9-5-2025

Effective Strategies Nonprofit Leaders Use to Enhance Volunteer Recruitment

Noelle Lauren Pollack
Walden University

Walden University

College of Management and Human Potential

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Noelle Pollack

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee
Dr. Michael Campo, Committee Chairperson, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Dr. Bruce Requa, Committee Member, Doctor of Business Administration Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2025

Abstract

Effective Strategies Nonprofit Leaders Use to Enhance Volunteer Recruitment

by

Noelle Pollack

MS, UMASS Global, 2020

BS, Brandman University, 2019

AA, Bay Path University, 2014

Research Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

October 2025

Abstract

Human aid nonprofit organizations across the United States face significant challenges in recruiting volunteers, which impacts their ability to deliver essential services to vulnerable populations. The issue is important to nonprofit leaders because a lack of volunteers threatens organizational operations and sustainability. The purpose of this qualitative research project, grounded in self-determination theory, was to explore successful strategies nonprofit leaders use to enhance volunteer recruitment. The study was guided by a pragmatic inquiry design and included semistructured interviews with seven nonprofit leaders in Nashville, Tennessee who held roles responsible for volunteer recruitment. Data were collected through interviews and volunteer program materials. Through thematic analysis, five themes were identified: (a) building relationships and personal connections, (b) creating a welcoming and inclusive volunteer culture, (c) purpose-driven messaging and mission alignment, (d) flexible and accessible opportunities, and (e) empowerment and recognition of volunteers. A key recommendation is for nonprofit leaders to integrate relationship-centered practices into their volunteer management approaches to strengthen recruitment outcomes. The implications for positive social change include the potential to help nonprofit leaders build stronger, more sustainable volunteer programs, thereby increasing support for underserved communities and advancing nonprofit organizations' missions.

Effective Strategies Nonprofit Leaders Use to Enhance Volunteer Recruitment

by

Noelle Pollack

MS, UMASS Global, 2020

BS, Brandman University, 2019

AA, Bay Path University, 2014

Research Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

October 2025

Dedication

This capstone is dedicated to my family and friends who have supported me throughout this journey. To my family, your encouragement and belief in me have been the foundation of my success. As a first-generation college graduate, I am proud of how far I've come and am deeply grateful for the path we've paved together. To my friends, thank you for checking in, offering laughter and light during overwhelming times, and reminding me to breathe. Most of all, I dedicate this work to my grandfather, whose love and guidance taught me the meaning of tenacity: the persistent determination to keep going despite challenges, a lesson we first named together while working diligently on a puzzle that took a long time to complete. I have carried that same tenacity through every assignment on this journey, and though he is no longer here, his presence is felt in every step I take forward.

Acknowledgments

I want to extend my deepest gratitude to my professors, whose guidance, encouragement, and expertise have been instrumental throughout my academic journey. Your dedication to teaching and your thoughtful feedback challenged me to think critically and grow as a scholar and professional.

I would also like to acknowledge the nonprofit leaders who generously participated in this research. Although their identities remain confidential, I am sincerely grateful for the time they took to answer my questions and share valuable insights into their organizations and leadership practices. Their contributions were essential to this study and will have a lasting impact.

And finally, while I joked about becoming a doctor before a Mrs., here I am, Dr. Noelle! Thank you to everyone who has been a part of this journey with me!

Table of Contents

List of Tables iv

Section 1: Foundation of the Project 1

Background of the Problem 1

Business Problem Focus and Project Purpose 2

Research Question 3

Assumptions and Limitations 4

Assumptions 4

Limitations 6

Transition 7

Section 2: The Literature Review 9

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature 9

Conceptual Framework: SDT 10

Alternate Theory: Social Exchange Theory 12

Volunteer Recruitment Strategies 14

Volunteer Motivation in Recruitment 16

Training and Development 17

Leadership in Volunteer Management 19

Creating a Sense of Community 20

Incentives and Recognition 22

Evaluating Recruitment Effectiveness 23

Successful Volunteer Recruitment Programs 25

Transition 26
Section 3: Research Project Methodology 28
Project Ethics 28
Nature of the Project 29
Population, Sampling, and Participants 30
Data Collection Activities 31
Interview Questions 32
Data Organization and Analysis Techniques 34
Data Analysis 35
Reliability and Validity 36
Reliability 36
Dependability 36
Validity 37
Credibility 38
Transferability 38
Confirmability 38
Transition and Summary 39
Section 4: Findings and Conclusions 40
Presentation of the Findings 40
Theme 1: Building Relationships and Personal Connections 42
Theme 2: Creating a Welcoming and Inclusive Volunteer Culture 45
Theme 3: Purpose-Driven Messaging and Mission Alignment 47

Theme 4: Flexible and Accessible Opportunities 50

Theme 5: Empowerment and Recognition of Volunteers..... 52

Business Contributions and Recommendations for Professional Practice 55

Implications for Social Change.....58

Recommendations for Further Research.....60

Sector and Organizational Diversity 61

Volunteer Perspectives..... 62

Longitudinal Impact..... 63

Technology and Recruitment Tools..... 65

Geographic and Cultural Contexts..... 67

Applications in For-Profit Contexts..... 69

Quantitative Validation..... 71

Conclusion 73

References.....76

Appendix A: Participant Invitation Letter 87

Appendix B: Interview Protocol.....88

List of Tables

Table 1. Participant Demographics and Organization Types 41

Table 2. Themes Identified in This Study..... 42

Section 1: Foundation of the Project

Background of the Problem

The focus of this research project was the challenges nonprofit leaders face in the human aid services sector regarding volunteer recruitment. Nonprofits providing essential services to vulnerable populations often struggle to maintain a stable and engaged volunteer base (Hager & Brudney, 2003). Recruitment challenges are concerning because the capacity to deliver timely and effective human aid services depends on volunteer availability and reliability (Walk & Peterson, 2023). Limited financial and human resources, along with competing leadership priorities, often prevent leaders from developing and executing effective volunteer management practices, thereby hindering recruitment efforts (Xu et al., 2024). Understanding the contextual challenges surrounding recruitment lays the foundation for identifying strategic solutions that nonprofit leaders can apply to strengthen their volunteer pipelines.

Few studies offered specific, actionable strategies to address volunteer recruitment challenges in human aid nonprofit organizations. Simms et al. (2024) noted that engagement strategies aligned with self-determination theory (SDT) can enhance volunteer recruitment and increase satisfaction, and Woolford et al. (2022) emphasized the need for clear role expectations and ongoing support. Although these insights are valuable, there was a gap in applied research regarding the specific, real-world strategies nonprofit leaders employ to recruit volunteers in human aid settings. The identified gap indicated a need for applied research to develop practical strategies that enhance volunteer recruitment efforts.

Business Problem Focus and Project Purpose

The specific business problem was that some leaders of U.S. human aid nonprofit organizations lack effective strategies to recruit volunteers. Ineffective recruitment practices often result in staff burnout, decreased service delivery, and reduced capacity to achieve organizational goals, which harm the communities that rely on human aid services (Hager & Brudney, 2003; Walk & Peterson, 2023). Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry project was to explore the successful strategies that nonprofit leaders of human aid nonprofits use to recruit volunteers. The study focused on nonprofit leaders operating within human aid organizations located in Nashville, Tennessee, with the goal of identifying leadership practices that strengthen volunteer recruitment efforts. By concentrating on the recruitment process rather than retention or engagement, the study aimed to generate actionable insights that could inform future nonprofit practices.

I used a qualitative research method and a pragmatic inquiry design to collect and analyze data that would provide insight into the real-world practices of nonprofit leaders. Pragmatic inquiry was well suited for examining practical solutions to organizational challenges and prioritizing findings that were applicable to practice (Foster & Martin, 2022; Xu et al., 2024). The current study involved a purposive sample of seven nonprofit leaders, including executive directors, volunteer coordinators, and program managers with a minimum of 1 year of experience in volunteer recruitment or management. Participants were selected from human aid organizations that operate within the Nashville, Tennessee area. To ensure relevance to the research purpose, I required

participants to hold a leadership role and have demonstrated success in enhancing volunteer recruitment outcomes. Evidence of the participants' success included increased volunteer enrollment, improved retention rates, or the implementation of effective recruitment strategies. Access to participants was established through direct outreach, professional networks, and referrals. Data were collected through semistructured interviews and the review of publicly available documents such as volunteer recruitment materials and organizational reports.

The conceptual framework for this study was grounded in SDT, developed by Ryan and Deci (2020). SDT posits that intrinsic motivation is enhanced when individuals experience the satisfaction of three fundamental psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Research indicated that when volunteer environments are structured to support autonomy, competence, and relatedness, individuals are more likely to experience intrinsic motivation and a stronger commitment to their roles within nonprofit organizations (Howard et al., 2020; Van den Broeck et al., 2016). Applying SDT to the current study facilitated a deeper understanding of how nonprofit leaders create conditions that encourage volunteer participation. By aligning the study with SDT, the project connected leadership strategies with established motivational theory to produce theoretically grounded and practically applicable findings.

Research Question

What successful strategies do leaders of U.S. human aid nonprofit organizations use to recruit volunteers?

Assumptions and Limitations

Assumptions

One primary assumption that guided this study was that participants would be open and honest in sharing detailed information about their volunteer recruitment strategies. In qualitative research, assumptions refer to beliefs the researcher holds to be true without empirical verification, serving as a foundation for the research design, data collection, and data interpretation processes (Woolford et al., 2022). A second key assumption that guided this project was that nonprofit leaders participating in the research would be willing to share authentic and detailed descriptions of their strategies for enhancing volunteer recruitment outcomes. I also assumed that participants would provide honest and thoughtful responses which would be essential for drawing actionable insights that may inform practice within nonprofit management (see Hager & Brudney, 2003; Wymer & Čačija, 2025). These assumptions were fundamental for producing credible data and ensuring the practical value of the research.

SDT provided the theoretical foundation for this study, and one core assumption was that participants would disclose their strategies and experiences. Prior studies grounded in SDT demonstrated that psychological need satisfaction leads to higher openness, motivation, and sustained involvement in organizational settings (Howard et al., 2020; Simms et al., 2024; Van den Broeck et al., 2016). Woolford et al. (2022) and Wald and Peterson (2023) highlighted that supportive environments foster meaningful engagement and strengthen recruitment outcomes. This assumption about SDT's relevance ensured that the study would generate insights grounded in theory and practice.

Another assumption that guided this research was that SDT would provide an appropriate and comprehensive framework for investigating volunteer engagement dynamics within human aid nonprofit organizations. SDT has demonstrated empirical relevance in various organizational settings and continues to be used widely to explain individual behavior in roles where intrinsic motivation plays a significant part (Van den Broeck et al., 2016; Xu et al., 2024). Preliminary consultations with nonprofit experts and a literature review, including studies by Compion et al. (2022) and Simms et al. (2024), supported SDT's fit for the current study. The theoretical framework guided the data collection strategy and thematic analysis, ensuring consistency in how findings were interpreted and presented.

The final assumption was that the research findings would provide valuable insights to the organizations participating in the study and to a broader range of nonprofit entities seeking to improve volunteer recruitment. The assumption of broader applicability reflected the study's commitment to generating transferable knowledge, a key goal in qualitative research (see Elloukmani et al., 2025; Woolford et al., 2022). Although universal generalization was not the objective, I assumed that through thick description and careful contextual analysis, nonprofit leaders would be able to assess the applicability of the findings to their organizational contexts. This assumption supported the overall trustworthiness and relevance of the study's contributions to nonprofit leadership practice.

Limitations

One important consideration in the current study was that certain weaknesses may exist in the study design or implementation that were outside of my control. Limitations are defined as potential weaknesses that may affect a study's credibility, dependability, or transferability due to constraints the researcher cannot control, such as time, access, or resources (Kwame & Petrucka, 2024; Woolford et al., 2022). Another major limitation of the current study was the potential difficulty of accessing a diverse and representative sample of nonprofit leaders and volunteers. Individuals who agreed to participate in the study may have exhibited strong engagement practices, while others with less effective or absent strategies may have declined participation (see Hopkins & Dowell, 2021; Walk & Peterson, 2023). This sampling limitation could have affected the range of perspectives in the data and the degree to which findings could be meaningfully transferred to nonprofit settings with different organizational cultures or resources.

Another limitation of the study was the potential for participant selection bias that favored nonprofit leaders with a track record of success in volunteer recruitment. By focusing on leaders who demonstrated effective strategies, the study may have primarily captured practices aligned with the psychological principles of SDT, such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness (see Howard et al., 2020; Van den Broeck et al., 2016). Limiting the participant pool to successful cases may have inadvertently excluded the experiences of leaders who were still developing or refining their volunteer recruitment strategies, restricting opportunities to explore challenges and emerging practices within the field (see De Clerck et al., 2024). Also, focusing on one context may have limited the

understanding of how recruitment strategies evolve across diverse nonprofit environments.

A final limitation concerned the interpretive nature of qualitative research and the role I had as the researcher in the data analysis process. Subjectivity in coding and theme development may have impacted the consistency and reproducibility of findings across different researchers (see Elloukmani et al., 2025). Although I used strategies such as member checking and an audit trail to enhance credibility, the interpretive approach reflected my worldview and experiences (see Braun & Clarke, 2006). Time constraints imposed by my academic schedule may have restricted the number of interviews conducted or limited the depth of thematic exploration. Recognizing these limitations was critical to framing this study's contributions accurately and supporting the responsible interpretation of the research outcomes.

Transition

Building on the foundational understanding of nonprofit leaders' challenges in recruiting volunteers, Section 1 outlined the central problem of volunteer recruitment in human aid nonprofit organizations and emphasized the need for effective leadership strategies. Section 1 also introduced the purpose of the study, the qualitative inquiry design, and the conceptual framework grounded in SDT. The integration of the conceptual framework, literature findings, and identified gaps established a clear rationale and foundation for conducting applied business research focused on identifying recruitment strategies from the perspective of nonprofit leaders.

Section 2 provides a review of professional and academic literature related to volunteer recruitment. The literature review includes theoretical foundations and practical applications, as well as recent studies addressing leadership practice, motivational theory, and organizational structures that influence recruitment outcomes. This review identifies gaps in the literature and highlights areas requiring further exploration to guide nonprofit leaders in practice.

Section 3 presents the research methodology, including the ethical considerations, qualitative research design, participant selection criteria, and data collection and analysis techniques. Section 3 explains how the study ensured credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability through well-established qualitative research procedures. Section 4 details the study's findings and conclusions, including the key themes that emerged from the data analysis, how they related to the conceptual framework and existing literature, the implications for business practice and social change, and recommendations for future research.

Section 2: The Literature Review

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

Section 2 presents a comprehensive review of the professional and academic literature related to volunteer recruitment in nonprofit organizations. This section builds on the foundational elements introduced in Section 1 by establishing the theoretical and empirical basis for the research problem. The literature review supports the research design and methodology, providing justification for the qualitative pragmatic inquiry approach and the study's focus on leadership strategies within human aid nonprofit organizations.

The review begins by addressing key themes related to volunteer recruitment, including leadership practices, motivational theories, training and development, and organizational culture. Each theme was explored through a synthesis of recent peer-reviewed literature to highlight practical implications for nonprofit leaders. Keywords used in the database research included *challenges in volunteer recruitment*, *effective volunteer leadership*, *enhancing volunteer recruitment*, *leadership in human aid nonprofit organizations*, *nonprofit volunteer management*, *volunteer incentives in nonprofits*, and *volunteer recruitment strategies*. The databases searched included Emerald Insight, GuideStar, ProQuest Central, SAGE Journals, and Taylor and Francis Online.

The articles selected for review supported and justified the current challenges nonprofit leaders face in recruiting volunteers and emphasized evidence-based strategies to address these issues. Section 2 provides a synthesis of scholarly literature that

informed the research question and identified knowledge gaps in the field. There were 63 total references used in the Literature Review section, of which 55 (87.3%) were published between 2020 and 2025. A total of eight sources (12.7%) were dated prior to 2020, including four peer-reviewed articles (6.3%), and four books (6.3%).

Conceptual Framework: SDT

SDT provided a foundational lens for exploring how nonprofit leaders can enhance volunteer recruitment by addressing internal motivation and psychological need fulfillment (see Crochiere et al., 2023; Peña-Garay et al., 2025). Ryan and Deci (2020) asserted that individuals are more likely to engage in sustained behaviors when their psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are satisfied. In the context of nonprofit volunteerism, Howard et al. (2020) emphasized that internal motivations are more powerful than external incentives for long-term engagement. Recent studies confirmed that SDT helps explain how volunteers negotiate their sense of purpose and maintain consistent involvement even in unpredictable contexts (Ganzevoort & Van den Born, 2023). Understanding how needs are supported allows nonprofit leaders to design roles that attract and retain dedicated volunteers, thereby enhancing organizational impact.

Volunteers experience autonomy when they have flexibility in choosing their roles and perceive control over their decisions. Hopkins and Dowell (2021) found that volunteer motivation increases when nonprofit leaders offer choice in scheduling, task assignment, and goal setting. Prince and Piatak (2023) noted that providing autonomy encourages innovation and improves task ownership, which can lead to greater

organizational commitment. Volunteer autonomy aligns with SDT by reinforcing individuals' sense of personal agency, contributing to more meaningful engagement in nonprofit activities.

A sense of competence, the second need identified in SDT, is nurtured when volunteers believe they are capable and effective in their roles. Ashfaq et al. (2021) demonstrated that targeted onboarding and role-specific training helped volunteers feel confident and better prepared, increasing their motivation and performance. Cohen (2024) noted that competence was enhanced when leaders provided feedback and recognition that affirmed volunteer contributions. Recent research suggested that clear preservice expectation setting further strengthens perceived competence and reduces early dropout rates (Dunlop et al., 2022). By reinforcing skills and offering opportunities for learning, nonprofit leaders signal that volunteers are valuable assets to their organizations.

Relatedness, the third SDT need, is satisfied when volunteers feel connected to others and experience a sense of community. Kramer et al. (2021) explained that volunteer retention improves when interpersonal relationships are prioritized within nonprofit structures. Hoye and Kappelides (2020) found that nonprofits that facilitate social bonding through group training and community events foster stronger volunteer cohesion. Relatedness helps to fulfill emotional needs and strengthens commitment to organizational missions (Howard et al., 2020). When nonprofit leaders create intentional spaces for peer interaction, they promote an inclusive culture that encourages volunteers to remain engaged.

External rewards can undermine intrinsic motivation if overused or misaligned with volunteer values. Ryan and Deci (2020) observed that volunteers are less motivated by financial or material incentives than by meaningful involvement in a cause. Public recognition and social acknowledgment enhance volunteer motivation without displacing intrinsic drivers (Ilyas et al., 2020). Nonprofit leaders can protect intrinsic motivation by emphasizing emotional satisfaction and mission alignment rather than relying on transactional incentives that may inadvertently diminish long-term commitment.

SDT can be operationalized in nonprofit recruitment strategies through intentional role design, training support, and social engagement efforts. Howard et al. (2020) suggested that aligning volunteer opportunities with individuals' personal goals and values increases the likelihood of sustained participation. Ngah et al. (2023) found that personalized communication and community-building programs positively influence recruitment and retention outcomes. Leveraging mobile technology platforms may further support SDT alignment by streamlining how volunteers access opportunities and feedback (Wadekar et al., 2024). When volunteer strategies are informed by SDT principles, nonprofit leaders can foster a motivated, capable, and committed volunteer workforce, which supports organizational effectiveness and long-term community impact.

Alternate Theory: Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory (SET) provides a relational framework for interpreting how volunteers assess the value of their contributions to nonprofit organizations and how organizations reciprocate that value (see Biermann et al., 2024; Foster & Martin, 2022).

In contrast to SDT, which centers on intrinsic motivation and psychological need fulfillment, SET emphasizes the exchange of tangible and intangible benefits between individuals and organizations (see Innes et al., 2024; Licandro et al., 2022). Individuals evaluate their involvement in organizational contexts based on perceptions of reciprocity and support (Crochiere et al., 2023). Volunteers weigh their investments such as time, energy, and emotional effort against the benefits they anticipate, including skill development, recognition, and social belonging (Licandro et al., 2022). Recent research underscored that clear exchanges and fair treatment can boost volunteer consistency, especially during demanding projects (Ganzevoort & Van Den Born, 2023). Understanding reciprocal exchange enables nonprofit leaders to improve engagement by balancing perceived effort with meaningful returns (Mitchell & Clark, 2020). This perspective is critical for designing volunteer experiences that support mutual value and increase retention.

Reciprocity is a central mechanism of SET that shapes volunteers' decisions to stay or disengage from nonprofit roles. When volunteers perceive that their contributions are acknowledged and reciprocated, their likelihood of continued participation increases. Ilyas et al. (2020) found that volunteer satisfaction is significantly influenced by the perceived fairness of organizational responses and recognition efforts. Walk and Peterson (2023) also highlighted that volunteers who receive consistent support and appreciation are more likely to sustain involvement. New research shows that volunteers who feel trusted and supported develop a resilient sense of loyalty that buffers against organizational challenges (Innes et al., 2024). When the emotional or time-based costs of

volunteering outweigh the perceived benefits, individuals may experience dissatisfaction and withdraw (Won et al., 2024). SET provides nonprofit leaders with a practical lens for identifying and correcting imbalances in volunteer experiences, ultimately supporting recruitment and retention efforts.

SET-informed strategies empower nonprofit leaders to develop systems of recognition that reinforce volunteer engagement. Volunteers who feel appreciated through personalized feedback, public acknowledgment, or development opportunities report higher satisfaction and organizational loyalty. Volunteers' perception of fairness and respect is closely linked to retention outcomes (Ngah et al., 2023). Emotional rewards such as social inclusion and affirmation can be just as effective as material incentives in promoting long-term participation (Prince & Piatak, 2023). Leaders who remain attentive to both explicit and subtle exchanges within the volunteer experience can productivity reduce turnover and build a stronger sense of commitment (Foster & Martin, 2022). These findings suggest that nonprofits should consistently evaluate the ways in which they recognize and respond to volunteer efforts. Without adequate acknowledgment, volunteers may perceive a lack of reciprocity, increasing the risk of disengagement and turnover.

Volunteer Recruitment Strategies

Effective volunteer recruitment depends on intentional planning and the use of outreach strategies that align with an organization's mission and goals (Antunes et al., 2025). Nonprofit leaders who adopt a strategic approach are more likely to attract individuals whose values match the organization's purpose and feel motivated to

contribute meaningfully (Biermann et al., 2024). Research shows that targeted communication and careful volunteer segmentation can strengthen outreach efforts and improve recruitment outcomes (Ngah et al., 2023). Peer referrals also play a vital role, as introductions through trusted personal networks enhance an organization's credibility and appeal (Liang et al., 2022). Trust-building through peer recommendations has been shown to boost volunteer engagement and increase the likelihood of long-term commitment (Simms et al., 2024). Combining tailored messaging with peer-driven recruitment helps nonprofit leaders create a reliable pipeline of mission-aligned volunteers.

Ongoing evaluation of recruitment efforts is necessary to sustain and improve volunteer engagement outcomes (Ramanadhan et al., 2021). Regularly assessing the impact of outreach strategies helps leaders refine recruitment plans using data-driven evidence. Kappelides and Kappelides (2021) suggested measuring volunteer participation and satisfaction trends as essential indicators of recruitment success. Implementing structured assessments such as retention tracking and volunteer feedback collection allows nonprofit leaders to make informed decisions that align with organizational capacity and volunteer expectations (see De Clerk et al., 2020; Piatak & Carman, 2023). This process enhances the effectiveness of future strategies and strengthens volunteer relationships.

Volunteer recruitment can be compromised when nonprofit messaging fails to connect with prospective volunteers' motivations. Recruitment strategies that lack alignment with volunteer values and beliefs often underperform, regardless of planning.

Emotional alignment between the nonprofit's mission and the volunteer's internal motivations increases recruitment success (Chowdhury & Septianto, 2022). Nonprofit leaders can improve recruitment efforts by segmenting audiences and tailoring outreach to shared values, cultural expectations, and community narratives (Mitchell & Clark, 2020; South et al., 2022). Recruitment messaging that reflects intrinsic motivators and organizational purpose fosters stronger emotional resonance, which ultimately supports higher engagement and long-term commitment.

Volunteer Motivation in Recruitment

Understanding the core motivations of volunteers is fundamental to developing effective recruitment strategies. Volunteer behavior is influenced by a range of psychological and contextual factors that shape an individual's willingness to commit to nonprofit causes (Miao et al., 2025). Intrinsic motivators such as personal growth, a sense of purpose, and the desire to contribute meaningfully are central to sustained volunteer commitment (Howard et al., 2020). When volunteers perceive alignment between their personal values and the mission of the organization, they are more likely to maintain long-term engagement (Xu et al., 2024). Nonprofit leaders who design roles that reinforce autonomy, relatedness, and personal growth can foster greater volunteer satisfaction and commitment to service.

Extrinsic motivators also play a critical role in influencing volunteer participation and should not be overlooked in recruitment strategies. Factors such as public recognition, social status, and tangible benefits serve as external incentives that can increase interest in volunteer opportunities (Miao et al., 2025). Piatak and Carman (2023)

emphasized that public acknowledgement of volunteer contributions reinforces feelings of value and belonging within the organization. Nonprofit leaders who create consistent recognition systems such as volunteer spotlights, appreciation events, or formal certifications may increase both volunteer morale and the nonprofits appeal to new participants (Sledzieski et al., 2023). Balancing intrinsic and extrinsic motivators can ensure that volunteers remain engaged for reasons beyond material benefits alone.

While motivational frameworks like SDT offer insight into internal drivers, it is equally important to consider the external limitations that may hinder volunteer participation. Personal constraints, such as limited time, caregiving responsibilities, or transportation issues, can significantly restrict an individual's ability to engage in long-term volunteering (Negrin et al., 2022). López et al. (2023) also observed that role clarity and strong onboarding support can reduce volunteer attrition by setting appropriate expectations from the outset. Balancing motivational strategies with accommodation for real-life barriers ensures that recruitment efforts remain inclusive and sustainable. Nonprofit leaders who address both psychological and logistical factors are better positioned to build a stable and committed volunteer workforce.

Training and Development

Training and development are critical elements of effective volunteer recruitment in nonprofit organizations. Volunteers who feel confident and well-prepared are more likely to remain dedicated to the organization's mission and contribute meaningfully (El-Amin, 2023). Structured training programs enhance volunteer competence and satisfaction, which can reduce disengagement and turnover among volunteers (Biermann

et al., 2024). For example, Kappelides and Kappelides (2021) emphasized that providing clear expectations and mission-focused orientation sessions creates a supportive environment where volunteers can thrive. Additionally, investing in targeted training that delivers both foundational knowledge and relevant skills improves volunteer clarity and motivation, reinforcing their commitment to the organization (see Kappelides et al., 2020; Wadekar et al., 2024). By prioritizing comprehensive training, nonprofit leaders strengthen volunteer capacity and promote long-term recruitment success.

Ongoing development opportunities also contribute significantly to attracting and retaining volunteers over time. Van den Broeck et al. (2016) highlighted that consistent support for competence-building activities correlates with increased motivation and engagement among organizational participants. Volunteers who receive ongoing skill development are more likely to experience role satisfaction and continue their service (Huang et al., 2020). Biermann et al. (2024) highlighted that skill refreshers, advanced workshops, and leadership pathways create additional incentives for volunteers to deepen their involvement and share their expertise with peers. When volunteers perceive growth as a priority, they are more likely to establish a strong emotional and functional connection with the organization, which contributes to long-term involvement and peer recruitment.

Despite the benefits of training, nonprofit organizations frequently encounter resource limitations that challenge implementation. Organizations with limited funding often struggle to offer comprehensive training programs, resulting in underprepared volunteers and weakened recruitment outcomes (López et al., 2023). To address the

challenge of limited training resources, nonprofit leaders may implement scalable options such as online learning modules or peer-led mentoring initiatives (Akyavuz & Asici, 2021). Low-cost training solutions help ensure volunteers are adequately prepared while minimizing budget strain, thereby supporting recruitment and retention goals.

Leadership in Volunteer Management

Leadership style plays a pivotal role in shaping the success of volunteer recruitment in nonprofit organizations. Nonprofit leaders influence the motivation, satisfaction, and retention of volunteers through their behaviors, communication style, and ability to inspire (Elloukmani et al., 2025). Transformational leadership, which focuses on articulating a compelling vision and fostering inspiration, has been identified as particularly effective for building sustained volunteer engagement (Compion et al., 2022; Howard et al., 2020). Walk and Peterson (2023) argued that transformational leaders motivate volunteers by aligning individual's values with organization goals, which reinforces a sense of purpose. Volunteers who feel inspired by a clear vision and empowered by meaningful work are more likely to remain engaged and actively contribute to the organization.

Participative leadership also serves as a valuable approach for improving volunteer recruitment and long-term involvement. Kappelides and Kappelides (2021) emphasized that when nonprofit leaders involve volunteers in decision-making processes, individuals are more likely to experience autonomy and competence, two core needs outlined in SDT. The participative leadership strategy builds mutual trust and respect, demonstrating that volunteers' insights are valuable to organizational success (Wright et

al., 2024). Volunteers who feel heard, consulted, and empowered are more inclined to develop a sense of ownership in their roles, which strengthens their emotional connection to the organization (Piatak & Carman, 2023). Nonprofit leaders who adopt participative strategies not only promote a more inclusive culture but also benefit from higher levels of volunteer motivation, initiative, and retention.

The alignment between leadership behavior and organizational culture is another critical factor in volunteer recruitment outcomes. Woolford et al. (2022) emphasized that leadership efforts are most effective when they reflect the nonprofits core values, such as transparency, authenticity, and inclusiveness. When volunteer leaders act in ways that reinforce the organization's mission and ethical standards, they foster an environment of trust and consistency (Kutlu & Ekici Özcan, 2025). In contrast, a lack of alignment between leadership actions and organizational values can undermine volunteer morale and lead to disengagement (Prince & Piatak, 2023). By cultivating a leadership approach grounded in purpose and openness, nonprofit leaders can reinforce loyalty, increase satisfaction, and ultimately support stronger and more consistent volunteer recruitment outcomes.

Creating a Sense of Community

Establishing a strong sense of community within a nonprofit organization contributes significantly to long-term volunteer engagement and recruitment success. Volunteers who feel socially connected and emotionally integrated into the nonprofit organization are more likely to remain involved and committed to the organization's mission (Hager & Brudney, 2003; Howard et al., 2020). Social connectedness and

belonging have been identified as powerful motivational drivers in volunteerism, as individuals often seek purpose and interpersonal relationships in their volunteer experiences. When volunteers perceive themselves as part of a cohesive group, retention levels increase, and satisfaction deepens (Walk & Peterson, 2003). Having a sense of belonging reinforces volunteers' emotional investment, leading to sustained involvement and advocacy.

Nonprofit leaders can strengthen volunteer recruitment by intentionally cultivating inclusive, relationship-based environments. Regular social events, collaborative projects, and peer-led support groups provide opportunities for interpersonal connection and community building (Prince & Piatak, 2023; Woolford et al., 2022). López (2023) noted that activities such as team-building events and open communication channels create spaces where volunteers form meaningful friendships and social bonds. Social connections enhance volunteer experience and create a culture that encourages participation, trust, and a shared sense of purpose (Howard et al., 2020). A strong internal community also enhances external recruitment efforts, as satisfied volunteers are more likely to recommend the organization to others.

Despite the benefits of in-person community building, nonprofit organizations may encounter challenges when fostering community in remote or hybrid volunteer settings. In virtual environments, the absence of face-to-face interaction can hinder the development of social bonds (Casey et al., 2023). Compion et al. (2022) emphasized that effective digital engagement strategies, such as virtual recognition programs and online team-building exercises, are essential for maintaining connection among geographically

dispersed or remote volunteers. Leveraging technology to support inclusive, interactive experiences enables nonprofit leaders to maintain a sense of community across different platforms and volunteer roles (Lee et al., 2023). Intentional efforts to connect with volunteers, whether in-person or online, can help sustain and strengthen recruitment efforts over time.

Incentives and Recognition

Incentivizing and recognizing volunteers is a vital strategy for improving recruitment outcomes and sustaining volunteer involvement. Nonprofit leaders who implement structured appreciation programs signal that volunteer contributions are meaningful and essential to the organization's success (Hopkins & Dowell, 2021; Ngah et al., 2023). A well-rounded recognition system can include both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards that address diverse motivational drivers among volunteers (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Negrin et al., 2022). While intrinsic rewards such as emotional satisfaction, personal growth, and a sense of purpose help foster internal motivation, extrinsic incentives can also be powerful motivators (Sekar, 2021). Wymer & Čačija (2025) emphasized the importance of providing tangible rewards such as public recognition, certificates, or small gifts to encourage initial engagement and continued participation.

Public acknowledgment of volunteer efforts reinforces a culture of appreciation that supports long-term commitment. Organizations that publicly celebrate volunteer contributions through events, newsletters, or social media help instill pride and reinforce a sense of belonging (Van den Broeck et al., 2016). López et al. (2023) reported that volunteers who feel visible and valued by leadership are more likely to sustain their

involvement. Recognition can also extend beyond events, including personalized thank-you messages, milestone celebrations, or opportunities for professional development (Eiseman et al., 2020). Such actions demonstrate that the organization respects and supports its volunteers, which enhances loyalty and promotes positive word-of-mouth recruitment.

Nonprofit leaders must avoid excessive reliance on extrinsic motivators because an imbalance may dilute volunteers' sense of purpose. Overemphasis on material incentives can shift focus away from the organization's mission and weaken intrinsic commitment (Howard et al., 2020; Lachance et al., 2022). Huang et al. (2020) observed that when volunteers engage mainly for tangible benefits, their connection to community impact often declines. To maintain genuine involvement, leaders should blend authentic recognition with carefully selected incentives that highlight collective mission and volunteer contribution (Wymer & Čačija, 2025). By doing so, organizations can strengthen recruitment outcomes and nurture a loyal, mission-driven volunteer base.

Evaluating Recruitment Effectiveness

Measuring the success of volunteer recruitment strategies is a critical aspect of effective nonprofit management. Regular evaluation ensures that recruitment aligns with organizational priorities and helps build a stable volunteer base (Akyavuz & Asici, 2021; Davies et al., 2021). Arnon et al. (2023) emphasized that using clear key performance indicators (KPIs) such as retention trends, satisfaction surveys, and referral rates provides leaders with practical feedback for improvement and supports ethical stewardship of volunteer resources (Abukari & Petrucka, 2024). Tracking retention reveals levels of

volunteer commitment, while survey results offer direct insights into satisfaction and engagement (Dorner et al., 2023; Sale & Carlin, 2025). Consistent KPI analysis allows nonprofit leaders to close gaps, adjust strategies, and better meet volunteer expectations and mission goals.

Incorporating data analytics enhances the precision and effectiveness of volunteer recruitment strategies in nonprofit organizations. Leaders who leverage data-driven insights can identify which outreach methods generate the highest engagement and return on investment (Liang et al., 2022; Van den Berg et al., 2025). For example, Akyavuz and Asici (2021) found that monitoring how volunteers initially connect whether through social media, community initiatives, or peer recommendations enables organizations to concentrate recruitment efforts where they have the greatest impact. Analyzing these patterns supports the development of targeted messaging and informed resource allocation, which expands an organization's reach and fosters deeper community engagement (De Clerck et al., 2024; Eiseman et al., 2020). By embedding data analytics into recruitment practices, nonprofit leaders can make strategic decisions that attract and retain dedicated volunteers.

Promoting a culture of continuous assessment reinforces sustainable recruitment success. Leaders who routinely monitor trends and test outreach strategies can adapt efforts to match changing volunteer interests (Foster & Martin, 2022; Kramer et al., 2021). Analyzing outcomes by age group, motivation, or cultural factors allows messages to resonate with diverse populations (Ganzevoort & Van den Born, 2023). For example, online platforms may attract younger volunteers, while community events and local

partnerships may better engage older or rural audiences (Miller et al., 2024). By embedding consistent evaluation into recruitment efforts, nonprofit leaders ensure strategies remain responsive, impactful, and aligned with both volunteer needs and the organization's mission.

Successful Volunteer Recruitment Programs

Effective volunteer recruitment programs are distinguished by innovative outreach methods and a deep understanding of volunteer motivation. Nonprofit organizations that align messaging with their mission and audience values are more likely to attract and retain committed volunteers (Compion et al., 2022; Huang et al., 2020). One example of innovation is using storytelling as a recruitment strategy (Dorner et al., 2023; Lachance et al., 2022). Crafting impactful narratives that demonstrate organizational outcomes fosters an emotional connection with potential volunteers (Mitchell & Clark, 2020). When individuals relate personally to the nonprofit's mission, they are more likely to invest time and energy in service (Xu et al., 2024). This approach differentiates organizations in a competitive volunteer market and appeals to people whose values match the nonprofit's goals.

Peer recruitment models also represent an effective strategy for reaching new volunteers. Encouraging current volunteers to invite friends or family expands reach and builds on existing trust (Prince & Piatak, 2023; Walk & Peterson, 2023). Volunteers brought in through peer referrals often show deeper commitment because relationships are built on shared trust and community ties (Ngah et al., 2023). Peer recruitment not only supports initial engagement but also fosters retention by creating mentorship

opportunities and reinforcing a culture of inclusion and support (Akyavuz & Asici, 2021). Focusing on peer relationships and community building strengthens morale and commitment across the volunteer base, resulting in a more resilient team.

Nonprofit organizations that embrace flexible, creative recruitment methods are more likely to build lasting volunteer programs. Storytelling and peer recruitment illustrate how emotional connection, and social influence can improve recruitment results (Davies et al., 2021). Organizations that adapt to volunteer needs and community trends can maintain trust and attract ongoing support (Ilyas et al., 2020). Evaluating the impact of these creative strategies enables leaders to refine outreach over time and build a recruitment system that supports the nonprofit's long-term success.

Transition

Section 2 provided a comprehensive review of current literature related to volunteer recruitment in nonprofit organizations, examining theoretical frameworks such as SDT and SET, and highlighting how leadership practices, training, motivation, and organizational culture influence recruitment outcomes. The review demonstrated that successful volunteer recruitment depends on aligning opportunities with individual values, offering structured support systems, and fostering a sense of community and recognition. The analysis also identified a gap in empirical research focused specifically on practical recruitment strategies within human aid nonprofit organizations in localized contexts such as Nashville, Tennessee. Building on insights from the literature, Section 3 describes the research methodology designed to examine how nonprofit leaders apply strategies to strengthen volunteer recruitment efforts. Section 4 presents the study's

findings, providing evidence-based results that address the identified gap and inform actionable recommendations for nonprofit leadership practice.

Section 3: Research Project Methodology

I used a qualitative pragmatic inquiry design to explore the real-world strategies that nonprofit leaders implement to strengthen volunteer recruitment in human aid organizations located in Nashville, Tennessee. The purpose of the research was to identify practical leadership approaches that address the challenges associated with attracting volunteers in mission-driven organizations. Pragmatic inquiry allowed for an applied focus on outcomes by examining the lived experiences of leaders managing volunteer programs (see Kwame & Petrucka, 2024). By concentrating on the recruitment process rather than retention or engagement, the study aimed to generate actionable insights that may inform future nonprofit management practices.

Project Ethics

As the primary researcher, I led all data collection activities, including recruiting eligible participants and conducting semistructured interviews in full compliance with ethical standards. I did not have any prior professional or personal relationships with the participating organizations or individuals, which reduced potential bias and supported impartial data collection. My professional background in nonprofit management and volunteer coordination equipped me with relevant knowledge to interpret participant experiences accurately while remaining objective. To further promote trustworthiness, I maintained a reflexive journal to document decisions, reactions, and reflections throughout the research process, ensuring transparency and accountability in how data were gathered and interpreted.

Ethical principles, including respect for persons, beneficence, and justice, guided this study to protect participant rights and ensure fair treatment (see Kwame & Petruka, 2024). Participants received a detailed informed consent form explaining the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw at any time without consequence, and the measures in place to safeguard confidentiality. No incentives were offered to avoid undue influence and preserve voluntary participation. Confidentiality was maintained using pseudonyms, secure storage, and the removal of identifying information from transcripts. All collected data will be stored securely for 5 years before safe disposal in accordance with Walden University's guidelines. Before any data collection occurred, Walden University Institutional Review Board (07-18-25-1197977) approval was obtained to confirm that all procedures met federal and university research ethics standards, ensuring that participant well-being would remain a central priority throughout the project.

Nature of the Project

I used a qualitative pragmatic inquiry design to explore the real-world strategies nonprofit leaders use to recruit volunteers. The qualitative method was appropriate because it enabled the collection of data regarding nonprofit leaders' lived experiences and decision-making processes in volunteer recruitment (see Rouse et al., 2025). The pragmatic inquiry design emphasized practical problem solving and actionable insights and aligned with the current study's focus on real-world applications (see Van den Berg et al., 2025). Pragmatic inquiry supported the current study's applied focus by aligning data collection and analysis with the goal of improving organizational practices (see Negrin et al., 2022). The pragmatic inquiry design was suited to the exploration of

leadership behaviors and strategic implementation within dynamic nonprofit environments (see Compion et al., 2022). By applying a qualitative pragmatic inquiry approach, I captured the contextual factors that influence recruitment success and produced findings that may be relevant to scholarly research and nonprofit leadership practice.

Population, Sampling, and Participants

The target population for this study included nonprofit leaders and managers from organizations that provide human aid services in Nashville, Tennessee. Participant eligibility criteria included individuals with experience managing volunteer programs who could provide valuable insights into their strategies and challenges related to volunteer recruitment. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, a technique appropriate for qualitative studies aiming to recruit individuals with knowledge and experience relevant to the research focus (Kwame & Petrucka, 2024). Participants' titles included executive director, manager of volunteer engagement, and volunteer and engagement coordinator to ensure multiple leadership perspectives were aligned with the research purpose.

Seven experienced nonprofit leaders were recruited using the purposeful sampling strategy, which aligned with qualitative research standards for small, information-rich samples that allow for in-depth exploration of complex management practices (see Biermann et al., 2024). Participants were selected based on their responsibility for volunteer recruitment in human aid nonprofits and their ability to provide rich, relevant data. To ensure data saturation, I conducted interviews until no new codes, categories, or

themes emerged, and I documented the process through reflective memos and a saturation tracking log. If necessary, additional participants would have been recruited to confirm redundancy. Access to participants was gained through nonprofit networks, organizational directories, and direct outreach via email and LinkedIn. Potential participants received a recruitment letter and consent form detailing the study's purpose, ethical protections, and the voluntary nature of participation. To build trust and ensure informed consent, I used clear and respectful communication and provided participants with opportunities to ask questions and reaffirm their autonomy throughout the process. Credibility was strengthened through a standardized interview protocol, triangulation of perspectives, and participant validation to ensure the findings accurately reflected participants' experiences.

Data Collection Activities

Semistructured interviews served as the primary data collection method for this qualitative study, with me acting as the main instrument for gathering data. This approach was effective for capturing detailed insights into nonprofit leaders' experiences and perspectives on volunteer recruitment strategies (see Van den Berg et al., 2025). An interview protocol modeled after the guidelines in the Walden University Research Handbook ensured consistency across interviews while allowing flexibility to explore new themes as they emerged (see Howard et al., 2020). Using a formal protocol enhanced the credibility and dependability of the data collection process by providing a clear framework for asking open-ended questions and probing for deeper insights.

Data were collected through a structured sequence that followed a step-by-step approach. First, eligible nonprofit leaders were recruited via email invitations. Once participants had given consent, individual interviews were scheduled at a convenient time. Sessions were conducted using Zoom, a secure video conferencing platform, to increase accessibility and comfort. Before each session, verbal consent was confirmed, and interviews were audio recorded with permission. During each interview, I followed the protocol questions, took field notes to capture nonverbal cues and contextual details, and maintained a reflexive journal to monitor bias (see Kwame & Petrucka, 2024). After each interview, I reviewed transcripts for accuracy and shared summarized findings with participants for member checking to verify the accuracy of interpretations (see Negrin et al., 2022). The invitation email to participants is listed in Appendix A. All interview questions are provided as an interview protocol in Appendix B. The planned methods produced thorough, credible insights that supported the study's aim of identifying effective strategies for recruiting volunteers in nonprofit organizations.

Interview Questions

The interview questions for this qualitative study were designed to elicit detailed responses from nonprofit leaders and managers regarding their experiences with volunteer recruitment. The questions were open-ended, allowing for flexibility in responses while ensuring that key themes were addressed:

1. What strategies do you use to enhance volunteer recruitment?
2. How do you measure the effectiveness of your recruitment strategies?

3. What factors do you believe most influence volunteer motivation, and how does your organization leverage those factors in its recruitment efforts?
4. What forms of training and development are provided to either staff or volunteers to build competence and confidence in volunteer recruitment?
5. How would you describe your leadership style, and how does it impact your ability to recruit volunteers?
6. How does your organization create a sense of community or belonging among volunteers to enhance long-term engagement and recruitment success?
7. In what ways does your organization recognize or incentivize employees or current volunteers to support recruitment efforts?
8. Can you share an example of an effective program or initiative that significantly improved volunteer recruitment? What made it successful?
9. Is there anything else about effective volunteer recruitment or management practices that you think are important to share but have not been covered in this conversation?

These questions were designed to prompt open-ended responses, encouraging participants to share their thoughts and experiences in depth. The interviews were guided by these questions while allowing for follow-up inquiries based on participants' responses, ensuring the conversation remains relevant and informative. Using this structured yet flexible approach, the research aimed to gather rich qualitative data that could inform best practices in volunteer recruitment within the nonprofit sector.

Data Organization and Analysis Techniques

The research study used a systematic approach to organizing and analyzing qualitative data to ensure accuracy, credibility, and alignment with the central research question. I have stored interview transcripts, field notes, and reflective journal entries in password-protected folders on a secure device, each labeled with a unique pseudonym and timestamp. A research log was maintained to document key decisions, reflections, and analytical memos throughout data collection and analysis (Elloukmani et al., 2025). Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis process to systematically identify, review, and refine themes. Microsoft Excel served as the primary tool for coding and categorizing data, with each row representing a segment of participant dialogue and columns used to assign codes, track patterns, and record memos and reflections. All raw data will be stored securely for 5 years before safe disposal, maintaining confidentiality and compliance with ethical research standards.

Using a structured Excel matrix combined with an established thematic analysis method enhanced consistency and transparency throughout the coding process. Triangulation of multiple data sources such as interview transcripts, field notes, and personal reflections strengthened the dependability of the findings. Identified themes were compared to existing literature and the study's conceptual framework to ensure that interpretations were credible and aligned with recent research and theoretical foundations (Piatak & Carman, 2023). Comprehensive data organization and analysis techniques produced trustworthy results and generated actionable insights for nonprofit leaders seeking to improve volunteer recruitment practices.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis guided the examination of interview data, allowing for a detailed exploration of the strategies nonprofit leaders use to recruit volunteers. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase process was applied: familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and writing up the results. Codes were assigned manually using Excel, and themes were refined through comparison and reflection as new insights emerge. This process included both inductive coding, allowing themes to naturally emerge from participant narratives, and deductive coding shaped by the study's conceptual framework.

Themes were interpreted through the lens of SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2020), with attention to how leadership strategies support volunteers' psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Using an SDT-guided lens ensured alignment between the conceptual framework and the study's practical findings. Patterns identified in the data were compared with current literature on volunteer recruitment to strengthen the study's scholarly contribution and relevance.

All raw data, including interview transcripts, field notes, and coding matrices, will be stored securely in password-protected folders for 5 years, in accordance with Walden University's ethical guidelines. This practice maintains data confidentiality and supports auditability if needed. Together, this analysis strategy ensured a systematic, credible interpretation of participant experiences grounded in both established theory and real-world practice.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

In qualitative research, reliability refers to the consistency and dependability of the data collection and analysis procedures over time. Establishing reliability ensures that findings can be traced back to transparent and replicable methods (Rouse et al., 2025). To enhance reliability, I used a structured interview protocol with standardized open-ended questions. By doing so, I ensured that all participants were asked the same core questions, reducing variability in data collection while allowing for follow-up probes based on individual responses. All interviews were audio recorded with participant consent and transcribed to preserve the integrity of participants' responses.

A secondary review of transcripts was conducted to confirm accuracy, reducing the risk of transcription errors. Additionally, participants had the opportunity to engage in member checking, reviewing the themes and summaries derived from their interviews to validate accuracy and interpretation. These practices helped ensure the study's findings were based on consistent, verifiable data collection processes.

Dependability

Dependability involves demonstrating that the research process is logical, traceable, and documented. This study ensured dependability by maintaining a comprehensive research log that records procedural steps, analytic decisions, and reflective notes. A detailed audit trail documented how data was collected, coded, and interpreted, which allowed external reviewers to assess the consistency and transparency of the process (Biermann et al., 2024). Using a clear and repeatable methodology

supported by peer-reviewed sources strengthened the study's ability to produce dependable results.

Validity

In qualitative research, validity refers to the accuracy and trustworthiness of interpretations derived from the data. Several strategies were used to strengthen validity in this study. Methodological triangulation involved using multiple data sources or perspectives to cross-check and verify themes, which increased the depth and credibility of findings (Wright et al., 2024). Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework further supported validity by providing clear, systematic steps for familiarizing with the data, coding, developing themes, reviewing and defining themes, and producing a coherent narrative of results.

Triangulation was applied by collecting data from a diverse sample of nonprofit leaders and comparing themes across different participant responses to identify consistent patterns and nuanced insights (Foster & Martin, 2022). Member checking also enhanced validity by allowing participants to review and confirm whether the interpretations accurately reflected their experiences and viewpoints. Additionally, I maintained a reflective journal throughout the research process to identify and mitigate potential researcher bias. Peer reviews from academic mentors and colleagues provided external feedback on research design and thematic interpretation, strengthening the credibility and accuracy of the study's conclusions.

Credibility

Credibility refers to confidence in the truth of the findings and the extent to which participants' experiences are accurately represented. To establish credibility, I used prolonged engagement with the data, in-depth semistructured interviews, and member checking to ensure participants had a voice in the verification of the results (Lee et al., 2023). Triangulation of multiple data sources added further support to the credibility of the findings (Piatak & Carman, 2023). These strategies collectively ensured the research results were well-substantiated and faithful to participant perspectives.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings can apply to other contexts beyond the immediate study setting. While generalization was not the primary aim of the qualitative research, thick description was used to provide detailed context about participants, organizational environments, and specific recruitment strategies (Elloukmani et al. (2025). This depth of detail enables readers to determine whether the findings may be relevant and applicable to their own settings. By clearly outlining the sampling criteria, data collection procedures, and organizational characteristics, the study will help nonprofit leaders and scholars evaluate how the insights might inform volunteer recruitment practices in their respective contexts.

Confirmability

Confirmability addresses the objectivity and neutrality of the research findings. Confirmability was supported through maintaining an audit trail, reflexive journaling, and detailed documentation of coding and analytic decisions. All interpretations were

grounded in the data, and direct participant quotations supported key themes. To ensure data saturation was achieved, I continued data collection and analysis until no new codes, themes, or insights emerged from successive interviews. I documented this process by keeping a log that tracks when saturation occurs and comparing new data with existing categories to confirm redundancy. Triangulation of multiple data sources and participant validation helped ensure that sufficient depth of information had been gathered. Such strategies minimized bias and ensured that findings were based on participant perspectives rather than researcher assumptions.

Transition and Summary

Section 3 detailed the methodology used to explore the volunteer recruitment strategies of nonprofit leaders. This section outlined the qualitative approach and pragmatic inquiry design, described participant eligibility and recruitment procedures, and explained the data collection process using semistructured interviews. Manual data organization using Microsoft Excel and thematic analysis procedures were also discussed, along with the methods used to ensure the reliability, validity, and overall trustworthiness of the study.

Section 4 presents the research findings, offering a thematic analysis of the data collected from nonprofit leaders. The findings were interpreted through the lens of SDT and examined in relation to existing literature. Section 4 also discusses how these findings contribute to business practice, promote social change, and suggests directions for future research.

Section 4: Findings and Conclusions

Presentation of the Findings

The research question guiding this study was the following: What successful strategies do leaders of U.S. human aid nonprofit organizations use to enhance the recruitment of volunteers? I conducted semistructured interviews with seven nonprofit leaders within the human aid sector. Thematic analysis of the interview data revealed five key themes: (a) building relationships and personal connections, (b) creating a welcoming and inclusive volunteer culture, (c) purpose-driven messaging and mission alignment, (d) flexible and accessible opportunities, and (e) empowerment and recognition of volunteers. The findings suggested that successful recruitment is not only about filling roles but also about creating meaningful, relationship-based systems that connect volunteers to community impact. These findings align with core constructs of SDT and extend prior research on volunteer recruitment and nonprofit leadership.

Table 1 presents the demographic and organizational characteristics of the seven participants who contributed to this study. Each participant held a leadership position within a human aid nonprofit organization in the Nashville, Tennessee area. The table includes the participant number (used to ensure confidentiality), their position title, the type of organization in which they serve, and the estimated number of volunteers engaged annually. Organizational types varied across sectors, including food security, veteran services, youth mentorship, and environmental stewardship. Annual volunteer engagement ranged from fewer than 200 to over 28,000 volunteers, reflecting the diversity in scale and scope among participating organizations.

Table 1

Participant Demographics and Organization Types

Participant	Position title	Organization type	Number of annual volunteers
P1	Executive director	Homeless services	300+
P2	Volunteer engagement manager	Food security	28,000+
P3	Peer leader specialist	Veteran organization	50+
P4	Volunteer manager	Youth services	600+
P5	Community connections manager	Homeless services	2,000+
P6	Senior manager of partner engagement	Community volunteering	22,000+
P7	Community outreach and volunteer lead	Parks and environment	1,700+

Table 2 outlines the five key themes that emerged from data analysis in this study. Each theme represents a common strategy or perspective shared by participants regarding successful volunteer recruitment practices in human aid nonprofit organizations. The table includes the theme number, theme name, participants who contributed to each theme, and a sample excerpt from the interviews that exemplifies the theme. These findings were derived from thematic coding of semistructured interview transcripts and reflected the strategies nonprofit leaders use to engage and motivate volunteers effectively.

Table 2

Themes Identified in This Study

Theme number	Theme name	Participant number	Sample excerpt from interview
1	Building relationships and personal connections	All participants	"Most of our volunteers come through word of mouth and relationships we're intentional about making that first connection personal."
2	Creating a welcoming and inclusive volunteer culture	P1, P3, P5, P6	"We treat our volunteers like family. They need to feel like they belong here, not like they're just filling a role."
3	Purpose-driven messaging and mission alignment	P1, P2, P4, P5, P6	"Every volunteer role is tied back to our mission. They know they're part of something bigger that's what makes it meaningful."
4	Flexible and accessible opportunities	P2, P3, P5, P6, P7	"We offer a range of opportunities short-term, virtual, weekend events so people can say yes without feeling overwhelmed."
5	Empowerment and recognition of volunteers	All participants	"We try to give volunteers ownership whether it's leading a project or helping train others. That keeps them coming back."

Theme 1: Building Relationships and Personal Connections

The first major theme that emerged from all seven participants was the importance of building relationships and personal connections as a foundation for volunteer recruitment. Leaders described trust, consistent outreach, and individualized engagement as essential to attracting volunteers. Rather than relying solely on

generalized marketing or passive interest, participants focused on face-to-face conversations, community partnerships, and relational follow-up to develop meaningful connections with prospective and current volunteers.

P1 explained “we treat our volunteers like family. They want to feel seen and known.” P2 added “most of our volunteers come through word of mouth and relationships; we’re intentional about making that first connection personal.” P7 described attending neighborhood events and speaking with community members directly: “It’s all about having face-to-face conversations, it makes a difference.” P3 emphasized the need for genuine listening: “Sometimes the best thing you can do is sit down and just hear someone’s story, people remember that.” P4 shared “it’s not about recruiting numbers, it’s about recruiting people who trust you. That only happens when you build relationships first.” P5 added “we’ve learned that showing up matters. If you show up for your volunteers, they’ll show up for you.” P6 echoed the sentiment: “We lead with relationships before we ever ask someone to serve.” Participants agreed that relational trust formed the gateway to deeper engagement, including peer referrals and long-term volunteer commitment. Volunteers who felt connected to staff and other volunteers were more likely to return and invite others to join them.

The importance of relatedness in volunteer motivation was evident in the strategies nonprofit leaders used to foster strong interpersonal connections. SDT emphasizes the psychological need for relatedness, which is essential for sustaining motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Relatedness refers to the need to feel connected, valued, and supported by others. Leaders in the current study operationalized relatedness by

creating intentional, person-centered experiences that emphasized interpersonal trust and emotional connection. Crochiere et al. (2023) found that volunteer engagement is strongly influenced by self-expression, cocreation, and interpersonal relationships between volunteers and organizational leaders. Similarly, Prince and Piatak (2023) reported that volunteers are more likely to remain engaged when they feel appreciated and have consistent, direct interaction with leadership. Volunteers in the current study expressed greater satisfaction in organizations that facilitated ongoing dialogue and connection. Ashfaq et al. (2021) also emphasized that recognition, relationship building, and emotional support promote initial recruitment and long-term retention. The alignment between prior studies and the current research suggests that interpersonal trust and connection are not simply desirable qualities but core elements of volunteer management strategy. By intentionally cultivating environments that prioritize mutual respect, appreciation, and dialogue, leaders can enhance recruitment success and retention rates. These findings reinforce the strategic value of relationship-centered leadership, bridging psychological theory with practical volunteer engagement approaches that sustain organizational capacity.

From a business practice perspective, relationship-centered recruitment mirrors employee engagement strategies that emphasize personal connection and trust. According to Wymer and Čačija (2025), volunteers who felt emotionally connected to a brand or leader are more likely to support the organization long term. The leaders in this study confirmed that relational recruitment not only strengthens volunteer loyalty but also generates positive word-of-mouth, further expanding the organization’s reach.

In summary, building personal connections is not simply a cultural value, it is a strategic recruitment approach rooted in motivational theory and reinforced by the literature. Volunteers are more likely to engage when they feel relationally supported, and leaders who prioritize connections create stronger, more sustainable volunteer networks.

Theme 2: Creating a Welcoming and Inclusive Volunteer Culture

Creating a welcoming and inclusive culture for volunteers emerged as a key recruitment strategy among five of the seven participants. Leaders emphasized the importance of cultivating environments where volunteers feel emotionally safe, respected, and valued. Participants described how fostering a sense of belonging leads not only to initial volunteer engagement but also to long-term retention and organic peer recruitment. A culture of inclusion, according to participants, begins with the first point of contact and is reinforced through personalized communication, thoughtful onboarding, and consistent acknowledgment of each individual's contribution.

P1 shared, "we treat our volunteers like family. They need to feel like they belong here, not like they're just filling a role." P7 discussed hosting low-pressure, community-building events to help volunteers feel comfortable and welcomed: "If we can make them feel seen and connected early on, they're more likely to stay involved." P3, working with a veteran population, explained; "for a lot of our volunteers, this is their first step back into a community. We make it a point to welcome them in." P5 stated, "we take time to learn who our volunteers are and what they care about. No one is just a number here." P6 added; "people want to know they are welcome regardless of where they're at in life. That's how we build community." P4 shared that the sense of inclusion often starts with

language: “We try to speak to volunteers like they’re already a part of something bigger; it’s never ‘if’ you belong, it’s that you already do.”

Inclusive practices complement the relatedness component of SDT by emphasizing how inclusive practices contribute to a broader sense of psychological safety and belonging. While relatedness focuses on interpersonal connection, the welcoming environments described by participants reflect intentional organizational culture-building that reinforces volunteers’ value and acceptance. Leaders in this study operationalized these principles through culturally responsive onboarding, emotional support, and inclusive communication strategies that help volunteers from diverse backgrounds feel at home.

Inclusive and autonomy-supportive leadership plays a critical role in fostering volunteer satisfaction and reducing turnover. De Clerck et al. (2024) found that leadership approaches that combine inclusion with support for volunteer autonomy contribute to higher satisfaction levels and greater retention. Huang et al. (2020) similarly emphasized that organizational inclusion and the fulfillment of volunteer needs are essential for sustaining long-term engagement. Together, these studies highlight how inclusive communication, and culturally responsive practices cultivate an environment where volunteers from diverse identities feel safe, respected, and motivated to contribute. By prioritizing these leadership qualities, organizations can strengthen volunteer commitment while reducing the risk of disengagement over time.

The findings confirm and extend the work of Ashfaq et al. (2021) and Huang et al. (2020), both of whom highlighted how inclusive practices significantly impact

volunteer motivation and retention. This study builds on those findings by illustrating how emotional safety, informal recognition practices, and a welcoming tone set during first contact contribute to a deeper sense of belonging within human aid organizations.

The theme also aligns with best practices in nonprofit and business leadership literature. According to Piatak and Carman (2023), nonprofit organizations that prioritize inclusive engagement and invest in cultivating a positive volunteer culture experience higher retention rates and stronger organizational identification. Ngah et al. (2023) found that when leaders demonstrate servant leadership behaviors such as inclusivity, emotional support, and moral care, volunteers are more likely to experience affective commitment and engage in prosocial behaviors. These findings suggest that integrating inclusive and servant leadership principles into volunteer management strategies can strengthen organizational culture while fostering long-term volunteer loyalty and engagement.

In summary, creating a welcoming and inclusive volunteer culture is a powerful recruitment strategy grounded in both motivational theory and organizational leadership literature. When volunteers feel safe, respected, and connected, they are more likely to return, contribute meaningfully, and invite others to participate. Leaders who intentionally foster these environments enhance organizational stability and community trust, ultimately expanding their impact and capacity for service.

Theme 3: Purpose-Driven Messaging and Mission Alignment

A strong alignment between organizational mission and volunteer roles emerged as a key strategy among five of the seven participants. Leaders emphasized the importance of clearly communicating purpose to help volunteers understand how their

service contributes to broader organizational impact. Participants shared that volunteers who connect emotionally with the mission are more likely to remain engaged, serve consistently, and recruit others. This sense of purpose fosters deeper motivation and loyalty among volunteers.

P1 shared, “we make sure every volunteer knows the why behind what they’re doing. That connection to purpose is what keeps them coming back.” P2 explained, “when people understand how their time directly helps feed a family, it becomes more than just showing up for a shift it becomes personal.” P4 emphasized the importance of attracting value-aligned mentors: “We recruit people who care about youth and want to make a difference. It’s not just about filling a spot it’s about calling them into something bigger.” Similarly, P5 described sharing success stories and community impact during volunteer briefings to reinforce purpose. P6 added, “we bring our mission into every interaction. If people can see how their efforts tie into something meaningful, they’re more likely to return.”

The strategies identified in this study closely align with the internalization process within SDT. According to Ryan and Deci (2020), internalization occurs when individuals adopt an organization’s values as their own, leading to more sustained, autonomous motivation. In this study, leaders facilitated internalization by embedding mission-driven messaging throughout the volunteer journey from recruitment and onboarding to role assignment and reflection. This alignment helped volunteers feel emotionally connected to their service and reinforced their personal identification with the organization’s goals.

The findings confirm and extend current literature on volunteer motivation. Crochiere et al. (2023) found that value congruence between volunteers and the organization strengthens co-creation and long-term commitment. Likewise, Miao et al. (2025) emphasized that emotionally connected volunteers demonstrate higher engagement when they understand the social value of their contributions. These findings support the idea that purpose-driven messaging is more than branding. The results from this study, together with the work of Crochiere et al. (2023) and Miao et al. (2025), indicate that purpose-driven messaging operates as a psychological driver that deepens volunteer loyalty and promotes sustained engagement. As a result, nonprofit leaders who intentionally integrate purpose-driven messaging into their volunteer recruitment strategies can foster a more committed and enduring volunteer base.

Connecting volunteer tasks to the broader mission is a critical strategy for fostering long-term engagement. Arnon et al. (2023) introduced the concept of volunteer engageability, which is significantly influenced by the clarity and resonance of an organization's mission. Participants in this study reinforced this idea by describing how they incorporate visuals, testimonials, and mission-centered conversations to consistently link volunteer activities with their overall impact. By framing service as purposeful rather than transactional, leaders strengthened volunteers' emotional investment and reinforced their commitment to the organization's goals.

From a business perspective, mission alignment is a critical strategy for recruitment, retention, and brand loyalty. According to Wymer and Čačija (2025), volunteers who identify with an organization's core values are more likely to act as brand

ambassadors and contribute consistently. Participants in this study demonstrated that emotionally engaging volunteers through purpose-based messaging encourages deeper commitment, stronger word-of-mouth promotion, and more meaningful long-term involvement.

In summary, purpose-driven messaging and mission alignment are essential components of volunteer engagement strategy. When leaders connect volunteers to the broader meaning behind their work, they activate intrinsic motivation, foster long-term commitment, and create a culture of shared values that sustains organizational impact.

Theme 4: Flexible and Accessible Opportunities

Flexibility and accessibility in volunteer opportunities emerged as a core recruitment strategy for five of the seven participants. Leaders emphasized that reducing barriers to participation such as rigid schedules, high initial expectations, or limited formats was essential for attracting and retaining a diverse range of volunteers. Participants described offering multiple pathways to engagement, including short-term, virtual, and low-commitment roles, which not only increased initial interest but often led to deeper, long-term involvement.

P2 explained, “we offer a range of opportunities short-term, virtual, weekend events so people can say yes without feeling overwhelmed.” P7 shared how one-time events serve as an accessible gateway: “If we can get people out once, they often come back.” P3 noted working with a veteran population, emphasized the need to adapt to physical or emotional limitations: “We meet them where they are. If that means starting with a phone call or virtual opportunity, that’s okay.” P5 highlighted the importance of

scheduling flexibility: “Some people can’t come during the day, so we offer evening and weekend roles. Accessibility is key.” P6 reinforced this idea, stating “we let people decide what level of involvement works for them. That choice is empowering.”

The strategies identified in this study reflect the autonomy component of SDT. According to Ryan and Deci (2020), autonomy refers to the psychological need to experience choice and volition in one’s actions, which is a critical factor in fostering intrinsic motivation. In this study, leaders supported autonomy by creating environments where volunteers could determine how, when, and to what extent they wanted to contribute. By removing rigid constraints and offering volunteer roles that fit a variety of lifestyles and needs, the organizations encouraged more inclusive and sustainable participation.

The findings confirm and extend prior research on volunteer flexibility and engagement. Hopkins and Dowell (2021) emphasized that organizations that tailor volunteer opportunities to meet individual lifestyles, age demographics, and capacity levels achieve better recruitment and retention outcomes. Likewise, Compion et al. (2022) highlighted the value of episodic volunteering brief, one-time service events as a successful low-barrier entry point for new volunteers. This approach mirrors the strategies used by participants who introduced short-term events with the intent to foster recurring engagement.

Providing flexibility and meeting volunteer expectations from the outset is a key strategy for sustaining engagement. Dunlop et al. (2022) found that volunteers are more likely to remain involved when their initial experiences align with their expectations and

when the organization offers flexible roles. The authors' research further demonstrates that early accommodation and autonomy in scheduling help reduce burnout and turnover. Participants in this study implemented similar strategies by meeting volunteers "where they are," both logistically and emotionally, ensuring that service opportunities fit individual circumstances and capacities. This alignment between research and practice highlights how flexibility and responsiveness can strengthen retention by fostering positive, sustainable volunteer experiences.

From a business practice standpoint, offering flexible opportunities mirrors customer-centered models in the for-profit sector, where success often depends on personalizing offerings to meet the diverse needs of clients. According to Wymer and Čačija (2025), adaptability and customization are essential components of relationship marketing, helping organizations build trust and long-term loyalty. Participants in this study demonstrated that nonprofits could benefit from adopting a similar mindset, volunteers who are given choice and flexibility are more likely to develop sustained, meaningful connections to the organization.

In summary, offering flexible and accessible volunteer opportunities is both a motivational strategy and a practical tool for inclusive engagement. By empowering individuals to serve on their own terms, nonprofit leaders expand their volunteer base, increase retention, and foster greater long-term organizational capacity.

Theme 5: Empowerment and Recognition of Volunteers

Empowerment and recognition of volunteers emerged as a key theme among five of the seven participants. Leaders described how offering meaningful responsibilities,

leadership development opportunities, and intentional appreciation helped foster a sense of ownership and long-term commitment. When individuals felt their contributions were nurtured, celebrated, and connected to the organization's mission, they were more likely to remain engaged and become advocates who recruited others.

P1 shared, "we celebrate our volunteers often. Appreciation goes a long way whether it's a shout-out at an event or just taking the time to say thank you." P2 described a leadership pipeline within the volunteer team: "We provide training and mentorship. Some of our best team leaders started as volunteers who just showed up once." P4 emphasized how empowering mentors-built consistency and trust in youth programs: "We train our volunteers to take on more because they want to, and because they're capable." P5 shared, "people want to feel seen. We make it part of our culture to acknowledge their time and their heart." P6 added, "we want volunteers to feel uplifted and publicly affirmed," describing how faith-based gatherings were used to recognize contributions and reinforce spiritual motivation.

The strategies identified in this study directly support two core components of SDT: competence and relatedness. Competence refers to the need to feel capable and effective in one's actions, while relatedness involves feeling connected and valued within a social context (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Leaders in this study fostered competence by offering training, skill development, and leadership roles. Relatedness was reinforced through personalized recognition, emotional affirmation, and creating spaces where volunteers felt appreciated and connected.

Empowerment and acknowledgment emerged in this study as essential strategies for sustaining volunteer recruitment. De Clerck et al. (2024) found that autonomy-supportive leadership, which includes recognizing contributions and fostering volunteer growth, significantly enhances retention by fulfilling volunteers' psychological needs. Similarly, Crochiere et al. (2023) identified co-creation of value as a key driver of volunteer motivation, highlighting that volunteers who contribute meaningfully and build skills are more deeply committed to the organization. The alignment between these studies and the current findings underscores that recognition, skill development, and shared value creation are not supplementary benefits but core practices that strengthen long-term volunteer commitment.

Recognition, both public and personal, also played a vital role in maintaining engagement. Prince and Piatak (2023) emphasized that volunteer satisfaction is strongly linked to personalized and consistent appreciation from leadership. Ashfaq et al. (2021) also confirmed that volunteers who feel acknowledged are more likely to report a strong sense of belonging and continue serving overtime. Evidence from both the literature and this study positions recognition as a strategic retention tool that not only affirms volunteer contributions but also strengthens their emotional connection to the organization, fostering sustained participation.

From a business practice perspective, volunteer empowerment and recognition closely mirror proven employee engagement strategies. As noted by Wymer and Čačija (2025), individuals who feel emotionally connected and publicly appreciated tend to maintain stronger affiliation with the organization and contribute at higher levels.

Nonprofit leaders in this study demonstrated that investing in volunteer development and affirmation is not merely a retention tactic but a strategic, values-based leadership approach.

In summary, empowering and recognizing volunteers is a foundational practice rooted in both motivational theory and effective leadership. Volunteers who are given opportunities to grow, lead, and feel valued are more likely to sustain their commitment, deepen their emotional investment, and inspire others to serve ultimately expanding the organization's reach and reinforcing its mission.

Business Contributions and Recommendations for Professional Practice

The findings of this study contribute meaningfully to the professional practice of business by offering clear, evidence-based strategies to improve workforce engagement through enhanced volunteer recruitment in nonprofit organizations. Although focused on the nonprofit sector, the findings also have strong implications for leaders in corporate, hybrid, and socially responsible business models. As organizations across sectors continue to navigate resource constraints, shifting workforce expectations, and a growing emphasis on purpose-driven work, the ability to attract mission-aligned individuals whether volunteers or employees has become a strategic imperative.

This study fills a gap in the literature by providing practical insights into how nonprofit leaders successfully mobilize volunteers through intentional leadership practices. Existing research often addresses volunteerism in general terms but lacks specific strategies linked to long-term engagement, leadership style, and community building within high-demand human aid environments. By grounding the findings in SDT

and using a pragmatic inquiry approach, the research identifies concrete methods by which leaders create environments that meet volunteers' psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, factors that are equally critical to employee satisfaction and retention in for-profit settings.

Business and nonprofit leaders can benefit from incorporating the five key themes identified in this study into their organizational practices to enhance recruitment, engagement, and long-term commitment among volunteers or employees. First, the theme of Building Relationships and Personal Connections emerged as foundational to successful volunteer recruitment. Participants emphasized that trust, individualized outreach, and authentic human connection are essential for drawing volunteers into sustained engagement. Volunteers were often recruited through personal invitations and maintained through ongoing relational touchpoints. Leaders in both nonprofit and for-profit sectors can strengthen employee and volunteer engagement by emphasizing relational leadership, prioritizing interpersonal communication, and investing in partnerships that foster trust and shared values.

The theme of Creating a Welcoming and Inclusive Volunteer Culture highlighted the importance of fostering a sense of belonging and psychological safety. Participants described how creating a supportive, inclusive environment helped volunteers feel valued and more likely to stay involved. This culture was built through warm onboarding processes, community-building events, and inclusive communication practices. Business leaders can adopt similar approaches by cultivating inclusive team dynamics, supporting employee resource groups, and embedding equity and belonging into workplace culture.

The theme of Purpose-Driven Messaging and Mission Alignment revealed that volunteers were more committed when they understood and connected with the organization's mission. Leaders intentionally linked volunteer roles to the broader purpose and impact of the organization. This alignment helped individuals feel that their contributions mattered. Organizations can integrate this strategy by consistently sharing impact stories, clarifying how individual tasks contribute to collective goals, and reinforcing the organization's mission across communication channels and programming.

The theme of Flexible and Accessible Opportunities addressed the need to lower barriers to participation. Participants shared that volunteers are more likely to engage when roles accommodate different time commitments, abilities, and interests. Providing a variety of entry points and schedules allows individuals to participate in ways that fit their lives. Leaders can apply this principle by offering flexible roles, virtual options, short-term engagements, and clearly defined pathways to deeper involvement while maintaining clear expectations and providing adequate support.

The theme of Empowerment and Recognition of Volunteers demonstrated the importance of appreciating and uplifting those who serve. Leaders who offered volunteers opportunities for leadership, development, and public recognition saw higher levels of motivation and retention. Recognition included informal thank-you notes, structured appreciation events, and advancement into leadership roles. Business leaders can reflect this in their human capital strategies by implementing recognition programs, peer-nominated awards, and leadership development tracks for both employees and volunteers.

The strategies identified in this study are especially relevant for nonprofit executives, human resource leaders, corporate social responsibility professionals, and program managers responsible for volunteer coordination and workforce engagement. Incorporating these strategies into leadership development, onboarding systems, and organizational culture initiatives can support stronger relationships, better retention, and a more motivated workforce. Additionally, leadership workshops, nonprofit association webinars, and sector-specific publications can help bring these insights to organizations that benefit from volunteer engagement.

The findings of this study provide a roadmap for effective volunteer recruitment strategies that are grounded in human-centered leadership, values-driven culture, and motivational theory. These strategies can be adapted across sectors to improve recruitment, increase engagement, and drive lasting impact in mission-focused and employee-centered organizations alike.

Implications for Social Change

The findings of this study contribute to positive social change by equipping nonprofit and business leaders with evidence-based, replicable strategies to strengthen volunteer recruitment through relationship-building, inclusivity, mission alignment, flexibility, and recognition. By exploring the lived experiences of leaders in human aid nonprofit organizations, this research offers practical insights that can enhance organizational effectiveness, improve volunteer retention, and expand the reach of critical services to individuals and communities in need.

At the organizational level, the study provides a framework for designing inclusive, purpose-driven volunteer programs that expand capacity without compromising quality. Leaders who adopt practices such as building personal connections, offering flexible engagement opportunities, and publicly recognizing volunteer contributions can reduce turnover, increase volunteer satisfaction, and deliver services more efficiently. These improvements directly benefit the populations served such as individuals facing homelessness, food insecurity, or isolation by ensuring they are supported by a stable, motivated, and empowered volunteer workforce.

For corporate and business leaders, the study reinforces the social and operational value of employee volunteerism. Partnerships between nonprofits and businesses can mirror the strategies identified in this study particularly mission alignment, recognition, and relational engagement to foster shared value across sectors. Encouraging corporate volunteer efforts not only builds team cohesion and enhances brand reputation but also contributes to stronger community ties and an expanded culture of civic responsibility.

At the community level, effective volunteer engagement contributes to increased trust in institutions, higher rates of civic participation, and a more resilient social safety net. Volunteers who feel connected, competent, and purposeful consistent with the principles of SDT are more likely to remain engaged and inspire others to contribute. This ripple effect reinforces social capital and empowers communities to collaboratively address local challenges.

From a scholarly perspective, this study contributes to the broader literature on nonprofit leadership, workforce sustainability, and organizational behavior. By applying

a qualitative, pragmatic inquiry grounded in SDT, the research offers new insight into how motivation and leadership practices intersect to support long-term volunteer engagement, particularly in emotionally demanding service contexts. These insights may inform future studies on leadership, engagement, and strategy within mission-driven organizations.

Overall, the implications of this study extend beyond nonprofit volunteerism to support a broader vision of inclusive leadership and social innovation. When organizations prioritize relationships, recognize contributions, and create accessible, empowering pathways for service, they foster environments that elevate human dignity, activate community strengths, and promote sustainable social change. These practices not only improve organizational outcomes but also contribute to more connected, equitable, and resilient communities.

Recommendations for Further Research

The findings from this qualitative study provide a foundation for understanding effective volunteer recruitment strategies within human aid nonprofit organizations. However, additional research is needed to further strengthen business practices in both nonprofit and for-profit sectors. Future studies can build on the limitations of this project and explore new contexts, populations, and methodologies to deepen insight into sustainable volunteer engagement and its relationship to organizational success. The following areas are recommended for further research.

Sector and Organizational Diversity

Future research should further examine whether the five core strategies identified in this study: building personal relationships, fostering inclusive volunteer cultures, aligning roles with organizational purpose, offering flexible opportunities, and recognizing and empowering volunteers are equally effective across a broader range of nonprofit sectors beyond human aid. While the present study focused on human aid organizations, which often involve high emotional labor and urgent service delivery, other sectors such as arts and culture, environmental advocacy, education, animal welfare, and international development may operate under different organizational structures, resource constraints, and volunteer motivations.

For instance, arts organizations may rely on project-based, seasonal, or event-driven volunteer models, while environmental nonprofits may require physically demanding or remote service roles. Educational nonprofits, in contrast, often engage volunteers in more structured mentoring or tutoring capacities. Each of these contexts presents unique challenges and opportunities for implementing volunteer recruitment strategies. Exploring how the five strategies adapt to these settings could yield important insights into sector-specific nuances, including how culture, mission intensity, or volunteer demographics influence recruitment outcomes.

Comparative studies between mission types such as between faith-based and secular nonprofits or between locally focused and globally operating organizations could help determine which strategies are universally effective and which require contextual tailoring. Examining how organizational size, funding structure, and leadership style

mediate the effectiveness of these strategies may also provide valuable direction for nonprofit leaders seeking to enhance volunteer engagement.

Broadening the scope of research to include diverse nonprofit sectors would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of volunteer management and leadership practices. Such research could also help identify transferable models of volunteer engagement that can be shared across the sector, ultimately improving volunteer recruitment, satisfaction, and retention regardless of the organization's mission area. A cross-sectoral lens would enrich the field's knowledge base and strengthen the capacity of nonprofits to adapt best practices in a rapidly evolving volunteer landscape.

Volunteer Perspectives

This study centered on the experiences and strategies reported by nonprofit leaders; however, future research should intentionally incorporate the voices and lived experiences of volunteers themselves. Understanding volunteer motivations, expectations, and perceptions directly from those engaged in service can provide a more holistic view of what drives sustained participation and satisfaction. While leaders may offer strategic insight into recruitment and engagement practices, volunteers can reveal whether those strategies are perceived as effective, inclusive, and motivating from their point of view.

Including volunteer perspectives could help identify potential gaps between leadership intentions and actual volunteer experiences. For example, leaders may perceive their communication as purpose-driven and empowering, while volunteers may feel under-informed or disconnected from the broader mission. Similarly, practices

intended to foster inclusion, or flexibility may not be experienced equally across demographic or cultural groups. Hearing directly from volunteers may uncover subtle barriers to engagement or unmet needs that leaders have not yet recognized.

A comparative analysis of leader and volunteer perspectives may also yield new insights into how organizational culture, recognition efforts, training, and role clarity are received and interpreted by those serving. These findings could support more targeted interventions and volunteer-centered program design. Furthermore, research that includes diverse volunteer voices such as episodic, long-term, youth, older adult, and marginalized community volunteers can help nonprofits create more inclusive and responsive engagement strategies tailored to a broader range of experiences.

Future qualitative or mixed-methods studies that triangulate data from both leaders and volunteers would enrich the current understanding of effective volunteer recruitment and retention. By validating leader-reported strategies through the lens of volunteer perception, researchers can provide more balanced, evidence-based recommendations for nonprofit practice. Ultimately, elevating volunteer voices contributes to more democratic, human-centered research and fosters organizational accountability to the very individuals who make service possible.

Longitudinal Impact

The present study utilized a cross-sectional design, capturing nonprofit leaders' perspectives at a single point in time. While this approach provided valuable insights into the strategies currently used to recruit volunteers in human aid organizations, it limits the ability to assess how these strategies perform and evolve over the long term. Volunteer

recruitment and engagement are dynamic processes, influenced by organizational growth, shifting community needs, and changes in volunteer demographics, availability, and motivation. As such, future longitudinal research is essential to examine how volunteer recruitment strategies impact sustained engagement, organizational loyalty, and volunteer-driven outcomes over time.

A longitudinal or mixed-methods approach would allow researchers to track changes in volunteer participation across various stages from initial recruitment through orientation, ongoing service, and eventual departure or advancement into leadership roles. This design could also uncover factors that contribute to volunteer burnout, turnover, or continued commitment, offering a more comprehensive understanding of which strategies result in meaningful, long-lasting engagement. Furthermore, longitudinal data could help identify how contextual variables such as organizational capacity, leadership transitions, or external disruptions (e.g., pandemics, economic downturns) affect the sustainability and adaptability of recruitment practices.

By capturing data at multiple time points, future research could explore the ripple effects of recruitment strategies on broader organizational outcomes, such as program delivery, service quality, donor support, and community impact. For instance, does building strong personal relationships with volunteers lead to increased retention rates after one year? Do flexible opportunities result in higher conversion from episodic to long-term volunteers? Are recognition efforts predictive of volunteer leadership development and advocacy behavior?

Incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data over time would enrich the understanding of causal and correlational relationships between recruitment practices and volunteer outcomes. This would also support evidence-based decision-making for nonprofit leaders seeking to implement or refine engagement strategies based on their long-term return on investment. Ultimately, longitudinal research would extend the current study's findings by revealing not only what works in the moment, but what sustains volunteerism and contributes to organizational resilience over time.

Technology and Recruitment Tools

Several participants referenced the use of digital platforms to streamline volunteer recruitment and engagement efforts, including online sign-up forms, event management systems, and social media outreach. While these tools were acknowledged as helpful in reaching broader audiences and simplifying administrative processes, the current study did not explore in depth the scope or effectiveness of specific technologies used. As digital communication becomes increasingly integral to nonprofit operations, future research should investigate the role, impact, and best practices for integrating technology into volunteer recruitment, coordination, and retention strategies.

Technology offers nonprofit organizations a powerful means of increasing accessibility and visibility, particularly for younger, tech-savvy demographics who may expect intuitive, mobile-friendly systems and real-time communication. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn can amplify recruitment messaging, while volunteer management software like SignUpGenius, VolunteerHub, or Salesforce Nonprofit Cloud can streamline scheduling, communication, and data tracking. However, the effectiveness

of these tools likely varies depending on the organization's size, budget, digital literacy, and target audience. Research is needed to determine which tools best support not only initial recruitment but also long-term engagement, satisfaction, and re-engagement of volunteers.

As hybrid and remote volunteering opportunities grow in popularity especially following the COVID-19 pandemic, technology can facilitate more flexible models of service. Virtual volunteer orientations, online training, and remote engagement platforms may lower participation barriers and expand an organization's reach beyond its immediate geographic area. Future studies could assess how technology supports the autonomy and competence components of SDT by enabling volunteers to choose how to participate and build new skills through digital platforms.

There is also a growing opportunity to examine how data analytics, email automation, and customer relationship management (CRM) systems can personalize communication and strengthen volunteer relationships at scale. For instance, research could evaluate whether targeted emails, personalized thank-you messages, or digital badges for completed service milestones improve retention or increase volunteer satisfaction. Understanding the return on investment for various technological tools would help nonprofit leaders make informed decisions about digital infrastructure and allocate resources strategically.

In summary, while this study briefly acknowledged the role of digital tools in volunteer coordination, future research should explore how technology can be optimized to enhance recruitment, foster deeper connections, and sustain engagement. A better

understanding of technology's role will be especially relevant for nonprofits seeking to modernize their outreach strategies, engage younger generations, and operate more efficiently in an increasingly digital landscape.

Geographic and Cultural Contexts

This study was geographically limited to nonprofit organizations operating in Nashville, Tennessee, a city with a distinct cultural identity, strong faith-based networks, and an established history of community engagement. While the findings provide valuable insights into effective recruitment practices within this local context, they may not be fully generalizable to organizations operating in different regions or cultural environments. Future research should examine whether the five identified strategies: building personal relationships, fostering inclusive volunteer cultures, aligning volunteer roles with mission, offering flexible engagement opportunities, and empowering and recognizing volunteers hold the same significance in other geographic or sociocultural settings.

Differences in regional values, economic conditions, population demographics, and institutional infrastructure may influence how volunteer recruitment strategies are implemented and received. For instance, communities with limited internet access may be less responsive to digital recruitment methods, while those with stronger collectivist cultural values may place greater emphasis on group affiliation or community identity. Urban versus rural dynamics may also affect outreach tactics, availability of volunteer opportunities, and the role of word-of-mouth in engagement efforts. Moreover, access to

resources such as staff capacity, technology, and funding can vary greatly across regions, shaping how leaders are able to design and implement volunteer recruitment strategies.

Cultural context is equally important, particularly for organizations working with diverse or marginalized populations. Recruitment approaches that are effective in faith-based or veteran-centered environments such as those represented in this study may not translate directly to secular, intergenerational, or culturally specific nonprofits. Understanding cultural norms, communication styles, and values around service and giving influence volunteer motivation is essential to developing inclusive, context-sensitive recruitment practices. Research that examines these strategies in multicultural, multilingual, or immigrant-serving organizations, for example, could provide valuable insight into culturally adaptive approaches to volunteer engagement.

Comparative studies that examine nonprofit practices across cities, states, or countries could illuminate both universal principles and locally adapted methods. This type of research would support nonprofit leaders in tailoring their recruitment strategies to better align with the specific needs and expectations of the communities they serve. The results from such studies would also inform policy recommendations, training programs, and funding initiatives designed to strengthen the volunteer sector nationally or globally.

In summary, while the present study provides a deep understanding of effective recruitment strategies within the context of Nashville-based human aid nonprofits, broader geographic and cultural exploration is needed to fully understand the transferability and adaptability of these strategies. Expanding this line of research will

contribute to a more nuanced and inclusive body of knowledge, supporting nonprofit leaders in designing recruitment practices that are culturally competent, geographically responsive, and community informed.

Applications in For-Profit Contexts

Several findings from this study particularly those related to recognition, empowerment, and structured onboarding hold significant implications for employee engagement and corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices within for-profit organizations. While the present research focused on nonprofit leaders, the principles underlying effective volunteer management, such as fostering intrinsic motivation, cultivating a sense of belonging, and providing opportunities for meaningful contribution, are also central to workforce engagement in business environments. These parallels suggest that nonprofit strategies for recruiting, developing, and retaining volunteers may offer valuable models for enhancing employee motivation and organizational culture in the private sector.

Recognition practices identified in this study such as public acknowledgment, personalized appreciation, and structured appreciation events mirror proven employee engagement strategies in for-profit settings. Employees, like volunteers, are more likely to demonstrate loyalty, productivity, and innovation when their efforts are consistently recognized and valued by leadership. This supports the broader application of nonprofit-style recognition frameworks in business, particularly in environments where employee morale, retention, and team cohesion are critical to success.

Empowerment, another key theme in this study, also translates effectively to business contexts. Providing volunteers with leadership roles, skill-building opportunities, and voice in decision-making mirrors strategies used in employee development and talent retention programs. These practices align with the growing emphasis on inclusive leadership, psychological safety, and distributed decision-making in contemporary human resources literature. Future research could explore how the empowerment of unpaid contributors in mission-driven organizations compares with strategies used to build leadership capacity and professional growth opportunities among paid employees in for-profit enterprises.

Structured onboarding processes such as intentional orientation sessions, mission-focused messaging, and early relationship-building merged as crucial to volunteer engagement and retention. These strategies have direct relevance for onboarding new employees, particularly in large corporations where connection to organizational purpose can be diluted by scale or bureaucracy. As businesses increasingly adopt values-driven branding and seek to integrate purpose into their internal culture, insights from nonprofits can offer actionable guidance for designing onboarding programs that foster emotional connection, identity alignment, and early engagement.

In the context of CSR, the study findings also point to new possibilities for strengthening corporate volunteerism programs. Several participants described successful partnerships with businesses where employees served as volunteers. These initiatives, often organized as team-building events or service days, can benefit from adopting volunteer recruitment principles identified in this study such as clarity of mission,

flexible participation options, and authentic relationship-building. Future research could examine how nonprofits and businesses co-design service opportunities that meet community needs while advancing business objectives such as brand reputation, employee satisfaction, and civic engagement.

Ultimately, the nonprofit sector's emphasis on mission, community, and relational engagement offers an alternative lens through which to examine leadership and workforce development in business settings. Exploring cross-sector applications of these strategies may yield innovative practices that humanize corporate cultures, foster intrinsic motivation, and enhance employee retention. As businesses seek to align profit with purpose, nonprofit volunteer management strategies may serve as both a practical and philosophical guide for building more engaged, value-driven workplaces.

Quantitative Validation

This study's qualitative pragmatic inquiry design enabled a rich, contextualized exploration of nonprofit leaders' perspectives on effective volunteer recruitment strategies. Through in-depth interviews, the research captured nuanced insights into how relational, cultural, and motivational factors contribute to volunteer engagement. However, the qualitative nature of the study also presents inherent limitations in terms of generalizability and the ability to establish causal or correlative relationships between variables. To address these limitations, future research should incorporate quantitative methodologies that test and validate the themes and strategies identified in this study across broader populations and organizational settings.

Quantitative validation could involve the development and distribution of structured surveys to a large sample of nonprofit organizations across various sectors and regions. These instruments could assess the prevalence and perceived effectiveness of practices such as volunteer recognition, flexible scheduling, mission-driven messaging, and inclusive onboarding. Researchers could then use statistical methods such as regression analysis, structural equation modeling, or path analysis to measure the relationships between these strategies and key outcomes like volunteer satisfaction, retention rates, recruitment conversion rates, and overall organizational performance.

Such empirical testing would allow for the identification of statistically significant predictors of volunteer engagement, offering nonprofit leaders and practitioners a stronger evidence base for strategic decision-making. For example, measuring the degree to which perceived recognition predicts volunteer longevity could inform the design of formal recognition systems. Likewise, analyzing the correlation between onboarding quality and early volunteer dropout rates could highlight critical areas for improvement in initial engagement efforts.

Quantitative studies could segment findings by organizational size, budget, mission area, or geographic location to assess whether certain strategies are more effective under specific conditions. This would enhance the applicability of the findings across a wider range of nonprofit contexts and support the customization of recruitment practices to fit unique organizational needs. Cross-sector comparisons may also be conducted to examine how these strategies perform in for-profit, hybrid, or international contexts.

Another potential avenue for quantitative validation includes longitudinal designs that track volunteer behavior and organizational metrics over time. By collecting data at multiple time points, researchers could assess the sustained impact of recruitment and engagement strategies, providing insight into the long-term effectiveness of approaches identified in this study.

Incorporating quantitative validation into future research would significantly advance the field of volunteer management by offering actionable, data-driven insights. It would also enhance the credibility and generalizability of findings, supporting the translation of qualitative themes into scalable best practices. As the nonprofit sector continues to evolve and professionalize, the integration of robust quantitative evidence will be essential for refining strategies that attract, motivate, and retain a dedicated volunteer workforce.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry research study was to explore the successful strategies used by leaders of U.S. human aid nonprofit organizations to enhance volunteer recruitment. Using a pragmatic inquiry approach, the study employed semistructured interviews with seven experienced nonprofit leaders whose organizations serve vulnerable populations. The in-depth interviews provided rich, contextual data on the relational, organizational, and motivational practices that contribute to effective volunteer engagement.

Through thematic analysis, five interconnected strategies emerged as essential to successful recruitment: (a) building personal relationships through direct, authentic

engagement; (b) creating welcoming and inclusive volunteer cultures that foster psychological safety and belonging; (c) aligning volunteer roles with the organization's mission to inspire purpose-driven service; (d) offering flexible and accessible opportunities that accommodate diverse lifestyles and abilities; and (e) empowering and recognizing volunteers through skill-building, leadership roles, and appreciation. Collectively, these strategies demonstrate that effective recruitment extends beyond transactional outreach. It is a relational and values-based process that prioritizes trust, autonomy, and long-term engagement.

The results of this study are strongly supported by SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2020), which emphasizes the psychological needs of relatedness, autonomy, and competence as drivers of intrinsic motivation. Leaders in this study operationalized these principles by cultivating environments where volunteers feel seen, valued, and empowered to contribute meaningfully. The study also confirms and extends recent literature on volunteer motivation, organizational inclusion, and relational leadership, offering both theoretical insight and practical relevance.

Importantly, this research contributes to the broader understanding of nonprofit leadership by identifying actionable strategies that address common challenges in sustaining a volunteer workforce. For practitioners, the findings offer replicable approaches to strengthen recruitment pipelines, deepen volunteer commitment, and increase organizational capacity through community-centered engagement. For scholars, the study adds to a growing body of knowledge emphasizing the role of leadership intentionality, emotional connection, and mission alignment in volunteer management.

In summary, effective volunteer recruitment is not merely about filling gaps in service, it is about fostering belonging, inspiring purpose, and nurturing lasting relationships. As human aid nonprofit organizations continue to navigate increasing demand with limited resources, applying these strategies can enhance volunteer retention, improve service delivery, and contribute to long-term social impact. Future studies that expand on these findings through quantitative and longitudinal designs will further strengthen the evidence base, informing sustainable practices that support civic participation and community resilience across the nonprofit sector.

References

Akyavuz, E. K., & Asici, E. (2021). The effect of volunteer management mentoring program on mentors' entrepreneurship tendency and leadership self-efficacy. *Participatory Educational Research*, *8*(2), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.17275/per.21.26.8.2

Antunes, H., Rodrigues, A., Gouveia, É., Lopes, H., & Sabino, B. (2025). Volunteer management in sports tourism events: Motivation and satisfaction as drivers for repeat participation. *Societies*, *15*(4). https://doi.org/10.3390/soc15040080

Arnon, L., Almog-Bar, M., & Cnaan, R. A. (2023). Volunteer engageability: A conceptual framework. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, *52*(6), 1633–1659. https://doi.org/10.1177/08997640221132499

Ashfaq, F., Butt, M., & Ilyas, S. (2021). Volunteering: What drives and retains it? An analysis of motivational needs together with organizational policies and practices. *Qualitative Research Journal*, *21*(2), 189–205. https://doi.org/10.1108/QRJ-04-2020-0024

Biermann, K. Y., Breitsohl, H., & Meijs, L. C. (2024). Occupation-related volunteering: A qualitative systematic literature review, conceptualization, and directions for Future Research. *Sage Journals*, *14*(2). https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440241255834

Braun, B., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Casey, M., Harvey, J., Charity, M., Talpey, S., Reece, L., & Eime, R. (2023). Understanding volunteer motivations and concerns in coaching and officiating basketball: Implications for sport policy. *BMC Public Health*, *23*(1), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-023-15949-5

Chowdhury, R. M., & Septianto, F. (2022). Recruiting volunteers: The roles of fear, hope and courage. *European Journal of Marketing*, *57*(1), 226–257. https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-05-2021-0297

Cohen, A. (2024). Stuck between a rock and a hard place: An investigation into a youth-serving community-based organization, philanthropy, and urban public schools. *Children and Schools*, *46*(3), 183–193. https://doi.org/10.1093/cs/cdae012

Compion, S., Meijs, L., Cnaan, R. A., Krasnopolskaya, I., Von Schnurbein, G., & Abu–Rumman, S. (2022). Repeat and non-returning volunteers: The promise of episodic events for volunteer recruitment and retention. *International Society for Third-Sector Research*, *33*, 472–482. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-022-00452-z

Crochiere, R. J., Fernandes, T., & Aires de Matos, M. (2023). Towards a better understanding of volunteer engagement: Self-determined motivations, self-expression needs and co-creation outcomes. *Journal of Service Theory and Practice*, *33*(7), 1–27. https://doi.org/10.1108/JSTP-09-2022-0215

Davies, A., Lockstone-Binney, L., & Holmes, K. (2021). Recognizing the value of volunteers in performing and supporting leadership in rural communities. *Journal of Rural Studies*, *86*, 136–144. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2021.05.025

De Clerck, T., Aelterman, N., Haerens, L., & Willem, A. (2020). Enhancing volunteers capacity in all-volunteer nonprofit organizations: The role of volunteer leaders' reliance on effective management processes and (de)motivating leadership. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, *31*(3), 481–503. https://doi.org/10.1002/nml.21444

De Clerck, T., Haerens, L., Devos, G., & Willem, A. (2024). A self-determination theory perspective on how autonomy-supportive and chaotic leadership relate to volunteers' need-based experiences and turnover intentions: A variable-centered and person-centered approach. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, *34*(4), 777–800. https://doi.org/10.1002/nml.21591

Dorner, Z., McLeod, L. J., Milfont, T. L., Stahlmann–Brown, P., Hine, D. W., Maris, R. D., Kitson, J. C., & Tassell-Matamua, N. A. (2023). Motivating residents to volunteer for urban waterway restoration: A segmentation approach. *Conservation Science and Practice*, *6*(11), 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1111/csp2.13258

Dunlop, P. D., Holtrop, D., Kragt, D., Gagné, M., Farid, H. M., & Luksyte, A. (2022). Setting expectations during volunteer recruitment and the first day experience: A preregistered experimental test of the met expectations hypothesis. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 842–853. https://doi.org/10.1080/1359432X.2022.2070478

Eiseman, D. L., Armstrong, A. K., & Chatrchyan, A. M. (2020). Designing an extension Climate Stewards volunteer program: Incorporating sense of community, social

practice, and self-efficacy theories. *Environmental Education Research*, *26*(11), 1636–1655. https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2020.1811841

El-Amin, A. (2023). Utilizing effective volunteer management to elevate nonprofit organizational capacity. *Journal of Nonprofit Education and Leadership*, *13*(2), 101–111. https://doi.org/10.18666/JNEL-2022-11716

Elloukmani, S., Raeymaeckers, P., & Oosterlynck, S. (2025). Understanding diversity in nonprofit organizations: An institutional logics perspective. *Human Service Organizations: Management, Leadership & Governance*. https://doi.org/10.1080/23303131.2025.2488279

Foster, L., & Martin, G. (2022). The experience of conducting collaborative pragmatic qualitative research. *Frontiers in Sociology*, 7, 970333. https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2022.970333

Ganzevoort, W., & Van den Born, R. J. (2023). The everyday reality of nature volunteering: An empirical exploration of reasons to stay and reasons to quit. *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management*, *68*(1), 207–226. https://doi.org/10.1080/09640568.2023.2240953

Hager, M. A., & Brudney, J. L. (2003). Volunteer management practices and retention of volunteers. *The Urban Institute*.

Hopkins, B., & Dowell, D. (2021). Recruitment and retention in not–for–profit organizations: Tailored strategies for younger and older volunteers. *Employee Relations*, *44*(1), 259–273. https://doi.org/10.1108/ER-10-2020-0450

Howard, J. L., Bureau, J., Guay, F., Chong, J. X., & Ryan, R. M. (2020). Student motivation and associated outcomes: A meta-analysis from self-determination theory. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, *16*(6), 1300–1323. https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691620966789

Hoye, R., & Kappelides, P. (2020). The psychological contract and volunteering: A systematic review. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *21*, 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069221119576

Huang, Y., Bortree, D. S., Yang, F., & Wang, R. (2020). Encouraging volunteering in nonprofit organizations: The role of organizational inclusion and volunteer need satisfaction. *Journal of Nonprofit & Public Sector Marketing*, *32*(2), 147–165. https://doi.org/10.1080/10495142.2019.1589624

Ilyas, S., Butt, M., Ashfaq, F., & Maran, D. A. (2020). Drivers for non-profits' success: Volunteer engagement and financial sustainability practices through the resource dependence theory. *Economics*, *8*(4). https://doi.org/10.3390/economies8040101

Innes, P. A., Jefferies, G., & Gates, T. G. (2024). Volunteering behavioral declines amid personal and organizational upheaval: Recruitment, retention, and barriers in Australia. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1080/10911359.2024.2396032

Kappelides, P., Mort, G. S., D'Souza, C., & McDonald, B. (2020). Volunteer recruitment, activation, commitment, and retention: An introduction to the special issue. *Journal of Nonprofit & Public Sector Marketing*, *32*(1), 1–3. https://doi.org/10.1080/10495142.2020.1719324

Kappelides, R., & Kappelides, P. (2021). The psychological contract and volunteering: A systematic review. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, *31*(4), 665–691. https://doi.org/10.1002/nml.21446

Kramer, M. W., Austin, J. T., & Hansen, G. J. (2021). Toward a model of the influence of motivation and communication on volunteering: Expanding self-determination theory. *Management Communication Quarterly*, *35*(4), 572–601. https://doi.org/10.1177/08933189211023993

Kutlu, M. B., & Ekici Özcan, N. (2025). The effect of brand heritage on intention to donate in non-profit organizations: An evaluation within the context of temporal focus and brand trust. *Journal of Nonprofit & Public Sector Marketing*, *37*(2), 221–244. https://doi.org/10.1080/10495142.2024.2353384

Kwame, A., & Petrucka, P. M. (2024). Ethical dilemmas in cross-national qualitative research: A reflection on personal experiences of ethics from a doctoral research project. *Journal of Academic Ethics*, *22*(2), 251–268. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10805-023-09484-6

Lachance, E. L., Thompson, A., Bakhsh, J. T., & Parent, M. M. (2022). Examining changes in sport event volunteers' motivation, satisfaction, commitment, sense of community: Evidence from a prevent–post event design. *Event Management*, *26*(8), 1727–1743. https://doi.org/10.3727/152599522X16419948694801

Lee, J., Park, Y. J., & Kim, S. E. (2023). Volunteers and resource management competencies of nonprofit organizations during challenging times. *Nonprofit Management & Leadership*. https://doi.org/10.1002/nml.21562

Liang, X., Amarakoon, U., Bird, S., & Pearson, D. (2022). “It is hard to say ‘no’ to someone who wants to help”: An exemplary model of corporate volunteer management and its challenges. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, *32*(4), 531–553. https://doi.org/10.1002/nml.21499

Licandro, O., Yapor, S., & Correa, P. (2022). Analysis of the personal factors of the volunteers as mediators between the satisfaction and the permanence in employee volunteering. *International Review on Public and Nonprofit Marketing*, *19*, 127–151. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12208-021-00299-y

López, M. P., Rijpma, A., De Moor, T., & Reijerink, J. (2024). Behind the crowdsourcing platform: Assessing volunteer recruitment and engagement instruments. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, *53*(6), 1381–1409. https://doi.org/10.1177/08997640231212839

Miao, Q., Huang, J., & Yin, H. (2025). Emotions matter: Understanding the relationship between drivers of volunteering and participation. *Journal of Social Service Research*, *51*(3), 678–692. https://doi.org/10.1080/01488376.2024.2348533

Miller, J. J., Martinez, J. M., & Stoll, J. A. (2024). Conducting a special small-scale sporting event: What motivates people to volunteer in a small city? *Managing Sport and Leasure*, *29*(1), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/23750472.2021.1980423

Mitchell, S. L., & Clark, M. (2020). Rethinking non-profit brands through a volunteer lens: Time for B2V. *Journal of Marketing Management*, *37*(5–6), 464–487. https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2020.1818804

Negrin, K. A., Slaughter, S. E., Dahlke, S., & Olson, J. (2022). Successful recruitment to qualitative research: A critical reflection. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *21*, 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069221119576

Ngah, N. S., Abdullah, N. L., Suki, N. M., & Kasim, M. A. (2023). Does servant leadership affect organizational citizenship behavior? Mediating role of affective commitment and moderating role of role identity of young volunteers in non-profit organizations. *Leadership and Organization Development Journal*, *44*(6), 681–701. https://doi.org/10.1108/LODJ-11-2022-0484

Peña-Garay, M., Sandoval-Díaz, J., & Cuadra-Martínez, D. (2025). Social representations of formal volunteers and spontaneous volunteers in socio-natural disaster risk management contexts. *Behavioral Sciences (2076–328X)*, *15*(4), 497. https://doi.org/10.3390/bs15040497

Piatak, J. S., & Carman, J. G. (2023). Unpacking the volunteer experience: The influence of volunteer management on retention and promotion of the organization. *Journal of Public and Nonprofit Affairs*, *9*(3), 278–296. https://doi.org/10.20899/jpna.9.3.1-19

Prince, W., & Piatak, J. (2023). By the volunteer, for the volunteer: Volunteer perspectives of management across levels of satisfaction. *Nonprofit & Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, *52*(5), 1191–1209. https://doi.org/10.1177/08997640221127974

Ramanadhan, S., Revette, A. C., & Aveling, E. L. (2021). Pragmatic approaches to analyzing qualitative data for implementation science: An introduction.

Implementation Science Communications, *2*(70). https://doi.org/10.1186/s43058-021-00174-1

Rouse, E., Reinecke, J., Ravasi, D., Langley, A., Grimes, M., & Gruber, M. (2025). From the editors: Making a theoretical contribution with qualitative research. *Academy of Management Journal*, *68*(2), 257–266. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2025.4002

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2020). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation from a self-determination theory perspective: Definitions, theory, practices, and future directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, *61*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2020.101860

Sale, J. E., & Carlin, L. (2025). The reliance on conceptual frameworks in qualitative research - a way forward. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, *25*(36). https://doi.org/10.1186/s12874-025-02461-0

Sekar, S. (2021). What drives employee's involvement in corporate volunteering? Bright and dark side of consequences to organization. *Benchmarking: An International Journal*, *29*(7), 2258–2274. https://doi.org/10.1108/BIJ-02-2021-0074

Simms, J., Trad, A. M., Richards, K. A., & Woolf, J. (2024). Examining strategies for undergraduate student volunteer engagement and management in a community-based sport-for-development program. *Recreational Sports Journal*, *48*(1), 75–84. https://doi.org/10.1177/15588661241236407

Sledzieski, N., Gallicano, T. D., Shaikh, S., & Levens, S. (2023). Optimizing recruitment for qualitative research: A comparison of social media, emails, and offline

methods. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *22*. https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069231162539

South, J., Woodall, J., Southby, K., Jones, R., Yates, G., Kinsella, K., & May, E. (2022). Volunteerism, social context and health impacts: A qualitative study of Glasgow Commonwealth Games event volunteers. *Taylor & Francis*, *6*(4), 671–683. https://doi.org/10.1080/23748834.2020.1791424

Van den Berg, P. L., Henderson, S. G., Jagtenberg, C. J., & Li, H. (2025). Modeling the impact of community first responders. *Management Science*, *71*(2), 992–1008. https://doi.org/10.1287/mnsc.2022.04024

Van den Broeck, A., Ferris, L., Chang, C. H., & Rosen, C. C. (2016). A review of self-determination theory's basic psychological needs at work. *Journal of Management*, *42*(5), 1195–1229. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206316632058

Wadekar, P. P., Sachan, S. K., Patil, S. K., Wagh, H. M., & Mahato, M. (2024). V - vibe: efficient volunteer management using mobile technology. *2024 2nd International Conference on Sustainable Computing and Smart Systems (ICSCSS), Sustainable Computing and Smart Systems (ICSCSS), 2024 2nd International Conference On*, 1236–1245. https://doi.org/10.1109/ICSCSS60660.2024.10625339

Walk, M., & Peterson, E. (2023). Volunteers as active shapers of their work: The role of job crafting in volunteer satisfaction and organizational identification. *International Journal of Voluntary & Nonprofit Organizations*, *34*(2), 289–300. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-022-00462-x

Won, D., Chiu, W., Lee, C., Bang, H., & Chen, L. (2024). Mandatory volunteerism: The role of perceived organizational support in perceived benefits and costs, and volunteer outcomes. *Managing Sport and Leisure*, *29*(5), 851–868. https://doi.org/10.1080/23750472.2022.2115394

Woolford, M., Joyce, C., & Polacsek, M. (2022). Strategies to optimize aged care volunteer recruitment and retention: A systematic review. *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, *65*(1), 45–62. https://doi.org/10.1080/01634372.2021.1923605

Wright, A. L., Willett, Y. J., Ferron, E. M., Kumarasamy, V., Lem, S. M., & Ahmed, O. (2024). Using social media to recruit participants in health care research: Case study. *JMIR Publications*, *26*. https://doi.org/10.2196/51751

Wymer, W., & Čačija, L. N. (2025). Brand strength's influence on volunteers' retention and support intentions. *Journal of Nonprofit & Public Sector Marketing*. https://doi.org/10.1080/10495142.2024.2448420

Xu, J., Jamil, R., Mai, X., Deng, L., Zhang, J., & Yang, Y. (2024). Volunteer management in nonprofit organizations: A bibliometric analysis. *SAGE*, *1*(23). https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244024128424

Appendix A: Participant Invitation Letter

Dear Participant,

You are invited to take part in a research study about effective strategies nonprofit leaders use to recruit volunteers. This study may help nonprofit professionals and researchers better understand successful leadership practices that enhance volunteer recruitment efforts in human aid organizations.

About the study:

- One 20–30-minute interview conducted via Zoom (audio recorded, not video recorded)
- Your name, organization, and any identifying details will not appear in the final published study
- Your participation will remain confidential, and your responses will be used for academic research purposes only

To participate, you must:

- Hold a leadership or managerial role in a nonprofit organization that provides human aid services
- Be located in Nashville, Tennessee
- Have at least one year of experience overseeing volunteer recruitment or volunteer program management

This interview is part of the doctoral capstone research for Noelle Pollack, a Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) student at Walden University. Interviews will be scheduled at your convenience during August 2025.

If you meet the criteria and are interested in participating, please contact Noelle Pollack at noelle.pollack@waldenu.edu. You are also welcome to share this invitation with other eligible nonprofit leaders who may be interested in contributing to this study.

Thank you for considering participation in this research.

Sincerely,

Noelle Pollack
Doctoral Candidate, Walden University
noelle.pollack@waldenu.edu

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol	
What you will do	What you will say–script
Introduce the interview and set the stage.	Hello, my name is Noelle Pollack. Thank you for taking the time to meet with me and participate in this doctoral study. The purpose of this study is to explore effective strategies nonprofit leaders use to strengthen volunteer recruitment. The main research question for this study is: What successful strategies do leaders of U.S. human aid nonprofit organization use to enhance the recruitment of volunteers? During this interview, I will ask you nine interview questions related to your experience and perspectives on volunteer recruitment. As a reminder, you have consented to participate in this study, and your participation is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Do you have any questions or concerns about the confidentiality of your participation? Do you have any questions about the informed consent form or the process before we get started? To start, would you please state your name, role, organization you work with and a little bit about the services you provide?
Watch for nonverbal cues. Paraphrase as needed. Ask follow-up probing questions to get more in depth.	1. What strategies do you use to enhance volunteer recruitment? 2. How do you measure the effectiveness of your recruitment strategies? 3. What factors do you believe most influence volunteer motivation, and how does your organization leverage those factors in its

	recruitment efforts? 4. What forms of training and development are provided to either staff or volunteers to build competence and confidence in volunteer recruitment? 5. How would you describe your leadership style, and how does it impact your ability to recruit volunteers? 6. How does your organization create a sense of community or belonging among volunteers to enhance long-term engagement and recruitment success? 7. In what ways does your organization recognize or incentivize employees or current volunteers to support recruitment efforts? 8. Can you share an example of an effective program or initiative that significantly improved volunteer recruitment? What made it successful? 9. Is there anything else about effective volunteer recruitment or management practices that you think are important to share but have not been covered in this conversation?
Wrap up interview thanking participant.	This concludes the interview. If you have any additional thoughts, insights, or examples you would like to share, please feel free to reach out any time. Thank you again for your time and for contributing to this study.
Schedule follow-up member checking phone call.	I will use today's audio recording to transcribe this interview along with my notes to summarize my interpretation of your responses. Once this is complete, I will email you with a copy of the transcript within five business days for your review. Please review this for any errors in my interpretation of your responses.

Introduce follow-up phone call interview and set the stage. Share a copy of the succinct synthesis for each individual question. Bring in probing questions related to other information that you may have found–note the information must be related so that you are probing and adhering to the IRB approval. Walk through each question, read the interpretation, and ask: Did I miss anything? Or, what would you like to add?	During this meeting, I will review a succinct synthesis of your responses to each question asked during out initial interview. Please let me know if I have missed anything or interpreted a response incorrectly. 1. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation–perhaps one paragraph or as needed. 2. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation–perhaps one paragraph or as needed. 3. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation–perhaps one paragraph or as needed. 4. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation–perhaps one paragraph or as needed. 5. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation–perhaps one paragraph or as needed. 6. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation–perhaps one paragraph or as needed. 7. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation–perhaps one paragraph or as needed. 8. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation–perhaps one paragraph or as needed. 9. Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation–perhaps one paragraph or as needed.