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# Rethinking Leadership Training: Relay for Life

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RETHINKING LEADERSHIP TRAINING:  
RELAY FOR LIFE

A Capstone Experience/Thesis Project

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

the Degree Bachelor of Arts with

Honors College Graduate Distinction at Western Kentucky University

By

Lora Haley Miller

2014

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2014

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine volunteer training that American Cancer Society Relay For Life volunteers receive in a rural and non-rural county. A qualitative study was conducted by interviewing Relay For Life volunteers from Edmonson County, KY and Warren County, KY. The data generated three overarching themes: Training was inconsistent, there was ineffective quality and quantity of training, and relevance and experience play a role in the differences between training in a rural and non-rural county. These findings offer insight into the ways in which the American Cancer Society and other nonprofit organizations may improve their volunteer training. This case study not only provides suggestions to the American Cancer Society, but also adds to the nonprofit and communication literature on volunteer training. Practical implications, as well as limitations and future research, are discussed.

Keywords: nonprofit, volunteer, volunteer training, American Cancer Society, Relay For Life

Dedicated to

My Mom-Michelle Burklow  
I hope I make you the proudest.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Even though I wrote this thesis, there are several people that I must thank. Without them, this would never have been possible. First, I thank God for giving me the life and opportunities that he did. He has blessed me beyond measure. I also want to thank my fiancé, Justin Coy, my parents Michelle and Leroy Burklow, and my sister Claire Burklow for their love and support; no doubt I was hard to be with during this project. Next, I want to thank my CE/T committee for all of their help and support. Finally, I say thank you to Dr. Jennifer Mize Smith, my brilliant advisor. Her help and guidance are immeasurable; I am thankful to have had the opportunity to work with her on my project.

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## FIELDS OF STUDY

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In our society there are two major types of businesses, for-profit and nonprofit. The goal of most for-profit organizations is to make money. On the other hand, the goal of nonprofit organizations (NPOs) is also to raise money, but rather than benefiting owners or stockholders, NPOs use that money to help or assist the group of people in which they represent.

Nonprofit organizations comprise the third sector in the United States economy. The unique thing about this sector is the vast programs that are offered and provided by these nonprofit organizations. The National Center for Charitable Statistics (NCCS) wrote, “The broad range of their activities includes health, human services, arts and culture, education, research, and advocacy” (n.d., par. 2). Numerous types of programs serve numerous groups of people, and all contribute to improving a community’s quality of life.

According to the National Center for Charitable Statistics, there were more than 1.4 million U.S. nonprofit organizations in 2013. Most NPOs are primarily supported by charitable contributions. *Giving USA* reported that in 2012, individuals gave upwards of \$229 billion (as cited by NCCS, 2013) in charitable contributions. Nonprofit organizations rely heavily on individuals who give their time to support nonprofit efforts. Lewis (2013) defined volunteers using three criteria: “1) performs tasks with free will, 2)

receives no remuneration, and 3) acts to benefit others” (p. 2). According to *The NonProfit Times*, “Approximately 62.6 million people volunteered through or for an organization at least once between September 2012 and September 2013” (Clolery, 2014). While volunteers are not paid, the *Independent Sector* estimated that a volunteer’s time is worth \$22.55 per hour (2013). The value of a volunteer is calculated by certain factors, including “the hourly earnings (approximated from yearly values) of all production and non-supervisory workers on private non-farm payrolls average (based on yearly earnings provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics)” (Independent Sector, 2013, par. 5). The value of a volunteer, some may even say is invaluable. A volunteer is special in the way that they choose to spend their spare time working with and helping these organizations.

One specific nonprofit organization is the American Cancer Society. One of their largest fundraisers is Relay For Life. There are Relay events all over the world, raising millions of dollars. The amazing thing about this fundraiser, however, is that it is a volunteer-run event. Each event has one staff partner from the American Cancer Society, but the event is primarily organized and implemented by a committee of volunteers, team captain volunteers, and team member volunteers.

Although nonprofit organizations depend on their volunteers in great ways, there is little research addressing volunteer training. Volunteer training is needed if an organization wants its volunteers to be successful. Training is a way to ensure that the volunteers are prepared to help the organization grow.

The purpose of this research is to determine types and effectiveness of training received by Relay For Life volunteers, specifically committee members and team

captains. In addition, this study examines possible differences between training in a rural and training in a non-rural county.

Volunteer training is an especially important topic to the American Cancer Society because without their volunteers, a large portion of their donations would disappear. Without their volunteers, there would not be a Relay For Life event. Findings from this study will contribute to ACS volunteer training in particular, but may also be useful to other nonprofit organizations that similarly rely on volunteers to raise money and implement programs.

This introductory chapter has outlined the importance of nonprofit organizations and volunteers, as well as the need for effective volunteer training. Chapter 2 provides a review of relevant literature, specifically in the areas of nonprofit organizations, the American Cancer Society, and volunteer training. Chapter 3 describes the case study methodology used in the current study, including a description of participants, data collection, and thematic analysis. Chapter 4 presents the research findings including themes and subthemes illustrated by participant quotes. Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the findings in relation to extant literature. In addition, Chapter 5 offers some practical applications and the ways in which these findings may be used to improve the training of American Cancer Society volunteers. The chapter concludes with research limitations and suggestions for future areas of study.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

As mentioned in Chapter 1, nonprofit organizations are an important part of American society, and most rely heavily on volunteers. Effective volunteer training is critical for organizations like the American Cancer Society whose primary fundraising event is organized and implemented by local volunteers.

This chapter reviews the broad area of nonprofit organizations and specifically highlights the American Cancer Society. It also presents extant research on volunteer training and then concludes with the research questions explored in this study.

#### **Nonprofit Organizations**

Research in nonprofit contexts is steadily increasing. Because charitable giving is critical to most all nonprofit organizations, researchers have begun exploring how and why people give. Nonprofit giving comes from both individuals and corporations. For example, “Existing literature has focused on three rationales for corporate philanthropy: through-the-firm giving, corporate statesmanship, and profit motivated giving” (Fry, Keim, & Meiners, 1982, p. 94). Corporations can have several reasons for donating to charity. NPOs also benefit from individual giving where “charitable giving reflects variations in the relationship of individuals to the community of which they are a part” (Radley & Kennedy, 1995, p. 685). Individuals’ charitable giving often stems from a connection that donors have to someone or to a particular cause. Charitable gifts from

both individuals and corporations are important to the livelihood of nonprofit organizations and their missions.

One line of research explores the intersection of corporate and individual giving. Mize Smith and Sypher (2010) reported that when an employer communicated philanthropic values, “employees viewed charitableness as an integral part of the organization’s overall value system” (p. 370). In follow up studies, Mize Smith (2012; 2013) found that employees favored altruistic motives behind corporate giving and that a philanthropic-minded employer influenced employees’ charitable giving values and behaviors. Her research has shown corporate giving influences the employees of corporations and can lead to individual donations as well.

Additionally, in recent decades, scholars have elevated the importance of studying volunteers and volunteer contexts, including the areas of volunteer value, motivation, and retention. Most recently, Kramer, Lewis, and Gossett (2013) edited an entire book of volunteer studies. The volume covered a range of topics from volunteer recruitment and socialization to the darker side of tensions and dissent.

Organizations in the nonprofit sector rely on volunteers to help them provide the programs and services for which they were created. Most of the time, without volunteers, nonprofit organizations would not be able to function or achieve the things that they do. Hartenian (2007) agreed, saying, “Some agencies would not exist if it were not for volunteers; they depend on volunteer time and talent for the direct delivery of the agency’s services, as well as providing support in less direct ways” (p. 332). The value of a volunteer is almost incalculable.

One interesting area of research focuses on how volunteers and staff members relate to one another. Staff members often rely on volunteers to reach goals and make accomplishments. Ashcraft and Kedrowicz (2010) wrote, “Our results indicate that, while volunteers prioritized the role of social support in accomplishing empowerment, staff members treated volunteers as pseudo-employees to be empowered through enhanced authority and participation” (p. 88). The work of a volunteer is often just as valuable as that of a paid employee. It seems that staff members recognize their value by giving the volunteers power in the organization.

Not only is making volunteers feel empowered important, but keeping them around is another hurdle for nonprofit organizations. Garner and Garner (2011) studied volunteer retention and found, “Motivation, satisfaction, and responses to frustrating events all affect volunteer retention” (p. 813). This is important for nonprofit organizations to keep in mind. They must be aware of how to retain their volunteers so that they can continue to prosper as an organization. Nonprofit organizations need to recognize that volunteers have these needs and in order to keep them around, they must be met.

One particular group of volunteers that is important to nonprofit organizations is the Board of Directors. Individuals who serve on a nonprofit Board volunteer their time and expertise to ensure the NPO is accountable to the public and pursues the mission for which it was created (Axelrod, 1994). Consequently, numerous studies have been conducted to explore Board structure and effectiveness. For example, Brown and Iverson (2004) examined nonprofit Board committee structures in relation to organizational governance and strategy. It appears that more effective boards contribute to creating more

effective organizations (Herman & Renz, 1998), which illustrates the critical role played by these volunteers.

### **The American Cancer Society**

One specific example of a nonprofit organization is the American Cancer Society (ACS). The mission of the American Cancer Society states, “The American Cancer Society is the nationwide, community-based, voluntary health organization dedicated to eliminating cancer as a major health problem by preventing cancer, saving lives, and diminishing suffering from cancer, through research, education, advocacy, and service” (ACS, Mission Statement. Par. 1). In 1913, 15 business people and physicians came together to start the American Society for the Control of Cancer (ASCC) (ACS, Our History, par. 1). According to the American Cancer Society, “Rarely mentioned in public, this taboo disease was steeped in fear and denial. Physicians sometimes did not tell their patients they had cancer, and patients often did not tell their friends and families if they had been diagnosed” (ACS, our history, par. 1). The fear caused by the word *cancer* was unimaginable; that group of doctors and business people wanted to stop the fear and eventually stop cancer.

In 1936, Marjorie G. Illig made the biggest proposal of the time. According to the American Cancer Society, “She proposed creating a legion of volunteers whose sole purpose was to wage war on cancer” (ACS, Our History, par. 5). This is when the ASCC became a volunteer- based organization. Illig’s idea caught on within the organization, “In 1935, there were 15,000 people active in cancer control throughout the United States. At the close of 1938, there was 10 times that number” (ACS, Our History, par. 6). The

idea of having volunteers in the forefront of the fight changed the way that the ASCC functioned, and it gave them the publicity they needed to push to the front of the fight.

In 1945, the American Society for the Control of Cancer transformed itself into a new organization, the American Cancer Society. With this transformation came innovation; “In 1946, philanthropist Mary Lasker and her colleagues met this challenge, helping to raise more than \$4 million for the Society – \$1 million of which was used to establish and fund the Society’s groundbreaking research program” (ACS, Our History, par. 8). This was the move that has kept ACS in the limelight ever since. The American Cancer Society’s research program has continued to grow and impact cancer research. According to the ACS website, “Society-funded researchers have contributed to nearly every major cancer research breakthrough we’ve seen in the more than 60 years since the Society’s research program began” (ACS, Our History, par. 10).

Seventy-two years later, Dr. Gordy Klatt, a surgeon, wanted to make a difference in his town. He wanted to raise more money for the local American Cancer Society office, and so with that goal in mind, he began the journey to the first Relay for Life event (ACS, History of Relay, par.1). He was only sure of a few things: he wanted to increase the money given to his local ACS office, and he loved to run marathons. In May of 1985, Dr. Klatt circled for 83 miles and raised \$27,000 (ACS, History of Relay, par.3). Once he completed his first 24-hour cycle, he wanted to get more people involved. In turn, he created the first committee to plan the event. One year later, 19 teams raised \$33,000 (ACS, History of Relay, par.5).

This one man’s dream has turned into an entire movement that is not only sweeping the country, but the world. According to ACS, “Each year, more than 4 million

people in over 20 countries take part in this global phenomenon and raise much-needed funds and awareness to save lives from cancer” ( Relay For Life, par. 2). There are more than 5,200 Relay For Life events in the US alone (ACS, History of Relay). This event is growing every year, “raising nearly \$5 billion to fight cancer” (ACS, What is Relay). Relay For Life events are primarily planned and implemented by volunteers in each Relay community. Without volunteers, Relay For Life events and the resources they generate would not be possible. The importance of these volunteers points to the importance of volunteer training and how well they can perform their tasks.

Relay For Life events occur all across the world, and each is somewhat unique. However, there are some standard parts that most every Relay For Life event incorporates. For example, every Relay For Life event is guided by a Relay For Life Specialist (a paid employee of the American Cancer Society), a Relay committee, team captains, team members, and survivors. Everyone is important to the outcome of Relay For Life, but some have more responsibility than others. The committee is a group of volunteers that is in charge of planning and carrying out the event. The committee consists of several chairpersons who are vital to the outcome of the Relay For Life event. The committee includes the following chairs: event chair, event co-chair, logistics, team recruitment, team development, survivor, accounting, recognition, activities, luminaria, sponsorship, youth engagement, fundraising, online, mission, advocacy, and publicity (American Cancer Society, 2014). Each chairperson is responsible for carrying out the tasks for his/her position, whether that is to lead the entire committee or focus specifically on the luminaria ceremony, for example. Each chairperson is essential to the Relay For Life event’s success.

On the other side of the event are the team captains. These are volunteers who have accepted the responsibility of recruiting and organizing a team. According to Jill Isom, an ACS Relay For Life Specialist, “Teams form to fundraise for local Relay For Life events. The team captains are the leaders; they are supposed to keep everyone on their team accountable” (personal communication, November 5, 2014). The team captains are in charge of planning and implementing the fundraising efforts for their team. In short, each volunteer role is important, and a massive amount of responsibility is placed on these volunteers, especially those in leadership positions.

Since volunteers are so instrumental to the success of Relay events, ACS wants their volunteers, especially committee members and team captains, to be well versed in their roles and responsibilities. Therefore, the American Cancer Society has created training materials for their volunteers to follow. As Jill Isom explained, “We have had guidebooks in the past for committee members, depending on their positions and team captain guidebooks for volunteers to go by throughout the Relay season” (personal communication, November 5, 2014). However, according to Isom, it is not clear if and how these materials are distributed or used.

### **Volunteer Training**

Although research about volunteer training within the American Cancer Society has not yet been conducted, extant literature offers some overall ideas that may be helpful across organizational lines. For example, Steimel (2013) examined volunteer messages and the similarities in training between volunteers and paid employees. Unfortunately, Steimel found “volunteers are less likely to receive formal socialization and training than paid employees” (p. 12), which points to a potential problem in nonprofit organizations.

Because volunteers are often the backbone of a nonprofit organization, their training is equally important as paid employees.

Despite a lack of training, volunteers are often given great responsibility. According to Delworth, Moore, Millick, and Leone (1974), “Increasingly, volunteers are being asked to take on demanding and important roles in service to others” (p. 57). Consequently, it is important that volunteers receive training that matches the responsibility they are given. One technique noted by Delworth et al. (1974) was to set up different levels of performance and knowledge. Once they passed one level of training, volunteers moved on to the next level in the training program. Volunteers could not move from a level until they had mastered the information or skills from that level. This process helps everyone to be on the level that they need to be. It makes training a building block situation; without the foundation they cannot advance. Once volunteers are placed at a level suited to their performance and knowledge, it is important to stick with the model of expectations through each level of training. Delworth et al. said, “In all teaching functions, trainers operate from a model of systematic skill building” (p. 59). To ensure that everyone is receiving the same training, content and quality, it may be best for organizations to follow a systematic model when training each level of volunteers.

Delworth et al. (1974) suggested a four-step training model: explain, demonstrate, practice, and discuss. These are basic steps, yet they accomplish the goals of training. First, the information is explained so that all volunteers understand the training subject. Then, the information is exemplified for the volunteers through a demonstration. Next, the volunteers have the chance to actually carry out the act or task about which they are

learning. Finally, the topic is discussed once all trainees have had the training. This helps to reiterate the importance of the topic and should help with recollection

A particular problem related to training is retention and the likelihood that trainees will actually remember and use what they learn over time. This issue pertains to paid employees and volunteers alike. Saks and Belcourt (2006) researched this concern, and according to their study, “Sixty-two percent of employees apply what they learn in training immediately after attending a training program. However, after six months, only 44% apply the training material, and after one year, only a third (or 34%) are still using what they have learned in training on the job” (p. 642). If paid employees have difficulty retaining information, then it is likely that volunteers will have similar trouble.

Although most volunteers take their jobs seriously, especially since they choose to be involved, over time, training must be repeated or followed up in some way. Saks and Belcourt (2006) found that “training activities before, during, and after training were significantly related to the transfer of training” (p. 643). This finding demonstrates the need for continuous activities before the training, during the training, and after the training so that the information is more likely to stick with trainees. Therefore, volunteer training must be a continuous process so that information is absorbed and used by volunteers. Neither the ACS nor other nonprofit organizations will benefit long-term from a one-time and done style of training.

Along with the lack of training or the lack of follow-up, sometimes training just is not in line with the organizations in which the volunteers are associated. Grenier (2008) found, “An institution's educational philosophy should form the core of volunteer training and in turn be reflected in public programs” (p. 7). Grenier examined the way that a

museum trained their volunteers based on their organizational values. This is important for volunteers for many reasons. Not only is it important to train volunteers for their positions or tasks, but it is also necessary that they understand the organization's beliefs, values, and goals. Grenier's findings "suggest a need for aligning an institution's educational philosophy with its training practices and assessing the impact of such alignment on volunteer training and program delivery" (p. 7). Making a connection between the philosophy of the organization and its training will allow volunteers to be well-versed not only with the position they are fulfilling, but also with the organization itself. The volunteers are often the public faces of the organization; the more they know and the better they are, the more help they can be to the organization. Tying the organization's values to volunteer training may also give the volunteers a sense of pride and motivate them to work harder for the NPO.

Training volunteers across numerous tasks and areas allows them to contribute to the organization in multiple ways. Netting, O'Connor, Thomas, and Yancey (2005) wrote, "Findings concerning the roles played by participants, volunteers, and paid staff reveal the wearing of multiple hats, facilitated by a tendency toward cross training, role diffusion, and doing what is needed" (p. 179). A lot of times volunteers are able to take on many different roles in the organization, allowing them to be more involved and contribute more to the nonprofit cause.

Training obviously helps volunteers learn about the organization and their roles, but it also brings a group of volunteers together. Costa, Chalip, Green, and Simes (2006) found, "Event volunteers come together early in their volunteer experience (and sometimes for the first time) in the context of their training prior to the event" (p. 178). It

is important for volunteers to feel connected not only to the organization, but also to their fellow volunteers. Costa et al. also noted, “The opportunity to share opinions and experiences during training may enhance volunteers’ sense of community because it is an early and tangible basis for interaction and indication of support from peers and supervisors” (p. 178). Therefore, training may make better volunteers based on the information and practices they learn, but training also helps volunteers create relationships with others and feel a sense of belonging to the organization. This supports the human need for connection with others. Therefore, organizations may want to consider utilizing volunteer training for both informational and emotional support of their volunteers.

In the case of the American Cancer Society, Relay For Life volunteers are organized by county and include various committees and groups of team captains within each county. Training offers an opportunity for volunteers to bond and become a team, which may allow them to accomplish more in the long run of the event.

It is important to note that different types of people, depending on their goals and responsibilities, need different types of training. There are actually two different types of volunteers (Hartenian, 2007). The first type of volunteer is direct service role where “volunteers work alongside paid staff, performing point-of-service activities” (Hartenian, 2007, p. 319). These volunteers work directly with the population that the organization serves. The other type of volunteer is the indirect service role where “volunteers answer phones, prepare mass mailings, deliver supplies, raise funds, maintain facilities, or serve on boards of directors” (Hartenian, 2007, p. 320). These volunteers do the behind-the-

scenes work of the nonprofit organization but do not necessarily have direct contact with the NPO's beneficiaries.

Depending on the type of volunteer, the training may need to differ. According to Hartenian (2007), "Agencies that depend on direct (point-of-service) volunteers are more likely to bring volunteers on board and use the performance feedback process to guide any needed improvements. Role playing and mentoring are particularly effective training techniques for these volunteers" (p. 319). In contrast, Hartenian said, "Agencies that depend on indirect support volunteers use the recruitment process to screen out those who would not be successful volunteers and terminate them quickly for lack of confidentiality and reliability, particularly if they have had on-the-job training" (p. 319). In other words, the volunteer role and tasks influence how each volunteer is recruited and trained. Nonprofit organizations, like ACS, often have both types of volunteers, suggesting that training should be tailored to each group.

In short, as the literature suggests, volunteers are the backbone of many nonprofit organizations. Consequently, Procknow (2013) believed, "Proper training for volunteer positions is the bare minimum of what every organization should provide" (p. 22). Procknow also suggested, "A comprehensive program of education and training, tailored to each person's needs, is a simple way to retain volunteers seeking personal development" (p. 22). It is important that volunteer training continues because, "As long as they're learning and growing, volunteers will be passionate about your organization and the work they do for you" (Procknow, 2013, p. 23). Since volunteers are so valuable to an organization, it is important to meet their training needs.

The American Cancer Society has offices all over the country and Relay For Life events across the world, collectively raising millions of dollars each year for cancer research. Each of these events is made possible by numerous volunteers who participate as a committee member or a team captain. For ACS, volunteers are their lifeline to the world and their primary source of fundraising. Therefore, volunteer training may be critical the organization's success.

### **Summary**

In summary, nonprofit organizations rely heavily on both charitable donors and on volunteers. In recent decades, researchers have increasingly examined nonprofit contexts, including giving and volunteers, so that we may better understand their unique processes and challenges.

In the case of the American Cancer Society, volunteers are especially worthy of our attention because they generate the majority of ACS revenues through the organization of Relay For Life fundraising events. Therefore, it is important to understand not only the ways in which ACS volunteers are trained, but also the value they place on their training. According to Lo Presti (2012), "Understanding how certain organizational aspects are perceived by volunteers... could be useful in the management of voluntary associations in order to improve the volunteers' organizational experiences and their subsequent performances and turnover rates" (p. 971). Not only is acknowledging and training volunteers important, but actually knowing who they are and what they respond to is an important part of volunteer training.

Lo Presti (2012) concluded that volunteers may feel more rewarded and more committed if provided "higher levels of support (both social and technical)" (p. 982).

Volunteer support includes providing volunteers with the appropriate training, information, and resources they need to do their jobs. Consequently, the American Cancer Society has much to gain from volunteers' perceptions about the information that volunteers receive and the extent to which it is beneficial in helping them accomplish their volunteer jobs and in motivating them to continue as an ACS volunteer. Extant research has begun to explore volunteer training issues and offers some good insight into the need for training that is ongoing, value-based, inclusive of multiple areas, and tailored to particular types of volunteers. This literature provides the starting point for a more localized case study to explore how current volunteer training research is applied to and used by a particular nonprofit organization, such as the American Cancer Society. The current study poses the following research questions:

RQ1A: What training is provided to American Cancer Society Relay For Life committee members?

RQ1B: What training is provided to American Cancer Society Relay For Life team captains?

RQ2A: To what extent do American Cancer Society Relay For Life committee members believe their training is useful and effective?

RQ2B: To what extent do American Cancer Society Relay For Life team captains believe their training is useful and effective?

RQ3: What are the differences, if any, in the American Cancer Society Relay For Life volunteer training in a rural county versus a non-rural county?

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

The goal of this study was to examine the training process from the perspective of American Cancer Society volunteers. Consequently, qualitative methods were deemed most appropriate to explore participants' thoughts and experiences. According to Treadwell (2014), "Qualitative researchers look to understand how phenomena are seen through the eyes of the participants" (p. 194). Therefore, qualitative methods are especially useful for research aimed at understanding the perspectives of ACS volunteers.

#### **Research Context**

Although there are Relay For Life events all over the world, this study focused on Warren County, KY and Edmonson County, KY. Warren County is considered a non-rural county of Kentucky with a population of 118,370 (United States Census Bureau, 2014). Within Warren County, Bowling Green is the state's third largest city (Bowling Green Area Convention & Visitors Bureau, 2012). It has a population of 61,488 (United States Census Bureau, 2014). Bowling Green is also the home of Western Kentucky University and is a regional hub for business and healthcare. In contrast, Edmonson County is a small, rural county with a population of 12,062 (United States Census Bureau, 2014). Its small economy is comprised primarily of small businesses and agriculture. Despite the fact that these two counties border one another, they are different in many ways, not only in size and economy, but also their Relay For Life events. For

example, in 2014, Warren County raised \$273,222 gross, while Edmonson County raised \$37,009 (J. Isom, personal Communication, November 5, 2014). In addition to the difference in money raised; there is also a major difference in the number of volunteers in each county. Jill Isom, the Relay For Life Specialist for Warren and Edmonson counties, shared that Edmonson county had 24 committee members and 14 team captains, whereas Warren County had 41 committee members and 89 team captains last year (personal communication, November 5, 2014). While Warren County has been recognized many times by the American Cancer Society for their fundraising, Edmonson County struggles to obtain and retain volunteers.

### **Participants**

Ten ACS volunteers, five from Warren County and five from Edmonson County, were recruited for this study. I first contacted the American Cancer Society office in Bowling Green, KY and gained permission from the staff partner who covers both, Edmonson and Warren counties. She then invited me to attend meetings in both counties where I shared information about my study and requested volunteers to participate. Participant criteria included being 18 years or older, an ACS Relay For Life volunteer in either Warren or Edmonson County, and currently in a volunteer leadership position as a team captain or committee member.

Participants' experience with Relay ranged from a few months to the upward of twenty years. Edmonson county participants included two who had only been committee members and three who had held both team captain and committee member positions. Of the Warren County participants, all five were current committee members and were

currently or had previously been team captains, as well. Participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identities.

### **Data Collection and Procedures**

After obtaining organizational permission from the American Cancer Society, the Institutional Review Board approved the research project in February 2014 (see Appendix A for approval form). Once approval was given, I began attending meetings in both counties in order to gain participation. Interviewing started in May 2014 and concluded in July 2014.

**Interviews.** The data for this study were collected through semi-structured individual interviews with the ten volunteers. Semi-structured interviews were selected because they ensure similar kinds of data are collected across participants but also allow for the researcher to probe any unexpected but interesting topics that may arise in conversation. According to Treadwell (2014), “Semi structured interviews keep the interview focused but allow both the interviewer and the interviewee room to move (p. 197). Prior to beginning the interviews, participants were asked to read and sign an informed consent form (see Appendix B for document). The interview protocol consisted of 13 questions that asked participants to reflect on the kind of volunteer training they received, how much training they received, and the perceived effectiveness of the training they received (see Appendix C for interview protocol).

Interviews were conducted outside of the American Cancer Society office, wherever the volunteers felt most comfortable meeting. Interviews lasted between five and thirty-five minutes, with an average of 15.27 minutes. Interviews were recorded and later transcribed verbatim, yielding a total of 61 double-spaced pages.

**Data Analysis.** I conducted a thematic analysis of the interview data and followed the constant-comparative method outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1998). Open coding began by reading line by line and assigning labels to any words, phrases, or sentences that addressed the research questions. Open coding generated approximately 313 different codes which were organized in a codebook. Next, similar codes were grouped into larger categories. The categories were then compared in relationship to one another, and overarching themes were constructed to reflect the categories that were most relevant to the research questions and most discussed by participants. A theme had to represent a majority of participants and meet one of more of Owen's (1984) criteria of repetition, recurrence, and forcefulness. Finally, the data were revisited to find supporting quotes or any outlying data that might contradict the proposed themes.

### **Role of the Researcher**

Conducting this research study was very important to me because of my involvement with the American Cancer Society and Relay For Life. I have been a team captain for three years and a committee member for one year. In addition to being a volunteer, I was able to serve as an intern at the American Cancer Society office in Bowling Green, KY. Once I had seen Relay For Life as both a volunteer and a staff member, I noticed that there were several issues that could be addressed through volunteer training. In my research, I expected to hear from other volunteers that they were not receiving training very often and when and if they did receive training it was not very helpful.

My own experiences fueled my desire to help the American Cancer Society improve their training for Relay For Life volunteers. As a result, I believe my experiences

benefited the research project because I was able to understand the participants and their experiences. In some cases this understanding allowed me to ask questions to excavate their answers and at other times it allowed me to make connections between data that I otherwise wouldn't have noticed. However, I also had to make an effort to not let my own expectations and opinions influence the data or my findings. During this project I consulted with my advisor, Dr. Jennifer Mize Smith, to ensure that my data analysis wasn't biased. While accessing the data with Dr. Mize Smith it helped me to further remove myself from the information and gain new insights from the data.

### **Summary**

This chapter has reviewed the methodology employed in the current research study. Specifically, it has discussed the research context, participants, data collection, data analysis, and role of the researcher. The following chapter presents the findings of this study.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

This research project explored three different questions relating to the training of American Cancer Society Relay For Life volunteers. Research question one explored the training that Relay For Life team captains and committee members received. The second research question examined the effectiveness of the volunteer training, from the volunteers' perspectives. Finally, the third research question considered if there were any volunteer training differences between the two counties, rural and non-rural. Largely, the data showed that training was inconsistent, the quantity and quality of training was ineffective, and the relevance of training and volunteer experience were major differences between the rural and non-rural counties. Within each overarching theme were categories that illustrated the data. The findings of this study offer a snapshot of the training that Relay For Life volunteers receive in Warren County, KY and Edmonson County, KY.

#### **Inconsistencies**

Research question 1A asked what training Relay For Life committee members received. During the interviews, it emerged that research question 1B, what training did team captains receive, had no distinct differences. Most of the interviewees had held positions as both a team captain and a committee member and made no distinction between the two roles. Therefore, the two RQs were combined when reporting the findings.

A general theme of *inconsistencies* emerged from the interview question regarding the training that volunteers had received. Throughout the data, it appeared that there were many different stories about the training provided to Relay For Life volunteers. The inconsistencies of training fell into three main categories: (a) informal training, (b) formal training, and (c) no training. These inconsistencies are explained with quotes from volunteers from both counties' participants.

**Informal training.** *Informal Training* had the largest number of responses. Out of ten participants, five of them felt the training they had received was very informal. Informal training, in this sense, was more about experience and guidance from other volunteers than actual training. Claire, a participant from Warren County claimed, "...I guess I learned as I went along and from what I saw. I had a lot of help from past team captains..." This seemed to be a common happening across the board. Charity agreed, "...I've been kind of learning as I go along." The informal training occurred in both counties. When asked if training was formal or informal in Edmonson County, Stephanie answered, "informal, even our meetings are informal. So I wouldn't say anything we do is very formal." The other participants who contributed to the *Informal Training* category had similar things to say about their training experiences. Most of the participants' information and knowledge had come from experience and time spent with other volunteers.

**Formal training.** While half of the participants reported receiving only informal volunteer training, three of the 10 participants mentioned having received more formal training. *Formal Training* was described as American Cancer Society sponsored events that were created strictly for volunteers to learn. All three of these participants Relay in

Warren County, and all three mentioned the same formal training event, called the Summit. The Summit is a training event that the American Cancer Society conducts every year. It is usually regionally centralized, and it is a way for Relay For Life volunteers to come together to get ready for Relay season. As Linda explained, “I was invited to the national Summit in Nashville a couple of years ago, which is basically, your day is made up of different workshops and stuff like that. None of it was specific about the luminary ceremony; it was more in general about how to make your event successful, how to draw new people in, how to advertise your event, things like that. But that’s all the training that I’ve had.” Another participant, Leslie, had also participated in the Summit meetings, saying, “Well, I would call them formal because they are organized, and there is structure and an agenda to things...” *Formal Training* was considered, by these volunteers, as the bigger, planned gatherings for volunteers. Michelle, the third participant, agreed, as she recounted,

I’ve been very fortunate to attend several [trainings]. They have changed the names over the years. Some were summits; some were conferences. During all of those events, it was one-on-one training, group training, a lot of getting pumped up, getting encouraged about what you were doing. It was some role playing. It was very informative. It was information that we could bring back to our communities and share

These formal trainings offered knowledge that increased the volunteer’s knowledge and abilities, yet only three participants reported these formal sessions as the main training they had received.

**No training.** *No Training* is the final category of the *Inconsistencies* theme. Two volunteers claimed to have never received any training whatsoever. Both volunteers Relay in Edmonson County. According to Lisa, a new volunteer, “I have nothing, I don’t know, no training at all.” She was new to the committee and upon arriving, had received no type of training about her position or what was expected of her. Maggie had a similar experience. When asked about her training experience, she retorted, “I’ve never really [been trained]; nobody’s ever said ‘there’s going to be training; do you want to go?’” These two volunteers felt their training was nonexistent because they were never trained on any part of their positions, nor was training ever offered to them outside of their county meetings.

Overall, most participants believed the training they had received was very informal, mainly being experience and guidance from peers. However, there were, at least, a few who had received planned, formal training as a volunteer. Yet, on the other end of the spectrum there were some volunteers who did not receive any type of training. These inconsistencies were found across the participants of both counties, suggesting there is an underlying issue with the overall training of Relay For Life volunteers, particularly when volunteers from the same county do not receive the same training.

### **Ineffective Quantity and Quality**

The second set of RQs examined the extent to which Relay For Life team captains/committee members believed their training was useful and effective. Again, because most participants had held both volunteer positions, no distinctions appeared in the data.

A general theme of *Ineffective Quantity and Quality* materialized from the data. The theme is comprised of two main categories: (1) too little information and (b) poor information. Although some participants reported having received informal training, and others were provided formal training, there were still flaws within that training information and process.

**Too little information.** *Too Little Information* addresses the fact that although most volunteers had experienced some training, whether formal or informal, there was not a significant amount of either type available in either county. For example, Claire had an issue with the amount of training materials she was given. When asked to explain what she had learned, she responded, “I don’t really, because I haven’t been given a lot of materials, so it’s hard to say.” Similarly, Charity felt she was not given enough information, so she took matters into her own hands. She explained,

It’s a lot of self-initiative. If I want to do a good job at it, then I do a lot of online research, and I check out what other Relay For Life teams around the country do and what they offer. So I get ideas and educate myself that way.

According to these participants, the training information and/or materials was not sufficient for what they needed to fulfill their volunteer roles. Consequently, they went looking for the information themselves.

Another participant, Shawn, had also received some information but still did not feel fully prepared for his volunteer tasks. “In theory, [information] is really good, but a lot of times you face things that aren’t on the paper; it’s difficult to know how to handle those.” He and others would have appreciated having information and opportunities to discuss their roles and potential situations they might face.

**Poor information.** Although some participants focused on the quantity of information provided, others described the quality of the information received. *Poor Information* describes the ineffectiveness of what little training was received. Shawn, an Edmonson County volunteer, best summarized the overall feeling of the group. He said, "...It is difficult when you are first starting because you don't know what questions to ask; it's one of those things that you don't know that you don't know, so a lot of things get missed because you don't know the right, correct questions." In Shawn's case, he was given some materials, yet they were not explained, so they were not understood by him which caused him to struggle as a volunteer. Lindsey also felt as though she had received training, informally, but it still was not what she needed to succeed. She described feeling "a lot better prepared" than when she started, but also admitted, "I don't think we are on top of it, but we are still a few months away from the Relay..." Similarly, Charity expressed, "Even after receiving the materials, I still didn't feel 100% confident..."

Although some volunteers received some form of training, it was not of a quality that they felt prepared them for their role as a team captain or a committee member. According to Leslie, sometimes the information was just the same thing over and over again. When talking about a recent training, she said, "I mean, pretty much everyone were people who had been involved with Relay for some time, so we weren't getting new information per say." The data shows that training just did not have the quality that it needed to meet these volunteers' needs or expectations.

In summary, the theme of *Ineffective Quantity* and *Quality* best captures participants' concerns about the effectiveness of training that was given to Relay For Life volunteers. Building on the findings from research question one, when asked to evaluate

the little training that was received, participants questioned both the amount and content of information provided. Sometimes the training, information, and materials were in short supply; not enough was given to volunteers. Other times, the training, information, and materials lacked substance and did not meet volunteers' need. These data demonstrate that, even when volunteers receive training, there is still room for improvement.

### **Relevance and Experience Differ**

Research question three explored the differences between Relay For Life training in a rural and a non-rural county. During the interviews, there were no questions asked regarding the differences between the two counties, although some participants voluntarily noted differences in their responses. Using their responses and noting participants' counties across responses to other questions, I interpreted potential differences between the two areas. These differences are captured in the overall theme, *Relevance and Experience Differ*.

This theme is comprised of two categories that reflect the findings from the first research question, *Formal Training* and *Informal Training*.

**Formal training.** According to these participants, *Formal Training* differed between the rural and non-rural counties. Shawn, a Relay volunteer in Edmonson County, made this comparison:

A lot of things that really didn't pertain to us were thrown at us in the packets, and of course, you're talking about a difference in Bowling Green having 98,000 [people]...and us having 12,000 [people]. There's a big difference in the structures and economic factors you have in the county.

Coincidentally, a Warren County volunteer had a similar statement about the training.

Linda claimed,

Sometimes sitting in with people that are in such a vastly different demographic, I feel like ... [the training] is for all the other surrounding counties. When they are talking and sharing, it just seems like it's just not relevant to us at all...I wish we could do [a training] with like some other big, big events. I would say that would be the most helpful

Ironically, participants from both counties believed the information they were given was directed to a different type of county, to a smaller or bigger Relay. This is an interesting finding, considering the training materials should have been the same across the organization. Still, both volunteers believed the material was not relevant to them.

**Informal training.** *Informal Training*, as defined by the data, referred to the experience and guidance that volunteers received from others. The data suggests important differences in the experiences of volunteers, particularly as those experiences and lessons learned are passed along to new volunteers. Warren County, being the larger Relay, had experience on their side, including many years of informal training. Leslie described it this way:

We have a very, a highly experienced committee and so a lot of times for better or worse we are on auto pilot in the sense you go and you prepare for relay and you know the things you need to do and you go in and do them because you've been doing them so long.

The *Informal Training* process appears to be the primary difference between the two counties. Although not directed by ACS, Warren County volunteers have created a

succession process that retains and passes on the experience and knowledge of veteran Relay volunteers. This socialization process of teaching new volunteers likely contributes to the accomplishment of their Relay goals. Consequently, by reaching their goals, Warren County volunteers are invited to special ACS trainings as recognition of their success, which also allows them to take advantage of additional formal training.

### **Summary**

The three research questions that were proposed at the beginning of this project were used to address the existence, quality, and potential differences in training for the American Cancer Society's Relay For Life volunteers. Based upon responses from 10 volunteers across two counties, one rural and one non-rural, there appear to be inconsistencies in how volunteers are trained, if at all. Participants also reported ineffective quality and quantity in the training they received. Finally, the relevance of information and the experience of volunteers seem to differ from county to county, which affects the preparedness of current volunteers, as well as the training of newcomers. In short, the data point to potential areas in which the ACS may improve its volunteer training. Further interpretation of the findings and practical implications are discussed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

Nonprofit organizations depend heavily on their volunteers. For volunteers to be the best that they can be, they need adequate training. The purpose of this study was to explore the volunteer training of American Cancer Society Relay For Life volunteers in both a rural and non-rural county. More specifically, this research examined three research questions including (1) the training received by ACS volunteers, (2) the effectiveness of that training, and (3) potential differences between training in a rural and non-rural county. The data suggested three overarching themes. Training was inconsistent; training was ineffective in quality and quantity; and relevance and experience matter when it comes to the geographic area of the volunteers.

Inconsistent training means that some volunteers reported having received formal training (i.e., planned training events that provided an abundance of information), while other volunteers only received informal training (i.e., on-the-job experience). Although the latter volunteers learned what needed to be done, they did so as they went along or they learned from one another. Finally, there were some volunteers who said they did not receive any training at all. These inconsistencies were across both counties involved in the study. When asked about the effectiveness of training, volunteers reported frustrations with both the quality and quantity of information they received. For the people who

received training, they felt it was largely ineffective because the information they were given was not helpful. In contrast, some believed the information was helpful but thought they did not get enough to make a difference in their abilities. Finally, the primary differences between the rural and non-rural counties seemed to be related to training relevance and volunteer experience. Ironically, participants from both counties claimed the formal training was not relevant to their particular Relay. They believed the information was geared more toward other Relays, but not their own. In terms of informal training, Warren County has a more experienced committee which is advantageous to the training process. They have not necessarily received more or better training, but they retain a good number of volunteers who continuously learn and pass along their experiences to other volunteers. These findings can be connected to previous literature on volunteer training.

The inconsistencies across the American Cancer Society's training lies in direct contrast to what has been suggested by other scholars. Although most of these participants received little or no training, Procknow (2013) emphasized the importance of training, saying, "When you help people learn, they don't only gain knowledge and skills. They also develop higher confidence and self-efficacy. They have more positive attitudes toward the organization and their role in it" (p. 22). By helping volunteers learn, they may be more willing to help the organization and may become a better volunteer. Procknow also suggested training as a means to increase volunteer retention. "A comprehensive program of education and training, tailored to each person's needs," he explained, "is a simple way to retain volunteers seeking personal development" (p. 22). A comprehensive program points to the need for everyone to receive the same training

throughout the organization. For ACS, such a program would enable all Relay volunteers to receive training, despite their geographic community or Relay size.

Although some participants received some training, neither the content nor the amount adequately met their needs. Previous research suggests that one-time training is not sufficient. As Saks and Belcourt (2006) explained, “There remains an obvious decay or relapse of training as early as six months following training” (p. 642). Therefore, if training is not repeated, volunteers will likely forget what they have learned. A training model, like the one created by Delworth, Moore, Millick, and Leone (1974), may help organizations ensure that teaching new information is done repeatedly and in different ways. Delworth and colleagues outlined four training steps: explain, demonstrate, practice, and discuss. Although Delworth et al. was aimed at student volunteers, a model as simple, yet effective, as this can be used for any aged volunteer.

Finally, this study indicated that the relevance of the training was important, as well as the experience of the volunteers. Participants, both rural and non-rural, wanted training that was more relevant to their particularly Relay event and volunteer roles. Their sentiments seem to be supported by Hartenian (2007) who recognized that different types of volunteers required different types of training. Similarly, different types of Relays call for different types of training.

Because the training provided by the American Cancer Society did not meet the needs of these participants, the volunteers’ own experiences became increasingly important. Consequently, the county that had more long-term volunteers seemed to engage in more effective informal training of one another. Participants explained how they retained many volunteers who then assumed committee leadership roles and shared

what they had learned over the years. In other words, this volunteer group was building institutional memory. Sawy, Gomes, and Gonzalez (1986) explained the advantages of institutional memory, saying “Through institutional memory managers and leaders derive the historical perspective that helps shape their visions of the organizational future, and aids them in understanding the context of decisions in the present” (p. 118). In Warren County, volunteers pass along their experiences of what worked and did not work when organizing a Relay event. As a result, they could make more informed decisions about Relay and future events. In contrast, Edmonson County participants showed little signs of having a stable institutional memory which could offset the lack of training provided by ACS. Because there is a vast turnover of volunteers, volunteers must start over every year or so because they do not have anything or anyone from the past to guide them.

The American Cancer Society has a unique opportunity to connect with volunteers on a personal level and could potentially decrease the volunteer turnover. Although this study did not focus on volunteers’ motivation, most every participant shared a personal reason for being involved with Relay for Life. This personal connection could help the American Cancer Society to retain volunteers. According to Greenier (2008), “An institution's educational philosophy should form the core of volunteer training and in turn be reflected in public programs” (p. 7). The organization’s core values of fighting and eradicating cancer could be more emphasized in training to increase the identification of volunteers and perhaps retain them longer to help establish some institutional memory.

## **Practical Implications**

The findings of this study, combined with suggestions from past literature, point to several ways in which the American Cancer Society can improve the training provided to Relay For Life volunteers.

First, to address the inconsistencies of training throughout the organization, a comprehensive plan, like the one mentioned by Procknow (2013), would be extremely helpful. This comprehensive plan should include a detailed process of how the American Cancer Society will train its volunteers. There is obviously a gap between the training that is intended for everyone and what the volunteers actually receive. If a step-by-step plan is made and implemented, then ACS employees everywhere would have a checklist to follow to ensure that every volunteer was trained in the same way. The plan should begin by socializing volunteers into the group in which they are joining. Then, it should outline training content and timeliness, allowing for Relay events all across the world to be consistent in their training, no matter who is leading or where they are. Both volunteers and staff partners can use the plan to ensure their training needs are met.

More specifically, the training plan should incorporate Delworth et al.'s (1974) four-step model. The first step in the model is *Explain*. When training a group of Relay For Life volunteers, it is important that specific tasks are explained to the volunteers, and then it is important that they understand what is going to be expected of them once the training is completed. This allows for a solid foundation to be created for each training subject; whether it is fundraising or recruitment, they would all be modeled the same way. This would ensure that both parties, the volunteers and staff partners, were on the same page from the very beginning of training.

The next step is *Demonstrate*. Once the information has been explained and understood, then it is important to actually show the volunteers an example of what they are going to be doing. For example, if a group of Relay For Life team captains were training on fundraising and donations, then the demonstration section of the training would show the volunteers how to go into a business and ask for a donation. Another example would be to show a team recruitment chairperson how to “sell” being a team to a business or group of people. Actual demonstrations, such as these, would help volunteers better understand the information being provided for them. It is also a way to reach different types of learners. Some learn through listening; others through seeing. By completing these first two steps, different types of volunteers would be able to grasp the training information they needed.

Once volunteers have heard and seen the information provided in a training session, it is time to allow them to *Practice*. This third step is just as important as the first two. This allows the volunteers to get hands-on experience with the information before they get out into the “real world” and are expected to remember or do those skills. For example, once a logistics chairperson was given the information about setting up a relay and a trainer had demonstrated the task, the practice step might be to have the chairperson set up a fake Relay. Another example would be showing a team captain how to use the Relay website. First, they would be given the information, and then someone would show them how to access the website. In order to practice, the team captain would then work the website by themselves. Practice makes perfect. Actually allowing the volunteers to practice the tasks under a trainer’s guidance makes them more accountable for understanding and using the information they have learned.

Finally, *Discuss* what has been taught in each training session. During the discussion, volunteers can give feedback about the session, good and bad, ask questions about things that confused them and get clarification, as well as get energized about using this new information to improve their Relay. Although these four steps are simple, following them will likely lead to better prepared volunteers who are poised to organize and implement successful Relay For Life events.

A training model addresses the consistency, quality, and quantity issues that were raised by participants in this study. Improving how and when all volunteers are trained would allow the American Cancer Society and its volunteers to hold one another accountable for what they should know and be able to do. Important volunteer information would not only be delivered more effectively, but also shared four different times in four different ways. Consequently, volunteers would be more likely to retain what they had learned, making the overall training program both more effective and more efficient.

Finally, the rural vs. non-rural training differences should also be addressed by ACS. Although the above model suggests a somewhat standardized training *process*, the *content* need not all be the same. ACS must recognize the differences across Relay events and tailor parts of the training to meet various needs. In other words, to best equip volunteers with the tools they need for their particular communities, ACS should provide more specialized training. The model mentioned above will help ensure everyone everywhere gets the same quality and quantity of training. However, the content of training must fit the Relay For Life event in each geographic area.

With the implementation of more continuous and relevant training, the importance of institutional memory may become less important. However, there will always be information and experiences that are unique to each area and the insights of past volunteers are undoubtedly helpful for newcomers. It is difficult for any group to grow if they have no roots on which to stand. To help build institutional memory, despite volunteer turnover, ACS could require that volunteers record important information about their positions, for example, what they did, how, and when; what worked and what did not work; and suggestions for how to improve the process next year. More written records would provide a guide for future volunteers to follow. Local ACS staff might also organize a mentor program where veteran volunteer members are paired with new volunteer members. This would allow information to get passed along from each generation of Relay volunteers to another.

In summary, findings generated from this research study point to specific ways in which the American Cancer Society could improve its volunteer training, and as a result, perhaps improve the experiences of volunteers and the success of Relay For Life events. Admittedly, these suggestions would take time to implement but in the long run, would better prepare Relay volunteers across the world.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

Although this study contained helpful information and had practical implications for the American Cancer Society, it had limitations which could be addressed in future research. First, it is a case study and consequently, focused on only two counties. While case study results are not meant to be generalizable, this is a worldwide event, and future research could examine Relay training in more and different types of geographical areas.

Additional comparisons would provide a broader picture of ACS volunteer training and may also offer insights for other nonprofit organizations that are geographically dispersed.

A second limitation of this study was the number of participants. Due to the focus on only two counties, the number of participants was relatively small. If ACS were interested in further research, they could interview more participants, either in this same area or by expanding the boundaries of the study. Additional data gathered from more participants would verify if the inconsistencies reported in this study were common across ACS volunteer experiences. Finally, these data relied on participants' recall of training, or lack thereof. This was another limitation because for some volunteers, there was a significant time lapse since beginning as a committee member or team captain. This means that some of the data could have been skewed by time and memory. In order to gain a more accurate account of a new volunteer's training, an ethnographic study or longitudinal study would produce more timely data. While there is always room for improvement, the findings from this study could begin a whole line of volunteer research for the American Cancer Society.

## **Conclusion**

The focus of this research study was to explore volunteer training within the American Cancer Society. The goals of the study were to illuminate the perspectives of Relay For Life volunteers in Warren County, KY and Edmonson County, KY, specifically regarding the training they received, the effectiveness of that training, and any potential training differences between a rural and non-rural county. Findings suggested inconsistencies in training (i.e., formal, informal, and no training), a lack of

quantity and quality in training (i.e., too little information and poor information), and differences in relevance and experience between the two counties. These findings were used to suggest practical ways in which the American Cancer Society can improve its volunteer training.

Despite its limitations as a case study, this research offers multiple contributions. First, it adds to extant literature on nonprofit contexts, and particularly volunteer training. This study was specific to an organization instead of being generalized information. This will increase the information available about volunteer training, as well as our understanding of training in a real nonprofit setting. More broadly, these findings also add to the communication literature on training. Many of the participants concerns are directly related to basic communication principles including message content, channel, and interpretation.

In addition, as mentioned previously, this study generated practical suggestions and findings that can be used by the American Cancer Society to improve volunteer training for their Relay For Life volunteers. However, this information is not only for ACS. The practical suggestions are transferable, and other nonprofits could use this information to grow and improve their organization and volunteer training as well.

Overall, this research brings added attention to the important topic of volunteer training and may be especially useful to the American Cancer Society. If volunteers are giving their time and effort to ACS and other nonprofit causes, then organizations should prepare them as best as possible for the tasks they are to perform.

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## APPENDIX A



INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD  
OFFICE OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY

DATE: February 28, 2014

TO: Haley Miller  
FROM: Western Kentucky University (WKU) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [579353-1] Relay for Life Leadership Training  
REFERENCE #: IRB 14-307  
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED  
APPROVAL DATE: February 28, 2014  
EXPIRATION DATE: December 31, 2014  
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Western Kentucky University (WKU) IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this office prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

This project has been determined to be a Minimal Risk project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of December 31, 2014.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Paul Mooney at (270) 745-2129 or [irb@wku.edu](mailto:irb@wku.edu). Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Western Kentucky University (WKU) IRB's records.

IRB # 2019-001  
Date of Approval: 10/15/2019  
Principal Investigator: [Name]  
Sponsor: [Name]  
IRB Chair: [Name]

The following information was provided to the IRB for review and approval of the proposed research project. The information includes the title of the project, the investigator's name, the sponsor's name, the IRB number, and the date of approval. The IRB has reviewed the information and has approved the project for implementation. The IRB's approval is based on the information provided and does not constitute a guarantee of the safety or efficacy of the project. The investigator is responsible for ensuring that the project is conducted in accordance with the IRB's approval and all applicable regulations. The IRB will continue to monitor the project and may require additional information or modifications at any time.

## APPENDIX B

### INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT



Project Title: **Relay for Life Leadership Training**

Investigator: **Haley Miller-WKU Department of Communication 270-392-8550**

You are being asked to participate in a project conducted through Western Kentucky University. The University requires that you give your signed agreement to participate in this project. If you are not at least 18 years of age, please stop here.

The investigator will explain to you in detail the purpose of the project, the procedures to be used, and the potential benefits and possible risks of participation. You may ask her any questions you have to help you understand the project. A basic explanation of the project is written below. Please read this explanation and discuss with the researcher any questions you may have.

If you then decide to participate in the project, please sign on the last page of this form in the presence of the person who explained the project to you. You should be given a copy of this form to keep.

1. **Nature and Purpose of the Project:** It is my understanding that the purpose of this project is to examine the American Cancer Society Relay for Life training materials, their usage, and their effectiveness among team captains and committee members in Warren and Edmonson counties.
2. **Explanation of Procedures:** It is my understanding that the researcher will conduct individual interviews, (approximately 30 minutes in length) and/or focus groups (approximately 1 – 1 ½ hours in length), during which I will be asked about my own personal experience with Relay for Life training and my personal opinions on the best training procedures that I have used or what I believe will be the most effective.
3. **Discomfort and Risks:** It is my understanding that this study places me at little to no risk. The probability of harm anticipated is no greater than I would encounter in everyday life.
4. **Benefits:** While this study offers no direct benefits or compensation, it is my understanding that I will have an opportunity to share my opinions and experiences that will create a better understanding of how to most effectively train Relay for Life team captains and committee members so that Relay for Life events in all types of areas, rural and larger populations, are as successful as they can possibly be.
5. **Confidentiality:** It is my understanding that my responses will be kept strictly confidential. Records will be viewed, stored, and maintained in private, secure files only accessible by the researcher and faculty sponsor for three years following the study, after which time they will be destroyed. All participants will be assigned pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality, and any other subject identifiers will be altered or reported only in comprehensive form.

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Expedited
Original - 2/28/2014

(consent form continued)

6. **Refusal/Withdrawal:** Refusal to participate in this study will have no effect on any future services you may be entitled to from the University. Anyone who agrees to participate in this study is free to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty.

*You understand also that it is not possible to identify all potential risks in an experimental procedure, and you believe that reasonable safeguards have been taken to minimize both the known and potential but unknown risks.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

*It is also my understanding that my participation in an interview and/or focus group will be audio recorded.*

(Initial here) \_\_\_\_\_

THE DATED APPROVAL ON THIS CONSENT FORM INDICATES THAT  
THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN REVIEWED AND APPROVED BY  
THE WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD  
Paul Mooney, Human Protections Administrator  
TELEPHONE: (270) 745-2129



WKU IRB# 14-307  
Approval - 2/28/2014  
End Date - 12/31/2014  
Expedited  
Original - 2/28/2014

## APPENDIX C

### Individual Interview Questions:

#### RQ1 A/B:

1. Tell me about your role as an American Cancer Society Relay for Life volunteer?

Probe: How long have you volunteered and in what positions?  
How did you get started and why?

2. Think back to when you first started as a Relay for Life team captain or committee member. What information were you given about your role on the committee/as a team captain?

3. Tell me about the training that you received?

Probe: Did you participate in any formal training sessions? If so, describe them (e.g., when, where, how long, by whom, who attended, etc.).

What kind of information was shared with you? Give an example of the topics covered.

To what extent did you receive any informal training? If so, from whom and how often? What kind of information was shared with you? Give an example.

4. More specifically, tell me about the materials you received?

Probe: When and from whom?  
What information was covered?

5. Since beginning as a Relay for Life volunteer what types of additional training/materials, if any, have you received?

Probe: Was it more formal or informal? Explain and give an example.

6. What other kinds of guidance have you been given to have a more successful relay event

RQ2 A/B:

7. Tell me about what you have learned from the training/materials?

Probe: Give some examples of what you learned.

8. Overall, to what extent do you think the training and materials you received were useful? Why or why not?

9. What was most beneficial from the training/materials?

Probe: What were the most useful pieces of information and why?

10. What was least beneficial from the training/materials?

Probe: What were the least useful pieces of information and why?

11. How, if at all, have you used the training/materials to prepare for this Relay

12. After the training or after receiving materials, how prepared did you feel for your role as a team captain or committee member? Why or why not?

13. How could the training have been improved? How could the materials have been improved?

Probe: What information do you wish you had been given in the training/materials and why?

\*\* Focus Group Questions will expand further upon the responses received during individual interviews but will continue to inquire about volunteer training and materials received, as well as volunteers' perceptions of their usefulness or effectiveness



