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## Juggling Multiple Roles: An Examination of Role Conflict and Its Brief Report: Relationship to Older Adult Volunteer Satisfaction and Retention

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**CENTER ON AGING**

**Juggling Multiple Roles:  
 An Examination of Role Conflict and Its Relationship to  
 Older Adult Volunteer Satisfaction and Retention**

**BRIEF REPORT**

Center on Aging, University of Maine

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**Introduction**

The face of older adult volunteering has been changing over time requiring volunteer programs to innovate and respond to the new realities of the “retirement years.” This shift has surfaced new questions to be explored that will help the nonprofit sector anticipate and respond accordingly. In the spring of 2018 a multi-phase study, funded by the Corporation for National and Community Service, was launched to examine: 1) the relationship between holding multiple roles (such as caregiving, working for pay, and informal volunteering) and older adult volunteering outcomes; 2) the benefits that older adults gain from volunteering; and 3) the strategies used by both volunteers and volunteer programs to help older adults juggle increasingly “full plates” of activities. The study yielded valuable information about how older adults and their volunteer programs are able to avoid and address role conflict. Findings from this study provide implications for volunteer program practices that can be applied to help recruit and sustain older adults as volunteers.

This report provides a brief summary of the key findings from this study on older adults and their volunteering. A full technical dissertation report for the Phase I volunteer survey can be [found online](#).

Either report is also available by request from the study PI, Dr. Jennifer Crittenden at [jennifer.crittenden@maine.edu](mailto:jennifer.crittenden@maine.edu).

## Background

Older adults, a key group of volunteers for the nonprofit sector, provide an estimated economic value of \$162 billion per year to their communities (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2008). Not only does continued volunteering among this population provide the opportunity for substantial positive economic impact, but volunteering among older adults has also been associated with numerous benefits for older adults themselves. Some of the benefits associated with volunteering include: increased physical and mental wellness through increased physical activity; increased ability to cope with stress and adjust to life changes; improved self-esteem and perceived health status; higher rates of life satisfaction; increased knowledge; and, in some cases, a longer lifespan. Benefits also include improved health behaviors, lower rates of disability and depression, and skills acquisition. Furthermore, volunteering has even been cited to improve cognitive functioning, as it provides an outlet for sustained social, cognitive, and physical activity (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2010; Kopera-Frye & Massey, 2014; Windsor, Anstey, & Rodgers, 2008).

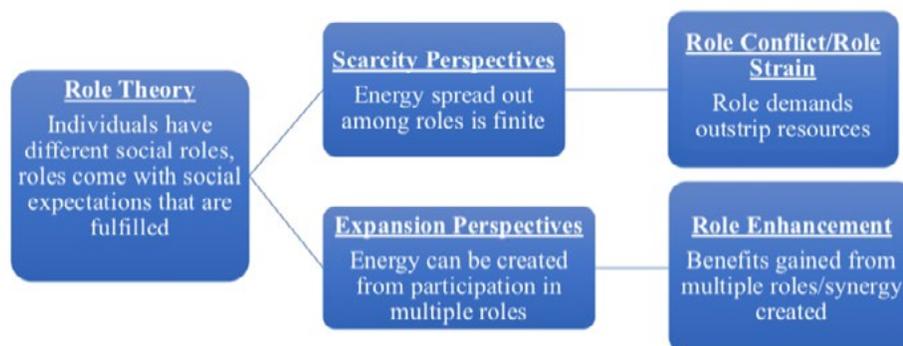
The face of retirement and aging is shifting in the U.S. as older adults are increasingly filling multiple social roles, such as caregiving, working for pay, or volunteering on a formal or informal basis. Approximately 40% of adults aged 55 and older are engaged in the workforce, with this percentage continuing to grow (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). Additionally, the likelihood of maintaining a role as a family caregiver increases with age. Currently half of all caregivers in the U.S. are 50 years of age or older and one third of caregivers are over the age of 65 (Family Caregiver Alliance, 2016). In addition to formal volunteering through an established program or agency, approximately 63% of adults participate in some form of informal helping, such as participating in religious or faith community activities and providing aid to their friends, family, and local community (Morrow-Howell, Carden, & Sherraden, 2005; Tang, Morrow-Howell, & Choi, 2010). It is important to note that while informal and formal volunteering are related, they are conceptualized as two distinct roles

as they vary in the types of recipients served and the context in which help is delivered (Morrow-Howell et al., 2005; Tang et al., 2010).

Despite known positive outcomes associated with volunteering, the rate of formal volunteering is decreasing as rates of participation in other roles are increasing. In fact, only about a quarter of older adults currently participate in formal volunteering (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2015). According to role theory (see figure 1), this decrease in participation may be attributed to role conflict, wherein the demands of multiple roles outstrip one's resources such as time, energy, and stamina (Goode, 1960). Yet, an alternative pathway is also put forward through this theory in which individuals reap benefits from having multiple social roles. As illustrated in figure one below, there are two different lenses from which to view the roles that we fill. A role scarcity perspective suggests that the more roles and activities we take on, the less energy we leave to fulfill other roles in our lives. However, from an expansion perspective, the more roles we take on, the more opportunity we have for building synergy and reaping benefits that help to replenish our energy (Marks, 1977).

One of the aims of this research study was to investigate whether higher levels of role conflict were predictive of satisfaction with, participation in, and/or intention to stay within the volunteer role. Role scarcity suggests that the more roles we have, the less likely we are to be satisfied with volunteering, the less likely we are to participate in volunteering, and the more likely we are to depart from the formal volunteering role. A role expansion lens suggests that holding multiple roles would be associated with higher levels of satisfaction with, participation in, and intention to remain in the volunteering roles, as these different held roles bring interconnected benefits.

Additional topics of investigation included learning about strategies used by older adults to cope with role conflict, identifying approaches that programs use to assist older adults with role conflict, and the ways in which benefits of volunteering helped older adults to counterbalance the strain of having multiple demanding roles.



**Figure 1.** This chart indicates the two pathways identified by role theory, namely scarcity and expansion perspectives.

## Methods

In order to address these areas of interest, two phases of the current study were carried out in partnership with Retired and Senior Volunteer Programs (RSVPs) across the US.

### Phase I Volunteer Survey

For Phase I research, a volunteer survey was constructed. The first section of this survey consisted of Likert-type and fill-in-the-blank items used to measure participant demographics, role conflict, volunteer satisfaction, intention of the volunteer to remain in their role, and volunteer participation. An additional series of open-ended questions allowed respondents to express personal experience, including questions that explored the benefits associated with volunteering accrued by older volunteers that could combat role conflict. In the demographic portion of the survey, some of the questions included, "In a typical month, how many hours do you work for pay?"; "In a typical month, how many hours do you spend helping a friend or relative age 18 or older who has trouble taking care of him or herself because of a physical or mental illness, disability, or for some other reason? (includes caring for them directly or arranging for their care by others)?"

The survey also included modified items from the Work Family Conflict Scale (Haslam et al., 2015) rated on a scale of 1 to 7 (Likert-type; 1=Very Strongly Disagree; 7=Very Strongly Agree), such as, "My RSVP volunteer performance suffers because of my [paid work/caregiving] commitments," and "It is difficult for me to concentrate when I am volunteering with RSVP because I am so exhausted by my [paid work/caregiving] responsibilities."

The survey also included a number of open-ended, write-in response questions, such as, "In what ways has your volunteer work through RSVP helped you in your caregiving?"; "In what ways has your volunteer work through RSVP helped you in other volunteer and helping work (not caregiving)?" and, "Please provide other thoughts you would like to share about your volunteer work, paid work, caregiving, or unpaid help you are providing in your community."

In order to separate out different roles, definitions were developed for working volunteers, caregiver volunteers, and volunteers who participated in informal and non-RSVP volunteering. The working volunteer role was defined as one or more hours per month in which one worked for pay. The caregiver volunteer role was defined as one or more hours per month in which one engaged in helping a friend or relative 18 years of age or

older who had trouble taking care of themselves due to physical or mental illness, disability, or another reason. Finally, the informal volunteer role was defined as one or more hours per month in which one provided unpaid help to others outside the formal setting of the RSVP. The data analysis took into account both the presence of these roles and the intensity (hours/month) of the roles held by respondents.

In Phase I of the study, a national sample of volunteers who were 55 years of age or older was recruited from RSVP programs through a partnership with the National Association of RSVP Directors and the National Senior Corps Association. Ultimately, 55 programs across 27 states circulated the survey to their volunteers. Each site completed a program profile form which provided basic background information about the RSVP site. Based on these data, the participating RSVPs represented a range of program configurations. On average, the participating RSVP sites hosted 385 volunteers a year, with a program range of 80 to 1,800 volunteers a year found across the survey sites. Through these sites, a total of 6,796 surveys were distributed by mail and email. An introductory letter was delivered to potential participants one week before the surveys were sent out. A total of 1,697 surveys were completed and returned, accounting for 25% of the surveys distributed.

### Phase II

Phase II of this research study included the distribution of an online survey to RSVP program staff, including program directors and coordinators, who were associated with the 55 participating RSVP sites that responded to Phase I of the current study. The online survey contained two components. The first

section was a profile form that included 9 questions regarding background information on the size, scope, associated host organization(s), and volunteer makeup of the participating programs represented among the respondents. The data gathered from the first section was used to provide context for qualitative responses associated with the second survey section.

The second section included seven open-ended questions designed to collect information regarding how RSVP programs support their volunteers who are also caregivers and workers. The survey questions were as follows: 1) What strategies have you seen volunteers use to juggle their RSVP volunteering and caregiving responsibilities?; 2) What strategies have you seen working volunteers use to juggle their RSVP volunteering and working responsibilities?; 3) In what ways has your program supported those older adults who are caregiving and volunteering with RSVP simultaneously?;

In Phase 1 of the study, 55 programs across 27 states circulated the survey to their volunteers. Each site completed a program profile form which provided basic background information about the RSVP site. Phase II included the distribution of an online survey to RSVP program staff, including program directors and coordinators, who were associated with the 55 participating RSVP sites that responded to Phase I of the current study.

4) In what ways has your program supported those older adults who are working and volunteering with RSVP simultaneously?; 5) What advice would you give to other volunteer managers about supporting older adult volunteers who are also working?; and 6) What advice would you give to other volunteer managers about supporting older adult volunteers who are also caregivers? A final question gave participants the opportunity to add any additional thoughts: "Are there any additional comments you would like to make about older adults who are juggling multiple roles in addition to their RSVP volunteer work?"

A total of 21 complete surveys were returned, representing programs across 14 different states. The participating RSVP programs had been in operation for an average of 35 years at the time of the survey, with a range of 3 to 47 years overall. On average, these sites served 438 volunteers (with a range of 85 to 900 volunteers overall) through an average of 73 community volunteer stations (SD=56.82). The study sample consisted of 17 program directors, 3 program coordinators, and 1 office manager. The respondents had been employed with their respective RSVP programs for an average of 7.5 years with a range of 1 to 29 years of experience across the sample.

## Volunteer Survey Results

### Demographics

The average age for participating RSVP volunteers in the Phase I study was 72.4 years, with 50% of respondents falling into a range of 66 to 75 years of age. Approximately 72% of respondents identified as female, nearly 27% identified as male, and 0.8% identified as 'another gender.' Over half of the respondents reported having a bachelor's degree or higher, whereas only 15.7% of the sample identified as having completed high school or less. Ninety-one percent (91%) of the participants identified as White, 5% as African American, 1.2% as multi-race, and the racial categories of Asian, Native American, and the "another race" write-in option represented slightly more than 1% combined across the three. Of the RSVP volunteers who participated in the current study, 61% reported being married or having a partner, 21% reported being widowed, and 11% reported

being separated or divorced. See Appendix A for corresponding demographic graphs and figures.

### Volunteer Participation, Satisfaction, and Intent to Remain

The respondents had spent a range of time serving with their RSVP program from less than a year to 31 years of program participation with an average of approximately 7 years. Respondents spent an average of 22.62 hours per month participating in formal RSVP volunteering with a range of 0 to 220 hours per month. Scores representing satisfaction with volunteering were created using five items which were scored on a scale of 1 to 4, with a reported range of 4 (very unsatisfied) to 20 (very satisfied). The average score for this sample was 16.84, indicating a high level of satisfaction overall. Intent to remain with RSVP within the next year was scaled between 1 (certainly not) and 7 (certainly), with mean score 6.47, indicated a high level of intention to remain among those who participated in the current study.

Higher levels of formal volunteer participation were noted among volunteers who were older, non-female, had lower incomes, and lower education levels. No significant differences in volunteer participation were noted by health status, marital status, or race. Although reports of volunteer satisfaction were relatively high across the sample, satisfaction with volunteering was found to vary significantly by gender, health, income, and education, but not by factors such as age, marital status, and race. Higher satisfaction scores were reported by individuals with less education, females, and those with higher levels of health and well-being. Additional statistical testing revealed that satisfaction also varied significantly by income, wherein those with lower incomes reported higher satisfaction scores. Intent to remain within the formal volunteering role was found to vary by age, gender, health status, and income, but not by marital status, race, or education. Scores of higher intent to remain volunteering were generally reported by baby boomers (individuals born between 1946-1964), female volunteers, those with higher levels of health and well-being, and those with higher income levels.

**Research Question One: Does role conflict predict satisfaction with, participation in, and/or intention to leave the volunteer role?**

### Role Load and Role Conflict

On average, participants in the current study held 1.19 additional roles beyond formal volunteering. This additional paid work, caretaking, and/or non-RSVP volunteering accounted for an average of 33.8 hours of time and effort each month with baby boomers reporting higher role hours (M = 59.57, SD = 68.70) and higher total roles (M = 1.29, SD = 0.80) when compared to their older counterparts role hours (M = 48.94, SD = 62.85) and total roles (M = 1.07, SD = 0.78). Those with an associate's degree or higher also reported a higher number of roles additional to volunteering (M = 1.26, SD = 0.79) than



those without ( $M = 1.06$ ,  $SD = 0.79$ ), as did participants who reported “good” or better health and well-being ( $M = 1.20$ ,  $SD = 0.79$ ) compared to those with less than “good” health and well-being ( $M = 0.96$ ,  $SD = 0.84$ ). No differences in role load intensity or role total were found with regard to gender, marital status, income, and race.

Role conflict, with a median of 5 out of a maximum and high of 35 ( $M = 7.49$ ,  $SD = 5.05$ ), was also reported at lower levels among individuals of female gender, white race, and those reporting higher levels of perceived health. Role conflict was found to be positively correlated with role load, both as measured by the number of hours spent in different roles and the total number of roles held.

**Initial analyses indicated an association between higher levels of role conflict and lower levels of volunteer satisfaction and intention to remain in the volunteer role.**



### Role Conflict and Participation

Initial analyses indicated an association between higher levels of role conflict and lower levels of volunteer satisfaction and intention to remain in the volunteer role. Additional analyses were run to investigate whether role conflict would continue to account for changes in satisfaction and intention to remain by statistically accounting for age, income, education, health, marital status, race (Caucasian), and gender (female) (this statistical process will be referred to as “controlling for covariates” below). The initial results indicated that role conflict significantly predicted a small portion of variance in volunteer satisfaction and intention to remain. However, after controlling for covariates, role conflict was no longer found to have a significant relationship with participant’s intent to remain. Role conflict was not found to be a significant predictor of participation in any of the statistical tests performed. These findings indicated that role conflict is a predictor of satisfaction but it is not an accurate predictor for intent to remain or volunteer participation.

### Role Load and Participation

Initial statistical analyses, which were run to investigate the impact of role load, indicated that a higher number of total roles held by a volunteer were associated with lower levels of volunteer participation. Role load was not found to be a significant predictor for satisfaction or intent to remain. After controlling for covariates (age, income, education, etc.), the unique relationship remained. However, when role load was measured in terms of the number of hours spent in different roles, no associations were found with volunteer participation, satisfaction, or intent to remain, by any statistical tests

run. Role load, as measured in total roles, was a predictor of volunteer participation. Role load, as measured in hours, was not found to be a predictor of any of the volunteer outcomes of interest.

**Role load, as measured in total roles, was a predictor of volunteer participation. Role load, as measured in hours, was not found to be a predictor of any of the volunteer outcomes of interest.**



**Research Question Two: What are the compensatory strategies used by older adults to navigate role conflict and what benefits do older adults accrue in their volunteer roles that could effectively counterbalance role conflict?**

Answers provided by older volunteers to open-ended survey questions were used to explore the following guiding research questions:

**Guiding question 1: What role-related benefits are derived from volunteering that impact the caregiver, worker, and informal volunteer roles?**

**Guiding question 2: What strategies have older adult volunteers employed to combat role conflict?**

Narratives from the open-ended questions were coded and separated into two categories to be explored. The first, guided by research question 1 above, was to identify specific benefits derived from formal volunteering that were applied to other social roles. The second was to identify the strategies that older adults used to combat role conflict.



## Volunteering Benefits

Role-related benefits derived from formal volunteering included positive outcomes that were both directly and indirectly applied to different social roles. Direct benefits included new skills and techniques that could be applied to other roles, new information and resources, new role opportunities, networking and connecting, and respite. The new skills and techniques that were identified ranged from broad categories, such as social, organization, and time management skills to specific, niche skills such as those needed for tax or meal preparation.

In addition, respondents noted a variety of more indirect benefits including socialization, personal growth, a greater perspective and awareness of the needs of others, positive emotional benefits, the opportunity to stay busy and active, and physical and cognitive health improvements.

**Direct benefits are illustrated by the following participant quotes:**

Theme	Illustrative Quote
<b>New skills and techniques</b>	"[RSVP] has given me the opportunity to see many different facets and approaches to provide better care and service as a caregiver." #556
<b>New information and resources</b>	"My RSVP assignment has given me information on Medicare services that are helpful in my caregiving responsibility." #8767
<b>New role opportunities</b>	"Volunteering at the county museum led directly to my current job with that museum." #8484
<b>Networking and connection</b>	"[RSVP has helped me to] coordinate with community agencies." #450
<b>Respite</b>	"[Volunteering] relieves work stress." #8443

**Indirect benefits are illustrated by the following participant quotes:**

Theme	Illustrative Quote
<b>Socialization</b>	"It [formal volunteering] has widened my circle of friends." #721

<b>Personal growth</b>	"I have more self-confidence than I did before." #242
<b>Greater perspective</b>	"I am more aware of other's needs and their lack of what I sometimes take for granted." #613
<b>Positive emotional benefits</b>	"Through volunteering with RSVP I am a happier person." #8237
<b>Staying active/busy</b>	"[Volunteering] represents different ways to stay active now that I am mostly retired." #8957
<b>Physical and cognitive health benefits</b>	"My physical condition has improved and I have more energy." #9032



## Compensatory Strategies

A number of different kinds of conflicts and barriers to volunteering were reported by participants via the write-in responses, including role conflict (which was separated into worker, caregiver, and informal volunteer-related conflict for the purposes of the study), health-related barriers, and time-related barriers.

Types of conflict and barriers are illustrated by the following participant quotes:

Theme	Illustrative Quote
<b>Caregiver conflict</b>	"I was a caregiver for my husband for 8 years. He had Alzheimer's and has since passed away. I had to give up my RSVP work while caring for him, but I am now a facilitator for an Alzheimer's support group." #420
<b>Worker conflict</b>	"I most recently took on 2 part-time jobs and have taken a temporary leave from my RSVP jobs. I plan to resume my RSVP duties this summer." #476
<b>Informal volunteering</b>	"If I was not so involved in church activities, I would volunteer more often with RSVP." #9188
<b>Health-related barriers</b>	"I do not volunteer more than 1 day per week because of my age-related hip and knee problems." #671
<b>Time-related barriers</b>	"Right now I am pretty busy with other obligations, so I don't do much for RSVP." #8190

Similarly, a number of compensatory strategies were identified by volunteers. Write-in responses suggested that time management and flexible scheduling, along with key characteristics of the formal volunteer assignment itself facilitated participation in multiple roles. For example, some respondents identified that formal volunteer assignments required similar skill sets to those developed and honed through other social roles. In addition to volunteer assignment attributes that helped to ease role conflict, additional strategies that emerged from the data focused on maximizing limited time resources and included approaches like time management, role reductions or transitions in roles, and flexible and seasonal scheduling. A subset of responses underscored that in addition to time, money was also an important resource needed to pursue volunteering and reduce role conflict.

Compensatory strategies are illustrated by the following participant quotes:

Theme	Illustrative Quote
<b>Similarities across roles</b>	"The two volunteer activities [RSVP and non-RSVP] seem to complement one another." #613
<b>Something different</b>	"[Volunteering provides a] change of pace and perspective." #8675
<b>Maximizing limited time resources</b>	"RSVP is mostly in the summer when I'm not working (sub teacher), so it all fits well together and keeps me from boredom in the summer." #656
<b>Prioritizing time in order to pursue what "matters most"</b>	"I am as busy as I wish to be. I do the things that matter most to me." #8632
<b>Money</b>	"I am now financially able to give back to the community by volunteering my time or money." #609

## Identifying a Focus for Phase II (Program Survey)

The volunteers who completed the Phase I survey, as a whole, demonstrated relatively low levels of role conflict. This was likely attributable to recruiting participants from within a volunteering population. In other words, the fact that all participants were current volunteers was likely directly related to lower levels of conflict as individuals with higher levels of conflict may be more likely to self-select out of the RSVP program. In the same way, this assertion is supported by the high levels of intention to remain within the sample overall. However, there was a significant difference found between caregivers and paid workers in comparison to non-caregivers and non-workers in that those who participated in multiple social roles tended to report higher levels of conflict. This was one of the main findings from the volunteer survey which shaped the implementation of the Phase II program survey, a survey which focused on how programs support volunteers who are also caregiving and working for pay outside of RSVP.

## Program Survey (Phase II) Results

### Program Profiles

A total of 21 completed surveys were returned from RSVP programs, representing a 38% response rate. The sample consisted of 17 program directors across 14 different states, along with three program coordinators, and one office manager. A range of host organizations

were reported by respondents including private non-profits (28.57%), government-based organizations (14.29%), area agencies on aging (19.05%), and a college/university host setting (19.05%). Other organizations identified through write-ins included national non-profit, public non-profit, city government, and a regional government council. The programs served an average of 438 volunteers, with a range of 85 to 900 through an average of 73 program sites. Results reported out below are based on responses that were most frequently noted in the data and that aligned most closely with the guiding research questions. See Appendix B for corresponding demographic graphs and figures.

**Research Question One: What role enhancement strategies have older adult volunteers, specifically caregivers and workers, employed to combat role conflict?**

**Caregivers**

Mirroring volunteer survey findings, programs reported that volunteers who are also caregivers juggle multiple responsibilities in addition to their volunteer work by making alternate care arrangements for their care recipients and participating in volunteer work alongside their care recipients when possible. These unique strategies used by caregivers focused on the need for respite for care recipients and the creative ways that respite can be addressed in conjunction with the volunteer experience. Specific responses included the use of respite care and the inclusion of the care recipient in volunteer work.

Quotes that illustrate these points include:

Theme	Illustrative Quote
<b>Making care arrangements for their care recipient</b>	"If they can afford a paid sitter, they use that as a way to get out of the house and volunteer." Program #2
<b>Participating in volunteer work alongside their care recipient</b>	"...one of our volunteers takes her husband with her to a food distribution. He sits there in a wheelchair and watches while she works. She says they both enjoy getting out." Program #21

**Enhancement strategies for caregivers included making alternate care arrangements for their care recipients and participating in volunteer work alongside their care recipients when possible.**

**Workers**

Similar to findings from the volunteer survey, programs reported that strategies used by workers to juggle responsibilities focused largely on scheduling and flexible arrangements that allowed such individuals to remain in both the worker and volunteer roles despite time constraints. Such arrangements used by working volunteers included engaging in volunteer activity during the off-work hours, including nights and weekends, along with seeking out one-time, short-term, and intermittent volunteer assignments.

Quotes that illustrate these strategies include:

Theme	Illustrative Quote
<b>Scheduling and flexible arrangements</b>	"Utilizing flexibility in the times for volunteering. Picking volunteer opportunities that are more accommodating for the volunteer's needs." Program #1
<b>Volunteering activity during the off-work hours</b>	"Offering volunteer opportunities that are in the evening or weekend." Program #19
<b>Seeking out one-time and intermittent volunteer assignments</b>	"Other working volunteers will schedule...once a week or once a month, so it is not too much to juggle." Program #25

**Enhancement strategies for paid workers focused largely on scheduling and making flexible arrangements that allowed individuals to remain in both the worker and volunteer roles despite time constraints.**

**Overlapping Strategies for Caregivers and Workers**

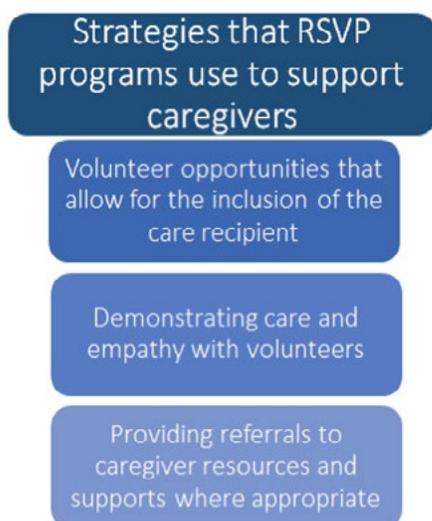
Programs reported that caregivers and paid workers had a variety of overlapping strategies for managing RSVP volunteering and other role responsibilities. These strategies included seeking out flexible and accommodating arrangements, using personal organizational and time management skills, utilizing breaks from volunteering, and seeking out volunteer work that was either meaningful or could provide respite to the individual volunteering.

**Overlapping strategies included making flexible and accommodating arrangements, using personal organizational and time management skills, utilizing breaks from volunteering, and seeking out volunteer work that was either meaningful or could provide respite to the individual volunteering.**

Quotes that illustrate these strategies include:

Theme	Illustrative Quote
Seeking flexible/ accommodating volunteer experiences	"Utilizing flexibility in the times for volunteering. Picking volunteer opportunities that are more accommodating for the volunteer's needs." Program #1
Job-sharing and team-based service	"If possible, working volunteers can encourage their co-workers to assist with their volunteer tasks, or with the support of their supervisor, maybe develop a service team that can alternate days they help. We have banks and local utility companies that serve as a team." ID #25
Using time management and organizational skills	"I have seen volunteers switch their volunteer shifts/ days in order to still help the organization." Program #6
Taking a break from volunteering	"These volunteers... take breaks when their responsibilities require it." Program #22

**Research Question Two: What strategies have RSVP programs employed to assist older volunteers in managing role conflict?**



## Caregivers

The unique strategies that RSVP programs use to support caregivers entail offering volunteer opportunities that allow for the inclusion of the care recipient, demonstrating care and empathy with volunteers, and providing referrals to caregiver resources and supports where appropriate.

Theme	Illustrative Quote
<b>Inclusion of care recipient</b>	"We provide opportunities for all ranges of volunteers. Therefore, if someone brings an older adult [care recipient], we have a volunteer project that they are able to perform, even if they are just a greeter. The job is meaningful and very important." Program #3
<b>Caring/understanding/ patience</b>	"Volunteer managers must be patient and understanding. Sending cards once in a while to let the volunteer know they are on your mind." Program #5
<b>Referrals to supports and resources</b>	"Perhaps the way that we best support the caretakers is by sharing information about resources available in the community." Program #1
<b>Respite directly for caregivers</b>	"I would love to be able to offer respite services for our volunteers, but we don't have that ability yet." Program #2

Based on these strategies and survey feedback, programs that adopt a caring and personalized approach help to support such individuals may experience stronger commitment by the volunteer to the program. In fact, responses suggest that some staff within RSVP programs viewed their role as one that requires a familiarity with caregiving resources, whether in-house or external, in order to provide referral and support when needed. This knowledge increases the ability of a program to refer caregivers for support when the time arises.

## Workers

The two primary strategies noted for supporting working volunteers included offering volunteer opportunities during off-work hours, such as nights and weekends, as well as offering intermittent and one-time volunteer opportunities. An additional strategy focused on hours of RSVP operation and leveraging electronic communication to extend reach to working volunteers. Respondents encouraged other volunteer program staff to foster a flexible mindset about volunteer scheduling and assignments.

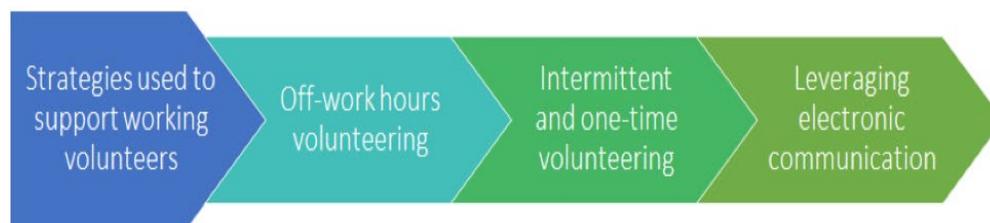
Support for these strategies are demonstrated in the following quotes:

Theme	Illustrative Quote
<b>Volunteer opportunities during off-work hours</b>	“We also have a list of outside agencies that need volunteers on evenings and weekends. Most of these volunteer stations are listed in ‘other community priorities’. They give volunteers working full-time a chance to volunteer.” Program #10
<b>Short-term or intermittent volunteer assignments</b>	“We also offer a number of events that the volunteers can participate in that are only 1-day events that are broken down into hour increments with 2 hours or 4 hours being the most popular.” Program #15
<b>Extended program hours and online communications</b>	“We also offer volunteer information sessions on weeknights to accommodate working volunteers. In addition, we also allow volunteers to enroll online using our new volunteer management system.” Program #19

## Both Caregivers and Workers

RSVP programs identified cross-cutting strategies that were used to support both caregivers and workers. These strategies included making accommodations and creating flexibility within the volunteer assignments and offering breaks from volunteering to support working and caregiving.

Theme	Illustrative Quote
<b>Assignment accommodations</b>	“If there is something that the volunteer might be able to do from home, such as handwork, encourage this.” Program #15
<b>Flexible and creative scheduling</b>	“Be flexible when scheduling volunteers who work. Overlap volunteer shift times in order to maintain that flexibility without leaving your organization in a position of having no volunteer available during that specific time when they cannot be there.” Program #6
<b>Breaks from volunteering</b>	“We make it clear from the beginning that this is not a job, so if someone needs to take a day, or a week, off all they have to do is say so.” Program #2



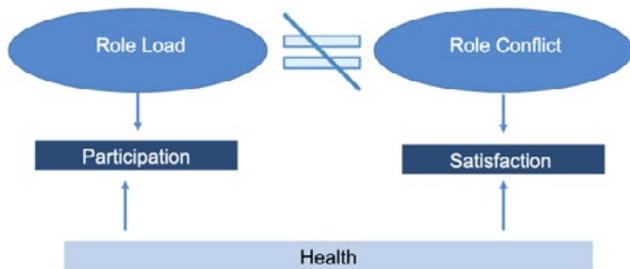
## Discussion

This study aimed to investigate a number of different topics, including whether higher levels of role conflict were predictive of participation in, satisfaction with, and/or intention to leave the volunteer role; strategies used by older adults to cope with role conflict; the ways in which benefits of volunteering helped to counterbalance the strain of having multiple demanding roles, and how programs can support volunteers in addressing and avoiding role conflict.

## Roles Matter and So Does Health

Study findings revealed that role load in hours was not a predictor of any volunteer outcomes of interest (satisfaction, participation, and intent to remain). On the other hand, total roles held was found to be a predictor of volunteer participation since the accumulation of multiple roles, rather than overall time constraints, was found to impact volunteer participation. Ultimately, the relationships between role load, conflict, and volunteer outcomes were not straightforward. It is likely that other moderating factors such as time, health, and personal coping mechanisms also play a role. This is supported by role theory framework, which posits that time is a resource that helps to balance competing role demands (Creary & Gordon, 2016). Additionally, poor health is a contributing factor to the ability to manage multiple roles and/or remain in a volunteering role.

Role load and role conflict were found to be two distinct constructs. In fact, they were found to be predictive of different outcomes (see figure 2). Again, health is a moderator of both volunteer participation and satisfaction.



**Figure 2. This chart outlines the moderating role of health as it relates to volunteer participation and satisfaction.**

As weak connections were found between conflict scores and volunteer outcomes, it is likely that potential sources of conflict lie in the commitments to other roles (such as paid work or caregiving) rather than conflicts within the volunteer role itself. In fact, data gathered from survey open-ended questions revealed the volunteer role to be a source of multiple benefits to older adults and to the additional roles they hold. As mentioned previously, relatively low levels of role conflict were reported by the study participants. It is likely that individuals who experienced high levels of role conflict have self-selected out of the RSVP program.

While role conflict was a statistically significant predictor of volunteer satisfaction, it was less so than health or income. Role conflict should be considered a part of a constellation of factors that influence the volunteer experience for working and caregiver volunteers.

Given that health plays an important role in both volunteering and volunteer outcomes, supports that boost health among volunteers are important for volunteer programs to implement. For example, such activities might include in-services on wellness topics, group yoga or exercise sessions for volunteers, and volunteer work that provides the opportunity for

continued physical activity and social contact. These offerings would foster community impact, provide positive personal outcomes for volunteers, and assist with reducing role conflict that might draw an older adult away from volunteer work.

## Working and Caregiving Volunteers Experience Benefits Associated with Volunteering

Paid workers and caregivers, though having higher levels of role conflict than volunteers who did not hold such roles, were able to identify benefits that make volunteering a worthwhile endeavor. Volunteering has been linked to a number of positive outcomes for older adults such as good health and mental health, social connections, and a sense of purpose. Based on the survey, as many as one out of every seven older adult volunteers are working for pay in addition to their volunteer work. As many as a third of older adult volunteers are also serving as caregivers. Despite juggling these roles, volunteering added distinct benefits to their lives. These benefits accrued to them personally, like personal growth and a feeling of “greater perspective,” but were also used to enhance their other roles outside of volunteering like skills learned in the volunteer placement that were then applied to paid work and caregiving roles. Both older workers and caregivers reported that volunteering provided benefits to each of their roles. In particular, volunteering provided them with information on different programs, services, and resources that could be tapped in their paid or caregiving roles. Volunteering provided an opportunity to meet new people and build a network that helped them in their paid work or caregiving. Finally, volunteering provided a valuable opportunity for stress relief or respite for workers and caregivers.

## Volunteers and Volunteer Programs Can Work Together to Manage Role Conflict

Study findings across both surveys demonstrated that both older adult volunteers and RSVP leadership actively employ strategies that have the potential to assist older adults in juggling their multiple life role demands. Open-ended question responses also revealed a number of role conflict strategies relevant to working and caregiving volunteers. For caregiver volunteers, taking advantage of respite services and bringing care recipients to volunteer with them were identified as ways to accommodate responsibilities across roles. For working volunteers, volunteering during hours or times of the year in which they do not work was noted as a key compensatory strategy. Regarding strategies which were helpful for both groups, flexible scheduling and accommodations for conflicts and time management skills were both reported to be key factors. Being able to take a break from volunteering when it has become overburdening and participating in meaningful volunteer work were also found to be coping strategies used by participants.

## For Programs, Empathy and Flexibility are Critical Approaches

Two key implications arise from the RSVP program survey. First, at the core of the responses provided by program staff was a recognition that older adult volunteers are occupying additional life roles beyond formal volunteering. This recognition is an essential element to building support strategies. Second, a flexibility mindset or approach on behalf of the volunteer program is a cornerstone principle of older adult volunteer support. This flexibility entails approaches like scheduling, job sharing, one-time and intermittent volunteering, and the ability to volunteer from home.

Findings also underscore the need for volunteer assistance that moves beyond the boundaries of volunteer management and provides support for the volunteer's overall health and well-being (Gonzales, Matz-Costa, & Morrow-Howell, 2015; Pettigrew, et al., 2008). Of note are volunteer management staff in this study who framed their role as one of connector and conduit through which caregiver support can be provided. Staff within such programs view their role as one that requires a familiarity with caregiving resources, whether in-house or external, in order to provide referral and

support when needed. Responses also indicate the need to listen and provide a caring and patient approach with volunteers who are known to be caregivers.

Volunteers seek flexibility and need the ability to engage with volunteering as is appropriate for their schedule, energy, and interests. Such flexibility in scheduling requires creativity on the part of program staff and is also likely to increase staff time and effort and recruitment needs as less intensive volunteer commitments are made by volunteers. In addition, recommendations around supporting caregivers through a more personalized and caring approach are also likely to increase the staff time and effort needed for such a level of engagement. Fostering a familiarity with local support and caregiver resources increases the role scope of existing volunteer management staff and has training and support implications for staff and programs in the field.

In summary, volunteer work is a source of numerous benefits that older adults can apply to other areas of their lives. Through a careful dance, both programs and older adults themselves can employ distinct strategies to increase volunteer engagement and retention over time in a mutually beneficial way for older adults and the programs and communities they serve.

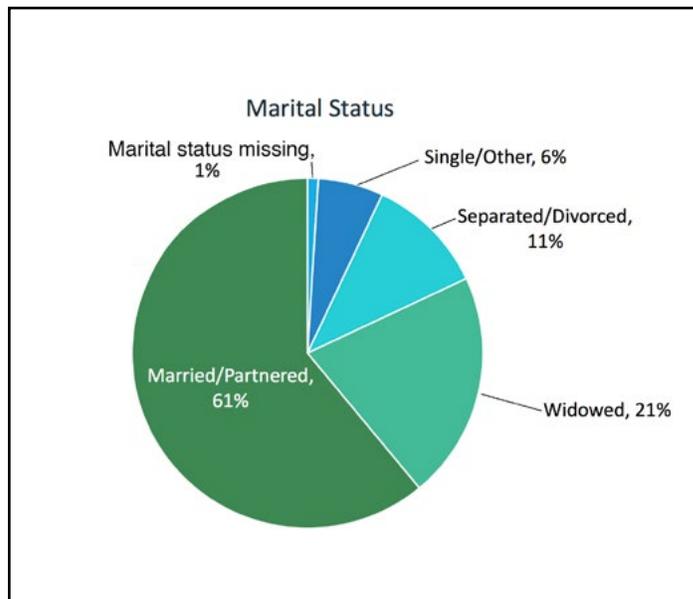
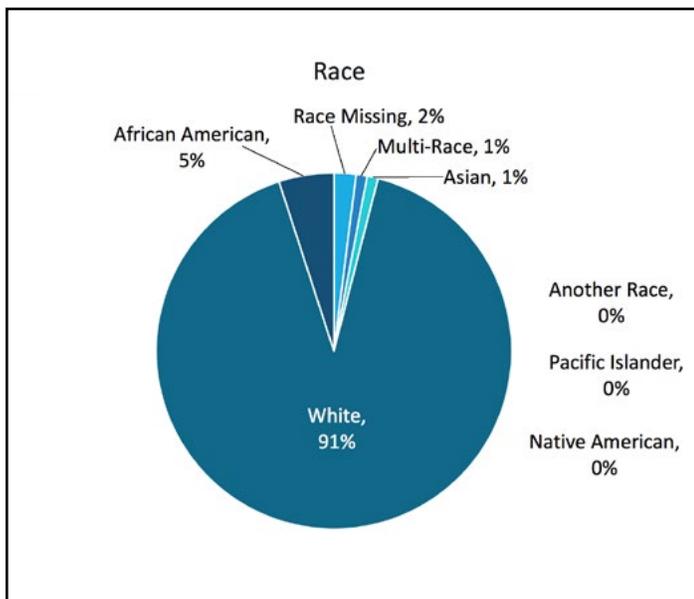
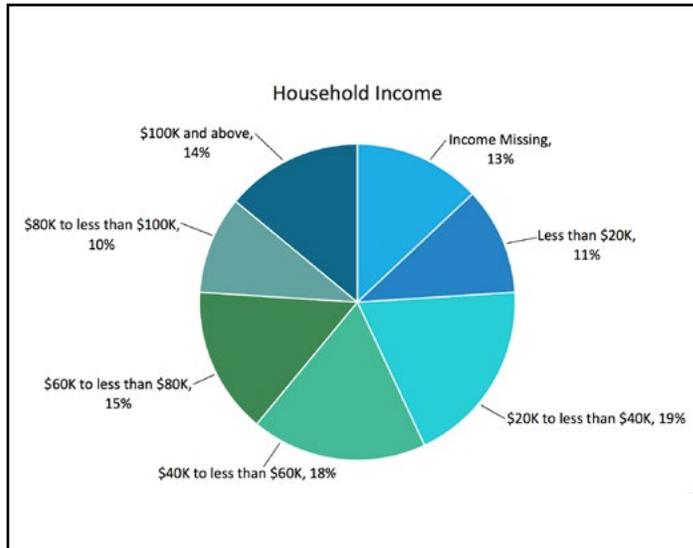
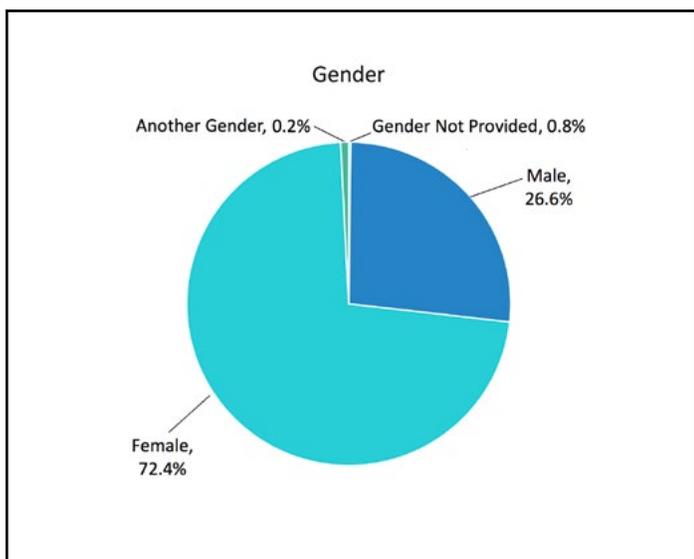
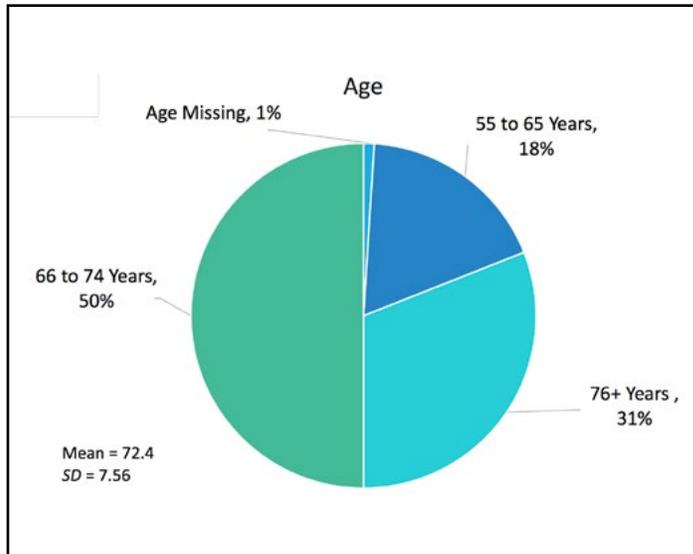
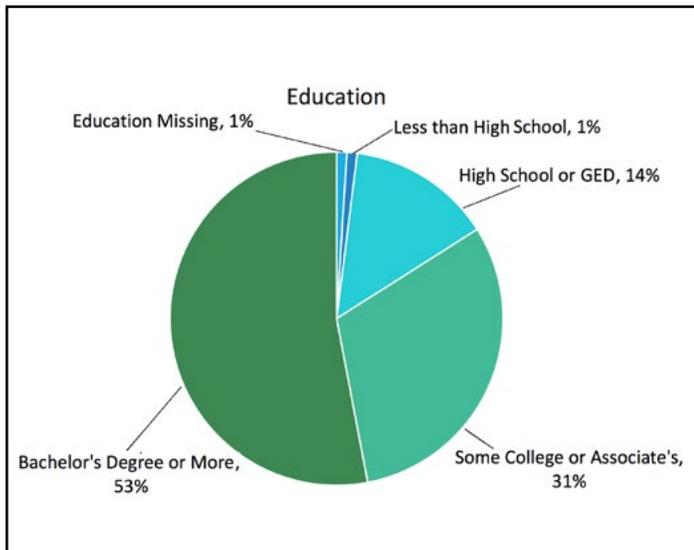
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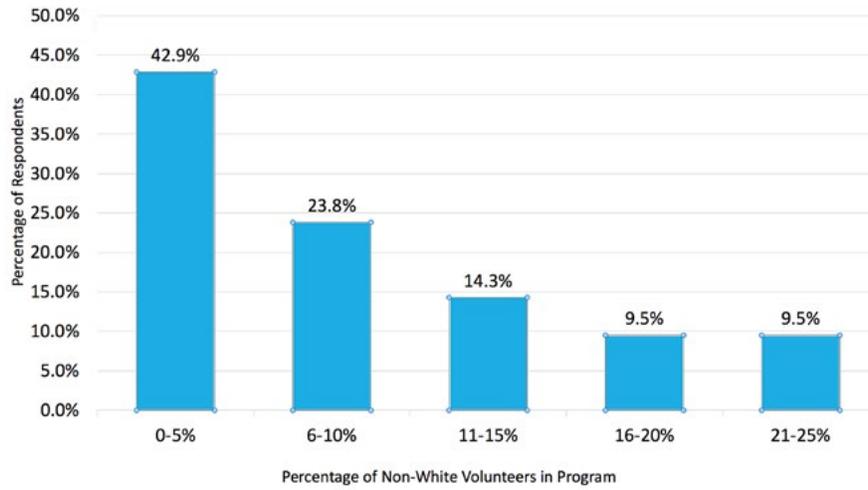
Appendices

Appendix A: Volunteer Demographics

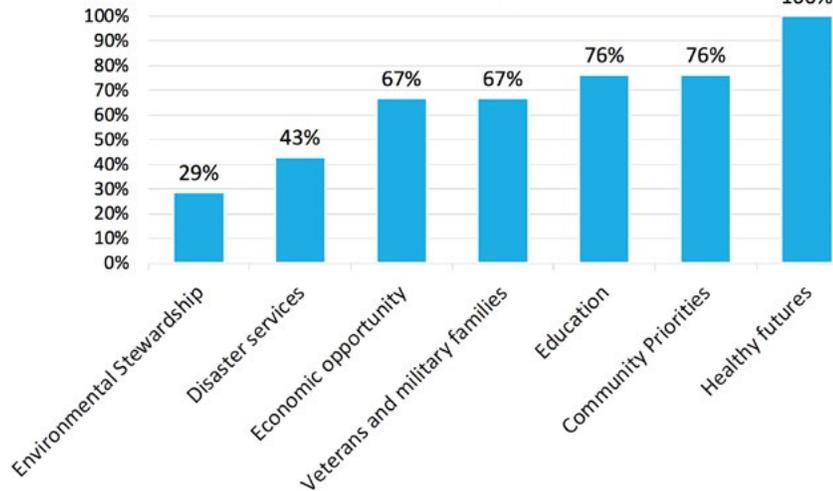


## Appendix B: Phase II Site Demographics

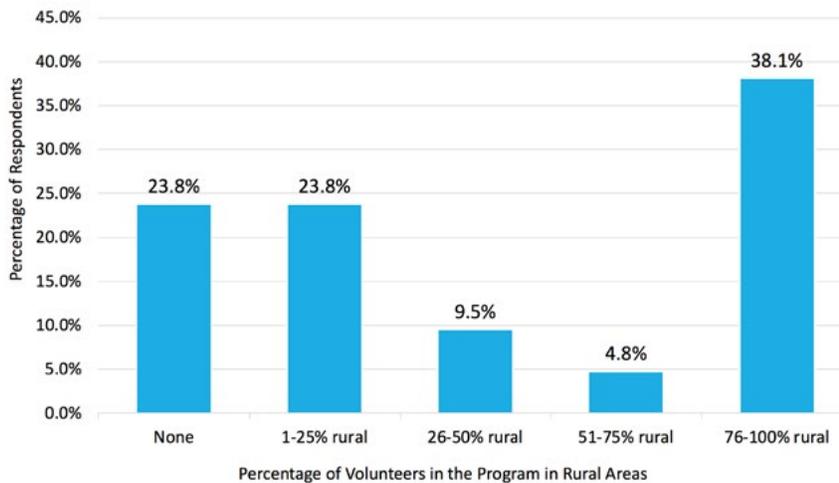
Volunteer Diversity: Proportion of Non-White Volunteers Within Host Program



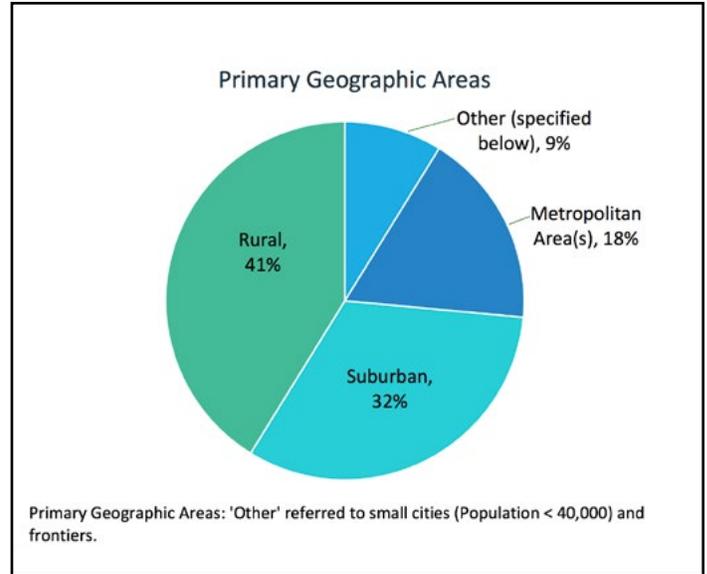
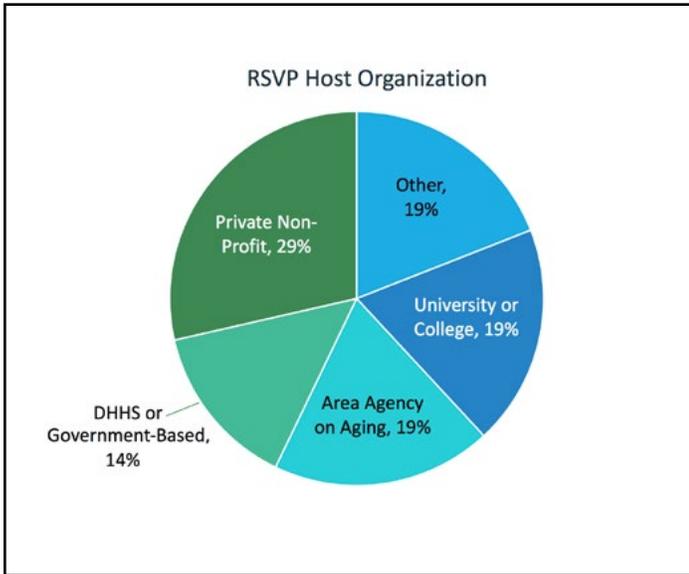
RSVP Focus Areas by Percentage of Respondents



Proportion of Volunteers Who Reside in a Rural Community



**Appendix B: Phase II Site Demographics *continued***



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