The Changing Face of Volunteerism:
Questionnaire Responses

In November 2012, over sixty volunteer coordinators, managers, teachers, and community leaders involved in Adult Basic Education within the state of Minnesota attended the Minnesota Literacy Council’s Volunteer Management Conference. The theme of the conference was “The Changing Face of Volunteerism.” Our featured presenters covered generational differences within the volunteer force, how to engage new generations of volunteers, shifting volunteer expectations and demographics, and incorporating new technology and social media into volunteer programs. Clearly, the changing nature of volunteerism is a hot topic within the field of volunteer management. However, we were curious to know, had the conference attendees actually observed these changes firsthand within their organizations? Do trends in current research reflect what they have personally experienced? To find out, we asked conference attendees to fill out a questionnaire. Below are their responses:

Question 1: Do you think the nature and practicing of volunteering has changed over time?
- Yes, depending on where you live, population effects and age of population
- Yes, some volunteers expect something more than basic ???
- Research says yes.
- More awareness, very different sources, more in demand due to lack of resources and budget
- Aware of opportunities, see how important the need is
- More opportunities AND ??
- Losing traditional volunteers; younger volunteers who work full time
- Variety of volunteers, different ages and cultures that they grew up in, expectations and needs differ
- Yes, research shows this is the case
- More intergenerational, more technology
- Don’t know
- Yes, organization risk management and recognition
- Yes, in high school just did it to do it, personal experience changes
- Time not available
- Yes, time and ?? greater need
- It’s hard to tell, I’m new to this. I think there’s new energy supplied by current college students in service, learning objectives
- Definitely, at first it was more self-serving because it involved projects children were involved in. Now, it’s about everyone else
- Yes, losing more traditional volunteers
- Ages have changed a lot
- Super historically- yes- since I’ve been volunteering more research/scholarship in the field
- Somewhat.
- Too new! Time will tell
- Yes, more hands on
- Yes, need more diverse opportunities for volunteers
Summary:
- The volunteer coordinators surveyed generally did agree that the nature and practice of volunteering has changed over time.
- Many participants cited they were aware of research that claimed such, and agreed with it.
- Overall, volunteer coordinators said the demographics of volunteers were changing; they were losing their “traditional” volunteers, and gaining youthful, college students. One participant stated that these college students brought a new energy to the volunteer force.
- Overall, the volunteer base is becoming more diverse, different volunteers have different needs and expectations.
- Because of this, the nature of volunteer positions is changing—more hands on work.
- There is more need for volunteers AND more opportunities!
- Volunteers overall, dedicate less time to a single opportunity. Looking for more short term.
- Some coordinators sited the influence of technology on volunteerism.

Question 2: Has your approach to volunteerism and volunteer coordination changed over time?
- Focused on learning more about it this time
- Yes, more imp. ???
- With age, I’ve found a lot influence by volunteering, chance in culture and income??
- More determined? Shame and guilt might be good tools?
- I guess...pre baby and post baby
- Seeing a bigger picture
- Recognizing a wide range of skills and interests
- Help volunteers use all their talents, understand them as individuals
- Using email vs. snail mail; tutor inboxes
- Only been a coordinator- not much experience “over time”
- My knowledge base has improved. I’m becoming more aware of the complexity of the task. More growth than change
- Yes and no. Some core values, expanded knowledge base
- Management of volunteer organization has changed over time
- Yes, with the possibility of becoming a volunteer coordinator instead of a volunteer
- Yes, I’ve learned from my peers and personal development
- Yes, from day to day to long term goals
- It is evolving
- Targeting, yes, strengths and interests
- A larger need
- Yes, more rollover in public schools, but now with ABE I take on a leadership role
- Using email more than snail mail or phone
- Yes, more empathetic

- Yes, broader experience base, sharpened skills
- No
- Yes
- Teacher-coordinator
- Increased realization of the foundation of volunteers
- Target strengths and interest areas, passion
- Multigenerational and diversity training, awareness and cultural competency

Summary:
- Most volunteer coordinators have changed their approach to volunteering and coordinating over time, gaining more knowledge and experience as they have taken on different roles and as the need for volunteers has increased.
- Many volunteer coordinators recognized that their approach as changed as a result of the changing demographic of volunteers. They are to recognize and accommodate a wide range of their volunteers’ skills and interests
- Many have learned to integrate new technologies such as email contact with volunteers

Question 3: Have there been changes in the name, type, or expectations of volunteers in your program? What are they?
- Evolving roles of volunteers at this time
- Not really
- Have not adapted to the times
- People leave for ???, many older
- No
- Neighborhood House provides more support than ??
- Bit of change, recognizing some resources more
- Recognizing need for volunteers, more as resources, get tighter
- Always look for diverse groups of volunteers
- One of the biggest changes- huge influxes of groups (Hmong, etc.)
- Computer experience- knowledge helpful with Rosetta Stone, online now for students
- Yes- added additional rules
- Yes, it’s changing with every volunteer coordinator
- Less demand due to fewer ELS in population
- Numbers of immigrants have declined in our area, less need for volunteers
- Yes, more digital literacy needs
- Yes, transition to more classroom based and less one-on-one
- Yes, name, logo, and marketing
- Yes, how we connect with volunteers, transitions and other name changes, reaction to larger issues
- Volunteers more internationally focused
- More ELL tutors, much GED, more diverse
- In my organization, we simply want more volunteers. Our numbers are sometimes low, so we are working on recruitment
- Yes, we are now trying to find volunteers for more specialized positions; roles more narrowly defined
- Added inboxes for volunteer email. Influences of different group needs and numbers of immigrants
- Computer experience
- More professional development
- Yes, created new positions
- Yes, more diverse
- Classroom assistant changed to co-teacher
- More narrow focus
- Awareness and cultural competency

Summary:
- Some volunteer coordinators have seen changes in the expectations and roles of volunteers in their programs as a result of the changing face of volunteerism, while others have not
- Volunteer coordinators are seeking out more diverse groups of volunteers, or have noticed that overall, the population has become more diverse.
- A greater need for volunteers has left some orgs in need of more volunteers, trying to boost recruitment, recognizing the value of volunteers as resources
- Greater variety of volunteer positions with more specified roles
- Some orgs. Claimed that they did not need as many volunteers, due to a decrease in immigrant population that they service
- Computer experience and digital literacy are more valued in volunteers, due to the influence of technology within the field.