

VOLUNTEERS IN SPORT

MOTIVATIONS AND COMMITMENT TO VOLUNTEER ROLES

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There were over 70,000 in Beijing in 2008¹. London 2012 Olympic Games organisers wanted up to 70,000 and an estimated 25,000 will be at the Winter Olympic Games in Sochi in 2014. Some 80,000 are expected to register for the 2014 FIFA World Cup Brazil (10,000 more than did so for South Africa 2010), and it is expected that between 15,000 and 18,000 will be at the finals. Who are they? Volunteers, of course!

Imagine a typical mega-event sport week in Doha, Qatar. Local and international organisers work around the clock to arrange a special event or tournament that attracts hundreds of visitors as participants or spectators. Single and multi-sport events attract audiences from all over the world and become the subject of much debate afterwards. Overnight and for the rest of the week broadcasters and journalists prepare and publish commentary eagerly consumed

by supporters. But who are the real drivers of these successful sport events?

The body responsible for delivering the Arab world's most anticipated sporting events held in Qatar every year (such as the Arab Games, Asian Games, Qatar Masters, IAAF World Indoor Championships, Class 1 Powerboat Championships, Moto Grand Prix and ATP Qatar Open) are the high calibre volunteers selected from both local and international communities. Volunteers are integral and essential to society and are an especially valuable resource in the sports sector.

This brief snapshot on sport event volunteers takes a current look into the world of volunteering. It begins with a discussion on the 'value' of volunteering (its scale and impact) and explores volunteer motivations and the challenges facing the volunteer sector. This article concludes with three top strategies for getting volunteers involved and committed.



Volunteering is defined as work performed without pay for the benefit of other people. Individual members of the community provide their time and effort to assist others for no financial gain.





Image: Qatari and foreign volunteers at the the 2006 Asian Games in Doha.

THE 'VALUE' OF VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers and community involvement lie at the very heart of any truly successful sporting event. Volunteers can provide the most basic of labour (e.g. handing out water and prize bags, set-up and clean-up) and can also be a great source of expertise needed by organisations (Table 1).

Many organisations rely heavily on volunteer labour and believe that volunteers are integral to the staging of major and local sport events. Volunteers offer event organisers a wide knowledge base and a range of skills to assist with tasks such as running competitions, liaising with visiting teams, working with media and security organisations and providing services for athletes, sponsors, spectators and other organisations associated with the sport event. Volunteers with wide-ranging work experience also contribute to the success of sports events, by providing much needed legal or accounting advice, marketing

assistance and hospitality and catering management services. Volunteers give their knowledge, skills and experience which is a great source of economic value in support of the event.

The economic value of volunteer contributions is significant and well-recognised. According to Sport England, *“Voluntary contribution to sport is of such a scale that when quantified it outstrips all other voluntary activity and dwarfs the amount of paid employment in sport.”*²

In 2007/08, volunteers in New Zealand contributed 51.3 million hours to sport and recreation with an estimated market value of NZD\$728 million, which equates to approximately QR2,167 million³. In England, the value of the time contributed by sports volunteers is equivalent to 720,000 additional full time equivalent workers and an estimated value of over £14 billion⁴! Volunteer contributions are also significant

VOLUNTEER ROLES

- *Marketing*
- *Catering and hospitality*
- *Media roles*
- *Team management and liaison*
- *Volunteer supervision and management*
- *Venue management*
- *Crowd control*
- *Finance and budgeting*
- *First aid provision*
- *Event operations*
- *Risk management*
- *Registration*

Table 1: Typical sport event volunteer roles.

1 VOLUNTEERING MOTIVES

1 VALUES

To help others (altruistic and humanitarian reasons)

2 UNDERSTANDING

To develop new skills

3 EGO ENHANCEMENT

For psychological growth

4 CAREER

To gain experience that will advance one's career

5 SOCIAL

To meet new people and improve social relationships

6 EGO PROTECTIVE

To provide an escape from personal problems; to do something different

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in the Middle East Region, and the ever-increasing number and size of sport events across the region has increased the reliance on volunteers. So what attracts volunteers to make such enormous contributions to sport events?

WHAT MOTIVATES VOLUNTEERS?

People are motivated to volunteer for all sorts of reasons. For most, it is a leisure choice. Many people volunteer because they find it enjoyable. Others believe that sport provides a challenging and inspiring environment to develop important values – from experiencing the spirit of competition to developing organisational skills that can be applied to other areas of life. The volunteer experience can also give people the chance to develop:

“time management, teamwork, problem-solving and cross-cultural communication skills, as well as the ability to take initiative and make a positive contribution to their teams.”⁵

There are six main categories of general volunteering motives⁶ (Figure 1). For sport events the nature of volunteer motivation is also multifaceted (Figure 2).

However, motives for volunteering can change over time. A person may begin volunteering to make career contacts, but as they become more experienced and

accustomed to the organisation and its values, their motivation for volunteering may change to wanting to enjoy the feeling of helping others. Volunteers can easily develop a social-connection to the organisation and over time will value different benefits and discover new ones.

Event organisers need to recognise and understand what motivates volunteers. Understanding volunteers' motives can help volunteer co-ordinators:

1. better meet the needs of volunteers, and
2. find ways to provide the benefits volunteers are looking for.

Excellent volunteer recruitment, management (training) and retention programmes that target volunteer motivations are vital for the success of any sport event. Programmes that focus on providing a satisfactory experience for all volunteers have become increasingly important as volunteer resources become more limited.

CHALLENGES FACING THE VOLUNTEER SECTOR

The demand for more volunteers across all areas of sport event operations is limited by a diminishing volunteer supply. Volunteer numbers are decreasing and existing volunteers are contributing

less time to their volunteer activity. The downward trend in volunteering across all industries is revealed in broad patterns of national participation rates. Australian studies have shown that the number of hours contributed by volunteers is declining⁷, and in Canada there was a 13% decrease in the total number of Canadians who volunteered in 2000 compared with 1997 (though the number of hours contributed per volunteer increased)⁸. Data from the United States show similarities.

In 2007, there was a decline in both numbers of volunteers and the volunteer rate from the previous year⁹, yet more recent data shows that the volunteer rate rose by 0.5% to 26.8% for the year ending in September 2011¹⁰.

In the sport industry, the decline in volunteer numbers is normally seen among 'core' volunteers. Core volunteers are described as those who fill management and leadership roles in the organisation and are typically more involved and committed. A reduction in core volunteers can have significant implications for the effective and efficient functioning of sport organisations. 'Peripheral' volunteers, on the other hand, fill operational roles and include team managers and event organisers. These volunteers typically prefer short-term or episodic volunteering opportunities.

SOCIAL & SPORT SYSTEM ISSUES

- *Increased expectations placed on volunteers*
- *Great deal of bureaucracy associated with sport*
- *Managing risk is a major concern*
- *Loss of sense of community*
- *Places of employment do not provide flexible options for individuals to juggle work and volunteering*

ORGANISATIONAL ISSUES

- *Volunteer roles are too demanding*
- *Attracting suitable volunteers is difficult*
- *Long serving volunteers make it hard for new ones to become involved*
- *Too many pressures to gain external funding through fundraising/ sponsorship/grants*
- *Organisational processes and policies are not actively communicated to volunteers*

PERSONAL ISSUES

- *Pressures of family and paid work are reducing the time available for volunteering*
- *Concern about a lack of appreciation/recognition for those who volunteer*
- *Volunteers have to work long hours and there is too much work required*
- *Fear of abuse by spectators or other people who behave badly*
- *Concern about a lack of skills/knowledge about the sport/event*

Figure 1: Volunteering motives.

Figure 2: Why do people volunteer? Motives of Sport Event Volunteers (adapted from Warner et al 2011).

Figure 3: Pressures on the voluntary sector. Adapted from: Ringuet C et al. Volunteer roles, involvement and commitment in voluntary sport organisations: Evidence of core and peripheral volunteers. Sport in Society; (in press).

Event organisers need to recognise and understand what motivates volunteers.

Fortunately, the numbers of these volunteers remain relatively stable. Most people who volunteer are attracted to 'short-term' roles like those offered by sport events. Yet the declining numbers of volunteers remains problematic. Lower levels of volunteer engagement can constrain the capacity of the voluntary sport sector to sustain national sport delivery systems, deliver more opportunities for participation in organised sport and achieve other social and health goals.

What are the main factors causing a shift in volunteer involvement trends? Common reasons that event volunteers give for discontinuing their involvement (or 'quitting') include:

1. the overall workload,
2. a lack of appreciation of their contribution,
3. problems with how the event was organised,
4. wanting more free time for other activities,
5. a lack of 'sense of community' among volunteers,
6. family responsibilities,
7. the inability to make decisions regarding their own position,
8. a dislike for some of their responsibilities and
9. lack of remuneration¹⁰.

More broadly, pressures on the voluntary sector (and subsequent reasons for the decline in volunteer participation) can be categorised into three areas:

1. Social and sport system issues.
2. Organisational issues.
3. Personal issues (Figure 3).

So, what can event organisers focus on to address these issues and facilitate more positive volunteer experiences?

STRATEGIES FOR INCREASING VOLUNTEER PARTICIPATION AND INVOLVEMENT

The need for more volunteers across all areas of sport event operations requires greater sophistication in the way that volunteers are recruited, managed and retained. Limiting volunteer turnover can spare event organisers and organisations the effort, time and financial resources required to continually recruit and train staff. Instead, these resources can be invested into the achievement of other organisational objectives. To increase volunteer participation and involvement, it is important to consider:

1. Volunteer motivations.
2. Volunteer satisfaction.

Focus on motivations

Recruitment and retention of volunteers is more effective when event organisers

focus on multiple volunteer motivations¹¹. This approach is particularly useful when designing persuasive communications, assigning volunteer tasks and structuring experiences to specific volunteers.

For example, to recruit volunteers who are highly motivated by social opportunities and career advancement, event organisers could use volunteer promotional brochures that highlight the people one can meet while volunteering (especially those who could advance the volunteer's career). To retain these volunteers, event organisers could design training sessions that are conducted in a group setting and team-oriented tasks. However, because volunteering motives may change over time and are multifaceted, volunteer co-ordinators may find this approach to be too resource intensive. Therefore, it is also important to provide volunteers with experiences that are satisfying.

Focus on volunteer satisfaction

Job satisfaction has been linked to decreased turnover and increased commitment to organisations. Therefore, volunteers are more likely to want to return to assist the organisation and volunteer again if the experience has been a satisfying one. With fewer people volunteering and the increased demand for volunteers, retaining motivated and skilled event volunteers is critical. Volunteer co-ordinators must determine how best to satisfy volunteers (i.e. fulfil volunteers' needs) to retain their services. Furthermore, volunteer satisfaction is not only important for retention purposes,

it is also important to recruit volunteers because satisfied volunteers are more likely to recruit other volunteers to assist the organisation (e.g. family and friends).

So, what specific features should be included in a volunteer programme to increase the satisfaction experienced by sport event volunteers?

Some volunteer programme features have the capacity to satisfy or disappoint volunteers such as whether there is good communication in the organisation, volunteer input is valued by the organisation and volunteers are provided with clear direction.

Higher levels of these features can lead to increased satisfaction while lower levels can lead to dissatisfaction. For example, the more volunteers feel like their input is valued by the organisation, the more satisfied they will be. On the other hand, if they do not feel that input is valued by the organisation they will be dissatisfied¹².

Because these elements are potential sources of dissatisfaction, event organisers must pre-plan ways to manage communication processes, recognition schemes and job processes. They should:

1. Design effective communication processes (e.g. user-friendly communication tools and methods).
2. Consider the best way to recognise volunteer input and contribution during- and post-event.
3. Examine innovative ways to provide volunteers with clear direction on their roles and job tasks.

HOW TO INCREASE SATISFACTION

- 1 *Variety of tasks*
- 2 *Serve in leadership role*
- 3 *Feel supported*
- 4 *Sense of belonging*
- 5 *Tasks are challenging*
- 6 *Experience is exciting*
- 7 *See inside the event*
- 8 *Work independently*
- 9 *Make career contacts*
- 10 *Make new friends*
- 11 *Use existing skills*
- 12 *Convenience*
- 13 *Qualified for tasks*
- 14 *Recognition for service*
- 15 *Training/orientation*
- 16 *Job description*
- 17 *Learn new skills*
- 18 *Free food*
- 19 *Tangible rewards*
- 20 *Contribute to society and organisation*

Table 2: Features that increase volunteer satisfaction

Other volunteer programme features can only increase satisfaction (they can never lead to dissatisfaction) (Table 2). For example, the more volunteers feel a sense of belonging in the organisation, or feel they learn new skills, the more they will be satisfied. However, if they do not feel a sense of belonging in the organisation or do not feel they have learned new skills, they will feel dissatisfied.

Volunteers consider most of the features listed in Table 2 to be a 'bonus', that is, they have the capacity to delight volunteers and are not pivotal considerations when seeking to attract or retain volunteers. These features come mainly from a human resource management framework and have no capacity to dissatisfy (e.g. job descriptions, tasks, skills, training).



Satisfaction with a specific volunteer episode is associated with positive perceptions of volunteering in general. If volunteers are more satisfied, they are more likely to enjoy their experience, repeat volunteer and inspire others to volunteer.





Images: Volunteers at the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games.



Designing a sport event volunteer programme

A successful Sport Event Volunteer Programme requires a certain amount of tweaking of traditional human resource management approaches (including recruitment, selection, orientation, training, development, performance management, recognition and reward processes) to effectively meet:

1. the needs and interests of sport event volunteers and
2. the strategic and operational contexts of particular sport events.

The way that sport event volunteers are managed has a direct bearing on their level of satisfaction. Therefore, event organisers need to devote effort to those aspects of the volunteer experience that will directly

impact on volunteer satisfaction and the likelihood of volunteers returning for subsequent events. In summary, the success of most sport events relies on three main areas or the 'Three Strategies For Success':

1. Focus on the individual.
2. Communication is key.
3. Encourage volunteers to engage with leaders of the event.

THREE STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

Strategy 1: Focus on the individual

Attracting and recruiting volunteers and supporting and training them should focus on individual values, motivations and contributions so that volunteers are personally satisfied with their participation and experiences. How can this be done?

1. Identify individual volunteer

preferences (needs and motivations, expectations, knowledge, experience and skills).

2. Match individual volunteer preferences to the most appropriate volunteer roles and job tasks. Be sure to consider the nature of supervision, operating conditions, co-workers, nature of the work itself and communication processes when aligning volunteer preferences to job roles and tasks.
3. Discuss opportunities and options with volunteers and, if required, reassign volunteers to particular roles that best meet their preferences (e.g. offer them more attractive rewards, better role design or improved opportunities to work with other volunteers or in other work settings).



Communication between event organisers and volunteers is both important and necessary to run a successful event.



4. Design training and induction sessions that address volunteer motivations.

Strategy 2: Communication

Communication is key. Ensure that your communication processes are well-designed.

Communication between event organisers and volunteers and between individual volunteers is both important and necessary to run a successful event. Effective communication ensures that everyone has access to important information and services when required. This helps to provide volunteers with clear directions about their role and an understanding of how they fit within the organisation. Communication can fall into three main areas:

- Pre-event.
- During event.
- Post event.

Pre-event communications

This includes communication between the event organisers and the volunteers about the event, the organisation and the individual's job role and tasks. A volunteer first becomes aware of how effective the organisation's communication strategies are by participating in an induction programme. Induction processes should include comprehensive induction manuals, group training sessions, checklists for individual roles and responsibilities, venue tours and documentation to help volunteers understand the event operations.

During-event communications

Communication between event organisers and volunteers and between individual volunteers or groups of volunteers helps to facilitate control of

the event. The more sophisticated the communication methods (e.g. phone, personal visits, internet, pagers, two-way radio), the easier the communication process is. During the event it is also important to invest time in debriefing volunteers on issues associated with their roles and the support provided to them.

Post-event communications

Post-event functions present an opportunity to conduct debriefing sessions to gather feedback from volunteers regarding event operations and the support provided to them. It is also important to recognise and acknowledge individual volunteer contributions, especially to the achievement of milestones.

Strategy 3: Encourage volunteers to engage with leaders of the event

Interaction between volunteers and the leaders of the organisation is critical. Leaders are an important source of inspiration and motivation for volunteers and are the key to promoting a sense of camaraderie, teamwork and commitment to the event purpose.

Leaders can:

1. Create an overall positive and enjoyable experience for all volunteers by communicating how valued their input is to the organisation and its success (through simple recognition schemes). The creation of a 'positive event vibe' among volunteers can flow on to event participants (e.g. athletes and spectators) and enhance the event experience for all involved.
2. Encourage volunteers to participate in decisions about their job roles and tasks and general event functions.

This helps volunteers to develop a sense of ownership by involving them in event planning and other decisions.

3. Encourage volunteers to develop a social connection to the organisation by, for example:
 - helping volunteers understand the values of the organisation,
 - facilitating the development of new friendships,
 - welcoming volunteer contributions to media releases or newsletters about the event, as well as blogs and other social media outlets related to the event.

CONCLUSION

Volunteers are fundamental to the success of international and domestic sport events. Sport event organisers rely on the knowledge, skills and experiences of volunteers to run events. The scale of volunteer involvement in sport events is significant, creating the potential for a wide range of economic, social, cultural and community benefits. While sport events provide key sites for volunteer involvement, it is critical to understand volunteer motivation and satisfaction. Understanding these aspects of volunteering can assist event organisers in the design and delivery of effective recruitment, selection, training, organising, reward and retention strategies that ultimately benefit the organisation, volunteers and event participants. Remember that volunteering is a leisure and recreational activity for most people. To keep volunteers involved and committed, make it an enjoyable experience!



Above: Sweden's Robert Karlsson poses for a picture with volunteers after winning the Qatar Masters golf tournament at the Doha Golf Club.

Right: Asian Games volunteers keep the court clean during a time out during the Men's Basketball, Doha, Qatar.



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