

UNDERSTANDING VOLUNTEER MOTIVATIONS AT THE NEW RIVER VALLEY  
SPECIAL OLYMPICS

Identification & Analysis of Volunteer Motivations at the New River Valley Special Olympics

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## **Abstract**

Volunteerism, which can be defined as the act of volunteering or helping others without financial benefits in return (Janus & Misiorek, 2018), is not a new concept within America. For centuries, people have engaged in volunteer work. The purpose of this case study was to identify and analyze individuals' motivation and intention to volunteer for Special Olympics sporting events. Through analysis of participants' results on the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) proposed by Clary et al (1998), I was able to uncover the different motivational functions that are influencing individuals to volunteer. Upon analyzing the results, conclusions and recommendations were identified in order to help the New River Valley Special Olympics with better recruitment and retention of the volunteers, while also being able to help improve volunteers' overall satisfaction with their volunteer work by assigning them to roles and tasks aligned with the motivational function most influencing them.

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## **Introduction & Purpose Statement**

The act of volunteering, otherwise known as helping others without any financial benefits in return (Janus & Misiorek, 2019), is a familiar concept in America. Volunteering has been essential for the creation of the world as it is today, with volunteering starting as early as human beginnings. All humans' actions are influenced by different intentions and motivations. Theories such as the Theory of Planned Behavior work to explain individuals' behaviors and actions (Ajzen, 1991). For decades now, the Special Olympics has been providing children and adults with intellectual disabilities opportunities to compete and discover new strengths and successes in their lives. Not only is the Special Olympics providing opportunities for their athletes, but the Special Olympics is also inspiring communities and societies to gain awareness of intellectual disabilities and provides a platform for individuals to encourage others (Special Olympics, 2020). The Special Olympics also provides a platform for their athletes and social support for individuals and their families. Numerous research studies have shown the many positive benefits the Special Olympics has on their athletes. For instance, parents have highlighted benefits such as: "opportunities for social engagement and development... positive impact on self-concept... the opportunity to participate... and physical benefits" (Kersh & Siperstein, 2012, p. 14). The Special Olympics relies heavily on volunteers in order to make their mission happen. Volunteers can serve as coaches, trainers, officials, event managers, organizers and fundraisers. Volunteers can range in all different ages and abilities. In 2016, the Special Olympics reported over one million volunteers, including youth volunteers, law enforcement personnel, and health volunteers; there were also over 430,000 coaches supporting the Special Olympics (Special Olympics, n.d.).

There is a great need to identify individuals' motivation and intention to volunteer. Since

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volunteers are a huge part of society, many organizations rely heavily on volunteers (Lee et al., 2014). The purpose of this case study was to identify and analyze individuals' motivation and intention to volunteer for Special Olympics sporting events. Organizations such as the New River Valley Special Olympics require a certain set of volunteers possessing certain qualities. Speaking with their current volunteers and analyzing the organization provides a better understanding of the volunteers' motivations and may ultimately better help the organization. This study may assist organizations with the process of recruiting and maintaining their volunteers by providing further insight on motivations for volunteering. It may also assist organizations in deciding how to better allocate volunteer efforts and promote higher satisfaction with their work. The research questions guiding the study were:

1. What factors most motivate individuals to volunteer for the New River Valley Special Olympics?
2. How can understanding individuals' motivations to volunteer better help the New River Valley recruit more volunteers?

### **Theoretical Framework**

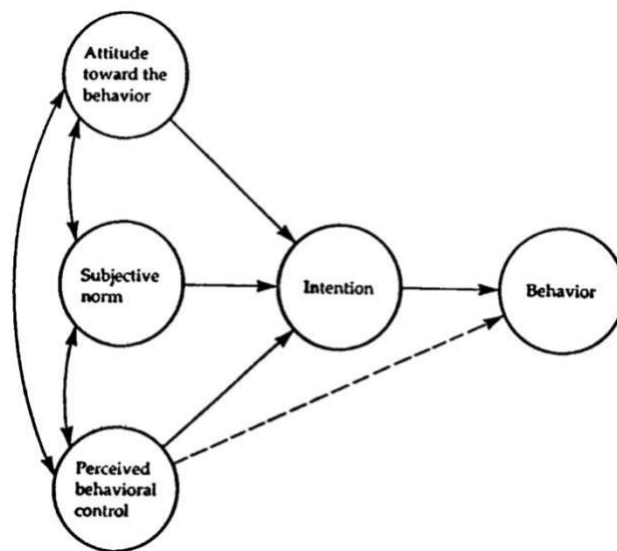
The research being conducted within this case study will look to analyze volunteers' behaviors and, more specifically, what motivates them to pursue behaviors such as volunteering for the New River Valley Special Olympics. When analyzing human behavior, one of the most frequently used theories is Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior. The Theory of Planned Behavior is focused on analyzing individuals' specific intentions to executing a particular task. Within the Theory of Planned Behavior, individuals' intentions are influenced by three different variables, "including attitude (positive or negative evaluations of performing a behavior), subjective norm (perceived social pressure or expectations to perform (or not to perform) a

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behavior), and perceived behavioral control (PBC) (perceived ease or difficulty of performing a behavior)” (Lee et al., 2014, p. 231). Individuals’ attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control are all key variables that will play a major role in an individual's intention and overall behavior is pursuing an action or activity (Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

*Theory of Planned Behavior*



*Note.* From “The Theory of Planned Behavior” by I. Ajzen, 1991, *Journal of Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50, 179-211. Copyrighted 1991 by Academic Press, Inc.

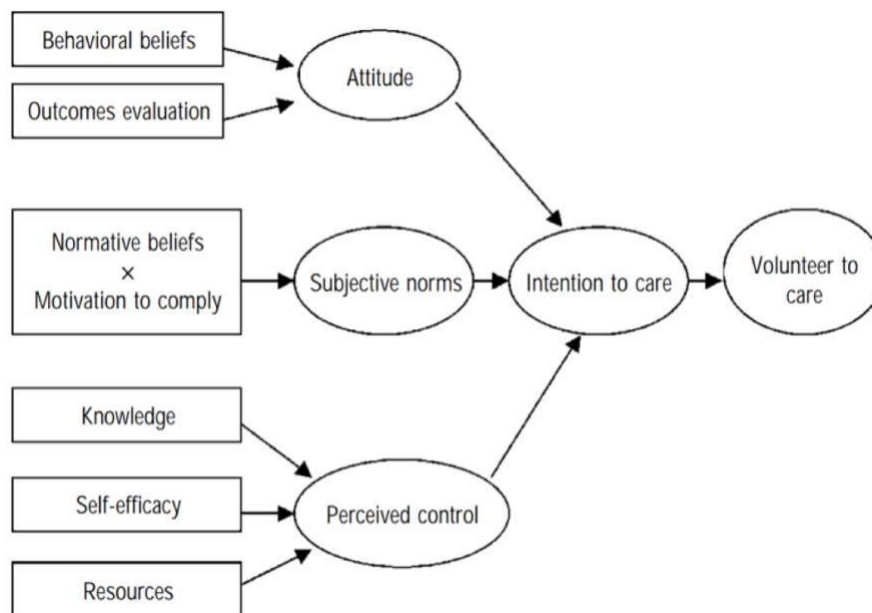
In terms of volunteering, the Theory of Planned Behavior assumes that individuals choose to volunteer based on social and contextual factors. The Theory of Planned Behavior makes the assumption that individuals do certain actions or behaviors after considerable thinking about the actions, accessing information regarding the task, and fully considering what their participation in the task entails (Ajzen, 1991; Clary et al., 1998). It is believed that the stronger an individual’s intention and motivation to perform a behavior is, the more probable they will

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perform the behavior. Figure 2 provides an even deeper description of the Theory of Planned Behavior. Within each of the three variables, there are additional situational, contextual and personal factors that influence an individual's intention.

**Figure 2**

### *Theory of Planned Behavior*



*Note.* From “The Theory of Planned Behavior” by I. Ajzen, 1991, *Journal of Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50, 179-211. Copyrighted 1991 by Academic Press, Inc.

By analyzing individuals' motivation to volunteer, we will learn more about the intentions that are driving them to these actions. This can assist programs such as the New River Special Olympics with the creation of tailored recruitment and retention practices. It can also help inform the New River Special Olympics about volunteer intentions, allowing them to better assist their volunteers in matching with ideal activities. Bang and Ross (2009) note that volunteer motivation is highly correlated with volunteer satisfaction. Thus, if there is a purposeful and conscious effort

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on behalf of the organization to try to connect volunteers' values, emotions, and intentions for volunteering to the actions they are doing, then their satisfaction may increase.

### **Literature Review**

There are many different types of opportunities people can volunteer for, and research has shown two distinct types of volunteers: continuous and episodic (Hallmann & Harms, 2012). Episodic volunteers are volunteers who may be seasonal or just volunteering for a specific event, while continuous volunteers are individuals who allocate a good majority of their time and energy volunteering with an organization (Hallmann & Harms, 2012). Continuous volunteers hold a lot of pride and compassion for the acts they are doing. Even though volunteer opportunities may vary depending on the individual, one thing that really stands out in research is why an individual may volunteer.

One major component of volunteering is the individual's motivation to volunteer. Determinants of volunteerism can be heavily individualized. However, prior research has noted a few common determinants including: “1) opportunities to express one’s values related to altruistic and humanitarian concerns for others (Values), 2) opportunities for new learning experiences, and to exercise one’s knowledge, skills and abilities (Understanding), 3) opportunities to be with one’s friends or to engage in an activity viewed favorably by important others (Social), 4) experiences that may be obtained from participation in volunteer work (Career), 5) reduced guilt over being more fortunate than others and addressing one’s own personal problems (Protective), and 6) the ego’s growth and development (Enhancement)” (Bang & Ross, 2009, p. 63). Other topics that have been researched as determinants and motivations to volunteer include an individual’s personality, their life satisfaction and their religion (Kee, Li, Wang & Kailani, 2018). One motivation that is consistently seen throughout research is the



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motivation to give back and help others (Anderson & Moore, 1978).

In addition, studies have been conducted to expand the knowledge on the theory of altruism and how altruism plays a role in volunteering. Burns et al. (2006) note that altruism plays a role in almost all reasons why an individual will volunteer, and it can play a bigger role with some reasons more than others. Within their case study, questionnaires were issued to collegiate students enrolled in marketing courses at multiple of universities. The universities chosen were able to represent a wide geographic range of universities. Each of the universities used in the study valued volunteerism and included volunteerism in their academic curriculum and mission statement for the university. The sample total was 480 students. When analyzing motivation, researchers noted that two different approaches could be taken: functional approach or symbolic approach. The functional approach to human motivation illustrates motivation as choices and actions, and it notes that different individuals can engage in the same volunteer action but for different reasons and motives (Clary & Snyder, 1999). As for the symbolic approach to human motivation, researchers note that motivation is a response to specific choices and actions and the motivation to do the action is generally for self-construction and how an individual wants to present themselves to others (Burns, et al., 2006). For this specific case study, the researchers noted that motivation would be analyzed through a functional approach, due to the inquiry of furthering their understanding of what causes individuals to volunteer and engage in these acts. When reviewing the questionnaires and individuals' responses, researchers noted that altruism played a major role and was highly significant in individuals' responses (Burns et al., 2006).

Even though there are strong altruistic reasons for volunteering, research has also shown that many participants volunteer in order to satisfy their own needs (Bang & Ross, 2009). Even

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though there are broad categories of why an individual may volunteer, self-oriented motives (such as one's motives concerning self-development and self-esteem) are determinants of someone volunteering for longer periods of time (Janus & Misiorek, 2019). Research by Janus and Misiorek (2019) has shown that organizations need to develop their own knowledge on why an individual is volunteering (i.e., specific reasons) and better match the volunteer's personal values, intentions, and goals to the type of work they are doing. In addition to helping the organization gain more devoted and effective volunteers, this will also greatly benefit the volunteers themselves and provide a greater life satisfaction with the work they are producing (Bang & Ross, 2009). Volunteers' motivations are positively matched with volunteer satisfaction; and there must be a relationship between volunteers' satisfaction, motivation, and experience to continue volunteer efforts (Bang & Ross, 2009). This further supports the notion that organizations should want to match their volunteers' experiences with each volunteer's specific interests and values.

Matching an individual's motivation to volunteer experience can be analyzed through a functional approach (Clary & Snyder, 1998) or based on Self-Determination Theory (Bang & Ross, 2009). As a framework to analyze individual motivation, Self-Determination Theory examines the social context of the volunteer action and the individual differences of the volunteers (Oostlander et al., 2014). Self-Determination Theory has continued to be used in research regarding volunteer motivation. As a conceptual framework, Self-Determination Theory states three psychological needs individuals must fulfill regarding motivation and growth: competency, relatedness and autonomy (Haivas et al., 2012). These needs play a major role in an individual's motivation to volunteer. However analyzed, there is evidence that creating this match between experience and motivation and values can increase volunteer satisfaction and will

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ultimately increase volunteer retention, encouraging the volunteer to come back and volunteer more (Bang & Ross, 2009).

There are great benefits to engaging in meaningful volunteer work. Volunteering is an extremely important act that one can do. Not only can volunteering help our society (Janus & Misiorek, 2018), but volunteers have been shown to add constructive feedback to an organization that paid employees may not be willing to offer (Bang & Ross, 2009). Because volunteers are committing themselves to an organization or an event due to values and specific interests, when compared to paid employees who may just be doing the job to make money, volunteers can offer more constructive feedback and more strongly commit themselves to the organization (Bang & Ross, 2009). Even though volunteers may not initially engage in the act of volunteering for personal reasons, volunteering does provide individuals with personal benefits as well including individual growth and expansion of knowledge and experiences (Fuller & Friedel, 2017).

### **Research Design & Methodology**

Volunteering is something that is practiced all over the world. Without volunteers and the act of volunteering, the world would be lacking a lot of organizations and companies that are extremely beneficial to our society (Janus & Misiorek, 2019). Special Olympics, which is a nationally recognized recreation and training program for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, is an example of an organization that uses its volunteers to support their events and functions. The Special Olympics movement was founded in 1968, with the objective of changing lives and attitudes regarding intellectual disabilities (Special Olympics, 2020). One major goal of the Special Olympics is to increase public awareness of intellectual disabilities and of the need for recreation programs for individuals with intellectual disabilities. The Special Olympics program wants to encourage their athletes to transform their lives, with the help from volunteers

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and society. The Special Olympics website shows that the power of sports is immeasurable to athletes. Sports have the ability to build confidence, improve individual's health and inspire others (Special Olympics, 2020). However, to do this, there is a great need for highly qualified volunteers who have the goals, mindsets and attitudes that are crucial to helping transform lives- the athletes, their own and others in society.

Within this study there were two main goals. The first goal was to look at the current volunteers at the New River Valley Special Olympics and see what characteristics and quality traits are consistent among effective volunteers. Secondly, this study sought to look at the volunteers' motivations and how the Special Olympics organization can use volunteers' motivations to increase recruitment and retention of volunteers. Management and execution of events and duties are extremely important components to volunteer recruitment and retention; therefore, having a better understanding of volunteers' motivations will help the organization develop better practices for recruitment and retention of volunteers.

For this research, a survey based on the Volunteers Function Inventory (VFI) proposed by Clary et al. (1998) was used to collect information from participants, including additional questions to analyze the different demographics of the volunteers within the New River Valley Special Olympics. The inventory worked to highlight the different motivational factors that have been illustrated within previous research (Bang & Ross, 2009; Clary et al., 1998). By looking at the different motivational factors that have been previously highlighted in volunteerism research, the current research from the New River Valley Special Olympics volunteers will help determine if there are specific motivational determinants, such as the ones discussed in prior research, that are driving the participants to volunteer. The different determinants of an individual's motivation to volunteer that were analyzed through the survey provided to the New River Valley Special

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Olympics volunteers include: Values, Understanding, Social, Career, Protective, and Enhancement. A brief description of each of the motivational factors can be seen in Table 1. Once answered, the questions were categorized into different areas regarding what motivates the participants to volunteer or categorized into participant demographics. This can ultimately help the managers and leaders of the New River Valley Special Olympics with their recruitment and retention of their volunteers.

**Table 1**

*Motivational Functions and Descriptions*

Function	Description
Values	A way to express ones altruistic and humanitarian values.
Understanding	A way to gain knowledge, skills, and abilities.
Social	A way to develop and strengthen social ties.
Career	A way to improve career prospects.
Protective	A way of protecting the ego from the difficulties of life.
Enhancement	A way to help the ego grow and develop.

Since human subjects were the participants in the study, IRB approval was necessary for the study to begin. Before opening the survey to the New River Valley Special Olympics participants, Virginia Tech's Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed the protocol and conveyed approval (Appendix A). Included in the documents sent to the IRB were the research protocol, consent forms (Appendix B), the email that was sent out to the New River Valley

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Special Olympics volunteers (Appendix C), and a copy of the survey used during volunteer participation (Appendix D). After approval from the IRB, I then sent the survey to my New River Valley Special Olympics contacts who then had to gain approval from their Leadership Board. After approval from the Leadership Board, the survey was then distributed to the volunteers.

Participation in the study was discussed and consulted with the Senior Director of the Southwest Region and the Southwest Region Project Manager to decide the best approach to reaching volunteers. Through email conversations with members of the New River Valley Special Olympics staff, we determined that a mass email to all members of their volunteer community would be the most beneficial approach to reaching as many participants as possible. An email was sent out to all volunteers describing who the researcher was and a brief overview describing the survey and the purpose behind the survey (Appendix C).

The administration and data collection of the survey results was collected through the use of Qualtrics. The survey was open to participants for about a month before analysis of the results using basic descriptive statistics. The Volunteer Functions Inventory items were scored on a scale of 1 being not at all important/relevant to 7 being extremely important/relevant to the participants. There were five items for each motivational function, resulting a potential total of 35 points per function.

### **Findings**

The primary focus of this study was to identify and analyze the motivations for volunteering with the New River Valley Special Olympics. Through the use of the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI), six prominent motivational determinants emerged through the survey responses. Scores can range from one to seven, with one indicating the question is not at all

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important or accurate, and seven indicating the question is extremely important or accurate. The total number of participants in this study was ten volunteers (n = 10). Out of the ten participants, seven were female (70%) and three were male (30%). The majority of the participants had one or two factors that were most frequently occurring, “Values” and “Understanding”, with their secondary factor being only plus or minus two points from their highest rated factor. The total results from each of the participants’ scores can be seen in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Motivation Function Scores by Participant*

	<b>Function</b>	<b>Score</b>
Participant #1	Understanding	27
	Values	22
	Protective	22
	Social	18
	Enhancement	18
	Career	7
Participant #2	Protective	30
	Values	28
	Understanding	28
	Enhancement	27
	Career	21
	Social	20
Participant #3	Values	26
	Understanding	14
	Social	7
	Career	5
	Protective	5
	Enhancement	5
Participant #4	Values	26
	Social	22
	Enhancement	12
	Understanding	10
	Protective	6
	Career	5

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	<b>Function</b>	<b>Score</b>
Participant #5	Values	34
	Understanding	33
	Career	30
	Enhancement	30
	Protective	30
	Social	27
Participant #6	Values	35
	Understanding	31
	Social	25
	Enhancement	17
	Career	12
	Protective	9
Participant #7	Values	35
	Understanding	33
	Career	21
	Enhancement	18
	Social	17
	Protective	10
Participant #8	Values	34
	Social	34
	Understanding	29
	Enhancement	20
	Protective	17
	Career	14
Participant #9	Values	33
	Enhancement	32
	Understanding	30
	Social	24
	Protective	16
	Career	5
Participant #10	Understanding	30
	Values	26
	Social	24
	Enhancement	24
	Protective	22
	Career	17

When analyzing the individual responses, the second highest rated factor was often only

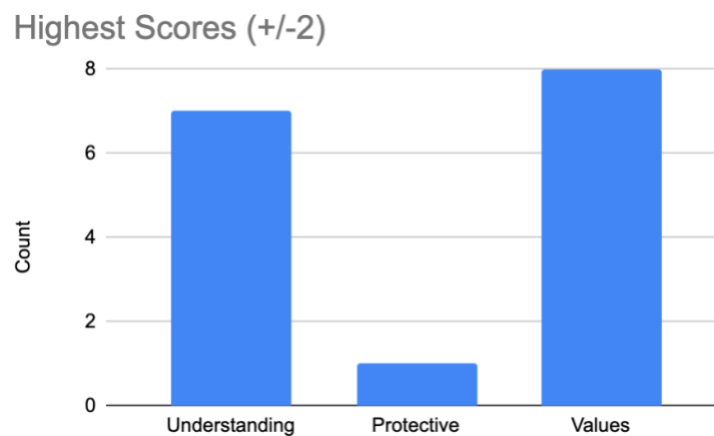


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plus or minus two points away from their second highest rated factor. For example, participant #2 had the highest score falling under the “Protective” motivational factor with a score of 30 points; in addition, they also had a high score under the “Understanding” factor and the “Values” factor with a tie of 28 points. Figure 3 shows the participants highest rated factors, including the secondary factors within plus or minus two point from an individual’s highest rated factor.

**Figure 3**

*Highest Participants Scores (+/-2 Points)*



By analyzing the results, we can see that the most prominent motivational reasoning were “Values” and “Understanding,” with every participant scoring one of those factors as their highest or second highest score with only a plus or minus two difference in scores. When analyzing the mean scores of each of the motivational factors, the “Values” functions scored the highest among all of the motivational factors with a mean score of 6.02, followed by the “Understanding” motivation factor with a mean score of 5.30. All motivational factors mean scores can be seen in Table 3.

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**Table 3**

*Volunteer Functions Survey Distribution*

<b>Function</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Mean</b>
<b>Protective</b>	1. No matter how bad I've been feeling, volunteering helps me to forget about it.	4.90
	2. By volunteering I feel less lonely.	2.90
	3. Doing volunteer work relieves me of some of the guilt over being more fortunate than others.	2.30
	4. Volunteering helps me work through my own personal problems.	3.10
	5. Volunteering is a good escape from my own troubles.	3.50
	Total Mean Value =	3.34
<b>Values</b>	1. I am concerned about those less fortunate than myself.	5.60
	2. I am genuinely concerned about the particular group I am serving.	6.30
	3. I feel compassion towards people in need.	5.80
	4. I feel it is important to help others.	6.00
	5. I can do something for a cause that is important to me.	6.40
	Total Mean Value =	6.02
<b>Career</b>	1. Volunteering can help me to get my foot in the door at a place where I would like to work.	2.33
	2. I can make new contacts that might help my business or career.	2.60
	3. Volunteering allows me to explore different career options.	2.50
	4. Volunteering will help me to succeed in my chosen profession.	3.80
	5. Volunteering experience will look good on my resume.	3.80
	Total Mean Value =	3.00
<b>Social</b>	1. My friends volunteer.	3.80
	2. People I'm close to want me to volunteer.	2.10
	3. People I know share an interest in community service.	5.40
	4. Others with whom I am close place a high value on community service.	5.20
	5. Volunteering is an important activity to the people I know best.	5.30
	Total Mean Value =	4.36
<b>Understanding</b>	1. I can learn more about the cause for which I am working.	5.40
	2. Volunteering allows me to gain a new perspective on things.	5.70
	3. Volunteering lets me learn things through direct, hands on experience.	5.60
	4. I can learn how to deal with a variety of people.	4.80
	5. I can explore my own strengths.	5.30
	Total Mean Value =	5.30

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Function	Item	Mean
<b>Enhancement</b>		
	1. Volunteering makes me feel important.	3.40
	2. Volunteering increases my self-esteem.	3.60
	3. Volunteering makes me feel needed.	4.00
	4. Volunteering makes me feel better about myself.	4.30
	5. Volunteering is a way to make new friends.	5.00
		<u>Total Mean Value = 4.06</u>

In addition to analyzing the volunteers' motivational functions, the volunteers were asked a series of demographic questions and satisfaction questions regarding their work at the New River Valley Special Olympics (Table 4). All of the volunteers stated that their overall volunteering experience not only met their expectations but also exceeded their volunteering expectations. Out of the 10 total respondents, nine stated that they would indeed volunteer with the New River Valley Special Olympics in the future, with only one participant stating they would be unable to participate in the future due to graduating and moving out of town.

**Table 4.**

*Responses Frequencies for Additional Survey Questions*

Question	Response Options	Count
Do you volunteer for the New River Valley Special Olympics on a regular basis?	Yes	8
	No	2
If yes, please state how often.	Once a week	3
	Once a month	1
	Once a year	0
	Two-three times per month	0
	Two-three times per year	3
	Other	1
How many hours do you spend volunteering?	Per week?	4
	Per month?	1
	Per year?	5

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Question	Response Options	Count
In what ways do you contribute to the New River Valley Special Olympics?	Time	7
	Money	3
	Leadership	7
	Resources	3
	Skills	4
	Other	3
Did your volunteer experience with the New River Valley Special Olympics meet your expectations?	Yes	10
	No	0
Did the volunteer experience exceed your expectations?	Yes	10
	No	0
Would you volunteer in the future with the New River Valley Special Olympics?	Yes	9
	No	0
	Other (Please Specify)	1*
Gender	Male	3
	Female	7
Please answer the appropriate age group for yourself.	Under 20	1
	21-30	2
	31-40	2
	41-50	0
	51-60	3
	60+	2
Please specify your working status	Student	2
	Employed	5
	Self-Employed	1
	Unemployed	0
	Other Volunteer Work	0
	Retired	2
	Other (Please Specify)	0

*Note.* \* Due to graduating, this participant was no longer in the area.

### Discussion

The survey instrument not only provided insight into the individuals' thoughts and opinions regarding their volunteer work with the New River Valley Special Olympics, but it also provided insight and value by analyzing the respondents' results as a whole, as well as individually. The findings in the survey indicated that one specific motivational factor—

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“Values”—was the most prominent factor in regard to this sample population. Individuals’ altruism and altruistic values are prominent within the Clary et al. (1998) definition of “Values.” “True” altruism can be defined as “voluntary, intentional behavior motivated to benefit another that is not motivated by the expectation of external rewards or avoiding externally produced punishments” (Burns et. al, 2006, p. 83). Through the use of the Volunteer Functions Inventory, we are better able to understand that many of the volunteers simply want to help others by volunteering and do not volunteer for their own personal purposes, such as career growth or improvement of their own lives. If volunteers were more motivated by more personal purposes, then there would be higher scores for the motivational factors such as “Enhancement” instead of “Values.” The overall findings of the survey are not only important to this particular study, but these findings can also assist the New River Valley Special Olympics with the recruitment and retention of their volunteers. The findings from this study do not represent the overall population of the New River Valley Special Olympics volunteers; however, the leaders within the organization can use the knowledge gained from this study to better incorporate measurement tools such as the Volunteer Functions Inventory into their volunteer applications or volunteer handbooks and use the information gained from their entire population of their volunteers to assist in placement and task assignments. Prior research has shown that when volunteers are assigned to roles and tasks that are specific to their own goals and motivations, then they not only produce better outcomes, but they are also more satisfied with their work (Bang & Ross, 2009). This ties in prior research regarding employee engagement and how employee engagement can better help an organization be successful in their goal efforts (Vance, 2006). When individuals are more satisfied with their volunteer work, they are more likely to continue doing volunteer work.

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The results from the surveys were helpful in determining if there were any specific motivational factors that were more prominent when compared to others. The “Values” motivational factor scored the highest among the other motivational factors; and this also supports other research regarding volunteer motivation and the Volunteer Functions Inventory. In addition, the survey results indicated that volunteers within the New River Valley Special Olympics were very satisfied with the organization as a whole and also the work they were able to contribute to the organization and that their volunteering experiences exceed their expectations.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Even though this study further supported prior research on volunteer motivation, there were also some limitations to this study. The most prominent limitation to this study that would cause for further research to be conducted was the limited number of participants in the study. There could have been multiple factors that affected the response rate. One factor that may have limited the number of participants was how the email was distributed. Due to the formatting of the email, volunteers may have not realized that they were being invited to participate in a research study. Research has shown that another way to help increase response rates would be to open the survey to the volunteers and send weekly reminders about completing the survey to the volunteers (Archer, 2007). In addition, another factor that may have affected the response rate was that the survey was distributed through email only. One way to combat this would have been by meeting volunteers at events and directly inviting them to participate in the research study by emailing them individually or by having them complete the survey in person. However, due to the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19), no in-person events have been taking place, so this was not a current option in order to increase response rates. However, in the future, meeting volunteers at

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Special Olympics events and creating a listserv of their contact information could assist in higher response rates. In addition, another limitation to this study could be geographic uniqueness.

Hypothetically, if this survey was distributed to individuals volunteering for the Special Olympics in a bigger city, there may have been more responses due to the possible larger population of volunteers.

However, despite the limitations, this study was able to still provide valued information for the New River Valley Special Olympics staff in the recruitment and retention of their volunteers. In some ways, this study could be considered a pilot, allowing appropriate consideration of further research to be conducted with more volunteer participants.

### **Conclusion & Recommendations**

The purpose of this study was to identify and analyze individuals' motivations and intention to volunteer for Special Olympics sporting events. The Theory of Planned Behavior and other research on volunteer motivation has shown that there are specific factors and intentions for individuals volunteering. By understanding an individual's motivation to volunteer, not only does this contribute to current research, it also allows for the New River Valley Special Olympics to better understand their volunteers. This notion further supports the points brought forth from the Clary et al. (1998) research article highlighting that individuals can be better recruited into acts of volunteerism by better appealing to their own functions and beliefs. Through analysis of the data collected from the participants, we can conclude that the most prominent motivational function for this sample of New River Valley Special Olympics volunteers is the "Values" motivational function. In addition to identifying the most prominent motivational function for this sample of volunteers, this research study also gave insight into further recommendations for practice within the New River Valley Special Olympics and also

## UNDERSTANDING VOLUNTEER MOTIVATIONS AT THE NEW RIVER VALLEY SPECIAL OLYMPICS

further recommendations for future research regarding volunteer motivation and the New River Valley Special Olympics. The following is a bulleted list of recommendations for practice at the New River Valley Special Olympics.

- Incorporate measurement tools such as the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) proposed by Clary et al. (1998) in volunteer training or volunteer handbooks to get a better sense of individuals' motivations for volunteering.
- Using measurement tools, provide volunteers with more roles that align with their prominent motivational factors, thus, contributing to overall satisfaction with their volunteer work.
- Provide volunteers with resources that can assist in gaining new skills or experiences that will contribute to their work.

In addition to recommendations for practice, the following is a list of recommendations for further research regarding volunteer motivation.

- Conduct further research within the New River Valley Special Olympics once in person events start occurring that would assist in yielding a larger sample size.
  - Directly talk to volunteers and explain the study to them in person.
  - Allow volunteers to conduct in person survey responses by hand.
  - Maintain a list of volunteers' contact information to directly contact them individually with the survey link and send reminders regarding completing the survey.
- Conduct further research analyzing if participant age affects their motivation for volunteering.

By better understanding why individuals are volunteering, organizations such as the Special Olympics can work to assign their volunteers to specific tasks that further



## UNDERSTANDING VOLUNTEER MOTIVATIONS AT THE NEW RIVER VALLEY SPECIAL OLYMPICS

support their individual motivation for volunteering. This can help to increase recruitment efforts and help to contribute to volunteers' satisfaction as well, and thus contribute to their work within the organization.

# UNDERSTANDING VOLUNTEER MOTIVATIONS AT THE NEW RIVER VALLEY SPECIAL OLYMPICS

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# UNDERSTANDING VOLUNTEER MOTIVATIONS AT THE NEW RIVER VALLEY SPECIAL OLYMPICS

## Appendix A: IRB Approval



Division of Scholarly Integrity and  
Research Compliance  
Institutional Review Board  
North End Center, Suite 4120 (MC 0497)  
300 Turner Street NW  
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061  
540/231-3732  
irb@vt.edu  
<http://www.research.vt.edu/sirc/hrpp>

### MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** September 29, 2020  
**TO:** Eric K Kaufman, Isabelle Schneiderman  
**FROM:** Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires October 29, 2024)  
**PROTOCOL TITLE:** Understanding Volunteer Motivation and the New River Valley Special Olympics  
**IRB NUMBER:** 20-683

Effective September 28, 2020, the Virginia Tech Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) determined that this protocol meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review under 45 CFR 46.104 (d) category(ies) 2(i),2(ii).

Ongoing IRB review and approval by this organization is not required. This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities impact the exempt determination, please submit an amendment to the HRPP for a determination.

This exempt determination does not apply to any collaborating institution(s). The Virginia Tech HRPP and IRB cannot provide an exemption that overrides the jurisdiction of a local IRB or other institutional mechanism for determining exemptions.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

<https://secure.research.vt.edu/external/irb/responsibilities.htm>

(Please review responsibilities before beginning your research.)

### PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Determined As: **Exempt, under 45 CFR 46.104(d) category(ies) 2(i),2(ii)**  
Protocol Determination Date: **September 28, 2020**

### ASSOCIATED FUNDING:

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this protocol, if required.

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# UNDERSTANDING VOLUNTEER MOTIVATIONS AT THE NEW RIVER VALLEY SPECIAL OLYMPICS

## Appendix B: Consent Form



### Information Sheet for Participation in a Research Study

Principal Investigator: Eric Kaufman, [ekaufman@vt.edu](mailto:ekaufman@vt.edu) 540-231-6258  
Other Study Contact: Isabelle Schneiderman, [isabelle@vt.edu](mailto:isabelle@vt.edu) 703-593-2919  
IRB# and Title of Study: 20-683, Understanding Volunteer Motivation and the New River Valley Special Olympics

You are invited to participate in a research study. This form includes information about the study and contact information if you have any questions.

I (Isabelle Schneiderman) am a graduate student at Virginia Tech, and I am conducting this research as part of my course work.

#### ➤ WHAT SHOULD I KNOW?

If you decide to participate in this study, you will complete a survey. You must be 18 years or older to participate in this research. As part of the study, you will be asked questions regarding your motivation to volunteer for the New River Valley Special Olympics. This study should take less than 15 minutes to complete.

We do not anticipate any risks from completing this study. You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

#### ➤ CONFIDENTIALITY

We will do our best to protect the confidentiality of the information we gather from you, but we cannot guarantee 100% confidentiality. Your information collected are anonymous, so no one can associate your answers back to you. Please do not include your name or other identifying information in your responses that can identify you.

#### ➤ WHO CAN I TALK TO?

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Isabelle Schneiderman at [isabelle@vt.edu](mailto:isabelle@vt.edu). You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact the Virginia Tech HRPP Office at 540-231-3732 [irb@vt.edu](mailto:irb@vt.edu).

# UNDERSTANDING VOLUNTEER MOTIVATIONS AT THE NEW RIVER VALLEY SPECIAL OLYMPICS

## Appendix C: Email to Volunteers

Title: NRV Volunteer Motivation

Below is the excerpt I will be providing Nancy Morehouse, Senior Director of the Southwest Special Olympics Region, and Kaitlyn Rosin, project manager. Through conversations with both contacts, we agreed that the best approach to reach the volunteers would be for them to send out an email with this information as well as the link to the anonymous survey provided.

Subject Line: Recruitment on Special Olympics Volunteers – IRB 20-683

Hello All!

My name is Isabelle Schneiderman and I am a current graduate student at Virginia Tech. I am working to assist the New River Valley Special Olympics in their collaborative efforts with their volunteers. To support my efforts, I am looking for individuals who would be willing to engage in a brief survey to understand and assess the motivations of their volunteers. The survey should take less than 15 minutes, and an anonymous link is provided below. All data collected from the survey will be used for research purposes only and will remain confidential. You must be 18 years or older to participate in this research. Participation in this research will in no way affect your volunteer position at the organization and participation is completely voluntary! Thank you again for taking the time out of your day to read this email and complete the survey below!

[https://virginiatech.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_6hrP4YxcAOdYd0h](https://virginiatech.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6hrP4YxcAOdYd0h)

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at [isabelle@vt.edu](mailto:isabelle@vt.edu) or (703)-593-2919.

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**Appendix D: Survey**

Do you volunteer for the New River Valley Special Olympics on a regular basis?

Yes

No

If Yes, please state how often.

Once a week

Once a month

Once a year

Two - three times per month

Two - three times per year

Other (Please Specify): \_\_\_\_\_

-----  
How many hours do you spending volunteering?

Per week? \_\_\_\_\_

Per month? \_\_\_\_\_

Per year? \_\_\_\_\_  
-----

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In what ways do you contribute to the New River Valley Special Olympics?

- Time (attending meetings, sit on a committee, fundraising drives, etc.)
- Money (donations, annual dues, etc.)
- Leadership (hold offices, chair a committee, act as a team leader, etc.)
- Resources (allow the use of your tools, vehicles, property, etc.)
- Skills (physical labor, expertise, etc.)
- Other (Please Specify): \_\_\_\_\_

For the following questions, please rate on a scale 1 being not at all important/accurate to 7 extremely important/accurate.



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	1 (Not at all important/accurate)	2	3	4	5	6	7 (Extremely important/accurate)
Volunteering can help me to get my foot in the door at a place where I would like to work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My friends volunteer.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am concerned about those less fortunate than myself.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People I'm close to want me to volunteer.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Volunteering makes me feel important.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
People I know share an interest in community service.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
No matter how bad I've been feeling, volunteering helps me to forget about it.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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I am genuinely concerned about the particular group I am serving.

By volunteering I feel less lonely.

I can make new contacts that might help my business or career.

Doing volunteer work relieves me of some of the guilt over being more fortunate than others.

I can learn more about the cause for which I am working.

Volunteering increases my self-esteem.

Volunteering allows me to gain a new perspective on things.

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SPECIAL OLYMPICS

Volunteering allows me to explore different career options.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel compassion toward people in need.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Others with whom I am close place a high value on community service.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Volunteering lets me learn things through direct, hands on experience.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel it is important to help others.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Volunteering helps me work through my own personal problems.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Volunteering will help me to succeed in my chosen profession.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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SPECIAL OLYMPICS

I can do something for a cause that is important to me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Volunteering is an important activity to the people I know best.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Volunteering is a good escape from my own troubles.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can learn how to deal with a variety of people.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Volunteering makes me feel needed.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Volunteering makes me feel better about myself.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Volunteering experience will look good on my resume.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Volunteering is a way to make new friends.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can explore my own strengths.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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Did your volunteer experience with the New River Valley Special Olympics meet your expectations?

- Yes
  - No
  - Other (Please Specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- 

Did the volunteer experience exceed your expectations?

- Yes
  - No
  - Other (Please Specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- 

Would you volunteer in the future with the New River Valley Special Olympics?

- Yes
  - No
  - Other (Please Specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- 

Gender

- Male
  - Female
  - Prefer not to say
-

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Please answer the appropriate age group for yourself.

- Under 20
  - 21 - 30
  - 31 - 40
  - 41- 50
  - 51 - 60
  - 61+
- 

Please specify your working status.

- Student
- Employed
- Self Employed
- Unemployed
- Other Volunteer Work
- Retired
- Other (Please Specify): \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you so much for completing this survey!

# UNDERSTANDING VOLUNTEER MOTIVATIONS AT THE NEW RIVER VALLEY SPECIAL OLYMPICS

## Appendix E: Summary of Volunteer Survey Findings for the New River Valley Special Olympics

**Special  
Olympics**



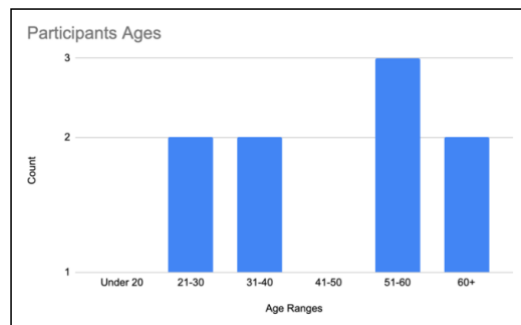
### Summary of Volunteer Survey Findings for the New River Valley Special Olympics

#### **Background**

Since volunteers serve as valuable members of the New River Valley Special Olympics, there is a great need to identify and analyze individuals' motivation to volunteer. Analyzing current volunteers and more specifically identifying and analyzing the volunteers' motivation for volunteering better helps the organization with recruitment and retention of their volunteers. In addition, prior research has shown that when volunteers are assigned to roles and tasks that are better aligned with their own goals and motivations, they not only produce better outcomes, but they are also more satisfied with their work (Bang & Ross, 2009). So, the identification and analysis of the individuals' motivations may also provide the New River Valley Special Olympics better insight in determining roles and task placement for their volunteers.

#### **Participant Demographics & Experience Questions**

There were ten volunteer participants in this research study; seven of the participants were female and three of the participants were male. The age range of the participants varied, with the highest number of participants, three participants, falling in the 51-60 age range and then two participants falling under the 21-30, 31-40, and 60+ age ranges. Within the survey the volunteers were asked a series of questions regarding their volunteer experience and overall satisfaction of their volunteer work within the



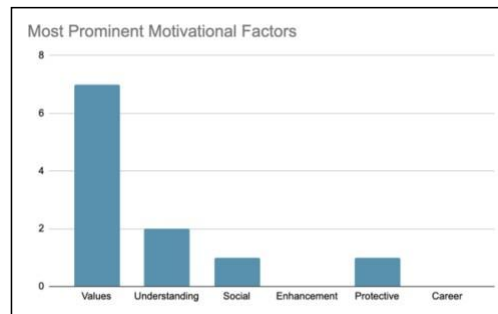
New River Valley Special Olympics. Notably, 90% of the volunteers stated that they would volunteer with the New River Valley Special Olympics in the future with only one participant saying they would not due to graduating and moving (however, if they were to stay in Blacksburg VA they would of continued volunteering). In addition, 100% of the participants stated that their volunteering experience not only met but exceed their expectations.

#### **Volunteer Functions Inventory**

Out of the 45 questions on the survey presented to the volunteers, 30 of the questions were inspired by the Volunteer Functions Inventory designed by Clary et al. (1998). The

# UNDERSTANDING VOLUNTEER MOTIVATIONS AT THE NEW RIVER VALLEY SPECIAL OLYMPICS

Volunteer Functions Inventory proposes six different motivational functions as the primary reason for individual volunteering. These motivational functions are: Values, Understanding, Social, Career, Protective and Enhancement. Through the use of the Volunteer Functions Inventory, we were able to see which of the six motivational functions were the most prominent for the New River Valley Special Olympics volunteers. The most prominent motivational reasoning for the participants were “Values” followed by the “Understanding” motivational function.



## **Recommendations for Practice**

Through this case study, the research team was able to identify and analyze the New River Valley Special Olympics volunteers, and more specifically their individual motivation to volunteer. By no means does this case study represent the entire population of the volunteers at the New River Valley Special Olympics; however, this case study and the information gained from this case study can better assist the leadership within the organization for the recruitment and retention of their volunteers. Below is a bulleted list of further recommendations for practice for the New River Valley Special Olympics.

- Incorporate measurement tools such as the Volunteer Functions Inventory in volunteer training or volunteer handbooks to get a better sense of individuals’ motivation for volunteering.
- Using measurement tools, provide volunteers with more roles that align with their most prominent motivational functions, thus, contributing to overall satisfaction with their volunteer work.
- Provide volunteers with resources that can assist in gaining new skills or experiences that will contribute to their volunteer work.

## References

Bang, H., & Ross, S. (2009). Volunteer motivation and satisfaction. *Journal of Venue and Event Management, 1*, 61-77.

Clary, E.G., Snyder, M., Ridge, R.D., Copeland, J., Stukas, A.A., Haugen, J. & Miene, P. (1998). Understanding and assessing the motivations of volunteers: A functional approach. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 74*(6), 1516-1530.