# Volunteer Retention Research Report
## *Nonprofit Professionals' Version*

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May 2024

Reference: Wymer, W. & Najev Čačija, L. (2024). Volunteer retention research report: Nonprofit professionals' version. Unpublished report.

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## Acknowledgements

Conducting a research study is a collaborative effort. To collect data, it was essential to have the participation of Canadian nonprofit organizations that were willing to encourage their volunteers to complete an online questionnaire. I contacted many organizations, reaching out across regions of Canada, and attempting to include a broad array of different types of nonprofit organizations. Many nonprofits did not respond to me. However, several did respond and offer to participate, and it was there help that made this study possible. While I am most grateful to all nonprofit professionals who participated, I would like to give a special thanks to some who were particularly helpful.

- The professionals at Alberta Health Services were very helpful. I would like to thank Amanda Rozon, Diane Polesello, Michele Rondot, among others.
- Deb Wach, Provincial Administrators of Volunteer Resources (PAVRO)
- Aleksandra Vasic, Volunteer Success
- Curtis Goodman, City of Lethbridge
- Mia Penner-Adamo, Volunteer Manitoba
- Michael Treadgold, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Guelph
- Jollean Ferrari, The North Edmonton Seniors Association
- Annette Carter, Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21
- Christopher Buchner, Toronto Humane Society
- Machel Reeves, Royal Alberta Museum
- Yexin Tan, Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery
- Bree Piotrowski, Calgary Humane Society
- Amber Mack, Golden Circle Senior Resource Centre
- Brittia Tonin, YMCA of Lethbridge
- Deb Wach, Provincial Administrators of Volunteer Resources (PAVRO)
- Saskia Rinkoff, Harbourfront Centre
- Emma Meadley Dunphy, Ontario Science Centre

## Research Goals

The goals of this research study included:

- Understanding the organizational influences on volunteer retention
- Understanding the experiential influences on volunteer retention
- Understanding the organizational/experiential influences on volunteer commitment

## Executive Summary

We developed this study to add to the stream of scholarly research literature on volunteer retention. We asked many Canadian nonprofit organizations to participate in this study. We tried to include a variety of different types of nonprofit organizations, from across the country, to have an inclusive and representative sample.

While we were primarily interested in influences on volunteer retention, we understood that committed volunteers also support their organizations in addition to volunteering. Therefore, in additional to investigating influences on volunteer retention, we also examined how these factors might influence other types of support intentions like donations, bequests, positive word-of-mouth referrals, an helping the organization recruit additional volunteers.

We developed and tested two models. One model examined organizational influences on volunteer behavioral intentions. The second model examined experiential influences, meaning factors pertaining to the volunteering experience.

With respect to organizational influences on volunteer retention and other support intentions, we found that brand strength had an important and broad effect on our outcome variables. Organizational transparency was also influential with respect to donation and bequest intentions. Other influences are presented later in this report.

With respect to experiential influences on volunteer retention and other support intentions, we found that feeling valued was particularly important. Feeling valued not only had a direct effect on our outcome variables but also exerted an indirect effect through its influence on volunteer satisfaction. Perceived usefulness had a positive influence on feeling valued. We also found that social connectedness and value congruence were positive influencers.

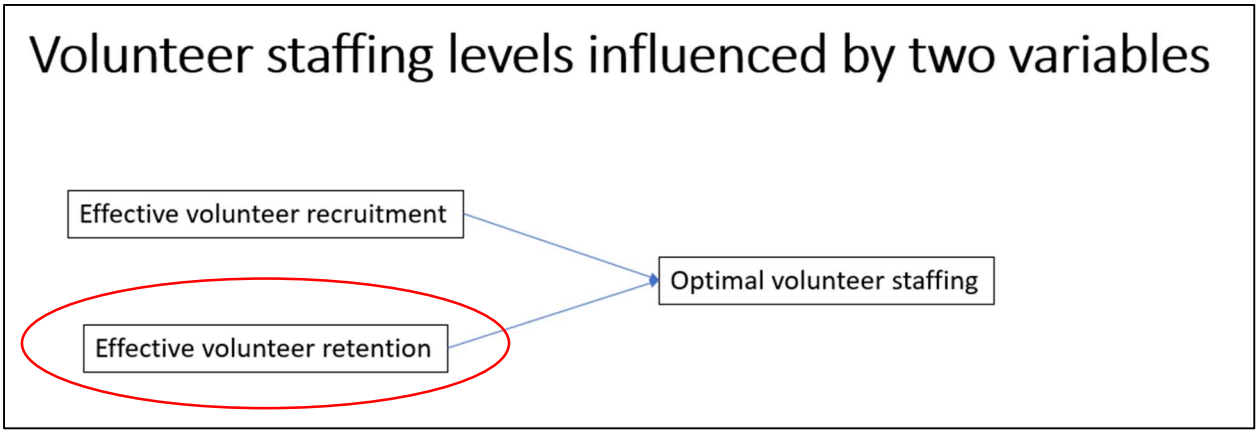
In this report, we present our methods and procedures. We present our variable definitions and how they were measured in our questionnaire. We present our significant findings and discuss managerial implications of our findings.

# Methodology

## Rationale for study:

There are two key influences on optimal volunteer staffing levels: effective volunteer recruitment and effective volunteer retention (see Figure 1). This study aims to better understand influences on volunteers' retention intentions. Much more has been researched on volunteer recruitment than on volunteer retention. Hence, to add to our knowledge on influences on volunteer retention intentions, this study was conducted.

**Figure 1**




For this study, we looked at two categories of influences on volunteers' retention intentions. First, we examined organizational factors that may influence volunteers' retention intentions (Figure 2). Second, we examined factors that influenced volunteers' satisfaction with the volunteering experience and their influence on volunteers' retention intentions (Figure 3). We examined these influences on volunteers' intentions to continue their volunteering in the short term (for one additional year) and the longer term (for the next five years).

We recognize that volunteers can also support their organizations besides giving their time. The prior research literature also suggests that as volunteers' commitments to their organizations increase, they tend to support their organizations in additional ways. So, in additional to assessing various influences on volunteers' retention intentions, we also investigated the influence of these factors on volunteers' (1) donation intentions, (2) bequest intentions, (3) intentions to help the organization recruit other volunteers, and (4) intentions to make favorable comments and referrals to others about the organization.

**Figure 2. Organizational influence on volunteer retention**

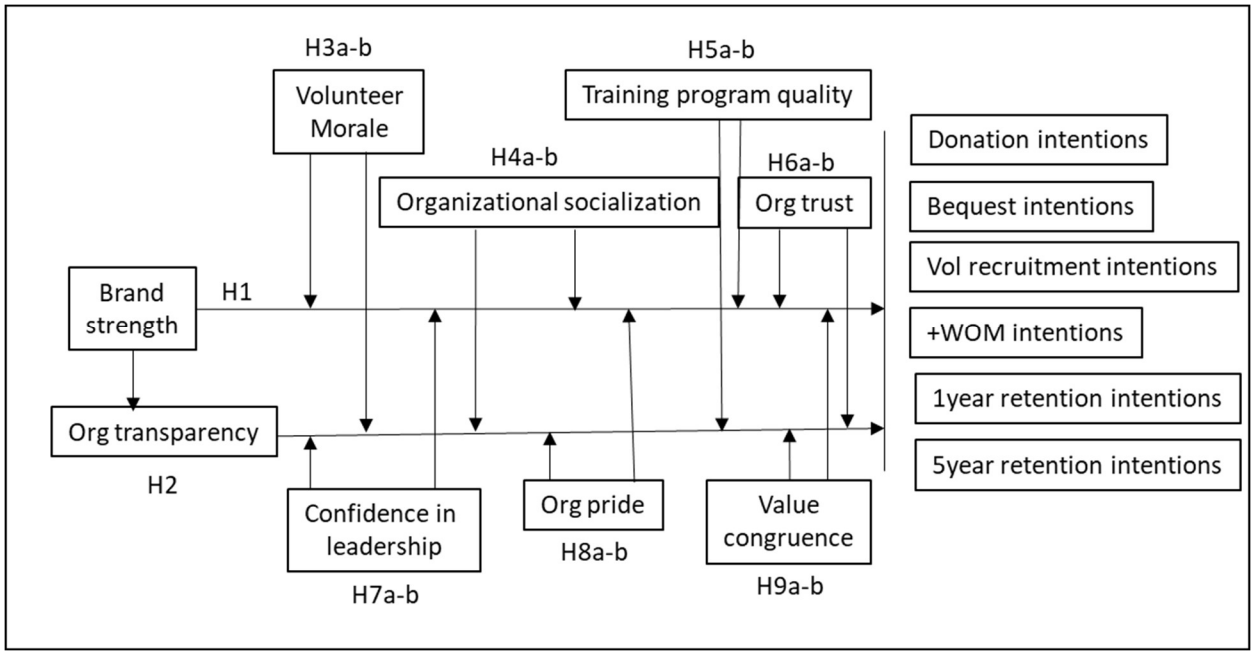
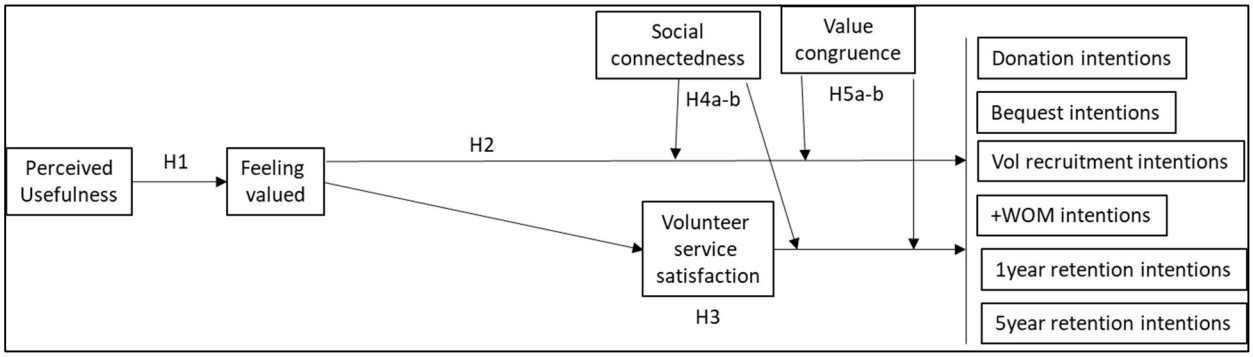



**Figure 3. Experiential influence on volunteer retention**




## The scope of this study:

1. Limited to Canadian nonprofit organizations.
2. Limited to individuals who were current volunteers of at least one nonprofit organization.
3. Identify factors that influence volunteers' intentions to continue volunteering for their organization.
    a. I assessed their intentions to continue volunteering in the near term (for one more year) and the longer term (for the next five years).
4. The objective was to get a sample of volunteers from different regions of Canada and from a wide variety of nonprofit organizations.

5. I contacted approximately 200 organizations and asked them to ask their volunteers to complete an online questionnaire.
    a. Because of the Ethics Review Board's requirements to ensure the anonymity of study participants, a complete list of participating organizations can not be created.
    b. Some organizations did not participate. Some did participate. Some organizations encouraged other organizations to participate.
6. The interested reader can view a copy of the questionnaire at https://forms.office.com/r/5Naa0WAirR

## Procedures:

1. Data were collected from August through December 2023.
2. A total of 631 completed Questionnaires were obtained.
3. Raw data was aggregated into an Excel spreadsheet. The data were then formatted for analysis using SPSS and SmartPLS statistical software.
4. Not all data is usable, and the final tally is less than the total number of completed surveys.

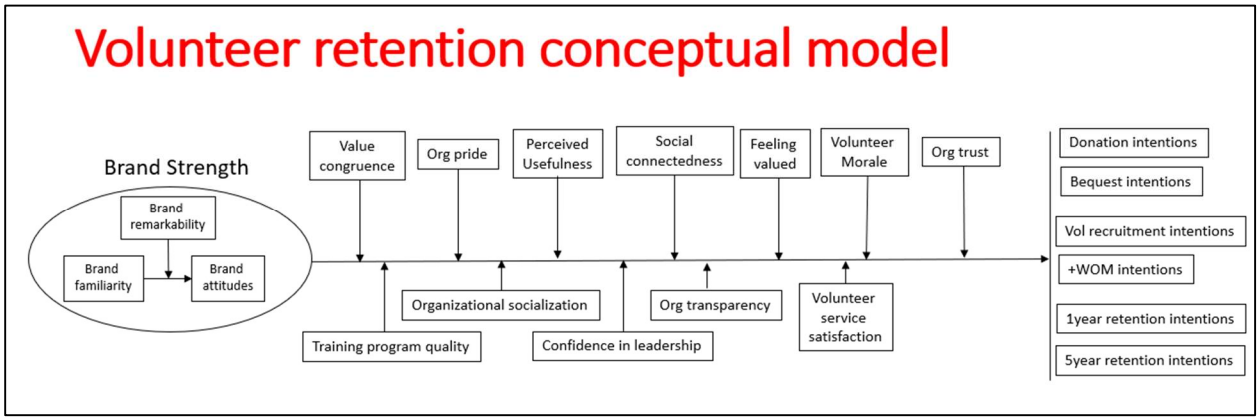
## Description of sample:

1. Sample size = 632
2. Average monthly hours volunteer = 13.6
3. Average number of weeks since last volunteered = 6
4. Average number of times volunteer per month = 4.4
5. 77.7% female, 20.8% male, 1.4% other
6. Average age of volunteer = 58 years old
7. Average years of formal education = 16 years

## Construct/variable definitions and scales:

It is important to understand what constructs/variables were used, how they were defined, and how they were measured. A composite representation of the constructs that were used in this study is presented in Figure 4. When we present the study's findings in a later section, we will divide the composite model into two parts: a model representing organizational influences on volunteer retention and a model representing experiential influences on volunteer retention.

**Figure 4. Composite study model**




In the model presented in Figure 4, brand strength is viewed as the antecedent or primary influence on volunteers. This is consistent with prior research on the importance of organizational reputation and well as branding research.

The list of variables on the far right are the outcomes or variables that are influenced. They pertain to volunteers' intentions. Two outcome variables relate to volunteers' retention intentions (1 more year and 5 more years). Two outcome variables related to volunteers' monetary support intentions (donation intentions and bequest intentions). Two outcome variables pertain to other ways volunteers can support their organizations (by assisting the organization in their volunteer recruitment efforts, and by providing favorable word-of-mouth (WOM) comments to others about their organizations.

The variables between brand strength and the outcome variables are our intermediary variables (mediators or moderators). These variables influence the effects of brand strength on our volunteer intention outcomes.

**Brand strength**

Brand strength refers to the degree to which a brand is well-known to a target group, is perceived favorably by a target group, and is perceived to be remarkable by a target group/audience of interest. Hence, brand strength is conceptualized as a three-dimensional (brand familiarity, brand remarkability, and brand attitude) latent psychological construct. Brand familiarity refers to the level of knowledge the target audience has about the brand object. Brand attitude refers to the degree to which a brand object is perceived favorably by a target group. Brand remarkability refers to the degree to which a brand object is perceived by a target group to be extraordinary (Wymer & Casidy, 2019)[2].

[2] Wymer, W. & Casidy R. (2019). Exploring brand strength's nomological net and its dimensional dynamics. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 49(3), 11-22.

| **Relevant:** |
| --- |
| Brand object:<br>Brand object refers to an entity that is the target of brand identification (Wymer, 2013[3]), which in the context of our study refers to the charity or nonprofit organization. |
| Brand:<br>Brand refers to a target group or audience's comprehension of a branded object based on information they have received about the branded object and experiences they have had with the branded object (Wymer, 2013). |

In summary, the brand object is the nonprofit organization. The brand pertains to how volunteers think about their organization and how it compares with other organizations. The development of brand perceptions is influenced by information received about the organization and especially by volunteers' experiences with their organizations.

| **Scale:** |
| --- |
| Brand Strength[4]:<br><br>Brand Familiarity<br>1 I am knowledgeable about [organization's name]'s activities<br>2 I can describe [organization's name] to others<br>3 I have a good understanding of what [organization's name] has done in the past<br><br>Brand Remarkability<br>4 No organization is better than [organization's name] at doing what it does<br>5 [Organization's name] really stands apart as being exceptional<br>6 [Organization's name] stands out in comparison to others<br><br>Brand Attitude<br>7 I have positive thoughts when I think of [organization's name]<br>8 I like [organization's name]<br>9 I have a positive impression about [organization's name] |

**Value Congruence:**

Value congruence refers to an individual's perception of the degree to which their values are like those of an organization (Wymer, Becker, & Boenigk, 2021).[5]

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[3] Wymer, W. (2013). Deconstructing the brand nomological network. *International Review on Public and Nonprofit Marketing,* 10(1), 1-12.

[4] Wymer, W., Gross, H., & Helmig, B. (2016). Nonprofit brand strength: what is it? How is it measured? What are its outcomes? *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 27(3), 1448-1471.

[5] Wymer, W., Becker, A., & Boenigk, S. (2021). An exploratory investigation of the antecedents of charity trust and its influence on volunteering and donating. *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, 26(2), e1690, online first version at https://doi.org/10.1002/NVSM.1690

| **Scale** (my creation using face validity) |
|---|
| Value Congruence:<br>1. My organization and I share important values.<br>2. The mission of my organization represents values that are important to me.<br>3. Supporting the work of my organization allows me to express my values. |

**Organization Pride:**

Organization refers to the individual's pleasure or satisfaction taken in being associated with an organization (Helm, 2013)[6].

| **Scale** [7] (this scale was modified by me to remove the word "pride" from each scale item) |
|---|
| Org Pride:<br>1. I get a sense of satisfaction from being a member of this organization.<br>2. I am pleased to tell others that I volunteer for this organization.<br>3. I am pleased to identify myself personally with this organization. |

**Perceived Usefulness:**

Perceived usefulness refers to a volunteer's sense of efficacy, competency, ability, and contribution from the volunteer's volunteering. (my definition)

| **Scale**[8] |
|---|
| 1. My volunteer service contributes to the work of the other volunteers.<br>2. I have the skills and abilities to help my organization.<br>3. My volunteer service makes a meaningful contribution to the organization. |

**Perceived Social Connectedness:**

PSC refers to the degree to which volunteers feel a sense of belonging to the group or community of people associated with the organization. (derived from Van Bel et al., 2009)[9]

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[6] Helm, S. (2013). A matter of reputation and pride: Associations between perceived external reputation, pride in membership, job satisfaction and turnover intentions. *British Journal of Management*, *24*(4), 542‐556.

[7] Groza, M. P., & Groza, M. D. (2022). Enhancing volunteer pride and retention rates: The role of organizational reputation, task significance, and skill variety. *Journal of Nonprofit & Public Sector Marketing*, *34*(3), 351-370.

[8] Lie, M., & Baines, S. (2007). Making sense of organizational change: Voices of older volunteers. Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations, 18(3), 225–240. doi:10.1007/s11266-007-9043-7

[9] Van Bel, D. T., Smolders, K. C., IJsselsteijn, W. A., & De Kort, Y. A. W. (2009). Social connectedness: concept and measurement. In *Intelligent Environments 2009* (pp. 67-74). IOS Press.

| **Scale** (adapted from Van Bel et al., 2009) |
|---|
| 1. I feel a sense of belonging with the community of people working or serving in my organization. |
| 2. I am satisfied the social contacts I have with the people working or serving in my organization. |
| 3. I relate well with the people working or serving in my organization. |

**Feeling Valued:**

FV refers to the degree to which volunteers believe that they are appreciated by their organization.[10] When members of the organization's community (e.g., leadership, staff, clients, other volunteers) communicate or demonstrate to volunteers that their personal qualities or activities has helped the organization, its mission, or the people it serves; volunteers feel valued. There is prior research reporting that when employees feel valued at work, positive benefits to the workers and their employers are manifested.[11][12][13][14]

| **Scale** (adapted from Rogers & Ashforth, 2017; Stumpf et al., 2013) |
|---|
| 1. I feel respected by my organization. |
| 2. I feel appreciated by my organization. |
| 3. My organization is grateful for my service. |

**Volunteer Morale:**

VM refers to degree to which volunteers have positive attitudes toward their organization, its leadership, and its staff/volunteers.[15][16]

| **Scale** (adapted from Arunchand & Ramanathan, 2013) |
|---|
| 1. I have a positive impression of the organization's leadership. |
| 2. I believe that my organization is exceptional. |
| 3. The volunteers and staff in the organization are friendly. |

[10] White, M., & Mackenzie-Davey, K. (2003). Feeling valued at work? A qualitative study of corporate training consultants. *Career Development International*, *8*(5), 228-234.

[11] Rogers, K. M., & Ashforth, B. E. (2017). Respect in organizations: Feeling valued as "we" and "me". *Journal of Management*, *43*(5), 1578-1608.

[12] Stumpf, S. A., Tymon, W. G., Favorito, N., & Smith, R. R. (2013). Employees and change initiatives: intrinsic rewards and feeling valued. *Journal of Business Strategy*, *34*(2), 21-29.

[13] Simpkin, A. L., Chang, Y., Yu, L., Campbell, E. G., Armstrong, K., & Walensky, R. P. (2019). Assessment of job satisfaction and feeling valued in academic medicine. *JAMA Internal Medicine*, *179*(7), 992-994.

[14] White, P. (2015). Appreciating your staff makes sound business sense: The four main ways to make employees feel valued. *Human resource management international digest*.

[15] Arunchand, C. H., & Ramanathan, H. N. (2013). Organizational culture and employee morale: A public sector enterprise experience. *Journal of Strategic Human Resource Management*, *2*(1), 1.

[16] Sania, U., Kalpina, K., & Javed, H. (2015). Diversity, employee morale and customer satisfaction: The three musketeers. *Journal of Economics, Business and Management*, *3*(1), 11-18.

**Organizational Trust:**

OT refers to the degree to which individuals believe in the reliability, honesty, and integrity of their organization. (Adapted from McKnight & Chervany, 2000)[17]. It is manifested in the belief that the organization would not act in a malicious or dishonorable manner.[18]

| **Scale** (derived from the preceding definition) |
|---|
| 1. My organization is reliable. |
| 2. My organization is honest. |
| 3. My organization is managed with integrity. |

**Volunteer Service Satisfaction:**

VSS is derived from the employee job satisfaction literature[19][20][21]. It refers to the degree to which a volunteer's service provides the volunteer with feelings of enjoyment, contentment, and fulfillment.

| **Scale** (adapted from van Saane et al., 2003)[22] |
|---|
| 1. I enjoy serving as a volunteer in my organization. |
| 2. I feel a sense of fulfillment from serving as a volunteer in my organization. |
| 3. I feel contented from serving as a volunteer in my organization. |

**Training Program Quality**

TPQ refers to volunteers' awareness and perceptions of their organization's training of volunteers.

| **Scale:** |
|---|
| 1. When I first became a volunteer, my organization made sure that I knew what I was supposed to do before I began to perform my volunteer tasks. |
| 2. When I first became a volunteer, my organization showed me how to perform my volunteer tasks. |

[17] McKnight, D. & Chervany, N. (2000). What is trust? A conceptual Analysis and an interdisciplinary model. Proceedings from the Americas Conference on Information Systems (AMCIS), Paper 382.

[18] Viljanen, L. (2005). Towards an ontology of trust. In *Trust, Privacy, and Security in Digital Business: Second International Conference, TrustBus 2005, Copenhagen, Denmark, August 22-26, 2005. Proceedings 2* (pp. 175-184). Springer Berlin Heidelberg.

[19] Nencini, A., Romaioli, D., & Meneghini, A. M. (2016). Volunteer motivation and organizational climate: Factors that promote satisfaction and sustained volunteerism in NPOs. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, *27*, 618-639.

[20] Bowling, N. A., & Hammond, G. D. (2008). A meta-analytic examination of the construct validity of the Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire Job Satisfaction Subscale. *journal of Vocational Behavior*, *73*(1), 63-77.

[21] Rentsch, J. R., & Steel, R. P. (1992). Construct and concurrent validation of the Andrews and Withey job satisfaction questionnaire. *Educational and psychological measurement*, *52*(2), 357-367.

[22] Van Saane, N., Sluiter, J. K., Verbeek, J. H. A. M., & Frings-Dresen, M. H. (2003). Reliability and validity of instruments measuring job satisfaction—a systematic review. *Occupational medicine*, *53*(3), 191-200.

| |
|---|
| 3. When I first became a volunteer, my organization made sure that I was comfortable in performing my volunteer tasks before assigning me tasks to do on my own. |

**Organizational socialization**

OS refers to perceptions of the organization's proactive relationship building efforts to integrate volunteers into the organization.

| **Scale:** |
|---|
| 1. There is a healthy level of social interaction between me and the rest of my organization. |
| 2. The leadership, staff, and volunteers of my organization know me. |
| 3. My organization makes me feel like I belong. |

**Confidence in leadership**

This refers to volunteers' belief that the organization's leaders are highly skilled, highly effective, and inspirational.

| **Scale:** |
|---|
| 1. My organization's leadership is highly skilled. |
| 2. My organization's leadership is highly effective. |
| 3. My organization's leadership motivates us to perform at higher levels. |

**Organizational transparency:**

Refers to perceived trust in organizational sharing of information, decision processes, and priorities.

| **Scale:** |
|---|
| 1. I am confident that my organization openly shares information about itself and operations. |
| 2. I am confident that my organization openly shares information about how its decisions are made. |
| 3. I am confident that my organization openly shares information about its priorities. |

## Measurement

The variables were measured using the scales presented above. The interested reader can view a copy of the questionnaire at https://forms.office.com/r/5Naa0WAirR

## Data analysis

Raw data were provided in an Excel spreadsheet format, which was converted to a format for importation into SPSS, which was imported into SmartPLS. SPSS was used to provide descriptive

statistics. SmartPLS was used for the partial least squares structural equation modeling analysis. The measurement model was evaluated and validated first. Then the structural model was assessed to provide hypothesis testing of the conceptual models presented in Figures 2 and 3.

## Summary

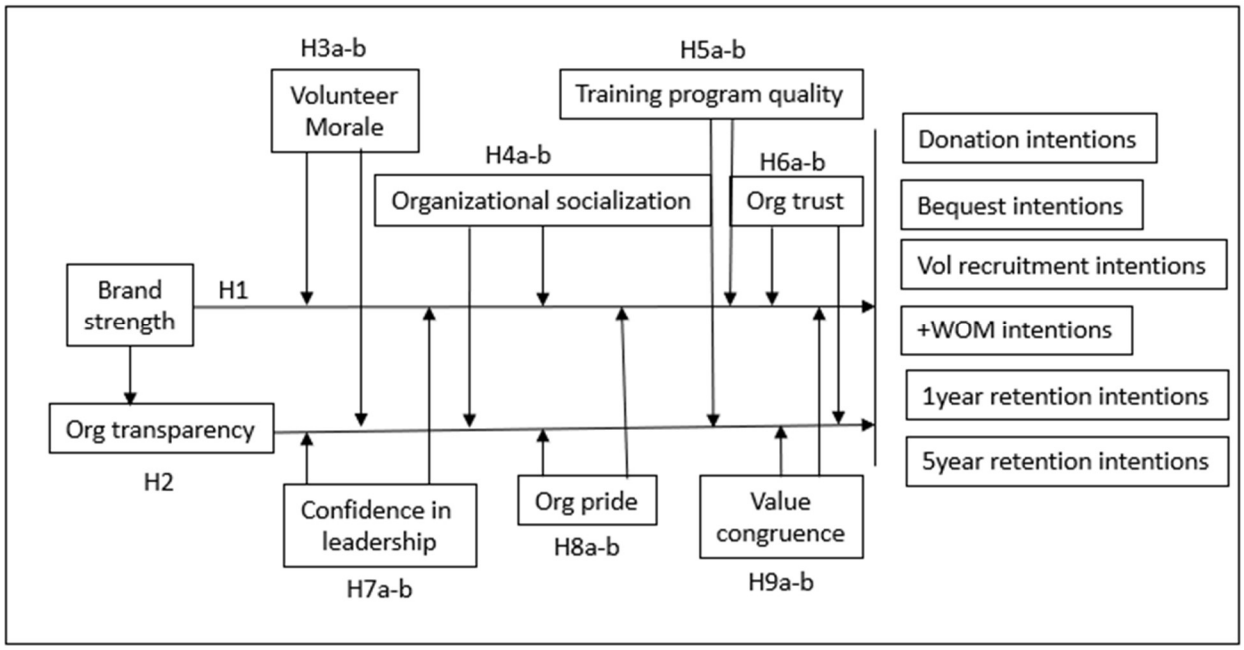
In this section, I have discussed the structure and methodology of the research study. The composite model presented in Figure 4 was divided into two conceptual models for further analysis (see Figures 2 and 3). Since this report is intended for a professional/practitioner audience, sections that this audience would not find interesting that will be included in the scientific report that will be submitted to double-blind review for a scholarly journal are not included. This would include (1) identification of knowledge gaps in the extent research literature to which this study contributes, (2) literature reviews and hypotheses argumentations, and (3) full presentations and defenses for statistical procedures and analyses.

This study examines two types of influences on volunteer retention and commitment. First, organizational factors that may influence volunteers were examined in one model. For the second model, factors that pertain to volunteers' perceptions of their volunteering experience, especially their satisfaction with their volunteering experience, were examined. The results of examining these two conceptual models will be reported next.

## Organizational influences on volunteer retention and support intentions

The organizational influences on volunteer retention and support intentions that were investigated are presented in the following figure.

**Figure 5. Organizational influences on volunteer retention intentions**




During the statistical analysis, two variables (confidence in leadership and organizational pride) were removed from the model due to variance inflation issues. This essentially means that these variables' influence on the outcomes were accounted for through other variables. The major significant results are presented in the following table. These findings will be explained further.

Abbreviations of the variables are: Brand strength = BS. Bequest intentions = BI. Donation intentions = DI. Intentions to help the organization in its volunteer recruitment efforts = REC. Providing positive word-of-mouth comments and referrals about the organization to others = WOM. Volunteers' intentions to continue their volunteer service for the next year = VR1; for the next five years = VR5. Value congruence = VC. Volunteer morale = VM. Organizational socialization = OS. Organizational transparency = OR. Training program quality = TP.

**Table 1. Statistical test results for organizational influences on retention intentions**

| Hypotheses | Relationship | Path coefficient /β | SE | t value | p value | BCCI 5%-95% (one-tailed test) | | $f^2$ values | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Direct effect** | | | | | | | | | |
| H1 a | BS -> BI | 0.172 | 0.059 | 2.911 | 0.002 | 0.075 | 0.269 | 0.013 | Supported |
| H1 b | BS -> DI | 0.13 | 0.066 | 1.971 | 0.024 | 0.024 | 0.241 | 0.007 | Supported |
| H1 c | BS -> REC | 0.162 | 0.06 | 2.683 | 0.004 | 0.066 | 0.265 | 0.013 | Supported |
| H1 d | BS -> WOM | 0.198 | 0.063 | 3.156 | 0.001 | 0.091 | 0.298 | 0.029 | Supported |
| H1 e | BS -> VR1 | 0.192 | 0.071 | 2.686 | 0.004 | 0.07 | 0.306 | 0.018 | Supported |
| H1 f | BS -> VR5 | 0.246 | 0.064 | 3.849 | 0 | 0.137 | 0.348 | 0.028 | Supported |
| **Mediation analysis** | | | | | | | | | |
| **Hypotheses** | **Relationship** | **Path coefficient /β** | **SE** | **t value** | **p value** | **BCCI 5%-95%** (one-tailed test) | | **$f^2$ values** | **Decision** |
| H2 a | BS -> OR -> BI | 0.092 | 0.033 | 2.783 | 0.003 | 0.039 | 0.147 | | Supported |
| H2 b | BS -> OR -> DI | 0.117 | 0.035 | 3.335 | 0.000 | 0.063 | 0.179 | | Supported |
| **Moderation analysis** | | | | | | | | | |
| **Hypotheses** | **Relationship** | **Path coefficient /β** | **SE** | **t value** | **p value** | **BCCI 5%-95%** (one-tailed test) | | **$f^2$ values** | **Decision** |
| H3 B e | VM x OR -> VR1 | 0.173 | 0.079 | 2.189 | 0.014 | 0.052 | 0.313 | 0.015 | Supported |
| H4 B f | OS x OR -> VR5 | 0.12 | 0.055 | 2.192 | 0.014 | 0.029 | 0.21 | 0.008 | Supported |
| H5 B c | TP x OR -> REC | 0.122 | 0.057 | 2.129 | 0.017 | 0.033 | 0.223 | 0.013 | Supported |
| H5 B e | TP x OR -> VR1 | 0.145 | 0.06 | 2.411 | 0.008 | 0.048 | 0.246 | 0.018 | Supported |
| **Post hoc analysis** | | | | | | | | | |
| | **Relationship** | **Path coefficient /β** | **SE** | **t value** | **p value** | **BCCI 5%-95%** (one-tailed test) | | **$f^2$ values** | |
| | OS -> VR5 | 0.114 | 0.052 | 2.203 | 0.014 | 0.032 | 0.202 | 0.007 | |
| | VC -> REC | 0.231 | 0.052 | 4.469 | 0 | 0.139 | 0.311 | 0.040 | |
| | VC -> WOM | 0.2 | 0.05 | 3.987 | 0 | 0.111 | 0.277 | 0.041 | |
| | VM -> WOM | 0.176 | 0.067 | 2.614 | 0.004 | 0.071 | 0.292 | 0.020 | |

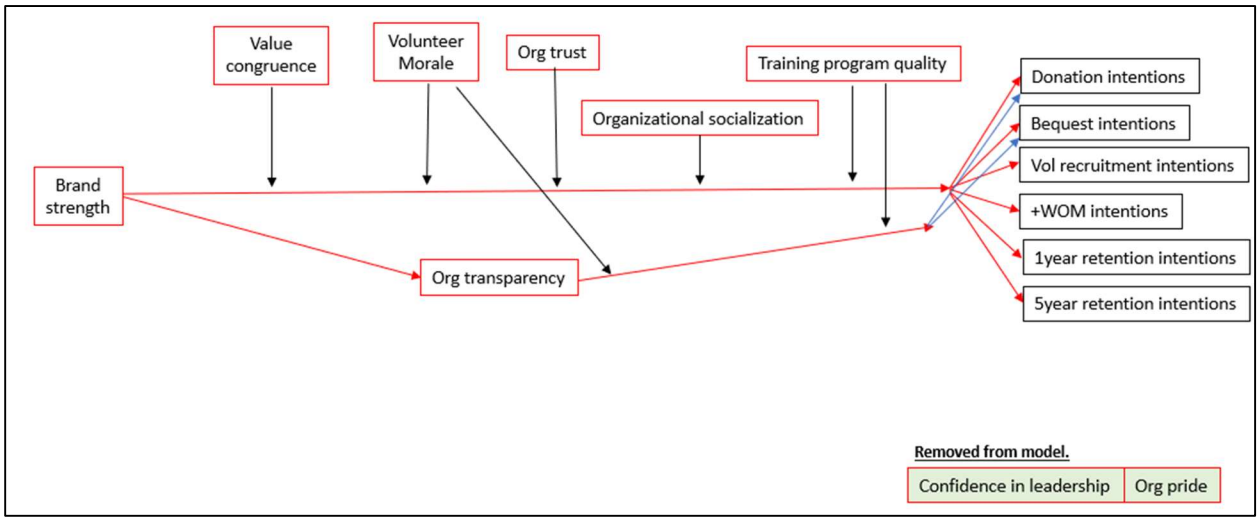
Our findings show the following:

1. Brand strength has a positive influence on all six outcome variables. With respect to volunteer retention intentions, brand strength as a positive effect on volunteers' intentions to continue their service for the upcoming year and for the next five years.
2. The effect of brand strength on donation and bequest intentions is mediated through its influence on transparency.
3. The interaction of volunteer morale and organizational transparency influences one-year retention intentions.
4. The interaction of organizational transparency and organizational socialization influences five-year volunteer retention intentions.

5. The interaction of organizational transparency and training program quality have a positive influence on volunteers' intentions to help their organization's activities to recruit other volunteers and to continue to volunteer during the following year.
6. Organizational socialization has a positive influence on five-year retention intentions.
7. Value congruence has a positive influence on volunteers' intentions to help the organization with recruiting other volunteers and their intentions to provide favorable comments and referrals to others about the organization.
8. Volunteer morale has a positive influence on volunteers' intentions to provide favorable comments and referrals to others about the organization.

A more graphical representation of these results in presented below.

**Figure 6. Organizational influences results**




Major take-aways:

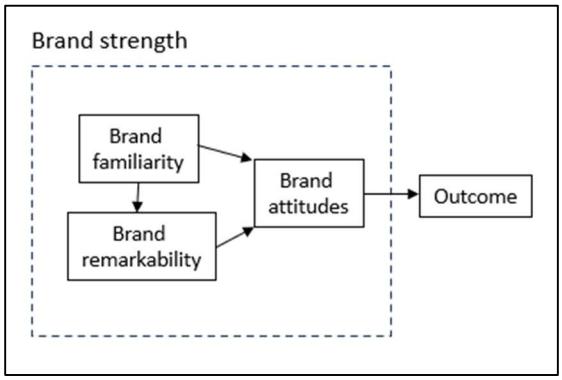
- Brand strength has an important influence on all outcomes, especially on volunteers' longer-term retention intentions.
- The influence of brand strength on volunteers' monetary support (donation intentions and bequest intentions) is mediated through its influence on organizational transparency.
- Factors such as volunteer morale, organizational socialization, and value congruence have less influence on the outcomes than brand strength and their influence is more specific to certain outcomes rather than all the outcomes.

## Managerial implications

Volunteers' perceptions of the organization's brand strength influence their desire to continue their volunteer service as well as their motivation to support the organization in other ways like donating, making a bequest, helping the organization to recruit other volunteers, and making positive comments about the organization to others. Volunteers want to be associated with and support organizations they perceive as strong brands.

To be perceived as a strong brand, volunteers must be sufficiently familiar with their organizations to inform their perceptions on the degree to which their organizations are managed in an excellent manner and are more effective than other organizations. In Figure 7, brand strength is shown to influence our outcomes. As volunteers become more familiar with their organizations, they form stronger and more enduring beliefs and opinions about their organizations. They arrive at perceptions about how well their organizations are effectively managed. Their attitudes toward their organizations become stronger and more enduring. Their attitudes toward their organizations influence their motivations to remain with their organizations and to deepen their support for their organizations.

**Figure 7. Brand strength's influence**




Given the influence of brand strength, it is not surprising that the other factors' influence is not as strong. For example, volunteers' perceptions of volunteer morale, confidence in leadership, and so forth, would be reflected in brand strength. Managers have a more general variable to monitor that reflects volunteers' attitudes and predicts their retention intentions—brand strength. More practically, however, brand remarkability can serve as something managers may periodically measure to determine the degree to which they are improving volunteers' attitudes and increasing volunteers' retention intentions and other support intentions.

The interesting caveat is volunteers' perceptions of organizational transparency, which is an important complement to brand attitudes in motivating volunteers' financial support to their organizations. Transparency informs volunteers of their organization's stewardship practices and enhances trust. As trust increases, perceived risk that donations will not be used as desired

decreases. While volunteers may be motivated to donate to the organization to support its good works, a lack of transparency may create a barrier or disincentive.

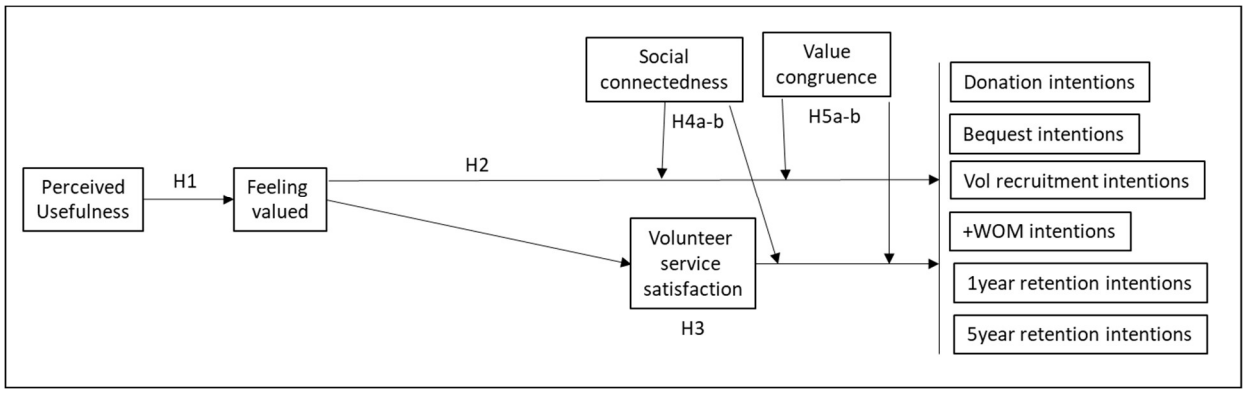
Managers can examine the scale items used to measure these variables for insights into areas of emphasis. It is important to understand that it is volunteers' perceptions that determine brand strength. Changes that enhance volunteers' perceptions should be emphasized for the attainment of higher retention rates and broader volunteer support.

Managing an organization with an emphasis on increasing brand strength may produce benefits beyond enhancing volunteer retention. Increasing brand strength may enhance the organization's ability to attract support from all its priority audiences. It may be possible to create a positive feedback loop or virtuous cycle to improve support from all stakeholder groups (priority audiences from whom the organization wishes to attract support).

## Experiential influences on volunteer retention and support intentions

The model in Figure 8 was evaluated to investigate aspects of volunteers' experiences that influence their retention intentions and other outcome variables.

**Figure 8. Experiential influence on volunteer intentions**




From the prior literature we understand that volunteer's satisfaction has an influence on retention. Instead of examining volunteers' satisfaction with different aspects of the organization, we asked volunteers to evaluate their overall satisfaction with the volunteer experience.

We predicted that the degree to which volunteers feel valued has an effect of their satisfaction. We believed that the degree to which volunteers feel valued influences their retention intentions. We predicted that feeling valued influences the outcome variables directly as well as indirectly through its influence on volunteer satisfaction.

We predicated that volunteers' perceived usefulness has an influence of how valued they feel as volunteers.

Other factors that may interact with feeling value and satisfaction are social connectedness and value congruence.

After validating our measures, we then tested the proposed relationships presented in Figure 8. The statistically significant results are presented in the following table.

Additional abbreviations were needed. Perceived usefulness = PU. Feeling valued = FV. Volunteer service satisfaction = VS. Social connectedness = SC.

**Table 2. Statistical test results for experiential influences on retention intentions**

| Direct effect | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Hypothesis** | **Relationship** | **Path coefficient β** | **SE** | **t value** | **p value** | **BCCI 5%-95% (one-tailed test)** | | **$f^2$ values** | **Decision** |
| H1 | PU-> FV | 0.405 | 0.042 | 9.608 | 0 | 0.33 | 0.469 | 0.196 | Supported |
| H2 b | FV -> BI | 0.18 | 0.063 | 2.876 | 0.004 | 0.075 | 0.28 | 0.015 | Supported |
| H2 c | FV -> REC | 0.168 | 0.057 | 2.962 | 0.003 | 0.083 | 0.27 | 0.016 | Supported |
| H2 d | FV -> WOM | 0.24 | 0.062 | 3.897 | 0 | 0.149 | 0.355 | 0.043 | Supported |

| Mediation analysis | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Hypotheses** | **Relationship** | **Path coefficient β** | **SE** | **t value** | **p value** | **BCCI 5%-95% (one-tailed test)** | | **$f^2$ values** | **Decision** |
| H3 c | FV ->VS->REC | 0.143 | 0.043 | 3.361 | 0.001 | 0.087 | 0.228 | | Supported |
| H3 d | FV->VS->WOM | 0.144 | 0.039 | 3.659 | 0 | 0.093 | 0.228 | | Supported |
| H3 e | FV->VS->VR1 | 0.185 | 0.042 | 4.358 | 0 | 0.128 | 0.267 | | Supported |
| H3 f | FV->VS->VR5 | 0.186 | 0.047 | 3.946 | 0 | 0.122 | 0.274 | | Supported |
| **Moderation analysis** | | | | | | | | | |
| H4A a | SC x FV -> DI | 0.134 | 0.055 | 2.447 | 0.014 | 0.044 | 0.225 | 0.016 | Supported |
| H4A f | SC x FV -> VR5 | 0.163 | 0.062 | 2.649 | 0.008 | 0.068 | 0.269 | 0.027 | Supported |
| H4B e | SC x VS-> VR1 | -0.209 | 0.059 | 3.54 | 0 | -0.312 | - | 0.037 | Supported |
| H4B f | SC x VS-> VR5 | -0.151 | 0.054 | 2.793 | 0.005 | -0.246 | - | 0.018 | Supported |
| H5A f | VC x FV -> VR5 | -0.139 | 0.053 | 2.637 | 0.008 | -0.222 | - | 0.018 | Supported |
| H5B f | VC x VS -> VR5 | 0.159 | 0.066 | 2.41 | 0.016 | 0.052 | 0.268 | 0.02 | Supported |
| **Post hoc analysis** | | | | | | | | | |
| | SC -> DI | 0.215 | 0.053 | 4.07 | 0 | 0.126 | 0.298 | 0.028 | |
| | SC -> BI | 0.159 | 0.048 | 3.283 | 0.001 | 0.075 | 0.236 | 0.015 | |
| | SC -> VR1 | 0.089 | 0.046 | 1.932 | 0.027 | 0.016 | 0.168 | 0.006 | |
| | SC -> VR5 | 0.156 | 0.059 | 2.658 | 0.004 | 0.062 | 0.256 | 0.017 | |
| | VC -> DI | 0.105 | 0.049 | 2.126 | 0.017 | 0.024 | 0.186 | 0.008 | |
| | VC -> REC | 0.223 | 0.047 | 4.732 | 0 | 0.144 | 0.299 | 0.045 | |
| | VC -> WOM | 0.243 | 0.054 | 4.513 | 0 | 0.15 | 0.326 | 0.07 | |

Our findings:

1. Perceived usefulness has a positive influence on feeling valued. The more useful volunteers feel, the more valued they feel.
2. Feeling valued has an important influence on our outcome variables. Feeling valued has both direct and indirect (mediated) effects on volunteers' behavioral intentions.
    a. With respect to the direct effects, feeling valued has a positive influence on bequest intentions, word-of-mouth intentions, and recruitment intentions.
    b. With respect to the indirect effects, feeling value has a positive influence on volunteer service satisfaction, which, in turn, influences recruitment intentions, word-of-mouth intentions, one-year retention intentions, and five-year retention intentions. Therefore, feeling valued influences these outcome variables through its influence on volunteer satisfaction.
3. We found that social connectedness also has important influences on our outcome variables.
    a. Social connectedness amplifies the influence of feeling valued on donation intentions.
    b. Social connectedness amplifies the influence of feeling valued on five-year retention intentions.

   c. Social connectedness amplifies the influence of volunteer satisfaction on both one-year and five-year retention intentions.
   d. Social connectedness has a direct influence on donation intentions.
   e. Social connectedness has a direct influence on bequest intentions.
   f. Social connectedness has a direct influence on both one-year and five-year retention intentions.
4. Although not as influential as social connectedness, value congruence had some meaningful influence on our outcome behavioral intentions.
   a. Value congruence amplifies the influence of feeling valued on five-year retention intentions.
   b. Value congruence amplifies the influence of volunteer satisfaction on five-year retention intentions.
   c. Value congruence has a direct influence on donation intentions, recruitment intentions, and word-of-mouth intentions.

## Managerial implications

Volunteers are an important resource for many nonprofit organizations and their purposeful management is required to enhance productivity, performance, and retention. The purpose of this study was to better understand important influences on volunteers' retention intentions. Whereas paid employees' have a more transactional relationship with their employer, volunteers tend to have a value expressive relationship with their organizations. Hence, the management of the volunteer experience is vital in effectively leading and retaining volunteers. Volunteers' perceptions of their organizational volunteering experience are an important influence and leading indicator of their retention intentions. Their perceived satisfaction also predicts their commitment support the organization in other ways such as donating to the organization, making a bequest in their wills, helping their organization recruit other volunteers, and making favorable referrals and comments to others about the organization.

We found that the volunteers in our study believed feeling valued as volunteers was important. Feeling valued directly influenced some volunteers' behavioral intentions. Feeling valued also has a positive effect on volunteer satisfaction. If managers want insights into how to go about helping volunteers' feel valued, they might benefit from examining the scale items we used to measure our variables. From reading through the three items used to measure feeling valued (presented earlier in this report), we can anticipate that if managers want their volunteers to feel valued, they should help them to feel respected and appreciated. Managers should make sure volunteers know the organization is grateful for their service. Of course, it is the regular experiences of volunteers that influence their perceptions.

We found that volunteers' perceived usefulness has a positive effect on feeling valued, which has a positive effect on satisfaction, which has a positive effect on volunteers' retention intentions. To enhance the degree to which volunteers feel useful and, therefore, valued, we

study the scale items to provide insights. Volunteers should believe that their service contributes to the work of other volunteers. They should feel like their skills and abilities are helping the organization and are making a meaningful contribution to the organization's work.

Volunteering is often a social activity. Volunteers frequently work collaboratively with staff and other volunteers and may work directly with clients served by the organization. Volunteers often serve because they believe in the importance of the organization's work (see value congruence), but many volunteers also want to have positive social interactions and derive a sense of belonging from their volunteering.

Managers should assess the degree to which volunteers are attaining social rewards from their volunteer service. Do volunteers feel the organization is welcoming? Do volunteers feel like they belong with the organization's community of volunteers and staff? Do they find their interactions with leaders, supervisors, other volunteers, staff, and clients enjoyable and rewarding?

Value congruence has a positive effect on volunteer behavioral intentions. The more aligned volunteers' view the organization's implicit values with their own core values, the more volunteers will believe in the importance of the organization's work. Volunteers should be reminded periodically of (1) the importance of the organization's work, and (2) how volunteers' service makes a difference in helping the organization to perform its important work.

# Discussion and conclusion

**Summary**

The focus of this research study was to learn more about factors that influence volunteers' retention intentions and commitment. Volunteers were asked to indicate the likelihood that they would continue to volunteer for the next year and for the next five years.

Volunteer commitment was assessed through volunteers' intentions to donate, leave a bequest, help the organization recruit new volunteers, and to provide positive word-of-mouth comments and referrals about the organization to others.

After reviewing prior research, we developed two conceptual models: one model testing organizational factors influencing volunteers' behavioral intentions and another model testing experiential influences on volunteers' behavioral intentions.

With respect to organizational effects on volunteers' intentions, brand strength exerted a strong influence on our outcome variables. When it comes to volunteers' intentions to monetarily support their organizations through donations or bequest giving, brand strength's influence was partially mediated through organizational transparency. The influence of other factors like value congruence, volunteer morale, organizational trust, organizational socialization, and training program quality on our outcomes was directed at specific outcome variables and some interaction effects.

With respect to aspects of volunteers' service experience that influence their behavioral intentions, feeling valued exerted a strong and broad influence on our outcome variables, both directly and indirectly through its influence on volunteers' service satisfaction. Volunteers are more likely to want to remain volunteers and more likely to support their organizations in additional ways when they feel valued, and they are satisfied with their volunteering experience. Perceived usefulness had a significant influence on feeling valued. Social connectedness and value congruence also had influence in our model.

**Managerial implications**

The value of research like ours is that it tests which variables have a meaningful effect on volunteers' retention and other support intentions. Our research also shows how variables relate to each other in combination. Hence, managers have more knowledge with respect to understanding which variables to emphasize in their volunteer management programs. A good way to develop a richer understanding of the variables found to have significant influence is to review the variable definitions and measurement scales. This will provide insights into what is meant by variables like social connectedness or perceived usefulness.

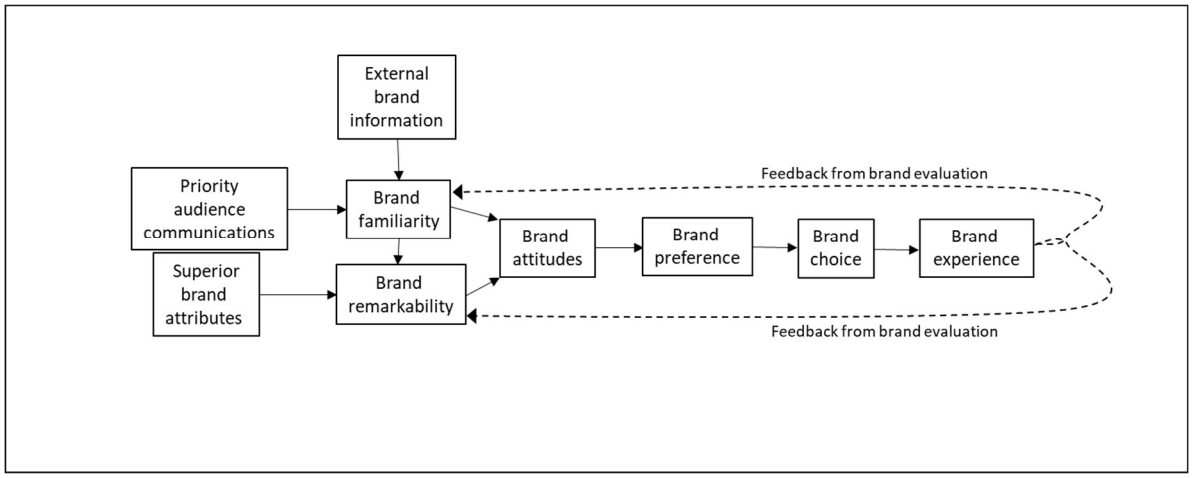
There are many managerial implications of our study. While effective volunteer management is essential to create conditions that promote volunteer retention, not all the conditions are under the control of volunteer supervisors. For example, we found that brand strength is quite important. However, increasing an organization's brand strength is a strategic goal that requires commitment from an organization's governing board and its executive. To

attain a high level of brand strength requires a commitment to continuous improvement (from the perspective of stakeholder groups), regular communication to stakeholder groups, and effective management to ensure that stakeholders' experiences with the organization are favorable.

With respect to making an organization a strong brand, there are many benefits. Supporters want to volunteer and donate and work with an organization they believe is exceptional. Supporters are proud to be associated with an excellent and outstanding organization; in other words, an organization they consider to be a strong brand.

When priority audiences become more familiar with a remarkable organization, they have favorable brand attitudes about the organization. They prefer to support a superior organization and will choose to volunteer or support it in a variety of ways. If their experiences with the organization are superior and reinforce their brand attitudes, a positive feedback loop or virtuous cycle can develop.

**Figure 9. Creating a brand management virtuous cycle**




We also found that organizational transparency is important. This also is managed by an organization's leadership. When volunteers believe their organizations are transparent (please examine the definition and measurement scale for transparency), they have greater trust in the organization and are more likely to donate and leave a bequest to their organizations. This assumes that their organizations are perceived to be strong brands.

While factors like brand strength and transparency are largely the responsibility of an organization's leadership, managing volunteers' experiences is somewhat under the control of the volunteer supervisor. The degree to which volunteers find their volunteering experience satisfying influences their retention intentions as well as their commitment to supporting the organization in other ways.

Volunteers that feel useful and feel valued are more likely to remain volunteers and more likely to find their experiences satisfying. Helping volunteers to feel welcomed, creating a community that values volunteers' ideas, and creating a culture in which people interact and

engage with each other in supportive and positive ways is a vital component of creating an effective volunteer management program.

**Additional suggestions**

Managers and supervisors emphasize variables that are measured and respond to incentives.

We have included variable definitions and measurement scales so that organizations can establish a program of periodically measuring factors that have been found to influence volunteer retention and other support intentions. We recommend that volunteers are asked to complete an annual questionnaire that measures variables like brand strength, transparency, volunteer morale, volunteer satisfaction, feeling valued, social connectedness, and so forth.

Organizations can calculate the averages for these variables using a spreadsheet. This will help provide richer information about the health of the organization's culture and volunteer management program. This will also create an opportunity to work towards increasing organizations' scores on these variables over time. Periodic measurement of important variables is a crucial part of continuous improvement.

We believe that making an organization a strong brand and helping volunteers feel valued and feeling satisfied with their volunteer experience is important. If organizations also believe this is important, then they can include these variables in performance metrics for managers having responsibility for these issues. Managers should know what is important and what is meant by good performance and, where applicable, some of these variables might be usefully included as part of performance evaluations. Not including these variables in performance evaluations signals their comparative unimportance to the organization.

## The Project Investigators

Dr. **Walter Wymer**, Professor of Marketing, University of Lethbridge (Canada). Professor Wymer conducts scholarly research on nonprofit marketing topics. You may learn more about his research on Google Scholar or Academia.edu. He has been editor and served on editorial boards for several scholarly journals. He was recognized by the *Journal of Philanthropy and Marketing* for having a top cited article during the 2022-2023 period. He was also ranked by research.com among the best business and management scientists in Canada.

Dr. **Ljiljana Najev Čačija**, Assistant Professor of Marketing and Entrepreneurship at the Faculty of Economics, Business and Tourism, Split (Croatia). Her main research interests are nonprofit marketing and social entrepreneurship. She actively publishes research in relevant international journals and books. Ljiljana is a member of the Croatian Scientific Centre of Excellence for School Effectiveness and Management and a Social entrepreneurship consultant for many non-profit organizations in the region. She has been a mentor and lecturer at Student Business Incubator programs for Social Entrepreneurship and Service learning for many years. She has received several awards and recognitions for her work.

# Appendix A

## Questionnaire

***Note: This questionnaire was converted to an online format. ****

1st page contains informed consent letter.

----------Next page----------

**Instructions**: Please select the answer that most closely corresponds with your level of agreement with the statements provided below. When the statements refer to "my organization," please think of the organization for which you volunteer most.

**Brand strength** *(variable name not to appear in actual survey)*

1. I am knowledgeable about my organization's activities

| Strongly disagree | Moderately disagree | Mildly disagree | Neither agree nor disagree | Mildly agree | Moderately agree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

***Note: the Likert scale item choice set will follow each statement. It is shown only once here for parsimony.***

2. I can describe my organization to others.
3. I have good understanding of what my organization has done in the past.
4. No organization is better than my organization at doing what it does.
5. My organization really stands apart as being exceptional.
6. My organization stands out in comparison to others
7. I have positive thoughts when I think of my organization.
8. I like my organization.
9. I have a positive impression about my organization.

**Value congruence** *(variable name not to appear in actual survey)*

10. My organization and I share important values.
11. The mission of my organization represents values that are important to me.
12. Supporting the work of my organization allows me to express my values.

**Organization pride** *(variable name not to appear in actual survey)*

13. I get a sense of satisfaction from being a member of this organization.
14. I am pleased to tell others that I volunteer for this organization.
15. I am pleased to identify myself personally with this organization.

**Perceived usefulness** *(variable name not to appear in actual survey)*

16. My volunteer service contributes to the work of the other volunteers.
17. I have the skills and abilities to help my organization.
18. My volunteer service makes a meaningful contribution to the organization.

**Perceived social connectedness** *(variable name not to appear in actual survey)*

19. I feel a sense of belonging with the community of people working or serving in my organization.
20. I am satisfied the social contacts I have with the people working or serving in my organization.
21. I relate well with the people working or serving in my organization.

**Feeling valued** *(variable name not to appear in actual survey)*

22. I feel respected by my organization.
23. I feel appreciated by my organization.
24. My organization is grateful for my service.

**Volunteer morale** *(variable name not to appear in actual survey)*

25. I have a positive impression of the organization's leadership.
26. I believe that my organization is exceptional.
27. The volunteers and staff in the organization are friendly.

**Organizational trust** *(variable name not to appear in actual survey)*

28. My organization is reliable.
29. My organization is honest.
30. My organization is managed with integrity.

**Volunteer service satisfaction** *(variable name not to appear in actual survey)*

31. I enjoy serving as a volunteer in my organization.
32. I feel a sense of fulfillment from serving as a volunteer in my organization.
33. I feel contented from serving as a volunteer in my organization.

**Training program quality** *(variable name not to appear in actual survey)*

34. When I first became a volunteer, my organization made sure that I knew what I was supposed to do before I began to perform my volunteer tasks.
35. When I first became a volunteer, my organization showed me how to perform my volunteer tasks.
36. When I first became a volunteer, my organization made sure that I was comfortable in performing my volunteer tasks before assigning me tasks to do on my own.

**Organizational socialization** *(variable name not to appear in actual survey)*

37. There is a healthy level of social interaction between me and the rest of my organization.
38. The leadership, staff, and volunteers of my organization know me.
39. My organization makes me feel like I belong.

**Confidence in leadership** *(variable name not to appear in actual survey)*

40. My organization's leadership is highly skilled.
41. My organization's leadership is highly effective.
42. My organization's leadership motivates us to perform at higher levels.

**Organizational transparency** *(variable name not to appear in actual survey)*

43. I am confident that my organization openly shares information about itself and operations.
44. I am confident that my organization openly shares information about how its decisions are made.
45. I am confident that my organization openly shares information about its priorities.

**Volunteering outcomes** *(variable name not to appear in actual survey)*

46. How many hours do you volunteer for your favorite organization in an average month?
47. How many weeks has it been since you last volunteered for your favorite organization?
48. How many times during an average month do you volunteer for your organization?

**Organizational citizenship behaviors** (*variable name not to appear in actual survey)*

49. Over the past year, how many new volunteers have you brought into your organization?
50. Over the past year, how many new financial contributors have you brought into your organization?
51. Over the past year, how many of your organization's events have you attended?
52. On a scale of 1 to 7, how actively do your help your favorite organization with its fundraising activities?

**Bequest intentions** *(variable name not to appear in actual survey)*

53. On a scale of 1 to 7, how likely are you to leave a bequest to your favorite nonprofit in your will?

**Retention intentions** *(variable name not to appear in actual survey)*

54. I plan to continue my volunteer service for my organization.
55. I plan to volunteer for this organization into the future.

**WOM intentions** *(variable name not to appear in actual survey)*

56. I will encourage others to volunteer for this organization.

**Demographic information** *(variable name not to appear in actual survey)*

57. Please indicate your gender.
    a. Male
    b. Female
    c. Other
58. Please indicate your age.
59. Please indicate your number of years of formal education (high school completion = 12 years).

*A reminder that by submitting your completed questionnaire, you are anonymous, and you are giving me permission to use this information, which I will combine with the responses of others who complete this questionnaire, in my data analysis reporting. I cannot identify individuals who have participated in this study.*