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# Education: an unexplored variable on millennial volunteer attitudes

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EDUCATION: AN UNEXPLORED VARIABLE ON  
MILLENNIAL VOLUNTEER ATTITUDES

A Thesis Submitted  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Designation  
University Honors

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Entitled: Education: An Unexplored Variable on Millennial Volunteer Attitudes

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## Abstract

For the 1.9 million nonprofit organizations in the United States, engaging potential volunteers in an efficient way is critical to their success. As Baby Boomers retire, the Millennial generation is expected to populate an ever-growing percentage of the volunteer workforce. The Millennial population totals nearly 80 million in the United States alone. The current body of research has been focused primarily on general attitudes of Millennials in regards to volunteering, philanthropy, and corporate social responsibility. There has been very little analysis on the attitudes of Millennials based on their demographic information, especially their education level. Less than a third of Millennials hold a bachelor's degree, and those without a college education are less than half as likely to volunteer (16.4% vs 39.4%) as their college educated peers. In this paper, I argue that there are many possible factors related to obtaining a college education that may affect a Millennials' volunteer habits, including income disparity based on education level, the civic component of college education, and self-reporting errors. I further assert that to understand whether or not there is a causal relationship between college education and higher volunteer rates, these possible factors must be further researched.

*Keywords:* Millennials, volunteering, volunteer engagement, nonprofit, college education

### Education: An Underexplored Variable on Millennial Volunteer Attitudes

Millennials, generally considered to be those born between 1980 and 1999, are next in line to replace the retiring Baby Boomer generation. Organizations all over the United States are seeking to engage Millennials in the workplace and as members of the volunteer workforce (Achieve, 2014; Aflac, 2015; Deloitte, 2016). With a population of 80 million in the United States alone (Achieve, 2014), Millennials will comprise 75% of the global workforce by 2025 (Strauss, 2013), and, ideally, a commensurate percentage of the volunteer force. As Baby Boomers retire and leave their leadership positions in the workforce and their volunteer engagements, nonprofit organizations throughout the country are facing a crisis to ensure that they do not die off in this time of transition (Eisner, Grimm, Maynard, & Washburn, 2009). It is therefore crucial to recruit and engage this new generation of potential volunteers.

In terms of time donated, volunteers are immensely valuable to nonprofit organizations. In 2013, the estimated value of hours volunteered in the United States totaled \$163 billion (McKeever & Pettijohn, 2014). Volunteered time is not only beneficial to the organizations receiving the assistance: volunteers also tend to see a beneficial return on their time invested, including psychological health benefits related to finding and having a sense of purpose (Greenfield & Marks, 2004). People who volunteer may opt to do so at any stage in life, but the percentage of individuals volunteering varies considerably across age groups. According to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016), “By age, 35- to 44-year-olds were most likely to volunteer (29.8 percent). Volunteer rates were lowest among 20- to 24-year-olds (18.7 percent).... Teenagers (16- to 19-year-olds) had a volunteer rate of 26.1 percent.” (para. 4)

Twenty to twenty-four year olds are the latter portion of the Millennial generation. A Google search of “Millennial volunteers” returned 311,000 hits and some conflicting

information. Some sources, including Cass (2014), indicated that Millennials are more engaged in volunteering than their parents' generation. The Bureau of Labor Statistics, however, contradicted Cass, and showed the group to have volunteered the least in 2015, as compared to other age groups. Represented graphically, the data from the United States of Bureau and Labor statistics appears as in Figure 1.

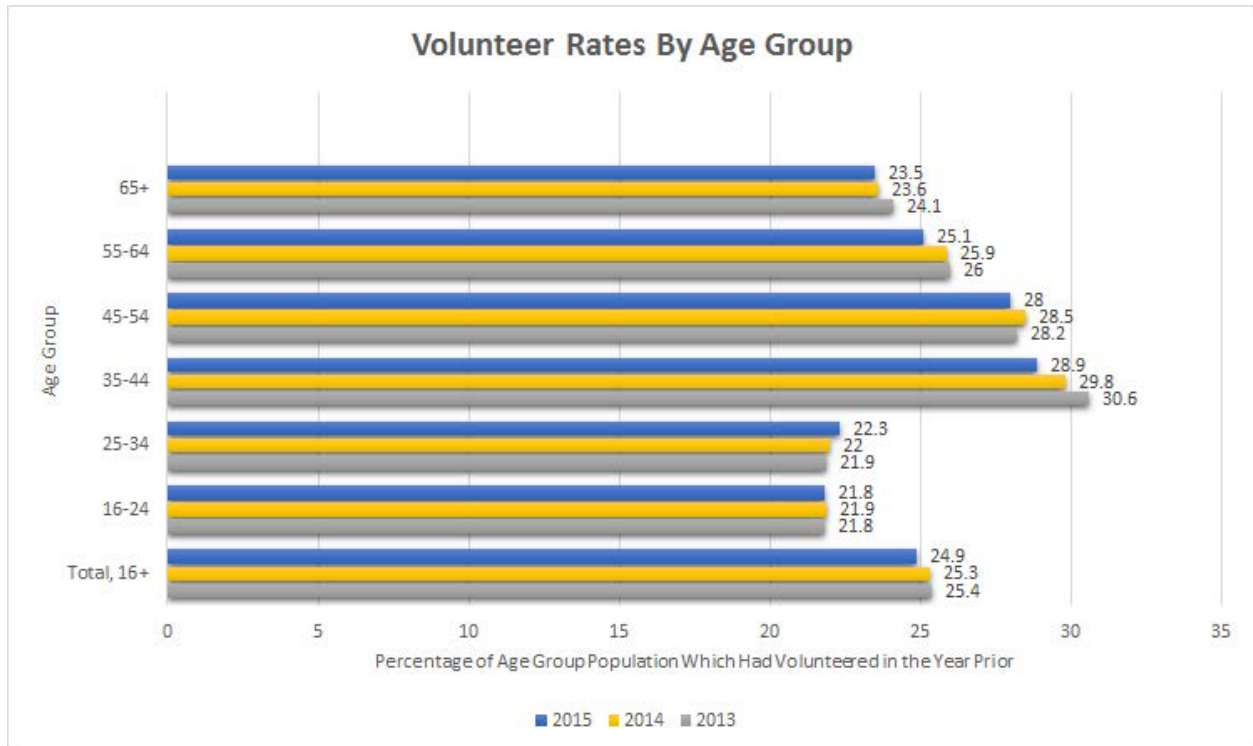


Figure 1- 2015 Volunteer Rates By Age Group. Adapted from United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016).

Millennials, represented in the 25-34 and 16-24 age brackets, volunteered the least of any age group. While this is concerning, considering that the Millennials' involvement is much lower than any other group, there are some stage-of-life considerations that deserve to be taken into account. One such consideration is that only a small portion of Millennials are likely to be attending or have attended college.

It is a fact that college-educated individuals are more likely to volunteer than their peers with less formal education. In 2007, 25% of 20-29 year olds with at least some college

experience had volunteered in the previous year (Kirby, Marcelo, & Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2009). However, that figure drops to 11% for people in the same age group who had never attended college (Kirby et al., 2009). When considering a broader age range, data from the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016) showed that 39.4% of the population with a bachelor's degree or higher volunteered in 2015; however, only 27.3% of those with only some college experience volunteered in the same time. The percentage drops to a mere 16.4% of the population with only a high school diploma or equivalent (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). Figure 2 illustrates the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics information.

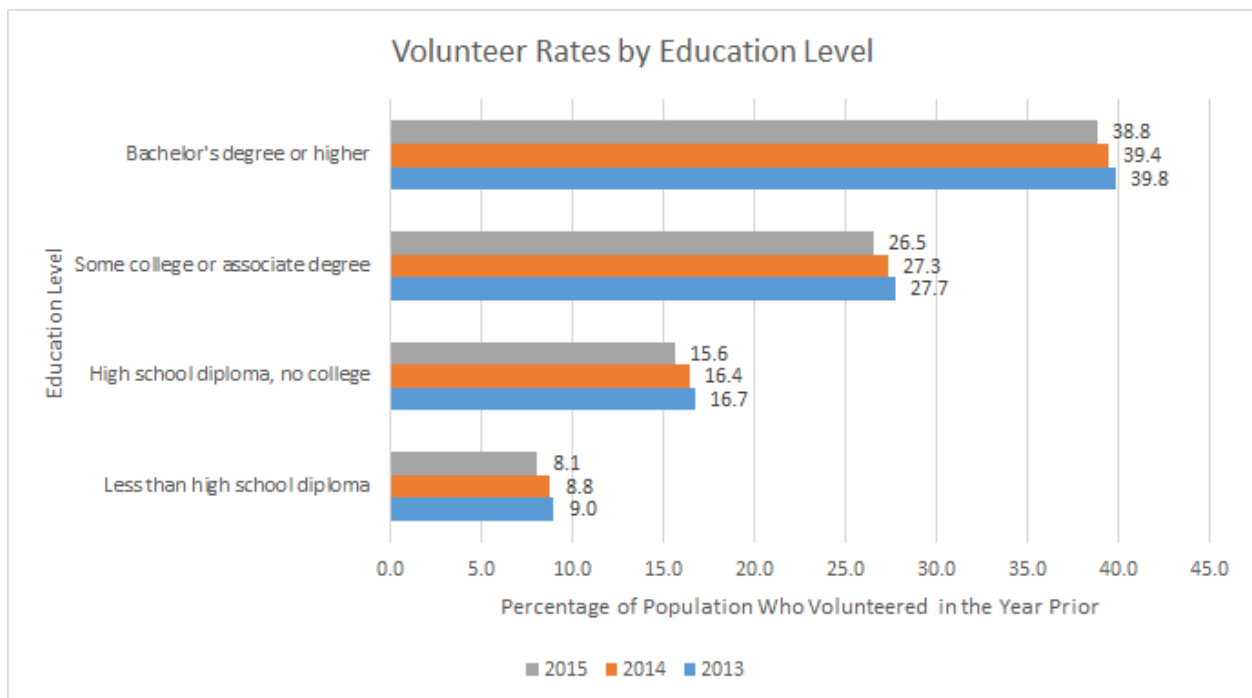


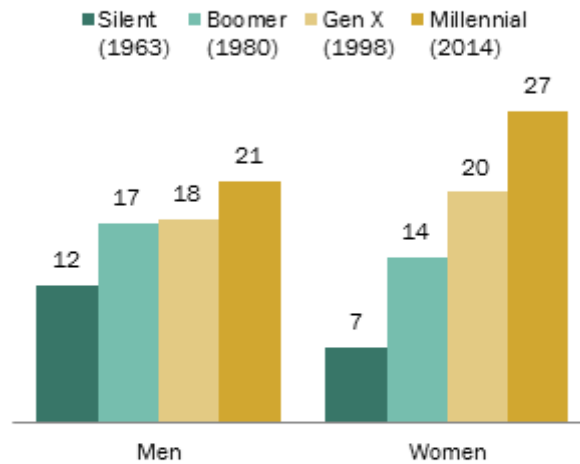
Figure 2 - 2015 Volunteering by Level of Education. Adapted from United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016).

Millennials are “electing to go onto college and graduate work in far greater numbers than previous generations ...” (Sweeney, 2006, p. 5). The enrollment numbers for Millennials, as compared to those of prior generations, are higher across all age groups, as shown in Figure 3 (Pew Research Center, 2015). However, of the 80 million Millennials in the United States,

roughly 76%, approximately 60 million, have not completed a college education. This means that a large portion of Millennials are volunteering at a lower rate than their peers.

### Millennials On Track to be the Most Educated Generation to Date

% completing at least a bachelor's degree at ages 18-33, by gender



Note: The educational attainment question was changed in 1992. So for Boomers and Silents, this refers to those who completed at least four years of college. Educational attainment was not available for the 1963 Current Population Survey. The education of Silents was approximated using 18-33 year-olds from the 1962 Current Population Survey.

Source: Pew Research Center tabulations of the March Current Population Surveys (1963, 1980, 1998, and 2014) from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS)

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Figure 3 - College Attendance by Generation (Pew Research Center, 2015).

For those in the nonprofit field, it is a point of interest to understand what values and beliefs Millennials hold that motivate them to become and remain volunteers. Simply knowing that those without a college education volunteer less frequently is not enough to tackle the problem of engaging them. Some organizations that rely on volunteers to be successful are commissioning studies to better understand Millennials and to provide recommendations on how to engage this future volunteer force most effectively (Callender et al., 2014). For example,



understanding that Millennials want to engage with an organization on a small scale before engaging more deeply allows efforts to attract Millennial volunteers to be more efficient (Achieve, 2014).

When considering the values and beliefs of Millennials towards volunteering, there is not a clear distinction in the literature between those who have and have not attended college. In fact, many studies are conducted on college campuses with only current college students being surveyed (Baranyi, 2011; Sweeney, 2006). For studies not conducted on a college campus, the demographic information is not readily available in terms of education level (Achieve, 2014; McGlore, 2011). Other surveys seek only respondents with a bachelor's degree (Deloitte, 2016). Given that there is a difference in volunteer rates between college educated Millennials and non-college educated Millennials, it is worthwhile to explore the effects of postsecondary education on attitudes and beliefs towards volunteering. This may shed light on ways to close the volunteering involvement gap between those with and without a college education.

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the need to explore what effect, if any, a college education has on Millennials' attitudes on volunteering. I will first define a few key terms, and then demonstrate why it is important to engage the Millennial generation in volunteering and nonprofit organizations. I will then review what is currently known about Millennials' attitudes towards volunteerism, and propose some explanations as to why educational level might affect such attitudes. Finally, I will provide recommendations for future work to explore this issue. The significance of this work is to provide a point of departure for future research on Millennials' volunteer attitudes which will allow for more targeted, effective volunteer engagement practices.

## Definitions

In the study of Millennial volunteer attitudes and engagement, there are no real concrete definitions. Instead, most sources rely on a generalized understanding of the vocabulary they utilize. Below, two key terms and their most general uses in this area of research are discussed.

### What is a Millennial?

Millennials are known by many names, including “Gen-Y,” “GenMe,” “The Net Generation,” and “the Boomlet,” amongst others (Balda & Mora, 2011; Haughn, 2015; Howe & Strauss, 2003). “Millennials” was coined by Howe and Strauss (2003), who defined a Millennial as an individual born from 1982-2003. However, various sources give start dates ranging from 1976 to 1982 and end dates ranging from 1995 to 2003 (Callender et al., 2014; Haughn, 2015; Howe & Strauss, 2003; Kuhl, 2014; McGlore, 2011). In the relevant literature, there is a lack of clarity regarding what exactly a Millennial is. It will therefore be necessary to allow for some flexibility with the generation in terms of specific years of birth.

Recent research on Millennials tends to focus on those Millennials graduating college in or around 2010. This may be due to the fact that 1990 was the largest year for Millennial births, so these students will have entered “college about 2008 and will likely graduate from 2011 to 2013” (Howe & Strauss, 2003, p. 1). Very little research places any emphasis on the earlier cohorts of the Millennials. Therefore, much of the literature referenced in this paper focuses on this later Millennial cohort.

### What is a “Volunteer” – or “volunteering”?

Many Millennials want to volunteer, but do not think they can for one reason or another (Ellis, 2012). In the literature, there is a surprising lack of clarity on what exactly a volunteer is. Volunteers may give time in a variety of ways, from serving in a clerical capacity to donating

professional skills pro bono (Callender, 2014). According to Worth's chapter on Managing Paid Staff and Service Volunteers (2014), some traditional volunteer roles include:

- Spot volunteers: Those who casually participate in a single event.
- Episodic volunteers: Those who may participate in recurring or seasonal events.
- Regular volunteers: Those who volunteer their time effectively as unpaid staff. These volunteers may be filling positions with written job descriptions and possess specific skill sets related to the task at hand.
- Encouraged or mandated volunteers: Those who are mandated by the court or their workplace to volunteer.
- Virtual volunteers: Those who donate their time from a distance.

Therefore, volunteers may fill a variety of roles within an organization for a short or extended duration of time. According to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics:

Collecting, preparing, distributing, or serving food was the activity volunteers performed most often for their main organization in 2015--11.3 percent of volunteers reported this as their main activity. Other activities performed frequently were tutoring or teaching..., fundraising..., and engaging in general labor. (2016, para. 20)

Though this encompasses volunteers across all generations and not Millennials specifically, it gives a good glimpse into the roles that organizations rely on volunteers to fill.

Perhaps a root cause of the uncertainty in what constitutes "volunteering" lies in the rise of virtual volunteers. Virtual volunteers opt to engage with an organization from a distance, providing services such as web development, phone banking, advanced editing, graphic design, and legal consulting, among others. More and more frequently, participating in online activities is considered to be volunteering. New acts of "microvolunteering," such as promoting a cause on

Facebook, are considered by nonprofit organizations as the new way for Millennials to get involved (Achieve, 2014). As Vitale (2013) explained, Millennials are born of the digital age, and have always been immersed in the technology that at once expands social networks and brings them closer together. Fine made an observation on how Millennials tend to engage and the sometimes overlooked value that their behavior has:

Millions of millennials are passionately engaged in causes, though not necessarily connected to specific nonprofit organizations. Millions more regularly practice their own form of citizenship using the tools and processes of democracy (e.g., sharing information, circulating petitions, mobilizing people) to voice their concern about or interest in items that are central to their lives, such as the cancellation of a TV show or organizing friends to attend the opening of a new restaurant. Those aren't trivial activities; they represent the latent power of millennials to use their own tools and voices for social-change efforts. (2008, para. 34-35)

In this way, Millennials are constantly engaging in activity that may be harnessed to encourage effective and meaningful acts of volunteering for nonprofit organizations. They are donating their time and social networks to further causes, in addition to more traditional volunteer roles. This raises questions on the types of volunteering that may be most useful to the organizations seeking to engage Millennial volunteers, as perhaps this is the area in which a clear definition of volunteer is the most important. The organizations seeking Millennials volunteers are ultimately the ones who will determine what sort of volunteering is most valuable to them. This will be addressed more fully later in this paper. It is clear that there are few rigorous definitions in the literature regarding Millennial volunteer attitudes and habits. It is important to keep these ambiguities in mind when considering the available literature.

### **Literature Analysis**

The current body of literature does not directly focus on Millennials' attitudes regarding volunteering. However, the focus on tangential issues, such as corporate social responsibility, workplace transience, and social attitudes in general can be leveraged to at least partially understand questions related to volunteering. In this section, I will explain why it is important to engage Millennial volunteers and summarize some of the key related pieces of research on Millennials which can be utilized by nonprofit organizations to effectively shape their Millennial engagement efforts.

#### **Why should organizations be concerned about engaging Millennial volunteers?**

It is no secret that the nonprofit sector, as a whole, is facing reorganization, realignment, and replacement of workers and volunteers on a massive scale. Volunteers, in addition to being useful to maintain regular operations, are extremely valuable to these organizations during this time of change. According to Eisner et al.,

The nonprofit sector desperately needs the professional skills offered by volunteers. The nation's nonprofits are under strain from the current economic crisis, a leadership drain as older executives retire, and high turnover among younger nonprofit staff. Volunteers are an undervalued and underused resource for tackling these challenges. (2009, p. 34)

Not only struggling to fill gaps left by the retiring Boomers, nonprofit organizations also seem to struggle with viewing and utilizing volunteers as "strategic assets" (Eisner et al., 2009, p. 32).

This can be extraordinarily detrimental to the process of engaging volunteers; as Eisner et al. (2009) notes, "...more than one third of those who volunteer one year do not donate their time the next year – at any nonprofit. That adds up to an estimated \$38 billion in lost labor" (p. 32). Eisner et al. (2009) also stated that "volunteers with valuable and specialized skills are often

dispatched to do manual labor rather than tasks that use their professional talents” (p. 34). Organizations may inadvertently end up chasing away volunteers, which impacts the entire nonprofit sector.

Given the diminishing numbers and high turnaround cited above, the need for new volunteers – especially skilled volunteers – is perhaps greater than ever. Filling these volunteer positions with the highly-diverse Millennial generation is one way to reduce this strain on the nonprofit field (Kuhl, 2014). According to Joan Kuhl (2014), founder of *Why Millennials Matter*, a speaking and consulting company based in New York City, “Millennials are the key to retaining [a] company’s legacy and core knowledge as well as trailblazing the path to future innovations” (p. 26). It is crucial that the nonprofit sector engages Millennials in a way that leads to retention of their volunteer base, as Millennials will be the ones to lead the next generation of development, philanthropy, and civil service (Fine, 2008).

### **What is currently known about Millennial volunteers?**

One organization has been calling for the study of Millennials and their civic engagement. Circle, the Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement, has primarily focused on youth participation in voting, but has also studied volunteering activity (Lopez & Kolaczowski, 2003), even going so far as to outline the difference in volunteer rates of young adults depending on the level of education attained. While their reports do not explicitly mention Millennials, the age group they focused on, 20-29 year olds (Kirby et al., 2009) falls within the Millennial category.

Circle’s report on “Volunteering and College Experience” (Kirby et al., 2009) directly handles the demographic information related to Millennials and their volunteer activity. While there is no focus on which attitudes and beliefs motivate volunteering activity, Kirby et al.

(2009) questioned how to engage Millennials in volunteering activities. While 40% of both educated and non-college educated Millennials reported that they took the initiative to approach an organization to begin volunteering, those without college experience were more likely to get involved when invited to participate, rather than seeking out the opportunities themselves (Kirby et al., 2009). Both education levels were most frequently asked to volunteer by “someone in the organization” (Kirby et al., 2009, p. 7). However, those without college experience were next most likely to be recruited by a relative, as opposed to those with college experience likely to be recruited by a friend (Kirby et al., 2009). The report also suggested that social media platforms are more and more the method by which to engage Millennial volunteers. This information may be useful to other organizations as they build their outreach and engagement plans with respect to Millennials.

It is important to note that overarching themes about Millennials’ beliefs also affect their attitudes towards volunteering. There is a general understanding of what motivates Millennials to volunteer, and what it is in their ethical and social beliefs systems that may shape where they choose to donate their time. While there is little research on Millennials and their education level in regard to volunteering, there have been many large studies aiming to understand Millennials and their beliefs on corporate social responsibility (CSR), volunteering, philanthropy, and “giving back” in general. Some of the more notable studies are summarized below.

**Aflac Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Survey.** One organization concerned with tapping into Millennials’ sense of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is Aflac. CSR is the extent to which a corporation is socially responsible in their practices and operations (Aflac, 2015). Ideally, nonprofits seeking Millennial volunteers are highly socially responsible, both in mission and practice. The authors of the Aflac survey sought to understand general beliefs

Millennials hold about social responsibility, which might then be applied to organizations with which they may volunteer. This survey obtained responses from 6000 Millennials (Aflac, 2015). The publication did not, unfortunately, reveal the researchers' definition of Millennial, nor any demographic information regarding education.

One key finding of this survey is that Millennials care more about a corporation's philanthropic activity than those aged 35 or older (Aflac, 2015). Approximately 85% of Millennials reported that they are more "likely to seek employment at a company that has been publicly awarded for its ethics," as compared to only 68% of those over 35 who reported the same (Aflac, 2015, p. 2). In regards to consumer behavior, 92% of Millennials "are more likely to purchase from an ethical company" (Aflac, 2015, p. 2). Millennials are also deeply engaged in social media, and believe it is best utilized "for raising awareness for a cause, rather than donations" (Aflac, 2015, p. 1).

This information reinforced the idea that Millennials care about how a company presents itself in terms of social responsibility. This can be applied to nonprofit organizations and volunteer activity by using this as a method to understand how Millennials evaluate which organizations to support. Millennials want to be associated with organizations that are ethical and are *known* for being ethical; nonprofit organizations should therefore work on promoting how their activity aligns with Millennial ethics.

**The 2016 Deloitte Millennial Survey.** The Deloitte Millennial Survey sought to understand Millennials' loyalty to their workplace. These attitudes and beliefs can be applied to Millennials' loyalty to the organizations for which they volunteer. This study reached 7,700 respondents from 29 countries (Deloitte, 2016). Unique to this study, all participants were stated to "have obtained



a college or university degree” (Deloitte, 2016, p. 2) at the time of the survey. This is the only study that explicitly controlled for the level of education of the participants.

One key finding was that 66% of Millennial employees surveyed expect to leave their current workplace by 2020 (Deloitte, 2016). This finding reinforces the popular notion that Millennials are ready to leave at a moment’s notice. Millennials also believe that financial performance should not be the only measure of success for a business, with over 87% indicating this (Deloitte, 2016). According to the report, “Millennials judge the performance [of the business] on what it does and how it treats people” (Deloitte, 2016, p. 9). One key component of this is that 25% of respondents stated that ethics is the value which supports “long-term business success” (Deloitte, 2016, p. 10). Millennials also reported that their “personal values/morals” are “very influential” when making decisions in their workplace (Deloitte, 2016, p. 12). An interesting note about Millennials’ workplace beliefs, however, is that they ranked salary and other financial benefits as the most important factor in evaluating a job opportunity; “the impact [the business] has on society,” meanwhile, ranked just 6<sup>th</sup> of 13 other factors in determining their future workplace (Deloitte, 2016, p. 20).

Another of the Deloitte Survey’s key findings was that Millennials are ready to abandon an organization that they do not feel fully supports their ethical notions. It is crucial, then, for organizations to clearly communicate their ethical guiding factors and their goals. Ideally, a nonprofit’s mission statement will convey this, but marketing it in a clear, concise way could make volunteer recruitment more efficient.

**Millennial Impact Project.** Created to fight the assumptions about Millennials that “lean more on cynical labels and generalizations than on hard evidence,” (Achieve, 2014, p. 3), the Millennial Impact Project began in 2010. Their four-year overview report, “A Generation for

Causes,” was released in 2014. This is a broad overview of their annual projects to date, which boasted more than 16,000 participants in total (Achieve, 2014). This study focused on overarching themes and beliefs held by Millennials. There was no demographic information related to education reported with the results.

The four major results of the report are as follows:

1. “Millennials engage with causes to help other people, not institutions.” (p. 6)
2. “Millennials are influenced by the decisions and behaviors of their peers.” (p. 7)
3. “Millennials treat their time, money, and assets as having equal value.” (p. 8)
4. “Millennials need to experience the cause’s work without having to be on site.” (p. 8)

These takeaways set the stage for broadly understanding Millennials. Nonprofits have an advantage in regards to the first point – they are not, generally, institutions that exist simply to exist, but instead they are driven by a mission, a cause. In agreement with this, a study at Kennesaw University found that 45% of Millennial respondents volunteer “to help others” (Baranyi, 2011, p. 35). Approximately 58% of respondents in the same study also said that the cause an organization represents is what makes them interested in a particular nonprofit organization (Baranyi, 2011, p. 35).

The second takeaway is a reminder not to underestimate the value of the social networks to which Millennials belong. Their social networks are valuable in terms of potentially engaging other Millennials via word of mouth. As seen in the next study, Millennials with a college education are more likely to be influenced to join an organization by their peers (Callendar et al., 2014). The third point explains the way that Millennials are shaping the entire conceptualization of philanthropy: because their time is just as valuable as their assets and money, they are approaching the world of giving in ways that are perhaps different than their predecessors.

The fourth and final takeaway is perhaps the most important one in terms of engaging potential volunteers. Millennials want a way to “test drive” an organization before they get involved. This may occur in a number of ways, including attending drop-in volunteering events or hosting community events (Achieve, 2014; Callendar et al., 2009). Therefore, nonprofit organizations should organize and utilize events like this to specifically target Millennial volunteers.

**Global Ties project.** The Global Ties study “Volunteer Engagement and Multi-Generational Collaboration: An Analysis” is one of the smallest and most targeted pieces of research discussed in this paper. Global Ties is an organization that engages approximately 38,000 volunteers who donate more than 600,000 hours annually (Callendar et al., 2014). The goal of their project was to understand their multi-generational volunteer workforce: the challenges they face, how they currently engage them, and changes their organization could make in the future to engage their volunteer workforce more effectively (Callendar et al., 2014).

Though limited by a very small response rate, the findings of this study detailed exactly the struggle the nonprofit sector is facing: volunteer coordinators think they know how to engage Millennials, but Millennials are saying the methods utilized are not the most effective. Volunteer coordinators were asked what methods they thought were most effective in reaching and engaging potential Millennial volunteers, while Millennials were asked what methods were most effective at engaging them. There is a stark contrast between these two responses, as shown in Figure 4.

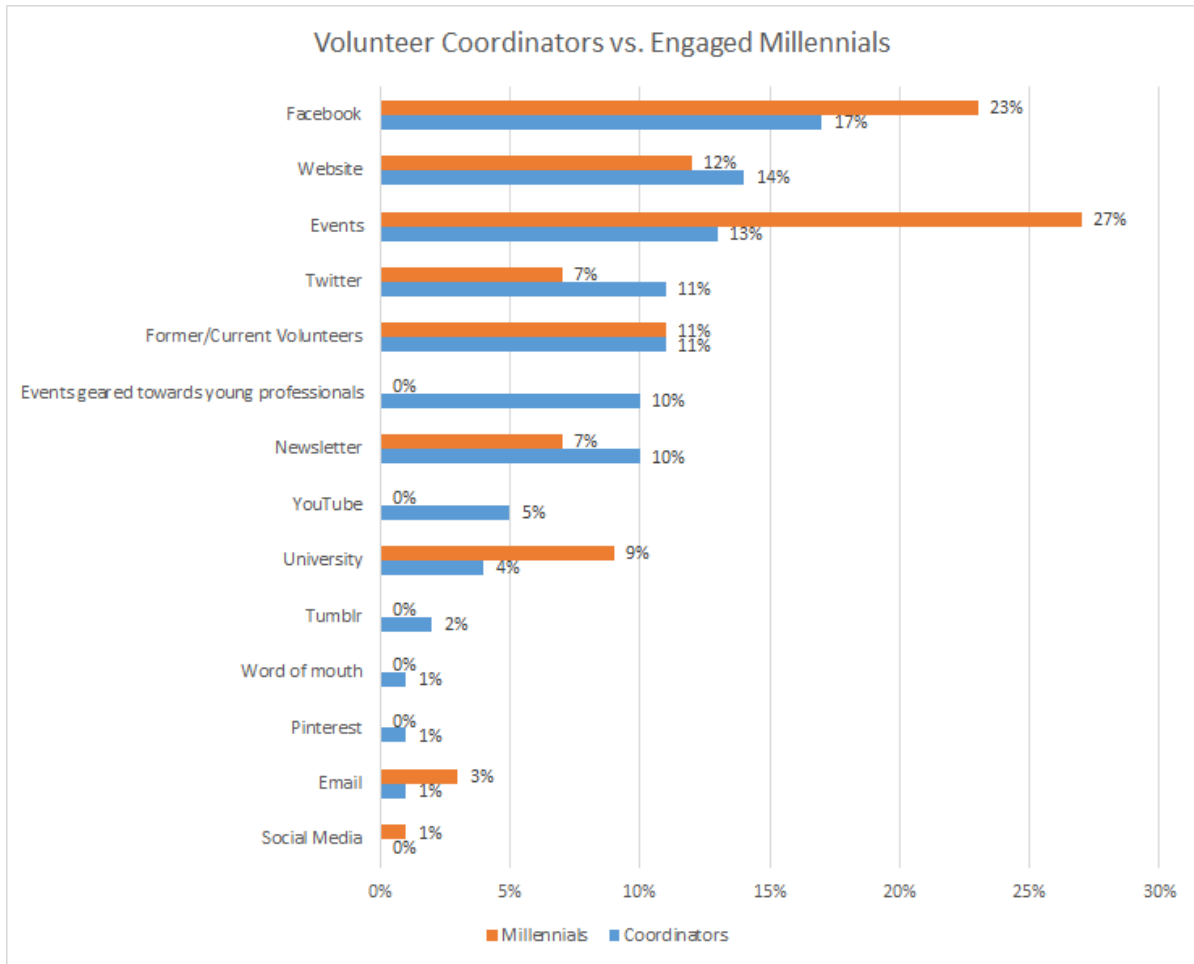


Figure 4- Effective Methods to Engage Millennial Volunteers. Adapted from Callendar et al. (2014).

Volunteer coordinators tend to think that Facebook is the most effective method for reaching Millennials. They underestimate, however, the utility of events. Echoing the Millennial Impact Project, Callendar et al. (2014) demonstrated that Millennials want to experience an organization before committing. Coordinators also use some forms of recruitment (events geared towards young professionals, YouTube, word of mouth, and Pinterest) which Millennials do not at all view as effective (Callendar et al., 2014). This points to an inefficiency in terms of recruiting potential volunteers. Nonprofit organizations may be wasting valuable time on methods that are not engaging Millennials. One gap in this study is that there was no use of demographic data to

understand if different methods are successful for targeting Millennials without a college education, as opposed to those with a college education.

To summarize briefly, the major studies cited above offer valuable insights for nonprofits seeking to engage Millennial volunteers, regardless of the education level obtained. Millennials without a college education are far less engaged in volunteering activity than their peers with a college education. Some groups, such as Circle, have been studying this phenomenon, but no sources have directly explored the effect of a college education on the attitudes and beliefs held by Millennials towards volunteering.

The above studies reinforce the notion that nonprofit organizations need to target their Millennial populations intentionally: by demonstrating their social responsibility and ethical codes, by emphasizing their mission statement such that Millennials understand how the organization impacts others, by utilizing Millennials' social networks to engage other potential volunteers, by creating ways for Millennials to engage in short term, "test run" style activities, and by utilizing the methods identified by Millennials to be effective in engaging their peer group. The majority of the Millennial population does not hold a college degree, and there may be differences between the college educated and the non-college educated Millennial populations which can be utilized to target each portion of the Millennial generation effectively. The aforementioned sources do not explore this variable and therefore further work needs to be done to understand if education is a factor which influences the attitudes of Millennials as previously reported.

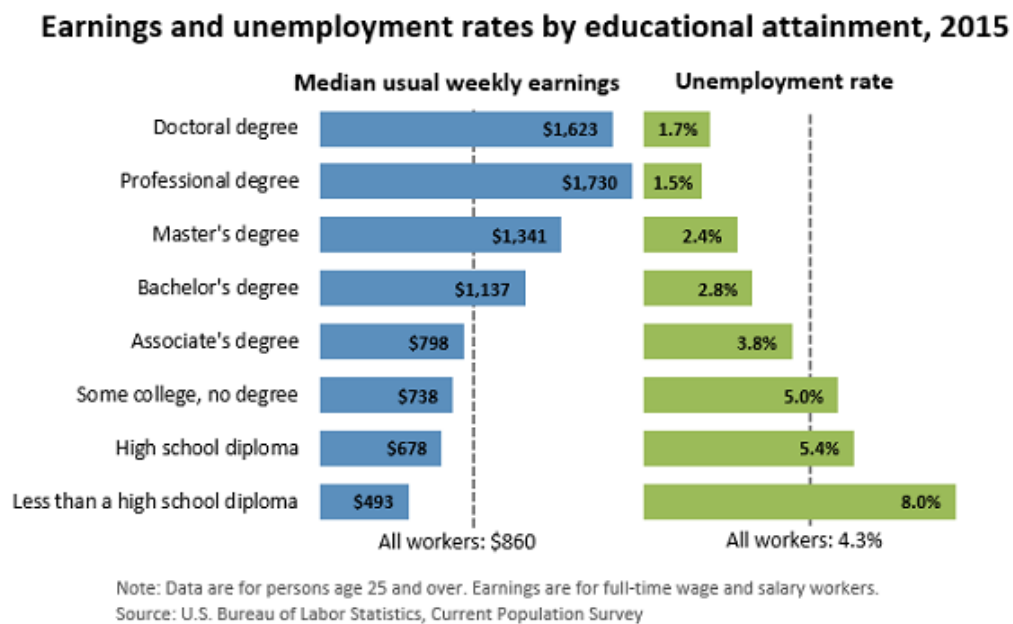
### **Potential Factors Affecting Volunteer Rate Disparity in Millennials**

It has been established that there is a difference in the volunteerism rates of Millennials based on the level of secondary and post-secondary education obtained. None of the current body

of research goes on to further ask the next question, then: why? Why do Millennials without a college education volunteer at drastically lower rates than their peers with a college education? What about the college education experience itself may affect this difference? Are there differences in attitudes on volunteering that exist between these two groups as a result of their educational difference? Much of the current research has sought to understand Millennials' general attitudes on volunteering or the demographic information on who volunteers and who does not. However, there is a need to explore *why* these discrepancies exist, and what it is about a college education that may be impacting these beliefs and volunteer rates. In short, there is a need to explore if this correlation is actually hiding a causal relationship between college education and higher volunteer rates amongst Millennials. This unexplored line of questioning may hold critical conclusions that allow organizations to more effectively target Millennial volunteers – both those with and without a college education.

There are many possible reasons as to why a college education might be causally linked with a higher volunteer rate. Here I will explore a few possible factors related to college education that may be influencing this difference.

**College graduates are more likely to have a higher income and work fewer hours to support themselves – leaving more time to engage in volunteer activity.** When each hour worked directly equates to the amount of food on the dinner table, hours of volunteered time may be more precious to those living with lower wages. According to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2015), those with any sort of college experience earn more than those without any college experience at all. Individuals with college experience are also less likely to face unemployment, as shown in Figure 5 below (United States Bureau of Labor statistics, 2015).



*Figure 5 - Earnings and unemployment rates by educational attainment (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015).*

Estimating a 40 year working career, those with a bachelor's degree will earn about 66% more than their peers with only a high school diploma (College Board, 2009). As education increases, so does this earning potential – with those obtaining professional degrees making 274% more over a 40 year career than those with only a high school diploma (College Board, 2009).

Workers who bring home smaller wages may be more pressured to spend their time on income-generating activities, as opposed to activities in which their time is freely donated.

However, this effect of a college education – increased income – may be experienced by other portions of the population who do not hold a college degree. For example, those who create their own business or obtain vocational training may see a larger income than otherwise seen in individuals with only a high school diploma. Because it is not immediately apparent whether or not there is a barrier to volunteering based on income or socioeconomic status, it is important to directly explore this potential relationship between volunteered time and income. One way to explore this is to ask Millennials directly if their income is a barrier to their ability to volunteer.

If so, nonprofit organizations may then be able to restructure their needs in a way that can be met in short time duration activities or from a distance.

A higher income may not be the only financial result of a college education that may affect Millennials' volunteer attitudes. Programs such as the Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education (TEACH) Grant and/or loan forgiveness programs for those who seek to enter fields of public service may also impact Millennials' attitudes toward volunteering. By providing a financial incentive to enter a field geared towards civic engagement, such as education, there may be a sort of conditioning effect to prepare these students to donate their time and be more civic-minded. To explore this question specifically, it is necessary to ask Millennials who have graduated college and taken advantage of these programs whether or not these financial programs had any lasting impact on their attitudes towards volunteering.

**College campuses seek to instill a sense of civic duty as a part of their culture.** A college education has long been considered a hallmark of an enlightened individual, capable of contributing to society. As Nelson Mandela (2003) stated: "Education is the most powerful weapon we can use to change the world ...."

If we examine the University of Northern Iowa as an example of this belief system, we discover that service is at the core of the university's operations and strategic planning. The 2010 Strategic Plan for the university states that the mission statement of the University of Northern Iowa is as follows: "The University of Northern Iowa provides transformative learning experiences that inspire students to embrace challenge, engage in critical inquiry, and contribute to society" (University of Northern Iowa, 2010, p. 1). Here, the focus on creating a sense of civic duty – by promoting the action of contributing to society – is clearly worked into the entire function of the university as a whole.



Further examination of this document reveals that one of the six core goals is as follows: “Goal 5. Enhance the economic, social, cultural, and sustainable development of the state” (University of Northern Iowa, 2010, p. 5). The first objective under this goal is to “Expand the university culture of community-engagement to increase the depth and breadth of participation” (University of Northern Iowa, 2010, p. 5). One of the three listed strategies to achieve this goal is as follows: “G5.O1.S3 – Increase service-learning opportunities and community-engagement in existing UNI courses” (University of Northern Iowa, 2010, p. 5). Above and beyond stating that contributing to society is in their mission, here is a clearly stated objective of increasing community-engagement with a clearly outlined strategy that promotes this engagement at the course level.

The University of Northern Iowa is not the only university with a focus on service in their mission: verbiage regarding “service” appears in the mission statements of The University of Illinois (2016), Texas A&M University (2016), Penn State University (2015), Lehigh University (2016), and The University of Alabama (2016), among others. This exposure to community-engagement should permeate the entire culture of the university as each student would then be exposed to it during the course of their studies. It stands to reason, then, that this emphasis on engagement will instill a sense of civic-mindedness in the students who are surrounded by such a culture on a regular basis.

There are, however, other sources from which Millennials may draw their opinions on volunteering. One such source may be their workplace. A 2004 publication from the Points of Light Institute notes that “Today’s business environment demands a heightened sense of ethics, accountability, and social responsibility. ... Ultimately ... companies know that they cannot expect to be successful doing business in an unhealthy community; and it’s their responsibility to

do something positive to make a difference” (p. ii). Millennials largely subscribe to this idea, and “one recent study revealed that 68 percent of people between the ages of 18 and 26 prefer to work for a company that provides professional volunteer opportunities” (Eisner et al., 2009, p. 37).

In order to ascertain whether or not it is the college’s work on instilling a sense of service that may have a positive effect of the volunteer rates of college graduates, it is important to directly question Millennials on how their college education impacted their views on service, if at all. It is also important to explore the role that workplace culture may have on Millennials’ volunteering attitudes. While nonprofit organizations may not seek to weigh in on whether or not to influence students to continue on for a college education, understanding the role that the educational experience itself may play in terms of preparing Millennials for volunteer service will allow for more targeted and successful volunteer recruitment. Volunteer recruitment will also be aided by an understanding of the role that workplace attitudes have on Millennials’ beliefs on volunteering.

**Millennials with a college education may define volunteering differently than their peers without a college education.** As mentioned previously, the lack in clarity on what constitutes volunteering may lead to some interesting and unintended results when Millennials are asked to self-report their volunteer activity. Of the major studies referenced in the Literature Review portion of this paper, only one disclosed the definition of volunteer that was used in their study (Global Ties, 2014). To restate what Ellis (2012) noted earlier, perhaps a large part of the difference in volunteer rates is that “people want to serve but don’t think they can” (p. 22). Or, perhaps Millennials are serving, but they themselves (or the nonprofit organizations they donate their time to) do not realize that their actions are a method of volunteering.

College educated Millennials may be exposed to technology more than their peers who have not pursued a college education. College students are demanding technology in a way that is revolutionizing pedagogical methods, according to the Educause Center for Analysis and Research (ECAR) Study of Undergraduate Students and Information Technology, 2014. The report states that technology serves not only to connect students to their peers and faculty, but also to connect the student to their institution (Educause Center for Analysis and Research, 2014). In fact, student engagement in coursework is directly tied to the course's use of technology (ECAR, 2014). Technology is an integral facet of the current college educational experience, on a level far above and beyond what is experienced in high school.

It is not unreasonable, then, to assume that these highly technologically inclined, college educated Millennials are also looking to more technology-based methods of volunteering – perhaps even more so than their peers. Perhaps they are engaging in this manner, and reporting their microvolunteering activity – sharing causes on Facebook and other online methods of leveraging their social networks – when asked about their volunteering habits. Are the nonprofit organizations who wish to harness the volunteer capacity of the Millennial generation detailing their volunteer needs in such a way that Millennials are willing to get engaged? Without a clear definition of what constitutes volunteering, it is impossible to know if Millennials are reporting acts of microvolunteering as their primary method of engaging with a nonprofit organization.

What about the Millennials without a college education? It is likely that this group, not as immersed in technology, does not view these same activities as volunteering – and therefore is not reporting these types of volunteering activities when asked about their volunteering habits. Unless survey questions explicitly state what is considered to be volunteering for the purposes of the study, there is likely a very large self-reporting issue that at least partially accounts for the

drastic difference in volunteer rates between college and non-college educated Millennials. This should be explored by determining what Millennials, of varying levels of education, consider to be volunteering.

This raises the question of what type of volunteering is most meaningful to nonprofit organizations, and whether there is a need to impart a more universal definition of volunteering on the Millennial generation, or even with the researchers seeking to assist nonprofit organizations in recruiting Millennials? Or, perhaps, is the type of volunteering needed by an organization so particular that speaking in generalities is the only way to encompass all of the possible needs? With such a large portion of the Millennial population without a college degree – more than three-quarters – nonprofit organizations need the information to understand just how to target these two demographic groups effectively and efficiently.

Nonprofit organizations must clearly state their needs, even those that Millennials may not be as eager to fill, such as stuffing envelopes and serving food. These activities are meaningful to nonprofit organizations and to the causes they support, and better marketing that focused on how Millennials contribute to these activities may encourage more engagement. Nonprofit organizations must also be more flexible in the ways they seek to engage Millennials, and must provide opportunities to be involved from a distance. By further exploring the potential factors that, due to a college education, may lead to the gap in volunteering rates (16.4% among those without a college education versus 39.4% for those with), nonprofit organizations will be able to recruit Millennials efficiently to fill their volunteer needs and sustain their organizations and their missions.

### **Conclusion**

Organizations that utilize volunteers are at a turning point in which they will begin to see Millennials as the next, largest population of their volunteer workforce. In order to efficiently engage Millennials, it is necessary to understand Millennials' beliefs and attitudes about volunteering. This paper provided a more critical look at the unexplored demographic variable of higher education on Millennial volunteer attitudes and behaviors. Millennials without a college education are far less likely to volunteer than their peers, yet comprise three-quarters of their generation. No research has explored if there is a causal effect between a college education and the higher volunteer rates as seen among the Millennials with a college degree.

This difference in volunteer rates may be due to a verity of factors, including income differences, values instilled during college, or a difference in beliefs as to what constitutes volunteering. Further study is necessary to fully understand this issue and provide nonprofit organizations with information that will allow them to target Millennial volunteers more efficiently. These questions are significant in that they provide a new direction for research that stands to benefit nonprofit organizations as they seek to bolster their volunteer workforce with the highly skilled, highly motivated Millennial generation.

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