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National Volunteer Week

Downward Trend in High School Volunteering

New Study Provides 50-State Breakdown of Volunteer Rates for Teenagers, Young Adults & Population Over 25

Vermont, Utah & North Dakota Show Highest Rates; New York and Nevada Among Lowest

Tisch College, Tufts University. - Fewer high school age (16-18) Americans stepped up to volunteer their time over the past two years, new research reveals. Traditionally, teenagers have volunteered at slightly higher rates than other age groups, but in 2007 people 25 or older were more likely to volunteer than were those 16 to 18.

These are some of the findings from a study examining youth volunteering trends from 2002 to 2007 released by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) at Tufts University's Tisch College. The research presents volunteer rates by state and age groups calculated using the Current Population Survey (CPS), a joint product of the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Census Bureau. The full study and 50-state breakdown can be found at www.civicyouth.org.

Overall trends showed a 6 percentage point decline in volunteering among 16-to-18 year-olds since the rate peaked in 2005 at 33 percent. Meanwhile, volunteer rates for the population aged 19-to-25 (18 percent) and 25 years and older (28 percent) both changed very little (2 percentage points or less) since 2002.

“The Millennial Generation volunteers at high rates, by historical standards, but there has been a decline since 2005. This should be a matter of concern as we celebrate National Volunteer Week,” said Peter Levine, director of CIRCLE. “Volunteering rates are affected by policies, and there are still too few federal- and state- level policies that integrate service-learning into education. During his campaign, then Senator Obama pledged to make active citizenship a ‘central cause of his presidency,’ and we hope his Administration will live up to that promise. Volunteering is an important aspect of active citizenship, along with opportunities to discuss issues, influence the government, and organize at the local level.”

Volunteer rates were found to vary tremendously across states and age groups, and to change from year to year. The state rates for 16-to-18 year-olds ranged from a high of 48 percent to a low of 14 percent in 2007, while in 2002 the high was 52 percent and the low 16 percent. The states with highest and lowest rates also differed for this age group. In 2007 the highest were Oregon (48 percent), Vermont (47%), Alaska and Utah (44% each). The top states in 2002 were Montana (52%), Iowa (48%) and Maryland (47%). The states with the lowest rates in 2007 were Nevada (14%), West Virginia (15%); and New Mexico and Kentucky (18%). In 2002, Mississippi and the District of Columbia (16% each) and Tennessee (17%) were the lowest.

The state rates for college-age adults (19-to-24 year-olds) were generally lower, and again with different states leading the pack and bringing up the rear in 2002 and 2007. In 2007 the highest rates were in Utah (30%), North Dakota (29%), Maine and Washington State (28% each) and the District of Columbia (27%). While in 2002, the top states were

Utah (36%) and Missouri (34%). The states with the lowest rates in 2007 were New Jersey (8%), Tennessee and Delaware (9% each). The bottom in 2002 were Massachusetts (11%), and Nevada, Tennessee and Indiana (13% each).

For the 25 and older cohort, the state volunteer rates and those with the highest and lowest rates remained relatively unchanged from 2002 to 2007. Rates in 2007 ranged from a high of 43 percent in Utah to a low of 19 percent in Nevada, Florida, New York and New Jersey. In 2002, Utah again led the pack at 49 percent and New York, Florida and Nevada had the lowest rates at 22 percent.

The study also examined the state policies impacting youth volunteering, which many researchers believe have an impact on the levels of volunteering for 16-to-18 year-olds. A Corporation for National and Community Service study found the public schools that make community service available has grown from 64 percent in 1999 to 68 percent in 2008, but those that meet the criteria for “service-learning” has declined from 32 percent in 1999 to 24 percent. Furthermore only two states, Maryland and the District of Columbia, have made volunteering a mandatory requirement to graduate from high school. Eight other states (AR, CT, DE, IA, MN, OK, RI and WI) allow service-learning activities to be counted towards high school graduation credit.

CIRCLE (The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement) conducts and promotes research on the civic and political engagement of Americans between the ages of 15 and 25. A part of the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service at Tufts University, CIRCLE has received funding from The Pew Charitable Trusts, Carnegie Corporation of New York and several other foundations.

The Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service, a national leader in civic engagement, prepares students from all fields of Tufts University to become engaged public citizens and community leaders.

Tufts University, located on three Massachusetts campuses in Boston, Medford/Somerville, and Grafton, and in Talloires, France, is recognized as one of the premier research universities in the United States. Tufts enjoys a global reputation for academic excellence and for the preparation of students as leaders in a wide range of

professions. A growing number of innovative teaching and research initiatives span all Tufts campuses, and collaboration among the faculty and students in the undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs across the University's schools is widely encouraged.