



Volunteering for a Sustainable World

Volunteer Recruitment reading list

October 27th, 2022 | RSM

The goal of The Volunteer Recruitment Reading List is to open up the academic literature for the local volunteer managers in Fair Trade Shops, support staff at national / regional offices and the organizers of the broader Fair-Trade movement. The intention is to offer an introduction to the topic of Volunteer Recruitment and present a list of the related open access articles in the major nonprofit academic journals Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly (NVSQ), Voluntas and Nonprofit Management and Leadership (NML).

Volunteer recruitment

All volunteer involving organizations, such as Fair-Trade shops, face the issue of volunteer recruitment. Volunteer recruitment is likely by far the most debated topic among organizations. Even though recruitment often requires various things to be considered first such as the creation of job descriptions and volunteer profiles. A Google search (13 Oct 2022) shows how much more attention this term receives compared to others.

Search term	Number of hits
"Volunteer management"	2.560.000
"Volunteer recruitment"	2.030.000
"Volunteer work design"	160.000
"Volunteer selection"	106.000
"Volunteer screening"	65.500
"Volunteer retention"	45.700

Table 1 Google search of volunteer terms, 13 Oct 2022

Volunteer involving organizations can focus on either increasing the time-investment of current volunteers or convincing non-volunteers to (re)start volunteering. Usually, statistics only differentiate between volunteers (who volunteered in the past 12 months) and non-volunteers (no volunteering in the past 12 months). Non-volunteers are a diverse group. Researchers Koolen-Maas, Van Overbeeke, Meijs and Brudney, propose categories to open the black box and clarify this group's unused volunteer energy potential (unpublished paper) (see table 2). When categorizing non-volunteers in this way, it becomes clear volunteer involving organizations have a narrow and broad responsibility in volunteer recruitment.

Volunteer Categories Volunteer Energy Levels

Never volunteer	Never volunteered before, theoretically possesses volunteer energy but it never materializes into volunteering;
Potential volunteer	Never volunteered before, possesses volunteer energy that can materialize into volunteering;
Current volunteer	Possessing volunteer energy and currently materializes into volunteering;
Not-now volunteer	Volunteered before, still possesses volunteer energy that can be materialized into volunteering;
Never-again volunteer	Volunteered before; no longer possesses volunteer energy.

Table 2 non-volunteer categories, Koolen-Maas, Van Overbeeke, Meijs & Brudney (unpublished paper)

Volunteer Categories and Volunteer Energy Levels

The **narrow** responsibility is recruitment of an individual into a specific volunteer position within their own organization. Such volunteer recruitment usually focusses on ‘current volunteers’ to do more and ‘not-now volunteers’ to come back. Sometimes, current volunteers are not or have not been involved in this specific organization yet, so recruiting them might come at the expense of another volunteer involving organization. Most volunteer recruitment follows this narrow perspective and there are many handbooks and materials to support volunteer managers (see e.g. <https://www.energizeinc.com/>, <https://www.volunteerhub.com/resources/>, <https://ellisarchive.org/>).

The **broader** responsibility is recruiting individuals into first time volunteering and volunteerism. Often, these are the ‘potential volunteers’ but the recruitment effort might also be aimed at ‘never volunteers’ or ‘never-again volunteers’. Attracting them sometimes implies recruiting groups instead of individuals or separating the recruitment from other parts of the volunteer management process (e.g., by using a National Day of Service or a high school to recruit the volunteers that can be placed in your organization). In many cases, the first introduction to volunteering is episodic.

Episodic volunteering has a clear start and finish. It may last an afternoon, a day, a weekend, or even a month, but when completed, the volunteers disappear from the organization. Episodic volunteer is more than micro-volunteering (online or from home tasks that take less than 30 minutes) and ongoing volunteering. An ideal episodic volunteering opportunity is a one-time (usually a few hours) assignment to perform a non-complicated or a very specialized and specific task that does not require additional training by the organization. Indeed, episodic volunteering also involves pro bono volunteering for a highly specialized task (using already within the individuals’ skills set). But hopefully the episodic volunteering experience hopefully leads to volunteering with the same or another organization. Recruiting the potential volunteers might come at some expense for the own organization.

The link between the narrow and broader responsibility is a kind of collective action problem. Literature is very clear, the people most likely to react positively to recruitment are current and not-now volunteers. Especially when recruitment pertains to non-episodic volunteer opportunities. Recruiting potential-, let alone never or never-again volunteers is more expensive to do and generally leads to less volunteer hours donated on the short run. But, at the same time, if no organization invests in it... in the long run volunteer pools will dry up.

Maybe the Fair-Trade shops and movement are not the frontrunners in this broader responsibility. However, Fair Trade shops and the local teams do invite people to ‘test the water’ of volunteering in their shop. Episodic volunteering, certainly when it is embedded in a broader context of something like the [UK Fairtrade Fortnight](#), a sustainability week or even the X-mas season, offers a ‘free’ trial for people as the no-commitment clause gives them the opportunity to stop without losing face.

Recruitment Into a Volunteer Function or Organization

Recruitment of ‘current volunteers’ or ‘not-now volunteers’ starts usually with identifying characteristics of current volunteers in the organization and trying to convince similar people to volunteer. Generally, three major elements provide the characteristics of volunteers and causes of volunteering (Shye, 2010): 1) (demographic) antecedents, 2) motivations, 3) and circumstances.

Volunteer antecedents can determine whether someone seeks out volunteer opportunities but also largely determines who is approached by others to volunteer (van Overbeeke et al., 2021). The literature on volunteer antecedents informs recruitment strategies as organizations tend to target individuals in recruitment efforts with high “participation potential” (Musick & Wilson, 2008, p. 290). Knowing and understanding current volunteers, informs cost-effective recruitment strategies (Callow, 2004; Lee & Brudney, 2009). Antecedents thus indirectly determine whether someone is asked to volunteer. Volunteer antecedents differ per country, culture and type of volunteering field but generally spoken they relate to gender, age, education, income level and marital status. In practice, for reasons of convenience, many of these antecedents will be connected to including or excluding a neighbourhood or specific group.

Motivations are an individual’s needs or reasons for seeking out volunteering commitments and for materializing volunteer energy. Volunteer motivations provide insights into how individuals possessing volunteer energy can be persuaded to materialize their energy. The most widely known and accepted motivations model is the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) by Clary and colleagues (1998). It examines the functional reasons why individuals choose to volunteer, as well as the needs and goals individuals seek to fulfil through volunteering. Performing a VFI analysis informs volunteer managers on what they can do to ‘reward and recognize’ their volunteers. Ongoing changes in volunteer motivations indicate that practitioners must reconsider what makes volunteering attractive. Given that volunteers often volunteer due to multiple motives, recruitment messages should stress multiple reasons for participating to materialize the resource (Baron & Byrne, 1997).

Circumstances then, refer to broader context of the life of an individual volunteer. Obviously, circumstances can be positive and negative forces for volunteering. Parents of the school-going children will be easier to recruit for volunteering at school than non-parents. People who are stuck at their houses cannot take up volunteer obligations at the location of the organization.

Based upon these three building blocks Fair Trade organizations can identify (groups of) individuals that based upon past experiences most likely say yes. There is an extensive body of literature delving into effective volunteer recruitment focusing on formal/informal recruitment and channels (e.g., Bussell & Forbes, 2003; Hager & Brudney, 2011; Wymer & Starnes, 2001), and effective recruitment messages (Clary et al., 1998; Snyder & Omoto, 2008).

According to literature the message should address volunteer motivations (e.g., Clary et al., 1998; Snyder & Omoto, 2008), volunteer benefits (Bennet & Kottasz, 2001), or organizational characteristics (Fisher & Ackerman, 1998; Boezeman & Ellemers, 2008).

The problem with this building block approach is that it can create a self-fulfilling prophecy as people who supposedly are less inclined to volunteer, because they have the ‘wrong’ antecedents, motivations and circumstances, will not even be asked. This is the most visible in the antecedents approach leading to not recruiting in certain neighbourhoods, amongst certain minorities or not approaching people with disabilities. Especially Fair-Trade shops and movement should be very cautious to use the antecedents approach if they want to diversify in both age and background, and should accept that these groups are not low hanging fruit.

Recruitment Into Volunteering and Volunteerism

Recruiting ‘potential volunteers’ and ‘never volunteers’ involves convincing people who never volunteer(ed) to take on their first experience. This is made more difficult by how volunteer involving organizations likely know little about who doesn’t volunteer, as opposed to who do.

Aim for the entire public is first approach, aiming for the entire public. National Days of Service (NDS) exemplify this by being: “nationwide volunteering events in which individuals and groups support nonprofit organizations by contributing their time to 1-day service projects” (Koolen-Maas et al, 2021, p2). Roughly comparing NLDoet (Koolen-Maas et al., 2021) and Mandela Day SA (Compion et al, 2020) it seems National Days of Service attract and introduce more novice volunteers (new faces) into volunteering in countries with a low percentage of the population volunteering. In the countries with traditionally more volunteering, an NDS provokes volunteers to give more (additional hands).

Next to NDS, there are more specific days or weeks that are connected to the Fair-Trade ideas, such as the forementioned UK fairtrade Fortnight or [World Fair Trade Day](#) (May 13th 2023). This allows for piggybacking on an event and invite people to help for a day (let them wrap presents, let them unbox on camera some of your items, let them make promotional social media messages etc.)

Cooperating with other organizations to reach specific groups is a second approach. Traditionally, a place of worship which combines religion and belonging (community) (i.e., church, temple, mosque) is the place to instill the habit of volunteering and start recruiting volunteers. It offers a unique combination of a normative appeal, the safety of a community of friends and the promise of good organizing by the church or other well-known organizations.

In contemporary Western societies, new third-parties (companies, educational institutes, governments) and intermediaries (volunteer centers, family volunteering programs, green gymnastics) also fulfil the role of getting people to volunteer. In traditional volunteer countries, third parties and intermediaries are very efficient in mobilizing more hands as in many cases they run programs based upon voluntary participation. The challenge for

volunteer-involving organizations is creating episodic volunteering opportunities that are easily adopted to the need of the third party. The Dutch organization Jarige Job uses the third-party approach to recruit teams to help pack birthday boxes. If a team participated for PR-reasons, many pictures will be taken and posted. If the team participates for teambuilding reasons, the organization ensures as many people work together. If the team is a group of singles on Valentine's Day, a big party will be organized at the end. If the team is the RSM NGO management course class, the introduction will be a bit more about the management than the need. The trick is that each team does the same job.

Third-party models can also be instrumental for inclusion (Van Overbeeke, et al., 2022) as they might use a different approach on antecedents, motivations and circumstances. Van Overbeeke et al. (2022) give three strategies that gatekeepers at third parties (sending organizations) can use to get the traditional non-volunteer to participate: 1) encouraging, 2) enabling, and 3) enforcing.

For Fair Trade organizations cooperations with third parties is interesting once the step is made to have more short-term or episodic volunteer possibilities. The example of Jarige Job is the so-called 'relay' approach in which 'the baton' is passed on to the next volunteer or team. This relay approach is difficult for volunteer-involving organizations when they must recruit the new volunteers themselves. But the third-party approach can move that recruitment burden to e.g. the educational institute or the company.

Open access articles selected from major nonprofit research journals

Antecedents, motivations and circumstances

Enjolras, B. Explaining the Varieties of Volunteering in Europe: A Capability Approach. *Voluntas* **32**, 1187–1212 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-021-00347-5>

Guidi, R. Reintermediating Voluntary Action: The Path-Dependent Pluralization of the Italian Volunteering Field. *Voluntas* **33**, 752–765 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-021-00386-y>

Hyde, M. K., Dunn, J., Bax, C., & Chambers, S. K. (2016). Episodic Volunteering and Retention: An Integrated Theoretical Approach. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 45(1), 45–63. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764014558934>

Lehner, M., Mattes, A., van Breugel, I. *et al.* Where I Belong: Identification Processes of Young Volunteers in Super-Diverse Cities. *Voluntas* **33**, 766–776 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-021-00404-z>

Meijeren, M., Lubbers, M., & Scheepers, P. (2022). Socio-Structural Determinants in Volunteering for Humanitarian Organizations: A Resource-Based Approach. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/08997640221114821>

Meyer, M., Rameder, P. Who Is in Charge? Social Inequality in Different Fields of Volunteering. *Voluntas* **33**, 18–32 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-020-00313-7>

Niebuur, J., Liefbroer, A. C., Steverink, N., & Smidt, N. (2022). Transitions Into and Out of Voluntary Work Over the Life Course: What is the Effect of Major Life Events? *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 51(6), 1233–1256. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08997640211057400>

Ramaekers, M.J.M., Verbakel, E. & Kraaykamp, G. Informal Volunteering and Socialization Effects: Examining Modelling and Encouragement by Parents and Partner. *Voluntas* **33**, 347–361 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-021-00315-z>

Southby, K., South, J. & Bagnall, AM. A Rapid Review of Barriers to Volunteering for Potentially Disadvantaged Groups and Implications for Health Inequalities. *Voluntas* **30**, 907–920 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-019-00119-2>

van Ingen, E., & Wilson, J. (2017). I Volunteer, Therefore I am? Factors Affecting Volunteer Role Identity. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 46(1), 29–46. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764016659765>

Walker, T., Menneer, T., Leyshon, C. *et al.* Determinants of Volunteering Within a Social Housing Community. *Voluntas* **33**, 188–200 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-020-00275-w>

Wallrodt, S., & Thieme, L. (2022). The Opportunity Costs of Volunteering: Evidence From Germany. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/08997640221129579>

Wiepking, P., Einolf, C. J., & Yang, Y. (2022). The Gendered Pathways Into Giving and Volunteering: Similar or Different Across Countries? *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/08997640211057408>

Aim for the entire public

Koolen-Maas, S. A., Meijs, L. C. P. M., & Brudney, J. L. (2021). Designing “National Day of Service” Projects to Promote Volunteer Job Satisfaction, *Nonprofit Voluntary Sector Quarterly*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764020982664>

Not open access: Compion, Sara, Bok Gyo Jeong, Ram Cnaan, and Lucas Meijs. "Mobilising episodic volunteers for Mandela Day." *Voluntary Sector Review* (2020).

Cooperating with organizations to reach specific groups

Cook, J., Burchell, J., Thiery, H., & Roy, T. (2022). “I’m Not Doing It for the Company”: Examining Employee Volunteering Through Employees’ Eyes. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/08997640221114309>

Haski-Leventhal, D., Meijs, L. C. P. M., & Hustinx, L. (2010). The third party model: enhancing volunteering through governments, corporations and educational institutes. *Journal of Social Policy*, 39(1), 139–158. DOI: 10.1017/S004727940990377 free text at: <https://repub.eur.nl/pub/17404/>

Kampen, T., Veldboer, L. & Kleinhans, R. The Obligation to Volunteer as Fair Reciprocity? Welfare Recipients’ Perceptions of Giving Back to Society. *Voluntas* 30, 991–1005 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-018-00082-4>

Meyer, M., Neumayr, M., & Rameder, P. (2019). Students’ Community Service: Self-Selection and the Effects of Participation. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 48(6), 1162–1185. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764019848492>

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