



FROM NICE TO NECESSARY:

UNLEASHING THE IMPACT OF VOLUNTEERING
THROUGH TRANSFORMATIVE INVESTMENT

MAY 2025





The Points of Light mission is to inspire, equip and mobilize people to create positive change through volunteering and civic engagement.

We accomplish our mission through our programs:



Building Capacity of Nonprofits & Community Leaders



Advancing Corporate Social Impact



Equipping Our Sector Through Convenings, Data and Insights

Our Vision

We envision a world in which every person will discover their power to make a difference, creating healthy communities in vibrant, participatory societies.



BE A LIGHT

EMPOWER VOLUNTEERS
TRANSFORM COMMUNITIES



IMPACT OF OUR WORK: THE POSITIVE CHANGE WE CREATE

We leverage our global ecosystem to **double volunteering by 2035**, bringing value and impact to individuals, communities, and society.

INDIVIDUALS

People live a life of meaning and purpose, are **socially connected**, and embrace their responsibilities to one another and their communities.

COMMUNITY

More nonprofits are able to **meet** their **communities' needs** because they will have the human capital to deliver on their missions.

SOCIETY

Volunteering is **deeply woven into the fabric of society**, enhancing civic engagement, fostering mutual understanding, and bridging divides.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES: OUR ROADMAP TO IMPACT

STRENGTHEN THE VOLUNTEER ECOSYSTEM

We create the conditions for volunteering—and more impactful volunteering—to thrive.

- **Build coalitions** to drive systems change, youth engagement, and technological innovation
- **Grow capacity** of NGO and corporate networks
- **Advance evidence** through research and impact measurement

TRANSFORM CULTURE

We shift mindsets to make service a core part of life, identity, and community.

- **Amplify storytelling** to champion volunteering
- **Launch campaign** to reignite a culture of service
- **Leverage thought leadership** to elevate volunteering as an essential priority

ENABLE OUR ORGANIZATION'S EFFECTIVENESS

We invest in our people, systems, and tools to deliver transformative impact.

- **Empower workforce** by fostering a strong culture
- **Strengthen operations** for financial and organizational health
- **Embrace technology** for greater impact



METHODOLOGY

- The report is informed with research conducted by The Bridgespan Group, a global nonprofit advisory firm, to reframe the value of investing in volunteering
 - Reviewed existing literature
 - Conducted interviews and focus groups with over 60 nonprofit, intermediary, corporate and philanthropic leaders, along with field experts and Points of Light's Global Network affiliate leaders
 - Undertook data analysis on funding trends, staff-to-volunteer ratios and other subjects
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- **REPORT NOTES**
 - Supported by The UPS Foundation and Phillips 66
 - Rich in qualitative data in interviews
 - Key new data points around funding for volunteer engagement



REPORT OVERVIEW

- Examines perceptions and funding of volunteering
- Explores the impact of volunteering on individuals and communities
- Highlights the resources and infrastructure required to fully realize that impact

WHAT WE FOUND

Volunteering is essential for realizing social impact, but there is a cycle of underinvestment that limits its potential. And there is a role for everyone to play in breaking that cycle.

KEY FINDINGS

The impact of volunteers is enormous but hasn't been sufficiently quantified. Nonprofits often track outputs like hours served, and there's substantial research on volunteerism's impact on the individual volunteer, but few nonprofits have the resources to measure deeper outcomes that stem from volunteers—especially those that benefit communities and society at large.

The full cost of volunteer engagement hasn't been sufficiently quantified. Recruiting, training, deploying, recognizing, and retaining volunteers requires significant effort, yet most nonprofits lack tools and capacity to systematically measure and justify these costs.

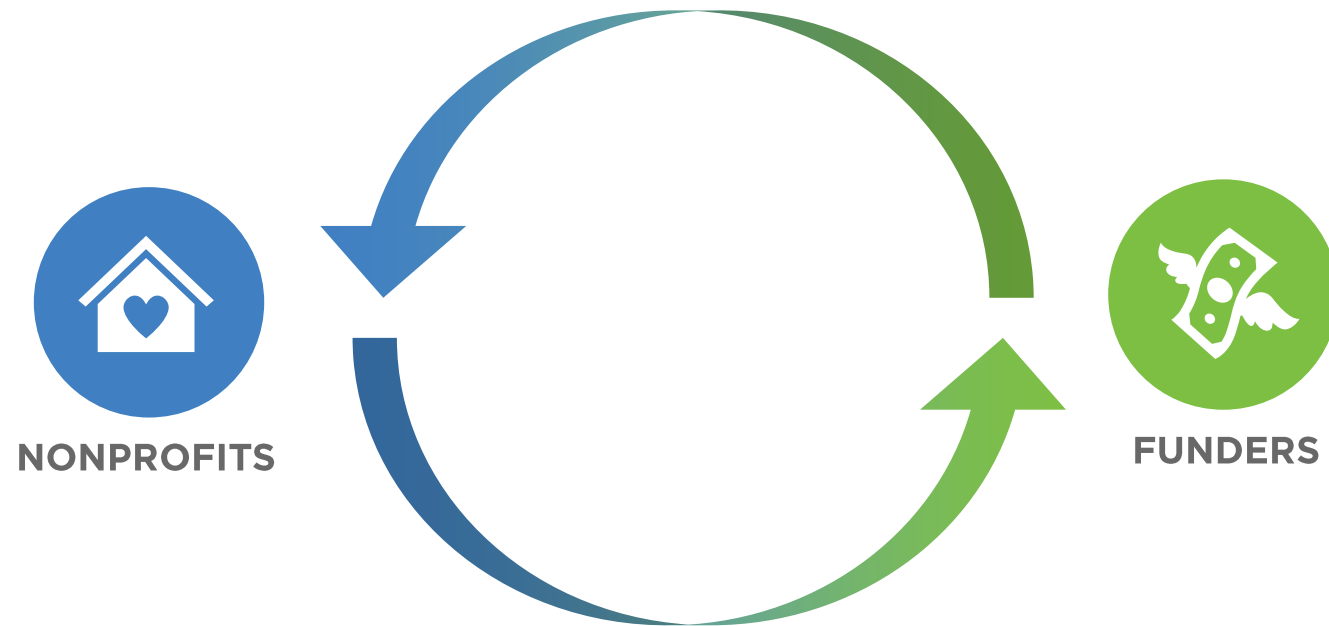
Limited impact and cost data fuels a lack of alignment between nonprofits and funders. There is a critical gap between the perceived and actual value of volunteers in effecting social change. While 72% of nonprofits say volunteers improve service quality, just 25% of funders agree—making it harder to secure necessary investment in volunteer strategies.

Corporate funders support volunteering more than foundations, but still at low levels. Though corporate giving to volunteer engagement is slightly higher, it remains a small portion of total giving. Many companies prioritize volunteerism for employee engagement, but broader impact on community and societal outcomes remains secondary.

This lack of alignment limits funding from institutional funders. Over the past ten years, only 0.19% of total funding from US-based foundations and public charities was directed specifically to volunteer engagement. The top 10 U.S. foundations allocate even less— just 0.07% of their portfolios to volunteer engagement—leaving critical volunteer infrastructure under-resourced.

THE CYCLE OF UNDERINVESTMENT

Nonprofits need more support for volunteer engagement but lack sufficient data on impact and costs, and perceive a lack of funder interest.



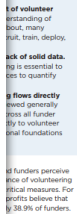
Funders would be open to more support for volunteer engagement if they had better data, but few are proactively supporting the research and systems required to make that possible.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BREAKING THE CYCLE

- **BETTER DATA:** While the impact on the individual volunteer is well explored and documented, **we need to do more to quantify and document the impact of volunteering on communities and society.** This research can provide vital information about how volunteers help achieve the outcomes that align with both nonprofits' and funders' strategic priorities.
- **STRONGER INFRASTRUCTURE:** We need **more resources and standardized tools to help nonprofits and intermediaries** more accurately and consistently assess the full financial investment required for effective volunteer engagement. This data can also help funders better understand the costs of achieving the outcomes they seek
- **MORE DIALOGUE:** Using impact and cost data, we can **encourage dialogue and develop alignment between funders and nonprofits** about the role of volunteers in driving social outcomes. These conversations can help further understanding and drive action to strengthen nonprofit capacity to recruit and deploy volunteers.



POINTS
OF LIGHT





#35YearsofLight