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Effective Leadership Strategies Used to Retain Volunteers in Nonprofit Organizations

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Walden University

College of Management and Human Potential

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Walden University
2025

Abstract

Effective Leadership Strategies Used to Retain Volunteers in Nonprofit Organizations

by

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MS, Cleveland State University, 2015

BS, University of Buea, 2009

Research Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

November 2025

Abstract

Nonprofit organizations provide critical services that address social, cultural, and economic needs within communities. Nonprofit leaders who cannot retain volunteers risk reduced organizational capacity, interruptions in program delivery, and weakened ability to achieve program objectives. Grounded in servant leadership theory, the purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry project was to identify and explore the effective strategies nonprofit leaders use to retain volunteers to support their program objectives. Participants were six nonprofit leaders in north Texas who have successfully retained volunteers to support their program objectives. Data was collected using semi structured interviews and a review of publicly available documents about nonprofit volunteer retention strategies. Using thematic analysis, four themes were identified: volunteer management practices, communication and relationship building, volunteer retention strategies, and challenges and adaptive solutions. A key recommendation is for nonprofit leaders to adopt people-centered strategies that emphasize flexibility, recognition, and empathy to strengthen volunteer commitment. The implications for positive social change include the potential for more engaged volunteers who provide higher quality services that benefit the community and reduce dependence on tax-funded government programs.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Project

Background of the Problem

Volunteers are important in most nonprofit organizations because they are crucial to the overall functions of the organizations in the delivery of services in programs, fundraising and advocacy. Volunteers' commitment and enthusiasm can bring positive outcomes and achieve organizational goals to further their missions (Dayal & Verma, 2021). Employee turnover can be disruptive to operations and add costs to organizations (Holtrop et al., 2024). However, a new issue of concern has emerged for many nonprofit organizations regarding how to retain volunteers, particularly in the last several years.

High turnover rates not only interfere with an organization's overall functioning but also discard the organization's chance of attaining its objectives in the most effective manner. The turnover rate relates to disruption, resources, and challenges with regards to achieving a long-term strategy (Dayal & Verma, 2021). Therefore, it is important to understand the cause of volunteer turnover to produce ways of enhancing the methods of addressing volunteers for higher organizational performance.

To maintain volunteers and support their work in nonprofit organizations, it is imperative to identify strategies to retain volunteers and offer volunteers motivation, meaningful experience, communication, transparency, and organizational inclusion. Focusing on volunteer satisfaction and commitment allows nonprofit leaders to build strong support crucial for achieving the organization's mission.

Business Problem Focus and Project Purpose

Volunteer turnover is especially problematic for nonprofit organizations because it adversely affects their missions and the fulfillment of their duties toward various communities (Gomes de Aquino et al., 2020). The general business problem is that some nonprofit leaders cannot retain volunteers, which adversely impact their ability to fulfill their missions and provide services to their constituents. The specific business problem is that some nonprofit leaders lack strategies to retain volunteers to support their program objectives. The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry project was to identify and explore the effective strategies nonprofit leaders use to retain volunteers to support their program objectives (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). The target population consisted of nonprofit leaders in north Texas who have successfully retained volunteers to support their program objectives. The findings of this project may contribute to positive social change by offering nonprofit leaders' strategies to retain volunteers to support their program objectives, thereby reducing members of their community's reliance on government-funded programs.

Research Question

What effective strategies do nonprofit leaders use to retain volunteers to support their program objectives?

Assumptions and Limitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are facts considered to be true but are not actually verified (Barocas et al., 2020). Assumptions pose risks and should be addressed in research. In the context

of the broad topic of studying leadership practices for volunteer retention in nonprofit organizations, the following assumptions were made for examining direction of the project. First, I assumed that the volunteer and organizational leaders would not provide skewed or biased information about their experience and observation. This assumption was premised on the participants volunteering information without any influence from the researchers. There was a possibility that people may provide misinformation to avoid stating the truth or due to socially desirable bias or for privacy reasons.

Second, I assumed that the leadership strategies that received positive feedback from both the volunteers and organizational leaders will lead to an increased number of volunteers being retained. This framework underpins the central research focus of the project and is applied in analyzing specific leadership behaviors and their effects on volunteer satisfaction and commitment (Tsai et al., 2023a).

Limitations

According to Akanle et al. (2020), limitations are issues that are sometimes beyond the control of researchers but affect the methodology as well as the outcome of the research. There are several limitations that impacted the overall effectiveness of the goal of this research. First, there are certain external limitations that tend to be associated with selection bias as well as sample size determination. In this regard there was a possibility of overrepresentation of demographics to ensure diversity when it comes to selection of volunteers from the various organizations.

Second, limitations to data collection and analysis stem from potential drawbacks of self-reporting and social desirability bias. People's responses may have been tainted by self-serving information bias hence introducing some level of bias into the results.

Another limitation is the time and resources available for conducting the research might have limited the range and the level of detail of the work produced. Constraints such as time constraints, financial constraints, and unavailable or scarce funds might have impacted the operations of data collection and analysis in different ways.

Transition

Section 1 provided the context of this research project through description of the background to the problem, highlighting the difficulties faced by volunteer organizations especially the nonprofits, and underlining the need to explore leadership solutions to volunteer turnover. The problems, purpose, assumptions, and limitations were also described. Section 2 consists of a thorough review of the literature related to this project. Section 3 will focus on the research project methodology, detailing ethics and the nature of the project, population, sampling, data collection and organization, and reliability and validity. The focus of Section 4 will be on the presentation of the findings, recommendations, and conclusion.

Section 2: The Literature Review

This section presents a comprehensive review of the existing literature on the effective leadership strategies used for retaining volunteers in nonprofit organizations. It aims to establish a foundation for understanding the current state of knowledge, identify key debates and gaps, and ultimately, inform the research questions explored in this project.

A Review of Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry project was to identify and explore the effective strategies nonprofit leaders have use to retain volunteers to support their program objectives. The topics covered in this project include nonprofit organizations, volunteer turnover and retention, retention strategies, and servant leadership. The conceptual framework for this project is the servant leadership theory (Metzger et al., 2024). The literature review material was collected from the Walden Online University Library research database, which included Academic Search, ProQuest Central, EBSCOhost, SciDirect, Google Scholar, and government websites.

Volunteer Turnover

Volunteer turnover has enriched the understanding of the turnover rates in the context of nonprofit organizations in recent years (Holtrop et al., 2024). discovered that volunteers may decide to drop out of an organization due to perceived exclusion and marginally empowered participation. Mohammed (2020) corroborated these findings in a survey in which they self-reported that absence of communication and poor promotion opportunities were significant reasons for voluntary turnover. These considerations

underscore the broader importance of fostering volunteers' sense of inclusion and investment on volunteers' training and professional growth in nonprofit settings.

The incidence of COVID-19 pandemic has changed the position of volunteers in nonprofit organizations. N. S. Davis (2021) stated that due to changes brought about by the pandemic, volunteer fatigue is even higher, and morale in the sector is lower. The COVID-19 pandemic has driven nonprofit organizations to adopt rapid changes from standard work settings and volunteering activities to virtual settings with improved volunteer well-being (De Clerck, Willem, et al., 2021). Approaches such as engagement platforms, improving communication systems, and putting support structures in place have become effective instruments for the leaders of the nonprofits to ensure they overcome these challenges and maintain an active volunteer base.

Knowledge of the various factors that motivate people to volunteer is crucial in designing response retention strategies. All these reasons for volunteering need to be recognized and encouraged as much as possible if the programs are to succeed. Nonprofit leaders may align their leadership styles to suit this; they need to fit the diverse needs of volunteers (Han, 2022). Creating environments that reflect volunteers' motives can be helpful in boosting satisfaction levels and commitment among these individuals within an organization (Gomes de Aquino et al., 2020). Apart from improving the relationship between the volunteers and the organization, it also ensures that the volunteers are allowed to work in supportive communities where their contribution is highly valued. Still, apart from knowing why the volunteers continue helping the organization, it is equally important to provide them with opportunities to learn and develop as well.

Volunteers are typically willing to engage in acts of volunteering that bring them to utilize their abilities while at the same time enhancing themselves (Metzger et al., 2024). Managers can support this by adequately outlining what is expected of volunteers, what should be achieved within a given period, and how they will be supported and rewarded regularly. Appreciation of volunteers' work also helps to encourage them as it provides a sense of ownership in the organization, hence encouraging volunteerism.

Clear communication is important in volunteer management. For this reason, nonprofit organization leaders should keep volunteers informed on the general updates within the organization, changes, new projects, among other things (Mohammed, 2020). Through offering volunteer support or responding to volunteers' problems quickly, volunteer leaders exhibit their cooperativeness from other volunteers. Creating such a feedback loop allows the volunteers to express their ideas, concerns, and recommendations on how certain issues should be addressed. This makes them more committed to the organization.

Leadership is critical in meeting the difficult challenge of volunteer retention in nonprofit organizations. De Clerck, Aelterman, et al. (2021) underlined the importance of open leadership practices that focus on communication and appropriate appreciation of volunteers as essential factors that have a positive impact on volunteers' satisfaction and readiness to continue volunteering. The same applies to Clement's (2021) finding of how servant leadership is critical in creating the right organizational culture and appreciation of volunteers' efforts, focusing again on the significance of leadership in volunteers' retention.

Farooq et al. (2020) also looked at the role of corporate culture in determining volunteer experience and results. The authors revealed that feelings of appreciation and inclusion as well as the overall support of the organization yield higher rates of volunteer retention. However, organizations exhibiting negative culture characterized by conflict, mistrust, and no appreciation to volunteers are likely to have high rates of volunteer turnover.

Factors Leading to Increased Employee Turnover Rates

Lack of Recognition and Appreciation

According to Huang et al. (2023), most volunteers feel worthless in their organization, hence making volunteer work unattractive. There is a need for a simple thank you and can be in the form of announcing their success in meetings, recommending them for an award, or presenting them with an appreciation certificate. These actions affirm volunteers and stand as a reminder that their work is indeed making an impact on the world (Metzger et al., 2024). On the other hand, the failure to make recognition leads to development of resentment and feeling of disillusionment, where volunteers doubt the effectiveness of their efforts and their usefulness to the organization.

To manage this problem, leaders of nonprofit organizations should set up clear appreciation policies that reward volunteers frequently and in front of others. Huang et al. (2023) suggested that supervisors should find ways in which to appreciate volunteer contributions and in doing so this should be performed genuinely through promoting the organizational culture and ethics. Nurturing an open atmosphere where volunteers feel recognized and appreciated for their contributions and efforts (Gomes de Aquino et al.,

2020). In this way nonprofit organizations create an organizational culture of valuing volunteers work and thus promote long-term volunteering practice.

Poor Communication

Communication is an ideal way of reinforcing unity and developing a competent volunteer structure in nonprofit organizations (Abdulkadir & Dobrin, 2022). There could be confusion and frustration experienced by volunteers in organizations when there is poor or limited communication from leadership (Han, 2022). Lack of clarity in communication results in many problems such as confusion, inaccurate completion of tasks, and adversarial relationship with the overall organizational objectives and vision. It means that volunteers should know what is reasonably expected of them in terms of what they are supposed to do, the amount of time they will devote to volunteering and the usefulness of their efforts.

Communication openness ensures that the leaders of the organizations and volunteers can hold dialogues with each other. Employees should be free to bring up any issues that they want to discuss and voice any questions and opinions they may have without any negative consequences (Abdulkadir & Dobrin, 2022). The suggestions include having follow-up meetings frequently to align the volunteers and giving out feedback that will enable them to stay in line with the organization's activities (Han, 2022). To enhance the communication process, nonprofit organizations can adopt communication channels such as newsletters, volunteer meetings and online forums.

Education campaigns for the volunteers and the staff as well as constant exposure to the best practices in communication can further improve clarity and comprehension

between the parties (Abdulkadir & Dobrin, 2022). Focusing on the communication processes within an organization and aiming at their improvement, nonprofit organizations will be able to ensure the proper balance in their relationship with volunteers, enhance the organizational bonds, and reduce instances of conflict which cause volunteers' attrition.

Limited Opportunities for Growth

According to Sudarshanam (2021), people are willing to provide a helping hand not for the compensation that they will get from the organization but for the satisfaction that they will gain physically, emotionally, and spiritually. They may be in the hunt for ways and means whereby they would be trained and learn new skills, get new experiences, and sometimes just update their resumes (Benevene et al., 2020). If to this, the nonprofit organizations do not offer means of upward mobility or professional progress, then volunteers may feel directionless or unappreciated and thus demotivated.

Possibilities for learning may be of varying types which could include training sessions, leadership courses, or mentored positions. This also provides volunteers in nonprofit organizations opportunities to assume extra roles or responsibilities or take charge of certain projects as a means of moving up and contributing even more to the organization (Sudarshanam, 2021). Nonprofit organizations should be proactive in determining volunteers' preferences and strengths as far as areas where there is potential for professional development and relevant opportunities. What is even better is that disputes or disagreement that may arise from time to time regarding goals and objectives may be resolved by tackling volunteer's goals and aspirations discussion. Thus,

upgrading volunteers contributes to both retention and the production of a more knowledgeable, dedicated volunteer pool, ideal for the nonprofit organizations.

Conflict and Disagreements

According to Robinson (2023), internal conflict and dissent among nonprofit organizations can establish a counterproductive and hostile climate that harms volunteers' motivation. Interpersonal conflict could happen among the volunteers themselves, between the volunteers and the paid staff or among the volunteer leadership. The key issues and disputes that may occur between different organizational units can be based on differences in methods of communication, different approaches to priorities, and concept of roles and functions (Benevene et al., 2020). In the case where disputes arise or persist, the development of the negative environment thereby damaging the rapport between individuals in conflict is inevitable.

Managing conflict is best accomplished before it arises and should involve the creation of respect and the encouragement of free communication in a certain organization. Some tactics nonprofit organizations can use to correct grievances include arranging of mediation sessions as well as discussions among the feuding parties. Hiring concerns and informing the teams of staff as well as volunteers concerning methods of handling confrontations can also assist them in possessing the needed tools for managing conflicts (Alam & Sun, 2022). Defined rules that determine how to solve conflict situations can provide people with a resource to use them and prevent inequality in that context. It is recommended that leaders establish themselves as good models by showing how conflicts can be solved and through promoting communication in the workplace

(Robinson, 2023). Proper and timely handling of conflict benefits the nonprofit organizations showing its positive influence on the organizational culture, volunteer satisfaction and retention.

Inadequate Training and Support

Dunn et al. (2020) suggested that proper training and development of volunteer support is required for nonprofit organizations and the volunteers also to understand their roles and to feel valued within their organizations. Benevene et al. (2020) stated that people that offer their services for free come with different qualities and characteristics but may need orientation on the part of the organization they are volunteering for regarding procedures, policies and overall perspective of their work.

Nonprofit organizations can contribute to the ineffective or insufficient training provided to volunteers, which means that they cannot perform their tasks competently. This lack of preparation forms the basis of frustration and perceived incompetence especially when volunteers are made to feel that they practically lack the capability to help further the objectives of the organization (Dunn et al., 2020). They may also get faced with issues or ask questions to which the volunteer organization has no follow-up, solution, or resource, which will only compound the feelings of loneliness and confusion. In response to this problem, nonprofit organizations need to develop elaborate training systems that focus on the volunteers' tasks and duties. It should be noted that training discussions should provide employees with all the necessary information about organizational goals, their policies, procedures in the work, as well as any necessary technical knowledge to accomplish a specific task. It is also necessary to hold the

meetings and performance appraisals, which enable volunteers to recognize their achievements and development (Benevene et al., 2020). This means that nonprofit organizations support volunteers' productivity by providing resources and education on how to develop their skills and therefore, volunteers participate in nonprofit organizations with a positive attitude when their organizations care for their welfare.

Mismatched Expectations

Clear compatibility of the volunteers' expectations and the actual opportunity they take in the given organization is the key to increasing volunteer satisfaction and their willingness to continue voluntary service. The volunteers come with specifying perceptions on the effects, time they will be donating, and the values and culture of the nonprofit organizations (Gomes de Aquino et al., 2020). If such expectations are not realized volunteers may feel unhappy and disappointed. For instance, while volunteers may have a clear picture of what they are supposed to accomplish and the roles they are supposed to play in the organization's decision-making system, they end up feeling excluded and their opinions are ignored.

Differences can also occur as per the understanding of the roles and responsibilities that are to be performed, or the amount of time required. Volunteers who feel overworked, or do not like what they are doing due to feeling that it is too demanding or is not what they originally signed up to do then they are likely to disengage from volunteering (Gomes de Aquino et al., 2020). To counter this, nonprofit organizations should make clear what is expected from volunteers during the recruitment process and

offer accurate previews of the tasks for a volunteer and the institution's internal environment.

According to Mohammed (2020), clear communication of the organization aims, principles, and processes might address volunteers' unrealistic expectations of their tasks. These can include follow-up meetings with volunteers to determine their levels of engagement satisfaction or lack of it and conflict resolution that involves taking note of the mismatches that may arise as the volunteers go about their duties. The primary means of communication that I believe nonprofit organizations can use to facilitate volunteerism is to encourage and model truthfulness with volunteers.

Burnout

Metzger et al. (2024) suggested that volunteer burnout in nonprofit organizations can occur easily when there is conflict between volunteer's tasks and other personal demands. It is quite possible that most volunteers have many feelings toward the causes or organizations they are volunteering for. This may make them very energetic, voluntarily assuming many responsibilities as they work (Alam & Sun, 2022). However, if volunteers are not supported by sufficient support structures, or if they receive very many assignments, they can easily burn out.

Volunteer burnout encompasses emotional exhaustion, low motivation, and the volunteers do not feel passion in the organizational goals. Volunteers themselves are liable to become tired physically and mentally, and this affects their work productivity and their willingness to continue volunteering (Metzger et al., 2024). Volunteer burnout does not only impact a single volunteer but also has negative implications for the

efficiency and morale of a team effort as well as an organization overall. While assessing the volunteers they should take actions that will promote a healthy working balance to avoid cases of burning out (Mendes, 2020). This includes expectations placed on the volunteer and expectations of the volunteer in the organization, the role description that is provided to the volunteer, and making sure the volunteer has all the resources they may require in the process of volunteering. Conducting follow-ups with volunteers is also an important way of ascertaining the levels of stress and burnout amongst volunteers.

Measures that can help prevent burnt out include the following: sharing of work among volunteers; providing hope and chance for the volunteers to rest; and self-care measures among volunteers (Metzger et al., 2024). Through encouraging volunteer support and creating a protective encompassing cover, nonprofit organizations can improve overall volunteer strength and endurance as well as continued volunteer performance.

External Factors

Nonprofit organizations may be unable to avert changes in the external environment that are leading to a high turnover of volunteers; however, they can intervene and assist their volunteers during such transition (Alam & Sun, 2022). This involves keeping a good rapport with volunteers, being aware of their changing needs and addressing them, particularly where there is flexibility concerning volunteers' position or timings (Holtrop et al., 2024). Enabling the volunteers to convey their possible future changes in plans, and the timelines for these can also assist the nonprofit organizations to address issues to do with succession of volunteers (Metzger et al., 2024). Thus,

demonstrating empathy and flexibility, nonprofit organizations can keep volunteers' favorable attitude toward them despite their changed personal situation and ensure that volunteers would be willing to volunteer again when they can.

Lack of Engagement or Meaningful Contribution

According to Westerlaken (2023), volunteers experience the urge to exercise their contribution to causes that they feel are important. When volunteers do not feel that what they are doing has an impact on the organization or that it is connected to the goals of the organization, they may think that their work lacks purpose. The absence of such interventions in the process may be somewhat frustrating, resulting in volunteers' dissatisfaction and disillusionment.

Enabling volunteers to observe their work outcomes in a bid to assess the extent to which their efforts will help achieve the organization's agenda can improve motivation. More specifically, the following could be useful in bolstering volunteers' role identity: Informing volunteers consistently of how their service is valuable, and more frequently praising them for the work they do.

Lack of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Pattinson et al. (2023) suggested that volunteer turnover is also associated with aspects such as an organization's diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policy. When volunteers have a notion that an organization has few or no people of color in leadership, staff, or volunteers, or when volunteers experience bias or exclusion on other aspects such as ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability or age, they tend to feel outside the organization's culture (Nyirenda et al., 2020). Avoid discriminating against them by not

giving them equal chances to volunteer. There is a need to train the staff and volunteers to enhance awareness of different views on diversity and inclusion.

According to Gilad (2021), considering DEI strategies and ensuring that any roles are open to people of all genders, races, and backgrounds are possible ways through which nonprofit organizations can improve volunteer retention and have a larger pool of people willing to volunteer. This will ensure increased effectiveness of the organization and management in delivering services in communities that are diverse.

Communication and Recognition Strategies

Intervention and appreciation systems are among the most critical factors in volunteer replenishment for nonprofits. Communication facilitates volunteers' interest, confidence, and participation, and the perceived importance and efforts propel satisfaction and commitment (Metzger et al., 2024). As part of this literature review, it is relevant to demonstrate the importance of communication and recognition strategies concerning volunteer retention based on recent research and theoretical findings.

Communication Strategies

The pragmatic component refers to the social interaction between the volunteers and the organizations to ensure understanding, trust, and relationship management. Effective communication is crucial in mitigating volunteer turnover, as a perceived lack of communication can lead to disengagement and withdrawal from volunteering activities (Forner et al., 2024). Key communication tools include but are not limited to regular updates, newsletters, and feedback mechanisms to transmit information, show appreciation, and address issues as they emerge (Mohammed, 2020). N. S. Davis (2021)

emphasized how communication practices should be aligned with virtual contexts, especially in the light of switching to voluntary work during the pandemic.

Recognition Strategies

Recognition is an excellent way of supporting and rewarding the volunteers for their hard work in the organization. De Clerck, Willem, et al. (2021) noted that recognition is one of the crucial factors that can influence volunteers' perceptions of value and, in turn, their satisfaction and retention. Clement (2021) explored how servant leaders appreciated volunteers by acknowledging their contributions and leaders' deference in the process to promote recognition. Developing context-specific recognition programs, including volunteer celebration activities like a party or reception, a volunteer reward system, or the generation of volunteer certificates, can add to the commitment and motivation of volunteers (Pattinson et al., 2023). Volunteer management is an important aspect for an organization, and the most common strategies of management are communication and recognition to retain volunteers.

De Clerck, Willem, et al. (2021) also noted that special attention should be paid to communication and ways to recognize volunteers to get more satisfied volunteers who will not quit volunteering. These researchers discovered that volunteering and communication, feedback, and recognition of the volunteers' efforts can help volunteers feel valued and involved, thus improving volunteers' performances and volunteer persistence rates. Chan (2020) and Benevene et al. (2020) have explored leadership, volunteer motivation, and organizational success in 2023. Self-determination theory revealed that matching leadership behaviors with volunteers' self-extrinsic regulation and

organizational objectives helps optimize volunteers' satisfaction and productivity for organizational effectiveness.

Conceptual Framework

Servant Leadership Theory

Overview

Servant leadership theory, which originated with Greenleaf, is based on the proposition that the provision of leadership starts with the provision of services. Servant leadership approach puts serving others above all other priorities (Greenleaf, 1977). As opposed to other leadership perspectives that focus on power and subordination, servant leadership focuses on virtue, people orientation, and appropriateness of power to the welfare of followers.

Servant leaders address the needs of their followers, and they ensure that people are empowered to realize their full potential (Farooq et al., 2020). In addition, servant leadership fosters organizational collaboration, trust, and involvement in teams. With this approach, leaders cultivate other people's abilities by listening to them, nurturing their potential, and supporting their individual and career advancement. Indeed, servant leadership strives for an organizational culture that is based on respect, empathy, and ethical standards.

Key Concepts

Idealized influence (charisma): Self-transcendence is one of the major characteristics of servant leaders who produce change and enthusiasm among followers.

Inspirational motivation: Leaders provide guidance, which inspires change in followers to align with the envisaged objectives, plans, and values.

Intellectual stimulation: Servant leaders always inspire creativity, innovation and perception in followers provoking new ideas.

Individualized consideration: Servant leaders are compassionate, encouraging, and coaching-oriented by identifying the followers' needs and dreams.

Propositions/Hypotheses

Servant leadership theory proposes that leaders willing to serve others will foster higher follower satisfaction, engagement, and commitment, leading to improved organizational outcomes (Farooq et al., 2020). This theory implies that engaging in behaviors like working together, respecting various views, and creating a culture of mutual understanding will increase volunteer retention rates in nonprofit organizations.

Application to Research Project

By analyzing how servant leadership influences volunteers' satisfaction, involvement, and persistence, the project seeks to produce worthwhile directions and solutions for the further improvement of volunteer management of nonprofit organizations (Westerlaken, 2023). More concretely, this investigation will focus on how charismatic and inspirational communication, visions, ideas, and personalized attentiveness may be strengthened to engage volunteers positively, lead them to remain involved in volunteering activities, and support overall organizational effectiveness.

This is in line with the research objective that sought to examine the role of leadership in the management of volunteer turnover challenges, and the research findings

indicate that nonprofit organization can develop a servant leadership culture that would enhance volunteer commitment and retention.

Transition

Section 1 provided the context of this research project through description of the background to the problem, highlighting the difficulties faced by nonprofits organizations, and underlining the need to explore leadership solutions to volunteer turnover. The problems, purpose, assumptions, and delimitations were also described. Section 2 consists of a thorough review of the literature related to this project including a synthesis of peer-reviewed scholarly and professional resources that offer pertinent information on the leadership practices that promote volunteer retention in nonprofit organizations. The literature review focused on the targeted research question and included a critique of recent literature using servant leadership theory to recognize patterns and research gaps. Section 3 will focus on the research project methodology, detailing ethics and the nature of the project, population, sampling, data collection and organization, and reliability and validity. The focus of Section 4 will be on the presentation of the findings, recommendations, and conclusion.

Section 3: Research Project Methodology

Introduction

The research methodology used in conducting the project to determine the effective leadership approaches when managing volunteers in nonprofit organizations is described in Section 3. This section provides a brief description of the research design, data collection technique, issues of ethics, and data analysis plan of the project.

Project Ethics

Ethical behavior in research was essential to preserve the integrity of research findings and outcomes. Because of this, I, who had experience volunteering and working for nonprofits, aimed to protect the participants' self-determination and confidentiality. The researcher's responsibilities included gathering qualitative data through face-to-face interviews and focus group activities, where honesty and appropriate behavior were vital. The principles of The Belmont Report (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 2013) were complied with, involving respect for people and fairness in the conduct of the project.

An informed consent form indicated the purpose of the project, the procedures to be followed, the risks involved in participating, the measures that were taken to ensure the confidentiality of the participants, and the rights granted to the participants. Respondents were informed of their rights and responsibilities as members of the research project, and only willing individuals will be allowed to participate in the project. To maintain the confidentiality of the participants, names were replaced with pseudonyms

or code numbers, and any sensitive information was stored in a folder different from the data that is being analyzed and summarized.

Participants were not incentivized because this might have led to coercion or bias. The participants were assured that their participation was voluntary and would not involve their organizations. They were also informed that they could withdraw from participation without penalty. Procedures for preventing harm included informing the participants, maintaining their privacy, and agreeing on strategies to avoid causing distress (Han, 2022). By pursuing these ethical standards, I sought to provide significant information on leadership practices that help to increase volunteer retention in nonprofit organizations and the societies benefiting from their services. The data and files related to this project will be stored securely for 5 years and disposed of after that time to protect the confidentiality of participants. The Walden University IRB approval number was 04-09-25-1019280.

Nature of the Project

A qualitative research approach was appropriate because this approach is particularly practical for investigating the intricate nature of leadership practices about volunteer recruitment in nonprofit organizations (Gilad, 2021). Some of the specific advantages of qualitative methods included using interviews and observations to provide a flexible and detailed examination of complex and overlapping activities that were hard to analyze solely with the quantitative method. The current project benefited from qualitative research as this approach focused on identifying and analyzing organizational

members' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors regarding volunteer management and leadership functionalities.

The research used pragmatic inquiry to gain knowledge in practice, which involves linking theory with practice in decision-making contexts (Robinson, 2023). This design was appropriate because this project aimed to identify strategies nonprofit managers used to improve volunteer retention. By applying the principles of pragmatic inquiry design, I was able to identify practical solutions derived from empirical evidence applicable to real-life challenges in managing and recruiting volunteers in nonprofit organizations.

Population, Sampling, and Participants

The target population consisted of nonprofit organization leaders in north Texas who successfully retained volunteers to support their program objectives. Due to the desire to sample nonprofit organization leaders in north Texas, the project used a mix of word-of-mouth and contact-list methods. First, the primary method was to recruit participants from the networks already known; this means using contacts in nonprofit organizations and attending community events to seek out individuals. Leaders of nonprofit organizations were contacted through social networks and the LinkedIn website.

There were several common sampling techniques in research: purposive, random, and snowball. According to Johnson et al. (2020), purposive sampling referred to intentionally selecting research participants based on specific characteristics relevant to the research question, while random sampling involved choosing participants purely by

chance, giving everyone in the population an equal opportunity to be selected. Snowball sampling is the technique where existing participants help recruit new participants from their network. Purposive sampling was the most suitable for participant selection in this project because this technique allowed the research to select participants who have the information, experience, and attitude in accordance with the project goal. Purposive sampling involved intentionally selecting participants based on specific characteristics relevant to the project (Campbell et al., 2020).

A small sample size of six participants was recruited to provide adequate degree of detail to perform qualitative analysis. This size was adequate to achieve data saturation; however, data collection continued until no further themes were uncovered.

Data Collection Activities

An interview protocol was used to maintain consistency in the interview and data collection process. Semistructured interviews offered structure to the conversation while still providing the participants with the opportunity to explain their ideas and thoughts while maintaining a degree of order to ensure key research themes are delved into satisfactorily (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021).

According to Johnson et al. (2020), qualitative research often included interview protocols as tools that helped collect rich and detailed information. Researcher alignment with goals stayed intact through this method which enabled participants to offer informative perspectives.

The interview protocol (see Appendix A) provided the framework to ask questions about retention tactics and challenges alongside achievements from participating

volunteers. Interview protocols provided a foundation for conducting qualitative interviews and strengthen the quality of data obtained throughout the entire project (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Face-to-face or video conference meetings were organized regarding protocol execution depending on participant selection of meeting type and the achievable schedule.

The research design enabled flexibility to adapt to participants' preferences thus gathering multiple nonprofit sector leaders. All audio recorded interview sessions were transcribed for detailed analysis, to enhance data accessibility and sharing, and promote accuracy and validity in the research process.

Qualitative researchers widely praised the effectiveness of semistructured interviews because these methods enabled participants to expand beyond relevant areas while exploring essential research themes (Han, 2022). This research approach delivered both elaborate findings and subtle specifics from participants. Semistructured interviews functioned as the data collection method during this investigation to permit participants to articulate their ideas concerning leadership best practices and volunteer management. The chosen methodology allowed me to acquire complex insights into nonprofit organization's volunteer leadership and management structures through detailed information acquisition.

The research performed member checking as one of the most common methods to verify both correct transcription content and thorough information capture (Han, 2022). Reflective journaling functioned as an essential tool in qualitative research to track both emergent trends and analytical methodological selections because these records boosted

both transparency and trustworthiness. I performed member checking to verify my interpretation of the participants' responses to the interview questions to confirm participants' views have been properly documented. I used a reflective journal to keep track of new patterns and methodology choices, among other assessment information, for maintaining research transparency and methodological rigor. A complete outline of the interview questions exists in the upcoming subsection and Appendix B.

Interview Questions

1. What are your responsibilities related to volunteers?
2. What strategies or practices do you use to successfully retain volunteers?
3. How do you facilitate communication with and how do you support volunteers?
4. What are some of the obstacles to volunteer retention?
5. What real life example of a volunteer engagement initiative or program you have implemented can you share?
6. What strategies have you personally implemented to retain volunteers?
7. What other information would you like to share about retaining volunteers in nonprofit organizations?

Data Organization and Analysis Techniques

The following systematic approaches were used to enhance the organizational and analytical integrity of data concerning leadership practices on volunteer retention in nonprofit organizations. First, all interviews were documented and recorded responses and notes made during observations were transcribed and kept secure. These data were then stored and labeled systematically to easily track and verify the credibility of data

during analysis. Interview and observation checklists, research logs, and reflective journals were also kept, monitoring progress and record developing knowledge and ideas about the project throughout data collection and analysis processes.

For data analysis, NVivo software assisted with organizing and analyzing qualitative data. Thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006), was the most appropriate and effective analytical model. Thematic analysis included the comprehensive process of recognizing, analyzing, and narrating patterns (themes) in the acquired data set. First, data collected were subjected to open coding, which involved tagging segments of the data with descriptive or analytical codes. These codes were then grouped together into possible themes that depicted patterns that could be observed or ideas that were likely to be of importance in the data set.

Second, publicly available documents, for instance, organizational reports, strategic plans, volunteer handbooks, and any other research papers containing information about participating nonprofit organizations, were used as another data source (Bergen & Labonté, 2020). These documents supplemented general information about the organizations, their purpose, beliefs and practices, or policies pertaining to volunteer engagement and maintenance. This was because the project used both qualitative data from interviews and from organizational documents to increase the validity as well as reliability of the project (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). This way, the conclusions drawn were from multiple sources, thus lowering the impact of prejudice or presuppositions and making the results of the research much stronger.

Thematic analysis was comprehensive and mindful to capture the most accurate understanding of leadership and volunteer retention within nonprofit organizations. I used NVivo software to analyze the data and followed established methodological procedures to ensure that the findings of the project provided relevant insights to guide the understanding of effective leadership practices in the nonprofit sector. The data and files related to this project will be stored securely for 5 years and disposed of after that time to protect confidentiality of participants.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability in qualitative research described the stability and dependability of the data gathered and the procedures used. A multisource approach was used to enhance reliability in this research project. Triangulation was achieved using interviews, focus group discussions, questionnaires, and review of documents supporting the research topic and limiting biases that may result from a single viewpoint (Denzin, 2017). For data triangulation, I used semistructured interviews and publicly available documents from the participants' organizations.

According to Robinson (2023) Data saturation occurs when no more new themes are identified from the data. Hence, I continued collecting data until no new themes were identified. If new themes emerged during the project, more participants would have been interviewed until data saturation is achieved. Data collection ceased once I achieved data saturation.

Transition and Summary

Section 3 described the components of the qualitative research project activities to be used. Section 3 focused on the research project methodology, detailing ethics and the nature of the project, population, sampling, data collection and organization, and reliability and validity. The focus of Section 4 will be on the presentation of the findings, recommendations, and conclusion.

Section 4: Findings and Conclusions

Presentation of the Findings

The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry project was to identify and explore the effective strategies nonprofit leaders use to retain volunteers to support their program objectives. The data were collected by using semistructured interviews with six nonprofit leaders in north Texas who have successfully retained volunteers to support their program objectives and review of publicly available documents about nonprofit volunteer retention strategies. The research question guiding this project was: What effective strategies do nonprofit leaders use to retain volunteers to support their program objectives? Using the thematic analysis framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006), and NVivo-codified data, four themes emerged: volunteer management practices, communication and relationship building, volunteer retention strategies, and challenges and adaptive solutions. These themes highlight the role of effective volunteer management, solid communication habits, and flexible adaptability in ensuring continued involvement of the volunteers and organizational success.

Table 1*Codes Combined into Categories*

Category	Definition	Example codes included
Role clarity & fit	Ensuring volunteers know what to do and are placed well	Clear role expectations; matching skills to tasks; task flexibility
Participatory leadership	Building ownership through shared decisions	Inclusion in decisions; empowering volunteers to lead
Communication channels	Ensuring information flow and accessibility	Multichannel communication; overcommunication; regular check-ins
Meaning & motivation	Reinforcing purpose, recognition, and belonging	MPV transparency; public recognition; spiritual/emotional encouragement
Job aids & training	Standardizing and developing capability	Job aids/SOPs; cross-training; mentoring
Engagement programs	Structured, meaningful opportunities	Skill-based volunteering; themed events; partnerships
Structural constraints	Factors that erode reliability or capacity	Cultural differences; no-shows; burnout; economic/personal limits
Adaptive responses	Leadership actions that stabilize delivery	Redistributing tasks; standby pool; mediation; scheduling flexibility

Table 2*Generating Initial Themes from Categories*

Initial theme	Definition	Constituent categories
Volunteer management practices	How leaders design roles and develop volunteers	Role clarity & fit; job aids & training; participatory leadership
Communication & relationship building	How leaders communicate and sustain trust	Communication channels; meaning & motivation
Volunteer retention strategies	How leaders recognize, empower, and engage	Engagement programs; meaning & motivation; participatory leadership
Challenges & adaptive solutions	What undermines reliability and how leaders respond	Structural constraints; adaptive responses

Table 3*Final Themes Aligned to Project-Specific Questions*

Theme	Aligned question	Summary finding
Volunteer management practices	How do leaders structure roles/support to reduce churn?	Clear expectations, skills-based placement, flexible assignment, and mentoring underpin reliable contribution
Communication & relationship building	How do communication and relationships shape volunteers' willingness to stay?	Multichannel communication, over-communicated expectations, and relational care (family ethos) drive trust and retention
Volunteer retention strategies	Which recognition and engagement levers most effectively sustain commitment?	Public recognition, certificates, empowerment to lead, and mission-linked events strengthen identification and continuity
Challenges & adaptive solutions	Which obstacles most threaten reliability and what adaptive responses work best?	No-shows, burnout, cultural/economic constraints persist; proactive redistribution, standby pools, and mediation buffer risk

Theme 1: Volunteer Management Practices*Role Definition and Task Allocation*

Clear Role Expectations for Each Volunteer. The first step in achieving effective retention is a considerate way of setting roles and assigning duties to volunteers. Throughout the interviews, the theme that re-emerged regarding the leaders was that clarity and fit is the basis of engaging volunteers, but this needs to be coupled with flexibility and respect. Some leaders observed that a lack of role clarity causes confusion and a lack of accountability. The fact that volunteers were aware of specific expectations, as Participant 4 stated:

Well, first of all, it's having clear expectations. You know, people are volunteering because they want to give back, they want to help. And so it's important that you are very clear with them about what kind of help you need and what you need them to do.

This remark is indicative of the ideology that in the case of unclear responsibilities, one can suffer because of the ambiguity of their role, or they may breach the boundaries without such intention. Describing obligations in advance, leaders can lay the path to modeling the minimum level of performance and prevent misunderstanding in the future, as often, this is achieved at orientation sessions or pointed out in the descriptions of the roles.

Matching Volunteer Skills to Appropriate Tasks. Pairing specialists with tasks is another common leadership behavior. Participant 2 commented: "Well, can you match them with somebody that is not on the volunteering team that could provide them with that cross training just to, you know, get the task completed." Such a strategic fit not only means that operations are efficient but also enhances the satisfaction of the volunteers, as the latter can work in their comfort zone or the field where they are more competent. There were comments on informal assessments of skills by leaders in the intake discussions, and constant observation to recreate task assignments as time goes on. Volunteers who feel they are exercising their talents in a meaningful way do not disengage as much. Good matching of the volunteers' talents to the appropriate tasks is one of the key tactics to assure the success of the organization, including satisfaction of the volunteers. When leaders recognize that not all volunteers are comfortable in the

same roles, they create opportunities for individuals to thrive in areas that suit their strengths. As Participant 6 noted,

It's not everybody, you know, to be one on one. They prefer not to necessarily be with the guests, but they want to be in the back doing, you know, sorting out things. So it works out. It works out. You let people, you know.

This kind of versatility reveals the necessity to attentively value the personal interests of volunteers and allocate them as such.

Flexibility in Assigning Roles. A key element in the effective management of volunteers is flexibility in role assigning. By letting people choose their own responsibilities depending on how comfortable they are or whether the situation has changed, one can make sure that no volunteers feel overwhelmed with stress and no longer want to volunteer. Participant 2, "Don't say because you've been assigned to something, make it your primary task kind of a thing. If you're struggling, raise your hands up, you know, you're not going to be judged, right?" This view reiterates the fact that the volunteers must be placed in an environment where they feel empowered and that they are not placed in an environment where they are not comfortable, i.e., they are not placed in a setting where they are not assigned specific tasks. Leaders promote openness and communication to diminish the burnout risk and help establish a sense of psychological safety, where volunteers can request changes and are not discouraged. Ultimately, this flexibility has a positive impact not only on the well-being of individuals but also on the performance of teams and organizational resiliency.

Inclusion of Volunteers in Decision-Making. Inclusion empowerment also stood out as a topic of importance: Participant 1 noted: “It’s also very important that we listen to our volunteers ... your volunteer pool is not just a free service. It’s a major aspect of your organization that contribute a lot in decision-making processes.” When experts/volunteers are included in operational or strategic meetings, they get a sense of ownership and collective responsibility. This can be as little as asking their opinions on how to organize the event to even including them in the problem solving when difficulties impinge.

Supervisory Oversight With Mutual Respect. Leaders said that volunteers that feel listened to and appreciated tend to be more engaged and loyal by performing above minimum expectations. Supervision was described not as top-down control but as guidance rooted in mutual respect. Participant 3 captured this dynamic: “And so I’ve made recommendations to them in the past of how they may better do the stuff, but I never had direct control over what they were doing in terms of the operation of that thing.” Leaders structured their supervision as a resource-based activity always making sure that the volunteers received sufficient support, reactions, and resources, as opposed to monitoring their every step. The strategy complies with the servant leadership in which the job of the leader is to empower and not control.

Support and Development

Cross-Training Opportunities. In addition to allocating roles, leaders understood that continuous engagement can only be achieved through maintenance and development. The strategies employed in equipping, developing and accommodating the

volunteers so that they feel competent and appreciated fall into this subcategory. Leaders provided volunteers with opportunities to learn multiple roles, increasing both their versatility and their investment in the organization. Participant 2 explained: “Again, speaking back to the cross-training opportunities I talked about, they’ve never done it, but they were willing to learn it, right? ... The task was a highly visible task, and they didn’t want to mess up.” Cross-training serves operational resilience but also engages volunteers by expanding their skill sets. According to the report of the leaders, the volunteers had always loved to acquire new skills that may also serve them, in other areas of their work or even in their communities.

Mentoring and Career Guidance. Individual mentorship became a powerful retention strategy. Participant 1 said: “I’ve also been able to mentor the younger generation.” In such mentorship, one does not relate to the needs of the moment in the organization, but it is an indication that there is interest in the success of the volunteers in the long term. Leaders explained how they provided advice on careers in professional life, introduced the volunteers to professional networks, and provided an insight about relevant industries. These activities lead to profound relational connections and experiences on the part of the volunteer that transform the individual.

Providing Letters of Recommendation. Letters of recommendation reflecting the contribution of volunteers was also another prized practice in recognition. And as Participant 5 explained: “write out—we write a letter of recommendation as well that’s good that’s good thank you very much.” This practical endorsement can go far in terms of career or academic payback, and that is the two-way relationship between volunteer and

leader relationship. The leaders perceived these gestures as a service recognition and an investment environment of their future.

Offering Resources for Personal Growth. Occasional workshops, networking opportunities or the access to educational materials were offered by some leaders, as it has been mentioned by Participant 1: “So when we train a volunteer pool, they also feel empowered because at the end of the training, they get a certification that they are able to include that on their resume.” This endorsement supports the notion that the volunteer experience may serve as the means of self-improvement, which works in accordance with servant leadership as the domain of developing others.

Adjusting Tasks for Volunteers with Special Needs. Participants shared the same value of inclusivity. Leaders reported altering their roles to adapt to health conditions, disability, or any other personal situation. This code was not attached to any direct quote in our previous excerpts; however, it follows Participant 2 with its focus on flexibility with its respectful oversight attitude:

Adjust roles as needed ... there are times people have raised their hands up to say, yes, I'm going to do this ... but you know, 3, 4 days into it, you're like, yeah, I know you're struggling. So ... we get you the help you need.

Instead of considering such adjustments as impostors on them, leaders considered the situation as possibilities to illustrate the values and commitment of the organization toward accessibility.

Theme 2: Communication and Relationship Building

Communication Approaches

Multiple Communication Channels. The research participants, who are leaders in the field, did not refer to communication and relationship building activities as distinct activities, but as integrated practices that maintain engagement of volunteers and organizational performance. They knew that good communication is about sending instructions and a means through which trust can be established, purpose of an organization expressed, and a feeling of belonging to the volunteers created. In a purely operational point of view, the need to have multiple channels of communication was imperative in ensuring the volunteers were up to date and coordinated. As Participant 2 explained, “Most people have WhatsApp... create a group; if you want to text, call me.” It is a sensible approach that not every volunteer has the same information-reading patterns; some would lean on instant messaging, others would depend on calls or emails. There were various platforms used by leaders to ensure that no vital update was going to be missed and thus there would be chances of last-minute confusion or disengagement because of miscommunication.

Over-Communicating Expectations. Besides making use of various channels, leaders have underscored the essence of over-communicating on expectations. Participant 4 described the preventive approach taken by many: “Your volunteers should never have to doubt what you are thinking. They should never have to wonder what you want them to do. And so that also goes into the leg of support.” Being over-communicated made things clear and gave no assumptions, and on their part, the volunteers had security in the

comprehension of their duties. It further conformed to the effect of recognizing that volunteers, in most cases, provide services parallel to other life requirements, and it is therefore important to continually remind them about what is expected of them.

Regular Feedback and Check-Ins. Another feature central to the communication strategies of leaders included frequent feedback and checking. According to Participant 2, I've led teams where a team individual has told me, I would like you to check in with me once a week. And I've had somebody else that has told me, well, I would like you to check in with me, or I would like daily check-ins.

In adopting matching feedback frequency to the preferences of individual volunteers, not only did leaders manage to continue with the operational oversight, but they also manifested an appreciation to the individual modes of working. This individualization indicated the concern about the needs of volunteers, which led to the reinforcement of trust.

Transparent Sharing of Mission, Purpose, and Vision. In addition to the logistical coordination, leaders tried to engage and unify volunteers by sharing the mission, purpose, and vision of the organization publicly. They focused on the bigger picture of the work, making sure that the volunteers should not forget about the contribution of an individual work toward the fulfillment of common objectives. Participant 3 stated, "Keeping people mindful of the reason why a church like ours exists ... and now your participation in it to help it to be sustained and to grow." Such transparency allowed to uphold accountability, develop a sense of collective ownership,

and emphasize that all the volunteers were required to support and expand the organization mission.

Use of Instructional Materials/Training Sheets. To enable leaders to be prepared to play this role, training materials and training forms were used. It is as Participant 6 said, “So we also have some training manuals or bank. We might take, you know, type up a sheet saying like how to do something, you know, just more of an instructional thing.” This kind of resources provided a stable point of reference, particularly for new volunteers. They also minimized the repeated verbal instructions as the trained volunteers would self-regulate after training. This has further strengthened role clarity and liberated leaders from their task-oriented approach to work to engage more in building relationships.

Relationship and Trust Building

Personal Visits and Check-Ins. Although these communication styles were critical, leaders realized that sharing of information would never translate to commitment unless there was planned relationship and trust building. One of them was the aspect of checking in on the volunteers on a personal basis and even those not doing their duties. Participant 4 stated: “Me calling her that day and actually coming to visit her, made her feel seen and cared for. That’s what she said.” This response illustrates a level of care that transcends organizational boundaries, making volunteers feel valued as people, not just contributors.

Showing Care Beyond Work. Leaders also exhibited care that was not limited to organizational work in that they contacted volunteers to help them in times of personal

problem and provided support that was not related to program deliverables. These acts of empathy created a spirit of reciprocal loyalty that encouraged the volunteers to go an extra mile as they felt well taken care of by leaders who cared about them. Participant 4 mentioned, “I called her from Cameroon. And I said, hey, Alice, I heard your son die. I just want to share with you my condolences. I’m praying for you. Just want to check to see how you’re doing.” Some sort of caring interaction strengthened trust and strengthened the relationship ties that kept the volunteers committed.

Building Rapport Through Shared Work. As Participant 1 recounted, “I’m present I’m presence in the field. So. That alone is an encouragement because the volunteers can say that, hey, this person that is a founder of the organization is with us.” The collective work produced instances of unofficial interconnectedness, horizontalized the hierarchies, and furthered a feeling of like-mindedness among a team. Volunteers often felt more motivated when they saw leaders “getting their hands dirty” alongside them.

Treating Volunteers as Family. The other theme that was repeated was that the treatment of volunteers was like family. This sentiment, voiced by Participant 4, “I’m present I’m presence in the field. So. That alone is an encouragement because the volunteers can say that, hey, this person that is a founder of the organization is with us,” reflects a relational culture grounded in mutual care, trust, and respect. This showed that leaders described themselves as members of the group and not superior to it, which prompted the volunteers to apply the same dedication. leaders had learned the importance of respecting people of various backgrounds and capabilities, and they articulate and

relate to them in a particular way. They were aware that volunteers had diverse cultural, educational, and professional backgrounds, and it was important to recognize their differences to ensure the promotion of inclusion. This respect was evident in terms of flexibility of roles, cultural sensitivity in communication and providing room among working styles to prosper.

Respecting Diverse Backgrounds and Abilities. The results of the combination of these practices are that effective volunteer leadership is based on the premise of personal, inclusive, and purpose-based communication. Leaders embraced multidirectional communication channels whereby over-communication was applied where there was a necessity to be clear and high frequency of check-ins to build trust and accountability. Open communication of mission and purpose provided the volunteers with a sense of purpose and training and resource materials provided allowed them to act independently. The growth of relational capital was also achieved by visits, show of empathy beyond the official position, joint responsibilities, being treated as family members, and respect to diversity. Participant 1 stated:

Empower them to know that they are expert in their respective domains of work
... even if it's a person that has never been in four walls of an academic
institution, they still have some kind of contribution to make.

These types of practices in communication did not only imply respect, but they also showed the internal worth of the individual volunteers, which enhanced commitment and engagement.

Theme 3: Volunteer Retention Strategies

Role Definition and Task Allocation

Publicly Highlighting Volunteer Contributions. Retaining volunteers was revealed as a complex procedure, which integrates recognition, empowerment, and developing an opportunity of meaningful engagement. The project leaders did not view retention as a problem at the end of service but incorporated it at the beginning of the volunteer experience and integrated retention over a long-term horizon. There were two entangled dimensions experienced across the interviews and they are recognition and motivation and engagement programs and opportunities. The major principles of recognition practices centered on the notion that an acknowledgement on contribution builds the sense of value and ownership by the volunteer in the society. As Participant 2 explained,

Recognition and appreciation is also one of it. And I want to speak to that very closely because at the start of, you know, at the start of each volunteering task, There's the getting to know aspect... how do you like to receive recognition and appreciation.

By encouraging public recognition, this mobilized the use of the internal and external audience which included peers, community members, and stakeholders to give credence to the commitment of the volunteer. Such social visibility was well known to be self-reinforcing, on the one hand, fostering regular involvement, and on the other hand, demonstrating a relevant example to others.

Certificates or Awards for Service. Certificates or other recognition of service offered formal acknowledgement of work done that could be used in subsequent projects by volunteers. Participant 1 testified:

Even with that, it will be great that the organization can provide some kind of recognition, like a certificate of recognition to give the volunteers to encourage them and to let them know that, hey, we thank you for your time, we thank you for your service.

The leaders regarded such documents as not only a ceremonial document but rather a professional and personal document that will add value to the portfolio of the volunteer in the long run. Having public and formal acknowledgement provided the possibility to cover both the emotional and pragmatic levels of appreciation.

Personalized Appreciation Gestures. Rewards were usually customized regardless of the individual contribution and what the individuals valued. Participant 4 explained recognition customization behaviors:

So one day she didn't come. She was not there. And during the counting that day, I stumbled across about \$50 worth of two-dollar bills. So, I bought them. I bought them and then I sent her. I went to her house, and I said, hey, I didn't see you at counting, so I got the \$2 bills.

These expressions were more than an award but really to acknowledge the personality and situations of the individual to build relations between the leader and the volunteer better.

Spiritual and Emotional Encouragement. Spiritual and emotional support, as it was practiced in one organization, was part of the recognition system, which can be seen as a holistic approach to the engagement of volunteers. Instead of asking the volunteers to be recognized based on the performance of their tasks or official appreciation, the leaders were keen on fostering the spiritual health of the volunteers. Participant 5 said, “We call everyone in a circle ... and then we ask for prayer requests and we pray over the pantry. And I think that’s what makes us different from other establishments.” This tradition underscored the fact that recognition was not limited to organizational service but confirmed the volunteers as entire personalities whose faith and values were the defining ones to the community.

Empowering Volunteers to Lead Initiatives. Empowering the volunteers by allowing them to take initiatives, providing them agency and exposure, enabled the leaders to keep volunteers. Participant 2 mentioned: “Really empowering them to make decisions and you know, it’s more of an acquired skill, right? You don’t have to come to me for everything because we all, we’re all in this together.” The empowerment in this case was not symbolic but rather the working choice to assign the volunteers with substantial responsibility. Leaders have given the free reins to volunteers to take leadership in certain projects which made them feel a sense of ownership and pride that encouraged them to advance further.

Engagement Programs and Opportunities

Skill-Based Volunteering. The affective domain of retention was through recognition and motivation, and the practical paths to retention were made possible

through engagement programs and opportunities. Several leaders created skill-focused volunteer activities where their professional or personal skills could be applied to support service needs. Participant 4 provided an example:

For instance, we have a volunteer that comes and does the pesticides. We have guests who come in and volunteer. Knowing, you know, if someone says, hey, I can do this for you guys. Well, you put that in a database and then you call on them if you need them.

The alignment made sure that the volunteers would create a high-impact contribution as well as complement their sense of mastery and relevance.

Community Service Integration. Some programs incorporated volunteering in support networks of community service all within the community so that the aspect of service becomes a source of social fabric. As Participant 5 reported, the program was developed so that volunteering was tied in with community service program:

Two, we have which is through [the county] and the court allow them to call us to schedule community service. And we give, thank you, we give them options based on what their offenses, hours to complete in our facility.

These collaborations did not just make the numbers of volunteers larger; they also brought in new demographics which have made the recruitment-retention cycle sustainable.

Mentoring Programs for Youth. The leaders sought to build mentoring programs among the youths, teaching them through service to develop themselves.

Participant 3 talked about the process: “The essential focus of that ministry was to partner

young Christian males between the ages of 10 and 18 with intellectually and spiritually and professionally accomplished, strong adult males of the same church.” This mentoring strategy was two-fold in its retention value, as the engaged mentors tended to stay longer to watch their mentees flourish, and mentees tended to maintain a long-term relationship with the organization.

Themed Service Events

Themed service events, such as career days, diversified engagement options and kept participation fresh. Participant 2 recounted: “Another one that was actually a huge success ... the career day was open to everybody, all the church members, as well as friends and family, anybody that we’re going to be invited.” Such events offered diversity, cross-sector cooperation, and an opportunity for volunteers to transfer their skills toward other new contexts. Burnout and monotony were minimized because these aspects increase the risks of retention due to the novelty and learning aspects of such events.

Partnerships With Other Organizations. Collaborations with other organizations opened opportunities to horizons and helped in the feeling that the experience of being a volunteer was lively and facing outwards. In the view of the leaders, they talked of working together with nonprofits, businesses, and civic agencies co-hosting certain events, sharing training materials, or offering combined chances to serve. Such an expanded network was not only contributing to the experience of the volunteers, but it served as numerous entry points to rewards and advancement in a career. As Participant 1 stated, “We work with grassroot organizations in Cameroon

whose missions and vision align with that of our organization. And with that they also feel involved because the sustainable development goals is calling for partnership.”

Combined interpretation of these results indicates that successful retention methods are both affective and structural. Public, formal, personalized and empowering recognition practices satisfy the intrinsic aspect of volunteers who have a need to be valued and meaningful. Their extrinsic needs, in terms of challenge, variety and growth, are satisfied through engagement programs, which are skill-based, community-integrated, youth-oriented, thematic and partnership-driven. In all instances that leaders reported, they agreed that when these factors are working well, it is more likely that the temporary participants will be transformed into long-term contributors as volunteers.

Theme 4: Challenges and Adaptive Solutions

Cultural Differences in Volunteerism

A complication that kept recurring was difference in culture regarding the role of volunteerism. Leaders mentioned that the act of volunteering cannot be fully comprehended and seen as a positive aspect in all communities, as misconceptions exist that it is free labor work, instead of a civic improvement. When all is said and done, as Participant 1 talked about, many people do not see what the point is of working without being compensated; it is viewed as exploitation:

One of our biggest challenges of retaining our volunteer is the culture of volunteerism, which is different in different countries. Being that our organization is a U.S.-based organization, volunteerism in the U.S. is seen as a sense of pride

... But in Africa, the term volunteerism is looked upon in different ways. Number one is free work.

This attitude may hamper both the recruitment and retention, particularly under circumstances where unpaid work may be less attractive due to economic deprivation.

Researchers identified that the issue can only be addressed through an active process of educating the community on the benefits of volunteering in terms of personal growth, social and developmental aspect as well as skill building.

Volunteer No-Shows and Inconsistent Attendance

The possibility of no shows or commitments and cancellations of volunteers was another major challenge. Participant 5 explained:

We also cannot control if someone is on the calendar that is community service that says they're going to show up and they don't. That's why we set that in line, where if you don't show up the first time, you're not allowed back on the calendar.

This irregularity makes a leader must alter the staffing regularly and frequently leaves work undone or unnecessarily pressuring the body above and beyond. Intermittent attendance is very disruptive, especially in events or programs which require certain skills and time bound activities.

Role Mismatches and Skill Misalignment

Close to the attendance problem are the situation of wrong role match and skill mismatch. Participant 2 observed, "Don't put me in something else because I am not interested. I don't have the bandwidth." This kind of incongruency may result in the

frustration of the leader and the volunteer, decreasing effectiveness, and ultimately resulting in attrition. Leaders admitted that there are cases when such a mismatch exists because of an urgent need to limit the process of matching as an ideal.

Volunteer Burnout From Overwork

Volunteer burnout from overwork was another common concern. Participant 4 reflected,

Very good at what they do, very committed, the natural tendency is you want to give them more things to do. Because you have confidence in them. But then again, is that really the best thing to do? If in doing that, you lead them to burnout.

Burnout was a common case scenario with core volunteers, where they had to replace the absentee colleagues or fulfil roles not in the original job description. Managers realized that it is essential to track workloads but acknowledged the fact that it is not always possible to avoid overextension due to limited resources at their disposal.

Economic and Personal Constraints

Economic and personal constraints that interfered with participation in volunteer activities were common and prevented people in most cases to participate in the same. Although most of these external constraints were not under the control of the nonprofit organizations, they directly affected the program sustainability and retention of volunteers. This forced leaders to be more flexible, empathetic, and able to support changes in levels of participation. By recognizing such obstacles, leaders established the atmosphere, in which volunteers could feel themselves heard and encouraged, even in situations when life situations did not allow them to participate.

Participation in the volunteers was often perturbed by economic and personal limitations. Participant 1 stated, “The economic situation of the country, too, is a major barrier. Because a lot of people are living below the poverty level, and they are looking for money to go about their daily living.” Although they are outside of organizational control, these challenges still, influence the sustainability of the programs and compel leaders to become flexible and understanding.

Adaptive Leadership Responses

Redistributing Tasks When Shortages Occur. In addressing these challenges, various responses in adaptive leadership were evident within the leaders which are closely related to resilience ideologies and servant leadership. As Participant 6 said,

So while it can be frustrating at times ... it kind of can put us in a bind, especially if we're having a huge delivery truck of seven, eight pallets ... so we'll have to just make those adjustments and fill in as we can.

One of the main strategies was assigning redistribution of duties when they are in shortage. That needs swift evaluation of their resources and the flexibility of redistribution of responsibilities without compromising the morale. Leaders usually depended on cross trained volunteers to make such adjustments smooth.

Maintaining a Standby Volunteer Pool. A second active measure entailed always having reserve volunteers. As Participant 2 explained:

So a lot of the volunteers were exhausted... Lots of pain points because you're having all these collections just sitting out there in the church ... so at that point in

time ... thankfully we had a control in place ... we were able to find a replacement to getting it done.

Standby pools formed a back up to unexpected absence thus achieved stabilization in operations. This was also a method that minimized heavy workloads amongst the core volunteers and the likelihood of burnouts.

Mediation to Resolve Interpersonal Conflicts. Mediation involving the resolution of interpersonal conflicts was also vital in helping to maintain engagement of volunteers. Participant 6 explained,

If there are conflicts, there really isn't right now between other volunteers, but there are times, you know, that we have to, Mediate this, you know, or we might have to make a decision that you know a bit isn't the best and that's in order to retain the volunteers that we have and we do we do give you know.

Leaders understood that a conflict could easily take away trust and synchronization, and therefore, they were quick in restoring normality and embarking into mission focus.

Adjusting Programs to Suit Availability. Another common practice was to accommodate the availability of volunteers. Participant 2 reported adaptations to programmer schedules to match the availability of volunteers: "Depending on how long the task is for... I've led teams where a team individual has told me, I would like you to check in with me once a week ... somebody else ... I would like daily check-ins." This has made participation to be more widespread though in short stints because more individuals became involved with this flexibility which in effect increased the pool of volunteers. Spiritual direction was also integrated into leadership by some of the leaders

to find its way through the difficulties. Connected by shared belief systems, leaders employed them as a unifying and strength sustaining resource: in prayer circles, moral encouragement, and value-based dialogues. The practice was more particular to the faith-based organizations, as mutual spirituality enhanced mutual trust and commitment in the hard times.

Incorporating Spiritual Guidance in Leadership. Lastly, other leaders took spiritual practice as their motivating applause and enhanced bonding and unity among volunteers. Religious groups especially integrated prayer circles, moral support and value-based discussions into their routine and provided volunteers an opportunity to come together not only in their work but also by the value and belief systems. This aspect of leadership was very keen on the necessity of taking care of the entire person; emotionally, spiritually, and socially, not considering volunteers only in terms of their functional services. As Participant 5 pointed out: “We call everyone in a circle and ... we ask for prayer requests and we pray over the pantry. And I think that’s what makes us different from other establishments.” These practices strengthened mutual trust and commitment to each other, making volunteers feel backed up in time of trouble. In their ability to affirm common identity and purpose, the leaders could develop resilience and long-term involvement in the community.

Business Contributions

This research contributes to the professional practice of business by showing how nonprofit leadership strategies can inform business-wide management in terms of retaining volunteers. The context of this project (immediate context, which was the

nonprofit organization, but the understanding applies to any sphere where the business depends on the engagement of employees, their flexibility, and trust) is that the insights stated in the paper can be applied directly to the business where employee engagement, flexibility, and trust are prioritized. The main point of the findings is that employee and volunteer retention cannot be merely an issue of financial consideration or resource distribution, but rather a role of the style of leadership, communication, and culture of the organization. The engagement and turnover can be enhanced, and the organization's sustainability can be maintained in businesses that embrace people-centered leadership practices.

Adaptability as a Core Competency

The project emphasizes the fact that organizational issues and adaptive processes are interdependent. The organizational cultures of resilience established by the leaders who established standby pools, cross-training programs, flexible time schedules and conflict mediation led to the establishment of resilience culture (van Assche et al., 2021). These adaptive mechanisms enabled leaders in nonprofit-making organizations to remain in operation even though there was an underlying uncertainty in the attendance and capacity of volunteers. To businesses, this highlights that it is not a choice but a necessity to be flexible in the current dynamic world. Sudden shocks, like losing an employee, a change in the market, or a crisis in the world, require systems that can be shocked without dampening morale. Business leaders can be on the offensive to institute flexibility in the workforce planning process by ensuring that they design flexible jobs and develop a culture of lifelong learning and cross-functional work integration.

Servant Leadership in Action

The results of this project are consistent with servant leadership theory, and they illustrate the practical advantages of empathy, active listening, and stewardship in leadership practice. The leaders who focused on people, rather than on processes enhanced retention and performance, which are demonstrated by the redistribution of tasks according to volunteer availability, interpersonal mediation, and holistic approach (Hassan et al., 2025). Holistic support in other instances was in the form of spiritual or emotional encouragement, whereby more emphasis was placed on the whole person as opposed to a narrow view of task performance. Companies can integrate the findings into professional development and leadership training packages. Teaching managers systematically to exercise humility, to be able to listen to employees, and to empower them may bridge an all-too-common gap in the leadership practice where technical ability is worn as relational capacity.

Retention Through Relational Capital

The personalized recognition, empowerment, and mission-based engagement were the aspects of volunteer retention strategies that showed that people stay committed when they feel valued, respected, and aligned to a bigger purpose. To businesses, these lessons are very crucial lessons on how to deal with challenges like high employee turnover and reduced employee loyalty (Abdelhay, 2025). Instead of using transactional incentives like pay raises or bonuses, organizations can develop relational capital by rewarding individual contributions, adjusting employee values to organizational missions, and providing autonomy and development. Relational approaches in such industries as

talent shortage or intense competition among workers with skills can be the difference between a disengaged workforce that denies commitment and loyalty and one with long-term commitment.

Operational Continuity Through Adaptive Planning

The research found that successful nonprofit leaders combined both planned, structured strategies (e.g., standby pools, structured levels of training) and real-time improvisation, i.e., reallocating tasks in case of unforeseen absenteeism (Farmer, 2024). This duality underscores a significant addition to the business practice where excessive rigidity in planning does not always factor in the variability of human beings. Stability and responsiveness may be considered the impact of combining agile work design with contingency planning on the business (Farmer, 2024). As an example, having a demonstrative backup plan on how a project will be delivered and, at the same time, training the leaders to make real-time adjustments that are flexible and people-based is sure to provide continuity without compromising employee well-being.

Recommendations for Professional Practice

Based on these findings, it is possible to give several recommendations that should be considered to improve business performance across industries by bringing the leadership approach to the reality of human relations in the workplace. To begin with, the workforce design should be flexible at the levels of business leaders, HR managers, and operations managers. The research results indicated that standby staffing pools, flexible schedules, and cross-training were found to be the adaptive practices that enabled nonprofit leaders to maintain productivity in the face of accidental changes in volunteer

supply (Gupta & Nagariya, 2025). Applying this observation to the business environment, companies are advised to institutionalize procedures that train employees to play various roles and absorb shocks without demoralizing. Cross training will provide the workers with cross-applicable skills, and flexible timing will recognize the personal and professional realities of the workers. Other staffing sources, such as standby staffing pools, can be utilized during peak demand times, like contingent or part-time workforces (Gupta & Nagariya, 2025). All these practices together help minimize burnout, increase reliability, and ensure that productivity is not derailed by absenteeism or unexpected turnover.

Second, organizations must entrench servant leadership practices in leadership pipelines. It is the role of senior executives and leadership development trainers to inculcate the virtues of empathy, empowerment, and stewardship into formal training and evaluation systems. The results revealed that leaders of nonprofits that prioritized the overall welfare of their volunteers could breed loyalty and commitment in the long term (Antoniou et al., 2019). On the same note, servant leadership styles can be used in business contexts to reinforce employee engagement and confidence, which are becoming critical in competitive and dynamic workplaces. Through leadership coaching, mentorship, and promotion standards and integrating servant leadership, businesses can convert cultures toward transactional management to people-oriented systems that enhance retention and performance (Abdelhay, 2025). The practices close a huge vacuum in most corporate settings where technical skills are highly important to the detriment of relational competencies.

Third, companies are encouraged to enhance recognition and empowerment initiatives to develop relational capital. The departmental head, the human resource practitioners, and team managers are expected to devise multiple levels of recognition that incorporate both the formal and informal methods, like appreciation in the form of personalized notes, correlative recognition, certificates, and mentorship (Duan et al., 2021). The current research results highlight the importance of ensuring that the volunteers, and subsequently the employees, are active and dedicated whenever they feel that their efforts are appreciated, significant, and visible. In addition to recognition, employees must be empowered by giving them chances to lead projects, make decisions, and participate in professional development geared toward achieving organizational objectives. The anticipated result is the heightened motivation, ownership toward results, and low turnover, especially in a sector with high turnover. These plans identify employees as contributors to organizational success, other than as substitutes.

Fourth, adaptive planning should be part of business entities. Project managers and operations strategists must balance actual improvisation and formal contingency planning (Abdelhay, 2025). The results showed that leaders of nonprofit organizations integrated structured preparation, e.g., training and schedule systems, with responsive improvisation, e.g., the redistribution of tasks during absenteeism. Applied to business, this allows companies to create backup staffing strategies and flexible workflow, while educating managers to make real-time, people-oriented decisions. This two-fold strategy develops resilience and flexibility to respond to both absenteeism and workload variability as well as to sudden skill shortages in an organization (Antoniou et al., 2019).

Companies that excessively focus on fixed planning are likely inefficient when upsets happen invariably; those that integrate long-term planning with responsiveness can maintain continuity and responsiveness.

Lastly, the publication of these results and the capacity building they facilitate is encouraged across industries. Business schools, training centers, and professional associations are vital in ensuring that nonprofit situations do not limit adaptable and people-oriented leadership approaches. These findings must be disseminated globally in academic journals, conferences, leadership seminars, and training programs in the industry (Duan et al., 2021). By so doing, practitioners and scholars can share knowledge, refine leadership frameworks, and facilitate cross-sectoral learning. The result is the increased adoption of practices that will increase adaptability, empathy, and relational leadership in various organizational settings. The long-term results of providing the present and future leaders with such insights will be to have stronger, more resilient, and people-oriented organizations that will maintain high performance and commitment of employees.

Implications for Nonprofit Leadership

The project findings and themes have a concrete implication for practicing nonprofit leadership. The first and foremost optimal strategy is the categorical statement that emotional intelligence (EI) is an inadmissible leadership skill. In every interview, the respondents report that emotionally intelligent leaders as those who are emphatic, self-literate, and able to communicate with others are more effective in developing volunteers' loyalty and cohesion (Atobatele & Okonkwo, 2024). This observation positively answers

the thesis provided by Goleman who reckons that the high-EI leaders will encourage the development of a better organizational climate and make their employees more satisfied. In the case of nonprofit organizations which rely on unpaid human capital, the game is even more serious: the increase in staff volunteers is not motivated by financial rewards but by the sentimental attachment, the perceived sense of importance and inter-human confidence.

The practices of leadership in volunteer-based organizations must be sensitive toward the heterogeneous nature and demographic constitutions of the member organization. One such solution was a homogenous approach also known as the so called one-size-fits-all strategy which was not effective especially between the generations and ability levels (Atobatele & Okonkwo, 2024). In an example, the baby boomers preferred a type of organization that used structure and human interaction as the primary means of communication, whereas Gen Z volunteers preferred loose positions and cyber communication tools. Superior retention was realized when the leader displayed contextual sensitivity, i.e., adaptive communication, participation, and work to suit the requirements and desires of the subgroups (Garner, 2022). This kind of flexibility in leadership is in accordance with the situational leadership theory, according to which the leadership strategies should resonate with the level of readiness and traits of the followers (Hersey & Blanchard, 2011).

Servant leadership is a style of leadership, characterized by humility, ethical behavior, and a main priority to meet the needs of others (Greenleaf, 1977). The leaders that would clean washrooms or defused conflicts calmly or were emotionally open would

motivate volunteers to do the same. These behaviors empowered morals and a culture of psychological safety and cooperation (Tsai et al., 2023a). This is why it is suggested to consider such relational indicators as conflict solving, volunteer health, and team spirit in the nonprofit performance assessment and evaluation of managers besides task accomplishment and effectiveness.

Actionable Recommendations

Prioritize Emotional Intelligence in Leadership Hiring

Motivation, engagement, and retention rely on leadership within volunteer-based organizations because volunteers do not sign contracts but allow themselves to be emotionally connected to the cause and related to others (Tsai et al., 2023b). In this respect, EI, as the skill of becoming aware, comprehending, and managing personal and other emotions, is an important leadership quality (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). High EI leaders have a better chance to live in a world of volunteers' various motivations and cultural orientations, to encourage honest dialogue, and to overcome conflicts. Results of this research have proven that those volunteers who felt more committed had their concerns recognized and treated empathetically, and disengagement usually followed the leaders who were not showing any emotional awareness (Mustofa & Muafi, 2021). This is consistent with the studies, which indicate that EI increases organizational commitment and lowers turnover within a volunteer context.

To have emotionally intelligent leadership, an EI assessment can be incorporated into recruitment and professional development in organizations (Ray Jones, 2018). Adaptability, empathy and conflict management proficiency can be assessed using tools

such as the Emotional Competence Inventory (ECI) and the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT). In contrast, behavioral interviews offer situational hints about the effectiveness of interpersonal abilities in candidates (Maritsa et al., 2022). This process can be reinforced by training hiring committees to identify EI skills, reduce unconscious bias, and use volunteer feedback in leadership selection. In addition to the hiring, the organization should develop cultures driven by EI via onboarding, coaching, and leadership modelling, where empathy, active listening, and resilience become a daily routine. These environments enhance teamwork and morale and directly impact retention because emotionally intelligent leaders create inclusive and supportive environments where volunteers feel appreciated and encouraged to resume even under challenging situations.

Integrate Faith or Purpose

There is a unique ability by faith-based organizations to sustain volunteer management because the organization ensures that their operations are clearly tied to spiritual and moral values. Volunteer engagement and satisfaction enhancing dimensions of integration of faith or a shared purpose or meaning about everyday organizational life can occur. It is best not to confine religious or values-oriented programs to sideline activities because they should be an intrinsic part of organizational culture and practices (Ray Jones, 2018). The principle of spiritual anchoring is often realized in the form of early morning devotionals, organized prayer, mission-oriented group discussion, thoughtful journaling or scheduling time during group silence. These activities not only make the spiritual mission of an organization valid but also offer the volunteers a chance

to sober up, realign and get fortified by internal imperatives (Lee & Kim, 2020). Offering prayers at the start or end of a volunteer shift is one of the examples of how it is possible to implement such activities to enhance community ties, reduce anxiety, and build resilience in people who are facing challenging tasks. Empirical observations also show that congruence of personal values on volunteers with the mission of the organization usually culminates in more perseverance and superior satisfaction rates. According to Garner (2022), when volunteers experience a sense of spiritual connectedness toward their service responsibilities, their levels of emotional thriving, and their motivation to become and stay active in the long-term increase. Such an effect is enhanced as organizational leaders habitually discuss the purpose of the organization with their colleagues when presenting their formal organizational mission, and when informally resorting to decision making.

Importantly, imbedding faith or purpose is not exclusionary to volunteers with a different belief system. Spiritual inclusivity should be developed by leaders as they frame activities in the context of common human values in terms of compassion, justice, and service. Nonreligious volunteers also do not need to be excluded, as value-based discussions about ethical leadership, common mission or global responsibility can also be found to be meaningful. A balance such as this promotes harmony without ignoring the diversity (Ray Jones, 2018). A good leader in nonprofit organization is typically believed to be one that portrays humility, servant leadership and the power to remain graceful under pressure. By adopting such traits, leaders can develop an organizational environment where every stakeholder can achieve spiritual and ethical growth (Hasan,

2025). Specific, planned interventions, including controlled training, leadership retreats, and storytelling negotiations, which involve the invited volunteers who express how selfless service coincides with individual values, are extremely effective in supporting such values. Through the integration of these activities in their normal operations, organizations are able to maintain a sustained motivation of the volunteers even in a time that may be prone to burnout.

Establish Feedback Loops

Feedback is one of the most effective tools to improve the experiences of volunteers and their desired outcome measures (Görgens-Ekermans & Roux, 2021). Because rewards in the nonprofit sphere are rather emotional, interpersonal or value-based, volunteers must feel that their contributions are listened to, respected, and co-created. The combination of multiple feedback tools on a continuous basis allows identifying the points of pain, celebrating successes, and having the ability of adaptability in real-time. Well-designed systems have both formal and informal elements (Samul, 2024). The formal processes encompass performance reviews on fixed basis, satisfaction surveys every quarter and exit interviews, whereas the informal applications incorporate frequent one-to-one discussions with volunteer managers, open-house periods in staff gatherings, and access to recommendation box in physical or online (Görgens-Ekermans & Roux, 2021). This wide variation of channels makes it possible to have multiple varieties of personality engaged, which renders candid and constructive participation. This process of feedback can also be simplified with the help of technological resources. There are online survey tools, e.g., Google Forms or SurveyMonkey, and are applicable

to obtain periodical insights. After all, anonymity also permits a person to speak their mind devoid of any fear of condemnation or punishment. This is particularly relevant to heterogeneous volunteer organizational populations where power structure or culture stood in the way of a free discussion.

Feedback loops are useful not only because they collect data; the utility is also based on the concept of a specific feedback loop closure where one can illustrate that earlier input is taken into consideration and is then acted on in turn. A case can be derived where volunteers express that a given job is too much due to lack of institutional support and leaders should clarify what specific changes are to be made or why certain adjustments cannot be made (Garner, 2022). This degree of transparency generates trust, and it encourages volunteers to feel they are part and parcel of a common cause. Further, feedback loops provide a positive setting for appreciative inquiry. Rather than only focusing on what is lacking, leaders are allowed to ask, what are we doing well, or how is volunteering here a rewarding experience on your part? The questions should be positive, affirmative, and support the good aspects of the volunteer experience and enable the leaders to build on the existing strengths.

Additionally in a culture comprising of much feedback, the development of leadership receives amplification. Giving voice and agency to the volunteers will make them more engaged, take more ownership of given tasks, and be more willing to enter the roles of leadership or mentorship (Samul, 2024). This interaction fosters internal capability and improves continuity of organizations. Altogether, the comprehensive process of the incorporation of effective feedback systems entrenches the responsiveness

of the organization, strengthens the sense of the volunteer owners, and fosters the culture of learning and growth-based organizational logic. This undertaking is never still and continuously changing in line with rapidly changing volunteer requirements and a volatile state of community service.

Promote Inclusive Volunteering

Inclusion is greater than a moral duty and acts as a strategic resource when it comes to recruiting and keeping volunteers. Groups that actively eliminate barriers and address a variety of needs can reach broader, more committed pools of volunteers (Garner, 2022). Diversity also supports diversity, equity, and a sense of belonging that are essential to long-term sustainable volunteer involvement. One key starting point and overall approach is that of a universal design; that is, the intentional design of roles, settings, and materials to accommodate as many people as possible regardless of age, ability, and background (Gimpl, 2025). This will include such things by making sure there are physical places that are wheelchair friendly, offering transport in the circumstances that we are able, and use of adaptive equipment in case of visual, hearing, or movement disabilities. Similarly significant is the development of volunteer positions at different levels of abilities. A person who does not have high literacy or who is cognitive will be successful in a practical position with visual guidelines. There are others who would like to work less visibly (e.g., packaging, inventory, or logistic functions). Job roles should mention duties as well as available accommodations such as: “This job position can be done sitting down” or “This position does not need previous experience.”

Similar attention should be given to practices in communication. Organizations must use direct language in the guides of volunteers, disseminate documents in multiple languages where needed and incorporate graphics to reach participants with less literacy. Video walkthrough and practical demonstrations can complement written instructions used in orientation sessions and leaders must ensure that they understand -they cannot assume that they do (Gimpl, 2025). Flexibility of time is another but most-of-the-time neglected deterrent to voluntary participation. Students, caregivers, part-time employees or elderly volunteers might not fit in with the normal 9-5 working hours during the weekdays. Offering evening, Sunday, offsite, etc., therefore, enlarges access. Those people who can offer their services monthly are also useful; they must be accommodated as well.

Cultural and social diversity is also one of the aspects to ensure inclusivity. By inviting volunteers of diverse ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and social economic status, the staff will require training on cultural competence, the development of an open communication environment, and microaggressions, or unconscious bias aversion (Garner, 2022). Further inclusion can be promoted by celebrating culturally diverse holidays, emphasizing the diverse volunteer stories, and launching affinity groups (Garner, 2022). Leadership will play a decisive role in indicating that inclusion is important. The assignment of volunteer inclusion officer, building of accessibility advisory panels, making the annual inclusivity audit help in the process of translating the abstract intentions into practical measures.

Implications for Social Change

Effective leadership strategies used to retain volunteers in nonprofits have evolved to reflect a broader social change in how people seek purpose and meaning in their work. Rather than simply receiving tasks, modern volunteers, like employees, desire meaningful engagement, skill development, and a clear understanding of the impact they are making. This shift has pushed some nonprofit leaders to move beyond purely transactional relationships toward a more servant leadership transformational approach, focusing on building strong, inclusive communities and fostering social connections. This progressive leadership helps meet volunteers' desire for self-actualization, thereby enhancing their motivation and long-term commitment, and ultimately strengthening the organization's mission and its positive social impact.

Recommendations for Further Research

There were several limitations in this project. The key limitation related to sample size and geography: all the people were interviewed in the United States, and the total sample size was low. In turn, the results cannot be generalized to a big scope or a secular nonprofit in an urban or a global setting. Besides, the qualitative nature of the research makes its findings interpretive, but not predictive; whereas the themes generated in an in-depth interview are subtle, they fail to participate in a statistical generalization (Hasan, 2025). This project was implemented at only one point in time which makes it not possible to assess any trend overtime variation in volunteer engagement or the effect of external factors like seasonal demand or funding crunch. Moreover, I conducted interviews and the analytical activities in the role of both an interviewer and an analyst,

making the possibility of bias despite following the best practices in thematic analysis. Lastly, the research gives more emphasis to leadership voices leaving few voices of volunteers. Triangulation of the leader accounts with testimonials of volunteers would be valuable in subsequent studies to develop a more in-depth understanding of the dynamics of retention.

Based on the findings of existing literature, further research needs to make comparative studies between the faith-based and secular nonprofits to establish whether the spiritual component has any measurable effect on volunteer longevity or whether similar results can be attained using nonspiritual and values-based interaction. This kind of comparative research would help to understand the comparative effect of spirituality on the retention of volunteers (Hasan, 2025). The longitudinal designs, especially the design following the cohorts over long temporal gaps, would be more powerful sources about the changes in the motivations and behaviors of the volunteers at different life stages, in different societal contexts, and in post-COVID settings. Additionally, it is worth scrutinizing the scale to which digital platforms female membership in any field such as volunteer management software, mobile application, and virtual engagement technologies enhance the relationship between volunteers (Hersey & Blanchard, 2011). Additionally, the effectiveness of specific measures of leadership interventions, e.g., EI workshops, servant leadership coaching, or training on inclusive communication, could be examined in terms of performing better and ensuring satisfaction of the volunteers through experimental methods. The inclusion of the demographic analyses would show whether leadership effects are age-related, gender base, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status.

Conclusion

The findings of this research project provide essential strategies to influence the retention of volunteers in the nonprofit-making organizations. Based on the qualitative project that included interviews with nonprofit leaders, the analysis will prove that successful engagement of volunteers is not only based on logistical efficiency but also on EI, servant leadership, and warm appreciation (C. J. Davis, 2017). Employees who have the qualities of leaders, empathy, resilience, and humility form the foundation of well-functioning volunteer staff. These findings confirm the volunteers as people seeking community, purpose, and respect as opposed to human resources that are managed (Maritsa et al., 2022). Nonprofit leaders can create lasting relationships with volunteers by tending to the logistical and emotional aspects of the practice: they are to onboard their volunteers explicitly, show their appreciation on a personal level, connect with them spiritually and engage them in inclusive practices.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Greetings

I will introduce myself and allow the participants to introduce themselves

I will get a conversation started so that we can all relax and prepare for the interview

I will make sure that the participant has signed the consent forms and is willing to participate

I will remind the participants that they can withdraw from the project at any time if they are uncomfortable or any other reason

Interview Questions

I will restate the research and the purpose of the project

I will ask the questions and record the responses

Conclusion

After the questions, I will thank the participants and remind them that I will contact them later so that they will see the typed transcript and make sure that the interview is satisfactory and correct.

I will remind the participant that the recording is confidential, and I will store the recording in a safe and secure place and, after 5 years, have the records destroyed.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. What are your responsibilities related to volunteers?
2. What strategies or practices do you use to retain volunteers successfully?
3. How do you facilitate communication with and how do you support volunteers?
4. What are some of the obstacles to volunteer retention?
5. What real-life example of a volunteer engagement initiative or program you have implemented can you share?
6. What strategies have you personally implemented to retain volunteers?
7. What other information would you like to share about retaining volunteers in nonprofit organizations?