



■ ■ ■ United States
■ ■ ■ Chamber of
■ ■ ■ Connection

VOLUNTEERING **Reconnected**

Transforming Service into a
Catalyst for Social Connection

In collaboration with



Friends,

Connection is the challenge of our time, and it's in free fall.

In 2001, Aaron founded the Taproot Foundation to transform volunteering by leveraging the underutilized skills of professionals to build nonprofit capacity. That work helped create a \$15 billion global pro bono service market.

In 2020, Goodera redefined corporate volunteering by digitizing experiences worldwide and centering the volunteer's emotional journey. By developing volunteer hosts and automating logistics, Goodera made service scalable, measurable, and accessible for companies and nonprofits alike.

Now, service must evolve again to take on an even bigger challenge: rebuilding connection.

This is our next chapter.

Over the last 75 years, the neighbor-to-neighbor service that once defined American life has declined by half. Families used to spend 10–15 hours a week helping their communities. Replacing that loss would require an estimated \$500 billion in service activity every year.

To close that gap, we must make connection itself a cause and reimagine service as the primary way we rebuild it.

In 2025, the U.S. Chamber of Connection, in partnership with Goodera, is mutualizing service through Volunteering Reconnected, treating service as a shared act of belonging, trust, and civic resilience.

Together, we're partnering with a growing network of hundreds of companies, government leaders, and nonprofits to advance this mission. This year, we aligned on a plan and will continue to meet annually to measure progress, share learning, and identify new ways to close the connection gap.

As you turn these pages, see this not as a report, but as an invitation to join the movement to rebuild connection through service.

Thank you for helping to reconnect America.

With partnership and purpose,



Aaron Hurst & Abhishek Humbad
U.S. Chamber of Connection & Goodera



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Executive Summary

We are living through a crisis of disconnection that touches every dimension of American life – from our public health to our economy, our culture, and the strength of our democracy. Nearly half of adults report feeling lonely; trust among neighbors, colleagues, and institutions is at historic lows.

Yet within this challenge lies an extraordinary opportunity: to recognize human connection itself as a measurable, actionable social good that strengthens our communities, our economy, and our collective well-being. This systemic shift is the only way to act with the speed and scale necessary to solve the connection crisis.

Volunteering Reconnected reimagines service as a transformative vehicle for rebuilding trust and social cohesion. It is not a new program, but a coordinated national effort to design volunteering experiences where **human connection is a central outcome, not a lucky byproduct.**

In October 2025, distinguished leaders from across the fields of service, connection, and social impact gathered in Silicon Valley, California to chart the future. Convened by the **U.S. Chamber of Connection** in collaboration with **Goodera**, and backed by founding partners including **Idealist, VolunteerMatch, the Foundation for Social Connection, UC Berkeley's Greater Good Science Center, RSA US, and Big Think**, the summit brought together top corporate, nonprofit, academic, and civic leaders united by one purpose: to reconnect America through service.

"...feeling energized by and aligned with the commitment of so many experienced social impact leaders to approach the urgent need for increased connection with the precision and pragmatism this moment demands."



Melissa Rhodes Carter
Senior Manager, Community
Grant Portfolios, Walmart

This movement calls for a new standard: volunteering designed to cultivate and strengthen human connection in a way that is measurable, fundable, and integrated into existing systems. It's about expanding the scope of service from charity to mutuality that recognizes that **when people serve, they don't only give; they also grow, learn, and connect**

What began as dialogue among leaders is now evolving into a framework for action that combines research, design thinking, and lived expertise.

This is the founding document capturing that framework: **a shared vision for how America can rebuild connection through service**, and the collective steps needed to make it real.

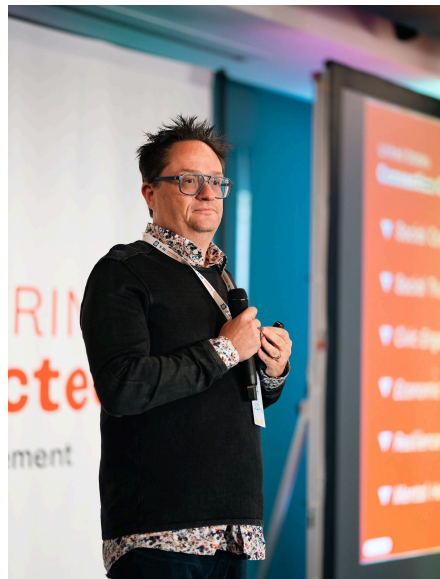
Key takeaways:

- Connection is the defining issue of our time. Addressing it requires coordinated, cross-sector design.
- Volunteering is a proven, scalable mechanism to close the social connection gap at pace and scale.
- Shared language and measurement standards are essential to design with rigor and validate impact.
- When organizations embrace mutuality, they take a more human-centered approach to impact, in turn prioritizing relationships over efficiency, and interdependence over individualism.
- To move quickly and gain traction, connection-first design must be easy to implement and integrate seamlessly into existing systems, supported by a new infrastructure and aligned frameworks that make connection measurable, fundable, and scalable.
- The next phase, leading to 2026, will focus on embedding social connection into everyday service experiences, making it central to how we define social impact.

“Volunteering can create a lasting positive impact in the communities where we live and work. Volunteering can also strengthen connections with our fellow colleagues/neighbors, expand world views, and develop/hone skills.”



Tara Lubbers
Global Volunteering Lead, Amazon



America's Connection Crisis

*Why Connection Can't Be Left to Chance.
It instead demands bold and immediate action.*

Disconnection is a public health, economic, cultural, and democratic issue that threatens both individual well-being and collective resilience. Loneliness has become one of the defining challenges of our time. It threatens health, weakens teams, and erodes trust in the institutions that hold communities together.

Connection has always been part of what makes us human. But in today's world, it's under pressure. This is underscored by the U.S. Surgeon General declaring loneliness a global epidemic (2023).

44 million American

adults are experiencing significant loneliness and 26 million report having no friends.

Source: U.S. Surgeon General, 2023

Loneliness contributes an estimated

\$466 per person

to our annual healthcare costs and costs employers

\$4,200 per employee

due to drops in productivity

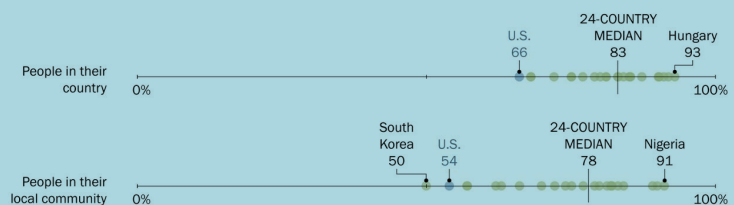
Source: National Institute of Health, 2021; Gallup, 2023

United States ranks last among 24 countries

in the percent of people who feel connected to other people in their country and second to last in feeling connected to their community.

Comparatively few Americans feel close to others in their country, community

% who say they feel *very/somewhat close to ...*



Source: PEW Research, 2023

Health risks of social isolation are comparable to smoking

15 cigarettes a day.

Source: U.S. Surgeon General, 2023

Having strong and secure connections can increase someone's life expectancy

by 50%

Source: Stanford Center on Longevity, 2023

1 in 3

say they feel lonely every week (APA, 2024).

Source: American Psychological Association, 2024

Alarming declines in generosity and civic engagement.

Volunteerism is at a **three-decade low** and **philanthropic giving** is declining.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau and AmeriCorps; Giving USA report, 2024

Only 20%

of employees have a close friend at work, yet those who do are ~7x more engaged.

Source: Gallup, 2023

Loneliness costs the U.S. economy

\$460 billion

just from absenteeism

Source: Center for Brain Health, University of Texas, 2023

Only 34%

of Americans trust others, costing 1-2% of GDP annually through friction and inefficiency

Source: PEW Research, 2024; McKinsey

People aged 15-24 spend

70% less time

with friends in person than they did two decades ago

Source: U.S. Surgeon General, 2023

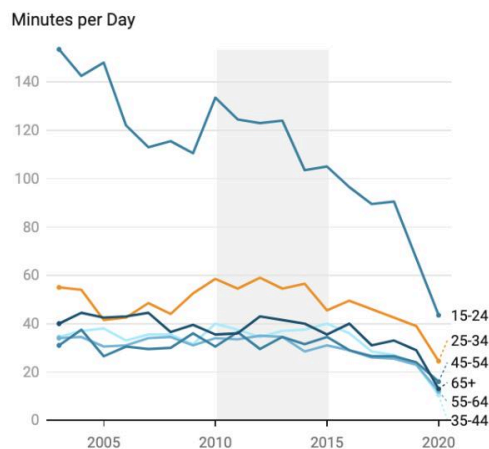
"While loneliness has the potential to kill, connection has even more potential to heal."



Vivek Murthy
US Surgeon General

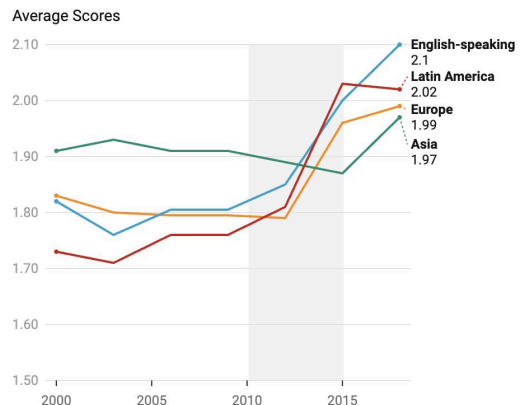
These aren't just statistics. They shape the way people show up at work, at home, and in their communities. When disconnection becomes the norm, it affects performance, culture, and even economic resilience. Not just now, but for generations to come.

Daily Time with Friends



Source: American Time Use Survey.
Special thanks to Dr. Viji Kanaan for these data.)

School Alienation, Worldwide (Ages 15-16)



Source: <https://www.anxiousgeneration.com/research/the-evidence>
Commentary (source: Jonathan Haidt, Anxious Generation)

We have experienced a global increase in loneliness, matching the trends of the mental health crisis in the USA, UK, and Canada

Why Social Connection Is the Cause of Our Time

Our social fabric is fraying. These trends are not inevitable, but reversing them will require deliberate, collective action.

And **few contexts are as well-positioned to bring together the essential elements of meaningful human connection as volunteering.**

Connection is not a competency or behavior; it is infrastructure. Research from psychology, organizational behavior, city planning, and public health all point to the same truth: people who feel connected are healthier, more engaged, more resilient, and more likely to contribute to the well-being of others.

And like any systemic issue, solving for it demands rigor: a clear definition, measurable outcomes, and coordinated action across sectors.

What Do We Mean by "Connection"?

Connection is the felt sense of trust, empathy, and belonging that arises when people share purpose and vulnerability.

It is the only thing that impacts everyone, everyone can help address and that you can't work on without helping someone else.



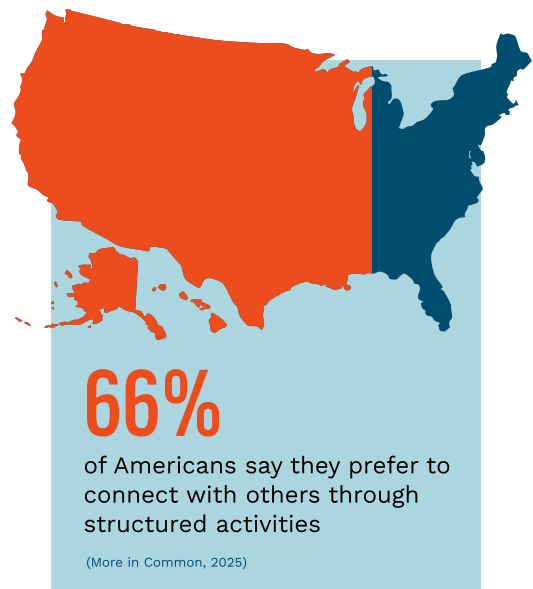
Connection is not casual interaction or networking. It is the foundation of resilient teams and thriving communities. It shows up when:

- People feel they belong and are seen for who they are
- Trust allows authentic collaboration
- Empathy bridges differences
- Shared purpose creates lasting bonds

Design Principles from Research

Scholars and practitioners have spent decades studying what makes people feel genuinely connected : in workplaces, neighborhoods, and communities alike. These insights point to one shared truth: **connection is not accidental; it is designed.**

By embedding the science of connection into how we structure experiences, we can shift systems from isolation and fragmentation toward consistent, intentional connection at every level — from teams to institutions to society.



Consistency, Vulnerability, and Positivity



Shasta Nelson
Relationship Expert and Author

Her work focuses on building meaningful human connections and belonging in personal and professional settings.

Meaningful connection thrives on three repeatable ingredients : consistency, vulnerability, and positivity.

- **Consistency** means showing up — creating reliable touchpoints and shared experiences that build predictability and trust.
- **Vulnerability** means creating safe spaces for authenticity — moments when people feel they can be seen and heard without pretense.
- **Positivity** is the emotional glue that binds people to experiences and to each other, sustained through gratitude, celebration, and shared joy.

When these three coexist, relationships become engines of belonging — spaces where people feel both grounded and uplifted.

Bonding and Bridging



Robert Putnam

Political Scientist and Professor at Harvard University

He is known for his research on social capital and community engagement in *Bowling Alone*.

Sociologist Robert Putnam distinguishes between two types of social capital that sustain strong societies:

- **Bonding capital** strengthens ties among people who share common ground — colleagues, neighbors, teammates. It builds loyalty, trust, and emotional safety.
- **Bridging capital** connects people across lines of difference — identity, class, age, or perspective — fostering empathy and mutual understanding.

Healthy communities require both. Bonding gives us roots; bridging gives us reach. Together, they create resilience and shared purpose across divides.

The Power of Moments



Chip & Dan Heath

Authors and Behavioral Researchers

Their work explores how emotional design and storytelling create memorable, purpose-driven experiences.

Moments of connection rarely happen by accident — they are designed through emotion. Chip and Dan Heath identify four ingredients that make experiences unforgettable:

- **Elevation** : breaking the script with surprise or delight.
- **Insight** : helping people see themselves or others differently.
- **Pride** : celebrating contribution, competence, and courage.
- **Connection** : that rare sense of belonging to something bigger.

Experiences that intentionally evoke these emotions tend to strengthen connection and meaning in lasting ways.

Amplifiers of Connection

Social Psychology and Neuroscience Research

Draws on studies of group synchrony, shared struggle, and emotional responsiveness as key drivers of trust and collaboration.

Certain conditions can supercharge connection, transforming good interactions into transformative ones:

- **Synchrony**: Moving, speaking, or creating in rhythm strengthens unity.
- **Shared Struggle**: Tackling meaningful challenges side by side builds mutual respect and closeness.
- **Responsiveness**: Feeling seen and acknowledged in real time reinforces trust and belonging.

Together, these insights offer a blueprint for designing volunteering that forges genuine human ties through experiences where people don't just do good, but feel connected through it.

*"Our online friends are fantastic, and AI companions *might* be too.....but we cannot let that version of connection become the new norm if we want our children and businesses and communities to flourish."*



Carrie Varoquiers

Chief Impact Officer, Workday

The Six Points of Connection

Drawing from research and best practices across disciplines, there are six consistent observable patterns that define how human connection forms and endures in communities, workplaces, and civic life.

Not everyone experiences disconnection in the same way. A person's role, environment, or daily routine often determines whether they feel part of something bigger, or invisible in the crowd.

Successfully connecting our country means helping every person adopt these six connection points:



These Six Points provide the evidence-based scaffolding for everything that follows, shaping how we design, measure, and scale connection-centered volunteering.

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■ ■ ■ Connection

The U.S. Chamber of Connection
aims to make the Six Points of
Connection a way of life, so
everyone thrives and lives in a
thriving community.

The Case for Connection-Based Service

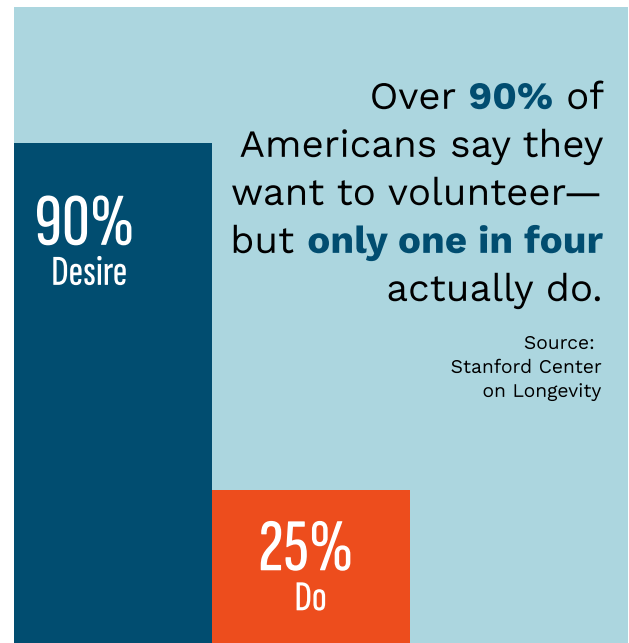
We all stand at a turning point. As workplaces, communities, and civic life grow more fragmented, service — one of our most enduring social practices — is poised for reinvention.

Unlocking the Transformative Power of Volunteering

When designed with intent, service can do more than help others. It can reconnect us all.

Volunteering offers one of the most practical and scalable tools we have to rebuild human connection, yet too often its connective power is left to chance.

When designed intentionally, service becomes a laboratory for belonging: it forges relationships, deepens empathy, and strengthens communities.



Leader Insights

“The three words that describe the future of volunteering are connected, customized, and impactful”



Emily Rasmussen
Founder & CEO, Grapevine

Mutuality: The Heart of Authentic Service

Service isn't one-way — it's reciprocal. Everyone gives and receives something of value.

- **Shared Humanity:** Both sides are equals, each with gifts, needs, and wisdom.
- **Reciprocal Growth:** Volunteers and communities alike learn, grow, and find purpose.
- **Co-creation:** Built with communities – not for them – through listening and collaboration.
- **Sustained Connection:** Mutual service builds trust and ongoing relationships, not one-off acts of charity.

“When we're lonely, we feel invisible. One of the most powerful ways to change that is to help others feel seen”.



Adam Grant
Organizational psychologist and best-selling author

Goodera: Building the Infrastructure for Connection

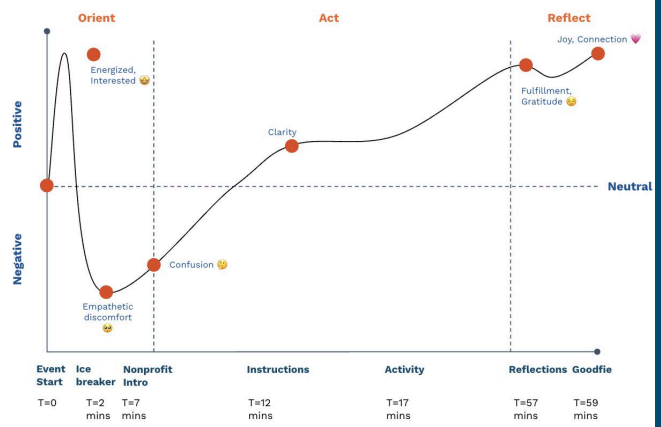
Goodera's story represents the next chapter in the evolution of service - moving from counting hours to cultivating human connection. Since 2020, Goodera has digitized and scaled employee volunteering across the world, designing experiences that are not only efficient but deeply human. By focusing on the volunteer's journey, it has turned service into an emotional arc that begins with curiosity, moves through empathy and reflection, and culminates in joy, gratitude, and belonging.



Abhishek Humbad
Founder and CEO, Goodera

At the heart of every Goodera experience is the Goodera Host, a trained facilitator who serves as both guide and connector. Hosts do not simply manage logistics; they hold space for honesty and shared meaning. From setting intentions at the beginning to leading reflection at the close, they help participants move beyond doing good toward feeling connected—to each other, to the cause, and to themselves.

The Emotion x Time Graph



They are part of a global network of passionate experts

[Watch our Host video](#)

Volunteering Reconnected grew out of a collective desire among Goodera's customers to explore and measure connection through volunteering, and to design experiences that make it intentional rather than incidental. With companies spread across **500 enterprises, 50,000 nonprofit partners, and more than 100 countries**, a shared realization emerged: organizations wanted to move beyond counting volunteers to understanding how service builds trust, empathy, and belonging within their teams and communities.

Through this balance of scale and empathy, Goodera curates experiences that mirror the emotional rhythm of human connection - the excitement of beginning something new, the discomfort of empathy, the clarity of reflection, and the fulfillment of shared purpose.

The Shared Vision for a Connection-Centered Era of Service

If left unaddressed, the forces driving loneliness, polarization, and burnout will continue to accelerate. Connection can be rebuilt, but doing so requires urgent, coordinated action to prevent disconnection from becoming a structural feature of modern life.

This is **Volunteering Reconnected**

It's not about reinventing volunteering; it's also not about small, incremental change. It is about consistently designing for connection, with rigor and intent. It means making connection a valued, prioritized, and even central outcome — through iteration (embedding connection into existing volunteer programs) and innovation (creating new forms of service where fostering human connection is itself the social good).

“Volunteers are often seeking relationships and connection, and when they volunteer they gain the community they desire, overcome feelings of loneliness, and are motivated to be involved for the purpose of supporting causes and communities.”

The Power of Volunteering:

Findings on connection, unity, and health of volunteers in NYC Survey, 2025

What Is Volunteering Reconnected?

Volunteering Reconnected is a long-term **national initiative** to optimize volunteering for human connection and bridge divides through service.

Led by the **U.S. Chamber of Connection**, the global authority on connection, in collaboration with **Goodera**, the leader in corporate volunteering, and pioneered by strategic partners, organizations, nonprofits, and civic leaders, Volunteering Reconnected aims to establish the new field of connection-based service by:

- Building awareness and frameworks for **connection-first volunteering**
- Developing tools and products to help organizations activate connection through service
- Creating a new cause area where **human connection is measurable, fundable, and celebrated**



Volunteering Reconnected Summit 2025: A Historic Gathering

In October 2025, leaders from across sectors convened in Silicon Valley, California, to confront one of America's most urgent challenges, and greatest opportunities: rebuilding human connection through service.

Hosted by the U.S. Chamber of Connection in collaboration with Goodera, the summit brought together executives, practitioners, and scholars from the nation's most influential organizations, movement builders, and social impact leaders:

"No single company or platform can move this work forward alone. But together — across teams, industry groups, and communities — we can redefine how employees connect purpose, belonging, and business impact."



Kenrick Fraser
Social Impact & Employee
Engagement Executive



Founding Partners

Leaders using the power of their platforms to bring these frameworks to life in their communities. Their expertise and leadership are integral to the co-design shaping this movement.



Convening cross-sector leaders and advancing research to build the evidence base and shared frameworks for social connection.



Launched a first-of-its-kind, Bridging Differences program, aimed to reach the cross-sector "gatekeepers" on the front lines of efforts to bridge divides between various groups, including education, government, workplace, and community-based organizations.



The first major media partner committed to amplifying Connection as a Cause through consistent, solution-driven storytelling that informs and inspires millions of leaders across sectors.



Advancing this movement by connecting global changemakers, providing institutional support, and helping scale connection-centered civic infrastructure across U.S. cities.



Creating actionable pathways for connection-based service through its monthly "Idealist Days", a global platform for consistent, visible gatherings that advance community, purpose and collaboration.



The day opened not with name tags, but with conversation. Over breakfast circles, participants reflected on the last time they felt genuinely connected — and what made that moment possible. The stories were intimate and real: mentoring a newcomer at work, finding common ground with a neighbor, rediscovering empathy through local service. It set a tone of honesty and hope — a reminder that connection begins with listening.



From there, the energy carried into a day designed for collaboration and creation. The summit wove together thought-provoking keynote dialogues with immersive design studios, where leaders rolled up their sleeves to explore five big opportunities: strengthening bonding, bridging divides, defining measurement, harnessing AI, and elevating connection as a cause. Together, participants surfaced barriers, prototyped frameworks, and stress-tested how these ideas could take shape inside real organizations and communities. Every studio became a microcosm of collaboration — leaders sketching ideas on canvases, debating definitions, and testing prototypes of what a more connected culture of service could look like.

From this, five key opportunities emerged to turn shared priorities into collective action.

Opportunity 1

Deepening Bonds Within Teams and Communities

Cultivating ties among people with shared ground.

The Opportunity

Bonding capital refers to the trust and loyalty built within groups, including friends, colleagues, teammates, and neighbors. It is not just about warm feelings; it is about building a fabric of trust and resilience that sustains individuals, organizations, and communities.

Bonding connection is the glue that transforms acquaintances into allies, and coworkers into trusted teammates. Yet most service experiences are not optimized for it – they focus on logistics and efficiency rather than trust and belonging.

We can design experiences that strengthen relationships among people with shared purpose, turning colleagues into trusted teammates and neighbors into allies.

Key Insights

Today's reality: Volunteering often prioritizes efficiency over human connection. Without intentional design, belonging is left to chance.

The opportunity in front of us:

Create service experiences that strengthen relationships among people with shared purpose, transforming colleagues into trusted teammates and neighbors into allies. And the business case is undeniable. Employees with a strong sense of belonging show:

56%

Higher job performance

(Source: BetterUp, 2019)

50%

Lower turnover risk

75%

Fewer sick days

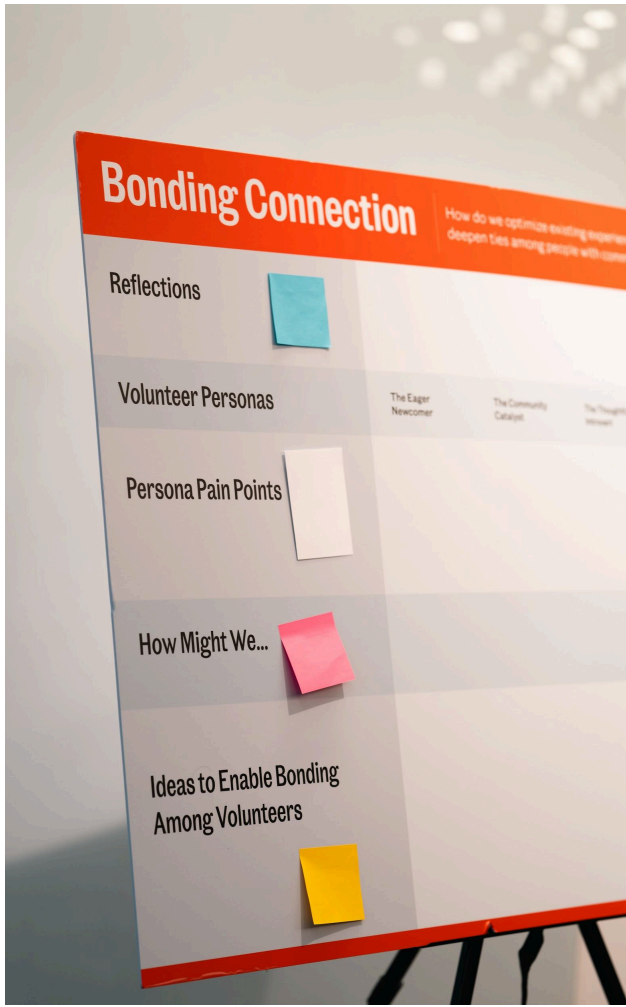


Leader Insights:

“To create the change we seek, we learned that we have to focus on the health and strength of the relationships in people’s lives — not just on the well-being of individuals themselves.”



Jenn Hoos Rothberg
Executive Director, Einhorn Collaborative



5 Steps to Take

- 1 Commit to Connection:**
Make belonging and trust explicit goals of every service initiative.
- 2 Design for Depth:**
Create opportunities for vulnerability, storytelling, and shared reflection.
- 3 Empower Participants:**
Give every volunteer a role in shaping the experience.
- 4 Recognize Relationships:**
Celebrate not just what was built, but who was connected.
- 5 Sustain the Momentum:** Keep ties alive post-event through shared reflection or reunion moments.

When designed with bonding in mind, service experiences are no longer “days of giving.” They become laboratories of trust.

Opportunity 2

Building Bridges Across Difference

Bringing people together across differences.

The Opportunity

Polarization in the U.S. has reached historic levels, with nearly two-thirds of adults saying they distrust those who vote differently from them.

Yet research reveals a paradox:

56%

of Americans feel responsible to connect with people whose backgrounds and viewpoints differ from their own

(Source: More In Common, 2025)

66%

believe they can learn from interacting with people who are different.

66%

of Americans say they prefer to connect with others through structured activities.

The primary barrier isn't lack of interest – it's lack of opportunity.

And for organizations, the stakes are clear. Teams are more diverse, global, and hybrid than ever, yet the ability to collaborate across difference often lags behind.

Bridging happens when people from different worlds find common ground, like a young employee connecting with older colleagues or a corporate volunteer with a nonprofit partner from a different background. Bridging connection creates space for people with different perspectives, backgrounds, and experiences to learn from one another. When done well, it turns diversity into understanding and difference into collaboration.

Key Insights

Today's reality: Despite its potential, bridging rarely happens by default. Group experiences often reinforce divides: people tend to stay within familiar circles, limiting opportunities for genuine exchange. Volunteering isn't an exception. Service most often happens within communities rather than between them. And when bridging does occur, it can feel like a one-way street, with one group positioned as the helper and the other as the helped, rather than a shared experience of growth.

The opportunity in front of us: Redesign volunteering to intentionally connect people across lines of difference, creating shared experiences where empathy grows, social trust expands, and learning flows both ways.

And in cities like New York, it's already starting to happen: Over half of NYC volunteers engaged across political lines, and 78% built trusting relationships with people holding different views — a model for what's possible nationwide.

(NYC Service, Mayor's Office, 2025)

Leader Insights:

"People don't get depressed when they face threats collectively; they get depressed when they feel isolated, lonely, or useless."



Jonathan Haidt

social psychologist, professor, and author of *The Anxious Generation*



5 Steps to Take

1 Curate Diverse Pairings:

Bring together participants with different perspectives and lived experiences.

2 Prime for Empathy:

Empathy is one of the key skills essential for overcoming divides. Use storytelling, reflection, and personal skills/practices to build curiosity and openness before activity.

3 Design for Equal Roles:

Structure service experiences where all participants contribute meaningfully.

4 Reflect on Mutual Learning:

Create time for participants to understand the need; explore what they gave and what they received, reinforcing the ethic of mutuality.

5 Extend the Bridge:

Encourage continued collaboration, learning, or storytelling beyond the event.



By redesigning volunteer experiences to connect people across differences (big and small), empathy grows and understanding replaces division.

Opportunity 3

Labels, Language, and Measurement

The Opportunity

Without a shared vocabulary, connection remains invisible. Naming and measuring the kinds of connection experiences create allows organizations to communicate clearly, move quickly, design with precision, and validate impact.

Just as nutrition labels bring clarity to what we consume, connection labels can bring clarity to what we create: the dynamics that build trust, belonging, and connection.

For leaders,

connection labels can justify investment by showing how a project strengthens workplace belonging or cross-cultural empathy.

For volunteers,

labels clarify what kind of connection they can expect, making them more likely to participate.

For champions,

inside organizations, labels provide the vocabulary to persuade others that volunteering is not just about hours logged, but about weaving the social fabric.

What kinds of connection do these projects actually create, and for whom?

What would it look like to make those types of connection visible, measurable, and even comparable?

Key Insights

Today's reality: Without shared language or taxonomy, connection remains intangible and unmeasured. We design and measure blindly.

The opportunity in front of us: Build a standardized vocabulary and labeling framework so organizations can design, fund, and advocate for connection with precision. With this, we can build distinct service portfolios that balance **bonding, bridging, weak ties, strong ties, and collective pride**, making the invisible visible.

Leader Insights:

"Many of us have measured connection in the past. But designing for connection is different. Part of this is labeling the experience for the types of connection, and also aligning employee outcomes to this. This helps us effectively communicate, recruit and attract volunteers."



Kenrick Fraser
Social Impact & Employee
Engagement Executive



5 Steps to Take

1 Design with Rigor:

Clarify which of the Six Points of Connection each volunteering experience aims to strengthen, grounding design in a shared framework for human connection.

2 Align on Language:

Adopt common terminology across teams and partners to describe and differentiate types of connection outcomes.

3 Embed Measurement:

Integrate indicators from the Six Points of Connection into existing reporting tools to track relational impact alongside traditional metrics.

4 Validate Impact:

Collect data and stories that illustrate how connection outcomes such as trust, empathy, and belonging have strengthened through service.

5 Share Transparently:

Publish outcomes to build credibility, accelerate learning, and inspire replication across sectors.

Opportunity 4

AI and the Future of Connection

Leveraging technology to strengthen, not replace, human bonds.

The Opportunity

We are entering a profound transition. AI is transforming how we live, work, and connect — freeing people from routine tasks while reshaping how we spend our time and attention. Yet the risk is clear: as automation rises, the already fragile fabric of human connection can grow thinner.

If designed with intent, AI can do the opposite — not replace connection, but amplify it. It can remove friction, deepen reflection, and make meaningful participation easier for everyone. Used well, AI can help volunteers, teams, and communities focus less on logistics and more on what matters most: the human experience of service.

The Human Differentiator

The skills that define the future of work : empathy, collaboration, adaptability, and trust. These are the very skills that distinguish us from machines.

- The World Economic Forum ranks these as top ten capabilities for 2030.
- McKinsey projects demand for social and emotional skills will rise by 20–25% this decade (2024)
- 92% of executives in Deloitte’s global survey say that “soft skills” like trust-building and creativity are now as critical as technical expertise — if not more so (2020).

Volunteering remains one of the most powerful, accessible ways to practice and strengthen these human capabilities in real-world settings.

Key Insights

Today’s reality: Technology can both unite and divide; it can deepen impact or distance us from each other. As AI reshapes how we relate and contribute, leaders must ensure that the human moments remain at the center.

The opportunity in front of us: To leverage AI **across the entire volunteering journey — before, during, and after service** — to create experiences that are more accessible, intentional, and reflective for every participant.

AI’s Role in Transforming the Next Era of Service

AI can support connection-first design at every stage of volunteering:

Before the Experience

- **Personalized Matching:** Use AI to align volunteers with opportunities that reflect their values, skills, and causes they care about, reducing mismatches and friction.
- **Inclusion and Accessibility:** Translate materials, remove barriers, and ensure diverse volunteers can participate meaningfully.

During the Experience

- Smarter Facilitation: Provide real-time insights to hosts and facilitators, helping them create more inclusive, emotionally aware experiences.
- Adaptive Engagement: Offer micro-prompts or reflection cues that help participants connect more deeply with each other and the mission.

After the Experience

- Reflection and Learning: Capture stories, emotions, and lessons through post-event reflections, summarizing key insights for both volunteers and organizers.
- Measuring Impact: Use AI analytics to surface patterns — who connected, how deeply, and what lasting impact emerged — helping organizations design more human-centered programs over time.

Leader Insights:

“I’m hoping AI in volunteering feels seamless, more human, and timely. The worst thing we can do is make people feel like they’re interacting with a computer more than they already are each day.”



Brian Mattos

Director of US Community Impact Programs at Visa



5 Steps to Take

1 Recognize Connection as a Core Capability

Treat empathy, adaptability, and collaboration as measurable outcomes of volunteering — not just feel-good benefits.

2 Design the Volunteering Journey End-to-End

Integrate AI thoughtfully before, during, and after volunteering to personalize, include, and reflect — ensuring technology enhances the human experience at every step.

3 Integrate Learning Through Service

Help volunteers apply what they learn through service — empathy, problem-solving, trust — back into their workplaces, teams, and communities.

4 Measure What Matters

Track both connection and capability outcomes using frameworks like the Six Points of Connection. Use AI analytics to gather relational data and surface continuous improvement insights.

5 Share and Scale What Works

Partner across sectors to test, refine, and expand AI-enabled, connection-centered service models — ensuring technology deepens belonging rather than automating empathy.

Opportunity 5

Connection as a Cause

Formally recognizing connection as a core social and organizational impact area.

The Opportunity

Connection is eroding faster than institutions can respond. The magnitude of the impact bears repeating:

44 million American

adults are experiencing significant loneliness and 26 million report having no friends.

Source: U.S. Surgeon General, 2023

United States ranks last among 24 countries

in the percent of people who feel connected to other people in their country and second to last in feeling connected to their community.

Source: PEW Research, 2023

Loneliness contributes an estimated

\$466 per person

to our annual healthcare costs and costs employers

\$4,200 per employee

due to drops in productivity

Having strong and secure connections can increase someone's life expectancy by

50%

(Stanford Center on Longevity, 2023)

Only 20%

of employees have a close friend at work, yet those who do are ~7x more engaged.

Source: Gallup, 2023

Establishing Connection as a Cause means **declaring social connection-building as a measurable social good**. It means that Connection is no longer a soft outcome or convenient byproduct. **It's a public good with an urgent need** that must be tackled systemically through innovation, alignment, and the conviction to do things differently than before.

This is not unprecedented. "Climate" evolved from the broader concept of "environment" into a **recognized, measurable, and coordinate** cause deeply integrated into civic and corporate strategies, governance, and systems. Similarly, "connection" must evolve from the fragmented space of relationships, engagement, and well-being into a prioritized category of its own. By establishing shared frameworks, standards, and outcomes, **we can bring visibility and value to the countless acts of connection that happen quietly every day**, scaling them into deliberate strategies that rebuild the infrastructure of trust in our country.

Expanding what "counts"

Addressing this crisis through scalable civic actions that are supported by the system. When systems and organizations empower and encourage people to play an active part in building the social fabric around them, they're investing in the health of their workforce, their communities, and our democracy.

Most acts that have long been recognized as foundational to cultivating belonging, collaboration, and community connection – planning block parties, leading walking groups, coordinating social clubs – are not currently recognized or formally encouraged as volunteering inside corporate or civic systems.

Welcoming and supporting newcomers

Running a maker night or skill-sharing workshop

Running a social club or social club fair

Organizing a block/building party or community BBQ

Coordinating mutual aid efforts during crises

Coordinating a parent playgroup or family meet-up

This gap undervalues millions of hours of civic contribution and limits companies' ability to measure their real impact on belonging and trust.

What if connection itself were treated as a recognized cause, as vital to human health and civic life as food, shelter, or climate?

Key Insights

Today's reality: Community service has long been seen as a way to give back. Pack a meal, plant a tree, clean a park. These are important contributions, but they're usually measured in outputs. How many hours? How many kits? Connection is often treated as a positive side effect, not a central purpose, making it invisible in strategy, funding, and design. And we cannot expect nonprofits to carry the weight alone.

The opportunity in front of us: What's often left unmeasured is the human side: **who** built trust, **who** felt belonging, **who** walked away lighter with joy.

.When social connection becomes a primary success metric, volunteering shifts from "projects" to rituals of belonging. It introduces **new forms of service**, where building belonging and connection is the greater good. It recognizes that addressing loneliness, the defining challenge of our time, **is measurable, strategic, and worthy pursuit**. To do this, we need new infrastructure that supports connection-driven volunteering

5 Steps to Take

1 Recognize Connection as Strategic:

Make connection a strategic pillar of impact. Integrate it into culture, well-being, and impact goals, measuring progress through the US Chamber of Connection's *Connection Quotient* metrics.

2 Expand Definitions of Service:

Broaden what counts as service to include civic and relational acts that strengthen the fabric of communities, supported by shared frameworks.

3 Fund What Connects Us:

Support employee-led and community-based initiatives that build trust and belonging, ensuring clear frameworks and measurable connection outcomes.

4 Tell Connection Stories:

Center human connection in impact reports and communications.

5 Identify how YOU will be part of the Movement:

Become part of the coalition advancing Connection as a Cause.

Collective Action: The Role We Each Play

Individuals

Service can take many forms – from building neighborhood networks and hosting community gatherings to helping others strengthen their Six Points of Connection in daily life. Find one that resonates and is meaning to you and do it.

Nonprofits

Use U.S. CoC frameworks to design and measure service experiences that deepen trust, foster belonging, and help volunteers strengthen their Six Points of Connection.

Organizations

Through pilot partnerships in 2026, Connection-as-Service will enable organizations to recognize and reward “connection hours” within their volunteer systems. Together, we will transform invisible civic acts into visible, measurable impact.

Civic Leaders

Champion policies and partnerships that elevate connection as a public good. Invest in infrastructure and incentives that strengthen trust and belonging across communities.



From Insight to Action: 2026 – The Year of Acceleration

2026 must be a year of acceleration, not contemplation. The stakes are high. The coming year is about collective action, experimentation, and measurable progress.

Coalition Commitments

Learn:

Build awareness of connection as a measurable driver of impact.

Evaluate & Iterate:

Embed connection-first principles into existing volunteer programs.

Measure:

Develop and adopt shared standards to validate connection outcomes.

Collaborate:

Partner across sectors to pilot, learn, and scale.

Centralize Connection as a Cause:

Rally 25,000 individuals and 250 organizations to formally commit to advancing connection by the end of 2026.

As we move from reflection to momentum, these upcoming moments will turn our shared vision into action - uniting organizations, volunteers, and changemakers to bring connection to life.



November 18th:

Next stop, New York! Be part of the next Volunteering Reconnected event and invite others who should be part of this journey. [Register Here.](#)

November 20th:

The Volunteering Reconnected Webinar will dive deeper into what Volunteering Reconnected Frameworks are.

[Register Here](#)



Become an early adopter of connection-based volunteering and measurement!

Respond to express your interest in joining the movement.

[I'm interested](#)

Connection: The Next Great Cause

What began as dialogue among leaders is now evolving into a framework for action: a transformative approach to volunteering that makes connection intentional, measurable, and scalable.

Looking ahead, this coalition will reconvene each fall to track progress, identify emerging barriers, and design solutions together.

These gatherings will serve as an annual pulse-check for the movement, translating insight into coordinated action across sectors. By committing to meet regularly, cross-sector leaders and influencers are embracing a collective-impact approach: sharing data, aligning strategies, and accelerating what works. Each year, the network will expand its reach and deepen its evidence base, ensuring that connection becomes not just a shared value, but a measurable national outcome.

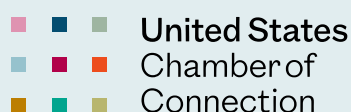
Service remains one of our most powerful tools for change, and this potential is largely untapped. When designed for connection, impact multiplies.

Connection turns moments of service into movements of belonging, trust, shared purpose, and impact.



This is our collective pledge:

**to make connection the
cause that defines our time.**



The U.S. Chamber of Connection is building the civic infrastructure for connection in America. Founded in 2025 by Aaron Hurst, we unite cities, employers, and community institutions to rebuild the systems that foster social trust and belonging. From launching local Chambers of Connection to launching Volunteering Reconnected, hosting Newcomer Nights at games and events, and re-imagining museums, libraries, and parks as connection hubs, we're helping communities nationwide optimize for connection.

Learn more at chamberofconnection.org or contact carolyn@chamberofconnection.org.



Goodera helps 500+ companies run engaging volunteering programs that build real connections and drive impact. With a network of 50K+ nonprofits and an all-in-one platform, we make it easy to bring people together through service.

Learn more at goodera.com or contact missy.peck@goodera.com

Developed by:

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