

Volunteering, Service and  
Remembering September 11<sup>th</sup>  
A National Survey of Adults 18+

Conducted for *AARP*

**August 2009**

A light gray wavy line is located at the bottom of the page, mirroring the shape of the dark red line at the top. It starts on the left side and curves towards the right, ending near the bottom right corner.



# Volunteering, Service and Remembering September 11<sup>th</sup> A National Survey of Adults 18+

Report written by  
Jean Koppen, Senior Research Advisor  
Member Value Research  
Knowledge Management

Survey conducted by  
ICR

©Copyright AARP  
Reprinting with permission only  
601 E St. NW  
Washington, D.C. 20049  
[www.aarp.org](http://www.aarp.org)

**August 2009**

The views expressed herein are for information, debate, and discussion, and do not represent official policies of AARP.

AARP is a nonprofit, nonpartisan membership organization that helps people 50+ have independence, choice and control in ways that are beneficial and affordable to them and society as a whole. AARP does not endorse candidates for public office or make contributions to either political campaigns or candidates. We produce *AARP The Magazine*, the definitive voice for 50+ Americans and the world's largest-circulation magazine with over 34.5 million readers; *AARP Bulletin*, the go-to news source for AARP's members and Americans 50+; *AARP Segunda Juventud*, the only bilingual U.S. publication dedicated exclusively to the 50+ Hispanic community; and our website, AARP.org. AARP Foundation is an affiliated charity that provides security, protection, and empowerment to older persons in need with support from thousands of volunteers, donors, and sponsors. We have staffed offices in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

AARP represents more than 40 million Americans, nearly half of whom volunteer each year. The Association recently launched an Office of Volunteer & Civic Engagement, as well as *Create The Good*, a network of members who are looking for opportunities to make a difference. They are working to inspire millions more Americans to serve through their television, radio, web and publications channels.

#### Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Alicia Williams for her review of the final report. For additional information contact the author, Jean Koppen, at 202-434-6311.

## **Background and Methodology**

---

The purpose of this study was to gather information on people's thoughts about remembering September 11, 2001, how remembering September 11th relates to service, and their overall perceptions about making a difference in their own communities. The information was gathered to help AARP's Office of Volunteer and Civic Engagement better understand volunteering in America.

This study was conducted via telephone by ICR, an independent research company. Questions were included on an omnibus survey on July 22 – July 26, 2009. The omnibus survey is a weekly national telephone survey of U.S. households. Interviews were conducted from among a nationally representative sample of 1,003 adults age 18 or older. The margin of error for total respondents is +/-3.09%. Throughout the report, when differences are mentioned between subgroups, they are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

## Executive Summary

---

This study surveyed American adults to better understand people's thoughts about remembering September 11, 2001, how remembering September 11<sup>th</sup> relates to service, and their overall perceptions about making a difference in their own communities. The telephone survey was conducted July 22 – July 26, 2009 by ICR among a nationally representative sample of 1,003 adults age 18 or older.

- Although one-half (50%) of those surveyed think Americans' sense of duty and service is "weaker" than just after September 11<sup>th</sup>, the majority (54%) think **their** sense of duty and service is the same.
- Most respondents (59%) prefer to observe September 11<sup>th</sup> in a private manner, while three in ten prefer to observe the day in a public manner (31%).
- The majority (71%) think giving their time has the greatest impact, compared to contributing money (17%).
- Almost all (95%) think giving their time can help ease problems in their community either a great deal (48%), somewhat (36%), or a little (10%).
- Survey respondents were split as to whether they personally do enough to help others (49% say they do enough and 50% say they do not do enough).
- While approximately one-quarter of respondents (26%) believe service and volunteerism is a high national priority, more than one-half of respondents (56%) rate service and volunteerism as personally important to them.
- One-quarter (25%) said they think about or consider giving time to service on a daily basis, 37 percent think about volunteering a few times a month, and 20 percent think about volunteering yearly.

## Detailed Findings

---

### Remembering September 11<sup>th</sup>

Directly after the attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, seven in ten Americans contributed time, blood, or money.<sup>1</sup>

Almost eight years after the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, one-half of Americans (50%) think the sense of community and duty in America is weaker compared to just after the attacks. One-fourth of respondents said the sense of community and duty is the same (25%) and one-fifth (22%) said it is stronger now, compared to 2001.

While half of respondents felt the sense of community and duty in America is weaker now, only one-tenth (12%) felt their own personal sense of community and duty is weaker. The majority of respondents (54%) felt their sense of community and duty is the same, and one-third (32%) felt it is stronger now, compared to 2001.

**Table 1: Do you think the sense of community and duty in America is stronger, weaker, or the same today as it was directly after the attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001?**

|       | <b>Stronger</b><br>% | <b>Weaker</b><br>% | <b>Same</b><br>% | <b>Don't know</b><br>% |
|-------|----------------------|--------------------|------------------|------------------------|
| TOTAL | 22                   | 50                 | 25               | 3                      |

**Table 2: Do you personally feel your sense of community and duty is stronger, weaker, or the same as you felt directly after the attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001?**

|       | <b>Stronger</b><br>% | <b>Weaker</b><br>% | <b>Same</b><br>% | <b>Don't know</b><br>% |
|-------|----------------------|--------------------|------------------|------------------------|
| TOTAL | 32                   | 12                 | 54               | 2                      |

---

<sup>1</sup> Independent Sector National Quorum Survey Results; October 2001.

When asked about whether certain activities to honor fellow Americans on September 11<sup>th</sup> are appropriate, the majority of respondents felt all activities were appropriate including service activities such as “helping a neighbor in need” (90%) and “participating in service projects or volunteering in one’s community” (89%).

**Table 3: Considered an Appropriate Way to Honor Fellow Americans on September 11<sup>th</sup>**

|                                                                                   | %  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| a. Showing our support and appreciation for military personnel and their families | 94 |
| b. Helping a neighbor in need                                                     | 90 |
| c. Participating in service projects or volunteering in one’s community           | 89 |
| d. Attending memorial services or activities                                      | 84 |

Interestingly, women were significantly more likely to respond that the service activities were an appropriate remembrance activity compared to men.

**Table 3: Think Appropriate Way to Honor Fellow Americans on September 11<sup>th</sup>**

|                                                                                   | Total<br>% | Women<br>% | Men<br>%  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|------------|-----------|
| a. Showing our support and appreciation for military personnel and their families | 94         | 95         | 92        |
| b. Helping a neighbor in need                                                     | 90         | <b>93</b>  | <b>87</b> |
| c. Participating in service projects or volunteering in one’s community           | 89         | <b>94</b>  | <b>85</b> |
| d. Attending memorial services or activities                                      | 84         | 85         | 82        |

When asked whether they prefer to observe September 11<sup>th</sup> in a private manner or in a public manner, most respondents (59%) prefer private observations. Less than one-third of respondents (31%) preferred to remember 9/11 in a public manner.

**Table 4: Do you prefer to observe 9/11 in a private manner or in a public manner?**

|              | <b>Private<br/>%</b> | <b>Public<br/>%</b> | <b>Don't<br/>know<br/>%</b> | <b>Refused<br/>%</b> |
|--------------|----------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| <b>TOTAL</b> | 59                   | 31                  | 8                           | 2                    |

### **Making a Difference**

The majority of respondents (71%) believe that they can have the greatest impact by giving of their time through volunteerism or service, compared to contributing financially (17%).<sup>2</sup> Younger respondents (18-49) were more likely to think financial contributions have the greatest impact (20%) compared to older (50+) respondents (12%).

**Table 5: Which has the greatest impact?**

|              | <b>Giving one's time<br/>through<br/>volunteerism or<br/>service<br/>%</b> | <b>Contributing financially<br/>to underserved groups,<br/>issues, or causes<br/>%</b> | <b>Equal<br/>%</b> | <b>Don't know<br/>%</b> |
|--------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>TOTAL</b> | 71                                                                         | 17                                                                                     | 9                  | 2                       |
| <b>18-49</b> | 71                                                                         | <b>20</b>                                                                              | 7                  | 1                       |
| <b>50+</b>   | 71                                                                         | <b>12</b>                                                                              | 11                 | 3                       |

<sup>2</sup> This finding complements previous AARP research in which respondents preferred giving time over money (Volunteering Perceptions and Realities; AARP; 2008).

Respondents are optimistic that volunteering can positively affect problems in their community. Almost all respondents (95%) said that giving their time can ease problems either a great deal (48%), somewhat (36%) or a little (10%).

**Table 6: To what extent do you think Americans giving time through volunteerism or service can help ease the problems facing people in your community?**

|       | <b>A great deal</b><br>% | <b>Somewhat</b><br>% | <b>A little</b><br>% | <b>Not at all</b><br>% | <b>Don't know</b><br>% |
|-------|--------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| TOTAL | 48                       | 36                   | 10                   | 4                      | 1                      |

Respondents were split as to whether they personally do enough to help others with one-half responding that they do enough to help others (49%) and one-half responding they do not do enough (50%).

For most Americans, however, volunteering is a frequent thought. When asked how often they think about volunteering, one-quarter of respondents (25%) said they think about it every day. More than one-third think about giving their time a few times a month (37%) and one-fifth (20%) think about volunteering a few times a year. Seventeen percent said they seldom if ever think about volunteering.

**Table 7: Do you think you personally do enough to help others?**

|       | <b>Yes</b><br>% | <b>No</b><br>% | <b>Don't know</b><br>% |
|-------|-----------------|----------------|------------------------|
| TOTAL | 49              | 50             | 1                      |

**Table 8: How often do you think about or consider volunteering or giving your time in service?**

|       | <b>Daily</b><br>% | <b>A few times a month</b><br>% | <b>A few times a year</b><br>% | <b>Seldom/never</b><br>% | <b>Don't know</b><br>% |
|-------|-------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| TOTAL | 25                | 37                              | 20                             | 17                       | 1                      |

While approximately one-quarter of respondents (26%) believe service and volunteerism is a high national priority (rating it an 8 or higher on a ten point scale), more than one-half of respondents (56%) rate service and volunteerism as personally important to them (rating it an 8 or higher on a ten point scale). Women were more likely than men to rate service and volunteerism highly both as a national priority and personally important.

**Table 9: To what extent is service and volunteerism currently a U.S. national priority?  
How important is service and volunteerism to you personally?**

| <b>% Giving a Top-3 Box Rating</b><br>(1-10 Point Scale) | <b>TOTAL</b><br>% | <b>Women</b><br>% | <b>Men</b><br>% |
|----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| A US national priority                                   | 26                | 32                | 19              |
| To you personally                                        | 56                | 64                | 49              |

When asked what one issue or problem they could help solve, respondents' answers varied, with one in ten citing "feed the hungry" (10%). Three in ten respondents (30%) could not cite a specific problem to solve.

**Table 10: What one issue or problem do you think you could help solve?**

|                                 | %  |
|---------------------------------|----|
| Feeding the hungry              | 10 |
| Mentoring youth                 | 5  |
| Helping people (general)        | 4  |
| Helping the homeless            | 4  |
| Health care                     | 3  |
| Better education                | 2  |
| Community awareness             | 2  |
| Environmental issues            | 2  |
| Helping the elderly/disabled    | 2  |
| Illiteracy                      | 2  |
| Political awareness             | 2  |
| Veteran/military issues         | 2  |
| Volunteering/donating (general) | 2  |
| Animals                         | 1  |
| Cleaning up the community       | 1  |
| Financial help                  | 1  |
| Poverty/economy                 | 1  |
| Religious issues                | 1  |
| Substance abuse                 | 1  |
| Unemployment                    | 1  |
| Unity                           | 1  |
| Other                           | 6  |
| None                            | 13 |
| Don't know                      | 30 |
| Refused                         | 1  |

When asked which public figure they think has personally done the most to help others, respondents named a variety of entertainers, political figures, religious figures, sports stars, and business figures. The most common responses were Barack Obama (14%), Oprah Winfrey (7%) and Mother Theresa (6%).

**Table 11: Which public figure do you think has personally done the most to help others?**

|                    | %  |
|--------------------|----|
| Barack Obama       | 14 |
| Oprah Winfrey      | 7  |
| Mother Theresa     | 6  |
| Michael Jackson    | 3  |
| George W. Bush     | 3  |
| Jimmy Carter       | 3  |
| Ronald Reagan      | 3  |
| Bill Gates         | 3  |
| Angelina Jolie     | 2  |
| Bono               | 2  |
| Brad Pitt          | 2  |
| Jerry Lewis        | 2  |
| Paul Newman        | 2  |
| Martin Luther King | 2  |
| Denzel Washington  | 1  |
| Ellen Degeneres    | 1  |
| Al Gore            | 1  |
| Bill Clinton       | 1  |
| John McCain        | 1  |
| None               | 12 |
| Don't know         | 17 |
| Refused            | 1  |

## Appendix A

---

### Annotated Questionnaire

Please note, all data are given in percentages. Asterisks indicate that cell size is negligible. Not all percentages will add up to 100 due to rounding.

DS-1 Directly after the attacks on September 11th 2001, some Americans felt a stronger sense of community and duty to help other Americans in some way. Do you think this sense of community and duty in America is stronger, weaker, or the same today as it was just after the September 11th attacks?

| Stronger | Weaker | The same | Don't know | Refused |
|----------|--------|----------|------------|---------|
| 22       | 50     | 25       | 3          | *       |

DS-1a Do you personally feel your sense of community and duty is stronger, weaker, or the same as you felt directly after the attacks on September 11th 2001?

| Stronger | Weaker | The same | Don't know | Refused |
|----------|--------|----------|------------|---------|
| 32       | 12     | 54       | 2          | *       |

DS-2 Which of the following do you think are appropriate ways to honor fellow Americans on September 11<sup>th</sup>? How about (INSERT ITEM)? Do you think that is an appropriate way to honor fellow Americans on September 11<sup>th</sup>?

|                                                                                   | Yes | No | Don't know | Refused |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|----|------------|---------|
| a. Attending memorial services or activities                                      | 84  | 14 | 2          | *       |
| b. Participating in service projects or volunteering in one's community           | 89  | 9  | 2          | 1       |
| c. Helping a neighbor in need                                                     | 90  | 8  | 1          | *       |
| d. Showing our support and appreciation for military personnel and their families | 94  | 4  | 2          | 1       |

DS-2a Do you prefer to observe 9/11 in a private manner or in a public manner?

| Private | Public | Don't know | Refused |
|---------|--------|------------|---------|
| 59      | 31     | 8          | 2       |

DS-3 In your opinion, which of the following has the GREATEST impact?

| Giving one's time through volunteerism or service | Contributing financial to undeserved groups, issues, or causes | Equal | Neither | Don't know | Refused |
|---------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|-------|---------|------------|---------|
| 71                                                | 17                                                             | 9     | *       | 2          | 1       |

DS-4 To what extent, if any, do you think Americans giving time through volunteerism or service can help ease the problems facing people in your community?

| GREAT DEAL/SOMEWHAT/A LITTLE |              |          |          | Not at all | Don't know | Refused |
|------------------------------|--------------|----------|----------|------------|------------|---------|
| NET                          | A great deal | Somewhat | A little |            |            |         |
| 95                           | 48           | 36       | 10       | 4          | 1          | *       |

(Asked of total who think, at least a little, that if Americans give time through volunteerism/service, it can help ease the problems facing people in their communities; n = 958)

DS-4a What one issue or problem do you think you could help solve?

|                                                 | 7/26/09 |
|-------------------------------------------------|---------|
| Animals (animal shelters, homeless animals)     | 1       |
| Better education                                | 2       |
| Cleaning up the community                       | 1       |
| Community awareness (action, support, educate)  | 2       |
| Environmental issues (climate change/recycling) | 2       |
| Feeding the hungry                              | 10      |
| Financial help                                  | 1       |
| Health care                                     | 3       |
| Helping people (general)                        | 4       |
| Helping the elderly/disabled                    | 2       |
| Helping the homeless                            | 4       |
| Illegal immigration                             | *       |
| Illiteracy                                      | 2       |
| Mentoring youth                                 | 5       |
| Political awareness                             | 2       |
| Poverty/economy                                 | 1       |
| Religious issues                                | 1       |
| Substance abuse                                 | 1       |
| Unemployment                                    | 1       |
| Unity                                           | 1       |
| Veteran/military issues                         | 2       |
| Volunteering/donating (general)                 | 2       |
| Other                                           | 6       |
| None                                            | 13      |
| Don't know                                      | 30      |
| Refused                                         | 1       |

DS-5 Which public figure (elected official, celebrity, etc.) do you think has personally done the most to help others?

|                            | <b>7/26/09</b> |
|----------------------------|----------------|
| <b>ENTERTAINMENT (NET)</b> | <b>25</b>      |
| Angelina Jolie             | 2              |
| Bill Cosby                 | *              |
| Bill O'Reilly              | *              |
| Bob Hope                   | *              |
| Bono                       | 2              |
| Brad Pitt                  | 2              |
| Danny Thomas               | *              |
| Denzel Washington          | 1              |
| Ellen Degeneres            | 1              |
| George Clooney             | *              |
| Jerry Lewis                | 2              |
| Michael Jackson            | 3              |
| Oprah Winfrey              | 7              |
| Paul Newman                | 2              |
| Rush Limbaugh              | *              |
| Toby Keith                 | *              |
| Willie Nelson              | *              |
| Other Entertainment        | 3              |
| <b>POLITICAL (NET)</b>     | <b>32</b>      |
| Abraham Lincoln            | *              |
| Al Gore                    | 1              |
| Arnold Schwarzneger        | *              |
| Barack Obama               | 14             |
| Bill Clinton               | 1              |
| Elizabeth Dole             | *              |
| Franklin Delano Roosevelt  | *              |
| George W Bush              | 3              |
| Ed Rendell                 | *              |
| Jimmy Carter               | 3              |
| John F. Kennedy            | *              |
| John McCain                | 1              |
| Martin Luther King         | 2              |
| Mike Bloomberg             | *              |
| Mike Huckabee              | *              |
| Nelson Mandela             | *              |
| Newt Gingrich              | *              |
| Ronald Reagan              | 3              |
| Sarah Palin                | *              |
| Ted Kennedy                | *              |
| Other Political            | 2              |
| <b>RELIGIOUS (NET)</b>     | <b>7</b>       |
| Billy Graham               | *              |
| Jesus                      | *              |
| Joyce Meyer                | *              |

|                     |    |
|---------------------|----|
| Mother Theresa      | 6  |
| The Pope            | *  |
| Other Religious     | *  |
| SPORTS (NET)        | 1  |
| Lance Armstrong     | *  |
| Other Sports        | *  |
| BUSINESS (NET)      | 3  |
| Bill Gates          | 3  |
| Other Business      | *  |
| Other               | 1  |
| No one/none of them | 12 |
| Don't know          | 17 |
| Refused             | 1  |

DS-6 Do you think you personally do enough to help others?

| Yes | No | Don't know | Refused |
|-----|----|------------|---------|
| 49  | 50 | 1          | *       |

DS-7 In your opinion, to what extent is service and volunteerism currently a U.S. national priority? Please use a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being not at all a national priority, and 10 very much a national priority?

|                          | 7/26/09 |
|--------------------------|---------|
| Bottom 3 Box (NET)       | 17      |
| 01 Not at all a priority | 4       |
| 02                       | 4       |
| 03                       | 9       |
| 04                       | 11      |
| 05                       | 17      |
| 06                       | 12      |
| 07                       | 14      |
| Top 3 Box (NET)          | 26      |
| 08                       | 10      |
| 09                       | 3       |
| 10 Very much a priority  | 12      |
| Don't know               | 3       |
| Refused                  | *       |

DS-8 How important is service and volunteerism to you personally? Please use a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being not at all important, and 10 being very important.

|                           | <b>7/26/09</b> |
|---------------------------|----------------|
| <b>Bottom 3 Box (NET)</b> | 4              |
| 01 Not at all important   | 2              |
| 02                        | 1              |
| 03                        | 2              |
| 04                        | 4              |
| 05                        | 11             |
| 06                        | 9              |
| 07                        | 14             |
| <b>Top 3 Box (NET)</b>    | 56             |
| 08                        | 19             |
| 09                        | 11             |
| 10 Very important         | 26             |
| Don't know                | 1              |
| Refused                   | *              |

DS-9 How often do you think about or consider volunteering or giving your time in service?

| <b>Daily</b> | <b>A few times a month</b> | <b>A few times a year</b> | <b>Seldom/never</b> | <b>Don't know</b> | <b>Refused</b> |
|--------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| 25           | 37                         | 20                        | 17                  | 1                 | *              |

## Appendix B

---

### *Demographics*

|                             | <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>18-49</b> | <b>50+</b> |
|-----------------------------|--------------|--------------|------------|
| <b>TOTAL</b>                | 100          | 58           | 40         |
| <b>Gender</b>               |              |              |            |
| Male                        | 49           | 50           | 47         |
| Female                      | 51           | 50           | 53         |
| <b>Marital status</b>       |              |              |            |
| Single                      | 19           | 28           | 7          |
| Single, living with partner | 8            | 13           | 2          |
| Married                     | 52           | 50           | 55         |
| Separated                   | 2            | 2            | 2          |
| Widowed                     | 9            | -            | 21         |
| Divorced                    | 9            | 7            | 13         |
| <b>Age</b>                  |              |              |            |
| 18-20                       | 6            |              |            |
| 21-24                       | 7            |              |            |
| 25-29                       | 7            |              |            |
| 30-34                       | 11           |              |            |
| 35-39                       | 10           |              |            |
| 40-44                       | 9            |              |            |
| 45-49                       | 9            |              |            |
| 50-54                       | 10           |              |            |
| 55-59                       | 7            |              |            |
| 60-64                       | 8            |              |            |
| 65-70                       | 5            |              |            |
| 71-74                       | 3            |              |            |
| 75-98                       | 7            |              |            |
| <b>Education</b>            |              |              |            |
| <HS                         | 15           | 12           | 20         |
| HS grad                     | 29           | 28           | 30         |
| Some college                | 27           | 31           | 21         |
| College grad                | 17           | 19           | 16         |
| Post grad                   | 9            | 8            | 9          |
| Technical school            | 3            | 2            | 4          |
| <b>Race</b>                 |              |              |            |
| White non-hispanic          | 67           | 62           | 76         |
| White Hispanic              | 13           | 17           | 8          |
| Black                       | 12           | 13           | 10         |
| Other                       | 4            | 4            | 3          |