

INVESTING IN VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT: A FORMULA FOR STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY

As a large philanthropic organization dedicated to caring for people in New York and around the world, UJA-Federation of New York invests in organizations so they, in turn, can strengthen communities and provide dignified and values-driven services to help people. We have long recognized that volunteers play a vital role in extending organizational reach and capacity. In 2014, we made this belief more explicit by establishing the Time for Good Initiative, which is dedicated to helping organizations leverage volunteer talent more strategically.

In the ten years since its launch, Time for Good has invested more than \$14 million in dozens of organizations. Time for Good is now transitioning to a new strategy in which volunteer engagement and associated funding will be integrated across all social service-related grant making. UJA and its partners believe that sharing the lasting results of these investments in volunteer engagement will inspire others to close the gap in volunteer engagement funding — by inspiring more funders to invest in volunteer engagement infrastructure and by emboldening more organizational leaders to request and budget for volunteer engagement resources.

This report provides an overview of the Time for Good Initiative, outlines research highlights gathered during initial grant periods and through longitudinal data collected years after the initial investment, and reveals UJA's strategic next steps. The results of surveys to grantees undeniably point to lasting effects of these investments on organizational capacity, culture, and service delivery and can serve as a replicable blueprint. While the details may not apply directly to every philanthropic organization, we believe that the lessons learned are widely applicable and can transform how foundations and donors enable organizations to fulfill their mission.

TIME FOR GOOD — AN OVERVIEW

With a three-part mission to care for Jews everywhere and New Yorkers of all backgrounds, respond to crises close to home and far away, and shape the Jewish future, UJA provides funding and other resources to a core network of nonprofits (nearly 65 health, human-service, educational, and community-building institutions), and more than 300 other organizations. To advance these priorities, UJA studies and tracks changes in the organizational landscape. Noting that government and philanthropic dollars were increasingly harder to come by in the wake of the Great Recession of 2008 – 2009, we were concerned that many organizations were missing out on the substantial benefits of strategic volunteerism because they did not understand the potential benefits or have competence in the basic best practices of volunteer engagement. This trend posed a stark contrast to UJA's long-held belief in volunteerism as a low-cost intervention to sustain and scale the work of nonprofits addressing priorities today and the needs of their communities tomorrow. Given our commitment to not only funding but also educating and encouraging our grantees to leverage all available resources, the Time for Good Initiative was born.

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In 2014, the Time for Good Initiative began to offer education to organizations on the "hows and whys" of strategic volunteer engagement, provide customized support to adopt effective engagement practices, and demonstrate the power and potential of strategic engagement across the organizational landscape. For the next decade, Time for Good was fueled by our belief that strategic volunteerism has the power to strengthen organizations, build community, and create a culture of care in which all matter, all can help, and all can receive. With the close of this chapter, we sought to verify these beliefs beyond agency grants reports (which are impressive!) and our own observations. As such, we surveyed Time for Good grantees to explore these themes and identify the longer-term impacts of our investments. This report provides a framework for understanding how the survey data demonstrate that investments in volunteer engagement infrastructure and support can have a profound impact on the organizations and the communities they serve.

Written by UJA-Federation of New York, in partnership with VQ Volunteer Strategies and the Initiative for Strategic Volunteer Engagement.



THE TIME FOR GOOD STRATEGY

While program focuses evolved over the decade, Time for Good consistently supported selected organizations through a four-phase strategy that included an assessment, training in volunteer best practices, coaching, and funding qualified organizations for sustained implementation. At its outset, Time for Good looked to the Points of Light Service Enterprise Initiative. Points of Light, a worldwide organization dedicated to volunteer service, brought its Service Enterprise Initiative to a national audience in 2013. Service Enterprise is a training and certification program that transforms organizations by centering volunteer engagement as a core strategy for mission fulfillment.¹

Guided by the national curriculum and informed by ongoing research, Service Enterprise training and certification are delivered locally by hubs (often volunteer centers, state service commissions, and, as in the case of UJA, foundations). In 2014, Time for Good launched its Jewish Service Enterprise Initiative (JSEI) with a cohort of agencies that completed the research-driven diagnostic, participated in 16 hours of training followed by individual team coaching, and then earned their Service Enterprise certification badges. Successful JSEI organizations were invited to apply for funds for volunteer management infrastructure. UJA (with support from some outside consultants who are certified Service Enterprise trainers) delivered JSEI to three cohorts of 19 agencies over the course of five years.

In 2019, Time for Good sought to adopt a nimbler and more individualized approach and engaged VQ Volunteer Strategies. VQ Volunteer Strategies, a consulting firm specializing in strategic volunteer engagement, already had experience delivering both JSEI and other cohort-based models to enhance volunteer-driven impact. VQ Volunteer Strategies and Time for Good partnered to pilot a new model of support, known as the Volunteer Accelerator.

While JSEI was a top-down process, designed to transform an entire organization at once, the Volunteer Accelerator supported organizations through more bottom-up change management, identifying one specific need that can be addressed through strategic engagement of volunteers. Volunteer Accelerators are based on the premise that demonstrating the power and potential of strategic engagement to address a pressing need inspires buy-in throughout the organization.

Like JSEI, this program model provided organizations with an assessment, training in volunteer engagement, and individual coaching sessions to address specific organizational volunteer needs and growth, though the Accelerators operated on a shorter timeframe. As with JSEI, successful agencies were invited to apply for a volunteer program grant ranging from \$45,000 to \$100,000 per year for up to five years. A hallmark of both models was the development of a community of practice to explore engagement trends, pilot new practices, and share learnings. Since 2019, Time for Good has engaged VQ Volunteer Strategies to

^{1.} The Service Enterprise program is now administered by the Association of Leaders in Volunteer Engagement, and successful organizations receive an accreditation (rather than a certification) as a "Service Enterprise."

deliver five Volunteer Accelerators, each hosting two to four agencies connected by a common mission: Food Pantry Accelerator, Employment Services Accelerator, Older Adult Accelerator, Mental Health & Wellbeing Accelerator, and Orthodox Women's Accelerator.

All organizations that participated in Volunteer Accelerators completed pre- and post-Accelerator surveys and submitted metrics on volunteer involvement and the impacts before and during the program year — for example, food distributed, crisis line calls fielded, education programs delivered, etc. Together, these data points tell a story of transformation over the course of the Accelerator. Yet, the Time for Good survey conducted in 2024 provides a powerful epilogue: a chance to see if and how the work was sustained beyond the initiative timeframe by JSEI and Accelerator participants. As will be shown below, the Accelerator's success across diverse programmatic areas suggests the potential for widespread adoption of the model.

Starting in 2020, Time for Good also provided emergency funding to some organizations that were engaging volunteers to respond to Covid-driven needs (such as organizations that quickly set up food pantries or meal programs), providing support for volunteer engagement professionals' salaries, other infrastructure, and, in many cases, coaching by VQ Volunteer Strategies. While not a cohort-based program, this support was in line with Time for Good's commitment to pair funding with education and professional development for sustained success. These grantees were also invited to complete the survey.



BUILDING BLOCKS OF STRATEGIC VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT

As noted above, Time for Good sought to educate organizations on the benefits of strategic volunteer engagement and provide customized support to adopt effective engagement practices, as well as to demonstrate the power and potential of strategic engagement across the organizational landscape — in other words, to build a culture of engagement with and across organizations. Survey results indicate success in all of these arenas.

Our initial approach was informed by the Service Enterprise research showing that organizations that embrace strategic volunteer engagement outperform others across multiple capacities. Further research identified key characteristics common to these organizations. These characteristics became the backbone of the Service Enterprise training and certification. As we shifted to the Volunteer Accelerator model, our commitment to proven best practices did not wane. Informed by VQ Volunteer Strategies' ten years of implementing the initiatives on which the Volunteer Accelerator was based, the Accelerators also were built around proven practices in volunteer engagement. These leading practices, which align with those of JSEI, include:

- Organizational commitment to volunteer engagement, including (but not limited to) leadership support of volunteer engagement and incorporating volunteer engagement into staff expectations
- Development of strategic, mission-aligned volunteer opportunities, with well-crafted position descriptions
- Effective volunteer recruitment, including ensuring that opportunities are accessible to prospective volunteers and cultivating current volunteers for new and different roles
- Thoughtful screening and placement of volunteers
- Training both volunteers and the staff who engage them for success.
- > Supporting volunteers and ensuring a culture of accountability
- Facilitating efficient engagement through policies and infrastructure
- > Tracking and communicating the multifaceted impacts of volunteer involvement
- Recognizing and celebrating those impacts meaningfully

Time for Good believes — and showed through its initiatives — that adopting these practices increases the likelihood of developing impactful and sustainable volunteer programs. As described by a post-Accelerator survey respondent from Propel:

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Building on the skills and knowledge that we acquired in the Volunteer Accelerator program, we have solicited 30 volunteer mentors.... This is only the beginning. We have formulated a plan for training these volunteers to be effective mentors and role models for our clients and ambassadors for our organization. We look forward to a deep and meaningful implementation of our plan as we empower the women of our community to support each other.

The pre- and post-Accelerator surveys consistently showed an increased adoption of best practices even over the course of the program year. The recent survey enabled us to benchmark whether those practices were sustained in the subsequent 1, 2, or 3 years after the Accelerator — and the results are encouraging. All or nearly all Accelerator participants who completed pre-Accelerator, post-Accelerator, and the 2024 Time for Good survey showed that they sustained or enhanced practices over the long term. See below.

Practice	Average pre- Accelerator	Average post- Accelerator	Average in 2024 Survey
Volunteer roles have written position descriptions	7%	72%	100%
We have a volunteer recruitment plan	10%	97%	83%
Volunteers receive training specific to their roles	35%	89%	92%
Staff members (or volunteer leaders) are trained to work effectively with volunteers	28%	81%	92%
We regularly track volunteer involvement (e.g. tracking hours)	27%	61%	100%

These — and other — building blocks of engagement were strengthened across all participating organizations, not just those who took part in the Volunteer Accelerator, and the sustained implementation of such practices was confirmed in the 2024 survey, which showed widespread use of:

- > Written volunteer position descriptions (85%)
- > Volunteer recruitment plans (92%)
- > Formalized volunteer application process (88%)
- > Volunteer orientations (92%)

This level of commitment to proven engagement practices indicates an infrastructure that supports sustained engagement. Betsy Jacobson, executive director of United Jewish Council of the Lower East Side, explained:

With the expertise and resources offered through the Accelerator program, we were able to recruit, train, and retain a dedicated team of volunteers who have made a significant impact on our community. The partnership with UJA-Federation through the Volunteer Accelerator program has been a game-changer for us, allowing us to leverage the power of volunteerism to drive positive change and make a difference in the lives of those we serve.

Building a Culture of Strategic Volunteerism

Time for Good recognizes that strategic volunteer engagement is best supported by an organizational culture that views volunteers as essential to mission-fulfillment — and that such a view begins at the top with board and executive support. Before beginning our work together, we required not only leadership support of the initiatives but also direct involvement. We also asked most participating organizations to invest their own funds and/or in-kind donations to the volunteer program. This investment increased organizational commitment to building an effective and sustainable volunteer department.

In addition to leadership support, a culture of engagement requires staff commitment. Time for Good believes that having one or more professionals dedicated to leading the volunteer engagement strategy is vital, which is why much of our ongoing funding helped to support salaries of volunteer directors and/or coordinators. Having professionals to advocate for the engagement strategy and sustain or expand infrastructure facilitates effective engagement. But volunteer engagement professionals cannot do this work alone. It takes the support of the entire organization to infuse strategic volunteerism into the work; in fact, training and equipping fellow staff to support volunteers is part of the volunteer director's responsibilities. Fortunately, our research shows that Time for Good grantees have integrated volunteer engagement across the organizations, with nearly all (24 of 26 survey respondents) including responsibilities for engaging volunteers in the job descriptions for staff across the agency.

Clear and consistent expectations of staff by leadership to engage volunteers — along with the support of experienced volunteer engagement professionals — ripples across an organization, benefiting staff, volunteers, and clients.

Of course, the benefits to clients are the ultimate goal.







THE IMPACTS OF STRATEGIC VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT

While best practices are the building blocks of strategic engagement, the ultimate goal is mission delivery. The results of Time for Good's investments indicate that investing in and supporting strategic engagement has directly enhanced grantees' delivery of mission-critical programs. Nearly all participating organizations agree that incorporating strategic volunteerism has enhanced the quality of programs and services. In addition to benefiting agency clients, strong volunteer programs strengthen organizations. More than 90% of Time for Good grantees say that their volunteers bring an enhanced organizational focus on mission, more energy, and more passion. Furthermore, engaging volunteers expands the organizations' resources. Of course, together, these results underscore the significant return on investment that the Time for Good funding reaped. These three areas of impact are highlighted below.

- > Enhanced Program Reach and Quality
- > Crisis Response and Resiliency
- > Return on Volunteer Investment

Enhanced Program Reach and Quality

Thanks to enhanced volunteer engagement, Time for Good grantees expanded reach and, in many cases, were even enabled to develop entirely new programs and services. For example, Shorefront Jewish Community Council, a Volunteer Accelerator participant, was able to implement a Census project in 2020 thanks to the engagement of many virtual volunteers who made calls, sent messages, and leveraged social media to educate and increase participation in the Census. For the Jewish Community Council of Rockaway Peninsula, additional volunteers and more strategic recruitment and scheduling enabled the organization to keep the food pantry open 50% more hours each week, thereby making it more accessible to clients.

According to the 2024 survey, 100% of Time for Good participants report that volunteers increase quality of programs provided and 92% say that volunteers provide more detailed attention to people served.

Volunteers can extend and expand the organization's capacity. This aspect of expanded organizational reach is reflected by Emily Ward, NYLAG's director of Institutional Giving and Government Relations.

Put simply, volunteers allow us to accept cases that we otherwise would not have the capacity to work on. Last year, the value of the time contributed by pro bono lawyers, law students, and other volunteers was valued at over \$53.5 million dollars, which is more than NYLAG's operating budget.

Further, NYLAG's experience is a reminder that organizations can tap volunteers for specialized skills beyond what staff alone can provide. Leaning into volunteers' unique talents and expertise benefits the volunteers eager to share their talents, the organizations that receive their support, and, of course, the individuals being served.

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Crisis Response and Resiliency

The latter years of the Time for Good Initiative decade were marked by crises. However, the early Service Enterprise research indicated that strategic engagement correlates with organizations being more adaptable² (as well as sustainable and capable of going to scale), and our Time for Good research bears that out as well. According to the 2024 survey, nearly all Time for Good participants (88%) report that engaging volunteers enabled the organization to be nimbler in crisis response.

In times of crisis, volunteers provide critically needed support to sustain organizations and extend their reach. The strong volunteer departments we helped establish allow our partner organizations to adapt their operations in the face of unexpected challenges and emergencies. In fact, 65% of Time for Good grantees mentioned the crucial impact of volunteers during the Covid-19 pandemic. In the face of unprecedented needs, volunteers rose to meet the moment, ensuring that the vulnerable did not go hungry, isolation was reduced through caring phone calls, and, when vaccines became available, all who needed help to schedule vaccine appointments received it.

Skilled volunteers were recruited to provide virtual job coaching and mentoring, technology training for older adults so they could continue to access medical appointments, and virtual recreational and educational programs. They also managed a domestic violence hotline so that, even in a time of rising levels of domestic violence, every caller received the listening ear and connection to services that they needed.

Volunteer-driven crisis response was not limited to the pandemic. Nearly 20% of Time for Good grantees said that their volunteers have made it possible for their communities to respond to the impact of the war in Ukraine both here in New York and abroad. Volunteers in New York organizations drives for much-needed humanitarian aid to support those who remained in Ukraine. Meanwhile, volunteers have translated for Ukrainian refugees so that they could access needed services and experience community far from home and have supported them through career readiness and job search efforts. Some of these volunteers were recent Ukrainian refugees themselves, giving back through the very organizations that had so recently helped them, as described by Larisa Boas, executive director of the Shorefront Jewish Community Council:

As new Ukrainian arrivals awaited work authorization documentation, they joined our volunteer ranks and subsequently shared their resettlement experiences with later arrivals. This firsthand knowledge empowered newcomers to navigate their resettlement journeywith greater confidence and direction, instilling a renewed sense of hope and motivation.

Most recently, almost a third of grantees explained the crucial role volunteers have played in their response to the terrorist attacks in Israel on October 7, 2024. Volunteers collected humanitarian aid and supplies for shipment to Israel. They also supported the emotional health of clients and staff struggling with the impact of October 7 in New York through the creation of a volunteer-run support hotline and small-group and individual support. Volunteers also continued existing support for Israel, made more urgent and impactful in light of the war. Rabbi Brian Fink, director of the UJA-Federation Engage Jewish Service Corps at the Marlene Meyerson JCC Manhattan (a Time for Good Partner) explained,

During the Israel/Gaza War, our English Overseas program has become vitally important as the world navigates partnerships between Israelis and Arabs. This program partners with the Municipality of Jerusalem, pairing Israeli high school students with JCC older adults for weekly conversations in English. We currently partner with high schools in East Jerusalem, bringing Arab high school students together with the JCC.

Simply put, in times of crisis, strategic volunteerism extends organizations' reach and expands the circle of caring.

Return on Volunteer Investment

Since its inception, Time for Good has invested \$14 million in volunteer programs. In FY23, Time for Good invested \$1.7 million dollars. These grants were used for volunteer engagement professionals' salaries and related expenses such as software and volunteer engagement training. The FY23 investment enabled grantees to mobilize 24,504 unique volunteers who contributed 333,602 volunteer hours in FY23 alone. Using Independent Sector's value of \$37.29 for a volunteer hour in New York,³ these volunteer contributions are equivalent to 12.4 million, a substantial return on every dollar UJA spends. Viewed through the lens of staffing, these 333,602 hours translate to the work of 158 full-time employees. These numbers demonstrate the return on our investments, and help our nonprofit partners share the impact of volunteers with donors, staff, and their boards.

Additionally, engaging volunteers has been shown to enhance services, strengthen organizations, and increase adaptability and resilience. Of course, research has, for years, linked volunteering with charitable giving — with volunteers being significantly more likely than non-volunteers to donate charitably. Our Time for Good research demonstrates additional ways that engaging volunteers expands resources. In fact, 85% of Time for Good partners report that engaging volunteers extend the organization's budget, and 92% say that volunteers bring the organization into contact with potential donors.

³ https://independentsector.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Value-of-Volunteer-Time-by-State-2001-2020.pdf



Sustaining Strategic Volunteerism

[Time for Good] funding has enabled us to enhance our infrastructure, invest in technology, and improve our outreach efforts, ensuring that our volunteer programs are sustainable and impactful in the long term. Overall, the Time for Good strategic volunteerism initiative has strengthened our organization's capacity to address the evolving needs of our community and has positioned us for continued growth and success in the future.

Alexandra Nyashina, director of Volunteer Services at the Riverdale Y, eloquently wrote the words above, but they could have been written by any of the Time for Good grantees. Participating organizations have learned volunteer management best practices and have incorporated them throughout their agencies. They budget for volunteer engagement and track and communicate impacts. In fact, organizational leadership demonstrates their belief that engaging volunteers is essential to program delivery in their budgeting process, with 92% of grantees incorporating volunteer-related expenses into program budgets at least some of the time. Further, all grantees now share the impact of volunteer involvement with their boards and funders. Together, these practices will help assure continued funding for volunteerism now that Time for Good grants have concluded.

Sustaining the work will require more than funds alone. Fortunately, the communities of practice built into the JSEI and Volunteer Accelerators specifically, and Time for Good in general, are already inspiring continued commitment to excellence. Learning these best practices with other organizations serving similar populations created a support network to rely on even after the cohort-based work concluded, as Laura Colin Klein, Director of Volunteer Services at DOROT, shared:

Connecting with other Time for Good grantees also has been highly valuable to learn about the different ways in which others work with their volunteer communities. We have maintained a particularly strong partnership with JCC Engage and refer volunteers to one another's programs on an ongoing basis.

Doing the work together creates bonds between organizations that share a commitment to effective volunteer engagement, reinforcing best practices, and providing connections that staff continue to tap.

OUR HOPES FOR THE FUTURE

Ten years of results of the Time for Good initiative have confirmed our belief that investing in strategic volunteerism extends the reach of organizations, ignites passion for their missions, and strengthens communities. It is gratifying to see the positive impact participation in Time for Good has had on our grantee organizations and to know that the work we began together will continue long after the conclusion of our funding.

We hope this is just the beginning. Now that funding under the Time for Good banner is drawing to a close, we are infusing best practices throughout our social service-related grant making. We want organizations we fund to benefit from the lessons we have learned from Time for Good about the power and benefits of strategic volunteerism.

For funders, we encourage you to think about providing funding for strategically engaging volunteers as part of program funding to your grantees. For organizations, if you have not already, start conversations with funders around budget lines to support volunteerism.

It does not stop with us. We believe that Time for Good is a replicable model for funders and practitioners. We welcome the opportunity to mentor others and share our learnings.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to VQ Volunteer Strategies and the Initiative for Strategic Volunteer Engagement for your partnership and contributions to this report.



VQ Volunteer Strategies is a leading provider of high-impact volunteer engagement solutions designed to help organizations achieve *smarter impact*. They help organizations maximize existing resources, unlock their potential, and achieve mission by integrating volunteer engagement as a core organizational strategy. A longtime partner of UJA-Federation of New York, VQ Volunteer Strategies' president was one of the facilitators of UJA's Jewish Service Enterprise and codesigned and led the Volunteer Accelerator Initiatives.



The Initiative for Strategic Volunteer Engagement (ISVE) is a joint effort of funders and nonprofits to transform the future of volunteerism. We believe in the power of volunteers to expand impact and maximize mission accomplishment. Through practical and research-informed tools and resources ISVE inspires nonprofits to intentionally engage their volunteer networks and funders to further invest in strategic volunteer engagement. Partners include UJA-Federation of New York, The Leighty Foundation, The Lodestar Foundation, VolunteerMatch, and The National Alliance for Volunteer Engagement — with support from Fidelity Catalyst Fund for research diseemination.

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Volunteers greatly amplify our ability to offer a range of high-quality programs and services. Strategic volunteer engagement allows us to enhance program development for social and recreational activities and address a variety of needs for special populations, including children and adults with special needs, Holocaust survivors, and older adults with varying physical and mental impairments.

— The Marion and Aaron Gural JCC

⁴⁴ Put simply, volunteers allow us to accept cases that we otherwise would not have the capacity to work on. Last year, the value of the time contributed by pro bono lawyers, law students, and other volunteers was valued at over \$53.5 million dollars, which is more than NYLAG's operating budget.⁷⁷

- NYLAG

It is no exaggeration to say that without a full team of volunteers, UJCES would be forced to consider closing at least one pantry and imposing restrictions on the days, hours, and number of clients served at the other pantry limiting access to food.

UJC of the Lower East Side

During the pandemic, there was the pandemic within the pandemic, as rates of domestic abuse rose drastically, our dedicated volunteers continued to demonstrate extraordinary flexibility and resilience. For the first time in our history, volunteers worked remotely, and helped us increase hours of our domestic violence hotline, providing crucial support to individuals in distress as they sheltered in place. Our volunteers also enabled us to launch a chatline — to increase a barrier to support for those that were not able to call.

— Shalom Task Force

Our volunteers are deeply rooted in the communities we serve, often sharing common experiences or backgrounds with our clients. This intrinsic connection fosters a profound sense of empathy and understanding, enabling them to offer not only practical assistance but also invaluable emotional support and encouragement."

Shorefront JCC

⁶⁶ The Time for Good volunteer initiative has made a significant impact at the Jewish Community Center of Staten Island and has allowed for us to enhance our community outreach and service capabilities. By developing a dedicated group of volunteers, we have been able to expand our programs, reach underserved populations, and respond more effectively to emergent community needs.⁹⁹

UJA's signature initiative to promote and strengthen volunteerism throughout New York organizations.

\$14 million invested in building the volunteer infrastructure of 35 nonprofit organizations.

In 2023, Time For Good partners successfully mobilized 24,504 unique volunteers who contributed 333,602 volunteer hours — which is equivalent to 158 full-time employees. Using Independent Sector's value of \$37.29 for a volunteer hour in New York, these volunteer contributions are equivalent to \$12.4 million.



