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A Different Take on the Millennial Generation

We are missing a key point about the millennial generation. You have, no doubt, seen countless articles that describe the challenges in reaching various generational groups. I have heard too often that perhaps the millennial generation—those under 30 for these purposes—are less likely to be involved in community groups.

What if I suggested to you that the millennial generation is more serious about giving back than their parents? What would you think if the data suggested that millennials are passionately committed to improving their local communities in meaningful ways? A recent survey by the Associated Press-GfK found that those under 30 are more likely to say that citizens have a “very important” obligation to volunteer. The volunteer efforts of past generations peaked when they were in their 30s and 40s, a time when many of these millennials will be raising families and looking for a way to make a difference not only in their children’s lives but also in their community as a whole. That time is now.

The survey tested six obligations of citizenship—volunteering, staying informed about news and public issues, voting, serving on a jury, reporting a crime, and speaking English. Some obligations, such as voting, stayed about the same, while others declined. Only 56 percent felt an obligation to keep fully informed about news and public issues. Among the six activities, volunteering is the only activity that adults under 30 rated as highly as older people. The share who called volunteering “very important” has climbed 10 percentage points, while staying informed dropped 13 points.

The activities most likely to draw those volunteer hours are those that directly impact the lives of people in the local community. It might be a food drive or tutoring a disadvantaged child. What can Scouting learn from these perspectives? If you believe, as I do, that Scouting is local, the analysis suggests that we have a legion of potential volunteers who are wired to give back to their local community. They are looking for opportunities, and if they do not find them, they will create their own. We need to reach that generation—on their terms and through a communications medium that they use—with the Scouting message about giving back to their community by changing the lives of the kids next door.



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We have a tremendous opportunity to capture a new generation of Scouting volunteers. We have talked at length about how to engage the next generation of unit commissioners. Too often, those discussions were influenced by the apparent misconception that this next generation was not willing to give back like past generations. Perhaps the underlying premise was incorrect. We need to design local outreach programs that capture the imagination of this next generation. So, as we start 2015, consider this an opportunity to figure out how your local commissioner corps can capture the volunteer passion of this generation. Share with us the local ideas that worked and those that did not, so the task force can capture the best and brightest ideas and share them throughout the organization.



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