



Opinions

Best state in America: Kansas, for its young volunteers

Every True Gamer Will Like These Cool Memes (MGID us)



By [Reid Wilson](#) December 26, 2014

Reid Wilson is the author of [Read In](#), The Post's morning tipsheet on politics. If you have a candidate for best state, e-[mail reid.wilson@washpost.com](mailto:reid.wilson@washpost.com).

The habits we form as kids tend to stick with us through adulthood. That's great news for Kansas, where [more](#) teenagers volunteer actively in their communities than in any other state.

The latest [Volunteering and Civic Life in America study](#), released this month by the Corporation for National and Community Service and the National Conference on Citizenship, found that 40.9 percent of Kansas teenagers volunteered between 2011 and 2013, the highest rate in the country.

Kansans of any age are generous with their time: [Two-thirds](#) engage in what the study calls "informal volunteering," such as helping out a neighbor. They contributed 82.2 million hours of service in 2013, time valued at \$1.8 billion.

More than a third of the state's total population, 36.1 percent, volunteered in a formal setting, the report found. More than a quarter of residents reported collecting and distributing food to the needy, while 23 percent said they spent time raising [money](#) for their favorite causes.

When looking beyond teens, Utah's [volunteerism rate](#) is higher than anywhere else. The majority

of Utah volunteers, 66 percent, serve religious organizations. In Kansas, by contrast, 35 percent of volunteers said they gave time to religious groups, while 26 percent said they helped educational organizations. (Utah residents' generosity with their money and time earned the state our [Best State award](#) in May.)

Volunteering isn't only good for the community — it can also be good for the economy. A June 2013 report from the Corporation for National and Community Service found that unemployed people who volunteer are [27 percent more likely](#) to find paying [jobs](#). And people without a high school diploma were 51 percent more likely to find employment if they volunteered than if they didn't.

“If volunteers are gaining or updating skills that are needed in the workplace through their volunteer activities,” the report said, “those skills may make them more attractive to and productive for employers and increase their chances of becoming employed.”

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Nationally, we can do better: The report found that the national volunteer rate stands at [25.4 percent](#), the lowest since 2002. [Fewer than 22 percent](#) of residents in West Virginia, Arkansas, Florida, Nevada, New York and Louisiana bothered to volunteer between 2011 and 2013.

As states seek to improve civic participation, they should look to Kansas, where volunteers get started young.

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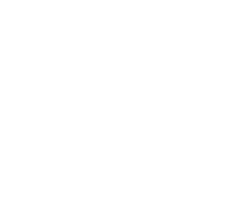
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Reid Wilson covers state politics and policy for the Washington Post's GovBeat blog. He's a former editor in chief of The Hotline, the premier tip sheet on campaigns and elections, and he's a complete political junkie.

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