

Is Everyone Welcome?

A Report Card on Inclusiveness in Volunteer Contexts



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Players

Assessing Diversity and Equity in Volunteer Inclusion (ADEVI) is a partnership between **Arizona State University (ASU)** and the **Council for Certification in Volunteer Administration (CCVA)**.

Faiza Venzant, Executive Director of CCVA, is co-principal investigator. She was a primary architect for the survey instrument, provided for connection with certified volunteer administrators (CVAs), and encouraged them to participate in the survey. She also provided regular feedback on the development of this brief.

Under the direction of **Dr. Mark Hager**, three graduate research assistants from ASU played vital roles in the ADEVI survey project. **Teresa Oswald** served as captain for data collection, while **Kelly Rutt** and **Suzette Major** crafted survey content and encouraged CVAs to participate.

The ADEVI project is a member of the 2022–2025 National Service and Civic Engagement Research cohort, sponsored by **AmeriCorps** (the operating name of the Corporation for National and Community Service).

Opinions or points of view expressed in this report are those of the authors and survey participants. Any claims herein do not necessarily reflect the official position of, or a position that is endorsed by, AmeriCorps or its Office of Research and Evaluation.

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The ADEVI Survey: Assessing Diversity

Several years ago, Mark Hager initiated a conversation with volunteer administrators about technology use in the pandemic. That marked the beginning of a productive partnership with Faiza Venzant. Reflecting on that project one day, Faiza remarked, “this technology topic has been interesting, but what the field could really use is more information on the inclusiveness of volunteer spaces. Does everybody have access? **Is everyone welcome?**”

Hager logged that comment in his head, awaiting opportunity. That day came when AmeriCorps announced a new round of funds available for research on civic engagement. He and Faiza proposed Year 1 of ADEVI. AmeriCorps opted to support it. **That first year focused on asking questions about equity, exploring inclusion, and listening to the field respond.**

Our foundational belief is that **communities work best when citizens engage each other.** With interaction, we learn about each others’ challenges and points of view. We learn to solve problems together. Volunteering in community organizations is a primary means by which we can engage our neighbors.

However, **if segments of the community do not feel welcome in volunteer spaces, they may well choose not to engage.** In that case, the benefits of civic engagement are lost.

So, what is the state of “inclusiveness” in these community volunteer contexts? To get a view on this question, we surveyed the professionals who are most in touch with volunteer spaces: CVAs. “CVA” is shorthand for an individual with a credential from the Council for Certification in Volunteer Administration (CCVA). **CVAs are “Certified in Volunteer Administration.”** We solicited information from 950 CVAs; we heard back from 564 of them (59.4%). For more background on the study, check out the last page of this report.

This report documents the section of the ADEVI survey that asks CVAs about their work and the inclusiveness of their workplaces. The next page describes a bit about the CVAs themselves. The bulk of the report is a variety of summaries regarding the equity journey of the organizations they work in. At a few points, **we are able to issue grades on organizational commitments to volunteers and inclusiveness.** The results are not always encouraging.

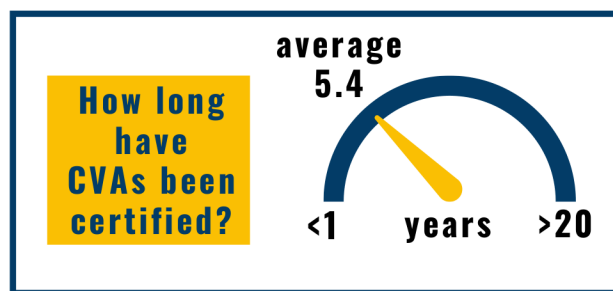
Participating CVAs

Volunteer administration is an under-appreciated profession. A large proportion of nonprofits and government agencies engage volunteers, but many under-invest in the programs and infrastructure required to maximize the experiences and contributions of those volunteers.

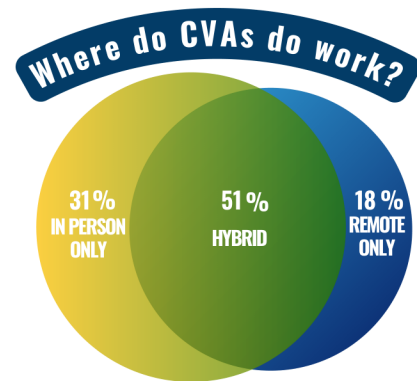


Most CVAs are paid staff working in paid positions (88%)

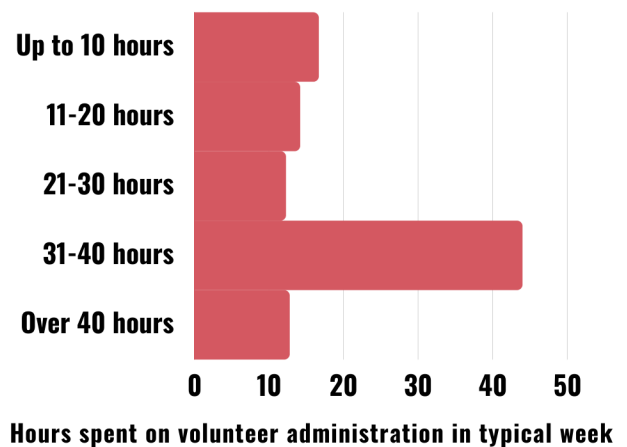
Those volunteer managers with a certification in volunteer administration (CVA) represent those who are most serious about the work. Organizations that employ them signal an unusual level of commitment to their volunteer program. However, even at this pinnacle, organizational commitments vary. For the CVAs that participated in the ADEVI survey, a substantial minority (12%) are working in a volunteer rather than staff capacity.



CCVA certifies new CVAs each year. Some survey participants were newly minted, while others earned their CVA more than 20 years ago. The average CVA in our study has held their CVA for a little over five years.



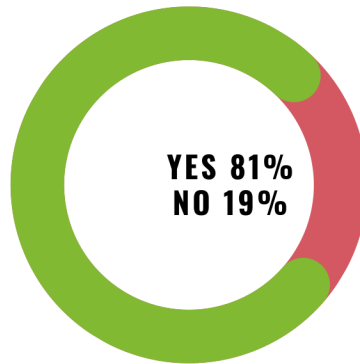
COVID-19 has accelerated remote work for volunteer administrators. **Less than one-third of survey respondents tell us they work solely from their work office.** Most do their duties partially or fully remote.



Variations in the commitments of employers and size of organization lead some volunteer managers to wear many hats. We asked CVAs how many hours they spend on volunteer administration. While some superstars are spending more than 40 hours a week, most spend less than 40. **A quarter of CVAs spend no more than 15 hours a week on volunteer administration duties.**

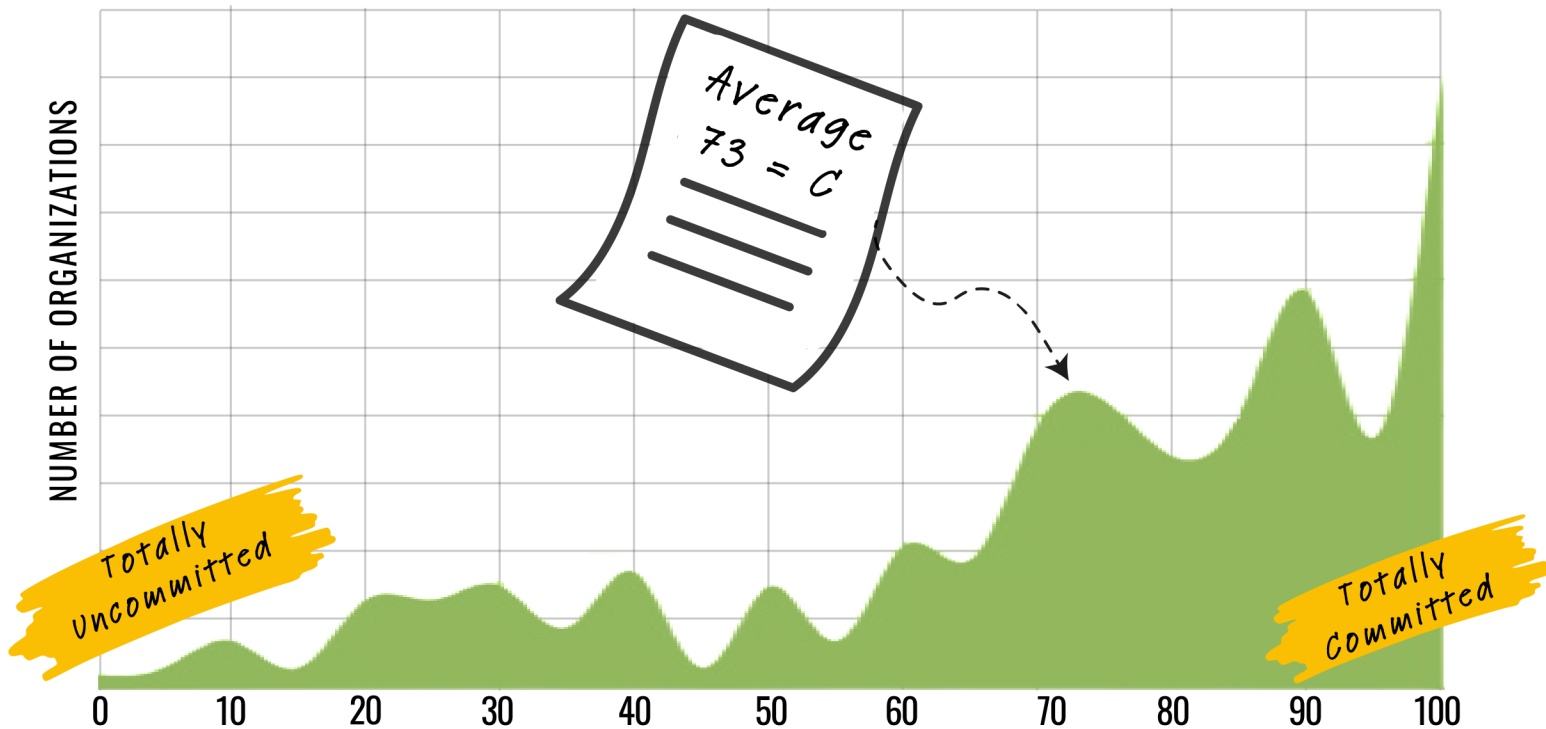
Commitments to Volunteers and Volunteer Administration

Does your organization have an individual who is designated for full-time volunteer administration?



How committed are voluntary organizations to their volunteers? Our respondents are atypical, since they come from that set of organizations that are serious enough to hire a certified administrator. So, we are a bit surprised to report that even **one-fifth** of this group does not have someone working at the task full time.

On a scale of 1 to 100, how would you rate your leadership's commitment to volunteers?



We asked the CVAs to assess their leadership's commitment to volunteers. While a fair number told us that their boards and top management teams were 70 to 100% committed to volunteers, almost as many gave lower "grades."

Indeed, a substantial portion told us that their leadership is less than 50% committed to volunteers. **The average (mean) CVA assesses their leadership as 73% committed. In most classrooms, that's a low C.**

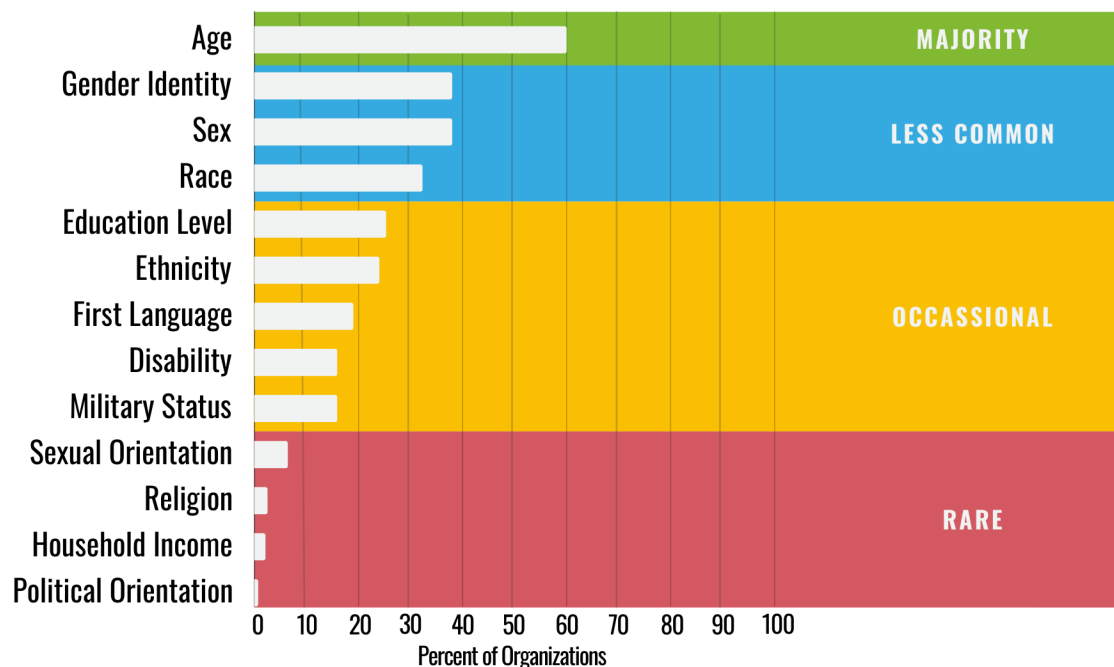
Equity Data

One indication of inclusiveness is the diversity of an organization's volunteers.

A more inclusive organization will attract and welcome a greater range of racial or gender identity, socio-economic standing, disability, or other hallmarks of difference.

We asked the CVAs if their volunteer program formally asks for and collects information on various characteristics of their volunteers. The table below shows that only age is collected by a majority of organizations. Even this is too sensitive for some organizations, with two in five declining to collect even this basic statistic.

Does your volunteer program formally collect this information on volunteers?



So, how diverse are the volunteers in our community organizations? Turns out that this question cannot be answered since organizations do not tend to collect such information from volunteers.

In some cases, the organization does not care to know. In other cases, the organization chooses not to ask questions that might be seen as sensitive or personal. The result is that we know less about the diversity of our volunteers than we might like.

Only about **one-third** of organizations collect information on **gender identity, sex, or race**. A **quarter or less** collect data on **education level, ethnicity, language, disability, or military status**. Knowledge of **sexual orientation, religion, household income, or personal political views** are almost unheard of.

Equity Data

Consequently, **most voluntary organizations cannot formally gauge their inclusiveness.** That is, they do not typically have a barometer of the current diversity of their volunteers.

But wait, perhaps volunteer administrators are familiar enough with their volunteers to know characteristics of their volunteers without having to formally ask about them? After all, many people wear their race, sex, and age on their sleeves.

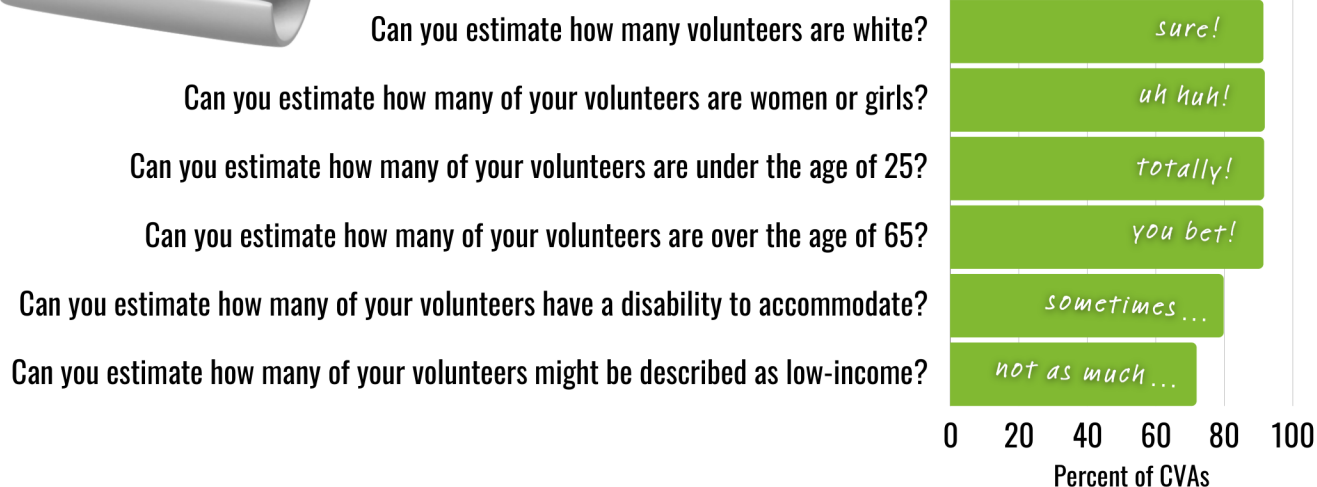
To check this ability, we asked volunteer administrators if they could estimate the basic demographics of their volunteer workforce.

As illustrated in the figure below, **over 90 percent felt they could estimate race, sex, and age.**

In the case of income and disability, two or three in ten CVAs declined to even make an estimate. Estimates of **inclusiveness** across income and disability are guesswork.

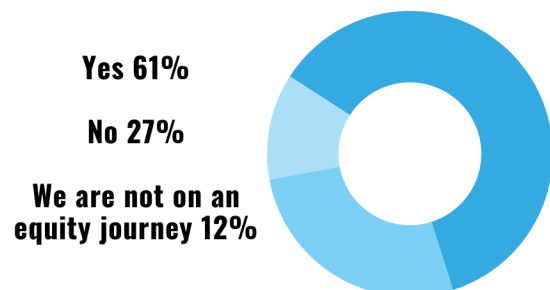


What percentage of CVAs are comfortable estimating demographics of their volunteer base?

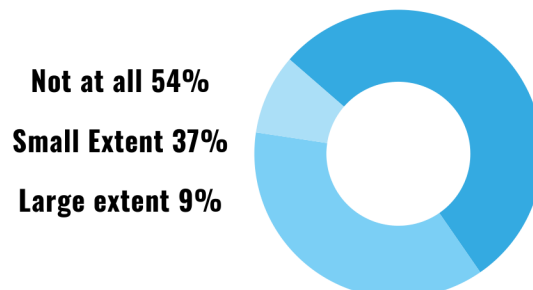


Including Volunteers on the Equity Journey

Wherever your organization is on its equity journey, are volunteers clearly accounted for or formally included in strategy and planning around **equity**?



To what extent does your organization use a screening process to investigate a volunteer's commitment to **equity**?



For new volunteers, do you provide **equity training**?

Yes 32%

No 68%

For current volunteers, do you provide ongoing **equity training**?

Yes 27%

No 73%

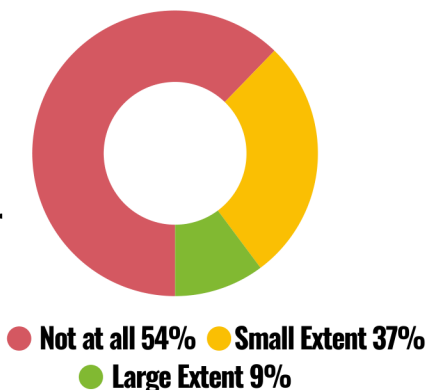
Do you believe you are providing enough **equity training** to your volunteers?

Yes 20%

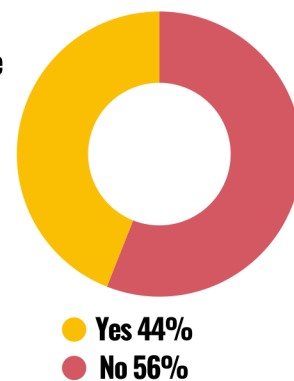
No 80%

Lived experience refers to a volunteer's personal knowledge gained through direct first-hand involvement as a member of or through work with the communities their organization engages.

To what extent is **lived experience** required for volunteers to partner with the communities your organization serves?

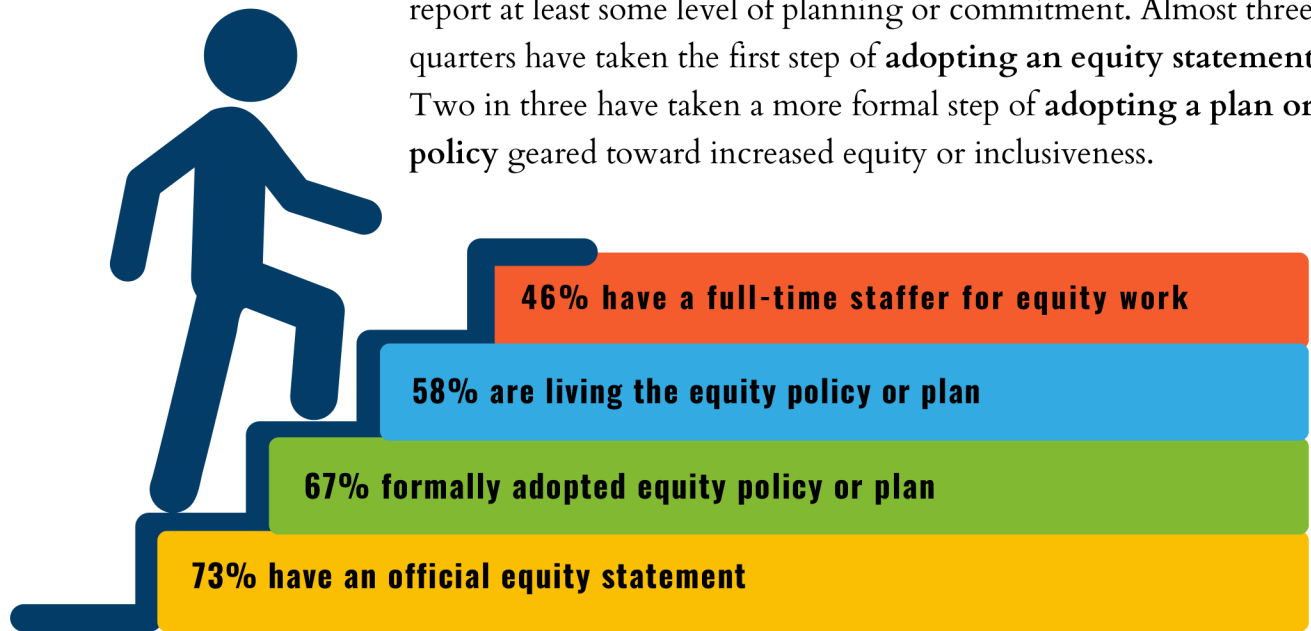


Does your organization provide training for your volunteers on the **lived experience** of the people or communities you serve or engage?



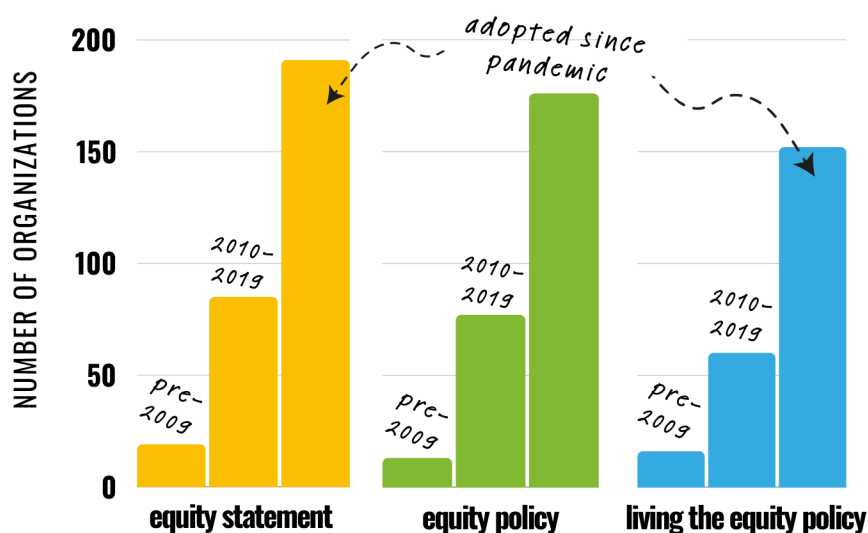
Organization Commitments to the Equity Journey

We are particularly interested in the “equity journey” of the organizations that CVAs work in. Nearly one in eight CVAs tell us that their organization is NOT on such a journey. The others report at least some level of planning or commitment. Almost three-quarters have taken the first step of **adopting an equity statement**. Two in three have taken a more formal step of **adopting a plan or policy** geared toward increased equity or inclusiveness.



Statements and plans are good steps, but they do not always translate into action. We asked CVAs the extent to which their organization is **living their equity plan**, and that step falls to just over half. A bigger step is **hiring of a full-time person responsible for equity work**. Surprisingly, nearly half of CVAs tell us that their organization has such a person. This underscores a clear difference between volunteer workplaces that are not on an equity journey

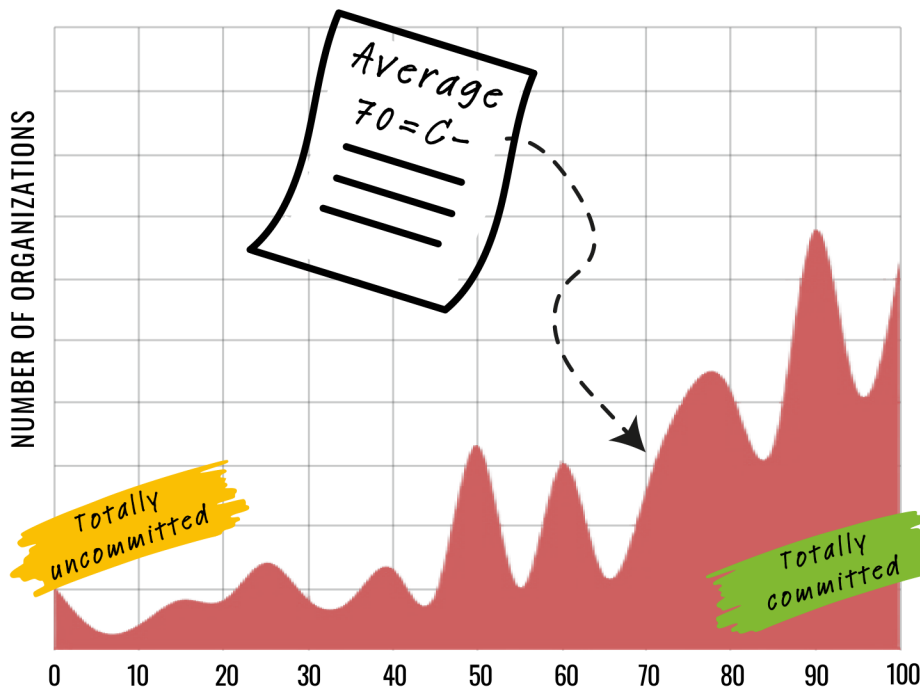
and others that have made big commitments to it.



Adoption of each step is recent for most voluntary organizations. In the chart to the left, the bars illustrate adoption at different points in time. **All three steps of the equity journey emerged primarily during or after the COVID-19 pandemic.**

Equity Journey Grades

On a scale of 1 to 100, how would you rate the **leadership's commitment to equity and inclusion?**



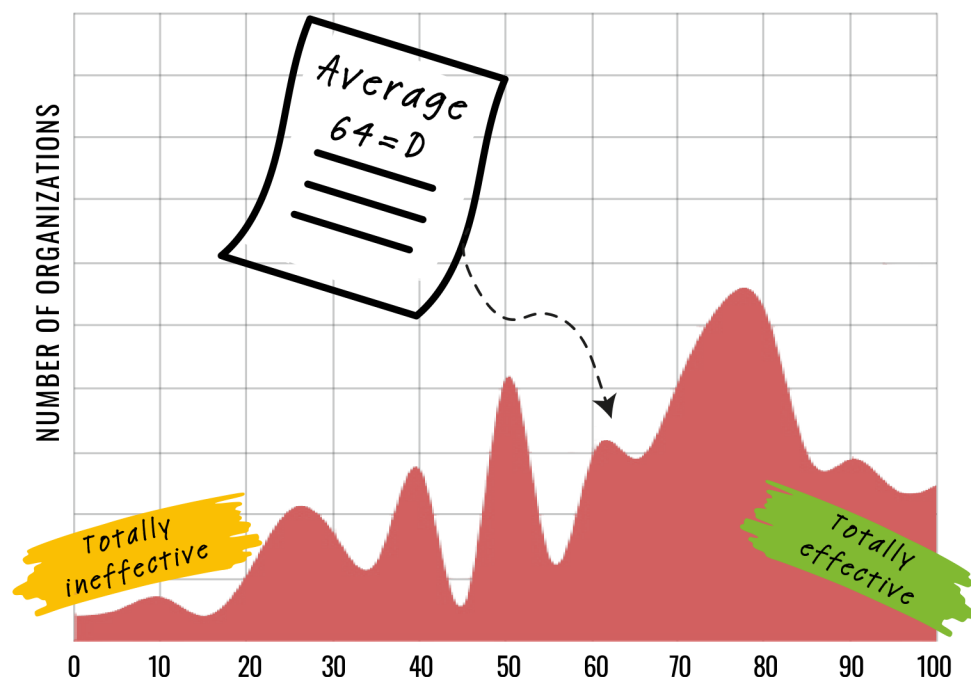
The first step in a successful equity journey is leadership commitment. Although many CVAs give high marks to leadership on inclusion, low marks are common.

The average grade on commitment to equity and inclusion is 70%, a very low C in most classrooms. This is a positive finding, so long as the field moves in the right direction.

On a scale of 1 to 100, How would you rate the effectiveness of your organization in **creating a diverse, equitable, and inclusive organizational environment?**

An organization's culture determines whether it is seen as welcoming. CVAs are fairly pessimistic about the status of their organization's equity journey.

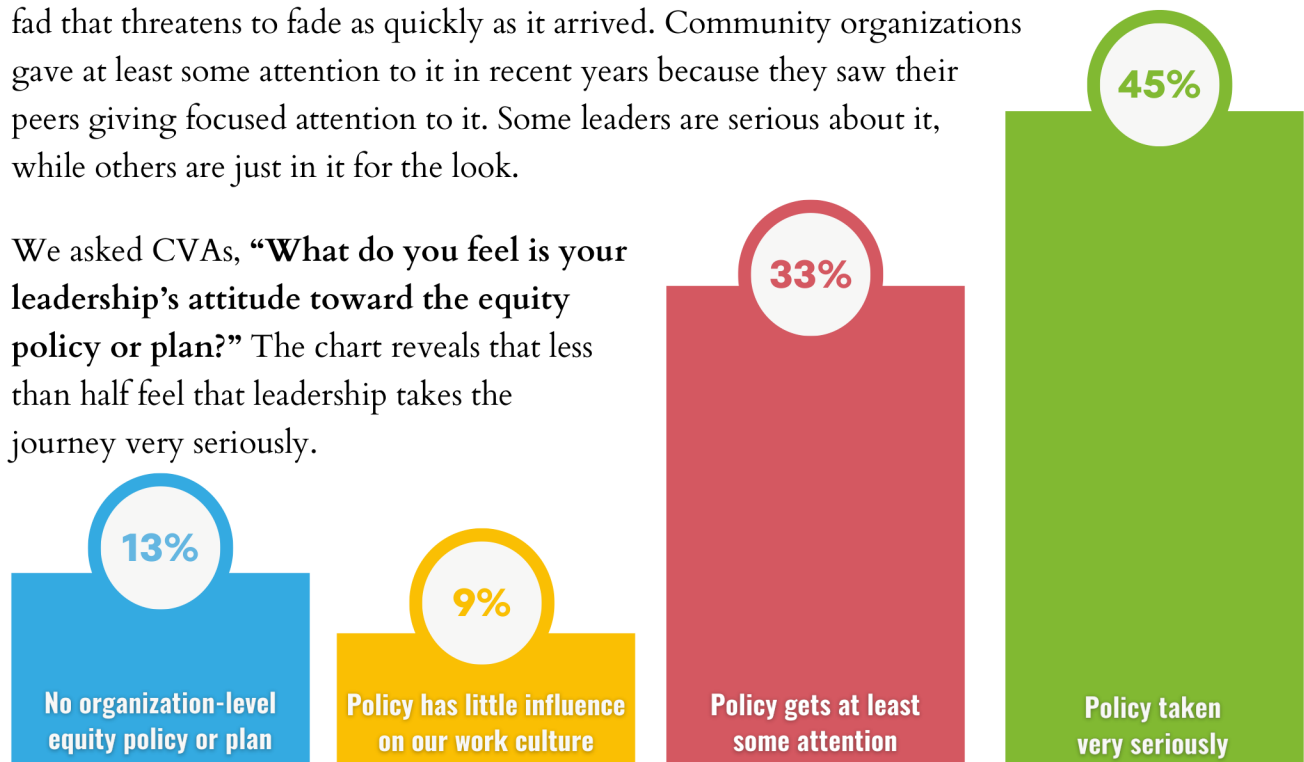
The average CVA gives a mark of 64%. This is a passing grade, but a middling D in most classrooms. More organizations need to increase inclusiveness if they hope to attract a representative swath of volunteers.



Waning Leadership Commitments

“Everybody is doing it.” Some worry that attention to equity and inclusion is a fad that threatens to fade as quickly as it arrived. Community organizations gave at least some attention to it in recent years because they saw their peers giving focused attention to it. Some leaders are serious about it, while others are just in it for the look.

We asked CVAs, “**What do you feel is your leadership’s attitude toward the equity policy or plan?**” The chart reveals that less than half feel that leadership takes the journey very seriously.



Leadership Attitude toward Equity Policy or Plan

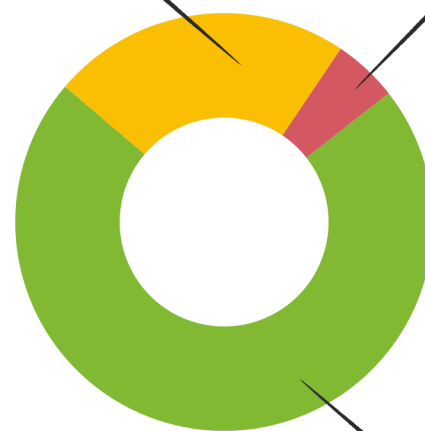
Should we worry about voluntary organizations shelving their equity journey? We asked CVAs to rate the **status of the policy now compared to when it was adopted.**

Seven in ten feel that the equity journey is still fresh, which we might expect given how recently organizations have adopted these policies.

However, nearly a quarter say that the attention to the policy has already waned. One in twenty organizations seems to have abandoned attention to equity altogether.

Reference to the policy is reduced from the time we adopted it

The organization seems to have forgotten about the policy entirely



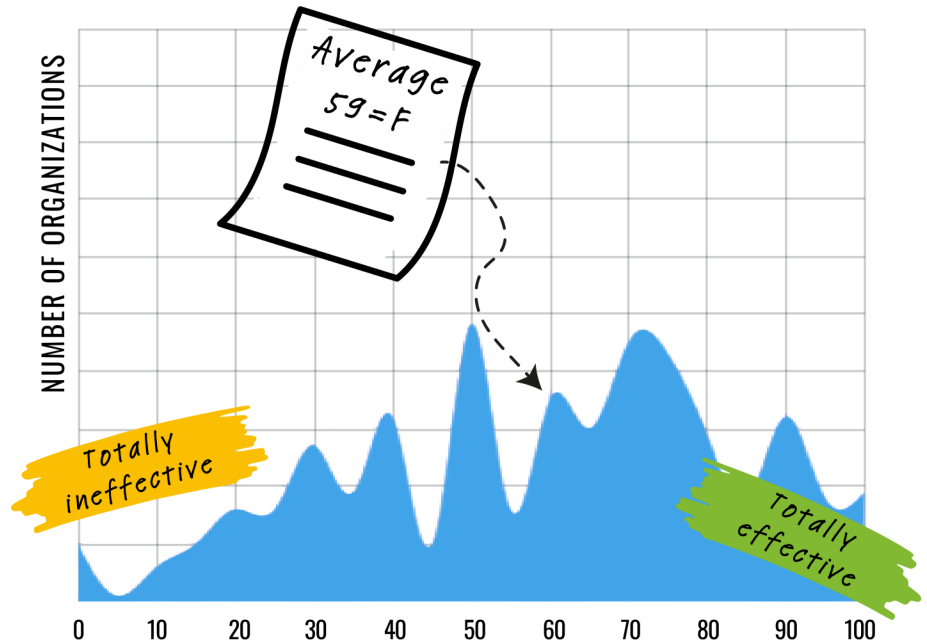
The policy has as much influence now as it did when we adopted it

Translating Equity into Outcomes

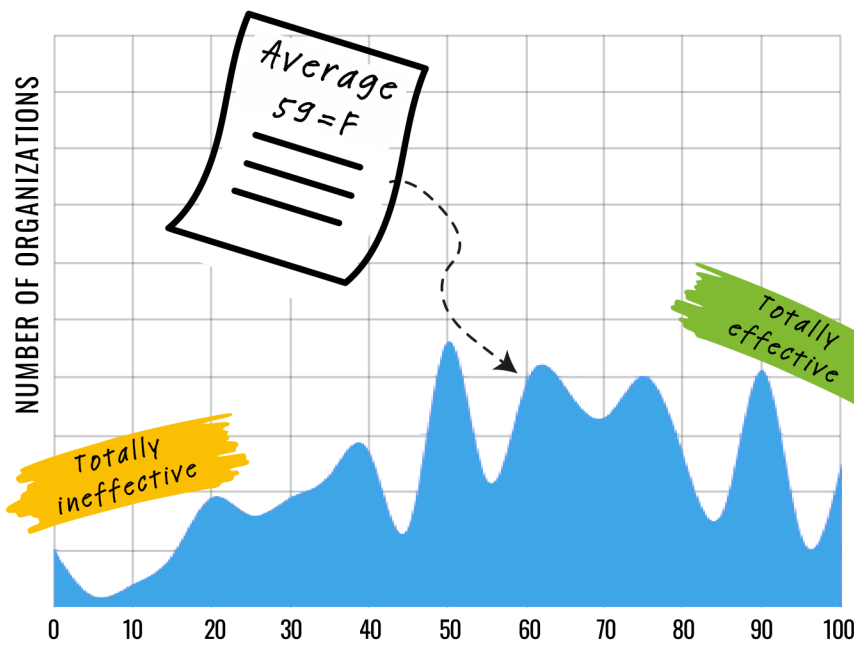
On a scale of 1 to 100, How would you rate the effectiveness of your organization at translating equity into better service delivery?

Inclusiveness is valuable to workers, but proponents also want to see gains in program outcomes. Such gains do not come automatically, though— they require effort to translate culture into better service delivery.

How do CVAs feel their organizations are doing? On average, they give a failing grade on efforts to parlay the equity journey into service outcomes. At 59, a passing grade is within reach.



On a scale of 1 to 100, How would you rate the effectiveness of your organization at translating equity into deeper relationships with the community you serve?



CVAs responded similarly to our question about efforts to guide the equity journey toward greater community connectedness. The average 59 is a failure in many classrooms.

Translating equity into deeper external connections is merely an aspiration for many community organizations, but even small gains would push the field onto passing ground.

Concluding Thoughts

The ADEVI research team undertook the 2023 survey of CVAS with little sense of how much those Certified Volunteer Administrators care about inclusiveness, what their organizations are doing, and what the future might look like. We learned a lot.

1. We learned that CVAs have a commitment to equity. This sense is underscored in the October 2023 report on focus groups, *Toward Broader Volunteer Engagement*. In that brief we note that the desire of CVAs to prioritize equity and inclusion through the fostering of anti-discrimination cultures. They note the potential for returns in trust and credibility in their communities. They anticipate gains from increases in diversity of perspectives. Although experiences and attitudes toward inclusiveness differ, we observed a clear message of support for more of it.

2. We learned that equity journeys are new for most community organizations. Page 8 of this report paints a picture of how many organizations jumped on the “DEI bandwagon” as it swept through organizations of all kinds in the early 2020s. This movement has promise to revolutionize reach into our communities. On the other hand, with so little track record, community organizations may struggle to identify where they are going and how best to get there.

3. We learned that equity journeys are in danger of flaming out. The problem with bandwagons is that people can jump off just as quickly as they jumped on. On page 10, we go so far as suggesting that attention to inclusion may be a fad. CVAs report that a quarter of the organizations that they work in are giving less attention to equity policy than they did when they first addressed it, just a few years before.

4. We learned that gains in inclusiveness stand on a precipice. From here, we can go up or down. If the field is to make good on its promise of being more welcoming, champions will need to hold community organizations to task. Commitments will either wane or translate into greater inclusion. In addition to champions, the latter path will require vision, resources, training, and the willingness of boards and top management teams to harness the potential of their equity journeys.

Methodology

The research team from ASU and CCVA designed and executed the ADEVI survey in the spring of 2023.

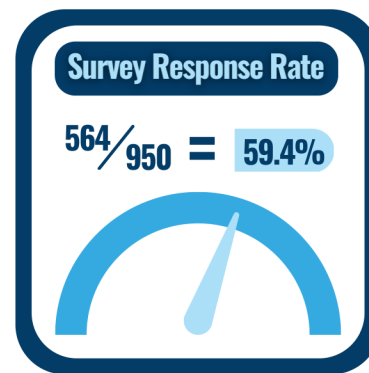
The study population was active Certification in Volunteer Administration (CVA) holders when CCVA drew the list on February 1, 2023. Most respondents lived in the United States or Canada, but the study includes representation from Australia, Hong Kong, Italy, Singapore, and the United Kingdom.

The initial CCVA file included 1,005 cases, but we removed 45 with no email address or phone number. After an initial email to these 960, we removed another 10 individuals who were either unreachable by email or declared themselves out of the field.

Our final working file totaled 950 cases. Initial data collection commenced in four waves over a four-week period. We distributed email invitations to participate via Qualtrics. Given the sensitivity of some information, we set Qualtrics to anonymize responses. We advised potential respondents that the research team would not be able to tie specific information to a given person.

We sent two reminder emails to individuals who had not completed the survey, followed by personal emails and texts from the ASU research team. The field period ran from February 15, 2023, to April 17, 2023.

The survey invitation described the research project and its value to the field. It also noted CCVA's offer of one Professional Development Unit (PDU) toward re-certification for survey completion. When data collection closed, ASU sent to CCVA, a list of individuals with complete surveys.



The final tally of respondents was 564 cases.

Following collection of descriptive information in Section 2, the

survey asked respondents if they currently lead and work with volunteers. A 'no' answer screened 65 respondents out of the remainder of the survey. So, most of the information in this report is based on responses from the 499 CVAs who had actively worked with volunteers "in the past year or so."

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