

THE VALUE OF OREGON HERITAGE ORGANIZATIONS' VOLUNTEERS:

An Oregon Heritage Commission Volunteer Study

OCTOBER 2020

A SUMMARY REPORT

Introduction

Since 1995, the Oregon Heritage Commission has been investing in efforts to promote and preserve "Oregon's heritage," that is, evidence of Oregon's past engraved in ideas, artifacts, traditions, and the inherited environment. Such work has ranged from maintaining historical cemeteries, preserving the character of historical downtowns and their unique architectural history, genealogical work and vital records preservation, to maintaining and sharing cultural traditions and practices. To do all this work, the Commission partners with "**heritage**" **organizations** across Oregon—who in turn partner with thousands of Oregonians who volunteer their time (and money) to help accomplish this preservation work.

The Volunteer Study conducted by the Commission in the summer of 2020 demonstrates that **the work volunteers do within heritage organizations is indispensable to the preservation of Oregon's heritage.** And it is this preservation mission that draws volunteers to dedicate their time, expertise, and money to heritage organizations. This summary report simultaneously highlights the value of volunteers to heritage organizations, as well as the value volunteers place on the work heritage organizations do, and the rewards they reap from volunteering at heritage organizations.

Motivations & Benefits of Volunteering at Heritage Organizations

Motivations for Volunteering: To understand the motivations for volunteering and the benefits of volunteering to heritage organizations on volunteers, the study relied on quantitative and qualitative responses from 177 volunteers from at least 25 identified heritage organizations.

- The findings show that at the **epicenter of volunteer motivations or pull factors are the historical and cultural preservation missions of heritage organizations.** In other words, it is the uniquely heritage-centered missions and work that attracts volunteers to heritage organizations.
- Flowing from these missions are programs and services that **engender uniquely “localized heritage preservation experiences” for the volunteers** which also provide them with opportunities for continued learning.

Figure 1 below shows the main pull factors to heritage organizations’ volunteerism, ranging from interest in genealogy and the preservation of vital records, in promoting unique horticultural heritages, to interest in the preservation of local historical artifacts and architectural structures, and to connecting with one’s personal or family heritage.



Figure 1 — What pulls volunteers to volunteer their time (& money) to heritage organizations?

The [organization] is THE cultural organization and is expanding the cultural interactions with Native Americans specifically local tribes.

—Volunteer E

I moved to this community and embraced the heritage through marriage. I was counseled by my wise mother that “wherever you live embrace the heritage of the location where you reside...this way you will always learn and appreciate a variety of diverse traditions and people.

—Volunteer B

- Beyond that, volunteers also choose to volunteer out of a **desire to see heritage organizations operate more effectively**. This motivation compels volunteers to lend a hand, share and apply their knowledge and expertise, as well as their financial resources, all in an effort to strengthen heritage organization’s capacities. **Why?** Because they strongly believe in the heritage preservation work of these organizations.
- In addition, heritage organizations’ locations and proximity to local communities and neighborhoods also **offer unique localized opportunities for volunteers to serve their communities**, while allowing them to bond with diverse cultures, pasts, and people.

I also joined to bring my communications, public relations, marketing and leadership skills to support... projects, events, and programs that engage Oregonians in their democracy and preserve the legacy of Oregon’s Capitol for future generations.

—Volunteer C

They needed the help to organize and catalog their vast collection without staff being able to do it.

—Volunteer Z

Benefits to Volunteers: In terms of benefits to volunteers, we find that in many occasions there was no clear separation between what motivated one to volunteer and the benefits they gained from their volunteerism. In other words, we find that what heritage organizations uniquely offer by way of their missions and work, not only serves as a pull factor for volunteering, but the doing of the work is sufficiently satisfying to be a benefit in and of itself for a lot of the volunteers. For example, those volunteers who chose to volunteer because they wanted to help heritage organizations function more effectively, found satisfaction in utilizing their resources, in terms of time, money, and expertise to help heritage organizations operate more efficiently. So, the doing of that which motivated them to volunteer in the first place becomes the reward.

Nonetheless, one benefit stands out; heritage organizations' volunteer engagement opportunities provide volunteers with **an enhanced sense of community and belonging to a place**, as shown in the quotes from some of the volunteers that are highlighted in this report.

For 96% or 169 out of 177 volunteers, volunteering at heritage organizations strengthens their sense of belonging to a place, community, or society since volunteers are involved in the act or work of securing, enhancing, preserving, sustaining, learning, and interpreting Oregon's heritage.

- Heritage organizations also offer volunteers opportunities to; **Help preserve important community history and heritage** (92%, or 161 volunteers); **Develop friendships** (90%, 159 volunteers); **Be engaged citizens** (84%, or 147), **as well as help organizations function more effectively** (84%).

The Value Volunteers Add to Heritage Organizations

Our data also shows that heritage organizations tend to be small, in terms of annual budgets - 71% of the organizations in our sample have budgets of less than \$250,000 per year. And out of 76 organizations that provided information, 23 are all-Volunteer-run, with no paid staff. Of the heritage organizations that have paid staff, the majority (40 organizations) have Full-time equivalent (FTEs) staff of between **.25 and 5 FTEs**. Without volunteers, we can conclude that: -

- Many heritage organizations would not be able to remain open; and if they were to remain open, their reduced capacity would undermine the quality and levels of their operations.
- In a nutshell, volunteer labor is crucial to heritage organizations' survival, efficacy, and effectiveness in preserving and promoting Oregon's heritage.

Below we demonstrate the economic value of volunteers to heritage organizations and to the Heritage Commission's mission of coordinating and preserving Oregon's heritage and heritage activities.

Economic Value of Volunteers to a Heritage Organization

Total Volunteer Hours: Not all organizations in this study track volunteer hours, which means that the numbers shown here are an underrepresentation of the true value and impact of heritage organizations' volunteers. In general, however, volunteer hours vary from organization to organization, depending on their need for volunteers and their ability to attract and retain them.

- Based on the 69 heritage organizations that systematically track volunteer hours, their **volunteers contributed a total of 321,863 volunteer hours, in 2019.**

Monetary Value of Volunteer Labor: Hypothetically, if heritage organizations could afford to financially compensate their volunteers for their time and labor, they estimated paying them hourly wages ranging from \$10/hour, to as high as \$50/hour. About 64% or 55 organizations, provided us with an hourly wage estimate.

- Across these organizations, their combined **total volunteer hours amounted to 199,016 hours.**
- Based on 199,016 volunteer hours and each organization's hypothetical wage estimate, the **total monetary value of volunteer services was \$3,307,406, in 2019.**
- The Independent Sector's (2020) estimated value of volunteer services in Oregon was \$26.39/hr in 2019. Multiplying this rate by 321,863 total volunteer hours reported by 69 organizations, the **total monetary value of the volunteer services amounted to \$8,493,965.**

Table 1 shows the monetary values of volunteer labor using different estimates of volunteer wage rate and total volunteer hours. The economic value of volunteers underscores the labor cost savings that heritage organizations may have accrued from volunteer labor in 2019.

	Mean Hypothetical Wage	Diverse Hypothetical Wages	Oregon State Minimum Wage	Independent Sector's Oregon Volunteer Wage
Wage Rate/Hour	\$11.37	\$10–\$50	\$11.25	\$26.39
Monetary Value of Volunteer Services	\$3,659,582	\$3,307,406	\$3,620,959	\$8,493,965

Table 1 — Estimated Economic Value of Volunteer Labor to Oregon Heritage Organizations (2019)

Volunteers' Contributions to Heritage Organization's Revenues: Volunteers from across 66% or 57 heritage organizations also make significant financial contributions or donations to the organizations they volunteer with, on top of volunteering their time.

- Approximately **2,654 volunteers made a financial donation to their heritage organization.** The value of these financial donations amounted to approximately **\$875,682** in 2019.

Promotion of Heritage Organizations: Volunteers also promote heritage organizations through a variety of ways, and this is done outside of their formal volunteer roles. For example, among a host of promotional strategies shown in **Chart 1**, volunteers;

- **Brought visitors** (in 58 or 67% of the organizations)
- **Recommended a heritage organization to their friends and family** (in 57 or 66% of the organizations)
- **Shared organizational updates with other community groups** (at the board level) (in 40 or 47% of the organizations)

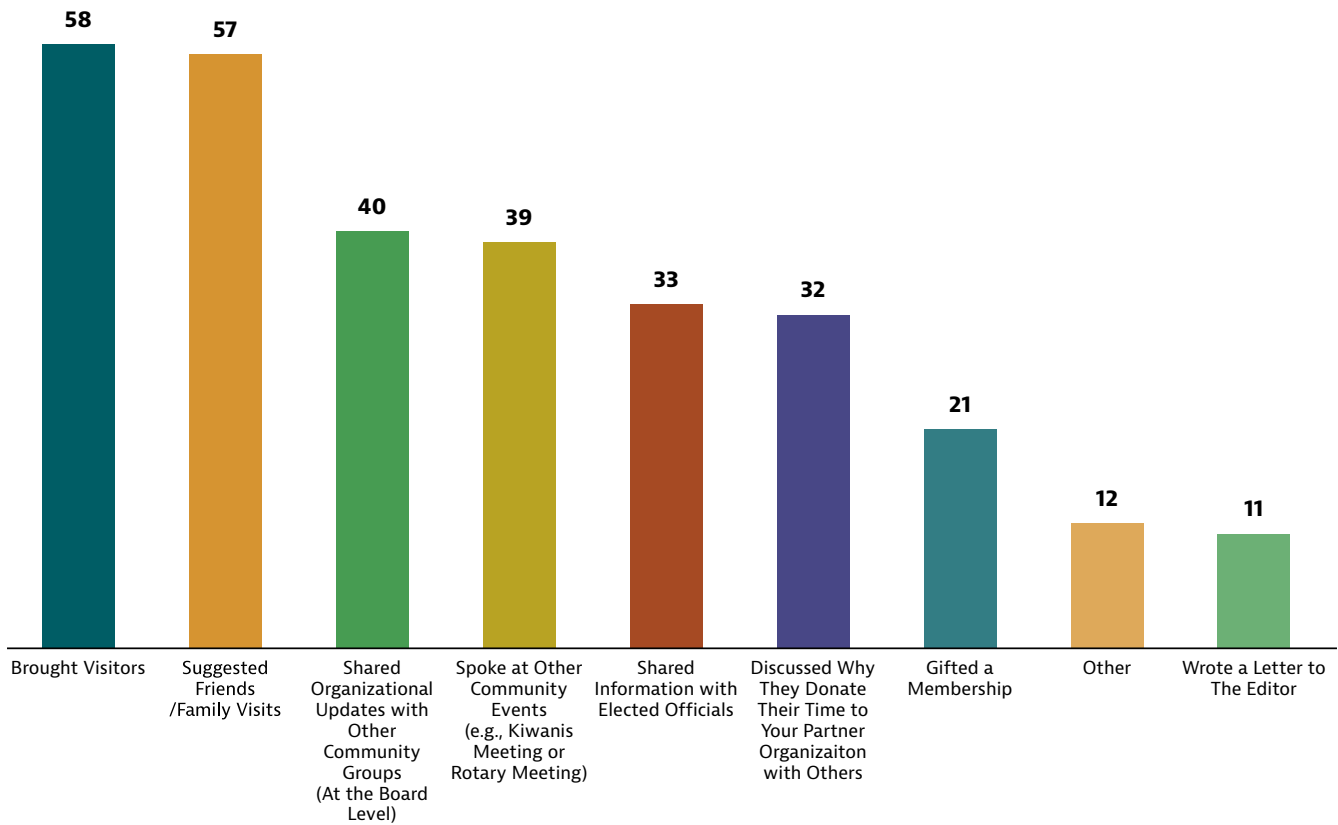


Chart 1 — Number of Heritage Organizations Benefiting from Volunteers’ Promotional Activities

Even though the remainder of the strategies are only occurring among volunteers from fewer organizations, we urge heritage organizations to formally encourage their volunteers to promote their organizations in the community. Not only will doing so encourage others to donate and support heritage organizations, such points of contact also raise awareness about the organizations’ heritage work, as well as volunteer activities and opportunities. Our data shows that many people became volunteers because they were asked by other volunteers, or because they saw others volunteering.

Conclusions

“Volunteer labor is extremely valuable..., it constitutes a significant portion of nonprofit organizations’ resources,” and **Oregon’s heritage organizations are reaping significant economic, programmatic, and qualitative benefits by embracing and engaging volunteers in their work.** One this is clear, the economic value estimates noted here underestimate the true value of volunteer labor and donations since, not all heritage organizations in our sample track this data. Systematically tracking such data would allow heritage organizations to routinely quantify and gauge the economic value their volunteers generate for them. In general, however, **the monetary value estimates of volunteer labor and volunteer donations all serve to demonstrate the value Oregon volunteers place on the historical preservation missions of heritage organizations.** This also demonstrates the need for continued support of these organizations, if the Commission is to continue to fulfill the goals articulated in the [2020–2025 Oregon Heritage Plan](#).

In general, however; it is clear from this analysis that volunteers are drawn to the heritage-centered missions of these organizations. And from engaging in “heritage” work, some quite poignant benefits emerge. First, given that heritage organizations consist of groups that support history work, such as museums, historical and genealogical societies, historic cemeteries, downtown associations, friends groups, and landmark commissions—**these organizations offer unique and diverse opportunities to connect with the history of a place, or one’s community.** This ultimately strengthens volunteers’ sense of belonging to their communities or place.

Second, the majority of the volunteers (61%), within organizations tracking such demographic information, tend to be older (55 years and older). This is confirmed by the Volunteer survey data in that 87.4% of the volunteer respondents are 55 years and older, and for these, heritage organizations offer avenues to make friends, a place to engage as citizens, whereby they partake in the work of preserving their community’s history and heritage, as well other specialized cultures and activities.

About The Oregon Heritage Commission

Founded in 1995 by the Legislature, the Oregon Heritage Commission is comprised of nine gubernatorial appointments and nine ex-officio members who function as the primary agency designated with the task of coordinating heritage activities in Oregon. This group of leaders from across the state of Oregon works collaboratively to champion resources, recognition, and funding for preserving and interpreting Oregon's past. To fulfill its heritage preservation mission, the Heritage Commission partners with hundreds of heritage organizations from across Oregon—most of which are nonprofit organizations. These organizations in turn partner with thousands of Oregonians who volunteer their time, money, gifts, and talents to help heritage organizations accomplish their work.

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