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Unpacking the Volunteer Experience: The Influence of Volunteer Management on Retention and Promotion of the Organization

Jaclyn S. Piatak – University of North Carolina at Charlotte
Joanne G. Carman – University of North Carolina at Charlotte

Volunteers play a vital role in nonprofit organizations. While considerable research examines volunteer recruitment and volunteer management, less is known about how to manage volunteers in such a way that inspires volunteers to continue to volunteer and to promote the organization. Using original survey data, we examine how volunteer experiences influence retention and volunteer promotion of the organization using the Net Promoter Score (NPS). The findings suggest that investing in training is paramount, along with making volunteers from diverse backgrounds feel welcome and included. Organizational support, very likely, plays a role too, in that interactions with paid staff and experience with the organization are positive predictors as well. These findings along with qualitative feedback from volunteers offer new insights on how to help nonprofit organizations bridge recruitment and retention efforts.

Keywords: Volunteer Management, Volunteer Retention, Volunteer Promotion

Volunteers help nonprofits and government organizations fulfill their missions. The Independent Sector (2023) values an hour of a volunteer's time at $31.80. Volunteers can be thought of as a natural resource (Brudney & Meijs, 2009; Koolen-Maas et al., 2023), where there is a finite number of volunteers and volunteer hours so volunteer energy should be renewed. Since volunteers are a vital resource and volunteering is a voluntary action, organizations should focus on how to manage and engage volunteers, so they have a positive experience. Satisfied volunteers bring value not only through their volunteer efforts but also through their promotion of and support for the organization (Prince & Piatak, 2022). Therefore, research and the field of volunteer administration should move from a focus on volunteer motivation and recruitment to account for the experiences of volunteers.

Volunteers decide to volunteer for a multitude of reasons. People may volunteer to make friends or to learn a new skill or to serve a cause they find personally important. In addition to the more motivation-based functions volunteers might have, people's pathways to volunteering may greatly vary. People most often become engaged through invitations to volunteer, but some may be excluded from these opportunities like the unemployed and those without home internet access (Piatak, 2016; Piatak et al., 2019). We know people volunteer for different reasons and may become involved in different ways, but we know less about volunteer experiences. How can nonprofits engage and retain volunteers who continue to

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bring value to the organization? More specifically, we ask: How does training, inclusion, activities, interactions, and the overall experience with the organization correspond to volunteer satisfaction, measured as promotion and retention?

Organizations must move beyond recruitment to focus on volunteer satisfaction and retention. Since the supply of volunteers is limited (Brudney & Meijs, 2009; Koolen-Maas et al., 2023), scholars have turned their attention to volunteer satisfaction, intent to remain, and actual retention. Research on volunteer satisfaction has evolved from matching the functional motivation of volunteers (e.g., Clary et al., 1992) to research on volunteer management and satisfaction (e.g., Brudney & Sink, 2017; Henderson & Sowa, 2019). Some volunteer best practices that influence satisfaction include matching volunteers to their interests and skills, providing training, and formally recognizing volunteer efforts (Einolf & Yung, 2018; Hager & Brudney, 2004; Smith & Grove, 2017; Walk et al., 2019). However, some volunteer management practices have mixed results, such as communication that can improve satisfaction (Smith & Grove, 2017) or be seen as overbearing (Hager & Brudney, 2004). We build upon this work to examine how a volunteer's experience influences satisfaction, that is whether a volunteer promotes an organization and intends to remain a volunteer in the future. Volunteers are a vital resource for organizations both in their roles as volunteers and as promoters, supporters, and advocates for organizations.

We examine how the volunteer experience influences volunteer intent to remain and promote the organization. Drawing upon original survey data from volunteers of nonprofit organizations engaged with a national foundation, we find training and an inclusive organizational climate are critical volunteer management practices for volunteers to intend to remain with the organization and promote the organization based on the Net Promoter Score (NPS), a commonly used performance measure (e.g., Reichheld, 2003, 2011) that has been used to identify volunteers who are enthusiastic supporters (Prince & Piatak, 2022). In addition, we offer context to our findings by incorporating a qualitative analysis of open-ended responses from volunteers on how to improve their volunteer experience. Although our sample is not generalizable to all volunteers and volunteering is context specific, our findings have implications for research and practice. For theory, we contribute the role of volunteers' experience highlighting the influence of training and the need to examine diversity climate and inclusion. For practice, we offer volunteer managers actionable advice in ensuring volunteers feel welcomed and trained to not only continue volunteering but also be promoters for the organization more broadly.

Volunteer Management: Unpacking the Volunteer Experience

Volunteer management has evolved from a focus on a universal approach (e.g., Connors, 2011) similar to the human resource management (HRM) process offering best practices regardless of organizational context. Many of the volunteer management models offer a process similar to Figure 1 below. While scholars have called for a movement from the universal approach to a contingency approach (e.g., Brudney & Sink, 2017) tailoring practices based on organizational needs, the focus continues to be on the organization, but what about the volunteer experience?

Rather than universal HRM processes and organizational variations, we are interested in the volunteer experience and how that shapes intentions to volunteer again and volunteers being organizational promoters. In examining 28 motives drawing upon the literature on volunteer motivation, Cnaan and Goldberg-Glenn (1991) find the motives overlap and suggest volunteer motivation is unidimensional, where volunteer managers should focus on fostering a "rewarding experience" overall (p. 281). Managers must not only address volunteer motives for engagement, but also must address volunteer management (Farrell et al., 1998) as reasons people begin volunteering may differ from the reasons they continue to volunteer

Figure 1. Volunteer Management Process

(Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008). Just as Studer and Von Schnurbein (2013) describe how volunteer management practices, organizational values and identity, and organizational context are all critical for volunteer coordination, we examine the role of the volunteer experience. Narrowing in on the volunteer experience, we examine how training, inclusion, activities, interactions, and the overall experience with the organization influence volunteers returning and promoting the organization. Our framework is below in Figure 2.

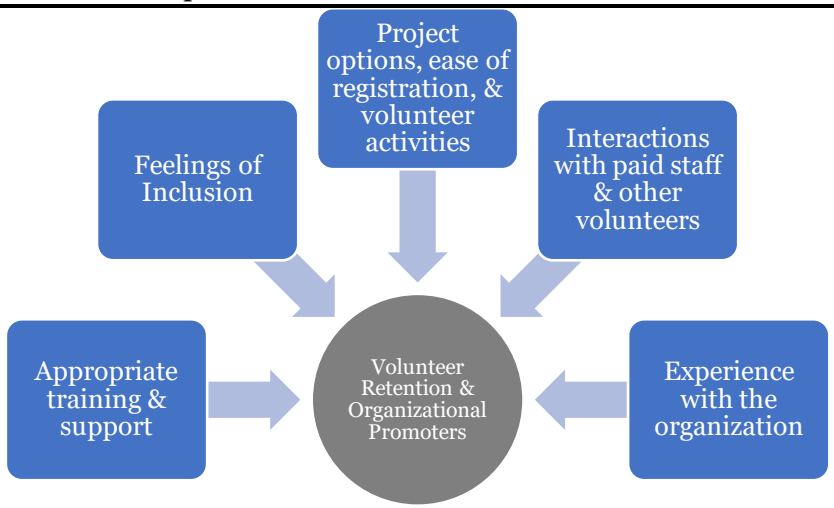
Our framework focuses on training, inclusion, and three key aspects of volunteer management—logistics, interactions with paid staff and other volunteers, and the organizational experience. In examining the adoption of management practices, Hager and Brudney (2021) find matching volunteers to appropriate tasks to be the most adopted practice along with communication, but only half support volunteers through regular supervision and few train staff to work with volunteers. Given the variation in adoption of best practices in volunteer management, we examine how the volunteer experience of onboarding and placement through interactions and engagement influence volunteer retention and being organizational promoters.

Volunteer Management: Logistics, Interactions, & Organizational Experience

Key aspects of volunteer management involve logistics, the administrative coordination of the volunteers. The volunteer experiences with the logistics or organizational rules, policies, and procedures, can be a burdensome, as much of the theory on red tape suggests (e.g., Bozeman & Feeney, 2014), or helpful, as green tape suggests (e.g., DeHart-Davis, 2017). Examples of logistics for volunteer administration include project options, ease of registering, and the activities, interactions with paid staff and other volunteers, and the organizational experience. Based on qualitative interviews, Englert et al. (2020) find eight factors enhance a volunteer's fit with an organization: "mission congruence, fulfilled need for organizational support, collegial commonalities and complementarity, appropriate supervision, competence-service matching, fulfilled need for autonomy and freedom compatibility with other spheres of life, and fulfilled need for recognition and appreciation" (p. 342). This illustrates the need for volunteer managers to ensure volunteers have a positive experience from logistics of onboarding and placement to interactions with others to experiences with the organization.

For logistics, organizations should ensure projects match volunteer interests and skills, clarify roles, and give volunteers autonomy in providing their service. Autonomy is a key aspect for volunteer satisfaction and retention. Much like paid employees (e.g., Onken-Menke et al., 2018), volunteers would like the flexibility and freedom to be able to take ownership for their service. Even among spontaneous volunteers, self-organization and coordination is needed for volunteer satisfaction, well-being, and commitment (Simsa et al., 2019). Drawing upon self-determination theory, Oostlander et al. (2014) find autonomy-supportive leadership, which addresses psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, has both a direct and indirect effect on volunteer satisfaction. Similarly, in an all-volunteer organization, transformational leadership increases the proactive behaviors of volunteers (do Nascimento et al., 2018). Through interviews with parks and recreation volunteers, Barnes and Sharpe (2009) highlight the need for flexibility, autonomy, and collaboration in volunteer management.

Figure 2. The Volunteer Experience Framework



For interactions, organizations should ensure volunteers have positive interactions with paid staff and other volunteers. Galindo-Kuhn and Guzley (2002) find participation efficacy and group integration correspond with both volunteer satisfaction and intent to continue volunteering. Among special event volunteers, communication with fellow volunteers and recognition predicted volunteer satisfaction (Farrell et al., 1998). Highlighting the importance of emotional support, relational organizational climate increases satisfaction and reduces turnover (Nencini et al., 2016).

Both task- and emotion-oriented organizational support increase volunteer organizational commitment (Boezeman & Ellemers, 2008) and volunteer engagement (Alfes et al., 2016), and reduce intent to leave the organization (Alfes et al., 2016). In addition, Lee (2021) finds both task and organizational fit improve volunteer retention. In examining 'super volunteers' or those that devote significant time to an organization, Einolf and Yung (2018) highlight the task-oriented support like flexibility in their responsibilities and clear, customized roles as well as emotion-oriented support like staff support influence time devoted to the organization. Much like Robichau and Sandberg (2022) find internal personal and external organizational factors influence the meaningfulness of work for employees, both task- and emotion-oriented support is needed for volunteers.

Yet few nonprofits follow best practices in volunteer management, especially those corresponding to volunteer satisfaction and retention. For example, many nonprofits pay insufficient attention to volunteer-staff relations. As Hager and Brudney (2021) found, only 19% of nonprofits surveyed trained paid staff on working with volunteers in 2003 and this fell to 15% in 2019 and was the least common volunteer management practice across surveys.

Drawing upon the literature on volunteer management, we expect volunteers who are more satisfied with logistics, interactions, and their experience with the organization supports and will be more likely to volunteer again and be promoters for the organization and intend to remain. As such, we hypothesize:

> H1a: Volunteers who are satisfied with the logistics, their interactions with staff and volunteers, and their experience with the organization will be more likely to volunteer again.
>
> H1b: Volunteers who are satisfied with the logistics, their interactions with staff and volunteers, and their experience with the organization will be more likely to be organizational promoters.

Inclusion

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts for employees are on the rise, but we know less about efforts to foster diversity, equity, and inclusion among volunteers. Organizational diversity climates matter for employees and volunteers alike. Social identity theory and intergroup relations provide the foundation for the diversity climate of an organization (Mor Barak, 2016; Mor Barak et al., 1998). Diversity climate refers to "shared perceptions of the policies and practices that communicate the extent to which fostering diversity and eliminating discrimination is a priority in the organization" (Pugh et al., 2008, p. 1422). While diversity climate and DEI efforts are understudied in volunteer management, research has highlighted the role of leadership, organizational culture, and values. More than a decade ago, Howlett (2010) called for the need to develop volunteer management as a profession to ensure the diversity of volunteer involvement, but how does inclusion influence volunteer intent to remain and being an organizational promoter?

Related to diversity climate and inclusion, research highlights the need for a supportive organizational culture. Commitment to volunteers, role clarity, team spirit of paid staff, and respect enhance the recruitment and retention of volunteers (Studer, 2016). In examining leader-member exchange dimensions, professional respect corresponds to job satisfaction, especially among younger volunteers in sports organizations (Bang, 2015). In examining the creation of National Day of Service projects, Maas et al. (2021) find nonprofits can enhance volunteer satisfaction by ensuring projects create a sense of added value, productivity, and make volunteers feel comfortable. Chui and Chan (2019) highlight the role of organizational identity and the need to build rapport with volunteers. In a hospital setting, volunteers feeling empowered with opportunities for social interaction, reflections, and rewards were more satisfied (Wu et al., 2019). Research illustrates how volunteers need respect, support from leadership and staff, and to feel comfortable in their organizations and volunteer roles.

Relatedly, volunteers thrive when given a voice and a volunteer identity. Having a voice and role identity increase volunteer retention (Garner & Garner, 2011; Grube & Piliavin, 2000). In examining AmeriCorps data, McBride and Lee (2012) find members are more likely to complete their service terms if sites involve members in planning, foster mentoring relationships, and facilitate reflections. Among volunteer fire fighters, support among their social circles as well as autonomy and feelings of efficacy in their volunteer work enhance volunteer satisfaction (Henderson & Sowa, 2019).

Additionally, some scholars explore issues of social justice and fairness in volunteering more directly. Calling for an examination of aspects of volunteering beyond the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI), Jiranek et al. (2013) finds social justice functions predict intentions to volunteer above and beyond the VFI measures. Relatedly, like employees, volunteers care about distributive justice that significantly predicts volunteer turnover (Hurst et al., 2017). In all-female youth sports, the agency of volunteer coaches to overcome structural barriers increased retention (Zanin et al., 2021). Despite examining different aspects of volunteer management, each of these studies show the value of social justice, fairness, and equity for volunteers.

Drawing upon research on the importance of fostering a sense of belonging in terms of respect, rapport, and support as well as research on social justice and fairness, we hypothesize volunteers will be more likely to continue volunteering and be organizational promoters when they feel welcome and included in the organization. As such, we hypothesize:

> H2a: Volunteers who feel welcome and included will be more likely to volunteer again.
>
> H2b: Volunteers who feel welcome and included will be more likely to be organizational promoters.

Training

Examining a variety of volunteer management practices on volunteer retention, Hager and Brudney (2008) find training plays a critical role. Learning and development opportunities can help with volunteer retention (Newton et al., 2014) and orientation and training corresponded to recommending volunteering (Wu et al., 2019). In a study of volunteer fire fighters, Henderson and Sowa (2018) find training, performance management, and organizational commitment influence short- and long-term intent to remain. Fallon and Rice (2015) find perceived investment in development, support and recognition, and training to predict volunteer satisfaction that in turn predicts intention to stay. Walk et al. (2019) find men who received training were more likely to continue volunteering. Past research finds a link between training and retention.

Examining the integration of volunteers into an organization, Hidalgo and Moreno (2009) find social networks, organizational support, positive tasks, and training are significant predictors of intent to remain a volunteer. Similarly, Englert et al. (2020) find organizational support enhances one's fit with an organization, in particular, access to service-related resources, training that is helpful and needed to provide the service, and development opportunities. Integration into the organization, such as training, relationships with other organizational members, and role clarity, reduce volunteer burnout (Moreno-Jiménez & Villodres, 2010).

Based on studies highlighting training as a predictor of retention as well as the vital role of training in integrating volunteers into the organization, we expect training will increase volunteer retention and being organizational promoters. As such, we hypothesize:

> H3a: Volunteers who receive appropriate training will be more likely to volunteer again.
>
> H3b: Volunteers who receive appropriate training will be more likely to be organizational promoters.

Data and Methods

We created an online survey to capture information about volunteer experiences with nonprofit organizations. The recipients of the survey were people who volunteered for organizations that used volunteers as a critical part of their service delivery model. The survey was distributed by organizations affiliated with a national foundation, and the data were collected from January 14, 2020, to April 2, 2020. For this study, we used data from 323 survey respondents for whom there was complete data—meaning we used listwise deletion of missing data for the study variables—and excluded 11 outlier responses (323/459=65.25%).

Dependent Variables

We focus on two volunteer outcomes to capture volunteer satisfaction with their experiences: organizational promoters and volunteer retention or intention to volunteer again. To measure the first dependent variable of organizational promotion, we use the Net Promoter Score (NPS) question that asked how likely it was that the volunteer would recommend the volunteer opportunities at the organization to a friend, family member, or colleague. The NPS, a commonly used performance measure, is the percent of promoters minus the percent of detractors (Reichheld, 2003, 2011). The original response set for this question was a 10-point scale, with "1" corresponding to "not likely at all" and "10" corresponding to "extremely likely." Those 1–6 are detractors, 7 or 8 are passively satisfied, and 9 or 10 are promoters. The NPS is an often-used feedback measure by businesses and nonprofits alike (e.g., Burnham & Wong,

2018). Many have likely been asked this question about whether they would recommend a given product, service, or experience. Prince and Piatak (2022) apply the NPS to volunteer management to find the most enthusiastic supporters are champions of the collective and a broader resource for nonprofits. Since we are most interested in examining what makes a volunteer a supporter of the organization or promoter, we transform this variable into an indicator variable that takes on a 1 if the response was a 9 or a 10 to signify the volunteer is a promoter and a 0 otherwise.

The second dependent variable is intent to remain, which is measured by a survey question that asked how likely it was that the volunteer would volunteer for the organization again in the next year. The original response set for this question was also a 10-point scale, with "1" corresponding to "not likely at all" and "10" corresponding to "extremely likely." While some volunteer studies have used administrative data to examine actual retention (Hager & Brudney, 2008; Walk et al., 2019), many use intent to remain as a proxy for retention (e.g., Alfes et al., 2016; Fallon & Rice, 2015; Galindo-Kuhn & Guzley, 2002; Henderson & Sowa, 2018). Since we are most interested in the volunteer experience, intent to remain is an appropriate measure of volunteer satisfaction with an organization.

Independent Variables

The three hypotheses (relating to positive volunteer experiences, inclusion, and training) for the study are operationalized by eight variables. Positive volunteering experiences is operationalized by six questions on the survey where the respondents were asked to reflect on how satisfied they were with their volunteer experiences at the organization. The options reflect three key areas: logistics, such as ease of registering, project options, and volunteer activities, interactions with paid staff and with other volunteers, and the volunteer's experience with the organization. The responses for these questions are coded as: "1" for very dissatisfied, "2" for dissatisfied, "3" for neutral, "4" for satisfied, and "5" for very satisfied. The six questions asked about satisfaction with respect to: a) The volunteer project options (mean=4.544, SD=0.780); b) The ease of registering for a project (mean=4.526, SD=0.804); c) The volunteer activities (mean=4.572, SD=0.778); d) The interactions with paid staff (mean=4.371, SD=0.964); e) The interactions with other volunteers (mean=4.421, SD=0.824); and f) Your experience with the organization (mean=4.622, SD=0.726).

Inclusion is operationalized by using a scale variable comprised of four survey questions: a) [Organization Name] makes it easy for people from diverse backgrounds to fit in and be accepted; b) Volunteers are developed and advanced without regard to the gender or the racial, religious, or cultural background of the individual; c) [Organization Name] pays attention to the needs and concerns of everyone; and d) I [do not] feel a sense of belonging to my organization [reverse coded]. These questions were drawn from measures of diversity climate (Pugh et al., 2008), organizational commitment for sense of belonging (Meyer et al., 1993), and managerial support (Hatmaker & Hassan, 2021). The responses (coded as "1" for strongly disagree, "2" for disagree, "3" for neutral, "4" for agree, and "5" for strongly agree) were combined to create the inclusion scale. The values for the scale ranged from 6 to 20 (mean=17.671; SD=2.527). Reliability for the scale was good (α=0.751) (Mohsen & Dennick, 2011).

Training is operationalized by using one question that asked respondents whether they had appropriate training and support to engage in volunteer activities at the organization. The response to this question is coded "1" for yes and "0" for no (mean=0.941, SD=0.235).

Control Variables

We control for both organizational level and volunteer level factors. First, data from the IRS Form 990 (Candid, 2021) were compiled to control for organizational characteristics. Larger

organizations, in terms of expense size and number of employees, have more volunteers (Lee, 2019) and may have better infrastructure for volunteer management, such as full-time volunteer coordinators (Handy & Srinivasan, 2005). For example, Hager and Brudney (2021) find larger organizations are more likely to regularly supervise and track volunteers, whereas smaller organizations are more likely to communicate the value of volunteers. Similarly, older organizations may have better infrastructure due to their experience and policy development over time, but organizational age was not significant in predicting volunteer use among human service organizations (Lee, 2019). We include four organizational characteristics: the number of organizational employees, ranging from 0 to 241 (mean=88.613, SD=61.287); the number of volunteers, ranging from 44 to 7,596 (mean=1,215.012, SD=2,055.769); age of the organization (in 2020), ranging from 10 to 114 years old (mean=43.136, SD=20.526), and total annual revenues, ranging from $310,982 to $7,630,737 (mean=3,992,867, SD=2,157,269). Total annual revenues were transformed using the natural log (base 10), and the new range was 5.493 to 6.883 (mean=6.477, SD=0.399).

Second, since many sociodemographic characteristics influence volunteering, the survey respondents were asked to report demographic information to control for individual volunteer characteristics, including: age, education, race, and gender. Age was calculated from the self-reported birth year, ranging from 20 to 90 years (mean=54.591, SD=17.646). Education is coded as three dummy variables: some college or less, coded as "1" or "0" (mean=0.219, SD=0.414); four-year college degree, coded as "1" or "0" (mean=0.386, SD=0.487), and professional degree or doctorate, coded as "1" or "0" (mean=0.393, SD=0.489). For race, the six-choice response set was recoded into a dichotomous variable (due to very little variation), where the value of "1" corresponded to respondents who described their race as Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC) and the value of "0" corresponded to respondents who described their race as "Caucasian/White" (mean=0.055, SD=0.229). Gender is coded as a dichotomous variable, where the value of "1" corresponded to respondents who described their gender as female and "0" corresponded to respondents who described their gender as male (mean=0.798, SD=0.401). We also controlled for how frequently an individual volunteered for the organization. This ordinal variable was coded as, "1" quarterly or less, "2" for monthly, and "3" for weekly (mean=2.339, SD=0.779) (See Table 1).

In addition, open-ended follow up questions asked the respondents to describe what the organization could do to better support volunteers and how training could be improved. The responses to these questions help to provide context to the quantitative data.

Bivariate Correlations

Bivariate correlations were conducted to examine the relationships between the independent and the control variables and check for multicollinearity. The lowest statistically significant correlation was –0.110 between the number of employees (an organizational control) and having a professional degree or doctorate (demographics/education control). The largest statistically significant correlation was between the log of total annual revenues and the number of employees (0.800). Values from tests for the variance inflation factor (VIF) ranged from a low of 1.06 (for BIPOC) and a high of 3.94 (for Number of Organization Employees) (mean=1.97) (See Appendix A).

Regression Findings

Logistic regression with robust standard errors was used to predict the variation in the promotion of the volunteer activities to friends, family members, or colleagues. The first hypothesis about satisfaction with logistics, interactions with staff and volunteers, and experience with the organization was not supported. The second hypothesis was supported,

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics (n=323)

	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis
Dependent Variables						
Organizational Promoters	0.811	0.392	0.000	1.000	−1.590	3.528
Volunteering Again	9.578	1.363	0.000	10.000	−4.163	21.424
Independent Variables						
Inclusion Scale	17.671	2.527	6.000	20.000	−1.306	5.024
Training	0.941	0.235	0.000	1.000	−3.750	15.063
Logistics						
Project Options	4.544	0.780	1.000	5.000	−2.034	7.691
Ease of Registration	4.526	0.804	1.000	5.000	−1.810	6.505
Volunteer Activities	4.572	0.778	1.000	5.000	−2.381	9.586
Interactions						
Interactions with Paid Staff	4.371	0.964	1.000	5.000	−1.652	5.252
Interactions with Volunteers	4.421	0.824	1.000	5.000	−1.580	5.726
Experience with the Organization	4.622	0.726	1.000	5.000	−2.451	10.243
Control Variables–Organizational Level						
Number of Employees	88.613	61.287	0.000	241.000	0.338	2.700
Number of Volunteers	1,215.012	2,055.769	44.000	7,596.000	2.593	8.069
Age of the Organization	43.136	20.525	10.000	114.000	0.525	4.135
Total Annual Revenues (Log)	6.477	0.399	5.493	6.883	−1.246	3.208
Control Variables–Individual Level						
Age of the Respondent	54.591	17.646	20.000	90.000	−0.417	1.986
Education–Some College or Less	0.219	0.414	0.000	1.000	1.353	2.831
Education–4 Year College Degree	0.386	0.487	0.000	1.000	0.464	1.215
Education–Professional Degree or Doctorate	0.393	0.489	0.000	1.000	0.437	1.911
Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC)	0.055	0.229	0.000	1.000	3.873	16.003
Gender (Female)	0.798	0.401	0.000	1.000	−1.490	3.221
Frequency of Volunteering	2.339	0.779	1.000	3.000	−0.827	2.136

with volunteers who reported having a sense of belonging and feeling welcome in their organizations having higher odds of promoting the nonprofit (1.361). The third hypothesis was also supported, with the odds of the volunteer being a promoter increasing by more than eight times (8.457) if the volunteer received appropriate training with the organization. The odds were also greater for female volunteers (2.534) and older organizations (1.033). The pseudo-R square (McFadden) was 0.358 (See Table 2).

Table 2. Logistic Regression Findings for Volunteer Promotion (n=323)

	Odds Ratio	Std. Err	z
Inclusion Scale	1.361***	0.113	3.700
Training	8.457**	6.143	2.939
Logistics			
Project Options	0.798	0.274	−0.659
Ease of Registration	1.141	0.354	0.427
Volunteer Activities	1.818	0.558	1.949
Interactions			
Interactions with Paid Staff	1.525	0.349	1.847
Interactions with Volunteers	0.543	0.178	−1.866
Experience with the Organization	2.009	0.743	1.887
Control Variables–Organizational Level			
Number of Employees	0.991	0.005	−1.688
Number of Volunteers	1.000	0.000	1.457
Age of the Organization	1.033*	0.015	2.274
Total Annual Revenues (Log)	1.444	1.252	0.424
Control Variables–Individual Level			
Age of the Respondent	1.018	0.012	1.525
Education–4 Year College Degree	1.476	0.756	0.761
Education–Professional Degree or Doctorate	0.770	0.393	−0.512
Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC)	0.670	0.452	−0.594
Gender (Female)	2.534*	1.071	2.199
Frequency of Volunteering	1.215	0.338	0.701
Constant	0.000	0.000	−2.595

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Linear regression with robust standard errors was used to predict the variation in the likelihood of volunteering again. The model accounted for 33.54% of the variance ($R2=0.335$, $F(17, 305)=2.66$, $p<0.000$). For this model, inclusion ($\beta=0.243$) and training ($\beta=0.206$) were positive significant predictors, providing support for second and third hypotheses. However, no support was found for the first hypothesis on the role of logistics (See Table 3). Across models, these findings were found to be fairly robust, with similar results from OLS and negative binomial regressions. Additional analysis also revealed that mission area and focus (e.g., arts, environment and animals, human services) were not significant predictors.

Additional Findings

To help unpack the influence of the volunteer experience on volunteer retention and volunteers being organizational promoters, we examine the responses to two open-ended responses in the survey. The first asked volunteers how training could be improved and the second asked what the organization could do better to support volunteers.

Training

The comments on improving training coalesced around three themes. The first theme related to the lack of formal training, whereby respondents indicated the training was informal, self-directed, or consisted of on-the-job learning, and asking questions. The second most common

Table 3. Linear Regression Findings for Volunteering Again (n=323)

	B	Std. Err	β	t
Inclusion Scale	0.131	0.041	0.243**	3.180
Training	1.191	0.577	0.206*	2.060
Logistics				
Project Options	0.047	0.181	0.027	0.260
Ease of Registration	−0.046	0.149	−0.027	−0.310
Volunteer Activities	0.072	0.123	0.041	0.590
Interactions				
Interactions with Paid Staff	0.239	0.143	0.169	1.670
Interactions with Volunteers	−0.073	0.123	−0.044	−0.590
Experience with the Organization	0.289	0.262	0.154	1.110
Control Variables–Organizational Level				
Number of Employees	−0.001	0.002	−0.061	−0.720
Number of Volunteers	0.000	0.000	0.042	1.440
Age of the Organization	0.005	0.006	0.069	0.820
Total Annual Revenues (Log)	0.296	0.359	0.087	0.820
Control Variables–Individual Level				
Age of the Respondent	0.008	0.005	0.108	1.800
Education–4 Year College Degree	−0.015	0.187	−0.005	−0.080
Education–Professional Degree or Doctorate	−0.147	0.208	−0.053	−0.710
Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC)	−0.220	0.325	−0.037	−0.680
Gender (Female)	0.319	0.216	0.094	1.470
Frequency of Volunteering	−0.016	0.106	−0.009	−0.150
Constant	1.124	2.317	---	0.480

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

theme was related to the sheer lack of training and how this made them feel, with respondents who described that they had little training felt "ignored", "not valued", "apprehensive", and "just thrown in." One respondent stated that there was "a disconnect between the person doing the training and the people I was to work with." Third, some respondents noted that while there was no training when they first started volunteering, training was now available, and finally, a few offered suggestions for how to improve the training (e.g., offer more training or refresher trainings).

Organizational Support

All of the respondents had the opportunity to respond to an additional open-ended question that asked about how the organization could improve the support of volunteers. Almost half (157/323 or 48.6%) of the respondents provided comments. Most (70/157) took the time to give positive feedback, writing comments like "all good," "Nothing comes to mind," or "They already do everything, can't improve on excellence." Others provided more constructive feedback that echo the findings from the regression analyses.

For example, some (21/157 or 13.4%) suggested the organizations and the staff needed to be more welcoming and inclusive to the volunteers, describing the need for staff to get to know

Table 4. Themes from the Qualitative Data

What can the organization do to better support volunteers?	(n)	(%)
No Comments	166	51.4%
Comments	157	48.6%
Total	323	100.0%
Comments		
Positive feedback	70	44.6%
Be more inclusive	21	13.4%
Create different opportunities to volunteer	15	9.6%
Better communication	11	7.0%
Better leadership and supervision	10	6.4%
More support from staff	9	5.7%
Improve training	9	5.7%
Show appreciation	4	2.5%
I don't know	8	5.1%
Total	157	100.0%

the volunteers (e.g., learn their name) and greet them. Respondents described the need for staff to be friendlier, make the volunteers feel valued, and interact more with them.

Some (15/157 or 9.6%) suggested that the organization create different opportunities for volunteers. For some, the suggestions were related to logistics, such as expanding the number of hours or days of the week they could volunteer, as well as being more mindful of accessibility issues. Others wanted more meaningful volunteer opportunities or opportunities to volunteer as a family.

Some (11/157 or 7.0%) described the need for better communication, especially as it relates to issues the organizations are facing, as well as changes in policies or procedures. Others (10/157 or 6.4%) described the need for better leadership and supervision, with clear tasks and greater clarity about to whom they should report. Some (9/157 or 5.7%) described how they would like better support from staff, who are visible, pay attention, and available to answer their questions. Some 9 (9/157 or 5.7%) described how training could be improved. One respondent, for example, suggested the organization develop "a rule book/manual available for volunteers to be able to check on certain procedures." Others described how they wanted more training, better training, or training at different times.

A few (4/157 or 2.5%) respondents suggested ways of showing appreciation, such as having events for volunteers, and giving them t-shirts or jackets. Some (8/157 or 5.1%) indicated that they didn't know what to suggest despite expressing the need for improvement (See Table 4).

Discussion

Volunteer management focuses on the HRM process and has moved to a contingency approach to consider organizational context, but what about the volunteer experience? In this study, we examine how volunteer satisfaction with logistics, interactions, and experience with the organization as well as feelings of inclusion, and views of training influence intent to volunteer again and being organizational promoters. Drawing upon original survey data and controlling for individual and organizational level characteristics, we find training and inclusion increase volunteer retention and the odds of volunteers being organizational promoters, using the Net Promoter Score. Inclusion and training significantly influence retention and promotion above and beyond volunteer satisfaction with common volunteer

management best practices like logistics. Our findings have implications for volunteer management theory and practice as follows.

Building upon the growing literature on volunteer management, we find support for the existing literature, particularly on the role of training. Like previous work (Fallon & Rice, 2015; Hager & Brudney, 2008; Henderson & Sowa, 2018; Newton et al., 2014; Wu et al., 2019), we find adequate training significantly predicts volunteer retention and whether a volunteer will be a promoter, according to the Net Promoter Score (NPS), that is strongly recommend the organization to a friend, family member, or colleague. Prince and Piatak (2022) demonstrate how the NPS can be a useful tool for volunteer management in gauging volunteer satisfaction and identifying enthusiastic supporters, a vital resource for the organization. As some argue and find (Englert et al., 2020; Hidalgo & Moreno, 2009; Moreno-Jiménez & Villodres, 2010), training seems to help orient and integrate volunteers into the organization. Training also predicts the likelihood that volunteers will volunteer again, underscoring the importance of investing in volunteer training.

Our study also highlights the vital role of an inclusive culture and fostering a sense of belonging among volunteers. We find inclusion significantly predicts volunteer satisfaction, measured both as promoting the organization and intentions to volunteer again. In addition to calls for greater organizational support, being more inclusive was a top comment from volunteers. Volunteer management should catch up to employee management in examining diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts for volunteers. Volunteers provide vital services to and for nonprofit organizations but face a difficult situation of being a bit like outsiders for organizations that also have paid staff. Our findings on inclusion support past work on the need for support and respect from staff and leaders (Bang, 2015; Studer, 2016) and the importance of ensuring volunteers feel comfortable (Maas et al., 2021), but highlight the need for organizations to do more to foster a sense of belonging, a supportive organizational climate, and a culture where everyone has a voice.

Like any study, our work is not without its limitations. Our sample was a voluntary survey so may not be representative of all nonprofit organizations, nor could we calculate a response rate due to the way the survey was distributed. Relatedly, volunteers tend to be prosocial people and may perhaps be prone to social desirability bias or generally more positive volunteers may have been more likely to respond to the survey as most of our sample responded favorably to our dependent variables. However, this perhaps makes our findings, particularly on inclusion and training, even more compelling. Data collection began in January 2020, but the COVID–19 pandemic began shortly thereafter, perhaps influencing our findings.

Research is beginning to examine the role of the pandemic on volunteering (e.g., Dederichs, 2022). Future research should examine how the pandemic may have shifted volunteer management practices. Attention to the volunteer experience following the pandemic would be helpful as volunteers may have different motivations, expectations, and experiences. Our sample is positively skewed to include more women, higher levels of education, and an average age of 55 where findings might vary across different volunteer groups. Moreover, a majority of volunteers in our sample volunteer for nonprofits serving animals or the environment followed by human service nonprofits, where volunteer experiences likely vary across organizational types. Future research may want to examine how sociodemographic variables might moderate the relationship between the volunteer management practices and the experience of volunteers. Future work may consider how volunteers view the efficacy of different volunteer management practices and what their experience is with volunteering and the organization.

Conclusions

Our study contributes to research on volunteer management in several ways. First, we examine the NPS, a common performance tool, that provides valuable insights for research to incorporate this measure and practice for organizations to gain promoters. The NPS can be used to measure volunteer satisfaction and identify enthusiastic supporters (Prince & Piatak, 2022). We augment our original survey findings with a qualitative analysis of open-ended responses to provide greater context and understanding of the volunteer experience. Using both the NPS and intentions to volunteer again as well as qualitative insights, our study paints a more complete picture of volunteer satisfaction with their experiences.

Second, we examine training, inclusion, and organizational supports from the volunteer perspective. Moving beyond the organization-focused volunteer management models, our study centers the volunteer experience. Examining how volunteers view management practices and their level of satisfaction with them helps provide insights both into the different practices and how they shape volunteer outcomes. By focusing on the volunteer perspective, we find training and inclusion matter more than the logistics most volunteer management models and best practices highlight.

Lastly, we highlight the importance of training and inclusion that not only informs volunteer management research but also serves as practical guidance to nonprofits. Volunteers can be seen as a natural resource (Brudney & Meijs, 2009; Koolen-Maas et al., 2023), one that needs to be invested in and renewed. Organizations should invest in their volunteers by devoting time, energy, and resources to onboarding and training volunteers and fostering an inclusive organizational environment. We find training and inclusion play a vital role in the volunteer experience for volunteers to recommend and promote the organization as well as to want to continue volunteering. Scholars and practitioners should pay greater attention to the volunteer experience, training, and fostering a sense of belonging.

Disclosure Statement

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest that relate to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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Author Biographies

Jaclyn S. Piatak is an Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science and Public Administration at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Her research focuses on public and nonprofit management, including human resource management and volunteering.

Joanne G. Carman is a Professor in the Department of Political Science and Public Administration at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Her research has appeared in a variety of journals including the *American Journal of Evaluation, Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation, Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, and *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*.

Appendix A. Bivariate Correlations between the Independent and Control Variables (n=323)

		(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)	(16)	(17)	(18)	(19)
(1)	Inclusion Scale	1.000																		
(2)	Training	0.239**	1.000																	
(3)	Satis. - Project Options	0.313**	0.158**	1.000																
(4)	Satis. - Ease of Registration	0.175**	0.131*	0.571**	1.000															
(5)	Satis. - Volunteer Activities	0.260**	0.201**	0.671**	0.558**	1.000														
(6)	Satis. - Interactions with Paid Staff	0.494**	0.206**	0.407**	0.300**	0.378**	1.000													
(7)	Satis. - Interactions with Volunteers	0.308**	0.208**	0.458**	0.447**	0.514**	0.482**	1.000												
(8)	Satis. - Experience with	0.470**	0.251**	0.578**	0.479**	0.593**	0.627**	0.583**	1.000											
(9)	Number of Employees	-0.181**	0.059	0.000	-0.002	-0.029	-0.140*	0.031	-0.079	1.000										
(10)	Number of Volunteers	0.135*	-0.018	0.157**	0.150**	0.144**	0.138*	0.072	0.133*	-0.194**	1.000									
(11)	Age of the Organization	-0.091	0.033	0.055	0.043	0.005	-0.099	0.019	-0.041	0.539**	-0.139*	1.000								
(12)	Total Annual Revenues (Log)	-0.215**	0.030	0.009	0.072	-0.017	-0.224**	-0.029	-0.102	0.775**	-0.086	0.560**	1.000							
(13)	Age of the Respondent	-0.059	-0.054	-0.026	-0.124*	-0.105	0.056	0.064	-0.016	-0.039	0.115*	-0.237**	-0.103	1.000						
(14)	Some College or Less	0.113*	-0.026	-0.035	0.034	-0.035	-0.042	0.046	-0.033	0.139*	-0.091	0.152**	0.003	-0.212**	1.000					
(15)	4 Year College Degree	0.028	-0.044	0.032	-0.054	0.011	0.037	-0.074	-0.007	-0.008	0.034	0.050	0.070	-0.025	-0.422**	1.000				
(16)	Professional Degree or Doctorate	-0.124*	0.067	-0.002	0.025	0.018	-0.001	0.035	0.035	-0.110*	0.043	-0.179**	-0.072	0.204**	-0.427**	-0.640**	1.000			
(17)	BIPOC	-0.059	0.003	-0.014	0.076	-0.005	-0.038	-0.091	-0.004	0.007	-0.076	0.063	0.052	-0.163**	0.034	-0.027	-0.002	1.000		
(18)	Gender (Female)	0.014	-0.093	0.024	0.040	-0.008	0.001	0.022	0.005	0.055	-0.106	0.038	0.149**	-0.021	-0.032	-0.013	0.040	0.021	1.000	
(19)	Volunteering (How Often)	0.048	0.095	0.147**	-0.044	0.047	0.104	0.032	0.086	0.122*	-0.069	0.164**	-0.052	0.182**	0.083	0.009	-0.079	0.014	-0.090	1.000

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).