

By Doug Donovan

More Americans volunteered in 2011 than in any year since 2005, a new study finds. Approximately 64.3 million Americans volunteered at charities last year, providing 7.9 billion hours of service valued at \$171-billion.

The 1.5 million additional volunteers boosted the national rate to 26.8 percent of the population, a half percentage point higher than 2010. But the dollar value dipped by \$2-billion, as the average number of hours Americans volunteered in a year dropped to 32.7 from 33.9, the Corporation for National and Community Service reported.

Robert Grimm, director of the Center for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Leadership at the University of Maryland, said the increase was mainly the result of the growth in the American population, not a response to the economy or other factors.

National volunteer rates hit their peak of nearly 29 percent from 2003 to 2005 but have been stuck at around 26 percent ever since, according to a survey of about 100,000 people age 16 and older conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau for the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The number of volunteers is down from a 2005 high of 65.4 million.

The average number of hours has declined from a high of nearly 38 in 2004. Researchers say the dip may not be a sign that volunteers are actually spending fewer hours at charities, but that they might not be accurately remembering every year exactly how much time they give.

### **Utah Tops the List**

Utah outpaced all states last year with the highest percentage of residents who volunteer. However, the volunteer rate for the heavily Mormon state fell from 44.5 percent in 2010 to 40.9 percent last year, and the hours per resident dropped by 19 to an average of 70.3 hours.

Iowa, which had ranked second for the past two years, dropped to third place as Idaho jumped eight spots in state rankings to take the No. 2 position.

But Iowans appear to have taken seriously a plea from the state's governor, Terry Branstad, for every resident to volunteer at least 50 hours a year. The state average for volunteer hours in Iowa was 41.9 last year, up nearly eight hours from the state's reported average of 34.2 in 2010.

In Idaho, the growth in volunteerism comes in part because tutoring services and employment assistance centers were pushing people to give their time, according to officials at the Serve Idaho commission on volunteering and service.

"Parents are volunteering much more in schools," said Renee Cox, a Serve Idaho program manager. She said the commission had also gotten better at collecting data on volunteering trends, which could explain the increase as well.

### **Neighbors Helping One Another**

Utah also tops all states in "doing favors for and helping out neighbors," called "informal volunteering," the study finds.

Two out of three citizens helped their neighbors in 2011, an increase of 9.5 percent. The most neighborly states were Utah, West Virginia, New Hampshire, Montana, Vermont and Iowa (tied), and Idaho.

Among other key findings:

- Volunteer rates were higher in rural areas (27.7 percent) and suburban areas (27.5 percent) than in urban areas (23.4 percent).
- Religion, education, and social services attracted a bigger share of volunteers than other causes.
- Volunteers said they spent most of their time fundraising, collecting and distributing food, providing labor or transportation, and tutoring.