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What Explained Nonprofit Organizations' Satisfaction with Volunteer Retention During the COVID-19 Pandemic?

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The purpose of this quantitative study was to investigate nonprofit organizations' satisfaction with volunteer retention during the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants were 74 nonprofit organizations' leaders who participated in the online survey. The response rate was 10.6%. We found that the overall mean score for satisfaction with organizational retention of volunteers during the COVID-19 pandemic was 3.50 (SD = .98), and the importance of volunteer management practices was 3.52 (SD = .96). Most nonprofit organizations were proactive (38.8%) and reacted promptly (52.2%) while addressing the organizations' response to the pandemic. Approximately 10.3% of the variation in satisfaction with organizational retention of volunteers during the COVID-19 pandemic could be explained by the importance of volunteer management practices and organizational response to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, within the final model, only one factor was a significant predictor of satisfaction with organizational retention of volunteers during the COVID-19 pandemic, namely, organizational response to the COVID-19 pandemic (β = -.304; p = .014). Recommendations for future research discussed. Implications for volunteer management and leadership studies faculty, University Extension educators, human resources practitioners, and local nonprofit organizations' leaders are also presented.

Keywords: Satisfaction with organization volunteer retention**,** volunteer management practices, organizational response to the COVID-19 pandemic, COVID-19 pandemic, nonprofit organizations.

Introduction

The importance of volunteers has never been more evident than in the last year during the COVID-19 pandemic. Important nonprofit organizations like food banks, meal delivery services, homeless shelters, and free clinics have had dramatic increases in demand for their services. In contrast, uncertainties about health and safety have caused many volunteers to reduce their hours or stop volunteering altogether (Fidelity Charitable, 2020). Nearly 70% of human services

organizations and 50% of arts and culture organizations expect to experience or have already experienced a decline in the number of volunteers due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Nonprofit Organization Research Panel [NORP], 2020), making recruitment and retention more difficult. Even under normal circumstances, the relationship between an organization and its volunteers is paramount to maintaining a consistent and reliable volunteer pool. Many nonprofit organizations rely on volunteers to play significant roles because their work is crucial in allowing them to function and carry out their mission. Without volunteers, many nonprofits would cease to exist. In 2020, the average value of a volunteer's time in the United States was estimated at $28.54 per hour to organizations, increasing from $27.20 in 2019 and $25.43 in 2018 (Independent Sector, n.d.). The value of a volunteer's time is reduced by recruitment and training costs, especially for new volunteers. However, nonprofits can maintain efficiency and consistency in their programs and services by retaining volunteers. Because of this, nonprofits are consistently looking for ways to improve volunteer retention (Waters & Bortree, 2012).

Adams (2010) wrote that nonprofit organization leaders must be very intentional about leadership development despite limited resources. Adams mentioned that while the connection between nonprofit organization leader effectiveness, organizational effectiveness, and volunteer retention is clear, the challenge of consistently attracting and retaining volunteer leaders remains. Nonprofit organizations operated by volunteers weaken without sustained leadership (Adams, 2010). Thus, organizational leadership and management of volunteers are key factors in the success of many nonprofits. As a result, Adams (2010) recommends that nonprofit organizations invest in nonprofit organization leadership development. In many volunteer-based nonprofits, volunteer leadership is essential and has also been effective and successful (Smith & Shen, 1996). Recent studies have examined the relationship between volunteer management practices and volunteer retention (Al Mutawa, 2015; Cho et al., 2020; Cuskelly et al., 2006; Windon et al., 2021). These studies suggest a significant relationship between specific volunteer management practices and volunteer retention.

This study aims to explore volunteer retention by answering the following questions: (1) Does the relationship between volunteer management practices and volunteer retention remain the same during periods of uncertainty, such as a global pandemic? (2) What, if anything, explains how nonprofit organizations can efficiently provide continuous service during an uncertain time? Because of the unique circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, this exploratory study examines the relationship between volunteer management practices, organization response to the pandemic, and volunteer retention under the current uncertain conditions.

Literature Review

Volunteer Retention

In general, volunteer retention represents a significant benefit as well as a challenge to nonprofits, even though retention has only recently gained attention in the literature (Al Mutawa,

2015). An organization's ability to retain its volunteer pool is impacted by several factors, including organizational trust (Sefora & Mihaela, 2016), the nonprofit's ability to meet volunteers' expectations (Kim et al., 2007; Walker et al., 2016), the volunteer's relationship with their supervisor (Reamon, 2016), the richness of communication used to promote organizational identification (Bauer & Lim, 2019), specific management practices (Cuskelly et al., 2006), and the volunteer's personal intention to continue volunteering (Bauer & Lim, 2019).

Other studies posit that a key factor impacting volunteer retention is the volunteer's fit within the organization (Englert et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2007; Van Vianen et al., 2008). These studies all posit that nonprofits generally tend to struggle to retain volunteers during "normal conditions." Retention is key because even during the best of times, it is not uncommon for nonprofits to encounter volunteer dropout and turnover (Garner & Garner, 2011). Volunteer turnover can be attributed to several factors including, age, gender, level of organizational commitment (Vecina & Chacón, 2017), isolation, lack of training, lack of professional development (Skoglund, 2006; Windon et al., 2021), and length of time with the organization (Dekimpe & Degraeve, 1997).

Volunteer retention (or the attempt to prevent volunteer turnover) can be a struggle for nonprofits, but during a pandemic, that struggle intensifies. During the COVID-19 pandemic, not only did the demand for many nonprofit services increase, but the rate of volunteer dropout and turnover also increased, putting extreme stress on nonprofits. Many nonprofits could not retain volunteers and were forced to reduce or cut their services (Nonprofit Organization Research Panel, 2020). Yet, some nonprofits persisted and thrived (BDO USA, 2020). To better comprehend and evaluate the current situation facing nonprofits, this study examines the organizational satisfaction with volunteer retention during uncertainty and seeks to understand what differentiated those nonprofits who retained volunteers from those who did not during the pandemic? Did the retention strategies that nonprofits found useful before the pandemic work during the pandemic?

Volunteer Management

"Best" volunteer management practices may be used to reduce volunteer turnover, hence increasing volunteer retention (Cho et al., 2020; Skoglund, 2006). Best practices include processes by which an organization recruits, trains, supports, and retains its' volunteers (Einolf, 2018). Managing volunteers presents a significant challenge to organizations with issues like developing meaningful roles for volunteers who have limited time, recruiting enough volunteers, and finding individuals with the right skills for the organization (Moore & Rehnborg, 2013). Nonprofits address these challenges using "best practice" volunteer management such as the ISOTURE and GEMS models.

The ISOTURE model (Boyce, 1971) is a linear model that outlines seven steps in volunteer management (identification, selection, orientation, training, utilization, recognition, and evaluation). Identification involves finding individuals who have the required qualifications and

skills to fill specific positions in the organization. Selection involves interviewing potential candidates to understand better their interests, motivations, and experience to identify the potential fit within the organization. Orientation involves the clarification and definition of the volunteer's role in the organization as well as an introduction to the organization (characteristics, values, mission). Training involves providing applicable and relevant skills to volunteers based on individual needs. Utilization involves ensuring that volunteers are put in positions to succeed and are provided sufficient support and opportunities to utilize their knowledge and skills effectively. Recognition involves the acknowledgment of volunteer achievements and efforts. Finally, evaluation involves the proactive provision of feedback from both the organization and volunteers regarding performance and organizational policies. Originally developed for 4-H volunteer management, the ISOTURE model is widely utilized and promoted by State Extension service providers, including Penn State Extension (Denny, 2019; Terry et al., 2010).

Like the ISOTURE model, the GEMS Model of volunteer management (Culp et al., 1998) is widely used by many University Extension programs. GEMS identifies four distinct concepts associated with managing volunteers: generating, educating, mobilizing, and sustaining. Within each concept are several steps related to the management and administration of volunteers. The generating phase involves conducting an organizational needs assessment, creating specific job descriptions, and identifying potential volunteers. This is followed by targeted recruitment, volunteer screening, and finally, the selection of new volunteers. The educating phase involves providing necessary resources and information to volunteers through orientation, training, and teaching. Mobilizing involves engaging volunteers with their roles and tasks, motivating and supervising volunteers to help them carry out the assigned tasks to the best of their ability. Finally, the sustaining phase involves evaluating, recognizing, promoting, retaining, or disengaging volunteers.

Despite the widespread use of concepts of ISOTURE and GEMS in many different environmental and situational contexts, especially within Extension (Ferguson, n.d.), there has not been explicit application and evaluation of these models in times of uncertainty. However, components of these volunteer models have been used to develop other crisis volunteer management models, specifically utilizing orientation and evaluation aspects of ISOTURE (Salmani et al., 2019). Other components, specifically training (Pardess, 2005; Unlu et al., 2010) and selection (Jannat et al., 2017; Neubauer et al., 2013), have been utilized during times of uncertainty, crisis, or disaster.

Relationship Between Volunteer Management Practices and Volunteer Retention

The relationship between volunteer management practices and volunteer retention has been a topic of increased interest during the last 15-20 years. Hager and Brudney (2004) explored specific volunteer practices in charity organizations and found a significant positive relationship between volunteer recognition, training, screening, and task matching with volunteer retention.

Similarly, studies such as Cuskelly et al. (2006) tenuously linked volunteer management practices to volunteer retention. More recently, there has been a shift in focus to examine the relationship between volunteer management practices and retention by examining volunteer motivation and volunteer satisfaction (Al Mutawa, 2015; Cho et al., 2020). Previous studies suggest volunteer motivation, particularly intrinsic motivation, significantly predicts volunteer retention (Graves, 2019; Hoye et al., 2008). Volunteer satisfaction has been shown to predict volunteer retention, whereby increased volunteer satisfaction with one's organization and role is positively associated with intent to continue volunteering with the organization (Pauline, 2011; Terry et al., 2013). Al Mutawa (2015) examined the mediating effects of volunteer motivation and volunteer satisfaction. The study results found that volunteer motivation mediated the significant relationship between specific volunteer management practices (volunteer training and support) and volunteer retention. Volunteer satisfaction was found to mediate the significant relationship between volunteer recognition, performance management, and volunteer retention. Cho et al. (2020) also examined the mediating effects of volunteer satisfaction on the relationship between volunteer management and intent to continue volunteering among event volunteers and found that volunteer management practice had a significant positive relationship with volunteer retention using volunteer satisfaction as a mediating variable. This suggests that the presence of a mediator variable enhances the relationship between volunteer management and retention. It is important to note that much of this research has concentrated on the relationship between volunteer management, satisfaction, and retention from the volunteer's perspective. This study aims to explore these variables from the organizational leadership and management perspective.

Organizational Response to COVID-19

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, nonprofits were rapidly forced to acknowledge an uncertain public health crisis. The pandemic required many nonprofits to adjust the extent and nature of their services (Shi et al., 2020). Similarly, many nonprofits experienced a significant reduction in the number of both employees and volunteers, threatening the survival of these nonprofits (Kim & Mason, 2020b). However, the impact was mitigated by the organization's response (Kim & Mason, 2020a). How nonprofit organizations may have responded to the pandemic's uncertainty is critical to their ability to maintain organizational resilience and volunteer retention (CAF America, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic required organizations to use resources creatively and identify alternative solutions to maintain functionality. In general, organizations that tend to survive and even thrive during a crisis are able to establish a clear purpose, frequent and clear communication channels, a rapid decision-making structure, a strong local network, and clearly defined worker roles (Rudrajeet, 2013). Possessing a strong organizational culture of empowerment and providing employees with the required technology increases organizational resiliency under adverse circumstances (Chong et al., 2020). In essence, nonprofit organizations must change to survive, let alone thrive during a crisis (e.g., global pandemic).

The nature of change by adopting a new policy or idea is described in Everett Rogers' book, *Diffusion of Innovations* (1962). In his book, Rogers explains how new ideas, practices, or technologies are adopted among individuals or groups. As one of the seminal crisis management theories, Rogers Diffusion of Innovation theory is widely applied in times of uncertainty (Singh & Chahal, 2015) and has been used to assess emergency preparedness in organizations (Shiels, 2018). In community outreach and management, the Diffusion of Innovation theory has been used in the design and development of community extension programs related to agriculture technology adoption and development for farmers (Ozcatalbas, 2014) as well as community outreach programs related to maternity health and family planning (Bang et al., 2018), inclusive recreation services for persons with disabilities (Schleien & Miller, 2010), nutrition intervention (Huye et al., 2017), and diabetes treatment and prevention strategies (Lien & Jiang, 2017).

Rogers identifies the rate of adopting an innovative decision using five segments, each of which identifies the degree to which a person or group is ready to adopt something new (an idea, technology, product, etc.). The five segments are innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards.

Innovators are characterized as those who actively seek to try and adopt new practices or technology. Innovators are the least represented group with only around 3% of the population. The next segment is early adopters. Early adopters are those who are aware of a need to adapt and often show the ability to influence others, take on leadership roles, and/or embrace new ideas. This segment represents roughly 14% of the population. The third segment is the early majority composed of people who typically require evidence of success prior to adopting a new practice. The early majority represents 34% of the population. The fourth segment is the late majority, representing 34% of the population. The late majority is generally characterized by people who are skeptical of change and new practices. As such, they typically will not adopt a new practice until the majority of people have tried it first with documented success. The last segment is the laggards, who represent 16% of the population. Laggards are characterized as very traditional and conservative, skeptical of change, and the last to adopt a new practice. We use Rogers' (1962) work to frame how new policies and ideas regarding COVID-19 may be acknowledged and presented by an organization's leadership to volunteers as an organizational response to COVID-19.

Organizations able to proactively react to environmental and societal situations can ensure their continued existence and success, while those who fail to react often experience difficulties adapting and surviving during times of crisis and uncertainty (Miles et al., 1978). Similarly, organizations that can rapidly adopt new practices and technology to maintain functionality are more resilient than those that cannot.

Relationship Between Organizational Response to Uncertainty and Volunteer Retention

Uncertainty and crisis are often stressful for both organizational leaders and the organization's volunteers and can lead to higher rates of volunteer burnout and stress (Olivares, 2015). Organizational responses have been shown to help mitigate the effects of uncertainty by promoting a sense of safety and preparedness, promoting a sense of calm, developing a sense of self and collective efficacy, promoting connectedness between members of the organization, and finally instilling a sense of hope (Hobfoll et al., 2007). During the current health crisis due to COVID-19, organizational responses have varied dramatically. Some organizations have taken no more than the actions required by federal or state law, while others have made substantial adjustments to address employee concerns (Shepard et al., 2021). Several studies suggest that perceived organizational psychological support is a key factor in reducing the likelihood of volunteer or employee burnout among individuals in high-stress environments (Cyr & Dowrick, 1991; Miller et al., 2017; Moreno-Jiménez & Villodres, 2010). These studies counter that organizational inaction related to addressing employee safety concerns fails to improve retention. Similarly, in private organizations, proactive organizational responses and support during crisis situations were shown to impact perceived job security among employees, which is significantly positively correlated with employee organizational commitment and retention (Filimonau et al., 2020; Gharib et al., 2017).

Purpose and Research Objectives

This quantitative study seeks to assess perceptions of organization retention of existing volunteers during a pandemic among local nonprofit organization leaders in Centre County, Pennsylvania, and explore the relationship between organization retention and organization volunteer management practices. The knowledge gained through this study should expand current understandings regarding the nature, scope, and value of organization retention of existing volunteers within the nonprofit organization leader's role. The current study was guided by two research objectives:

(1) Describe the importance of volunteer management practices, organizational response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and satisfaction with organizational retention of volunteers during the COVID-19 pandemic.
(2) Describe to what extent satisfaction with organizational retention of volunteers during the COVID-19 pandemic can be explained by the importance of volunteer management practices and the organizational response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methods

We used a survey method to address the two research objectives of this study. We used an online questionnaire administered via Qualtrics to explore local nonprofit organizations' leaders' perceptions of (1) Satisfaction with organizational retention of volunteers during the COVID-19

pandemic, (2) Importance of volunteer management practices, and (3) Organizational response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This research was approved by Penn State University's Office of Research Protections.

Participants and Data Collection

The target population for our study was approximately 700 nonprofit organization leaders, all from Centre County, Pennsylvania. Our study used a census approach and followed Dillman et al.'s (2014) online data collection technique. The list of nonprofit organizations in our population was created from the IRS Charity database (https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/tax-exempt-organization-search). We identified over 1,500 nonprofit organizations in the County. We then Googled each organization on this list to locate each organization's website to the extent possible. From there, we gleaned the names of Board Presidents, executive directors, and/or key leaders. We also reached out to and used our own local networks to connect with as many of these organizations as possible. We were able to distill email addresses for 696 organizational leaders, where an organizational leader is a Board President or Executive Director. We sent an invitation email to all of these nonprofit organizations' leaders and asked these leaders to participate in our voluntary study. We sent four email reminders. Data collection occurred during the Spring of 2021. We received survey responses from 105 leaders. After removing responses with missing data, the final data set included responses from 74 nonprofit organizational leaders, providing a response rate of 10.6%.

Sixty percent (60%) of the 74 nonprofit organizational leaders reported that they reduced their organization's services during the COVID-19 pandemic, whereas 13% reported making no changes in their organization's operations during the pandemic, and 27% reported increasing their organization's services. Other actions (not mutually exclusive) taken by the 74 nonprofit organizational leaders who completed our survey included: transitioning to remote working (about 55%), creating or reorganizing existing volunteer teams (25.7%), reducing the number of volunteers in the organization's volunteer pool (44.6%), and implementing social distancing practices and/or adjusting working areas according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) guidelines (66%).

Instrumentation, Validity, and Reliability

We developed a one-item scale, *Satisfaction with Organizational Retention of Volunteers During the COVID-19 Pandemic*. This variable was measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, whereby 1 (not at all satisfied), 2 (slightly satisfied), 3 (moderately satisfied), 4 (very satisfied), and 5 (extremely satisfied). The second variable of interest was a nine-item scale, *Importance of Volunteer Management Practices,* developed using current literature that specifically discussed both ISOTURE and GEMS models (Boyce, 1971; Culp et al., 1998). This variable was measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, whereby 1 (not at all important), 2 (slightly important), 3 (moderately important), 4 (very important), and 5 (extremely

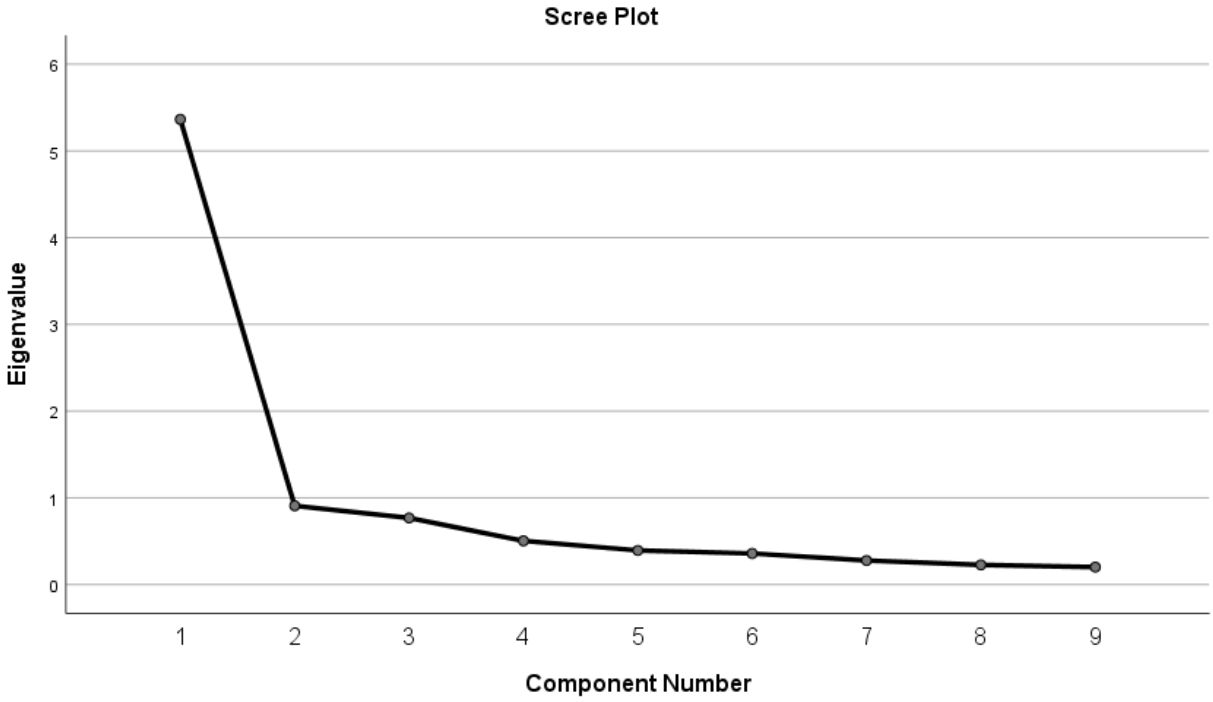
important). The mean score of the nine-scale instrument was calculated and used in further statistical analysis. The Cronbach alpha coefficient for the newly created *Importance of Volunteer Management Practices during the COVID-19 pandemic* scale was .92. We asked participants to indicate the importance of the indicated activities related to volunteer management practices during the COVID-19 pandemic. Examples of scale items include having a specific volunteer recruitment plan; matching the skills, experience, and interests of volunteers to specific roles; providing trainings for all staff and volunteers; screening potential new volunteers; and formally recognizing efforts of individual volunteers.

To measure "*Organizational Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic,*" we adapted Roger's theory of innovation model to develop one survey question "*Which of the following best represents your organization's response to the COVID-19 pandemic*? Five response options were provided using a 5-point scale: 1 (the organization proactively acted to address the situation ahead of time), 2 (the organization actively collected external data and reacted promptly), 3 (the organization waited on others' early success stories before reacting), 4 (the organization was reluctant to react and waited for the majority to react before it acted), and 5 (the organization was skeptical and one of the last to react).

Prior to administering our survey, we asked a panel of seven people – Penn State Extension educators, Extension administrators, academic faculty members with expertise in survey methodology, and a graduate student in Extension education – to review our instrument for face and content validity. The panel of experts determined that the instrument was sufficiently valid. A pilot test was conducted to assess the validity of the created instrument further. For the pilot study, we selected 18 Penn State Extension educators from around our state who frequently work with their community's leaders of volunteer-based organizations. The response rate for individuals completing the pilot study was 61% (n = 11).

We conducted a principal component analysis with direct, oblique rotation (assuming scale items are highly correlated) to identify the factor loadings for the newly developed nine-item scale "*Importance of Volunteer Management Practices.*" The scree plot (Figure 1) indicates the point of inflection on the curve. This curve begins to tail off after one factor.

Figure 1. Scree Plot of Component Extraction



The initial principal component analysis yielded one factor, which is presented in Table 1. In other words, the result in Table 1 showed that eight items out of nine were highly loaded onto the same factor (Factor 1). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin statistics of sampling adequacy for these nine variables was .891. That indicates that we should proceed with Exploratory Factor Analysis. The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was 382.63 with a significance level of < .001. Only one component has total initial eigenvalues greater than one, and, in our case, it explains 59.6% of the variance. We compared the rotated matrix with the unrotated solution. The result of the unrotated matrix showed that most variables (8 items) loaded highly onto the first factor. The remaining item, "*Formally recognizing efforts of individual volunteers,*" had a low factor loading .248. This item was eliminated from the newly created scale for further statistical analysis. We justified that the newly developed scale is a one-factor model.

Table 1. Factor Loadings

Items	Factor 1
Having a specific volunteer recruitment plan	.628
Identifying volunteers according to organizational needs	.547
Screening potential new volunteers	.722
Matching the skills, experience, and interests of volunteers to specific roles	.589
Providing orientation for new volunteers	.726
Provide training for all staff and volunteers	.649
Supervise volunteers (building relationships, mentoring volunteers, checking the status of work)	.659
Formally recognizing efforts of individual volunteers	.248
Evaluate volunteers	.597

Control for Nonresponse Error

Early and late responses were compared to evaluate no-response errors in this study (Miller & Smith, 1983). The first forty respondents were assigned as an early phase respondent group, and the last forty respondents were identified as a late phase respondent group. The early and late phases of responders were determined based on the day and time their questionnaire was submitted. We conducted an independent *t*-test to determine if group means for total scores on the four measured constructs differed between the two groups of respondents (early and late). The independent samples *t*-test (alpha level of .05, two-tailed) for equality of means for scale scores of constructs between early and late respondents showed no statistically significant differences between early and late respondents. The results of the *t*-test suggested nonresponse bias was not an issue (Lindner et al., 2001; Miller & Smith, 1983), and they reveal that data collected from leaders of local nonprofit organizations were representative of the entire study population (see Table 2).

Caution is advised in interpreting the study findings since participants are not a random sample. The findings of this study will only apply to those who participated, and as such, can only be generalized to the entire population of leaders of nonprofit organizations in the County surveyed.

Table 2. Independent Samples t-test for Equality of Means on Scale Scores of Construct Between Early and Late Respondents

	Respondents					
	Early (*n* = 30)		Late (*n* =30)			
Scale	***M***	***SD***	***M***	***SD***	***t***	***p***
Importance of Volunteer Management Practices	3.59	.94	3.56	.81	.137	.891
Satisfaction with your Organization's Retention of Volunteers During the COVID-19 Pandemic	3.60	1.07	3.38	1.01	.812	.420

Data Analysis

We used SPSS® version 26 to conduct the data analysis for our study. Both our dependent variable – *Satisfaction with Organizational Volunteer Retention During the COVID-19 Pandemic* – and our independent variable – *Importance of Volunteer Management Practices* – were treated as interval data. A descriptive statistic was utilized to describe the first research objective. For research objective two, we used an application of the Pearson correlation coefficient to measure associations between *Satisfaction with Organizational Retention of Volunteers During the COVID-19 Pandemic, Importance of Volunteer Management Practices, and the Organizational Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic*. A multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to explain the relationship between overall *Satisfaction with Organizational Retention of Volunteers During the COVID-19 Pandemic* (dependent variable) and independent variables, such as *Importance of Volunteer Management Practices* and

demographic variable *Organizational Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic*. Also, we used standard Davis Conventions (1971) to describe the magnitude of the correlation between independent and dependent variables (see Table 3).

Table 3. Describing the Magnitude of Correlations Based on Davis' (1971) Conventions

The Magnitude of the Correlation Coefficient	Description
1.00	Perfect association
0.70 or higher	Very strong association
0.50 to 0.69	Substantial association
0.30 to 0.49	Moderate association
0.10 to 0.29	Low association
0.01 to 0.09	Negligible association

Note. Adapted from Davis (1971).

Findings

The first research objective was to describe local nonprofit organization leaders' perceptions of their *Satisfaction with Organizational Retention of Volunteers During the COVID-19 Pandemic, Importance of Volunteer Management Practices,* and *Organizational Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic.* The mean summative score for *Importance of Volunteer Management Practices* was 3.52 (*SD* = .96, *n* = 74). Results for the set of eight items comprising this variable are shown in Table 4. Higher scores indicate a higher level of importance in the particular area of volunteer management, while lower scores indicate a lower level of importance in the particular area. The survey items scoring the highest mean values were the importance of (a) Matching the skills, experience, and interests of volunteers to specific roles (*M* = 3.95; *SD* = 1.02), (b) Supervising volunteers (*M* = 3.74.70; *SD* = 1.05), and (c) Providing trainings for all staff and volunteers (*M* = 3.70; *SD* = 1.20). The survey items scoring lower importance scores were (a) Evaluation volunteers. (*M* = 2.80; *SD* = 1.20), (b) Having a specific volunteer recruitment plan (*M* = 3.21; *SD* = 1.34), (c) Screening potential new volunteers (*M* = 3.42; *SD* = 1.41).

Table 4. Importance of Volunteer Management Practices

	n	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**		
Item				**Frequency (Percent)**			***M***	***SD***
Evaluating volunteers	74	3(4.1)	6(8.1)	15(20.3)	28(37.8)	22(29.7)	2.80	1.20
Having a specific volunteer recruitment plan	72	11(15.3)	13(18.1)	10(13.9)	26(36.1)	12(16.7)	3.21	1.34
Screening potential new volunteers	74	9(12.2)	13(17.6)	13(17.6)	16(21.6)	23(31.1)	3.42	1.41
Identifying volunteers according to organizational needs	74	3(4.1)	8(10.8)	16(21.6)	31(41.9)	16(21.6)	3.66	1.06
Providing orientations for new volunteers	74	9(12.2)	7(9.5)	6(8.1)	28(37.8)	24(32.4)	3.69	1.34

	n	1	2	3	4	5		
Item				**Frequency (Percent)**			***M***	***SD***
Providing trainings for all staff and volunteers	74	5(6.8)	8(10.8)	13(17.6)	26(35.1)	22(29.7)	3.70	1.20
Supervising volunteers (building relationships, mentoring volunteers, checking the status of work)	74	3(4.1)	7(9.5)	13(17.6)	34(45.9)	17(23.0)	3.74	1.05
Matching the skills, experience, and interests of volunteers to specific roles	74	3(4.1)	4(5.4)	10(13.5)	34(45.9)	23(31.1)	3.95	1.02

Note. The scale's items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all important), 2 (slightly important), 3 (moderately important), 4 (very important), and 5 (extremely important).

The descriptive statistics of *Satisfaction with Organizational Retention of Volunteers During the COVID-19 Pandemic* are shown in Table 5. The mean score of *Satisfaction with Organizational Retention of Volunteers During the COVID-19 Pandemic* was 3.50 (*SD* = .98). Approximately 51 % of participants indicated that they were very and/or extremely satisfied with their organization's retention of existing volunteers.

Table 5. Satisfaction with Organizational Retention of Volunteers During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Item	**Not at all Satisfied**	**Slightly Satisfied**	**Moderately Satisfied**	**Very Satisfied**	**Extremely Satisfied**	***M***	***SD***
Satisfaction with organizational retention of volunteers during the COVID-19 pandemic	4 (5.6%)	3 (4.2%)	28 (38.9%)	27 (37.5%)	10 (13.9%)	3.50	.98

The descriptive statistics of the *Organizational Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic* variable are shown in Table 6. Most nonprofit organizations were proactive (38.8%) and reacted promptly (52.2%) while addressing the organization's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 6. Organizational Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Items	**Frequency**	**Percent**
The organization proactively acted to address the situation ahead of time	26	38.8
The organization actively collected external data and reacted promptly	35	52.2
The organization waited on others' early success stories before reacting	2	3
The organization was reluctant to react and waited for the majority to react before it acted	3	4.5
The organization was skeptical and one of the last to react	1	1.5
Total	67	100

The second research objective was to describe to what extent *Satisfaction with Organizational Retention of Volunteers During the COVID-19 Pandemic* can be explained by *Importance of Volunteer Management Practices and Organizational Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic*. Application of the Pearson Correlation Coefficient (Freedman et al., 2007) showed a significant low negative association between *Satisfaction with Organizational Retention of Volunteers During the COVID-19 Pandemic* and *Organizational Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic* (r = -.28, p = .011). The correlation between *Satisfaction with Organizational Retention of Volunteers During the COVID-19 Pandemic* and *Importance of Volunteer Management Practices* was not significant (r = -.06, p = .612). No significant correlation was found between *Importance of Volunteer Management Practices* and *Organizational Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic* (r = -.14, p = .268). A multiple linear regression model was conducted to determine the relationship between our dependent variable *Satisfaction with Organizational Retention of Volunteers During the COVID-19 Pandemic* and independent variables, namely, *Importance of Volunteer Management Practices* and *Organizational Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic*. Multiple R^2 indicated that approximately 10.3 % of the variation in *Satisfaction with Organizational Retention of Volunteers During the COVID-19 Pandemic* could be explained by *Importance of Volunteer Management Practices* and *Organizational Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic* (see Table 7).

Table 7. Multiple Regression Analysis Between Satisfaction with Organizational Retention of Volunteers During the COVID-19 Pandemic, Importance of Volunteer Management Practices and Organizational Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Model Fit	*R*	R^2	Adj. *R*	*SE*
1	.321	.103	.074	.911

Note. $p < .05$

Analysis of variance in overall *Satisfaction with Organizational Retention of Volunteers During the COVID-19 Pandemic* is presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Analysis of Variance in Support for Satisfaction with Organizational Retention of Volunteers During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Model	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean square	*F*	*p*
Regression	5.991	1	2.995	3.610	.033
Residual	52.267	63	.830		
Total	58.258	65			

Note. $p < .05$

Within the final model, only one factor was a significant predictor of *Satisfaction with Organizational Retention of Volunteers During the COVID-19 Pandemic*, namely, *Organizational Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic* (β = -.304; p-value = .014). Multiple relations' coefficients are presented in Table 9.

Table 9. Multiple Regression Coefficients

Model	*B*	*SER*	*β*	*p*
Constant	4.683	.513		.000
Importance of Volunteer Management Practices	-.145	.115	-.152	.212
Organizational Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic	-.343	.136	-.304	.014

Note. $p < .05$

Discussion, Implication, and Recommendations

Nonprofit organizational leaders are tasked with developing and implementing appropriate and effective management policies toward the retention of volunteers (Boezeman & Ellemers, 2014). The need for retaining volunteers is more important during times of crisis than otherwise (VolunteerMatch, 2020). Leaders must be prepared, decisive, collaborative, and transparent to respond to uncertainty and lead their employees and volunteers through difficult periods (Gilstrap et al., 2016).

This study makes a unique contribution to nonprofit leadership and management research by examining the relationship between volunteer retention, "best" volunteer management practices, and organizational satisfaction with the retention of volunteers during the COVID-19 pandemic. By focusing on retaining existing volunteers and not on recruiting special volunteers who may be of assistance, especially during a crisis (Steerman & Cole, 2009), we are able to extend previous research findings that "best" volunteer management practices are generally commendable, but during a crisis, such as a global pandemic, these practices are not as valuable to an organization's ability to retain existing volunteers compared with the value gleaned from being an early, proactive responder to the crisis. Also, the omission of a key item in the "best practices" literature – *formally recognizing efforts of individual volunteers* – may not have loaded onto the one factor because offering formal recognition was not an option with the County during the lockdown, forcing people not to hold formal face-to-face ceremonies. Thus, future researchers may question the applicability of each "best practice" item given the environmental circumstances at play and consider the overall value of the "best practices" in general. That is, the "best practices" may have greater applicability at a given time and/or place than at other times and/or places, and future research may further delineate this time and/or place.

Organizations that proactively responded to the COVID-19 pandemic were more apt to retain their existing volunteers than organizations considered laggards in addressing the pandemic's health implications. Volunteer retention is a significant challenge for many nonprofit organizations, and this challenge was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of this study showed that despite most nonprofit organizations (60%) reducing their service during the COVID-19 pandemic and some nonprofit organizations (27%) increasing their services, the ability to retain existing volunteers was more a function of being an early, proactive responder (i.e., organizations who did not hesitate to take adaptive measures to protect themselves and their workers at the beginning of the pandemic) than it was due to anything else. The relationship

between "best" volunteer management practices for retaining volunteers and satisfaction with volunteer retention suggests that volunteer management practices alone are insufficient to predict satisfaction with maintaining an existing pool of volunteers.

Our study is not without limitations. First, generalization is limited by our sample, which is location-specific. We focused only on respondents from Centre County in Pennsylvania. The COVID-19 pandemic manifested itself differently at different times across the County. Some counties were hit harder than others. We acknowledge that the extent to which COVID-19 was present in our community could have played a significant role in our findings. At one point during the 2020-2021 timeframe of the pandemic, our County ranked 7th overall in the nation for being the worst COVID-19 hotspot. It could be that the leaders of nonprofit organizations located in counties facing fewer COVID-19 infections would have responded differently to our survey, and further research is needed to bear this out. Also, our survey was administered in the Spring of 2021, and the pandemic's uncertainty was more rampant and tumultuous in early 2020, giving our respondents the advantage of hindsight to some extent. If our survey had been administered early in 2020, respondents might have felt differently; thus, our results may have differed. Again, future research is needed to bear this out (albeit, we do not wish for another global pandemic to exist for the sake of creating such an "opportunity"). Lastly, although we learned that being an early, proactive responder to the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a greater likelihood of retaining existing volunteers, following up with a qualitative assessment of what exactly being an early, proactive responder "looks like" could be immensely helpful. Using Rogers' *Diffusion of Innovation* (1962) model is a good first step, but articulating what was going on in the minds' of the nonprofit organizations' leaders who responded early to the pandemic can help us better understand how to carry out an early response strategy in an effective way. Based solely on leaders' responses to Rogers' 5-stage general model, we cannot assume that all early responders interpreted what each stage meant in terms of implementation. Follow-up studies should be conducted to refine (1) how our dependent variable is measured (not simply as a leader's perception of volunteer retention like in our study, but possibly measuring the actual percentage change in the number of volunteers being retained), (2) how Rogers' theory can be further refined and measured, (3) how other change management practices or strategies may influence volunteer retention, and (4) the timing of when a leader carries out the organization response to change, to name a few ways to extend our research. Lastly, our study surveyed the leaders of nonprofit organizations. Future students may wish to survey leaders in the for-profit sector, governmental leaders, and/or institutional leaders (such as those working for public schools, college administrators, etc.)

Volunteer management and leadership studies faculty, University Extension educators, and human resources practitioners can use our study's findings to help create more advanced curricula for educating nonprofit leaders for change. The COVID-19 pandemic was a jolting, serious crisis that represented a massive change in how people and organizations carried out their work. Change is inevitable with some changes, like the pandemic and other disruptive events

(e.g., war/conflict, cybersecurity, and technological progress) being sudden. Other changes may occur more gradually over time (e.g., freshwater quality and availability, climate change, and/or shifts in population to more urban areas). Yet all changes will impact people and hence organizations. How organizational leaders deal with crisis-level changes may determine if the organization thrives, simply survives, or fails to continue existing. Having leadership and volunteer management education scholars, University Extension faculty, and human resources practitioners working collaboratively in both research and leadership change-education initiatives, such as formal classes, outreach programs, training, and/or by offering other professional development opportunities, not only provides shared learning but also informs future research needed to advance our understanding. Collaborations can help strengthen existing leadership curricula as it relates to retaining an existing volunteer base, managing change for existing volunteers, and knowing when to use and not use "best" management practices as one factor or separately as individual items. The importance of change-management education for nonprofits could not be greater than it is right now. Educators, practitioners, and nonprofit leaders should themselves follow Rogers' model and consider our findings to be proactive, early adopters of advancing change-management curricula.

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