



VolunteerMatch



Volunteering During COVID-19

National Cross-Sector Data on the Impact of
COVID-19 on Volunteering

April 2020 - Volume 1

A hand is pressed against a glass window, with bokeh lights visible in the background. The hand is the central focus, with fingers spread. The background is a warm, golden-brown color with out-of-focus light spots. The glass has some condensation or water droplets on it.

Introduction

In over twenty years of VolunteerMatch, we've never witnessed a more critical time for the social sector to be operating at its highest capacity; however, the virus has gutted nonprofits' financial and human resources. Sheltering in place has left many feeling anxious and uncertain about effectively helping those in need.

That is why we are learning as much as we can about the current challenges of the sector — so we can encourage solution-driven conversations. It is clear that volunteers are needed now more than ever, and that in order to build their numbers and maximize their impact, **we must, as a sector, reimagine what it means to volunteer.**

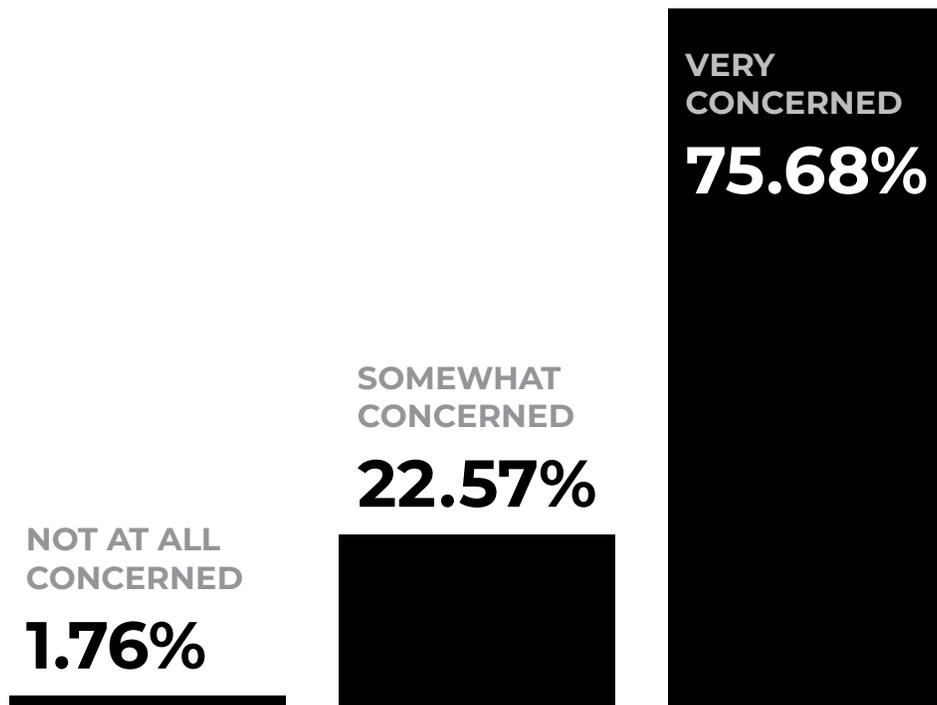
Quantitative Data

During an interactive Webinar that we hosted on March 24th, we polled nearly 800 of our constituents with questions on how COVID-19 is affecting their organization.

1 How concerned are the nonprofits?

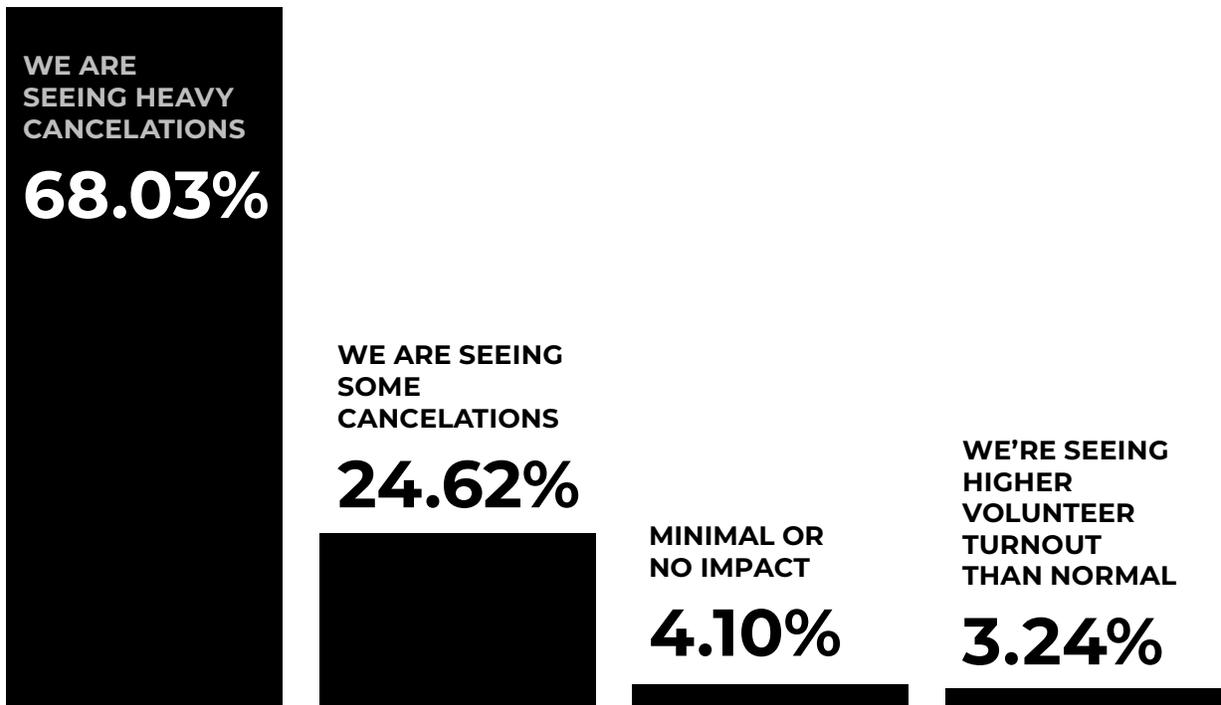
When we asked nonprofit employees how concerned they were about the current environmental, economic, and social conditions impacting their volunteering programs or individual volunteers' activities, 75% of them responded that they were very concerned, and 23% said somewhat concerned (graph 1). Thus, 98% of the nonprofits surveyed had moderate to severe fears about their volunteer programs. Indeed, there is cause for concern. Nearly three-quarters of nonprofits polled as having heavy cancellations, and the last quarter as having some (graph 2). A decrease in volunteers can have drastic effects on a nonprofit's ability to operate. The vast majority, 98% of those surveyed, worry about executing against their current budgets (graph 3).

VolunteerMatch Interactive Discussion 2020



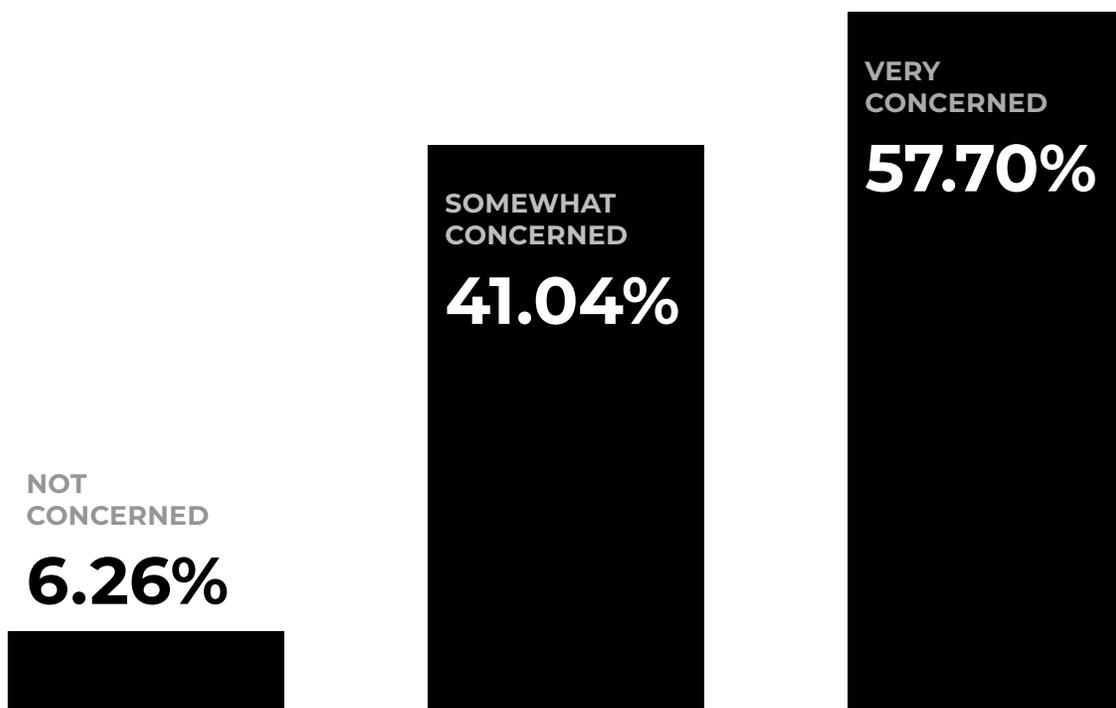
TOTAL RESPONSES 740

- 2 How have the current environmental, economic, and social conditions impacted your volunteer attendance?



TOTAL 463

- 3 How concerned are you about your ability to execute against your current budget in the context of the current environmental, economic, and social conditions?



TOTAL 463



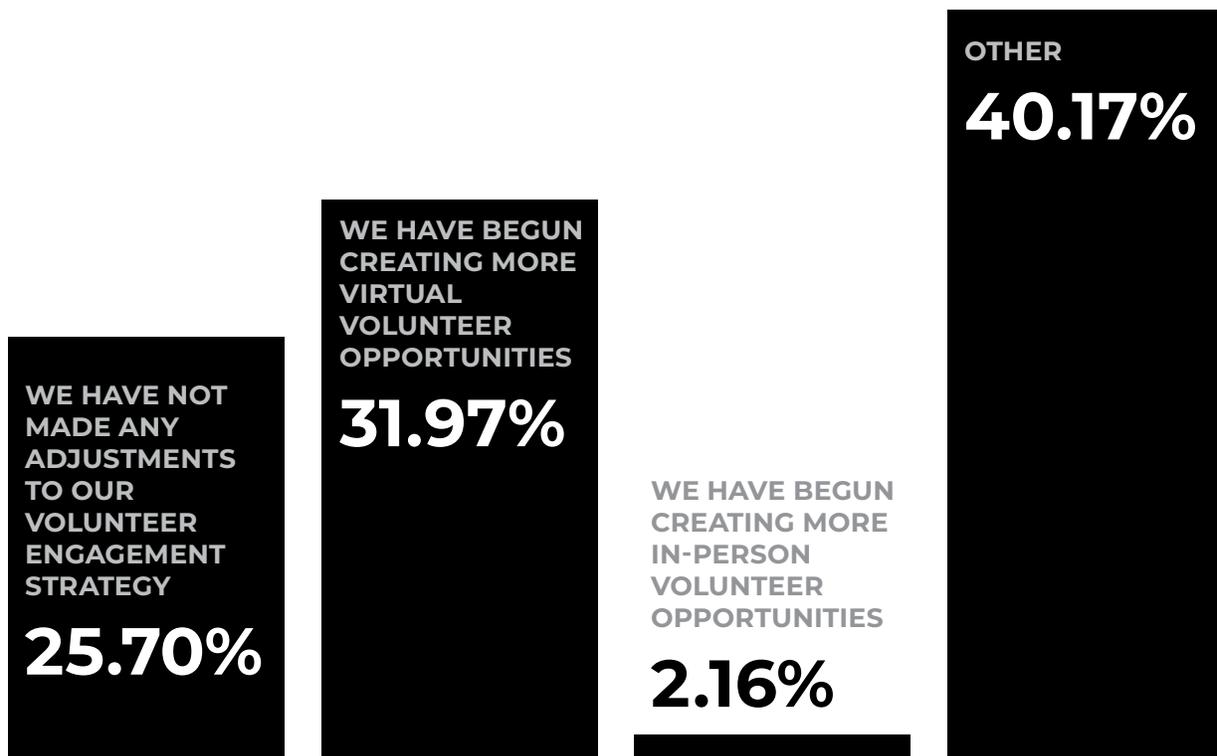
**Nonprofits will
have to adapt
quickly during
these times**

How do we Adapt?

Nonprofits generally have well thought out ways on how to engage volunteers, but they will have to adapt quickly during these times. Of nonprofits surveyed, 26% had not made any adjustments to their strategies while 32% were creating more virtual volunteer opportunities (graph 4).

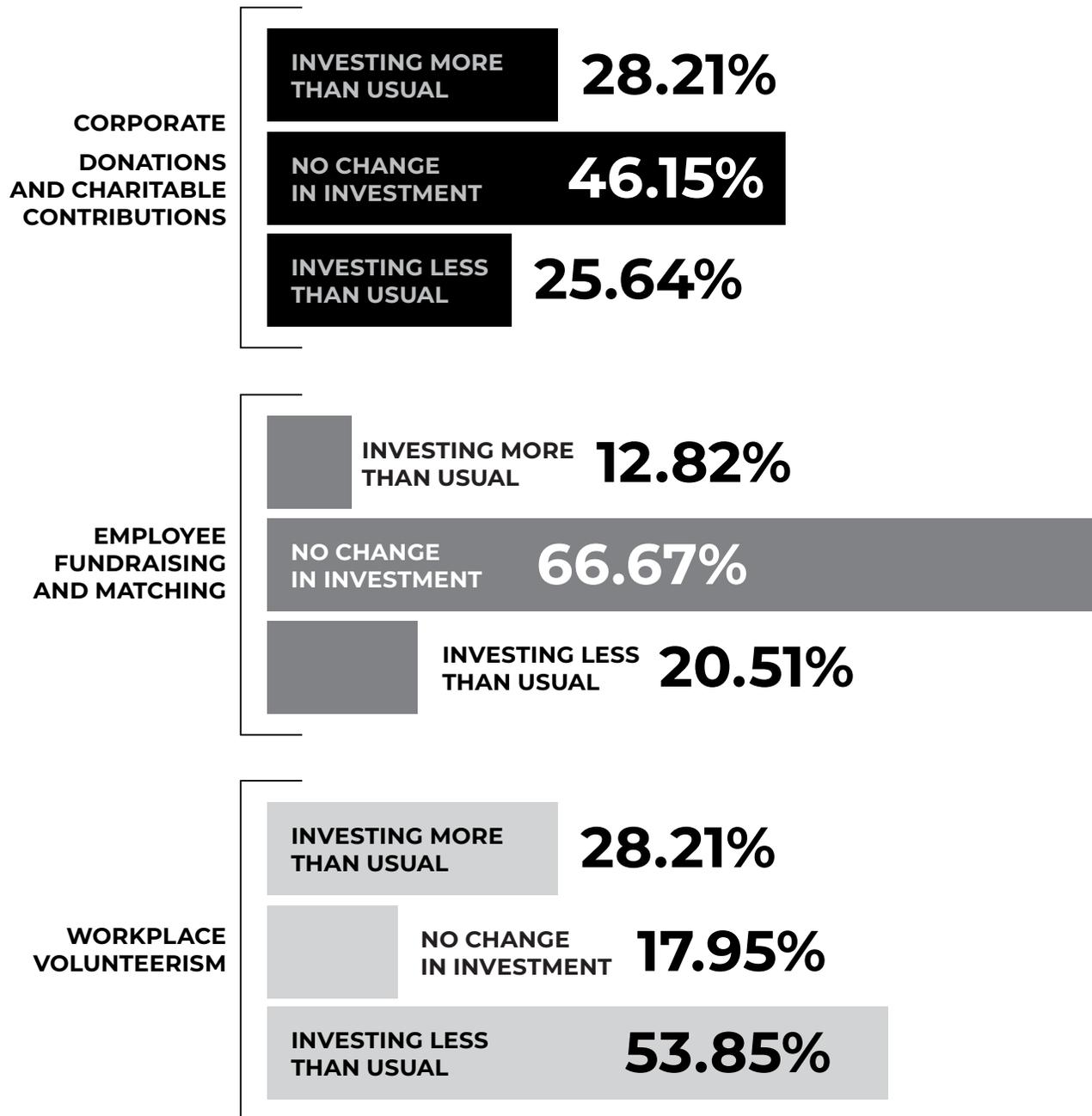
For businesses, we were curious about employee volunteer engagement. We asked whether the current conditions were impacting decisions around investments in workplace volunteerism and other Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives. In terms of corporate donations, employee fundraising, and workplace volunteerism, we see that the majority marked either “no change in investment” or “investing less than usual” (graph 5).

- 4 In what ways have you adjusted your volunteer engagement strategy given current environmental, economic, and social conditions?



TOTAL 463

- 5 How are the current environmental, economic, and social conditions impacting how you make decisions around investments in workplace volunteerism or other CSR initiatives?



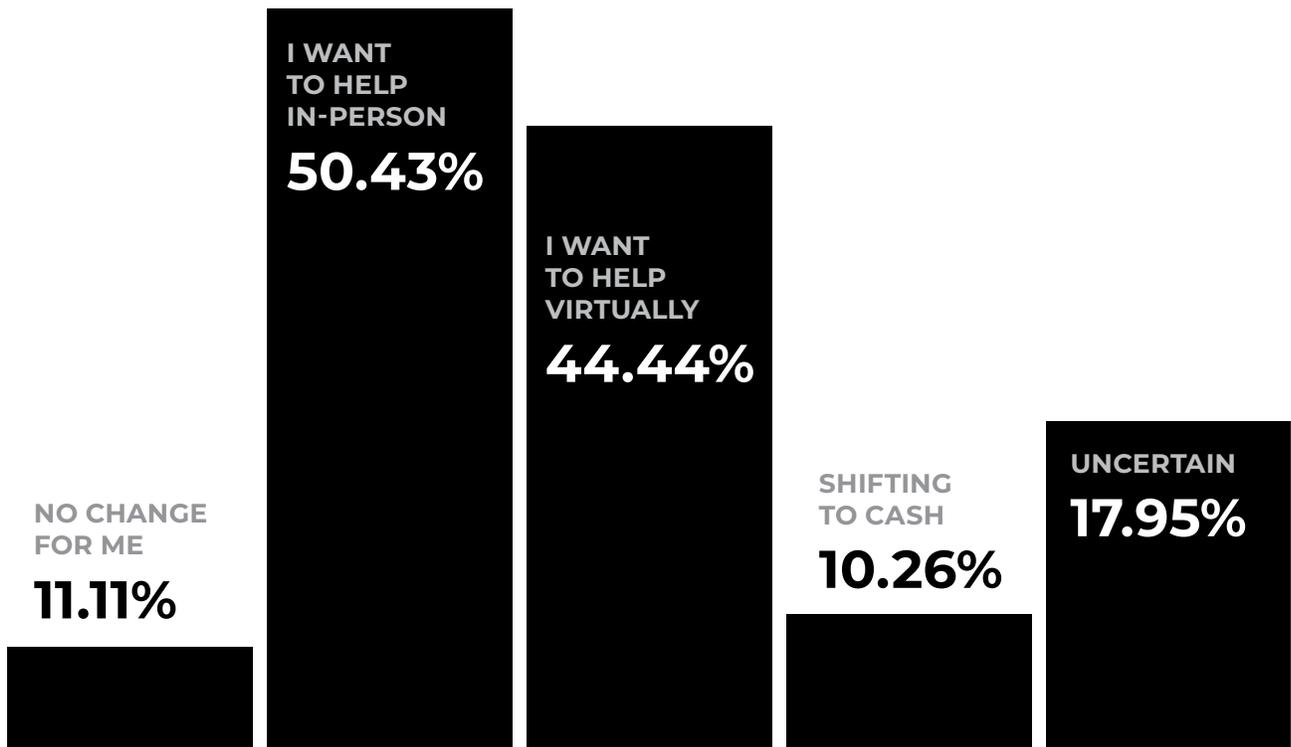


As an organization, what can you do to support nonprofits during this time? It all starts with gaining a deeper understanding of their needs. The first step is asking them where they need help. It could be that they need help with crisis planning or transitioning to a remote workforce and volunteer force. Another question you could ask is how your expertise may be helpful during this time? Some organizations may feel so overwhelmed with needs that this would be a good starting point for them. Then, you can see if anyone on your team aligns with those skills and you can create cross-functional teams to help them through the transition. As your staff is most likely remote given the stay at home orders, this is another way for teams to connect and build stronger relationships by doing good.

How is Volunteering Changing?

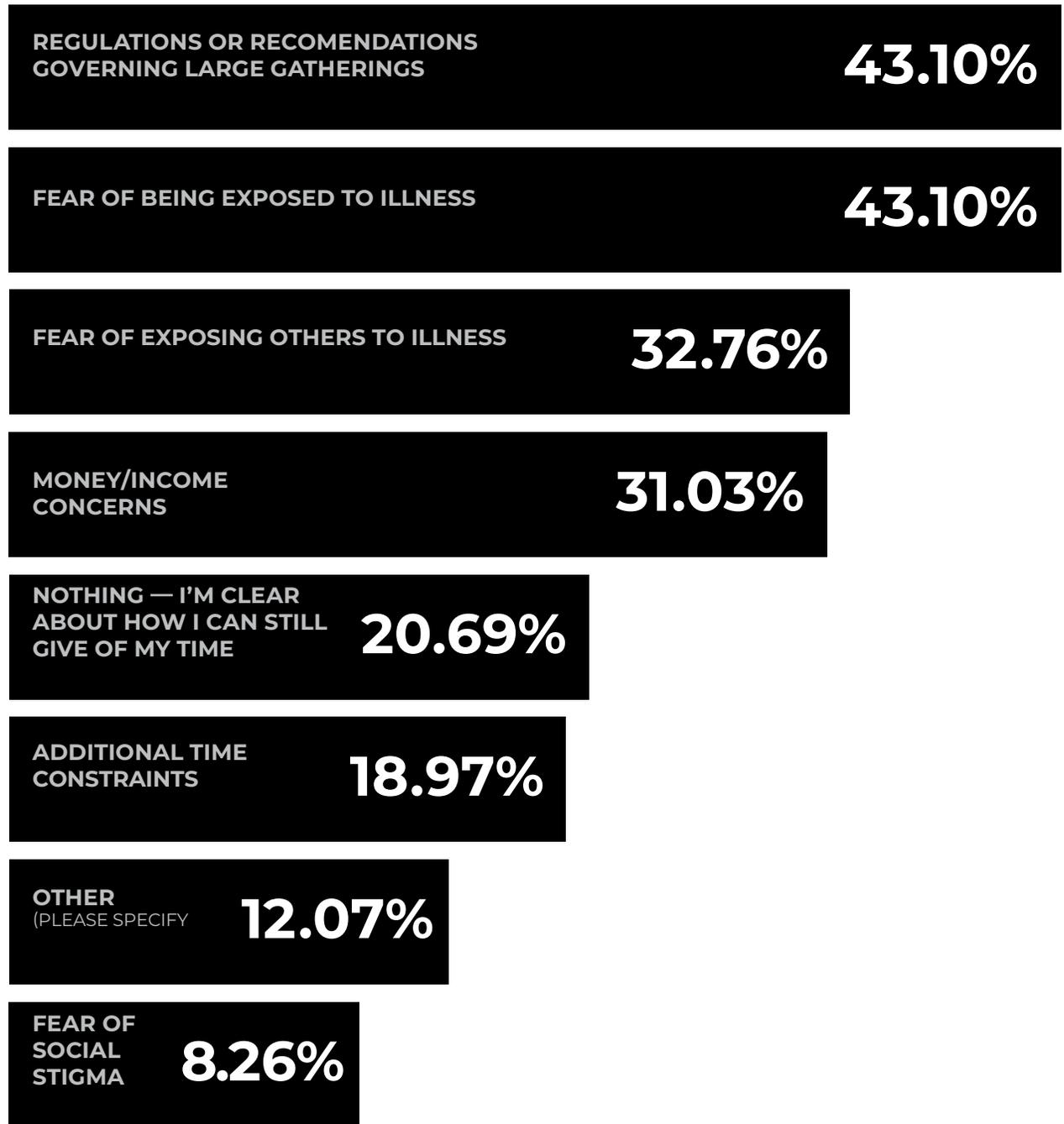
The current crisis compels us to think differently about our own volunteering. Half of the respondents who were volunteers answered that they want to help in-person and would like ideas on how to do so, while (44%) are comfortable switching to virtual volunteering (graph. 6). Around 10% were considering shifting their giving from time to monetary donations. We also learned what the greatest barriers to volunteering were with 43% of respondents citing the recommendations against gathering sizes as the greatest deterrent (graph 7). Only one-fifth of respondents felt as though there were no barriers to volunteering, and that they were clear on how they can continue to give their time.

- 6 How are the current environmental, economic, and social conditions changing how you think about your volunteering efforts?
(Choose all that apply)



TOTAL 117

7 What barriers might get in the way of your volunteering commitment during this time?
(Choose all that apply)



TOTAL 58

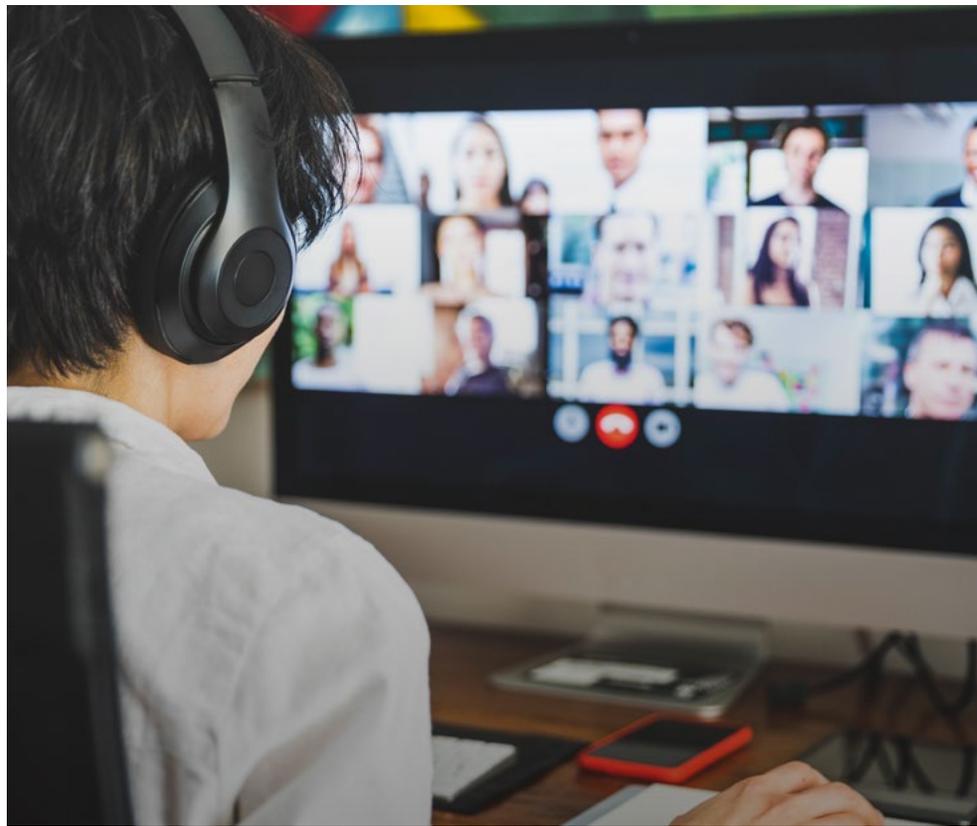
Qualitative Data

We at VolunteerMatch want to help you navigate the brave new world of volunteering during COVID-19. We surveyed over 1000 of our constituents, nonprofits and for-profits alike, with an open-ended question about their challenges, and for the past few weeks, have hosted a Slack Workspace, where members can collaborate on an ongoing basis. Dedicated do-gooders have been lighting up the feed with suggestions, solutions, and support. It's exciting to watch nonprofits shift their attention from what volunteers can't do during these times to what they can. As one constituent said, "Flexibility is key, as things are changing every day."

CSRs

When we sent out the open-ended question survey, approximately 20% of our corporate respondents inquired about virtual volunteering — what it is, how it works, and how to implement it. One constituent asked, "How do we offer assistance in a timely way without overwhelming nonprofits that are scrambling to understand their needs?" We cannot emphasize enough how important it is to listen to what nonprofits are saying, and then evaluate what you can do to maximize your impact.

Are you part of an organization that can offer COVID-19 relief grants? Do you manage a team with a variety of skill sets that could be utilized for virtual volunteering? Do you have a large social media following on which you could promote the needs of a nonprofit partner? Is there a way your team could bond over Zoom as they volunteer together?



Virtual Volunteering Opportunities

One respondent noted that “nonprofits are overburdened and don’t have time to think of creative virtual or DIY volunteer opportunities.” To help get the ideas flowing around virtual volunteering, we have made a list of some of the cool opportunities on our site.



Writing Grants



Public Relations



Content Editor



Creating Digital Art



Web Development



Coordinating Online



Editing Videos



Accounting Support



Fundraisers



Designing Websites



Coaching / Mentoring



Coding



Making Greeting Cards



Developing Curriculum



Tutoring



Sewing Masks

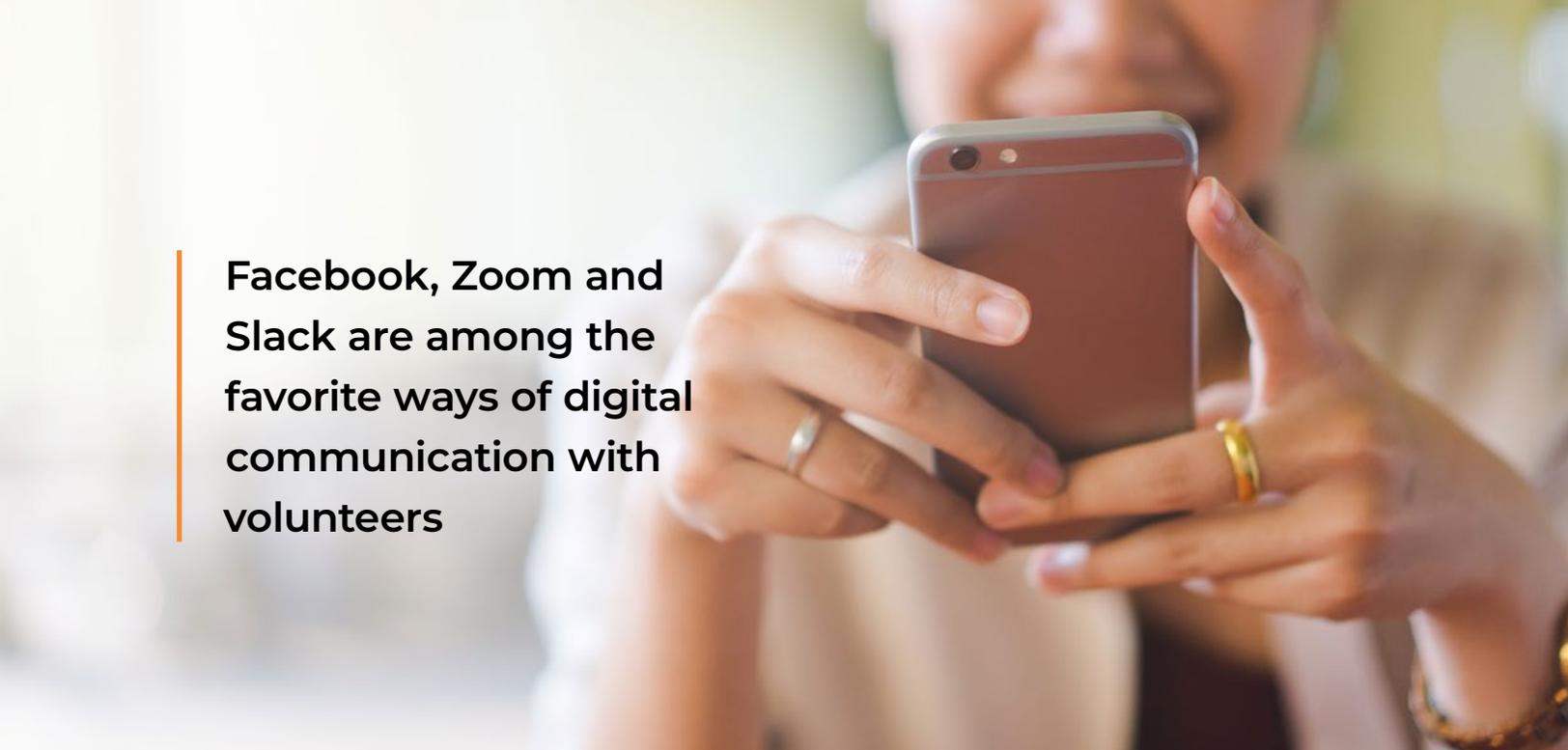


Chatting with Homebound Seniors



Dance Instruction

Visit: www.volunteermatch.org/virtual-volunteering



Facebook, Zoom and Slack are among the favorite ways of digital communication with volunteers

Qualitative Data

Remote Volunteering

We also see nonprofits developing workarounds for volunteer opportunities that cannot be made virtual. Organizations are mobilizing their existing volunteer force to respond to new needs in the community — like running errands and delivering groceries for neighbors that need to stay fully isolated. One Volunteer Coordinator for Americorps wrote in the Slack group, “Our upcoming opportunities are social distancing friendly--doing yard work and mowing lawns for seniors.”

Communicating Systems

Nonprofits want to know how to communicate with volunteers in a way that compels both immediate and long-term support. There is no precedent for our current situation — no protocols or pre-existing terms of engagement. Often, nonprofits have a substantial elderly population of volunteers, which is also the population most at-risk for COVID-19, and least comfortable with technology. One volunteer manager asked, “How to keep Docents, especially elderly (70-80yrs) engaged and connected,” she said the solution, “Can’t be too high tech or overwhelming.” Even with outreach to digital natives, there’s uncertainty: “Communications with volunteers—how much is too much?” It is clear from our Slack channel that Facebook, Zoom, and Slack are among the favorite ways of digital communication with volunteers. To reach those who are less tech-savvy, regular phone calls seem to be doing the trick.



Fundraising

For many, losing volunteers comes secondary to the financial toll of the virus. As one constituent said, “We have lost a lot of volunteers, but with our needs changing — what we need most, is monetary donations.” For most organizations, critical fundraising events have been postponed indefinitely. Another respondent told us: “We are an events-based organization. We are working to keep our community engaged during this time when we cannot hold events. This is also affecting our fundraising capabilities.” Business cannot go on as usual which is why it is so important to get creative. On Slack, we heard an interesting suggestion from Angelique:

“Hi all. My name is Angelique and I’m the Coordinator of Volunteer Services at Habitat for Humanity of Orange County (CA). We have currently cut all volunteer opportunities and I’m looking for ways to keep our volunteers engaged in the downtime. We also had to cut one of our biggest fundraising events of the year, but our Fund Development team did an amazing job at shifting gears last minute and turning it into a virtual drive! We nearly hit our goal and brought in more funds than years past! It was great to see everyone come together and rally behind the mission in such a time of uncertainty. If you want to check out what we did, [habitatoc.org/drive](https://www.habitatoc.org/drive) or on FB and Insta @HabitatOC.”

Other ideas for virtual fundraising might be dance-a-thons or phone-a-thons, charity live-stream events, or an online auction/raffle. Everyone is worried about what the long-term effects of the crisis will be on the economy so fundraising efforts must be conducted mindfully. Engaging people in a unique and fun virtual event that breaks up feelings of claustrophobia during quarantine will be a gift to donors as much as a donation to a nonprofit.

Volunteer Appreciation and Engagement

Because so many people are struggling to adapt to their new ways of living, it is especially important to show volunteers how much they are appreciated. Volunteer managers know that this is necessary for keeping volunteer forces motivated. We heard many inventive ideas on how to show your volunteers some love during these times. One member of our Slack community wrote, “I’ve got a project in the works — I’ve reached out to our ESL learners and asked them to send in photos or short videos saying thank you to their teachers. Then, once I get enough in, I’ll stitch them together into a video to send to all of our volunteers. It’s feeling really good to see people’s faces and hear their voices, and I’m excited to be able to send a feel-good piece out to people soon.”



Conclusion

We are inspired by the determination of nonprofits to collaborate in finding solutions during these stressful times. They are working together as a sector in turning volunteer and fundraising efforts into virtual opportunities. But they cannot do it alone. As one respondent told us, “People are good. Kindness overshadows the uncertainty and anxiety in this current climate.” The health of the social sector does not depend on nonprofit efforts alone. Businesses, government agencies, school districts, and individual citizens must listen to nonprofits and get involved. Everyone can be kind. Everyone can help.

“People are good. Kindness overshadows the uncertainty and anxiety in this current climate.”

VolunteerMatch helps thousands of organizations each year to inspire, recruit, and engage volunteers — both virtually and in person. Learn more about how we can empower you at solutions.volunteermatch.org, and we encourage you to contact Laura Plato, Chief Solutions Officer, with any questions you might have (laplato@volunteermatch.org).



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