CIVIC LIFE TODAY

A look at American civic engagement amid a global pandemic

September 2020
INTRODUCTION

Points of Light is committed to empowering, connecting and engaging people and organizations with opportunities to make a difference that is personal and meaningful. At Points of Light, we believe that the most powerful force of change in our world is the individual — one person making a positive difference in their community.

When we think about civic life today, we know that doing good comes in many forms. Today’s engaged person may express their desire to do good through the purchases they make, in what they share on social media, where and how they choose to work, and what nonprofit organization to support as a volunteer or donor. But in a world changed by global crisis, where will people find the inspiration, creativity and sustained energy to make change? How will people engage? How can institutions support them?

In Spring 2020, Points of Light commissioned a unique research study to understand the current state of American civic engagement – in all its facets – and explore the path forward for catalyzing deeper and broader civic participation.

Points of Light is grateful to our partners at AT&T, Hart Research and Carol Cone ON PURPOSE for their support of this work.
In May 2020, Points of Light commissioned a unique research study from Hart Research to understand how to catalyze civic engagement in 2020 and beyond. The survey dove deep into Americans’ behaviors, attitudes and motivations for civic engagement.

**Audience:** U.S. Adults  
**Sample Size:** n=1,441  
**Margin of Error:** +/-2.8%  
**Timing:** May 13-19, 2020

Research supplemented by third-party studies on social change:

- **2020 Edelman Trust Barometer and Spring Update: Trust and the Covid-19 Pandemic**  

- **Cause and Social Influence: Influencing Young America to Act**  
  (National Online Survey of Young Americans, June 2020)
FINDING PURPOSE AND MEANING FROM DOING GOOD
Prior to the pandemic, Americans were modestly engaged in civic life, primarily though voting and non-profit donations.

**Participation in Civic Life**

*Top 2 Box*

- Voted in all/most elections in past few years*: 72%
- Donated money to a nonprofit in the past year: 54%
- Signed a petition in the past year: 43%
- Made decisions on products based on company’s social responsibility in the past year: 41%
- Participated in volunteer activities in the past year: 36%

*Among registered voters*

**Points of Light: Engaging Americans in Civic Life (May 2020)**
Today, they believe civic action is more important than ever before.

**POST-PANDEMIC ENGAGEMENT LANDSCAPE**

Actions that will be More Important than Ever After the Coronavirus

*Top 2 Box*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Will do about the same</th>
<th>Will do more</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voting</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donating to nonprofits</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteering</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacting government leaders or advocacy groups</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Say they will maintain their current level of involvement or **do more** to get involved and make a difference after the pandemic passes.

*Points of Light: Engaging Americans in Civic Life (May 2020)*
People are holding themselves and each other accountable to get more involved and create a more connected future.

82% Agree “we all must get involved to rebuild our communities and country” post-COVID-19

66% Agree “the coronavirus will have a long-lasting, positive impact on consideration for others and willingness to get involved in making a difference”

64% agree that “as horrible as it is, this pandemic will lead to changes for the better in how we live, work and treat each other as people.”

(Source: Edelman Trust Barometer Spring Update, April 2020)
Across generations, “helping people” is at the heart of civic action.

**Top Desired Outcomes from Civic Engagement**

* % Selected

- **Helping People**
  - 59%

- **Creating positive change**
  - 47%

- **Making a difference**
  - 42%

- **Solve Problems**
  - 30%

- **Give back**
  - 21%

*Points of Light: Engaging Americans in Civic Life (May 2020)*
People are motivated to get involved because it enriches their lives and the lives of those around them.

### Personal Motivations for Getting Involved and Taking Action to Make a Difference

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivation</th>
<th>% Selected Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enriches my life</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sets an example for the young</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brings me joy</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pays it forward</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addresses issues/causes</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improves my local community</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post COVID, need to rebuild</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do something with family/friends</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps those less fortunate</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional health/reduced stress</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See firsthand impact I can have</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live my faith</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connect with like-minded people</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn new things directly</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Channel dissatisfaction</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was asked</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help career</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Points of Light: Engaging Americans in Civic Life (May 2020)**
GEN Z: TODAY’S CIVIC LEADERS
Just at the cusp of voting age, Gen Z already demonstrates higher rates of civic engagement than older generations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Activities Participated In Past Year</th>
<th>% Selected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Donated money to a nonprofit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signed a petition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase decisions based on company’s social responsibility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participated in volunteer activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posted or started group/campaign for issue on social media</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted elected official about issue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considered applying/taking job because of company’s social responsibility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended demonstration or rally for issue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public service thru military, elected office, nonprofit board</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voted in every/almost every election in past few years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Have done in past year, by age group:
- Gen Z
- Millennials
- Gen X
- Boomers/Silent Gen

Points of Light: Engaging Americans in Civic Life (May 2020)
Gen Z is living with the impact of the problems we haven’t solved, and they demand change

**Issue Priorities for Civic Engagement**

*% Selected; Shown: Top 4 Issues*

- **Mental health**: 31% Gen Z, 52% All Adults
- **Poverty**: 31% Gen Z, 38% All Adults
- **Environment**: 30% Gen Z, 35% All Adults
- **Race relations/racism**: 23% Gen Z, 33% All Adults

**Snapshot of Gen Z and Racial Justice**

79% of Gen Z took at least one action to address racial discrimination and inequality in late May/early June

(Source: Cause and Social Influence Influencing Young America to Act, June 2020)

Points of Light: Engaging Americans in Civic Life (May 2020)
Business, organizations and governments must prepare for a new generation that will be highly engaged on issues that they care deeply about.

**Number of Activities Engaged In Past Year**
% Selected Among Gen Z Respondents

- **67% GEN Z VS. 52% OF ALL ADULTS** have done 3+ activities
- **76%**
- **72%**

**GEN Z vs. 70% OF ALL ADULTS** agree “it is important for me to be able to see with my own eyes the results of actions I have taken to make a difference.”

**GEN Z vs. 57% OF ALL ADULTS** agree that “social media is an important way to learn about and discuss issues that I care about.”

Points of Light: Engaging Americans in Civic Life (May 2020)
In today’s age of corporate social justice, employee welfare and empowerment are top priorities.

**Agree that companies can take actions that both increase profits and improve conditions in communities where they operate.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top Corporate Actions to Promote Civic Engagement</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Essential</th>
<th>Pretty Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treat employees well: fair pay/benefits, paid sick leave/parental leave</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allows employees to volunteer wherever they want</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gives employees option to participate, but not requiring it</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial contributions to employees’ efforts to make a difference</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executives participating in volunteer activities alongside rank-and-file</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Points of Light: Engaging Americans in Civic Life (May 2020)
2. 2020 Edelman Trust Barometer Spring Update: Trust and the Covid-19 Pandemic
Corporate social responsibility informs consumer purchase decision-making, especially among younger adults.

Who They Are:
- 49% male, 51% female
- 36% under age 35
- Reflect the general population on race/ethnicity
- 39% have a college degree or higher
- 32% are parents of children under 18

How They Engage (in the last year)

- Voted in every/almost every election: 77% (72% for All Adults), 69% (54% for Those who made CSR product decisions)
- Donated money to a nonprofit: 62% (43% for Those who made CSR product decisions)
- Signed a petition: 49% (36% for Those who made CSR product decisions)
- Participated in volunteer activities: 34% (23% for Those who made CSR product decisions)
- Contacted an elected official about an issue: 24% (14% for Those who made CSR product decisions)
- Have attended a rally or demonstration: 16% (10% for Those who made CSR product decisions)
Company commitments to social responsibility will be key for attracting the next generation of talent.

**Who They Are:**
- 53% male, 47% female
- 54% under age 35
- More likely to be Hispanic or Latino (25%)
- 39% have a college degree or higher
- More likely to live in urban areas (38%)
- 39% are parents of children under 18

**How They Engage (in the last year)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>% Selected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voted in every/almost every election</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donated money to a nonprofit</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signed a petition</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participated in volunteer activities</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted an elected official about an issue</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have attended a rally or demonstration</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*All Adults* vs. Those who made CSR decisions
SPARKING ACTION: HELPING PEOPLE VOLUNTEER
Nearly three in 10 adults have not volunteered in the past year but are interested in doing so.

4% of adults volunteered last year but not interested in doing so again.

36% of adults volunteered in the last year.

32% of adults volunteered last year and interested in doing so again.

28% of adults did not volunteer last year but interested in doing so.

60% are interested in volunteering.

There is an opportunity to engage the nearly 3 in 10 adults did not volunteer in the past year but are interested in doing so.

The following groups are slightly more likely to fall into this category:

- Gen Z/Millennial Men
- Parents
- Millennials
- African Americans
MAKING VOLUNTEERING PERSONAL

People want to grow where they are planted, focusing on local opportunities that let them engage with those they are helping.

Volunteer Preferences
% Selected

Focus on global issues impacting our world 18% +37 → 55%
Focus on issues directly impacting my community

Not interact directly with people benefiting 24% +22 → 46%
Interact directly with people who are benefiting

Volunteer directly or with friends/neighbors, not through organization 28% +15 → 43%
Volunteer through an organization

Participate at home/online 30% +12 → 42%
Participate in person

Activities where I help someone one-on-one 27% +14 → 41%
Activities where I help groups of people

One-time activities 29% +10 → 39%
Activities that I can do on a regular basis

Points of Light: Engaging Americans in Civic Life (May 2020)
Finding meaningful opportunities to get involved are primary barriers to volunteerism.

### Top Barriers To Volunteering

**Top 2 Box (Major/Moderate Barrier)**

*Among Those Interested in Volunteering Who Have Not Done So*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unsure how to get involved or where to find opportunities</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Busy, don’t have time to volunteer</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rather do other things when I have free time</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannot find opportunities near me</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haven’t found a group of volunteers with whom I fit</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncomfortable volunteering with people I don’t know</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure what I can do that would be helpful</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haven’t found opportunities matching my skills, abilities</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t believe my efforts will make a difference</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Points of Light: Engaging Americans in Civic Life (May 2020)*
INVITE A FRIEND AND BRING THE FAMILY

Invitations from friends and family help people get involved, overcoming barriers to engagement

Top Incentives For Volunteering
Top 2 Box (Somewhat/Much More Likely) Among All Respondents

- Being invited to volunteer by a friend (64%)
- Volunteering with family (56%)
- Single online/mobile site to find opportunities/track impact (53%)
- Learning physical/mental health benefits for volunteering (52%)
- Getting follow-up communication on impact my volunteering had (51%)
- Receiving reminders each month of volunteer opportunities (50%)
- App tracking impact on my mental health, stress, feelings of wellbeing (41%)
- Earning recognition/rewards: shopping points/products, social media badge (38%)

Mental health is a top priority issue for Gen Z especially

Points of Light: Engaging Americans in Civic Life (May 2020)
Americans will make the time to participate in volunteer opportunities that feel worthwhile.

From the volunteer perspective, a worthwhile experience:

- **Is discoverable.** Can be easily found online
- **Is local.** Addresses an issue important to my community
- **Is credible.** Delivered by an organization with local/issue expertise.
- **Is social.** Allows me to invite my friends and family
- **Is authentic.** Explains why my actions will matter, upfront
- **Is personal.** Allows me to engage with beneficiaries
- **Is impactful.** Shows me the outcomes of my actions
- **Is repeatable.** Provides an avenue for me to reengage
INSIGHTS TO ACTION
Doing good comes in many forms.

**Call to Action:** What does this circle of action mean in your life? How can you help your health, your friends and your community by getting engaged? Use the Civic Circle to give yourself credit for the ways you are already taking action, and then challenge yourself to do more.

Combat the barriers to engagement that **you** can control.

**Call to Action:** Invite your friends to join you in volunteering, seek opportunities for families (however defined!), say yes to workplace engagement opportunities.

Utilizes the tools available to you to combat others.

**Call to Action:** Visit sites like engage.pointsoflight.org to find thousands of volunteer opportunities in your community managed by credible, local organizations.
Organizations must prepare to “catch” the post-pandemic wave of engagement

Call to Action: Make sure your programs and opportunities are online and discoverable through aggregators like allforgood.org.

People must understand the impact of their actions and support.

Call to Action: Get articulate about your organization’s impact and outcomes at the enterprise and activity level.

Organizations must focus on delivering an experience.

Call to Action: Evaluate your communication strategy, volunteer management strategy, and program strategy based on the principles of what makes a “worthwhile” opportunity.
Civic life is business action plus community engagement

Call to Action: You are being held accountable that your actions match your rhetoric.

In the age of corporate social justice employees must be number #1

Call to Action: Employee pay, benefits and environmental action matter to the health of your community.

Social responsibility is now a corporate imperative – it is only becoming more important as Gen Z enters the workforce.

Call to Action: Listen and learn in authentic partnership with local leaders to make engagement meaningful to your employees, recruits and customers.

Offer employees the opportunity to get involved in their community through their workplace.

Celebrate and recognize your employees volunteer activities with matching grants and peer recognition.
The solution to each problem that confronts us begins with an individual who steps forward and who says, “I can help.”

President George H.W. Bush, Founder, Points of Light
POINTS OF LIGHT