. However, this group is largely uninformed about volunteer opportunities. The data show that the top three outlets where this group receives its information are word-of-mouth, television, and Facebook. Due to the high costs of television, we recommend word-of-mouth and Facebook as the primary avenues to reach this audience.

The use of social media, particularly Facebook, will be an important avenue to reach young adults because of the amount of time this audience spends on the Internet. Our recommendation is to create and maintain a Facebook fan page that keeps fans up-to-date about opportunities to volunteer and support their local American Red Cross chapter. In order to effectively use social media, it will be important to put the task in the hands of someone who understands how to use social media tools, which may mean implicating social media training. We propose putting an intern in charge of social media in order to eliminate costs and to use a voice that is relatable to the target audience.

To engage students whose lives center around campus-life, high school and college campus events will be important. In order to generate word-of-mouth publicity, we recommend guerilla marketing on campuses in order to capture the attention of young adults and get them talking about the organization. Word-of-mouth can also be generated from online tactics including those employed on Facebook. We also recommend using YouTube and Twitter to generate conversations and raise awareness.

Outreach to local high schools is recommended to announce volunteer opportunities to high school students, as our research shows these students are often actively seeking out opportunities to volunteer

and get the majority of their information from school.

For those college students who are unhappy with the amount of volunteering they currently do and for those who wish they knew about more volunteer opportunities, we recommend intensive promotion of the American Red Cross clubs on campuses, and for those campuses that do not currently have an active club we recommend initiating one. We again recommend the use of Facebook and word-of-mouth, generated through guerilla marketing on campuses, to promote the American Red Cross clubs.

Our research further shows that college students are involved with a number of organizations, including organizations that are active with philanthropic organizations. We recommend outreach to achieve partnerships with such organizations in order to tap into new pools of young adult volunteers. In order to develop a lasting relationship with campus organizations, we recommend creating a relationship with a liaison from certain organizations who can connect the Oregon Pacific Chapter to various campus organizations.

Conclusion

This research demonstrates that young adults are a viable audience from which to recruit new volunteers. The research found that of the young adults surveyed, most want to volunteer more often or are

currently unhappy with how frequently they volunteer. Of those surveyed, high school and college students generally feel that they are not very well informed about volunteer opportunities. In most instances, high school students need volunteer hours in order to graduate and they receive most of their information about service opportunities while at school.

Despite what was found about young adults' desire to volunteer, the data also show that young adults wish they had more time to commit to volunteering. This presents some ambiguity in the data, making it unclear what elements would need to be in place to allow volunteerism to fit into the busy young adult's schedule.

Appendix A: Secondary Sources Cited

“Young Adult Leisure Trends – US – November 2009.” Mintel. Accessed online through the University of Oregon Libraries. 11 May 2010.
[http://academic.mintel.com.lib proxy.uoregon.edu/sinatra/oxygen_academic/search_results/show&/display/id=393600/display/id=496705#hit1](http://academic.mintel.com.lib.proxy.uoregon.edu/sinatra/oxygen_academic/search_results/show&/display/id=393600/display/id=496705#hit1).

Appendix B: Online Survey Questions

When I think of the American Red Cross, what comes to mind is: (open response)

True or False: I currently volunteer with at least one organization regularly.

Please list the organizations you are involved with, both on and off campus: (open response)

Rank your primary sources of information. (Facebook, Twitter, Television, Online Television, newspapers, online newspapers, word-of-mouth, magazines, YouTube, viral videos, blogs, radio)

Please select the services that you believe are offered by the American Red Cross. (only offers service overseas, CPR training, Meals on Wheels, Food for Lane County, babysitter training, international disaster relief, lifeguarding certification, local disaster relief, relief for victims of local house fires, support and housing during floods and other natural disasters, Goodwill stores, Toys for Tots, ownership of all public hospitals, response only to the largest disasters)

Select your level of agreement, from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

I wish I knew of more outlets to get involved and volunteer with an organization.

I have a good understanding of all the services offered by the American Red Cross.

It takes a major event or disaster to get me involved/passionate about a cause.

I'd like to volunteer, but my schedule doesn't allow me to volunteer regularly.

I'm happy with the amount of volunteer work that I do.

Appendix C: Personal Interview Questions

Do you wish you knew of more opportunities to volunteer? Explain.

Where do you hear about volunteer opportunities? Do you actively seek information? If so, how?

Are there any volunteer requirements you need to fulfill for any reason? Explain.

Are you currently a part of a volunteer organization? Or a club/organization that requires community service work?