

ABSTRACT

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Are Government Agencies Using More Volunteers?

Evidence from the U.S. and Implications for Other Nations

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Abstract:

Scholars and practitioners rarely conceive of volunteers as assisting the public sector (Brudney 1990). Although studies based on the U.S. suggest that government may be responsible for as much one-third of all volunteering activity, scant research has examined government preparation for and adoption of volunteer programs. The great bulk of research on volunteering is directed to the context of nongovernmental organizations.

In recent years, though, financial stringency has led elected leaders to advocate for volunteers to sustain or expand public services, not only in the United States but also cross-nationally. In the U.S. biennial surveys conducted by the Bureau of Labor Statistics attempt to document the extent of citizen volunteering--but an effective citizen response requires greater attention by nonprofit and government organizations to having and establishing supports, structures, and programs to enable more volunteering. Brudney and Gazley (2005) examined this issue among local governments in the State of Georgia in 2005, but a systematic evaluation of the use of volunteers by local governments has not been conducted since the early 1990s (Brudney, 1990). The proposed research will fill that gap by investigating changes in the landscape of government volunteer use over the past two decades.

Our research will estimate the response by local governments in U.S. cities and counties to increased pressures to incorporate volunteers in the 2000s. For this purpose we use the Alternative Service Delivery (ASD) Surveys administered by the International City County Management Association (ICMA) of a stratified random sample of cities and counties States. These

surveys assess the use by cities and counties of volunteers (as well as a variety of other service-delivery modalities, such as government personnel, outsourcing, etc.) to deliver 67 local public services.

Based on the ASD surveys conducted in 1997, 2002 and 2007 (and hopefully 2012, which ICMA plans to release in 2017), we investigate how volunteer use by local governments to deliver services has shifted since the late 1990s. We also examine how factors such as population, form of government, region, and financial resources affect these changes. We model our statistical analysis hierarchically to capture regional variations in volunteering in the United States at the highest level of aggregation, and circumstances of specific local governments such as tax burden, demands for services, etc. at a more

Most important references:

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