

Bridging the Gap – Involving Younger Generations in Service

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- Participants will compare the differences among the generations currently serving in the United States today.
- Participants will recognize the components of a quality service project and be equipped to plan their own.
- Participants will collect tips to consider when recruiting younger generations in service.

Community and purpose have been found to be keys to a longer life. Service provides the opportunity for both – a chance to come together for a purpose. In 2017, the United States experienced record highs for the total number of volunteer hours and charitable

dollars given to organizations. However, that statistic is deceiving as fewer Americans are participating in volunteering. Furthermore, rural areas have suffered the greatest decline in volunteerism (Where are America's Volunteers, 2018). One trend that is also clear is the age of volunteers. The review of a variety of research sources shows that Generation X (1965-1981) is participating in volunteerism at a higher rate than other generations, followed by Baby Boomers (1946-1964).

With volunteers playing such a key role in the efforts of Extension (and social capital, in general), where have all the volunteers gone? What are the key generational differences to know? How can we help them develop a successful service project? And how do we start engaging the younger generations in programming?

Generational Differences

When looking at society, there are currently seven generations currently living. These include the Civic or Greatest Generation that represents those born from 1901-1929, all the way to the generation just being born – Generation Alpha (2020-20??). Four of those generations, Baby Boomers (1946-1964), Generation X (1965-1981), Millennials (1981-2001)



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and Generation Z (2002-2019), make up the potential volunteer base. Each generation differs from the next, with defining dates and events shaping their lives.

Baby Boomers are known for having been the largest generation, with the birth rates being high through 1964. This era was known for being one of major unrest in the country with the Civil Rights Movement, the Cold War, the Vietnam War, Woodstock and historic assassinations. The high birthrates meant large, competitive classrooms and sporting venues. However, teachers also learned to utilize and began to introduce group projects to cut down on grading requirements. The large classrooms and large families resulted in a generation that understands and values teamwork; additionally, this was the generation in which the term, 'workaholic,' became popular, as the limited jobs and large population resulted in a generation with great work ethic, who worked long hours in hopes of being rewarded.

Generation X (1965-1981) was born to the earliest Boomers. They are the smallest generation, and they were the first generation to be born into two-income households and spend their preschool years in childcare. When they began school, they often came home alone at the end of each day, while their parents finished work. Generation X is often described as very private and individualistic. While they are highly skilled, the large number of Boomers before them resulted in many struggling to find employment or being vastly underpaid when they entered the workforce. All of this resulted in a generation not motivated by

teamwork or committees; instead, they value fun, work-life balance and working to live (not living to work).

Millennials (1982-2001) are the second-largest generation in history. The attack on the World Trade Center (September 11, 2001) is viewed as the ending point of this generation, so this is a generation that has never known a world without terrorism. As a result, Millennials majorly question everything. They are cynical and want to understand, "Why?" However, this generation has also been raised in a time where there has been greater emphasis on diversity, inclusion and multiculturalism. The result is an open-minded, sociable, optimistic and collaborative generation. Millennials are well connected, with greater influence and larger social networks. These networks often influence where they serve!

Finally, **Generation Z** (2001-2019) are the youngest generation that is talked about regarding volunteers. This is a generation born into a truly technical world, having had access to high-quality technology since birth. This results in a high interest in music and games, but it also provides an inept ability to quickly research and understand things. They are creative, caring and competent! While this generation is currently a combination of young adults and youth, they are never too young to start engaging in service!

Keys to a QUALITY Service Project

The service-learning cycle was developed to define the keys to a quality service project. This breaks a project down into three parts: the preservice phase, the service phase and the post-service phase.

First, we must plan our project. This occurs during the pre-service phase; it includes identifying the why, who, what, when and where of a project; while 'why,' may read best last, it should come first in this process. This phase involves questions like:

- Why – Identify the Need
 - What need will be addressed by this service project?
 - Who is being served? How can they have a voice in this project?



- Who – Develop Ownership
 - Who is going to do the work?
 - Identify members and make task lists.
- What – Establish Objectives
 - What will the members do?
 - Be thorough! Set goals!
- When – Plan and Prepare
- Where – Identify the Service Environment
 - Make sure the space is safe, accessible and identify who to contact at the location, if necessary.

Next, we implement the service project. This is identified as the service phase of the service-learning cycle. This involves the following steps:

- Conduct meaningful service.
 - Positive attitudes make all the difference!
- Observe the impact of the service.
 - Take photos! – Be sure to have approval from the host.
 - Plan any evaluations ahead of time.
 - Document what you are doing.

Finally, the project enters the post-service phase. This includes:

- Evaluate and document the experience through:
 - Conduct community surveys.
 - Create a Help-O-Meter to keep track of the number of hours youth volunteer in the community. Put this in a location people can see it!
 - Collect stories and impacts from those who receive the services and community partners effected.
 - Document qualitative data, including club reporter submissions, social media and local newspapers.
- Celebrate success!
 - Have a party, write thank you letters to participants.



Keys to Engaging Gen Xers, Millennials and Gen Zers in Service

As we have learned, each generation is different.

To engage Gen Xers, we must:

1. **Respect Their Family Responsibilities** – Nearly half of this generation are still supporting adult children, while another 21% are helping parents. Nearly one out of six Gen Xers (15%) are sandwiched between older and younger family members who need help.
2. **Value Work-Life Balance** – Gen Xers are typically described as being resourceful, independent and keen on maintaining work-life balance.
3. **Expert DIYers** – This generation is known for being left alone while guardians were away at work during their childhood. Gen Xers love DIY-ing projects.

Millennials are more interested in opportunities that emphasize:

1. **Passion for Learning** – This generation exhibits deep curiosity about the world and displays the desire to further develop skills and knowledge that can help them within their professional lives. Millennials understand the importance of setting and achieving goals.

2. Participating in Meaningful Service – In their work, Millennials value meaningful motivation. They may be characterized as being motivated by creative work, sharing their gifts, and making an impact on others and within their communities. Many can frequently be found working toward helping others, imparting inspiration or working to improve on a community or worldwide issue.

Finally, the keys to engaging Gen Z is providing opportunities related to:

1. **Mircro-Volunteering** – Gen Zers need flexible opportunities to serve. Service needs to fit their schedules. Gen Z is more likely to have volunteered than any other age group. Nearly half of Gen Z has volunteered, and almost 25% say they are currently serving.
2. **Engagement with Technology** – Digital Natives YouTube, Instagram and Snapchat are among teens' favorite online destinations. Gen Zers may want to participate

What Does This Mean for CEOS Member Recruitment?

Each generation has a unique perspective on the world of volunteerism and service. Young people are energetic, flexible, and passionate – three great qualities to find in volunteers. Here are strategies for reaching them and recruiting them as members of your organization:

1. Offer shorter, flexible opportunities. Between school, activities, sports, family and friends, it's hard for young people to find time to volunteer. By offering a variety of schedules, they are more likely to find something that works.
2. Reach out to the programs they are involved in. Connect with leaders of local church youth groups, sports teams and school clubs to see if they are willing to promote your organization.
3. Establish a social media presence. Meet your prospective volunteer base where they are at – on social media. Keep a regularly updated social media profile and post volunteer opportunities often. Work with county offices to help.
4. Make it mutually beneficial. Help younger volunteers by offering to provide them with position titles, help with recommendation letters, and development of job and life skills.

5. Focus on the cause. Gen Z is a passionate group. You'll best relate to them by focusing on your mission and highlighting their ability to make a difference for your club or community.

Ultimately, service is an important component of social capital that assures opportunities remain available for all. When communities come together, they really have the capacity for change.

Reflection Questions

- How do you see some of the generational differences within your own family or community?
- Based on what you know, how might you begin recruiting Millennial members?
- Share the positive skills/qualities you believe a younger generation will bring to service with your group.

Resources

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