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Successful Strategies Used for Volunteer Retention in Nonprofit Organizations

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Walden University
2025

Abstract

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MS, Florida International University, 2012

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

The inability to retain volunteers critically undermines nonprofit leaders' capacity to deliver consistent and effective services to vulnerable community populations, threatening organizational stability and mission fulfillment. Persistent challenges with volunteer retention hinder nonprofit leaders' operations, reduce program reach, and drive up recruitment costs, weakening organizational sustainability. Grounded in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, this qualitative multiple case study explored effective strategies that nonprofit leaders use to retain volunteers and support organizational sustainability. Five nonprofit leaders from the U.S. East Coast were participants and selected because each demonstrated success in volunteer retention. The themes that emerged from thematically analyzing semistructured interviews and organizational documents were ensuring volunteer motivation alignment, creating an impactful volunteer experience, fostering communication and recognition, and enhancing adaptable volunteer engagement. One recommendation is that nonprofit leaders center volunteer well-being through values-based engagement strategies that foster belonging, purpose, and personal development. The potential implications for positive social change include empowering community members through meaningful engagement and promoting civic participation across diverse populations.

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Dedication

I dedicate this study to the late Mother Hurt, my “Beautiful” Granny. Oh, how proud you would be to see your name listed first. To the late Aaron Sewell, my Daddy, who always valued my education above all else, your belief in my potential has carried me through. To the late Karen Renee (My Nan-Nay), from childhood to adulthood, your love and support never changed. To the leading ladies of my life, The Hurt Sisters, this journey has truly been an “experience,” and your eagerness to see me finish has fueled my determination. And to Zaiah Bayah and the next generation of the Hurt lineage, may my example show you that no matter the hand life deals you, you can go all the way.

Acknowledgments

I am cheerfully grateful to my chair, Dr. Faint; it took three tries, but I eventually received my first choice. From the start, I knew you would guide me to the finish line, and you did. To my second committee member, Dr. Dooley, thank you for never letting me slack. Your consistent push and high standards made this work stronger.

To my Mommy, Sharon Hurt, your constant pride and encouragement were everything. To my Best Best and prayer partner, Callie Danielle, thank you for the countless hours of transcription and unwavering support. To my Fross, thank you for the challenges, resources, and leadership. You are consistently leading by example. To my Roni who never hesitated to say I was doing too much and should be focusing on school. Thank you.

To BMG, Rev. Dr. R. LaMont Smith, II, and my Chapel Hill Church family, thank you for pouring into me and celebrating this victory long before I crossed the line.

To my tribe, you filled my tank when I was empty. From random texts to powerful praise breaks, your love was a lifeline. Even if we didn't talk often, your presence was always felt and always right on time.

To everyone, especially TB, who asked, "How's school?" or "When is graduation," those soft nudges were needed more than you knew.

I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth. To Jesus Christ, thank You for allowing me to finish in Your timing, not mine. I am truly grateful for this life experience. May He give you the desire of your heart and make all

your plans succeed. May we shout for joy over your victory and lift up our banners in the name of our God. May the Lord grant all your requests (Psalm 20:4–5).

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Nonprofit leaders experience challenges with identifying effective strategies needed to retain volunteers. Organizations depend on volunteers to help fulfill the mission (Erks et al., 2021). Recruiting volunteers is only the first step to having a successful volunteer program. Retention is where nonprofit leaders must strategize to keep the volunteers engaged. Nonprofit leaders should consider developing volunteer strategies that align with the organization's mission and goals, recognize the value that is brought to the organization through the efforts of volunteers, understand the motivations of the volunteers individually and collectively, cater to volunteers based on their demographics, and provide professional development opportunities along with incentives.

Background of the Problem

The financial sustainability of nonprofit organizations (NPOs) is essential to the economic growth of communities in the United States. The NPOs rely on volunteers to fulfill its goals and missions (Curran et al., 2016). The NPOs' functionality is impacted by a shortage of volunteers. Volunteering in America reported that 30.3% of Americans volunteered through an organization in 2017. While the number has increased from previous years, only 45% of retained volunteers come back to continue assisting the NPOs. NPO leaders often face problematic issues when it comes to volunteer retention and turnover. Limited research on improving volunteer engagement in nonprofit organizations is available (McBey et al., 2017). Some researchers have shared volunteer engagement strategies to reduce turnover in NPOs (Renz, 2016). The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2015) reported that Americans spent an average of 52 hours volunteering

annually. Leaders must understand the driving forces behind volunteer engagement to improve volunteer retention due to the declining number of U.S. volunteers (Harp et al., 2017). Retaining qualified volunteers depends on a leader's ability to develop volunteer engagement strategies that can promote sustainability (Malinen & Harju, 2017). The sustainability of NPOs is critical to local economies because they ensure employment and provide valuable social services. To increase viability, it is important for NPO leaders to focus on identifying sustainability strategies to improve volunteer retention. Consequently, the purpose of this study is to explore leadership strategies to improve volunteer retention.

Problem Statement

Inefficient retention strategies contribute to the loss of volunteers within nonprofit organizations, which leads to unfulfilled missions (Vretenar et al., 2020). Approximately 60.7 million people volunteered through an organization between September 2020 and 2021 (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2022). The general business problem is that nonprofit leaders who do not strategically retain volunteers may experience reduced organizational performance and services. The specific business problem is that nonprofit leaders lack strategies to retain volunteers to support the organizational mission.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies nonprofit leaders use to retain volunteers to support the organizational mission. The target population consisted of nonprofit organizations on the United States' east coast

who successfully retained volunteers to optimize performance and services to the communities. The implications for positive social change included the potential for nonprofit leaders to develop strategies that encourage people to give their time and skills to local communities. With more volunteers, nonprofit organizations could offer and sustain more services for benefiting communities' citizens.

Nature of the Study

I proposed a qualitative method for this study. Researchers use a qualitative method to understand a phenomenon and explore human experience (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). My focus was to use interview data, documentation, and physical artifacts to understand a phenomenon and explore human experiences. Therefore, the qualitative method was expected to be appropriate. Researchers use the quantitative method to test a hypothesis using numerical data (Almalki, 2016). The quantitative method was not appropriate because I did not use numerical data to test a hypothesis in this study. Mixed methods combine qualitative data collected from human experiences with quantitative hypothesis testing to address the research question (de Block & Vis, 2018). I did not combine qualitative data collected from human experiences with quantitative hypothesis testing; hence, the mixed methods approach was not appropriate.

A multiple case study design was proposed for this study. Yin (2018) asserted that researchers use a case study design to explore multifaceted perspectives, using numerous data sources in a real-world context. I used multiple data sources to explore the research problem; therefore, a case study design was appropriate. A multiple-case researcher gains broader perspectives by expanding beyond one organization. The phenomenological

design is an approach used by researchers to understand the meaning of the participants' lived experiences (Adams & van Manen, 2017). Exploring the participants' lived experiences alone was not the intent of this study; therefore, the phenomenological design was not applicable. Through immersion, researchers use the ethnographic design to study cultural settings and behavioral patterns of human groups (Hoolachan, 2016). The intent of this study was not to explore a culture or behavioral patterns; therefore, I did not use the ethnographic design.

Research Question

What strategies do nonprofit leaders use to retain volunteers to support the organizational mission?

Interview Questions

1. What strategies do you use to retain your volunteers?
2. What are the strategic goals of volunteer retention?
3. How do you manage volunteer satisfaction?
4. How does your retention strategies satisfy the physiological needs of volunteers to increase services within local communities?
5. How does your retention strategies satisfy the safety of volunteers to increase services within local communities?
6. How does your retention strategies satisfy the social needs of volunteers to increase services within local communities?
7. How does your retention strategies satisfy the self-esteem needs of volunteers to increase services within local communities?

8. How does your retention strategies satisfy the self-actualizaion needs of volunteers to increase services within local communities?
9. How does your organization assess the effectiveness of its volunteer retention strategies?
10. What additional information can you provide that could enhance my understanding of the volunteer retention strategies used to support your organization's mission?

Conceptual Framework

I used Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory as the conceptual framework for this study. Maslow (1943) introduced motivation theory (MT) as a model that identified the basic level of human needs: (a) physiological, (b) safety, (c) social, (d) self-esteem, and (e) self-actualization. Knowing the volunteers are looking for social, self-esteem, and self-actualization fulfillment when they join an organization, the leader can use this information to ensure their experience meets these needs. Leaders can strive to have opportunities available that will allow the volunteer to move to a higher level of MT, which could promote motivation and retention. The MT provided a contextual lens for exploring and understanding successful nonprofit organizations' strategies to retain volunteers.

Operational Definitions

Extrinsic motivation: Extrinsic motivation is the expression of a behavior that is driven based on the external reward received for completing the task (Zaccone & Pedrini, 2019).

Intrinsic motivation: Intrinsic motivation is the expression of a behavior that is pursued purely for the pleasure and satisfaction that comes by doing the task (Zaccone & Pedrini, 2019).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Chen et al. (2018) stated that assumptions are factors believed to be true but lack proof. For this study, I made four assumptions. First, every participant would answer each question honestly and truthfully. Second, the participants in the research interviews would articulate their experience of the research phenomena. Third, nonprofit leaders lacked strategies to retain volunteers to support the organization's mission. Fourth, the themes and patterns that evolved from the input provided by leaders participating in this study would assist in addressing the research topic.

Limitations

Research limitations are potential weaknesses beyond a researcher's control (Guise et al., 2017). The first limitation in this study was that only one organization may not represent a broader population, and it is only applicable to one sample, which means the findings may not be generalizable to all organizations in all locations. The second limitation was that the use of a qualitative case study could limit the ability to research other methods and designs.

Delimitations

Delimitations are restrictions that researchers impose to focus the scope of a study (Rule & John, 2015). There were three delimitations to this study. The first delimitation

was the geographical location. The participants worked on the East Coast of the United States. The second delimitation was that the population of this study was limited to nonprofit leaders. The third delimitation was the use of MT as the only conceptual framework to analyze the study findings.

Significance of the Study

Contribution to Business Practice

Nonprofit executives and management may be able to use the study findings to develop strategies to increase volunteer retention. Many nonprofit organizations depend on volunteer support to fulfill the organizational mission, and having a high turnover rate can be detrimental to longevity (Erks et al., 2021). To ensure volunteer efforts are managed properly, it is important to understand the volunteers.

Further contributions to business practice may include the potential to improve existing and develop new strategies for nonprofit leaders to increase volunteer retention. The development of new retention strategies might create an efficient volunteer retention plan that improves an organization's performance to remain operational. Nonprofit leaders can create strategies, services, and programs to increase volunteer longevity when they expand their scope of knowledge regarding volunteer retention (Windon et al., 2022). The results of this study could be applied by professionals or practitioners to enhance the methods used for obtaining organizational sustainability. This study could also expand existing literature.

Implications for Social Change

When nonprofit organization leaders possess successful strategies to retain their volunteers, they may increase their ability to meet the community's needs. The growing significance of volunteering and the promotion of sustainable initiatives to local communities have benefited society (Bauer & Lim, 2019). Communities benefit when volunteers are used to improve economic growth and serve nonprofit organizations (Renz, 2016). Volunteers help communities thrive when volunteer positions fulfill the needs of volunteers and communities (Renz, 2016). Positive social change could include the potential for nonprofit leaders to develop strategies that encourage people to enjoy giving their time and skills to their local communities. Volunteers who give their time and skills could provide more services and improve the quality of life for local communities.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this study was to explore leadership strategies to improve volunteer retention. Within NPOs, volunteers are considered critical stakeholders. The leaders of NPOs depend on the work of volunteers to fulfill the mission, goals, and vision of the organization. In the United States, there is a small percentage of NPOs that can hire salaried employees, which leads to the demand for recruiting and retaining volunteers to achieve the organizational goals (Miller, 2018). This literature review included a critical analysis and synthesis of sources, including journals, seminal books, and reports related to the conceptual framework theory and nonprofit volunteer retention.

Literature for this section was obtained using various databases. I used Walden University's library to access the following databases: ABI/INFORM Collection, Academic Source Complete, Business Source Complete, SAGE Journals, EBSCOhost, Emerald Management, and ProQuest. I also used Google Scholar's database to locate articles. The literature research strategy included identifying peer-reviewed journals, U.S. government reports, qualitative case study articles, books published between 2018 and 2022, and seminal works. Walden University's Doctor of Business Administration program recommends that 85% of the peer-reviewed articles and publications be dated from 2018 and newer. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the currency of articles used for the development of this literature review.

Table 1

Summary of Total Search Sources

Resources	Pre 2018	2018-2023	Total #	Total %
Books/Seminal Work	13	2	15	12
Government Report	1	5	6	5
Peer-reviewed articles	36	53	87	73
Websites and magazines	0	5	5	4
Other	2	6	8	7
Total	52	69	120	100

The following keywords and phrases were used to facilitate the search for relevant literature: *nonprofit (several variations), volunteer (several variations), volunteering motivation, volunteer retention, volunteer engagement, volunteer management, volunteer incentives, nonprofit motivation, nonprofit organization, nonprofit volunteers, retention strategies, engagement,* and *mission statement*.

While studying volunteer retention strategies, a critical analysis of the following topics was included in the literature review: generational volunteering, volunteer management, volunteer incentives, volunteer burnout, and volunteer demographics. Each of these topics were analyzed in correlation to the conceptual framework, MT, for this study.

Conceptual Framework: Maslow's Motivational Theory

I used Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory as the conceptual framework for this study. Maslow (1943), a psychologist, determined that there is a hierarchy of needs from the primary level to a higher level that the needs of humans fall within. Maslow introduced motivation theory (MT) in 1943 as a model that identified the five basic levels of human needs. The five basic needs can be used by the NPO leaders to understand the needs and motivations of volunteers. By utilizing Maslow's five components that make up the hierarchy of needs theory, NPO leaders can understand the needs and motivations of volunteers.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs can be described in five tiers. Maslow's (1943) five basic needs are: (a) physiological, (b) safety, (c) social, (d) self-esteem, and (e) self-actualization. An individual must meet the basic lower-level needs before escalating to the higher-level needs (Maslow, 1970). Ștefan et al. (2020) state that physiological needs entail satisfying basic needs, such as hunger and thirst. Safety needs refer to feeling safe and secure. Healy (2016) noted that physiological and safety, are already met when volunteers join a nonprofit organization. Organizations primarily get volunteers to join at the third level, social. Stefan et al. noted that social needs encompass relationships and

having a sense of belonging. Once the volunteer satisfies the need of socialism, they can advance to the next levels, self-esteem, and self-actualization. Self-esteem involves feeling good about yourself, and self-actualization is reaching the level of your full potential (Ștefan et al., 2020). Fulfillment of each need allows you to reach the highest level of need.

Attaining self-actualization requires a desire for growth. Maslow (1943, 1954) believed that seeking fulfillment and personal growth is attributed to human motivation. Throughout one's life, the growth of self-actualization (Maslow, 1962) implies the necessity for discovery and personal growth. Growth needs do not derive from a lack of something, but rather from the internal desire to grow as a human (Ryan & Deci, 2020). A person could meet the highest level of need, self-actualization, once these growth needs have been substantially satisfied (McLeod, 2018). For Maslow, a person is always "becoming" and never remains static in these terms. In self-actualization, an individual discovers a meaningful life that is important to them.

There was a shift in the need for completion of the lower level to move forward. Maslow later adapted the MT to suggest that a lower-level need does not have to be met completely before emerging to the next need (Maslow, 1987). He noted that external factors and individual circumstances might cause the order of needs to fluctuate. For example, some people may value having self-esteem over feeling loved. For others, having the most basic needs can be superseded by the need for creative fulfillment.

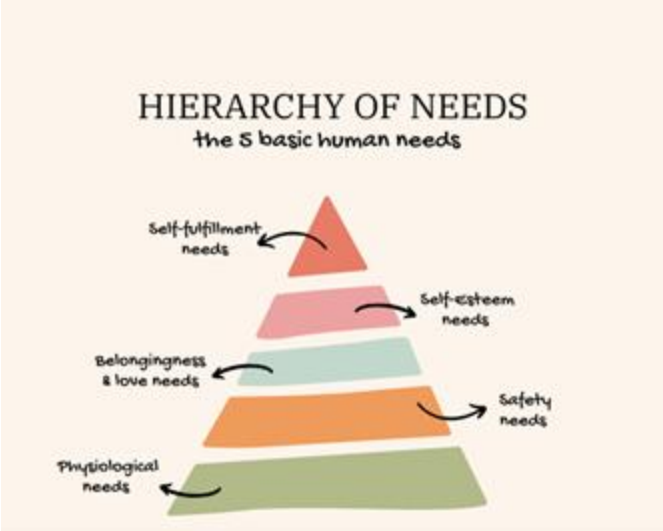
People are compelled to get involved when they feel their basic needs are met. Volunteers serve organizations with the expectation that they will be satisfied with the

experience and will have their needs met (Healy, 2016). Volunteers are motivated when they receive rewarding psychological stimulants while performing services (Costello, Homber & Secchi, 2017). When the service performed fulfills a person's need for motivation, people are more likely to begin and continue volunteering (Clary et al., 1998). Organizations can attract volunteers when they can meet the basic needs of the individual.

Knowing the volunteers are looking for social, self-esteem, and self-actualization fulfillment when they join an organization, the leader can use this information to ensure their experience meets these needs. Leaders can strive to have opportunities available that will allow the volunteer to move to a higher level of MT, which could promote motivation and retention. The MT may provide a contextual lens for exploring and understanding successful nonprofit organizations' strategies to retain volunteers.

Figure 1

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory



Note. This five-tier triangle is a model of human needs. The lower levels are considered basic needs and must be met before progressing to the higher-level needs. This model depicts deficiency needs and growth needs revealed by Maslow in 1943, with volunteers' needs arranged in order of priority. Adapted from *canva.com.*

Alternative Theories

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership was another theory that I considered using for my conceptual framework. In 1978, James Burns developed transformational leadership as motivating and inspiring followers and transforming them into better people. According to Burns, "leaders and followers help each other to advance to a higher level of morale and motivation." Under this leadership style, the leader is focused more on the individual completing the work.

The transformational leadership approach creates benefits for everyone. According to Burns (1978), the transforming approach creates significant change in the lives of people and organizations. It can be beneficial for an individual to volunteer for an organization with this leadership style because the ultimate goal is to make a difference in the lives of the community. Transforming leaders are a good example of working towards the benefit of the team, organization, and/or community.

Other theorists added to the transformational leadership concept. Bass (1985) further extended the work of Burns. Bass adds to transformational leadership by detailing how to measure its impact on follower motivation and performance. Bass introduced the four elements of transformational leadership: (a) idealized influence, (b) individualized

consideration, (c) inspirational motivation, and (d) intellectual stimulation. Bass (1997) posited that transactional leadership and transformational leadership are complementary to each other, opposed to contradictory. Bass redesigned Burns' theoretical arguments to make them applicable to organizational environments (Andersen, 2018). Bass's adaptations were intended to bridge the gap between transformational leadership and transactional leadership.

Reasons for volunteering vary by individual levels of motivation. Leadership styles that motivate, foster retention, and recognition can be used to improve the quality of nonprofit organizations (Kolar et al., 2016). Abraham Maslow's theory of human needs influenced Burns (1978) to understand that followers have needs and are willing to carry out tasks to the extent of personal satisfaction. I did not use this theory because the focus was on the needs of the volunteer and not the leader. There were two additional researchers that I reviewed prior to selecting Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of need: Herzberg's two-factor theory and Greenleaf's servant leadership theory. Neither theory was selected because it did not specifically focus on volunteers' motivations, but on the leaders and employees.

Figure 2

Transformational Theory

Note. This diagram explains how transformational leadership is most effective when a leader focuses on each element equally. The four I's were developed in 1980 by Barnard Bass. Adapted from *canva.com.*

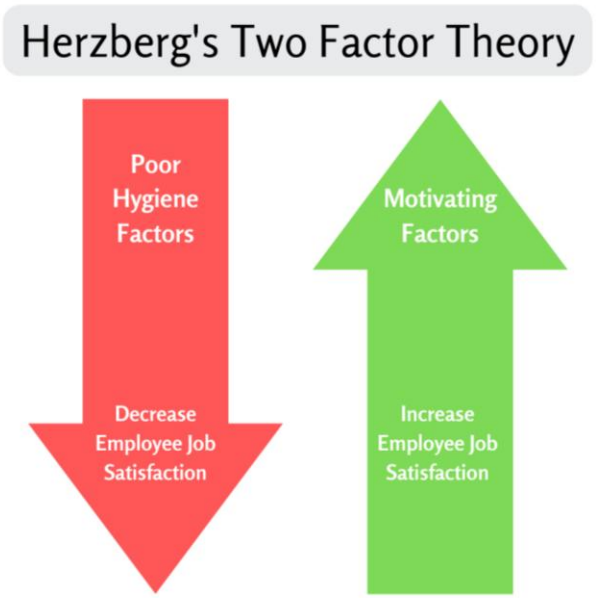
Herzberg's Dual Factor Theory

Frederick Herzberg developed the motivation-hygiene theory in 1959. This theory, now called the two-factor theory, was developed to promote workplace job satisfaction. Herzberg posited that there are two dimensions to job satisfaction: (a) hygiene and (b) motivation. Hygiene factors are characteristics associated with dissatisfaction that are linked to (a) work conditions, (b) supervision relations, (c) relationship with peers, and (d) compensation (Herzberg, 1959). Hygiene factors can be considered extrinsic factors that employees have no control over in the workplace.

Motivation factors link to satisfaction that (a) recognized growth, (b) achievement and responsibility, (c) job satisfaction, and (d) advancement. Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory is based on employees using intrinsic (motivation) factors within their job functions to find motivation (Alrawahi et al., 2020). Din et al. (2021) claim that both intrinsic and extrinsic factors are linked to employee motivation; however, most organizations focus on the outward needs of the employee and ignore the intrinsic needs altogether. This theory was not selected because this theory is suggested for use with employees rather than volunteers in a nonprofit organization.

Figure 3

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory



Note. The arrows symbolize the impact of job satisfaction factors found by Herzberg. The downward arrow represents the negative impact on job satisfaction when hygiene factors are poor. The upward arrow represents the

positive impact on job satisfaction when motivating factors are in place. Adapted from *canva.com.*

Servant Leadership Theory

In 1970, Robert Greenleaf developed the servant leadership. The SLT emphasis is on service to others and developing people to build a better tomorrow (Greenleaf, 1977). SLT is deeply rooted in the desire of a leader to make a positive impact on the lives of others (Heyler & Martin, 2018). Under the SLT, the leaders put the needs of others before their own. Leaders can experience increased teamwork, engagement, and performance from their volunteers when they focus on their followers' needs and desires. This theory was not selected because there are not enough studies done empirically to test this theory. Greenleaf (1970) admitted that this theory is unorthodox and might be difficult to operationalize because conceptualization is more of a way of life rather than a management technique.

Themes and Phenomena

Applying Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory to this study assisted in exploring themes and phenomena associated with successful strategies used for volunteer retention in nonprofit organizations. Utilizing MT provides a conceptual lens to examine the topic and identify behaviors that motivate volunteers. To help answer the research question, key search words were used to provide additional knowledge to expand the understanding. The themes outlined included (a) volunteers' value, (b) generational volunteers, (c) volunteer recruitment, and (d) volunteer retention.

Nonprofit Organizations

There are various characteristics of a nonprofit organization. Kim et al. (2021) define nonprofit organizations as private organizations that provide a public service to the community. Gupta et al (2018) specified that NPOs are either owned by "members" or do not have owners, such as religious organizations, communities, or nongovernmental organizations. Nonprofit organizations are not allowed to provide profits to anyone who has control over the organization. Fulfilling a mission for the community and staying economically sustainable is the purpose of NPOs. Arts, culture, health care, the environment, and religion sectors benefit from the work of NPOs.

There is a plethora of organizations for an individual to choose to volunteer with. Currently, there are more than 1.54 million registered nonprofit organizations in the United States, providing a wide variety of services (National Center for Charitable Statistics, 2022). Nonprofits focus on serving the public interest, supplying services to the disadvantaged, advocating for critical social causes, and pursuing community building, along with other activities. Additionally, all NPOs use similar policies and procedures to structure their operations to remain organized; are considered private organizations; restricted from disbursing earned income to the leadership; are self-governed; and concentrate on volunteerism (McDonald & Goodman, 2020). Though nonprofit organizations may vary in size of volunteers, employees, and the people served, they share similar goals.

Nonprofits are not driven by monetary value. An NPO is an organization that does not place obtaining a profit as the main reason for its existence, as defined by Khorin et

al. (2017). Nonprofit organizations can generate monetary profits and earn money, but leaders are not to allocate the funds to owners, board members, or stakeholders (Fischer et al., 2017). Khorin et al. (2017) asserted that NPOs' purpose is to achieve charitable, educational, cultural, and social goals for the less fortunate. Any funds solicited or obtained should be used for the sole benefit of the organization's operations and fulfillment of the mission. The expectation should be set by the leadership that, unlike for-profit organizations, individuals who choose to work for an NPO will not get compensated for their efforts.

A 501(c)(3) and 501(c)(4) are the two federal statutes that nonprofit organizational leaders can apply for. Conditions pertaining to the tax-deductible benefits, organizational operations, and fundraising are used in a 501(c)(3) or 501(c)(4) to refer to the type of provisions that are granted within that tax code (Bryson, 2018). An NPO with 501(c)(3) status can receive tax-deduction benefits for either individual or corporate donors, even though both statuses involve a tax exemption (Bryson, 2018). These are specific to the tax position of the NPO.

There are several organizations with federal nonprofit status. The National Center for Charitable Statistics (2018) reported that in the United States from 2006 to 2016, there was a 4.5% increase in the number of organizations with federal nonprofit status. There were a total of 1.54 million registered nonprofit organizations in 2016. These organizations consist of a wide range, including art, advocacy nonprofits, education, and health; business and professional associations; and labor unions. NPOs that gross less than $5,000 annually are not included in this number because they are not required to

report to the IRS (National Center for Charitable Statistics, 2020). Technically, there are more organizations with federal status than what is reported.

Nonprofit organizations that address the needs of the community rely on volunteers to share their time and skills. An economic impact is made by volunteers within nonprofit organizations when they contribute services and in-kind monetary donations (Huang et al., 2020). Huang et al. (2020) confirmed that greater volunteer retention is experienced when organizations actively cultivate relationships with their volunteers. Volunteers are motivated to continue working with an organization when they have greater self-determined motivations because their key needs have been satisfied (Huang et al., 2020). Nonprofit organizational leaders must do their part to retain the volunteers and ensure they want to continue to give of their time and resources.

Volunteer's Value

Contributions provided by volunteers help the leaders of nonprofit organizations to survive or thrive. Volunteers are needed to fulfill the NPO's mission and keep commitments to key stakeholders. Englert and Helmig (2018) defined volunteering as the act of freely providing time to benefit others, through unremunerated, planned, and proactive service provision in a formal organizational setting.

Volunteers are a value add to nonprofit organizations. The National Center for Charitable Statistics (2020) reported the value of the volunteers with the following statistics. In 2017, 64.4 million adults volunteered in the United States at least one time, which was 25.1% of the total population. There was a total of 8.8 billion hours volunteered collectively. The time spent volunteering was worth an estimated $256

billion. The value of volunteer time combined with private giving accounted for over half a trillion dollars ($435.31 billion); volunteer time represents 12.9% of that total.

While there is a large population of individuals volunteering for NPOs nationally, locally there is an even greater need for volunteers. If enough volunteers are not recruited and retained, NPO leaders need to reevaluate the services they provide and their operation (Prouteau & Tchernonog, 2021). An NPO would no longer exist or would struggle to remain in business without the contributions made by volunteers. Nonprofit organizations rely on volunteers to fill in the gap monetarily and in the budget (Rimes et al., 2017). Being required to hire employees to achieve the mission of the NPO would be cost prohibitive for nonprofit leaders. It is a cost saving benefit to utilize volunteers to meet the goals of the organization because hiring employees would be expensive and would lead to a restructuring of the process and the services offered to the community.

Nonprofit organizations profit from many services offered by volunteers. Even with over 64 million people volunteering in the United States there is limited research existence regarding their performance (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2019). The Corporation of National and Community Service (2019) expressed surprising concern for the lack of research on this subject because of the role volunteers play in several organizations. Those in the NPO sector generally receive a reduced amount of attention (Renz & Herman, 2016). Both the nonprofit sector and society are impacted by the work volunteers do (Maier et al., 2016). There should be a greater number of scholarly works in the nonprofit sector that showcase the contribution made by volunteers. Walk et al. (2019) suggested that nonprofit leaders should acknowledge the

value they place on their volunteers. Nonprofit organizations will benefit greatly from individuals who feel valued and motivated to volunteer their time and efforts.

Volunteer Motivation

Understanding the motivation behind volunteer involvement is important knowledge for nonprofit leaders. Cho et al. (2018) contended that research offers empirical evidence that motivations are the most critical determinants for activities related with volunteering. Neff (2017) asserted that individuals volunteer for NPOs for various reasons. Some of the reasons are for giving back, developing skills, to gain person satisfaction and/or to feel needed. There are varied levels and factors of motivation that causes individuals to volunteer (Clary et al., 1998). Smith et al. (2020) suggested motivators like promoting specific social values or the need to enhance career prospects have also been considered. Carrera et al. (2018) noted that altruism can be attributed to the motivation for volunteering for some individuals. Being that volunteers are vital to the core operations of a NPO, it is important to comprehend why volunteers choose this altruistic decision.

Volunteers use their personal experience to determine which organization, what role to fulfil and how often to give their time. There are several diverse groups from volunteers to choose from based on their interests. A specific organization can be selected based on personal interaction such as receiving assistance from a particular organization. Tonurist and Surva (2017) stated that people volunteer for a cause they genuinely believe in. Having a personal connection with a NPO would be something an individual could support and believe in.

Some believe that there are identifiable traits found in volunteers. Psychological research has indicated that certain character traits are associated with volunteering, and that individual attitudes drive the desire to volunteer (Smith et al., 2020). Individuals' decision to volunteer can be predicated upon the ask (Renz & Herman, 2016). Some volunteers volunteer only if they are asked directly to participate. Some individuals will volunteer if asked by family members and friends who are currently serving as a volunteer for a nonprofit organization. A direct ask rather than by phone or writing can impact the decision to volunteer. Identifying an organization that does work for a cause the individual is passionate about can also be a motivator for volunteering (Renz, 2016; Tonurist & Surva, 2017). Trends show that organizations can attract volunteers for varying reasons.

Personal growth is a motivator for volunteering. Numerous studies discovered professional development as a major motivational factor for volunteerism (Stefanick et al., 2020). This is common for particularly younger volunteers to middle-aged volunteers. Regardless of age, career-focused volunteers can benefit from professional development opportunities. Williamson et al. (2018) asserted that volunteering for professional development reasons may include exploring the work as learning new skills, networking purposes, and for potential career path. Additionally, professional development opportunities could facilitate the development of transferable skills for entry level workers to include on their resumes, as well as help experienced workers broaden their scope or skillset. Marta et al. (2014) reiterated the value younger volunteers place on

social and professional networking. Relationship building supports with retention of younger volunteers.

Motivation plays a substantial part in an individual's decision to volunteer, and research provides several motivating factors towards volunteerism. There is no age limit on the gratification experienced through the act of volunteering (Yamashita et al., 2019) According to Stefanick et al. (2020) a primary factor in volunteering is giving back to the community. Volunteers have shown a great deal of enjoyment after their first experience of giving back through a nonprofit organization. Career development, personal benefit and community service, are motivators for volunteering. Yamashita et al. (2019) identified that younger volunteers have a greater focus on experiences that impact their personal and career development, while older adults seek volunteer opportunity that provide emotionally meaningful activities.

Generational Volunteers

Many nonprofit organizations lean heavily on volunteers to fulfill their mission. Many NPOs pursue a volunteer base that includes both the maturity and experience of the older generations, in addition to the creative knowledge of the younger generations. Among each age group nonprofit leaders can identify similarities and differences in motivation and barriers to volunteerism (Yamashita et al., 2019). Understanding the differences and similarities helps with volunteer management.

The most recent data published by the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016) reported declining rates for teenaged and young adult volunteers ages 16-24. Statistic shows that over a 5-year period volunteerism in teens and young adults, with a

variety of contributing factors identified within the research. The report volunteer rate for this age group went from 22.5% in 2011 to 21.8% in 2015. There has been an increase in teenage volunteering recently, however the exact rates were not reported nor could be found elsewhere to compare recent trends (United States Census Bureau, 2019).

Nonprofit organizations have created volunteer management practices that effectively recruit and retain one generation of volunteers. There are several factors that can dictate the best type of volunteer for an organization and what is needed for each generation to thrive while volunteering. The next section will look at several generations and the characteristics of volunteering for their specific age group.

Silent Generation

The Silent generation was birthed from 1925 to 1945. As of 2021, their age ranges from 76 to 96 years (Gil-Lacruz et al., 2020). This generation place high values on hard work, discipline, loyalty, family and savings. The characteristics of this generation consist of being cautious, considerate, mentors, inclusive, and successful. Thornhill (2010) noted that volunteering for this group of individuals is the norm, constantly impacting change in their community with hopes to be the example for future generations. Volunteering within this group fills a gap of feeling needed and sharing expertise with younger individuals. Moreover, volunteering with the Silent generation can help to protect the elderly against the hazards of retirement, physical decline, and inactivity (Gil-Lacruz et al., 2020). It would be considered a win for all parties involved with volunteering for this generation. The NPO receives help with fulfilling a mission and free labor while the volunteer gains long term health benefits.

Baby Boomer Generation

The Baby Boomer generation was born during 1946 to 1964. As of 2021, their age range is 57 to 75 years (Hansen & Slagsvold, 2020). This generation places value on leading a healthy lifestyle, obtaining personal gratification, being competitive, focusing on self, and working (Hansen & Slagsvold, 2020). It is important that nonprofit organizations offer volunteer roles that match interests, values, and preferences (Hansen & Slagsvold, 2020). It is also important for nonprofit leaders to consider offering flexible opportunities. The Baby Boomers are often self-absorbed and want to monopolize the time they spend. Having options for this generation would combine community service with the pursuit of self-actualization and self-interest.

Generation X

The Generation X generation was birthed from 1965 to 1980. As of 2021, this generation ages range from 41 to 56 (Kamber, 2017). Gen X'ers value informality, diversity, life balance, technology, globalization, and fun. This generation can be describes as being serious about life, having high stress, being very spiritual, being loyal in relationships, self-reliant, being survivors, and possessing a level of skepticism. This generation grew up seeing their parents work very hard and therefore require work life balance to spend time with family (Miranti & Evans, 2017). Because this group has a level of skepticism, they are not quick to volunteer. They must do their research and ensure that the organization is trustworthy. Also, Gen X'ers look for opportunities that are challenging for them and will help them to develop the skillset (Finkelstien, 2010). Gen X'ers can be considered lifelong learners.

Millennial Generation

The Millennial generation, sometimes referenced as Generation Y, was born during the time frame of 1981 to 2000. As of 2021, the ages of Millennials are 21 to 40 (AbouAssi et al., 2021). The things this generation values are education, diversity, technology, civic engagement, and confidence. Millennials can be described as multitaskers, having a short attention span, being overscheduled and always busy, optimistic and idealistic, individualistic yet group-oriented, and ambitious guidance seekers. Jardim and Marques da Silva (2018) noted this group as being antisocial and self-centered. Millennials are considered important contributors to nonprofit organizations (Lee, 2019). Shields (2009) conducted a study that showed that Millennial's lifestyle supports the way they volunteer. A volunteer experience should include the things they value and compliment their characteristics.

Generation Z

Generation Z was born beginning in 2000. As of 2021, this generations ages from 0 to 21 (Perić et al., 2019). Generation Z is considered to be the digital natives, being born into the world where technology innovation is at its peak (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2021). This generation is financially-minded, socially-minded, diverse, educated, independent thinkers and politically engaged (Parker & Igielnik, 2020). While this generation has similarities with the previous generation, Millennials, there are subtle differences. This group is expected to become conscientious, engaged stewards of the world. Cho et al. (2018) noted that Generation Z volunteer habits are based upon their desire to be entrepreneurs. With high exposure to technology and high engagement with

social media, this generation is always aware of the need and impact of volunteering. Generation Z'ers volunteer when they see they can make a visible change and showcase it for others to see and get involved globally (Perić et al., 2019). Volunteering would be beneficial to gain knowledge and expertise for their future career goals.

Volunteer Strategies

Obtaining volunteers to assist with an organization does not happen magically. There is effort, work and strategy that must be exerted to ensure volunteers participate in fulfilling the mission. It is important that nonprofit leaders take time to strategize how to effectively recruit and retain volunteers to reduce high turnover.

Recruiting Motivated Volunteers

The role of a volunteer in an NPO is vitally important. Leaders are responsible for the recruitment of volunteers. The attraction of volunteers to a specific organization can be for several reasons. The recruitment strategy is paramount to attracting and selecting volunteers that are suitable for the organization (Nencini et al., 2016). The type of volunteer and organization can dictate the exact strategy that should be used.

The way an organization is led, contributes to an individual's decision to volunteer. Hamerman and Schneider (2018) posited that a volunteers' readiness to volunteer can be driven by the perception of organizations volunteer management style. According to Willems and Dury (2017), people are hesitant to volunteer for several reasons: physical boundaries, social boundaries, non-accountable, stress from volunteering, shortage of opportunities, lack of skills, scarcity of time and lack of benefits. Nonprofit leaders should develop an effective recruitment strategy that includes

the components to ensure the most eligible volunteers are able to contribute to the success of the organization.

Recruiting is a technique used to obtain volunteers. McGinley et. al (2018) and Yen (2017) defines recruitment as the process by which organizations increase their staff through the acquisition of additional people. Leaders should think about the volunteers' personal values and motivations, to keep them working at their best (Vareilles et al., 2017; Willems & Dury, 2017). Volunteers look for NPOs whose values align with their interest (Dorner & Rózsa, 2018; Tonurist & Surva, 2017). The benefits of volunteering, role of the volunteer, volunteer testimonials, work environment or culture may be helpful when recruiting. Another impactful technique may be to include personal testimonials and stories from previous volunteers (Claxton-Oldfield et al., 2018). Successful recruitment has this information clearly communicated during recruitment efforts.

Requests that are personal and direct is a method to recruit volunteers. This influences volunteers' decision to get involved more than written and telephonic requests. Renz and Herman (2016) asserted that individuals tend to volunteer with organizations when they are asked directly. This technique addresses the volunteers' intrinsic needs and can be rewarding (Tonurist & Surva, 2017). Meeting these needs can lead to volunteer retention.

Marketing is an important aspect to recruiting volunteers. Traditional and internal marketing strategies are used by nonprofit leaders to recruit volunteers to help fulfil the organizations goals (Stankiewicz et al., 2017). Generally, there is not a marketing budget for volunteer organizations, and they must find strategies that are low-cost and/or free

including referrals (Lee, 2021.). Bright and Hadden (2017) considers posters, flyers, social media, and websites as low-cost recruitment marketing tools. Attraction and recruitment of volunteers is successful when time and effort is put into skills and talents required, the provision of volunteers' needs, and the problem of time constraint (Febriani & Selamet, 2020). To properly recruit, organizations should consider adding a marketing budget.

Social media platforms have begun to impact volunteerism. The usage of current professional and social influences should be considered to promote altruistic volunteerism (Shier et al., 2020). There are benefits to using social media as a recruiting strategy within nonprofit organizations. Social media is a tool that can help recruit individuals to fill volunteer positions within the organization. Social media recruiting defined by Priyahashini et al., (2017) is the usage of social media to gain the attention of potential candidates to apply and advertise position vacancies. Nonprofit organization leaders could use social media to help communicate alignment and value they bring to the volunteers, through the efforts they make to the public (Milde & Yawson, 2017). Milde and Yawson encourages nonprofit leaders to be creative and innovative with social media. This platform allows an organization to recruit volunteers, engage with community/stakeholders/donors, raise money, build awareness about their cause, and share information. Volunteers will have a greater interest in volunteering their time when they have more information about the organization.

There are companies that have successfully used digital marketing strategies. Digital marketing tools that have been successful recruiting volunteers include Facebook,

Instagram, and Twitter in addition to specific volunteer websites like Volunteer Match (Lee, 2020). Using social media strategies will be profitable for both the volunteer and the organization because the volunteer will have prior access to the mission and values before taking the time to volunteer (Cadet & Carroll, 2019). Cao (2018) and Gross & Rottler (2019) suggest another way to gain interest in recruiting efforts is to utilize emotional persuasiveness within recruitment messages. Those who have had positive experiences within the nonprofit organization should be used to help recruit additional volunteers being that marketing is very influential.

For-profit and nonprofit organizations are very different. There are distinctions between a for-profit organization and nonprofit organization which does not allow the same concepts to be applied to volunteers in a nonprofit sector (Bartram et al., 2017; Kappelides et al., 2020; Vantilborgh & Van Puyvelde, 2018). Since individuals choose to volunteer and are not being monetarily compensated, nonprofits tend to lack structure for managing volunteers, compared to for-profit organizations that have more control over employees (Cady et al., 2018; Ward & Greene, 2018). Kolar et al. (2016) indicates volunteers should be selected based on their skillset, availability, and passion for the organization. For recruitment to be effective it is best to have volunteers who aligns with the organization. Those responsible for selecting volunteers should have a validation process like employees being hired for a paid position.

All volunteers are not a good fit for every organization. While volunteers are a necessity for NPOs to function, research indicates there could be additional problems from accepting volunteers just because they applied (Babcock, 2020). Not all volunteers

are the best suited for the roles needed, even if they have a desire to donate their time. Babcock (2020) and Stefanick et al. (2020) confirms that declining an offer to a volunteer should take place when the volunteer or the organization does not benefit from the agreement. Even though volunteers are not paid, the organization invests in training volunteers. If a volunteer decides to leave soon after being trained that is money lost. It is also important to note that volunteers with negative mannerisms and attitudes can adversely impact the organization. McNamee and Peterson (2016) address the issue of volunteer recruitment being challenging. Organizations must think about the motivations of the volunteer which could result in sporadic volunteerism and decreased long-term commitments (Stukas et al., 2016). Recruitment does not only involve effectively obtaining volunteers but also impacts the retention, turnover, and motivation in volunteers.

Retaining Volunteers

After recruiting volunteers, nonprofit leaders must strive to retain them. Volunteer retention is a critical aspect of nonprofit leaders' ability to sustain the organization and achieve the mission (Milbourn et al., 2019). Maier et al (2016) describes retention as the volunteer's external expression of satisfaction. New volunteers typically express enthusiasm and over time because of communication, training, rewards, and management practices resent their role (Moghaddam et al., 2018). Aboramadan et al. (2019) suggested that volunteers can experience a lack of commitment due to unpaid work. On the contrary commitment is higher when both the organization and personal values align.

Gathering feedback from volunteers can be a retention strategy. Cady et al. (2018) posited that disengagement is less likely and volunteers' retention is greater when feedback is encouraged, and the direction and vision is communicated by the leaders (McBey et al., 2017; Piercy & Kramer, 2017). Additional studies show that NPOs motivate and retain volunteers when they are integrated into the operation and there is high regard for their criticism, concerns, and efforts (McFarland, 2018). Commitment, trust, and satisfaction is a result of volunteer participation (Harrison et al., 2017). Kramer and Danielson (2017) explain that retention is obtained when the volunteers have clarity in their role, meanwhile, ambiguity in their roles stems to adverse satisfaction and reduced retention. Relationships are developed, organizational cultural norms and belonging are identified when the volunteer's role is clarified (Kramer & Danielson, 2017). All are steps to creating retention planning.

Volunteer retention can be significant challenge for NPOs, despite the number of volunteers. In addition to being a challenge it is a recurring problem (Moghaddam, 2018). There are several restrictions volunteers face when committing their time. Leaders must be cognizant of the limitations in addition to the volunteer's work-life balance and reason for volunteering (Harp et al, 2017). Receiving training and professional development are key components that drive people to volunteer (Yamashita et al., 2019). Retention requires leaders to develop retention strategies that fulfil their reason for committing. Focusing on these areas can lessen turnover and dissatisfaction.

Volunteers would like to know if there is a retention strategy developed. Many volunteers choose to remain engaged with an organization when there is implementation

of best practices and goals specifically for retention (Malinen & Harju, 2017). Neff (2017) recounted an inverse relationship between volunteer engagement and volunteer activity; when there is a decrease in volunteer activity there should be an increase in engagement by leaders at nonprofit organizations. Motivation is critical when creating methods to retain and engage volunteers (Chacón et al., 2017; Lorente-Ayala et al., 2019). Several researchers suggest retention can be increased by incorporating recognition of volunteers in addition to access to training and development opportunities (Einolf, 2018; Hurst et al., 2017). There are several options for nonprofit leaders to consider when working to retain their volunteers.

Training

Nonprofit organizations with volunteers should incorporate training into their program. Zievinger and Swint (2018) observed that training is an investment into the volunteer and motivates them to stay involved with the organization. When volunteers receive extensive training, they feel valued and prepared to be successful in their role. Continuous training should be offered to the volunteers by nonprofit leaders. Bright and Hadden (2017) suggests that specialized training boosts volunteers' confidence and self-esteem which can lead to a positive effect on the longevity of their engagement.

When individuals volunteer, the organization should ensure volunteers gain skills, and increase their competencies through training that aligns with the organization's values and goals (Cho et al., 2020). Volunteers are most effective when there are clear guidelines on organizational expectations, duties and responsibilities, and training.

Grossman and Furano (1999) further noted that retention is improved when training and development is provided by nonprofit leaders.

When volunteers leave, leaders should try to replace them. It can be costly to train new volunteers that replace those that leave (Veres et al., 2019). Successful training programs incorporates information pertaining to policies and procedures, roles and responsibilities, expectations, volunteer support, communication channels, networking and collaboration opportunities, educational development, and organization support (Woolford et al., 2021). Providing resources/benefits in several areas should encourage nonprofit leaders to ensure they have long term volunteers that are motivated to stay engaged with the organization (Palwasha et al., 2018). Proper training will reduce turnover and decrease the amount spent training new volunteers.

Training benefits are an incentive for volunteers to remain devoted to an organization. The excitement exhibited by new volunteers can be lost when they are not managed properly. Feyerabend et al. (2018) found that the lack of communication, rewards/recognition and training can lead to disinterest in an organization. Often, volunteers are motivated to volunteer because of the training and development opportunities (Dhanpat et al., 2018). Zollo et al. (2019) posited that there is a positive impact on volunteers who receive effective training and development from organizations they work with, which increases their organizational commitment and satisfaction.

Motivation by Rewards and Recognition

Nonprofit leaders should be aware of volunteer motivation when trying to recruit and retain volunteers. Volunteers' motivations and personal values should be at the

forefront of the organization culture in order to ensure they are working at max capacity (Oo et al., 2018; Vareilles et al., 2017). Since volunteers are working independently of a paycheck, they are considered to have intrinsic motivations (Lorente-Ayala et al., 2019; Piercy & Kramer, 2017). Bendaravičienė et al. (2019) and Feigin et al. (2018) suggests that altruistic intensions motivate volunteers to participate in nonprofit organizations causing them to work and not anticipate any type of reward for their actions. The traits include values, desire for personal growth, empathy, prosocial behaviors and, community engagements (Kolar et al., 2016). While the motivation levels for volunteering may differ for everyone, leaders can improve the quality of volunteering by retention and recognition programs.

Using recognition and reward programs can be used to motivate volunteers in nonprofit organizations. Walk et al. (2019) confirmed that volunteer's motivations can be enhanced when recognition and rewards are used properly. Graves (2015) noted that reward and recognition programs are less effective when they are not accessible. Rewards are incentives used by leadership to acknowledge the work accomplished by the volunteers. Rewards can be tangible or intangible and will require a budget (Hallman & Zehrer, 2019). Recognition is another way to motivate volunteers. Recognition is putting the spotlight on volunteer efforts at a low-cost. Positive feedback, encouragement, praise, and appreciation are ways to show recognition. Focusing on volunteer recognition positively impacts volunteers' motivation. Recognition is a great way to reduce turnover, increase retention and encourage higher engagement. Leaders that understand volunteer motivation can develop sustainable retention strategies.

Transition and Summary

Retaining volunteers in nonprofit organizations is more than reducing the amount of turnover. Nonprofit leaders must consciously develop and implement a strategy that does the following: align with the organizations mission and goals, recognizes the value that is brought to the organization through the efforts of volunteers, understand the motivations of the volunteers individually and collectively, cater to volunteers based on their demographics and provide professional development opportunities along with incentives. In addition, work must be done to grab the attention of the volunteers through recruiting efforts.

Utilizing theories provide formal explanations of observations that nonprofit leaders can use to help solve internal problems. There are several theories researchers have used to help identify the motivation behind volunteering in nonprofit organizations. In this study, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Transformational Leadership, Herzberg's Two Factor and Servant theory were identified as potential theories to help understand the issue of volunteer retention. Maslow's hierarchy of needs was selected as the best theory to use in this study.

Maslow's motivation theory suggests that nonprofit leaders should understand the basic level of human needs and ensure that the volunteering opportunities align accordingly (Healy, 2016). Nonprofit organizations are catering to the volunteers' higher-level needs of the MT: social, self-esteem and self-actualization (Huang et al., 2020). Engagement in a nonprofit organization fulfills the need of being socially connected with people and the community. By applying targeted and personalized

recruiting efforts for engagement, the organization satisfies the social and self-esteem needs of potential volunteers. Acknowledging the value the volunteers bring to the existence and progression for the nonprofit organization appeals to the self-esteem level (Prouteau & Tchernonog, 2021). Investing in volunteers through training and recognition is a form of motivation that increases both the self-esteem and retention of volunteers (Trent et al., 2017). Self-actualization can be achieved through volunteering when all the strategies are applied. Generationally, volunteer's motivations differ. When a volunteer has been given all the tools to be successful in their role, their efforts are both impacting social change and their desire to be their best.

In Section 1, I present the study's background emphasizing the business problem and purpose statement. I discuss the study's nature, research questions and interview questions. I identify the conceptual framework of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, operational definitions, assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and significance. This section includes a review of the academic and professional literature that supports this study. The literature review provides a detailed analysis of Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory and contrasting theories, nonprofit organizations, volunteers' values and motivations, generational characteristics of volunteers, and volunteer strategies for recruitment and retention. Section 2 includes details on the basis for research to include the purpose statement, the researcher's role, participants, the research method and design, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection instruments and techniques, data organization techniques, data analysis, reliability and validity, and a synopsis of section 3. Section 3 presents the study's findings, professional practice application,

implications for social change, recommendations for further research on this topic, followed by reflections and the conclusion.

Section 2: The Project

The focus of my study was to explore volunteer retention strategies used by nonprofit leaders. In this section, I explain the selected approach for exploring strategies to retain nonprofit volunteers. The topics discussed in Section 2 are the purpose of this study, the role of the researcher, the participants, the research method and design, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection instruments and techniques, data organization technique, data analysis, and reliability and validity.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies nonprofit leaders use to retain volunteers to support the organizational mission. The target population consisted of nonprofit organizations on the United States' east coast who successfully retained volunteers to optimize performance and services to the communities. The implications for positive social change include the potential for nonprofit leaders to develop strategies that encourage people to give their time and skills to local communities. With more volunteers, nonprofit leaders may offer and sustain more services to benefit the citizens of a community.

Role of the Researcher

Within this study, I served as the primary data collection instrument. In a qualitative study, the researcher's role involves the development of a research question, selection of appropriate research method, collection of data, and data analysis (Khankeh et al., 2015; Yin, 2018). My role as the researcher included immersing myself in all aspects of this study, selecting participants, selecting an appropriate research method,

collecting data, transcribing recordings, analyzing data, and documenting findings. I am also responsible for protecting the integrity of the research by ensuring the protection of participants' personal information.

I have more than 5 years of experience working with nonprofit organizations and over 25 years of experience as a nonprofit volunteer. I work for a nonprofit institution that relies solely on volunteers to fulfill the mission. Possessing professional experience in a study area fosters credibility (Berger, 2015). However, I did not have direct professional or personal connections with the research participants.

Researchers should be respectful of the participants' rights and keep all information shared secure and confidential (Karagiozis, 2018). Internal review boards (IRBs) monitor research being conducted ethically when human subjects are involved (Clapp et al., 2017). The Belmont Report contains ethical principles such as (a) respect of persons, (b) beneficence, and (c) justice (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979). Furthermore, the Belmont Report details the ethical principles that must be observed by a researcher when conducting research. I complied with both Walden's IRB and the Belmont Report and upheld ethical practices related to conducting research.

Member checking is a technique used to verify the accuracy of the researcher's interpretation of interview data provided by interviewees (Birt et al., 2016). Birt et al. further stated that member checking is used to establish the tenet of credibility in trustworthiness. Researchers should mitigate any form of researcher bias or opinions by applying standardized techniques designed to limit bias, such as using an interview protocol to ensure each interview question is asked the same way each time with each

participant (Jordan, 2018). A researcher should also apply their own professional interview capabilities by setting personal opinions aside and reporting interviewee perspectives as provided without assuming or drawing conclusions that reflect the interviewer's experiences and beliefs. To minimize personal bias or cultural viewpoints, I followed the interview protocol (Appendix) to administer interview questions; record participant responses, overcome unexpected situations, auditing and bracketing, and ensure unbiased data collection techniques are used. I also conducted member checking to establish data representation of participants' responses, and not my viewpoint or biases.

Qualitative researchers depend on interview protocols to attain commonality and add to the consistency and reliability of the research (Fryer et al., 2016). In each interview, I asked each participant the same interview questions. In addition to removing bias, I used the interview protocol to keep each interview focused on the topic, maintain clear communication, and guide the data collection process (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Following the steps mentioned above allowed uniformity and provided concise data with each interview.

Participants

In a qualitative study, participants' selection process is significant to the results and quality of the data (Flick, 2018). Marshall and Rossman (2016) detailed the importance for researchers to develop an action plan for research, particularly strategies for selecting participants. While the selection process can be challenging, it is essential for researching a qualitative study.

The selection criteria for participants in this study were leaders of a nonprofit organization from the East Coast of the United States who were willing to sign the informed consent form to participate in the study. Email and telephone calls were used to contact the participants. The participants came from the East Coast of the United States who met the criteria and aligned with the overarching research question.

Trust is gained from the participants through honesty (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I gave an honest statement of the purpose of this study to build rapport and trust with each of the participants. I also answered any inquiries, addressed concerns of participants, and confirmed the participants' confidentiality. Curran et al. (2019) stated that the importance of participants providing consent is to show cooperation with the researcher throughout the study. Each participant received an email with a detailed explanation of the process and expectations. After emailing the participants, I followed up with a call to address any concerns. Each interview was conducted with intentionality and consistency.

Research Method and Design

Research Method

The three approaches in research methodology are quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. In a qualitative study, a researcher collects data through interviews, observations, and archived documents (Yin, 2018). In a quantitative method, the researcher uses statistical analyses and numerical data (Matusiak, 2017). The mixed methods researcher combines both the qualitative and quantitative methods. Researchers often use quantitative and mixed methods when testing a theory (Venkatesh et al., 2013).

To obtain accurate and meaningful results, a researcher must select the appropriate method (Yin, 2018). When selecting a research method, the researcher should select the method that provides the best chance at answering the research question and consider whether the purpose is to identify themes or a theory.

When using mixed methods to conduct research, it is essential to be knowledgeable of both the qualitative and quantitative approaches. In mixed-methods, researchers should have an adequate understanding of both qualitative and quantitative approaches (Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2015). Many novice researchers lack sufficient comprehension of both research approaches, which is vital to efficient implementation of mixed-methods (Maxwell, 2016). As a student scholar, I can be categorized as a novice researcher and typically do not have the expertise to conduct both an inductive exploration and deductive analysis of research findings in one study.

This study used the qualitative research method. The data collected using this method allowed me to analyze this topic based on identified trends, themes, and patterns (Harrison & Rouse, 2015). Open-ended questions are used to get insight into the research problem with the qualitative method (Leed & Ormrod, 2016). The qualitative researcher collects and analyzes data from various sources to explore the research phenomenon (Morse, 2015). Open-ended interview questions are the primary means of gathering data in this study. I used NPO leaders, volunteers, and other forms of supporting documentation from the organization. The qualitative method was most suitable over the other methods because I gained insight into the participant perspectives of understanding

the strategies nonprofit leaders used to retain volunteers to support the organizational mission.

Research Design

To determine the best design for my research study, I considered three major qualitative research designs to explore: (a) phenomenology, (b) ethnography, (c) case study. Each design has a specific focus and provides different outcomes. As the researcher, it is important to understand what type of data is being sought after. That helped to select the appropriate design for a qualitative study.

If the researcher wanted to explore only the human lived experiences attributed to a phenomenon, this could be a preferred design (Ingham-Broomfield, 2015). My intent is to explore lived experiences along with perspectives, supporting additional data such as documents and physical artifacts as the key elements of the data collection process. Researchers use an ethnographic approach to study social customs, behaviors, beliefs, and practices that define a culture over a prolonged period (Cox et al., 2017; Percy et al., 2015). A researcher would select this design if they planned to evaluate a group for a long period and share the results with persons outside of the culture.

Researchers select a case study design as the preferred method when (a) control of the events does not belong to the researcher, (b) the researcher focuses on current events rather than historic events, and (c) how and why are the main research questions (Yin, 2018). Researchers use case studies to investigate one or more small social entities or situations using multiple sources of data. Multiple case studies increase the possibility of direct replication, which makes the conclusions resulting from independent cases more

powerful than those from a single case (Yin, 2017). A multiple case study design was the most appropriate design for this research study. Based on the requirements, I was able to accurately study the strategies leaders of NPOs use to retain volunteers using the multiple case study design.

When researchers use a case study design, data saturation is considered an important component. Data saturation occurs when the addition of new data, during the interview process, adds no new information, and the interviewer ceases the interview process. According to Yin (2018), data saturation is accomplished when the interview responses provide no additional information. Sim et al. (2018) mentioned that the focus of qualitative research should not be maximizing numbers but attaining data saturation. Therefore, I ensured data saturation by interviewing participants and reviewing company documentation until no additional themes appeared.

Population and Sampling

In this study, I used purposeful sampling to identify and select participants. Benoot et al. (2016) described purposeful sampling as a credibility tool used to select participants based on the study objective. Purposeful sampling is used to select a group of people with similar experiences and meet specified criteria to potentially be interviewed in a qualitative study (Luciani et al., 2019). Qualitative researchers seek individuals who can provide insight into the research problem investigated.

An appropriate sample size varies upon the scope of the research (Yin, 2018). Research sample size is the point in the interview process where the collection of data is exhausted, no longer adds new information, and the interview process ceases (Hennink et

al., 2017). Researchers choose a sample size conducive to collecting rich, thick data. Researchers continue conducting interviews until the addition of data adds no new information and the interview process ceases (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I estimated for this study that the interview process would require at least 5 participants to provide a robust volume of data for analysis.

There are two points for data saturation, the first point is through data collection and occurs during interviews when the addition of new data adds no new information, and the interview process ceases. The second point is through data analysis, where the determination of codes and clusters is exhausted prior to the identification of themes. (Luciani et al., 2019). I obtained data saturation by continuing the interview process until the addition of data adds no new information, and at that point, the interview process ceased.

For this study, the criteria for selection were leaders who were a part of a nonprofit organization and managed volunteers. Gaus (2017) suggested that participant selection for qualitative research involves identifying a group of individuals with similar experiences who meet specific criteria to be eligible to participate in the interview process of this study. Once candidates are identified as eligible for interviews, and they consent to the interview process, I set up a schedule for interviewing each individual. I collected data from each participant by asking interview questions outlined in the interview protocol, until the interview process reached data saturation, which is the point at which the addition of new data adds no new information, and the interview process ceases.

I used Zoom and the telephone to conduct my interviews. Research interviewees should be familiar with the location where the interview is conducted (Ahmed et al., 2018). The collection of study data can be enhanced when the research interviewer considers the impact of the interview site (Vashirbara Lerner et al., 2019). Conducting the interviews virtually still allowed the participants to be in an environment that they are familiar with.

Ethical Research

This section will outline in detail the consent process, participant withdrawal procedure, incentives, data protection, and participant confidentiality. I sent an email invitation to potential participants outlining the details of the study. The email included the purpose of the study along with benefits and takeaways for choosing to participate. Participation was voluntary, and any participant had the right to withdraw from the study at any time. The study only included the information of those participants who showcased a desire to be involved with the study.

Before contacting individuals to participate in the study, I followed the process to receive approval to conduct research from Walden University Institutional Review Board. I ensured that all participants indicated their willingness to participate, and the study did not violate any ethical guidelines. Potential participants received a request to sign an informed consent form to ensure they understood their role in the study. Researchers use consent forms to protect the privacy of individuals willing to participate in studies (Wallace & Sheldon, 2015); there should be no negative consequences to any individual who declines to participate. The consent form informed participants to contact

me as soon as possible to withdraw from participating. The informed consent process explicitly stated that participation is voluntary and strictly based on their interest in the study. There were no incentives for agreeing to participate. A copy of the findings of the study were available to all participants once completed.

I discussed the ethical issues regarding confidentiality to ensure the integrity of the relationship with the participants. Yin (2019) suggested that data collection, data storage, and data analysis must be secure to ensure the protection of the rights of the participants and to preserve their privacy. Marshall and Rossman (2016) recommendation for qualitative researchers to protect the participants identity is to assign numbers to each participant to protect their identity. I used alphanumeric numbers instead of names to identify the participants ensured privacy. Each of the participants were assigned a code such as C1 and C2, to ensure confidentiality. The researcher should not share any information of the participants, including name or any organization affiliations (Gaya & Smith, 2016). I will keep a record of the interview data in a locked and secure location for five years. Afterward, I will destroy both hard and soft copies of all records pertaining to this study.

Data Collection Instruments

When conducting qualitative research, the researcher acts as the primary instrument for documenting, explaining, and storing data (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Yin, 2018). For this qualitative multiple case study, I was the primary data instrument. I obtained responses from the organizations by conducting semistructured interviews and reviewing organizational documentation (email, website, and meeting minutes). Roger et

al. (2018) posits to obtain information to further the acquisition of knowledge that the researcher is responsible for extending the interview process. Interviews is a data collection technique that is used for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data obtained from participants in qualitative research (Wilson et al., 2016). Roger et al. (2018) suggests that participants can articulate their point of views using a semistructured interview format. Also, semistructured interviews contain several open-ended standardized questions relevant to the topic of the study (Shalhoub et al., 2017). I conducted semistructured, open-ended questions during the interview process that provided the participants the opportunity to share the strategies that nonprofit organizational leaders use to increase volunteer retention.

In qualitative research, interviews are one of the most popular methods of collecting data (Mason, 2017). As the data collection instrument in this study, I created an interview protocol to ensure that each interview I conducted followed the same format (See Appendix B). Generally, interview protocols include an outline of the script, interview questions and interview narrative (Gaya & Smith, 2016; Goicolea et al., 2016; Neuert & Lenzner, 2016). Maintaining a consistent interview protocol during the semistructured interviews strengthens the transferability of the research study (Yin, 2018). The best practices for a semistructured qualitative interviews determined by Yin (2018) are (a) following protocol, (b) not guiding the interviewee, (c) maintaining objectivity, (d) not dominating the conversation, and (e) developing follow-up questions during the interview. As part of the interview protocol, each participant received information regarding the purpose of the research and the informed consent form.

Alkhateeb (2018) postulated that in qualitative research, overcoming barriers of location, accessibility, and cost are easy through telephone and virtual platforms. Adams (2019) noted the purpose of a qualitative research study is to understand, interrogate, and deconstruct the information gathered. Due to the global pandemic and the proximity of my participants, I was limited to conducting interviews via a virtual platform. Even though I was not in the same location as the participants, the virtual platform allowed us to still have visual contact and I was able to visualize tone, and posture. A virtual platform will not limit the gathering of information and will still welcome productive dialogue via open-ended questions as described (Rodriguez & Bonner, 2018).

Candela (2019), Naidu and Prose (2018) stated that qualitative researchers commonly use member checking as a means of maintaining validity, verifying the accuracy of the data once collected, and creating trustworthiness. The member checking process entails providing the participants in the study with a rough draft of the documented interview and requesting an accuracy check (Candela, 2019). Each participant was presented with a rough draft summary of the researcher's interpretation of the interview.

Researchers also use organizational or archival documentation as secondary data collection to help in exploring the research topic from a broader perspective and aid in triangulating the findings (Ellram & Tate, 2016). Tenório et al. (2017) posited that methodological triangulation permits researchers to utilize multiple sources to collect and analyze data. Turner et al. (2017) indicated that the best practice to ensure studies meet reliability standards is triangulation. After I conducted each interview and reviewed all

documentation from the organization such as meeting minutes, onboarding documentation, organizational reports and websites, I transcribed the interview and review the organization's documents, to enhance reliability and validity of the data collected.

Data Collection Technique

Once approval from the IRB (04-12-24-0653986) was received, I began the data collection process to explore the strategies nonprofit leaders use to retain volunteers to support the organizational mission. The primary data collection technique was open-ended questions in interviews with nonprofit leaders accompanied with the secondary data collection technique of reviewing internal and external documentation such as volunteer agreements used by the organization to recruit and assign volunteers, and any pamphlets or articles supporting the data collection. After completing an interview, reviewing company documents on specific topics is useful for expanding the data collection (Yin, 2018). Meeting minutes, onboarding documentation, organizational reports and websites were the types of secondary data collected.

Using a semistructured interview was beneficial for this study because it allowed the collection of data to be gathered from interaction with individuals who had implemented strategies of volunteer retention. Aksan and Baki (2017) stated that researchers conducting qualitative research can use interviews, documentation, surveys and observations as a method of data collection. Kirac et al. (2017) and Shalhoub et al. (2017) recommended using semistructured interviews because it provides flexibility and opportunities to ask follow-up questions and points of clarification when needed.

I used an online platform (Zoom), to conduct the interviews. Before each interview the participant received an email detailing the process, along with the questions that were asked and instructions how to connect to Zoom. During the interview, I thanked the participant and reminded them of the purpose of the interview, and had time for Q&A. At the end of the interview, I asked for additional documentation to further advance my research. Van den Berg and Struwig (2017) recommends qualitative researchers obtain rich deep data through interviews, documents and physical artifacts.

Using semistructured interviews presents both strengths and weaknesses. Advantages of conducting a virtual face to face interview is the convenience of not having to travel. The participant participated in an environment that was conducive for them. While one of the weaknesses was, I was not in the same space, I still observed the body language and tone of the participants virtually. If I noticed the participant was uneasy or uncomfortable, I was able to adjust as needed. It is important to build trust and create an environment that is welcoming and comfortable for the participants to share information freely (Oplatka, 2018). Participants were to share experiences through the open-ended questions that was asked. To obtain clarity and explore different concepts from research participants, researchers use open-ended questions (Kenno et al., 2017). While interviewing, there is the possibility of the participant to assume bias and to provide answers the researcher wants to hear, which can be seen as a weakness (Yin, 2018). Lastly, the collection of organization documents can provide both advantages and disadvantages. When documentation is provided, the information can help the researcher corroborate and identify themes in addition to the interview (Marshall & Rossman, 2016;

Yin, 2018). However, there are occasions when the researcher is not able to obtain documentation, the information provided is not updated and the leaders do not use the information and therefore not considered useful.

For consistency, I followed an interview protocol (Appendix B) that outlined the method for collecting data and processing for all interviews. The interview protocol provided a standardized approach to ensure that each interview was conducted the same way for each participant. The interview questions were included in addition to step-by-step instruction. This ensured consistency in each interview. This process contained semi structured interview questions. The interview narrative, script and questions are generally included in an interview protocol (Gaya & Smith, 2016; Goicolea et al., 2016; Neuert & Lenzner, 2016). While collecting data, the interview protocol was a great tool for staying focused and timely.

To guarantee validity and accuracy during the data collection and analysis, qualitative researchers use member checking (Thomas, 2017). To ensure the participants responses are recorded truthfully, Candela (2019) argued that member checking must take place. To avoid issues during the data collection process (Sheehan, 2018), member checking took place after each interview. I provided the participants with my interpretation of their responses and asked for corrections and feedback. I performed member checking to verify my interpretation of the collected data.

Data Organization Technique

To track and manage information and to maintain credibility and reliability, researchers use data organization techniques (Gibson et al., 2014). Hua et al. (2014)

recommends creating a process to organize data and make locating data efficient. During the interview process I kept a journal to take notes and reflected on the interview. Each organization and person interviewed were given an alias to maintain confidentiality. The data I collected will be stored on password-protected storage devices for five years following the research (Renner et al., 2018). To adhere to Walden University, data retention policy and participant privacy, I will destroy all files after five years.

Data Analysis

Ganapathy (2016) posited that qualitative researchers use data analysis to identify new ideas and increase the understanding of the phenomenon. The analysis of data allows the researcher to identify patterns and themes to process and share outcomes. Cypress (2018) described data analysis as organizing, reading, coding, organizing themes, representing, and interpreting the data. To conduct the data analysis, I used Yin's five-step data analysis process which is compiling, disassembling, reassembling, and interpreting the data, and finally, concluding the findings. Thematic analysis is denoted as a qualitative method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within data (Scharp & Sanders, 2019). I collected data to conduct the thematic analysis by using semistructured interview recordings and company documents that provided evidence from the leader on how they motivate volunteer retention. Examples include invitations to organizational events, any gifts provided to volunteers for their service, recognition statements in newsletters, individual letters sent out in appreciation of service, etc.

Researchers must analyze and interpret the data collected for understanding and to detect emerging findings. When researchers use Yin's 5 stages of data analysis

(compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, concluding) the data is analyzed and themes are identified. NVivo software is used to support the process by organizing the data (Feng & Behar-Horenstein, 2019; Paulus et al., 2017). Once I collected the data, I conducted a thematic analysis.

Step one was compiling the data, which entailed recording each interview, writing out the contents of each interview, using member checking with each interviewee, to confirm the accuracy of the raw data written out from the recordings, once confirmed, add the secondary information collected from documentation and artifacts (Yin, 2018). I compiled the data from interviews, any documentation related to volunteer retention strategies, and any artifacts, such as newsletters celebrating volunteer services, awards, recognition strategies, etc.

Step two was disassembling the data, which entailed identifying key words and ideas drawn from the raw data from both the interviews and secondary information collected. The researcher applies codes from the NVivo software that highlight perhaps dozens of keywords and ideas spanning many topics found within the primary and secondary data (Yin, 2018). I identified patterns of keywords or ideas found within the collected data and gave each one a code to detect the repeated keywords and ideas. Step three was reassembling the data, which entailed clustering the coded data into meaningful information (Yin, 2018). I sorted and categorized data into meaningful patterns of information.

Step four was interpreting the data, which entailed reviewing the clustered patterns of information and seeking meaning from the clusters (Yin, 2018). In this step,

time was taken to place clusters into several related groups intended to enlighten the researcher to strategies applied by the interviewees related to the central research question. I reviewed the clustered patterns and drew interpretive meaning from the evolving ideas. Step five was drawing conclusions from the grouped information drawn from the interviews, documentation, and artifacts (Yin, 2018). I grouped the clustered information into four key themes, each offering potential solutions to the central research question.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

In research, researchers must aim to have trustworthiness and dependability. Trustworthiness in qualitative research demands an investigator's authentic, rigorous processes in developing their study. To establish trustworthiness in data collection, researchers should use an interview protocol which applies consistency between each interview to ensure all data is collected in the same manner with all participants (Anderson, 2017; Morse, 2015). Further, researchers gain consent and inform participants of their rights in research and work to protect the integrity of the study by keeping data confidential and applying secure storage of information to support the trustworthiness of the research process. I followed an interview protocol and gained consent by informing participants of their rights, ensuring confidentiality and secure information storage practices to enhance trustworthiness. To enhance the trustworthiness of the data analysis, researchers apply consistency in research by aligning assumptions, the conceptual framework, and methodologies (Chandra & Shang, 2017). I strengthened the

trustworthiness of my research by being authentic and rigorous in all research activities. The activities I used to build trustworthiness included aligning my assumptions, the conceptual framework and methodology.

Dependability is achievable by using multiple sources of data to confirm the replicability and consistency of outcomes in research (Maher et al., 2018; Marshal & Rossman, 2016). Strategies used to strengthen the dependability in qualitative research include developing an audit trail outlining all techniques used. This becomes a guide to others to increase the likelihood that the same techniques used repeatedly will garner similar results. Another strategy used to enhance dependability is the use of an expert panel or committee to review the appropriateness of the interview questions used. During the interview process, researchers work to achieve saturation which means continuing to collect data from participants until the collection of data adds no new information, and at that point, the point of data saturation, the interview process ceases (Maher et al., 2018; Marshal & Rossman, 2016). Saturation and member checking can support the dependability of research. researchers apply member checking to ensure the researcher's interpretation of the participant comments are well understood, this may build the accuracy of the interview data supporting the development of a dependable approach to research (Cypress, 2017; Yin, 2018). I used an expert panel to review interview questions, and I followed an interview protocol for consistency in the interview process. I worked to reach saturation in the interview process by continuing to draw on participants concepts until the addition of data added no new information and at that point, I stopped the interview process. I applied member checking to enhance the accuracy of the

interview data, all of these practices help to strengthen the dependability of the research process.

To confirm consistency in data collection, researchers use methodological triangulation to align approaches by using available documentation and physical artifacts from workplaces that help generate information related to the study (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Methodological triangulation may be useful in fortifying data collection and broadening the investigation (Maher et al., 2018; Marshal & Rossman, 2016). I invited participants to share any documents that supported their responses to interview questions, and I sought out publicly accessible physical artifacts, such as websites and bulletins, to support the research. To enhance the confirmability in the data analysis process, I applied thematic analysis to capture meaning within the data collected, and established the eventual themes in the findings.

Validity

Credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability add thoroughness and rigor to qualitative research by applying diligent, standardized practices in a consistent way, to ensure the trustworthiness and repeatability of research outcomes (El Hussein et al., 2015; Saunders et al., 2016; Yin, 2018). Rigor may be developed within qualitative research to provide reliability and validity (Stewart & Gapp, 2017). For a study to be valid, it must meet the strict guidelines of credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability.

Credibility

To prove a study is credible, researchers must exhaust the research process through conducting consistent interviews that are managed by an interview protocol. This is done until the collection of data adds no new information (Yin, 2018). It is imperative for validation to verify both the exhaustion of the research approach, and mitigation of bias in the research approach. Member checking is a form of establishing credibility (McInnes et al., 2017). Hancock and Algozzine (2016) described member checking as having research participants confirm the credibility of the researcher's interpretation of the interview. By doing this, the accuracy of the collected data might be strengthened and have the potential to gather clarifying details to provide a thorough account of each interview, adding credibility to the research process.

Confirmability

Confirmability in research comes from thorough activities during the data collection and analysis processes. The first step towards obtaining confirmability is via member checking, which may ensure the data collected accurately represents each contribution from the participants interview (Yin, 2018). Using NVivo, a data analysis software, demonstrated credibility by developing the understanding of the collected data through an organized and progressive method of analysis. Member checking and data analysis software should add rigor to the research and help the reader's to trust in the research processes.

Transferability

Transferability shows the results can be transferred to other contexts (Amankwaa, 2016; Freitas et al., 2017). Yin (2018) and Liao and Hitchcock (2018) noted that the researcher can address transferability by providing rich context of the research and the characteristics of the participants. Transferability can be achieved by following strict protocols and processes throughout the study, such as the interview protocol and audit documentation, to ensure the study can be duplicated and produce the same findings (Maher et al., 2018). There may be value added to a study when the research strategy is reproducible (Cypress, 2017). In the doctoral study, I used an interview protocol and kept concise auditing documentation to enhance transferability and reproducibility of the research approach.

Dependability

To increase the dependability of a study, researchers can create valid practices at the beginning of research, such as using an interview protocol to keep all activities consistent, in addition to ensuring data saturation during the collection process (Yin, 2018). There should be dependability in my study using an interview protocol and ensuring saturation in data collection. This may establish that I gathered as much information as I could, through a rigorous interview process. Triangulation and member checking can further enhance the dependability of a study, with the use of gathering additional sources of data beyond the interviews and ensuring that the interview process is accurate, and that the researcher strives to limit bias in data collection.

Validity

Qualitative researchers must exercise trustworthiness as they develop and implement their research. Establishing practices that are both trustworthy and rigorous may aid in creating a reliable and valid investigation. A valid study in qualitative research demands credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability.

Credibility. For a study to be characterized as credible, the researcher must apply consistent, standardized techniques, these techniques include, using an interview protocol, saturating the data, and member checking. An interview protocol is a consistent guide listing a set of repeatable interview questions to individuals who meet criteria to qualify to be interviewed. Using the interview protocol ensures each interview is conducted in one specific way, developed by the interviewer. Another technique to enhance research credibility is to saturate the data collected by continuing to interview participants until the addition of data adds no new information and at that point, the interviews cease (Yin, 2018). Credibility is further enhanced by member checking. Member checking is useful in limiting bias in the interview process by ensuring the recorded data collected is interpreted as the participant intended (Fusch & Ness, 2018). These techniques, the interview protocol, saturation, and member checking, enhance the accuracy of the data collected, provide an opportunity to reduce bias, and may lift the credibility of the research process.

Confirmability. Confirmability in research evolves from rigorous data collection and analysis activities. Confirmability in qualitative research begins with member checking. Member checking ensures the data collection process is accurate by reviewing

the recorded interview with each participant to ensure the researcher's interpretation is accurate and free of any researcher bias (Yin, 2018).Another way to ensure confirmability of qualitative research is to use a data analysis software, such as NVivo to organize the collected data, draw meaning, and advance the understanding of the data collected. Both of these techniques enhance the reader's trust in the research processes.

Transferability. Transferability means that a consistent approach to research methods and techniques should produce similar findings to build confidence and trustworthiness in the research process. Two techniques are used to potentially ensure the research approach and findings are repeatable and transferable are the interview protocol and the audit trail. The first technique is the use of the interview protocol (Cypress, 2017). The development and use of an interview protocol provides a template for others to follow the same steps to conduct their own research. As explained above, the interview protocol is a document containing the steps taken to engage in the interview process with interviewees. The interview protocol contains the list of interview questions, and instructions on how to close each interview in a consistent manner. The repeatability of the interview process adds value to the study. The second technique is the development of an audit trail, summarizing each step taken in the research process to provide a roadmap for other researchers to follow. This helps to assure that the same practices, or steps taken, may yield similar results.

Dependability. Dependability in qualitative research is achievable through various processes, first is the creation and use of an interview protocol, to keep all approaches to the research consistent. The second process is saturation, which means

continuing the interview process until the collection of data adds no new information and the interview process ceases (Yin, 2018). I worked to ensure dependability by using an interview protocol and continued to interview participants until I reached saturation in data collection to exhaust the interview process and gain as much information as I could in understanding the phenomenon. The third process is triangulation. Triangulation is the use of multiple sources to gain greater perspective on a phenomenon. I sought out any available documentation and reviewed physical artifacts to strengthen the data collection process. The fourth technique is to apply member checking. Member checking further validates the research by verifying the quality of the interview data. A fifth approach is triangulation. Triangulation is the process of drawing on additional sources of data to broaden the scope of data collection. The sixth approach is using data analysis software enhancing the objectivity and meaning to the data collected and ultimate findings of the study. I applied member checking, triangulation, and data analysis software to help establish dependability in my study.

Transition and Summary

In Section 2, I included the purpose of this study and described in detail the data collection process. This section includes the role of the researcher, a description of the participants and criteria, the research method and design, population and sampling, ethical research, data collection instruments and technique, data organization techniques, data analysis, and reliability and validity. In Section 3, I presented a comprehensive account of the research outcomes. Section 3 will detail the presentation of the findings,

implications for social change, professional application, and recommendations for further research on the topic.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study is to explore strategies nonprofit leaders use to retain volunteers to support the organizational mission. The data came from interviews with leaders and company documentation at five nonprofit organizations on the East Coast of the United States. The findings showed strategies that the nonprofit leaders used for volunteer retention in nonprofit organizations.

Presentation of the Findings

The central research question for this qualitative, multiple case study is as follows: What strategies do nonprofit leaders use to retain volunteers to support the organizational mission? The primary source of data collection was in-depth, semistructured interviews with five nonprofit leaders from nonprofit organizations on the East Coast of the United States of America. The interview findings were compared to a review of organizational documents and publicly accessible information to answer the research question. I conducted data analysis, which resulted in the identification of four major themes: (a) ensure volunteer motivation alignment, (b) create an impactful volunteer experience, (c) foster communication and recognition, and (d) enhance adaptable volunteer engagement. Evidence from the literature review coincided with the themes that emerged from the data collection.

Theme 1: Ensure Volunteer Motivation Alignment

Volunteer retention often begins with understanding what initially draws individuals to nonprofit work. People volunteer for various reasons, including personal

fulfillment, professional growth, community building, and giving back. When organizations take the time to identify and honor these motivations, they can tailor volunteer roles, communication, and recognition efforts to align with what truly matters to each individual (Faletehan et al., 2021). This personalized approach creates a sense of purpose and belonging, increasing the likelihood that volunteers will remain engaged over time.

This insight also connects to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which suggests that people are driven by a progression of needs, from basic safety to self-actualization. Volunteers seeking connections fulfill social and belonging needs, while those interested in leadership or skill development may aim to meet esteem needs. By understanding and addressing these underlying motivations, nonprofit leaders can create meaningful experiences that attract volunteers and sustain their involvement in a way that supports both the individual and the organization's mission.

P1 explained, "We've done volunteer motivation surveys…paying it forward and professional development were major themes," capturing the dual goals of altruism and growth. P3 added, "It's just the love of the work… to ensure our community thrives," reflecting a deep emotional connection to service. Ashfaq et al. (2021) emphasized that long-term engagement improves when organizations recognize these motivations and intentionally align volunteer roles with them. Usadolo et al. (2022) noted that volunteer management practices that acknowledge and support personal reasons for volunteering help sustain commitment. Therefore, NPLs seeking to retain volunteers must not only identify individual motivators but also design roles, recognition strategies, and support

systems that nurture both emotional fulfillment and personal development. This alignment deepens engagement and fosters lasting commitment.

Through the lens of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, aligning volunteer tasks with individual strengths addresses esteem needs. P3 stated, "Build your team according to their skills and strengths," and P4 noted that volunteers "who show consistent engagement are trained into leadership roles." These strategies validate volunteers' capabilities and foster confidence.

For many volunteers, engagement also serves as a path to self-actualization. Volunteers are more likely to stay involved over the long term when their work aligns with their personal values and aspirations. As P4 explained, "We want to give [volunteers] a direct voice in shaping our work and improving the organization... when volunteers have control and ownership, they're more motivated to give their best." P4 stated, "You're not just the registration desk, you're the door to the entire organization." By offering meaningful, growth-oriented experiences, minimizing administrative burdens, and aligning volunteer tasks with individual passions, organizations foster a sense of intrinsic motivation that helps build confidence, ownership, and encourages enduring commitment (Kaur et al., 2022). When NPLs empower volunteers to recognize themselves as vital contributors, not just helpers, they activate deeper purpose and belonging, which can significantly strengthen long-term retention.

Understanding what motivates volunteers is essential for creating a retention strategy that meets their needs. Volunteers who engage in opportunities that resonate deeply with their values and long-term aspirations are more likely to stay involved. When

organizations provide volunteers with the chance to contribute meaningfully, such as mentoring others, shaping organizational policies, or leading initiatives, they support their journey toward reaching their full potential. Nonprofit leaders can provide a sense of intrinsic motivation that encourages long-term commitment by offering diverse engagement options, minimizing administrative burdens, and aligning roles with volunteer passions. This intrinsic motivation creates a sustainable cycle where volunteers return because their service is not just about helping others but also about personal growth, meaningful relationships, and the pursuit of purpose. Understanding and leveraging these motivations strengthens retention, helping volunteers feel valued and empowered.

Theme 2: Create an Impactful Volunteer Experience

For volunteers to remain engaged, their experiences must be fulfilling, well-structured, and clearly aligned with the organization's mission (Zhenjing et al., 2022). As P4 emphasized, "Providing our volunteers with the best possible experience is key to that process. When they see the impact, they understand the mission more deeply." Many volunteers seek opportunities that allow them to see the direct impact of their work, whether through interactions with beneficiaries, participation in community projects, or tangible contributions to a cause. Providing hands-on opportunities where volunteers can witness the results of their efforts strengthens their emotional connection to the organization (Glasdam et al., 2023). P4 noted that "when homeowners engage directly with the volunteers, it reinforces our mission and demonstrates the tangible benefits of our work." Similarly, P1 described the goal of volunteer retention as creating an

experience “rewarding enough that people stick around long enough to feed back into those processes,” while P2 expressed a desire to maintain “75% engagement in some activity, some method towards a goal or purpose.” NPLs who intentionally design experiences where volunteers can clearly recognize the impact of their service not only reinforce the mission, they also inspire sustained participation and deeper commitment over time.

Structured roles and clear expectations contribute to a meaningful volunteer experience (Sandage, 2020). P5 explained the importance of clear direction, especially across culturally diverse settings. Volunteers should understand their responsibilities, the organization’s goals, and how their contributions fit within the larger community service framework. Dunlop et al. (2022) explained that role ambiguity can lead to frustration and disengagement, whereas a well-organized experience fosters confidence and satisfaction.

Nonprofits should remove barriers that might hinder volunteer engagement. Administrative burdens, vague role expectations, and rigid scheduling can deter even the most passionate volunteers. P1 described how their organization reduces administrative burden so volunteers can focus on “giving back to the community,” including strategies like offering certification programs and professional development opportunities. As P5 noted, “If volunteers have no clue what you want them to do, they’re not going to stay.” P2 added, “You take mythologies to sell the vision to those you feel have the talent,” underscoring the importance of clear and compelling communication. Kappaelides et al. (2020) supported the idea that flexible, clearly defined opportunities reduce volunteer frustration and enhance participation. Therefore, to foster lasting engagement, NPLs must

streamline processes, provide clarity around roles, and communicate purpose in a way that energizes and empowers volunteers to contribute meaningfully.

The need for belonging is also significant with volunteer experiences (Tse, 2020). P3 explained, “Most of them build relationships…volunteers show up for their friends.” Group activities, networking events, and peer support programs foster social bonds that reinforce organizational loyalty (Farny et al., 2019). Social needs are another essential component of volunteer retention. Many individuals volunteer not only to support a cause but also to foster relationships and expand their networks. P3 described the impact of social bonds, stating, “Most of them build relationships, budding friendships, sisterhood...volunteers also want to make sure they show up for their friends.” Providing team-building activities, networking opportunities, and community engagement events strengthens volunteers’ connections to both the organization and one another. When volunteers develop friendships and support systems, they are more likely to remain committed.

An impactful volunteer experience fulfills several levels of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, particularly belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization, which significantly influences volunteer retention. Volunteers are most engaged when they feel their contributions matter, see the real-world impact of their efforts, and have opportunities to connect with others. Hands-on experiences that align with personal values foster a sense of purpose, while well-structured roles, recognition, and opportunities for growth enhance confidence and competence. Public acknowledgment and community-building activities further reinforce a sense of belonging and appreciation.

When volunteers are supported, included, and able to witness the difference they make, they experience deeper fulfillment and are more likely to stay committed long-term. By designing volunteer roles that meet these psychological needs, nonprofit organizations boost individual motivation and strengthen volunteer loyalty and organizational sustainability.

Theme 3: Foster Communication and Recognition

Effective communication is a foundational element of successful volunteer retention. Volunteers need to understand their roles, the organization's mission, and how their work contributes to broader goals. Clear communication ensures that volunteers remain aligned with the organization's vision, reinforcing their sense of purpose and commitment (Turaga, 2019). P2 articulated the importance of this clarity, stating, "Number one, you try to make sure that your vision casting is clear. Number two is you take mythologies to sell the vision, especially to those you feel have the talent to do the task." Organizations should communicate consistently through multiple channels, including email updates, newsletters, training sessions, and one-on-one meetings.

Follow-up and continuous engagement further strengthen volunteer retention. Organizations should maintain regular check-ins with volunteers, ensuring they feel connected even when not actively participating in projects. Post-event surveys, feedback sessions, and volunteer satisfaction assessments allow organizations to refine their engagement strategies and address concerns proactively. P1. P3, P4, and P5 conduct surveys after each event to gather feedback from the volunteers so that they can make adjustments to the volunteer experience. Organizations can cultivate a loyal and

dedicated volunteer base by fostering open communication, reinforcing the organization's mission, and consistently recognizing contributions (Walk et al., 2019). Ongoing engagement should not be treated as an afterthought but as an intentional strategy that helps volunteers feel valued, heard, and continually connected to the organization's purpose.

Beyond communication, recognition plays a key role in retaining volunteers. Volunteers must feel that their efforts are valued publicly and privately (Dodoc, 2022). Research by Huang et al. (2023) and Lockstone-Binney et al. (2022) confirms that public acknowledgment and appreciation programs significantly improve retention. Recognition initiatives may include formal programs such as "Volunteer of the Month" awards, appreciation luncheons, and social media spotlights. Personalized acknowledgments, such as handwritten thank-you notes or direct expressions of gratitude from leadership, further reinforce a volunteer's value to the organization. P5 explained, "People need to be thanked right here, right now. That's their paycheck," while P4 shared that their organization "organizes volunteer-led appreciation events to celebrate efforts." P1 added that their team remains vigilant: "We follow up on social media comments and resolve issues promptly," highlighting responsiveness as part of volunteer care. Lu et al. (2019) expounded that these gestures, while simple, help foster a culture of appreciation that encourages long-term commitment and belonging.

Effective communication and recognition are more than operational strategies; they are essential components in meeting the psychological and emotional needs of volunteers, as outlined in Maslow's hierarchy of needs. When volunteers are well-

informed about their roles and understand how their efforts contribute to a broader mission, their need for belonging and purpose is fulfilled. Clear vision casting and ongoing engagement help volunteers feel connected and valued, reinforcing their commitment to the organization. Formal recognition and personal acknowledgment serve to directly address esteem needs, reinforcing the value and influence of each individual. Organizations consistently meet these foundational and psychological needs, creating an environment where volunteers can thrive, grow, and move toward self-actualization. This approach builds lasting loyalty and deeper engagement, benefiting both the volunteer and the organization.

Theme 4: Enhance Adaptable Volunteer Engagement

Volunteer retention strategies must continually evolve to meet shifting social dynamics, generational preferences, and external challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, drastically altered the volunteerism landscape, forcing organizations to rethink traditional engagement models (Kuenzi et al., 2021). P2 captured this change: "COVID taught us that we must stop running in circles and innovate." Adaptability became essential to maintaining connections and meeting needs during uncertain times.

Before the pandemic, in-person volunteering was the norm; however, health concerns and new societal priorities have given rise to virtual and hybrid models. Organizations that successfully implemented online engagement methods were able to maintain volunteer participation despite physical restrictions (Mao et al., 2021). These shifts underscore the need for flexibility and innovation in retention strategies (Kappaelides et al., 2020). As P1 noted, "the biggest thing that we did was change from

an all-in-person delivery model to online, and now we offer both online and in-person." This transition, while challenging, allowed the organization to adapt to volunteers' safety needs and scheduling constraints. When nonprofit leaders embrace adaptable engagement models, balancing safety, accessibility, and convenience, they are better positioned to retain volunteers in an ever-evolving social and public health landscape.

Generational preferences have also significantly influenced volunteer engagement patterns (Hopkins & Dowell, 2022). P1 shared that "Each generation has expectations and preferences that differ from generation to generation." Younger volunteers, particularly millennials and Gen Z, are more likely to seek short-term, impact-driven opportunities over long-term commitments (Febriani & Selamet, 2020). In response, organizations have been encouraged to diversify their offerings. P4 explained, "we're developing a marketing plan to attract volunteers who are willing to promote our cause digitally on platforms like Instagram." This digital-first approach aligns with younger generations' comfort with technology and desire for flexible engagement. Similarly, P5 reflected that "we try to put the volunteers and the participants in a situation. It's one thing for us to talk about the needs of people…it's a different thing when you're put in that situation," underscoring the need for experiential, meaningful opportunities that build both connection and purpose. In order to successfully engage and retain younger generations, organizations should provide flexible, technologically advanced, and purpose-oriented opportunities that align with changing values and emphasize meaningful, experience-based participation.

Organizational leaders embracing adaptability in their retention strategies are better positioned to meet the evolving needs of volunteers and their communities (Febriani & Selamet, 2020). By aligning strategic decisions with Maslow's framework and integrating volunteer voice into program design, nonprofits can cultivate inclusive, purpose-driven environments that nurture long-term engagement and personal fulfillment.

Adapting volunteer retention strategies in response to shifting social, generational, and global dynamics directly corresponds with Maslow's hierarchy of needs. In times of crisis, volunteers' safety needs are paramount, and organizations that pivot to virtual or hybrid models demonstrate a commitment to protecting those needs while still offering opportunities for connection and contribution. As generational preferences evolve, the need for belonging and esteem becomes more pronounced; younger volunteers seek flexible, purpose-driven roles affirming their values and skills. Nonprofit leaders in the organizations support these psychological needs by offering digital engagement options, experiential learning, and opportunities for meaningful contribution while fostering a sense of community. Ultimately, when nonprofits create adaptable environments that respond to individual motivations and external challenges, they enable volunteers to reach self-actualization. This comprehensive, human-centered approach enhances retention and increases the organization's capability to fulfill its mission in a dynamic environment.

Theoretical Alignment and Implications

The findings of this study confirm and extend existing literature on volunteer engagement and retention, particularly within the framework of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Consistent with prior research, the study emphasizes that volunteers are more likely to remain committed when their fundamental psychological and self-fulfillment needs are me. Participants in this study described how recognition, belonging, personal growth, and purpose play critical roles in sustaining volunteer involvement, echoing the core tiers of Maslow's framework. For example, volunteers valued appreciation (esteem), sought connection and shared purpose (love and belonging), and were driven by opportunities for self-development and meaning (self-actualization). These findings support literature suggesting that nonprofit organizational leaders must move beyond transactional volunteer models and instead foster environments that meet volunteers' intrinsic motivations. By adopting this approach, organizations enhance their ability to retain volunteers while fostering a resilient and values-driven volunteer culture.

This study also underscores subtle changes that question certain longstanding assumptions within the volunteerism literature, especially in relation to generational preferences, virtual participation, and the autonomy of volunteers. While Maslow's model has often been applied in hierarchical terms, the findings suggest that modern volunteer experiences may activate multiple levels of the hierarchy simultaneously, and not always in a linear progression. For instance, younger generations express a desire for flexibility, digital involvement, and immediate impact demands that align with both esteem and self-actualization needs but may bypass lower-tier needs such as stability or

routine. These patterns indicate a growing need to reconceptualize how Maslow's theory applies in contemporary, fast-evolving volunteer contexts. Furthermore, the increased reliance on hybrid and remote volunteerism post-pandemic presents new questions about how connection, recognition, and growth are experienced in less traditional environments. Therefore, additional research is warranted to explore how volunteer retention strategies can be designed to activate multiple levels of Maslow's hierarchy in dynamic and culturally responsive ways.

Applications to Professional Practice

Nonprofit leaders are uniquely positioned to translate volunteer engagement strategies into organizational strength. The four central themes identified from the participants in this qualitative multiple case study, understanding volunteer motivations, creating meaningful experiences, fostering communication and recognition, and adapting to evolving expectations, can be used not only to enhance volunteer retention but also to improve performance, profitability, and long-term sustainability.

Understanding and responding to volunteer motivations allows nonprofit leaders to build targeted engagement models that place volunteers in roles aligned with their interests and goals (Lorente-Ayala et al., 2019). This intentional matching increases productivity, reduces volunteer turnover, and enhances the effectiveness of program delivery. Volunteers who feel that their time is well spent are more likely to be proactive and reliable, resulting in more consistent and high-quality service outcomes. Operational efficiency increases when volunteers are well-positioned and well-prepared, which also reduces costs associated with ongoing recruitment and onboarding. Over time, this

strategic approach to engagement safeguards limited resources and strengthens the organization's operational resilience.

Creating meaningful and rewarding experiences supports a volunteer's emotional investment in the organization and encourages deeper levels of commitment (Glasdam et al., 2023). Volunteers who witness the impact of their efforts, receive consistent appreciation, and form strong connections within the organization are more likely to become long-term supporters and donors. By nurturing these relationships, nonprofit leaders can convert volunteer participation into diversified revenue streams through fundraising and advocacy (Zhenjing et al., 2022). Long-term volunteer engagement not only reduces reliance on short-term support but also expands the organization's funding base, contributing to both profitability and financial sustainability.

Clear communication, alignment with organizational vision, and meaningful recognition are essential for building trust and long-term engagement. Volunteers who comprehend the impact of their efforts on the organization's mission are more likely to remain motivated and focused on achieving goals. When nonprofit leaders implement strong internal communication systems and embed regular feedback and recognition practices, they create transparency and mutual accountability (Gara & La Porte, 2020). These attributes result in elevated performance standards, reduced miscommunications, and an enhanced team dynamic, all of which have a direct impact on program quality and organizational outcomes. Kumari (2020) ascertained that recognition also reinforces the perceived value of volunteer contributions, enhancing morale and loyalty.

Finally, adaptability is a critical trait for nonprofit leaders seeking sustainable growth. The ability to adjust to shifting volunteer expectations, including the rise of digital engagement, generational changes in service preferences, and crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, ensures that organizations remain relevant and resilient. Leaders who invest in flexible models, such as hybrid volunteering or micro-engagements, can tap into broader networks and respond quickly to changing community needs (Forgacs-Fabian, 2021). These adaptive strategies help retain volunteers and enable the organization to navigate competitive funding environments and uncertain economic conditions.

The strategic application of volunteer retention themes enables nonprofit leaders to transform engagement into a powerful lever for organizational improvement. By centering volunteer experiences within the broader framework of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, leaders can create value-driven environments that cultivate loyalty, increase capacity, and ensure long-term sustainability. Volunteers who perceive themselves as valued, connected, and empowered are not only more likely to remain engaged, they also become advocates for the mission, thereby contributing to its advancement into the future.

Implications for Social Change

The insights from this study show how organizations can support and retain volunteers, and how those practices may contribute to broader social changes. When volunteer programs are designed with intentionality and care, they foster environments that promote personal empowerment, collective responsibility, and community resilience

(Bartosova & Podhorska, 2021). The following implications illustrate how meeting volunteer needs at every level can contribute to sustainable, equity-driven social change.

When organizations take time to understand why people volunteer, whether for healing, connection, skill-building, or purpose, they create space for deeper, more equitable engagement. Volunteers who feel seen and valued become powerful agents of change in their own communities. This personalized approach strengthens retention in addition to empowers individuals to use their lived experiences to drive impact, challenge inequities, and promote inclusive narratives within service work (Dodoc, 2022).

Designing volunteer experiences that center purpose, visibility, and growth can transform how people see their roles in society. When volunteers witness the real impact of their work, they become more civically engaged and committed to causes that benefit the common good (Gates & Lillie, 2021; Maier et al., 2021). These experiences shift cultural attitudes, transforming service into a practice rooted in empathy, shared power, and community investment.

When volunteers are equipped with clear expectations and empowered through recognition, they gain the confidence and clarity to lead. This builds a pipeline of community-rooted leaders who are informed, connected, and ready to take initiative beyond the organization. Transparent communication and shared visioning also foster collective action, where people move from isolated service to unified social movement (Irawati et al., 2021).

Social change requires flexibility and responsiveness, particularly in the face of evolving societal challenges like pandemics, racial injustice, or climate crises.

Organizations can improve accessibility for engagement by modifying volunteer models to meet individuals' needs, such as offering virtual opportunities, shorter time commitments, or inclusive pathways. Inclusive practices dismantle traditional obstacles to service, thereby enabling civic participation for a broader and more diverse demographic (Boysen, 2020).

Recommendations for Action

Volunteer retention remains a critical success factor for nonprofit organizational leaders striving to achieve sustainable impact. Drawing from the analysis of volunteer engagement strategies and their alignment with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the following recommendations outline actionable practices that organizational leaders can implement to improve long-term volunteer commitment and well-being. These strategies focus on aligning volunteer motivations, enhancing volunteer experience, fostering communication and recognition, and adapting to evolving social and operational dynamics.

Organizational leaders must prioritize understanding the unique motivations that drive individuals to volunteer (Neely et al., 2022). Whether volunteers are seeking personal fulfillment, professional development, social connection, or healing from past experiences, organizational leaders should develop systems to assess and integrate these motivations into the volunteer journey. Conducting entrance interviews, regular check-ins, and surveys can help capture individual goals and interests. Assigning volunteers to roles that align with their intrinsic motivations fosters a sense of purpose and increases

the likelihood of long-term engagement. Personalized role-matching ensures that volunteers feel seen, valued, and connected to the mission on a deeper level.

Volunteers are more likely to remain committed when they can clearly see the tangible outcomes of their contributions. Organizational leaders should offer mission-driven, hands-on volunteer experiences that are both structured and meaningful. This includes creating opportunities for volunteers to directly interact with beneficiaries, participate in experiential service projects, and receive feedback about the impact of their efforts. Events and activities should be well organized, with clearly defined expectations, responsibilities, and support systems (Turaga., 2019). When volunteers understand how their efforts make a difference, their sense of personal fulfillment and organizational loyalty increases significantly.

Effective, transparent communication and consistent recognition are vital for sustaining volunteer engagement. Organizational leaders should establish clear communication systems that include pre-engagement orientations, ongoing updates, and feedback loops. Volunteers must understand their roles, how they contribute to the mission, and the expectations for their involvement. Additionally, volunteers thrive when their contributions are acknowledged both publicly and privately. Recognition strategies may include appreciation events, spotlight features, leadership acknowledgments, and personal thank-you notes (Lu et al., 2019). When volunteers feel their work is meaningful and celebrated, they are more likely to stay connected and committed.

In an era of rapid social and cultural change, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic, organizational leaders must demonstrate flexibility in how they engage

volunteers. Hybrid and virtual opportunities should be integrated alongside traditional, in-person service to meet diverse volunteer preferences and availability. Engagement models should be responsive to generational differences, work-life balance needs, and accessibility concerns (Forgacs-Fabian, 2021). Organizational leaders are encouraged to innovate by leveraging technology, developing micro-volunteering roles, and incorporating social media or remote advocacy opportunities. Adapting to change also means continually assessing volunteer satisfaction and engagement trends to refine strategies in real time.

Let this work serve as both a guide and an invitation. A guide for those who wish to strengthen their volunteer programs with strategic insight, and an invitation to reimagine volunteerism as a communal act of purpose. When nonprofit organizational leaders value their volunteers not just as helpers, but as partners in mission, they foster a culture of care that can ripple far beyond their immediate reach. In doing so, they do not just retain volunteers, they inspire movements.

Recommendations for Further Research

One limitation of this study is the relatively small sample size. By limiting the study to only five nonprofit organizational leaders, the findings may not be fully representative of the broader nonprofit sector. This narrow scope could introduce sampling bias and limit the generalizability of the results. Future research should consider expanding the sample size to include a more diverse and representative group of nonprofit organizational leaders across different regions, sizes, and missions. This would

provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing volunteer retention and enhance the reliability of the findings.

Another limitation pertains to the target audience of the study. This research focused solely on the perspectives of organizational leaders. While leaders provide valuable insights into strategic planning and management practices, their views may not fully capture the experiences and motivations of volunteers. There is a potential for bias in how leaders perceive the effectiveness of their volunteer retention strategies. Therefore, it is recommended that future studies include the voices of volunteers themselves. Conducting interviews, focus groups, or surveys with current and former volunteers could reveal additional insights into what motivates them to stay or leave, what they value in their volunteer experience, and how retention strategies are perceived on the ground level. Including volunteer perspectives would contribute to a more balanced and holistic understanding of effective volunteer retention strategies within nonprofit organizations.

Reflections

As a practitioner and scholar, I recognize the impact of volunteerism, particularly when it is approached with care, intention, and equity. This research has reinforced my conviction that achieving sustainable social impact starts with recognizing and respecting the humanity of those who serve. It is not enough to simply recruit volunteers; we must build ecosystems where they are seen, supported, and empowered to lead.

I’ve experienced this work from both sides: as a nonprofit leader managing volunteers and as a dedicated volunteer myself across numerous organizations for over

two decades. I understand firsthand the delicate balance of meeting organizational goals while honoring the needs, voices, and value of those who give their time. It is not always easy to marry the needs of the volunteer with the realities of running a business, but it is necessary.

Throughout the process of writing my dissertation, this dual perspective became a source of strength and clarity. During COVID-19, our organization saw a sharp decline in volunteer engagement. Engaging in this research allowed me to apply new strategies and theories in real time, and it worked. Volunteerism began to rebound. People felt more connected, appreciated, and seen.

Volunteers want to be recognized and valued. That is how I feel as a volunteer, and it is what I strive to ensure within my organization. As leaders, we are called to move beyond transactional models and instead cultivate cultures rooted in belonging, reciprocity, and growth. This work should be regarded as both a blueprint and an invitation to reframe volunteerism. Rather than viewing it solely as a means for organizational success, we should recognize its potential as a catalyst for collective liberation and societal improvement.

Conclusion

Volunteer retention is a defining concern for nonprofit organizational leaders striving for continuity, sustainability, and mission fulfillment. This study, grounded in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, sought to answer the question: What strategies do nonprofit leaders use to retain volunteers to support the organizational mission? Based on the findings of the study four themes emerged, (a) motivation alignment, (b) volunteer

experience, (c) communication/recognition and (d) adaptable engagement.

Volunteers play a pivotal role in nonprofit operations. As unpaid contributors, their motivation and commitment cannot be assumed; they must be cultivated. The findings of this study support the argument that volunteers remain committed when they are provided with opportunities that align with their values, support their personal and professional development, and affirm their significance to the organization.

Volunteers are not passive participants; they are active stakeholders whose commitment is shaped by their experiences and the degree of organizational responsiveness. Effective retention strategies include clear role definitions, meaningful recognition, and open feedback. When these practices are absent, volunteer disengagement becomes more likely, regardless of the organization's mission.

Furthermore, this study highlights the importance of evolving volunteer management frameworks to meet the expectations of a changing volunteer base. The post-pandemic environment, generational shifts, and increased emphasis on social justice require nonprofit leaders to adopt inclusive, flexible, and strategic approaches to volunteer engagement. It is no longer sufficient to rely on informal systems or assume altruism alone will sustain involvement. Leaders must invest in formalized volunteer infrastructure and position volunteer management as an essential leadership function

The findings of my study emphasized volunteer retention strategies could have a direct positive impact on supporting the organizational mission. Using the results of this study, nonprofit leaders can understand the importance of volunteer retention strategies

among fulfilling their mission. Volunteer retention is not a static outcome, but a dynamic reflection of organizational values, leadership integrity, and operational excellence.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

What I will do	What I will say – Script
Introduce the interview and set the stage	Thank you for deciding to participate I this interview. I am SherAaron Hurt, a doctoral candidate at Walden University. I am conducting a study on successful strategies used for volunteer retention in nonprofit organizations. Your insight to this topic will be very useful. As a reminder, you signed a consent form informing you that this interview will be recorded for accurate note taking and is 100% voluntary. If you need to take a break, stop the recording and/or would like to end the interview, you can withdraw without consequence. This interview will be approximately 45 minutes. Do you have any questions before starting? If not, let's get started.
• Watch for non-verbal queues • Ask probing follow-up questions for more in-depth • Paraphrase where needed	1) What strategies do you use to retain your volunteers? 2) What are the strategic goals of volunteer retention? 3) How do you manage volunteer satisfaction? 4) What additional information can you provide that could enhance my understanding of the volunteer retention strategies used to support your organization's mission? 5) How does your retention strategies satisfy the physiological needs of volunteers to increase services within local communities? 6) How does your retention strategies satisfy the safety of volunteers to increase services within local communities? 7) How does your retention strategies satisfy the social needs of volunteers to increase services within local communities? 8) How does your retention strategies satisfy the self-esteem needs of volunteers to increase services within local communities? 9) How does your organization assess the effectiveness of its volunteer retention strategies?
Wrap up the interviewing thanking participant	Script: This wraps up all my questions. Thank you so much for your participation. Be advised that your name/organization will remain confidential. The recording and notes will be password protected and destroyed after 5 years.

Schedule follow-up member checking interview	Script: The next correspondence from me will be to schedule the follow-up interview for member checking. During that time, I will have you to verify if my interpretation of your responses is accurate. When would be the best day and time to schedule the follow-up meeting?
Introduce the follow-up interview and set the tone for the interview	Script: Thank you for meeting with me again. During this interview we will review my interpretation of your responses to the interview questions.
Provide a copy of the succinct synthesis for each question Bring in probing questions related to other information found— note the information must be related so that the probing is adhering to the IRB approval. Discuss each question, read the interpretation, and ask: Did I miss anything? What would you like to add?	Script: Here is a copy of the synthesis for each question. We are about to go over each summary and please let me know if I missed or need to add any information. 1) Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation based on answers given by the study participant. 2) Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation based on answers given by the study participant. 3) Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation based on answers given by the study participant. 4) Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation based on answers given by the study participant. 5) Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation based on answers given by the study participant. 6) Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation based on answers given by the study participant. 7) Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation based on answers given by the study participant. 8) Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation based on answers given by the study participant. 9) Question and succinct synthesis of the interpretation based on answers given by the study participant.