



# Repeat and Non-returning Volunteers: The Promise of Episodic Events for Volunteer Recruitment and Retention

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Accepted: 31 December 2021

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**Abstract** In this article, we are concerned with the recruitment potential of one-off episodic events for attracting and retaining volunteers. Our specific focus is on the neglected pool of non-returning volunteers. These are one-off event participants who are unwilling to volunteer again in future. Many studies generally document an overwhelming willingness of people to repeat volunteering after participating in a one-off event, either due to reasons of social desirability or because they had a good volunteering experience. The positive participant reaction at

most one-off events leads to the assumption that such events are useful arenas in which to generate a pool of potential repeat volunteers. Yet, scant attention is given to those people at the events who have no inclination for further volunteering. This article addresses that gap. It is part of a special issue on episodic volunteering from an international perspective and uses data from nineteen countries across the world. Our statistical analyses, which compares returning and non-returning volunteers, finds that on average, 7.42% of episodic event participants do not want to volunteer again in future. The results reveal that younger, less educated, novices who participate on their own are more likely to report unwillingness to repeat volunteering. Non-repeat volunteers unexpectedly had higher levels of altruistic motivation, and as expected, a less satisfactory one-off volunteer experience. The article concludes with implications and recommendations for organizers of events employing episodic volunteers.

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**Keywords** Episodic volunteering · Retention · Social embeddedness · Motivation · Volunteer satisfaction

## Introduction

Short-term, one-off volunteer events, like a park cleanup day, a charity fun-run, a cultural music festival, or a food collection drive for a local food bank, are increasingly popular civic activities. Such events are episodic and require only brief commitment from the participating volunteers (Hustinx et al., 2008; Macduff, 2005). The volunteers also need not be aligned with the group organizing the event/activity. They can usually just show up for the activity and then leave (Cnaan et al., 2021). In this article, we are broadly interested in understanding what factors

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encourage some people to volunteer repeatedly for such episodic events, while others volunteer once and do not intend to do so again.

The issue of volunteer retention is important because event organizers and nonprofit organizations that rely on volunteers to help run events often struggle with volunteer shortages. (Curran et al., 2016; Nesbit et al., 2018; Schlesinger & Nagel, 2013). Event organizers often have difficulty recruiting new volunteers and also retaining sufficient numbers of available volunteers, on which to draw when needed for future help. Various approaches have been offered to cope with volunteer shortages, such as more targeted recruitment strategies, use of advanced marketing schemes, or deployment of incentive tactics for retention that try to minimize volunteer attrition. The general assumption from these endeavors is that positive participation in a short-term, simple, event-based activity will act as a springboard for more committed future volunteering. Scholarly research confirms this assumption, showing that one-off events are indeed impactful for attracting and possibly retaining new volunteers (Bang et al., 2009; Krasnopolskaya et al., 2016). Moreover, episodic volunteers do generally report a willingness to continue volunteering either with the same organization/event or with others (Compion et al., 2021; Pozzi et al., 2019).

In examining the role of episodic events to enhance overall volunteering, two areas of research are still lagging. First, there is a lack of empirical knowledge regarding the actual numbers and percentages of those who episodically volunteered for an event and who later became more active volunteers. In other words, to what extent is the reported intention to keep volunteering in future actualized? Second, there is a shortage of empirical knowledge about event episodic volunteers who report that they do not want to volunteer again in future. Who are the people that do not commit to further volunteering, and why?

In this article, we address the second issue, focusing on non-returning volunteers. If most episodic volunteers are willing to consider future volunteering, what makes others reluctant to do so? What compels these people to declare no interest in volunteering again? Are they different in their socio-demographic characteristics or did they have different experience from those who declared a willingness for repeat volunteering? These and many volunteerability-related questions about episodic volunteers have not been well studied. By concentrating on people who volunteered at an event, we aim here to ascertain probable reasons deterring some of them from continuing to volunteer again in future, as compared to those who do intend to volunteer again. We call these people the non-returners versus the returners.

Our analytical attention lies specifically with about 10,000 episodic volunteers from 19 countries across 6

continents (Africa, Australia, Europe, Asia, and North and South America) who volunteered at one-off events in 2017 or 2018. Using survey responses, we statistically analyze the characteristics of those individuals who reported no intention to volunteer again in future. To our knowledge, this is the first study using data from a large-size cross-national sample to focus on volunteers who plan not to return to volunteering.

The next section draws on the vast body of research which shows that data regarding ongoing volunteering rests strongly on personal motivations, positive experiences, social embeddedness, and suitable opportunity structures. These issues serve as the base for our assumptions and questions. We then provide a review of our research methods, using logistic regression. The findings section presents the areas in which the returning and non-returning volunteers differed statistically. Finally, we offer our summary and conclusions that includes limitations, suggestions for future research, and policy implications.

## Literature Review

One-off events such as charity fun-runs, culture festivals, sport feasts, national days of service, and fundraising parties are popular occasions that often attract individuals who prefer volunteering on an ad hoc basis. This type of episodic activity suits the lifestyle requirements of many people in contemporary civic culture, in which people desire more individualistic, self-expressive action, guided by intrinsic motives, and personal fulfillment (Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2003; Inglehart, 2018; Salamon et al., 2018). According to scholars of culture change, people are no longer members of *Gemeinschaft* communities where all know each other and where impacts on one person effect all others (Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2003; Inglehart, 2018; Tönnies, 1887/2001). Instead, today most people live in *Gesellschafts* or associational communities where self-interest justifies membership. These are communities of limited liability that require minimal involvement by residents in the local community affairs, but where people connect and commit to many different groups and voluntary associations each in a measured way (Hunter & Suttles, 1972; Milofsky, 2019). In such settings, people's emotional investment in their social environment is dependent on the degree to which the community meets their needs rather than their sense of belonging. Moreover, the process of disengagement and limited liability is intensified with modernity and people today regularly question their commitments and reassess the merit of local institutions. As such people are giving their time, efforts, and skills in a more calculated manner and when it suits them. Scholars like Putnam (2000) and Macduff (1990, 2005) add that increasing competition on personal

time and resources has led to a decline in sustained commitment to associational life and a greater desire for more short-term activities. Consequently, in a cultural climate where time is constrained and individual expression is valued, civic action tends to be more issue-based and short-term, and thus discrete event-based volunteering thrives.

Such a cultural context fosters one-off, short-term civic events, many of which rely heavily on volunteers for their success. These events require civil society to supply an available pool of potential episodic volunteers—people who are willing, able, and interested in volunteering for different events without necessarily being affiliated with the organizing group (Hustinx et al., 2008; Macduff, 2005; Smith et al., 2010). It is also presumed that people who are prepared to volunteer for a short, one-off period may be inclined to repeat involvement at similar events in future. That is, the one-off experience will whet their appetite for seriously considering more frequent volunteering (Bang et al., 2009; Krasnopolskaya et al., 2016). Our assumption therefore, is that knowing the characteristics, motives, and experiences of these different sets of returning versus non-returning volunteers can help identify whether episodic events have recruitment and retention appeal.

There are many factors that determine whether someone volunteers and continues to do so. Generally, these include a combination of individual and contextual influencers such as cultural values and beliefs, being asked to volunteer by someone in your social group, having the time, capability, and ability to volunteer, perception of volunteering, experience with volunteering, age, and living in a context where volunteering is socially acceptable (Dekker & Halman, 2003; Einolf, 2018; Hallet et al., 2020a; Haski-Leventhal et al., 2019; Musick & Wilson, 2008; Snyder & Omoto, 2000). Satisfaction with the one-off activity, and being asked to volunteer again are also strongly associated with increased willingness to participate in another volunteering event and possibly even move from intermittent to more sustained, ongoing volunteering (Bang et al., 2009; Bryen & Madden, 2006; Cnaan et al., 2017; Cnaan et al., 2021; Hallmann & Harms, 2012; Hyde et al., 2014; Maas et al., 2021; Neufeind et al., 2013; Smith & Lockstone, 2009).

To analytically tie all of these determining factors together, we rely on the Volunteer Process Model (Omoto & Snyder, 2002; Snyder & Omoto, 2008). This theoretical framework incorporates many different determinates of volunteering into three connected stages that holistically views volunteering as a process involving antecedents, experiences, and consequences (Omoto & Snyder, 2002). Doing so makes it possible to examine for instance if individual antecedent factors, like motives and beliefs, combined with social factors like belonging to a group where one is asked to volunteer, might lead a person to

have a positive, satisfying volunteer experience, which in turn prompts a willingness to repeat volunteering.

Using this Volunteer Process Model in our study, we account for motivation, social connectedness, and past volunteer exposure (i.e., antecedents); for event satisfaction (i.e., experience); and willingness to volunteer again (i.e., consequence). We ask, which of these factors supports or dissuades intentions for continued episodic volunteering? Each factor is discussed in further detail below, and accounted for in the models analyzing future volunteer intentions. We therefore include motivation, social connection, experience, and satisfaction as variables in an exploratory fashion guided by four research questions rather than a set of hypotheses.

### *Motivations*

The first antecedent factor that can influence future volunteering encompasses motives. Although specific research on recruitment and retention of event-based episodic volunteers is still emerging (Pozzi et al., 2019; Dunn et al., 2016), a strong body of scholarship agrees that many different motives simultaneously influence volunteering behaviour (Clary et al., 1996; Cnaan & Goldberg-Glen, 1991; Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2003; MacNeela, 2008; Musick & Wilson, 2008). Research on traditional volunteering consistently shows that people are motivated to volunteer for various reasons. Grönlund (2011) and Smith et al. (2010) argue that motivational forces, while often overlapping and sometimes interchangeable, can be grouped into altruistic, instrumental, and social motives. Motives are also multidimensional, and no one motive explains volunteering more than another (Cnaan & Goldberg-Glen, 1991; Hallmann & Harms, 2012). For instance, a person may concurrently want to do good for their community (altruistic motive), gain work-related experience to boost their resume (utilitarian motive), and hope to meet new people while volunteering (social motive) (Andreoni, 1990; Holdsworth, 2010; McCabe et al., 2007; Smith et al., 2010). Motives are also learnt behavior, shaped by personal, cultural and religious values and beliefs, and by an individuals' stage of life, their social status, and their group affiliations (see Dekker & Halman, 2003; Smith et al., 2010; Janoski, 2010; Janoski et al., 1998). Thus, people who volunteer have been socialized to do so. They have internalized the values, beliefs, norms, expectations, and ideologies that would motivate them to such action.

Accordingly, volunteer motives should be studied as a collection of driving forces that guide action (Clary et al., 1996). The same applies to the imaginary motives that current non-volunteers would have (Haski-Leventhal et al., 2018; Niebuur et al., 2019). Therefore, our first analytical

question asks if altruistic, instrumental, and social motives have an impact on future intent to volunteer or not to volunteer.

### *Social Embeddedness*

Next, interpersonal networks, and level of social embeddedness also matter as antecedents, explaining why some people volunteer and others do not (Musick & Wilson, 2008). Volunteer scholarship recognizes that people who are well connected in a group with strong social ties are more likely to be asked to give their time freely to the group's activities, and they are more likely to feel compelled to do so (Dury et al., 2015; Janoski, 2010; MacNeela, 2008; Murray & Mullan, 2019; Studer & von Schnurbein, 2013). They may volunteer with/for the group and its activities freely, or because they feel a sense of obligation, or because they fear negative social sanctions for noncompliance (Hustinx & Meijs, 2011). One-off volunteer events attract people regardless of their group affiliation. While many might be asked by friends, family, or colleagues to volunteer, or be invited by their church group, or neighborhood bridge club, other individuals might find the call to volunteer on social media, hear it on a radio announcement, or see it on an organization's website, even if they are not affiliated with that group. They do not need to be socially embedded in a group or be driven by the communal sense of "obligatory altruism" that usually prevails in membership-based sets (Hallet et al., 2020b). Instead, they can volunteer at the one-off event entirely unaffiliated, on their own.

Not much is known about how social connections might expressly influence episodic volunteering for one-off civic events. As such, our second research question asks if volunteers at one-off events come in groups or with friends and family—thus supporting existing understanding of the importance of social connection? Or do they come alone and does this offer any new understanding of episodic volunteering? Then we ask, how is the one-off experience with or without a supportive network different in explaining intention for future volunteering?

### *Past Volunteering Exposure*

The third antecedent factor that can influence future volunteering intentions is previous experience with volunteering. Studies show that repeated exposure to any volunteering is an important variable increasing the likelihood that a person will volunteer again (McCurley & Lynch, 2005). This is especially true if the repeated action is positive and satisfying (Cnaan et al., 2017; Pozzi et al., 2019; Wisner et al., 2005). Even though volunteering might be episodic, it is not necessarily the only time a person has

volunteered. At any given civic event that calls for volunteers, some people will be novice first-time volunteers, and others will have prior experience, volunteering either occasionally or regularly (Handy et al., 2006; Hustinx et al., 2008; Macduff, 2005; Smith et al., 2010). Based on this knowledge, the third research question in this study asks if participants with prior experience are more likely to intend pursuing future volunteering. And conversely, if those with no prior volunteer experience, the true novices, are less likely to indicate repeat volunteering?

### *Satisfaction with Event Volunteering*

Finally, repeated episodic volunteering also appears to be linked to the satisfaction of volunteer expectations (Pozzi et al., 2019; Stukas et al., 2009). Satisfaction is frequently linked to repeated behavior. For instance, Hallmann and Harms (2012) and Hyde et al. (2016) and Pozzi et al. (2019) show that in traditional volunteer contexts, a person who has a positive volunteering experience (meaning that it affirms their beliefs, aligns with their values, meets their expectations, satisfies their motives, and feels somehow rewarded), is more likely to volunteer again. Moreover, if the opportunity structures (i.e., further events needing volunteers, time, and resources) are also in place, then the individual is even more likely to express interest in volunteering again. This connection extends to episodic volunteering. The extensive literature from the sub-fields of sport and religious mega-events volunteering, support the connection between satisfaction and willingness to volunteer again if asked by the same or another organization (Bang et al., 2009; Bryen & Madden, 2006; Costa et al., 2006; Cnaan et al., 2017; Eonolf, 2018; Hallmann & Harms, 2012; Hyde et al., 2014; Maas et al., 2021; Neufeind et al., 2013; Smith & Lockstone, 2009). These studies suggest that anywhere between 70 and 95% of event episodic volunteers who reported a satisfying experience also reported willingness to volunteer in future. This high rate of willingness to keep volunteering led scholars to a disinterest in non-returning episodic volunteers. To counterbalance this, our final analytical question in this study asks if satisfaction at a one-off volunteer event decreases or increases intention to repeat volunteering or not?

Finally, the literature also submits that socio-demographic variables are important in understanding individuals' willingness to volunteer. Various scholars have suggested that people with high socioeconomic status are more likely to volunteer. Some call it a "dominant status hypothesis" (Smith, 1994), and others use the term "resource-based theory" (Musick & Wilson, 2008), but all agree that socioeconomic status and demographic characteristics are important in understanding who volunteers (Wilson, 2012). Yet, there is no empirical knowledge to the

degree that these variables are important for episodic volunteers who are asked to consider future volunteering. As such, we account for individuals' age, gender, education, marital status, and employment in all analyses.

## Methods

This article forms part of a larger cross-national study of episodic, event-based volunteering,<sup>1</sup> which collected data from 19 countries on 6 continents (Africa, North and South America, Europe, Asia, Australia). Listed alphabetically, the countries include Australia, Bahrain, China, Colombia, Finland, Ghana, India, Israel, Japan, Kuwait, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Switzerland, Tanzania, and the United States of America. The specific details of data collection for the whole study are discussed in a separate article in this special edition (Authors, in press). The study received an IRB approval from the University of Pennsylvania. Given that data were collected in nineteen countries, and that the other papers in this special issue detail the relevant research methods, we only provide a general overview of how data were obtained and analyzed for this article, and not a detailed account for each country. Here, we focus on the key methodological elements that are relevant for this article.

### Data Collection

Data were collected throughout 2017 and 2018. In each country, local research teams surveyed at least 300 people volunteering across a range of different types of organized one-off events. Data collection took place at the event, immediately after, or within one month of the event. The types of events where volunteers were surveyed included music festivals, cultural fairs, sports tournaments, charity fun-runs, national days of service, park clean-ups, religious festivals and so forth. Each country team was allowed to add or remove minimal questions (mostly regarding religion and religiosity), translating and transliterating the questionnaire was done both ways (from English to a local language and back to English) to assure uniformity of content. Participants completed a 40-question survey gathering information about motives for volunteering, personal background, previous volunteer experience, assessment of the volunteer activity, event management, organization, leadership and support, and proclivity for future volunteering. Depending on the setting, they could complete the survey electronically or on paper hard copy. In each country, survey teams collected data from at

minimum three different kinds of events, and from as broad a demographic population as possible. However, the sampling is not random, and caution should be taken when projecting results to the wider population.

### Data Analysis Framework

Data analysis began with a descriptive presentation of the sample population's demographic characteristics, and we used simple cross-tabulations to show the difference between returning and non-returning volunteers. We applied Pearson's Chi-square tests and Spearman's Rho to assess statistical significance of the relationships. To provide a more robust, multi-variate analysis, we then applied a logistic regression model to analyze the intent to volunteer again.

The dependent variable is a measure capturing *intent to volunteer in future*, which combines participant responses to two questions about whether they will volunteer again in future "for a similar organization" or "at a similar one-off event". It is reverse coded as intending to volunteer in future (0) and no such intention (1), because we are interested in non-returning volunteers. Intention to volunteer is not the same as actual behavior, but it does provide a useful proxy with which to predict the prospect that someone might do as they propose. It is useful for statistically modeling the factors that might forecast continued volunteering (see Chacón et al., 2007; Hyde et al., 2016; Compion et al., 2021).

The independent variables are concerned with motivations, past volunteer experience, social connectedness, and quality of episodic activity.

*Motivations* for volunteering are categorized into three response variables capturing altruistic, utilitarian, and social motives. Each index ranges from 0 to 1, where zero indicates low motivation and 1 is high motivation. Respondents could indicate from a list of nine items about why they volunteered—adapted from the Volunteer Functions Inventory (Clary et al., 1996). Altruistic or value-driven motives refer to the desire to help support others, to fulfil a civic duty, or to set an example for children and others. Utilitarian or instrumental motives refer to volunteering to gain new functional skills and experiences, to impress a boss, because it is a school/work requirement, or for personal emotional and spiritual fulfilment. Social or ego-defensive motives include volunteering to make new friends, to expand one's social network, to find a fun activity, or because friends/family offered an invitation to volunteer (Clary et al., 1996).

To account for past *volunteer experience*, the respondents are grouped into two groups based on their prior volunteering activity: novices who have no previous experience volunteering versus those who have volunteered

<sup>1</sup> See Authors (in press) for an overview of this study, definitions of episodic volunteering, and full methodological approach.



occasionally or more regularly, albeit episodically (see Cnaan & Handy, 2005; Hyde et al., 2014; Macduff, 2005). This is included as a binary variable where novice = 1, and experienced = 0.

*Social connectedness* is measured by whether a person volunteered alone, or came with family and friends, or with an organized group. Responses are included as dummy variables (yes = 1, no = 0) where “alone” is the reference group, in contrast to “came with family/friends” and “came with a group.”

Lastly, *satisfaction with the event volunteer activity* is recorded in three ordinal variables measuring participant’s rating of their “overall experience on the day,” “the quality of the event” (Likert scale: from horrible = 1 to excellent = 5), and their “comfort level with the assigned task” (Likert scale: very uncomfortable = 1 to very comfortable = 5).

We used a set of five *demographics characteristics as control variables*. Age is measured in decades as a seven-item categorical variable for adults 18 years or older and treated as continuous. Similarly, level of education is an ordered categorical variable (range 1–8), treated as continuous, with the categories consisting of some primary education = 1, primary education only = 2, some high school education = 3, completed high school = 4, some tertiary education = 5, completed tertiary-level education/bachelors degree/trade certificate = 6, some post-graduate education = 7, and completed post graduate degree = 8. Gender (female, male), marital status (single, married/cohabiting, widowed/divorced, other), and employment (unemployed, employed full-time, employed part-time, student, and retired) are included as dummy variables with “male,” “single” and “employed” constituting the reference groups, respectively.

## Findings

Our sample is composed of 9772 respondents. Of this sample, 725 (7.42%) were not inclined to volunteer again in future, neither for an event or an organization. This small group of non-returning volunteers often goes unnoticed, but in this cross-national sample their number is sufficiently large enough to allow us to study them more carefully.

Table 1 shows the composition of the sampled volunteers, given our variables of interest.

The first column contains the breakdown for the total sample. All participants were motivated to volunteer by slightly stronger altruistic and social reasons, than utilitarian ones. Most participated in the event with their friends, family, or an organized group (65%), but about a third (35%) went alone. Two thirds (67%) of people had

some prior volunteering experience while the rest were novices. Overall, they were satisfied with their volunteer experience, quality of support they received, and task on the day (Scoring above 4 for each item, on a scale from 1 to 5).

In terms of control variables and demographics for the total sample, the median age group of participants was 25–34 years (mean 3.79 = category 3 in range 1–7), and approximately half of the population had some tertiary or post high school education (mean 5.04 = category 5, in range 1–8). About 60% were female, roughly 44 percent were single, and 45 percent were married or cohabiting at least. Over half of the sample (55%) were employed, 27% were students, 8% were retired, and almost 10 percent were unemployed.

The last two columns in Table 1 show the sample differences between those who intended to volunteer again (returning), versus those who did not intend to volunteer again (non-returning). Both returning and non-returning volunteers were more strongly motivated to attend the event by altruistic motives than by social or utilitarian reasons. On the day of the one-off event, two thirds (66%) of the returning volunteers came with a group or friends and family, and 34% came alone, in contrast to the 47% of non-returning volunteers who came alone. Most returning volunteers had prior volunteering experience (69%), whereas this was the case for less than half (45%) of the non-returning volunteers. The two groups of people also appear to have had a different sense of satisfaction on the day of event volunteering. Returning volunteers gave overall higher scores for their experience, quality of service, and comfort with their assigned task than did non-returning volunteers (at least a one point difference on a scale of 1–5).

Demographically, the two groups differed little with regards to age and marital status. However, the sample of non-returning volunteers was slightly less educated than the sample of returning volunteers, and the returning volunteers were represented by a higher proportion of females (60 percent) compared to that of non-returning volunteer females (54 percent). Both groups were composed of mostly employed people (returning = 54 percent and non-returning = 64 percent) but a little more than a quarter (28 percent) of the returning sample were students, and over ten percent (13 percent) of the non-returning sample were unemployed as compared with 10 percent of returners.

To understand more robustly what sets non-returners apart, and if they truly differ from returning volunteers, Table 2 depicts the results of a logistic regression model for non-returning volunteers. Results are presented in odds ratios, where  $> 0$  is interpreted as a positive relationship in terms of statistical direction (i.e., increased odds) and  $< 0$  as a negative direction (i.e., decreased odds). Again, the

**Table 1** Demographic characteristics of volunteers

	Total sample ( <i>n</i> = 9772) (%)	Returning volunteer ( <i>n</i> = 9047) (%)	Non-returning Volunteer ( <i>n</i> = 725) (%)
<i>Dependent variable</i>			
Will volunteer in future?			
Yes	92.58	–	–
No	7.42	–	–
<i>Independent variables</i>			
Motivations (range 0–1)			
Altruistic	0.39 (0.38)	0.39 (0.39)	0.37 (0.37)
Utilitarian***	0.33 (0.30)	0.33 (0.30)	0.23 (0.26)
Social***	0.35 (0.34)	0.36 (0.34)	0.24 (0.30)
Social embeddedness***			
Came with group/family/friends	65.15	65.80	52.55
Came alone	34.85	34.20	47.45
Prior experience***			
Regular/occasional	67.33	68.60	45.24
Novice	32.67	31.40	54.78
Satisfaction (range 1–5)			
Overall experience rating***	4.34 (0.70)	4.38 (0.68)	3.86 (0.87)
Quality of service by organizers***	4.29 (0.76)	4.34 (0.73)	3.70 (0.94)
Comfort with task***	4.37 (0.81)	4.42 (0.77)	3.76 (1.00)
<i>Control variables</i>			
Age*** (range 1–7)	3.79 (1.66)	3.78 (1.68)	3.75 (1.53)
Education*** (range 1–8)	5.04 (1.76)	5.08 (1.78)	4.51 (1.47)
Sex**			
Male	40.40	39.95	45.78
Female	59.60	60.05	54.22
Marital status			
Single	44.40	44.14	47.33
Married/cohabiting	45.51	45.74	43.87
Divorced/widowed	8.33	8.42	6.78
Other	1.76	1.70	2.02
Employment***			
Employed	54.76	54.10	64.28
Retired	7.88	8.10	4.78
Student	27.43	28.04	17.94
Unemployed	9.93	9.75	13.00

For continuous/ordinal variables, average mean is given with standard deviation in parentheses. For categorical variables, percentages are given. Chi<sup>2</sup> tests/*t*-tests/Significance comparing returning with non-returning volunteers, at \*\*\**p* < 0.000, \*\**p* < 0.01, \**p* < 0.05

model in Table 2 shows the *likelihood of not volunteering again*. In terms of motivations, altruistic intentions were associated with greater inclination to not volunteer again, while utilitarian and social motives had the opposite effect. In other words, utilitarian and social motives mitigated negative intentions for future volunteering and are good for retaining volunteers. Those who came alone to the event (OR = 1.352, *p* < 0.000), and those who were novice

volunteers were less likely to want to volunteer again (OR = 2.380, *p* < 0.000). Greater satisfaction with the volunteer event in terms of overall experience, quality of service by organizers, and comfort with the volunteer task, were associated with increased likelihood for future volunteering.

For the control variables: The likelihood of volunteering again increases with age (OR = 0.839, *p* < 0.000) and

**Table 2** Logistic regression model of non-returning volunteers ( $n = 7255$ )

	Odds ratio	(se)
<i>Motivations</i>		
Altruistic	1.811***	(0.253)
Utilitarian	0.450***	(0.096)
Social	0.513***	(0.090)
<i>Social embeddedness<sup>e</sup></i>		
Loner	1.352***	(0.131)
<i>Prior experience<sup>d</sup></i>		
Novice	2.380***	(0.228)
<i>Satisfaction</i>		
Overall experience	0.738***	(0.057)
Quality of service	0.686***	(0.050)
Comfort with task	0.636***	(0.040)
<i>Control variables</i>		
Age	0.839***	(0.037)
Education	0.832***	(0.024)
<i>Sex<sup>a</sup></i>		
Female	0.913	(0.088)
<i>Marital status<sup>b</sup></i>		
Married/cohabiting	0.750**	(0.090)
Divorced/widowed	0.621**	(0.138)
Other	1.779	(0.624)
<i>Employment<sup>c</sup></i>		
Retired	0.900	(0.210)
Student	0.261***	(0.041)
Unemployed	0.809	(0.118)
Constant	0.289***	(0.076)
Pseudo <i>R</i> -squared	0.174	
LR $\chi^2$ test	706.2	

\*\*\* $p < 0.000$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \* $p < 0.05$  (two-tailed tests). Logistic regression with odds ratios presented and standard errors in parentheses

Omitted categories: <sup>a</sup>Reference is male

<sup>b</sup>Reference is single

<sup>c</sup>Reference is employed

<sup>d</sup>Reference is regular/occasional

<sup>e</sup>Reference is came with group/family/friends

education (OR = 0.832,  $p < 0.000$ ). It is also higher for those who are married/cohabiting (OR = 0.750,  $p < 0.01$ ), and those who are divorced/widowed (OR = 0.621,  $p < 0.01$ ), compared to single people. The opposite is true for those who do not intend to volunteer again. When compared to employed people, students are more likely to want to volunteer again (OR = 0.261,  $p < 0.000$ ), but there is no difference for those who are retired or unemployed.

To put this in simple terms, the chance of not volunteering again goes up when utilitarian and social motives

are low, when event satisfaction decreases, with younger age and lower levels of education, among single people, and among those who are employed compared to students. However, altruistic motives, and being a novice and a loner have a significantly positive impact on non-returning, meaning that non-returners are very likely those who volunteered alone and for the first time but with “good” intentions. An interpretation and discussion of these results follows.

## Discussion

Our findings confirm results from the literature on ongoing volunteers, showing that functional motives, a good volunteer experience, social embeddedness, and prior exposure matter significantly in determining whether a person continues episodic volunteering. A staggering 93 percent of all respondents in our study planned to volunteer again. We found that individuals who volunteer alone and for the first time are likely less interested in continued volunteering. This is even more probable if the person is younger, less educated, and single, and despite their motivations and experience at the one-off event. These findings have four important implications for understanding the recruitment and retention potential of event-based episodic volunteering.

First, we asked about the role of motives on intent to volunteer again and found that social and utilitarian motives for event-based volunteering are good for encouraging retention. People who volunteer at an event to fulfill a functional goal and for social reasons are likely to volunteer again. In contrast, altruistic motives can actually mitigate intentions to volunteer again in future. One reason may be that the individual who is motivated to do good, satisfies that need through the one-off experience, and so the desire is satiated and there’s no need to volunteer again (Pozzi et al., 2019). Another reason might be that only having altruistic motives and limited functional goals or social reasons, is contrary to many volunteer-management practices to give recognition and other rewards. Consequently, motives alone are insufficient as an explanation for repeated volunteering action.

Second, we were concerned with how social connectedness among episodic volunteers impacted future volunteering. We found that one-off events are very good for recruiting new, novice volunteers and for attracting individuals who are not yet connected to any social group but who want to get out and volunteer. The existing scholarship on volunteering has tended to emphasize the importance of social connections for recruitment to traditional volunteering forms, because it is through social groups, like membership in a sports club or a faith-based congregation,



or involvement in a work-place employee service program where people are asked to volunteer (MacNeela, 2008; Janoski, 2010; Studer & von Schnurbein, 2013; Krasnopolskaya et al., 2016). However, individuals might see the call to volunteer for a large one-off event on social media or on the internet, even when they are not connected to any group involved in the event, and as such they can choose to volunteer “alone” at such events. This is great news for event organizers and for people seeking a one-off volunteer experience, and for the scholarship because it shows that social connectedness is valuable but not essential for recruitment to participate in one-off events.

Third, we wanted to know how prior experience impacts future volunteering intentions. Our analysis shows that event volunteering supports the development of a habit of volunteering because almost all event volunteers who had prior volunteer experience reported a willingness to keep volunteering after the event. Event volunteering also serves as an entry to new volunteering, as about one third of the people we studied were novices with no prior experience. Only a small proportion of novice volunteers tended to not want to volunteer again. These non-returners total only 397 out of 3192 novice respondents (12.44%), showing that event volunteering yields 87.56% intended repeaters. As such, event volunteering is an interesting instrument to enhance volunteering in a community.

Collectively, the results show that motives, social connection and prior experience are important antecedents shaping whether or not people volunteer. This is valuable for understanding critical factors in recruiting volunteers. Using Volunteer Process Theory, we confirm that antecedents, combined with volunteer experiences, will best explain retention (i.e., Consequences) of episodic volunteering. For instance, we found that satisfaction with the event positively reinforced the willingness to want to volunteer again, and indeed lower satisfaction decreased future volunteering intentions. This study did not inquire into why non-returning volunteers were less satisfied. However, it would be a great point for future research, especially if qualitative work focused on both individual and organizational level factors.

## Conclusion

This article has focused on the value of one-off volunteer events for recruiting and retaining volunteers. It builds on the existing knowledge that volunteering is a process in which antecedent factors lead people to volunteer and that their experience during the activity can consequently impact their choice and ability to volunteer again in future. Our analysis of cross-national data found that one-off events are overall good for recruitment of new volunteers,

especially new episodic volunteers. However, they do not necessarily promote volunteer retention amongst new recruits. In fact, intention to volunteer in future is weaker among novice and lone volunteers, and among those who are younger, single, and less educated.

The takeaway message is that most people who volunteer for one-off events very likely intend to volunteer again in future, but those novices and socially unconnected volunteers are less likely to want to volunteer again. This is important knowledge for event managers, especially those needing a regular supply of episodic volunteers, because it highlights the need to ensure that events are not only focused on recruitment, but also on retention of volunteers. They might try viewing volunteers as a sustainable resource to be nourished and nurtured. They can consider ways to engage newcomers and novice volunteers, and those who volunteer alone. And they can work to better understand how their volunteers’ motives and expectations can be matched to create a more rewarding and satisfying volunteer experience. Organizing a satisfying volunteer experience matters for retention, and this means helping to manage volunteer’s expectations, matching expectations with rewards, and providing clear guidance and support for volunteers on the day of the event.

**Funding** None.

## Declarations

**Conflict of interest** The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

**Ethical Approval** This study received the approval of the Institutional Review Board of the University of Pennsylvania. Research participation was informed, voluntary and consensual.

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