

EXPLORING VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR: WHAT ARE  
THE CHALLENGES IN MANAGING VOLUNTEERS IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

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To effectively provide services to citizens, local governments have had to be creative. One approach has been the creation of volunteer programs to meet demands and expanding needs. Volunteer programs hold promise for creating meaningful engagement opportunities for citizens. However, limited organizational capacity, inadequate volunteer management practices, and difficulties in maintaining volunteer retention are concerns plaguing local government volunteer programs. Volunteer programs are often structured around a set of best practices thought to be necessary for ensuring the retention of volunteers. To apply best practices across the board would suggest that local government volunteer programs are similar in organizational structure, budget size, amount of citizen engagement, accountability concerns, and that they adopt similar bureaucratic procedures. Using human relations and bureaucratic theories as theoretical frameworks, four research questions are asked and answered: 1) What are the managerial and political challenges in volunteer management and retention for local government volunteer coordinators?, 2) What challenges are local governments' volunteer coordinators facing in using volunteer management practices?, 3) What strategies are helpful in retaining volunteers in local government volunteerism?, and 4) What challenges do local government volunteer coordinators face in engaging citizens? Data collection for this qualitative study was conducted using online surveys and telephone semi-structured interviews. The findings suggest that creating meaningful work for volunteers and coordinating this work with local government managers was an important "best practices" challenge. Although local government volunteer

programs also have a mission of engaging citizens, the practices actually used may directly conflict with their mission. Many volunteer management practices are supporting organizational goals rather than supporting the needs of volunteers. The study findings suggest that the best practices used by local governments are not given equal weight and “one size does not fit all.” Instead, local governments must prioritize their practices carefully.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### PROBLEM STATEMENT

The National League of Cities (2009) in a report on the fiscal conditions of cities indicated that nine out of every ten cities were in a financial bind and faced significant shortfalls in coming years (National League of Cities Report, 2009). This fiscal stress has its roots in the 1970s and early 1980s when local governments in the United States were faced with reduced public funding due to decreases in tax revenue (Backman, Wicks, & Silverberg, 1997). Even with the decrease in public funding, local governments were still expected to meet the growing demand for services by citizens. Volunteering is therefore regarded as a key strategy for providing support and services at the local level as well as community engagement and participation.

In order to effectively and consistently provide services to citizens, local governments have had to come up with creative ways for offering services demanded by their citizens (Sundeen, 1990). One popular approach became the creation of volunteer programs as local governments became increasingly reliant on volunteers (Brudney, 1999; Sundeen, 1990). A report conducted by International City/County Management Association (ICMA) noted that when faced with fiscal challenges, local government use volunteers to meet expanding needs and create meaningful engagement with citizens (ICMA, 2010).

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014), in 2012, 26.5% of the adult population (64.5 million people) in the United States volunteered for an organization. This totaled to an estimated 7.9 billion hours of volunteer service, and the value of this unpaid labor is estimated to be worth \$175 billion (Independent Sector, 2014). Though nonprofit organizations

get the bulk of this donated time and energy, government agencies get four billion hours (one-fifth) donated time towards government activities (NACO, 2010). This pool of volunteer labor has proven to be incredibly valuable to volunteer involving organizations as 80% of them use volunteers to meet their administrative and program needs and provide services (Hager & Brudney, 2004a). A major challenge in involving volunteers is managing and ensuring that they stay committed to the organization. Also, while volunteering provides organizations with cost savings, the use of volunteers and their management can be expensive due to costs associated with recruitment, orientation, training, supervising, task assignment, and overall support to volunteers (Dicke & Ott, 2003; Hunter, 2004). Limited organizational capacity, inadequate volunteer management practices, and difficulties in maintaining volunteer retention are concerns plaguing local government volunteer programs (Brudney, 1999; Choudhury, 2010; Cuskelly, Taylor, Howe, & Darcy, 2006; Hager & Brudney, 2004a). For example, Hager and Brudney (2004a) noted that two-fifths of volunteers stopped volunteering because of poor management practices rather than losing interest.

A cornerstone of a successful volunteer program has been structured around a set of management practices (Brudney, 1999; Govekar & Govekar, 2002; Gratton & Ghoshal, 2003; Hager & Brudney, 2004b; Silverberg, 2004). These practices are thought to be necessary for ensuring the retention of volunteers (Brudney, 1999; Cuskelly et al., 2006; Hager & Brudney, 2004b). Implicit in the idea of a set of best practices is an assumption that one size fits all. To apply best practices across the board would suggest that local government volunteer programs are similar in organizational structure, budget size, amount of citizen engagement, accountability concerns, and similar bureaucratic procedures. Because volunteering is often seen as an extension of citizen engagement (Gay, 1998), volunteer programs are often set up with the goal

of engaging citizens. Further, local government volunteer programs can have legal restrictions concerning their use of volunteers, and in some cases legislation must be enacted to relieve them to expand the boundaries of volunteer use. Martinez (2003) noted the importance of politics in shaping the controversial topic of volunteer tort liability and the role of the Volunteer Protection Act of 1997. Indeed, empirical research by Horwitz and Mead (2009) suggested that legal immunity protections and “the political will to protect volunteers” (p. 620) are direct correlates of volunteer rates. The logical extension of an argument for best practices is that their application will lead to predictable outcomes such as low turnover and a citizenry that is engaged in local government affairs. Evidence to support this is lacking however. A list of best practices is found in Appendix A.

### Study Purpose

The purpose of this study is to provide answers to the following research questions:

- 1) What managerial and political challenges do local government volunteer coordinators face in retaining volunteers or preventing their turnover?
- 2) What challenges are local governments volunteer coordinators facing in using volunteer management best practices for volunteer retention?
- 3) What strategies and best practices are helpful in retaining volunteers or preventing the turnover of volunteers in local government?
- 4) What challenges do local government coordinators face in engaging citizens in volunteerism?

Public sector volunteerism is popular. Brudney and Kellough (2000) indicated that a national survey of U.S citizens revealed that over 23 million people volunteer with government agencies. At the county level, this has resulted in an estimated \$1.8 billion worth of services. The

use of volunteers in cities and counties is second only to when government seeks alternative modes of service delivery through contracting with the nonprofit sector. Even with the increase in public sector volunteerism, extant literature indicates high levels of dissatisfaction. A study by Young (2008) on volunteerism and fundraising in the public sector found that 40% of volunteers reported dissatisfaction with how they were managed, while only 20% reported they were pleased with the way they were treated. Although 35% of those 65 or older involve themselves in volunteering, a substantial proportion of those discontinue their service within one year (BLS, 2014).

Volunteer involving organizations sustain considerable costs not only recruiting and training volunteers, but also replacing them. Though there are monetary costs associated with involving volunteers, nonmonetary costs tend to impose the highest burden. Following the exit of volunteers from an organization, continuity and organizational morale is affected. In addition, because volunteer turnover rate is high, this has contributed to the view by paid staff that volunteers are transients who are subject to high levels of absenteeism (Dover, 2010; Hager & Brudney, 2008). It becomes apparent there may be public sector human resource management issues that are unique from those in the nonprofit realm. The increased expansion of public services coupled with shrinking budgets makes it necessary and important to highlight some of those issues.

While best practices for managing volunteers have been identified (Cravens, 2006; Cuskelly et al., 2006; Hager, 2000; Hager & Brudney, 2004a; Meijs & Brudney, 2007; Shiner & Kline, 2003), retention remains a problem for many organizations (Cravens, 2006; Hager & Brudney, 2004a, 2004b). So, although specific retention strategies are known, there appears to still be lacking either application of the practices or some other factors that lead to poor retention

rates. Thus, learning more about the challenges in retaining volunteers at the local level requires additional research. Volunteer coordinators located in North Central Texas participated in this study to discover knowledge that may be used to answer the research questions posed above. It is hoped that this information can then be used to help coordinators better manage and retain volunteers at the local government level. For this research, the researcher used bureaucratic theory and human relations theories to posit the array of best practices that have been identified. These theoretical frameworks were used to design questions that asked volunteer coordinators about the managerial and political challenges involved in managing volunteers at the local level, the challenges with using best practices for volunteer retention, and the challenges they face in engaging citizens. In addition, understanding managerial and political challenges that may exist is important for providing local government volunteer program managers with information relevant to their contextual situations.

Volunteers are one means by which local governments can help to increase meaningful engagement with citizens and help meet the increasing needs for local government services with limited resources (National League of Cities Report, 2009). On a broader scale, volunteers in public agencies provide a variety of services to fill gaps in creating and sustaining collective societal goods that otherwise might have been limited due to fiscal stress on local governments or completely eliminated. This study may add to our understanding of how management practices may affect retention of volunteers. Further, this research may provide an opportunity to add much-needed data to any discussion concerning volunteering at the local government level from the perspective of volunteer coordinators. This perspective is important and meaningful because while a plethora of literature exists on nonprofit volunteer management (Brudney, 1990a, 1990b; Brudney & Kellough, 2000; Cuskelly et al., 2006; Hager & Brudney, 2004b; Shin

& Kleiner, 2003), little is known about the challenges in using identified best practices in managing public sector volunteers, and what needs to be done to retain them.

### Research Objectives and Questions

The purpose of this research is to provide answers to four research questions as indicated above in the purpose of the study. Local government volunteer coordinators are asked questions related to each of these research questions. These participants' views of the challenges in managing volunteers are largely unexamined in existing literature.

1. What are the managerial and political challenges in volunteer management and retention for local government volunteer coordinators?

The first objective was to examine the managerial and political challenges in volunteer management for retention experienced by volunteer coordinators at the local government level. For public organizations, the use of volunteers can be challenging because of the ways the law constrains and enables them with respect to volunteer use. For example, Brudney (1990a, 1990b) pointed out that politics and law often jointly shape public organizations in this regard. Local government volunteer programs can have legal restrictions concerning their use of volunteers, and in some cases legislation must be enacted to relieve them to expand the boundaries of volunteer use. Martinez (2003) similarly noted the role of politics in shaping the controversial topic of volunteer tort liability, and the role of the Volunteer Protection Act of 1997. Indeed, empirical research suggested that legal immunity protections and “the political will to protect volunteers” (Horwitz & Mead, 2009, p. 620) are direct correlates of volunteer rates. This issue may arise if certain tasks are transferred to volunteers in working with vulnerable populations, such as children and the elderly, or issues that have safety or confidentiality concerns. Although volunteers can often perform these tasks, they might require more extensive training, background



checks, and liability insurance that these programs may not be able to do. Thus, volunteer rates may be affected.

Although involving volunteers in organizations is not a new phenomenon, their use and effective management is a critical issue (Netting, Nelson Jr., Borders, & Huber, 2004). The academic research and practitioner literature addressing volunteer management appears to be in agreement that the most successful volunteer programs operate around a planned, established set of best practices (Brudney, 1999; Cuskelly et al., 2006; Fisher & Cole, 1993; Forsyth, 1999; Govekar & Govekar, 2002; Gratton & Ghoshal, 2003; Hager & Brudney, 2004a; Silverberg, 2004). Yet, local government volunteer programs appear to lack awareness of or knowledge about these best practices. For example, Choudhury (2010) in his study of 37 cities in Ohio, USA, posited that there was a lack of knowledge of best practices. His survey showed that 25 of 37 coordinators had received no training on best practices and were learning on the job. It is worth noting that this is only one study that indicated lack of knowledge of best practices. Other challenges he identified included the lack of organizational capacity, policy and legal descriptions of the volunteer program, financial resources, and labor requirements (Choudhury, 2010). He concluded that the lack of investment in attracting volunteers was a fundamental weakness in the management capacity of Ohio local public agencies to effectively attract, use, and value volunteers as an “integral part of their operation” (p. 599).

The expansion of volunteer involvement in service delivery in the public sector has occurred in a largely unplanned fashion leaving many local government agencies unprepared for the influx of volunteers (Gazley & Brudney, 2005). The challenge faced by volunteer coordinators is often manifested in tensions and a substantial lack of support for volunteer programs from public agency staff and their managers (Brudney, 1990a, 1990b; Dover, 2010;

Gazley & Brudney, 2005; Sundeen, 1990). Others have concluded that involving volunteers had challenges because their management could be expensive due to costs associated with recruitment, orientation, training, supervising, task assignment, and overall support to volunteers (Brudney, 1999; Cravens, 2006; Cuskelly et al., 2006; Dicke & Ott, 2003; Hager & Brudney, 2004b; Hunter, 2004; Shiner & Kleiner, 2003; Woods, 2006; Wymer & Starnes, 2001).

2. What challenges are local governments' volunteer coordinators facing in using volunteer management practices?

Given the size of the volunteer labor pool, diversity of roles filled, and budget, there has been difficulty in identifying and defining the specific set of challenges faced by local government volunteer coordinators. In an analysis of 3,000 volunteer-involving organizations in the nonprofit charitable sector, Hager and Brudney (2004b) found that 70% of respondents indicated that they found recruitment to be a challenge, while lack of funding to support the volunteer program was noted to be a "big problem." On the other hand, Rehngorg (2007) indicated that placement rather than recruitment is the volunteer coordinators' "greatest challenge" (p.118). Similarly, Cravens (2006) posited that the amount of time and resources needed to orient and train a volunteer could prove to be a challenge. Echoing these sentiments, Cuskelly et al. (2006) noted that the lack of planning and orientation practice is also a significant predictor of lower volunteer retention. Further, matching the volunteer interests to the needs of the organization and lack of written job descriptions for volunteer positions are all significant challenges for volunteer coordinators (Choudhury, 2010). Without the effective utilization of volunteer time and expertise, they will quit their positions (Rehngorg, 2007). Providing retention strategies is also a challenge for public agencies (Hager & Brudney, 2004a). Retention is an organization's ability to maintain volunteer participation and reduce high volunteer turnover

(Herman, 2010). Strategies for retention often stem from organizational management attempts to understand volunteers' behavior and fulfill effective retention decisions (Wymer & Starnes, 2001). Retaining volunteers is important as there is an increasing number of outlets citizens can contribute to volunteer their time. Fiscal constraints have also been cited as a barrier to proper volunteer retention on the part of volunteer coordinators (Cravens, 2006). In addition, Cravens (2006) pointed out that the amount of time and resources needed to orient and train a volunteer can prove to be a challenge. Cuskelly et al. (2006) also noted that the lack of planning and orientation practices were a significant predictor of lower volunteer retention. Another important challenge in retaining volunteers is the risk of investing resources into volunteers when they “may drop out after receiving an assignment” (Cravens, 2006, p.136). This is an important challenge considering that local governments are frequently in a financial bind when they need volunteers and need their investments in volunteer management to pay dividends in the form of a low turnover rate.

Evaluating the generously donated work of volunteers has been seen as a challenge for most volunteer programs (Brudney, 2010). Lack of evaluation may also be dismissive and indicative that volunteer work is not valued or taken seriously. Prior research has indicated that volunteers appreciate volunteer coordinators' availability, informative feedback, and regular communication — all of which is reassuring, helps clarify their tasks, and improve their performance (Dhebar & Stokes, 2008; Leonard, Onyx, & Hayward-Brown, 2004). Regular supervision and communication with volunteers is most commonly done in volunteer management (Hager & Brudney, 2004b). Systematically measuring the impact of volunteer activity is less frequent and challenging for public sector volunteer coordinators (Hager & Brudney, 2004b; Machin & Paine, 2008). This does not diminish the fact that volunteers

appreciate feeling needed (Kreutzer & Jäger, 2011) and want to know about the real impact of their work (Dhebar & Stokes, 2008).

### 3. What strategies are helpful in retaining volunteers in local government volunteerism?

Volunteer retention is a product of what organizations do to enhance the volunteer experience (Herman, 2010). Recognition of volunteers is a critical component of volunteer retention (Rehngorg, 2007). Recognition activities such as award ceremonies for volunteers contribute to volunteer retention (Hager & Brudney, 2004b). Volunteers who are recognized for their work are more likely to stay with an organization for future projects or for a longer period of time (Hager & Brudney, 2004b).

Also, when volunteers have the support of a qualified staff, retention rates increase (Rehngorg, 2007). This is because volunteers feel that volunteering is a worthwhile experience worth pursuing when the organizational culture is supportive (Hager & Brudney, 2004b). The provision of sufficient funding to support volunteers contributes to a higher retention rate (Choudhury, 2010). Support from board of directors, allocation of a budget for the volunteer program, providing continuing education opportunities for volunteer coordinators and their staff, as well as providing leadership opportunities for volunteers have all been cited as increasing the retention of volunteers (Choudhury, 2010; Cravens, 2006; Cuthill & Warburton, 2005; Meijs & Brudney, 2007; Rehngorg, 2007; Shin & Kleiner, 2003; Woods, 2006; Wymer & Starnes, 2001).

Understanding the volunteer needs, wants and motivations provides volunteer coordinators better insights into volunteer management practices such as recruitment and retention (Shiner & Kleiner, 2003). Understanding the forces that drive volunteer motivation and implementing those concepts into the volunteer management process will benefit both the program and the volunteer (Shiner & Kleiner, 2003).

#### 4. What challenges do local government volunteer coordinators face in engaging citizens?

Social networks, which form the key structural component of social capital, are a valuable resource for governments, providing access to community skills, knowledge, and experience (Cuthill & Warburton, 2005). However, volunteer coordinators find it difficult to provide opportunities for volunteers to create these networks. As indicated by Rehngorg (2007), insufficient funds are often directed towards engaging citizens instead.

Using volunteers in challenging times provides communities the opportunity to increase engagement with citizens at the same time be creative in meeting the expanding needs of local government with limited resources. (Cnaan, Handy, & Wadsworth, 1996). The successful implementation of volunteer programs can accomplish these dual goals, as many recent local government initiatives have shown. Yet there is an overall lack of focus on utilizing volunteerism, not only to meet service needs but also as a strategy for positive citizen engagement (Lynch & Smith, 2010).

#### Guiding Theoretical Framework

The motivation driving this research was to provide answers to the thorny question of how to better manage and retain volunteers at the local level. In addition, how to engage citizens through volunteering is an important public administration concern. There are a number of strategies in volunteer management that suggests that there are best practices that influence whether a volunteer leaves or stays. There is a presumption that people volunteer for purely altruistic reasons. Nevertheless, studies have shown that “pure altruism” does not exist (Finkelstein & Brannick, 2007; Meneghetti, 1995; Smith & Gay, 2005). Gratification and satisfaction achieved by volunteers are not accidental but expected from the beginning. “There is no evidence to justify a belief in some ‘absolute’ form of human altruism in which the

motivation for an action is utterly without some form of selfishness” (Smith, 2005, p. 25). Hence, looking beyond altruism to organizational theory is necessary to explain volunteer behavior. Theories explaining motivation postulate that volunteers leave an organization because the expectations and opportunities they sought remain unmet, or because organizational processes, structures, and relationships that complement the volunteer experience are lacking (Blau, 1964; Cnaan & Goldberg-Glen, 1990; Maslow, 1970; Vroom, 1964). Reasons that influences individuals to volunteer, that is, factors that initially influenced them to start volunteering, may not be the same ones that urged them to continue.

Two theories related to volunteer management and retention have guided this research: 1) bureaucratic theory and 2) human relations/motivations theory. Although many reasons for retention have been offered, these theories offer arguments regarding why people continue to volunteer. One argument is premised on the idea that *bureaucratic practices* matter, and the second is that the cultivation of good *human relations practices* matter in retaining volunteers. A theoretical framework of this argument is shown in Figure 1. Bureaucratic best practices typically include among other things: formal record keeping, screening, planning, performance management, support from high-level officials, training and support, budget for the volunteer program, reimbursement for work-related expenses of volunteers, and liability insurance. Human relations best practices typically include among other things: recognition, a recruitment newsletter for volunteers, training and support, annual evaluations, and orientation.

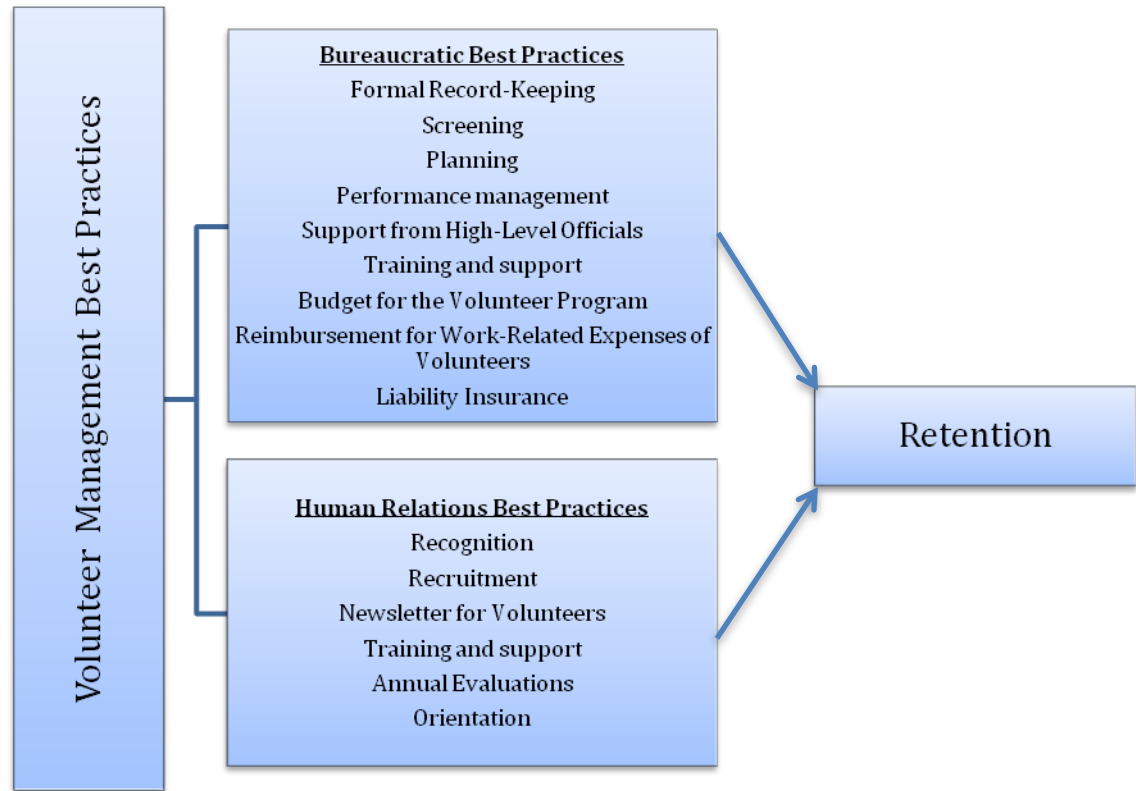


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework of Volunteer Management Best Practices

### Bureaucratic Theory

Bureaucratic theory posits that organizations prescribe clear structural arrangements and administrative practices designed to achieve specific goals and objectives (Downs, 1965). Bureaucratic theory is concerned with establishing operational control and facilitating efficient operations through (among other attributes) hierarchical structuring of organizational offices (i.e. centralization) and the division of organizational tasks into functionally distinct offices (Fry & Raadschelders, 2008). Weber viewed bureaucracy as the “most rational and efficient organizational form devised by man” (Fry & Raadchedlers, 2008, p. 36). Embedded in the elements of bureaucracy are the principles of formalization, instrumentalism, and legal authority (Weber, 1920). Formalization refers to the degree to which rules, procedures, and tasks assignments exist in written forms (Downs, 1965). These documents are written well in advance

of people joining the organization and are meant for directing and regulating organizational behavior. Bureaucratic tools are used to achieve specific purposes. For instance, rules, positions, and interaction patterns may be designed to achieve organizational objectives such as retention.

### Human Relations Theory

The second set of best practices investigated in this research is based on human relations theory. Human relations theory posits that the strongest motivational forces behind an individual's behavior at work are based on the preservation and nurturing of social relationships with colleagues (Mayo, 1933). In a discussion of human relations theory, Shafritz and Hyde (1997) identified the main assumptions of the school of thought that include (a) people want to be made to feel valued and important, (b) people want recognition for their work, (c) people want to be controlled sensibly, (d) managers must discuss the plans they make for staff by taking their objections into consideration, and (e) managers must encourage self-regulation on routine tasks. Based on human relations theory, best practices associated with human relations include activities such as recognition, evaluation, training and support, and volunteer newsletter. Herzberg's two-factor theory is an example of the human relations school and asserts that motivators leading to satisfaction include recognition and responsibility, while motivators leading to dissatisfaction include factors such as organizational policies, leadership style, and relationships with colleagues (Porter et al., 2003). Omoto and Snyder (1995) argued that good experiences correlate with commitment to the organization. Recognition is a critical ingredient. Fisher and Ackerman (1998) defined recognition as a "public expression of appreciation given by a group to individuals who undertake desired behaviors" (Fisher & Ackerman, 1998, p. 264).



## Definition of Terms

**Best practices:** Overman and Boyd (1994) stated that best practices are “the selective observation of a set of exemplars across different contexts in order to derive more generalizable principles and theories of management” (p. 69). For instance, cities reputed to have good budget practices may be examined to find commonalities in their budget systems. This common element is then taken and applied to other cities to improve their budgeting outcomes.

**Volunteer coordinators:** Volunteer coordinator refers to a person responsible for managing and involving volunteers in the organization effectively and efficiently (Hager & Brudney, 2004b; Humphrey-Pratt, 2006).

**Volunteer management:** Volunteer management refers to public and nonprofit management practices pertaining to volunteer recruitment, retention, and training (Ellis, 2006). For this study, it is local public sector management practices for organizations using volunteer management practices for recruitment, training, and retention.

**Volunteer retention:** Volunteer retention refers to the ability of an organization to keep its members active through various means such as recognition of group members, leadership development, and training (Jamison, 2003). On average, previous research has shown that controlling for other variables; volunteers tend to last 9 months with an organization (Hager & Brudney, 2004b).

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND BACKGROUND

Chapter 2 reviews prior literature related to the study. The chapter begins by discussing past volunteer management studies, best practices, and local government volunteers. The next section presents past literature on volunteering research, specifically public sector volunteers, followed by retention and citizen engagement.

#### Volunteer Management

Extant literature relating to the subject of volunteer management addresses questions such as why people volunteer (motivations), why volunteers are important (impact of volunteers on services), and what volunteers do (roles and tasks) (Haski-Laventhal & Bargal, 2008). Perhaps the most definitive work on what we do know about volunteer management and best practices comes from Brudney and his co-authors, who have written extensively on the topic. For example, Hager and Brudney (2004a) tested the adoption of nine best practices in volunteer management in a nationally representative survey of charitable organizations in the United States. The list included screening, recognition activities, liability insurance, training, written policies, data collection, professional development of volunteers, training of paid staff who work with volunteers, and annual measurement of the impact of the program. They utilized phone interviews with volunteer administrators in a random sample of 3,000 nonprofit charitable organizations who had filed a Form 990. No response rate was given in the study. Despite support offered in the literature regarding best practices that are effective in volunteer management, the authors expressed surprise in their findings that the best practices were not “adopted to a large extent”(Hager & Brudney, 2004b, p. 36) by these organizations that rely heavily on volunteers. With the exception of “supervision and communication with volunteers”

(adopted by 67% of charities), less than half of the charities that manage volunteers had adopted the volunteer management practices advocated by the field and literature (Hager & Brudney, 2004b, p. 36). The findings of this study showed that while nonprofit charitable organizations are open to adopting volunteer management practices, the adoption was contingent upon specific needs and characteristics. Adopting certain volunteer management practices may be limited by organizational resources (those with more personnel do better at adopting best practices), role of the volunteers (the level of education had an effect on adopting best practices) and size of the organization (charitable organizations older than 10 years did better at adopting best practices).

In his 1999 study, Brudney analyzed 400 government-based volunteer programs to examine how frequently these volunteer programs utilized best practices identified by the literature. He identified 16 best practices, including volunteer recognition, motivation, written rules, training, evaluation of volunteers, reimbursement of expenses, and so forth. In order to determine the extent to which best practices were adopted by the volunteer programs, survey questionnaires were sent out to the coordinators of the programs. The results of the study indicated that the successful adoption of best practices depended on the level of government: federal, state, and local. The author also found that volunteer programs supported by the federal government tended to adopt more trainings and written rules. On the other hand, programs sponsored by state and local government have a slow rate of adoption of written rules and trainings. Though the researcher was able to identify best practices that should be adopted by volunteer programs, there was no evidence to suggest that the adoption of best practices made any difference in the effectiveness of the program or give any indication of the effect of these best practices on reducing turnover.

Similarly, Brudney and Kellough (2000) examined the extent and characteristics of volunteers in state government agencies by surveying 350 personnel managers in state agencies across the United States. The authors used two models; the first model was to explain volunteer use by state agencies, and the second was to explain the benefits gained from involving volunteers. Survey questionnaires were sent to personnel managers asking them to describe the characteristics of their volunteer program and to assess the benefits and problems involving volunteers. The findings were 189 personnel managers responded that there were four principal benefits: 1) capability to do more with available resources, 2) cost savings, 3) job skills and experience gained, and 4) improved community relations. However, five principal problems relating to management resistance were also reported, including: 1) lack of support from department heads and supervisors, 2) misconceptions about the number of paid staff needed, 3) lack of paid staff time for training and supervision, 4) absenteeism, and 5) poor work performance.

In another research study on volunteer management by Cuskelly et al. (2006), management practices expected to influence sports volunteer retention were examined. Interviews were conducted with 98 rugby club administrators who participated in focus groups to identify volunteer management practices in use in their clubs. Interview questions were centered on seven best practices: 1) planning, 2) recruitment, 3) screening, 4) orientation, 5) training and support, 6) performance management, and 7) recognition. Results suggested that the use of volunteer management practices by sports club varies but those clubs that used practices such as planning and training reported fewer retention problems. The researchers also found that planning was shown as an important management practice for two out of four volunteer positions, but it did not predict retention of board members or team managers. Conversely, clubs

that used training and support and orientation practices extensively reported fewer problems with retaining managers and volunteer coaches. These finding suggested that the benefit of accepting and involving volunteers may be high and uncertain.

### Best Practices

Fisher and Cole (1993) noted that professionalization of a field leads to the creation of standards that, in turn, leads to best practices that all others rally around. Research has suggested that successful volunteer programs are carefully planned and implemented using best practices that are thought to be necessary for ensuring the retention of volunteers (Brudney, 1999; Cuskelly et al., 2006; Hager & Brudney, 2004b). Other research addressing volunteer management concluded that the most successful volunteer programs have operated around a planned, established set of best practices (Brudney, 1999; Cuskelly et al., 2006; Fisher & Cole, 1993; Forsyth, 1999; Govekar & Govekar, 2002; Gratton & Ghoshal, 2003; Hager & Brudney, 2003, 2004b; Scheier, 1996; Silverberg, 2004). There has been consistent support for successful volunteer management, including the 16 best practices mentioned in the research. But questions remain about the effectiveness of these practices within the context in which they are applied, as well as whether volunteer coordinators are actually using these best practices.

### Local Government Volunteer Literature

Many local government agencies depend on volunteer labor, yet volunteer management practices at the local government have received relatively little attention. Despite the economic value and social contributions of volunteers, not much is known of volunteer program management at the local government level and why or how best practices are used.

In the state of Texas, volunteers play a crucial role in local communities. For example, the Corporation for National and Community Service (2015a, 2015b) noted that in 2011 more

than 300,000 people volunteered or provided services to their communities valued in excess of \$45 million. Volunteers have accounted for a significant portion (25-30%) of government workforce (Brudney & Kellough, 2000). Much of this labor force has been provided for city and county government (Nesbit & Brudney, 2011). Contrary to the naïve belief that volunteers are free, there are costs and legal complexities organizations should take into account before introducing volunteers into the workforce.

Volunteering in the public sector can be defined as a voluntary activity that is sponsored and organized by a government agency (Brudney, 1999). This is different from other traditional volunteering (for example, volunteering within a nonprofit setting), and the initiative to include volunteers often has been sponsored or housed within government agencies (Nesbit et al., 2013), formally structured, volunteers have been unpaid, and work has been intended to benefit government agencies (Brudney, 1999; Rehnborg, 2005).

Recent research has demonstrated that “more than one-quarter of local governments have used volunteers to deliver public services” (Nesbit et al., 2013, p. 39). Local government volunteers have benefited the community by increasing the quality/quantity of government services, reducing costs, engaging citizens in the community, increasing quality of life, and making substantial contributions to service delivery (Brudney & Meijs, 2009; Gay, 2008; Gazley & Brudney, 2005).

The reasons for having government volunteers may not be the same for nonprofits, and the challenges in involving and managing volunteers may be different due to social, managerial, political, and financial reasons. For instance, where nonprofit organizations may raise funds for their programs, local government volunteer programs are given a budget that may or may not be adequate to support the needs of the program. Another challenge that nonprofits may face but

may be different from local government volunteer programs because of the context in which they operate is that volunteer coordinators rarely have contact with representatives who make laws affecting their programs (Ellis, 2006). Other challenges have been summarized below in Table 1.

Table 1  
*Nonprofit Organizations versus Government Agencies Involvement of Volunteers*

<u>Nonprofit Organizations</u>	<u>Government Agencies</u>
Board of directors has legal authority to make decisions and amend bylaws.	Operate under authority of Federal state, county, or municipal law
Executives have the power to request governance changes and can influence board response to such requests.	Coordinators cannot change the law and rarely even have contact with government lawmakers.
Are responsible for finding their own sources of funds and revenue and accept whatever donation they wish	Must budget according to tax revenue allocated to them
Can budget and raise funds for any need	Expend funds that may be narrowly authorized and cannot always accept donations of funds, goods, or services

*Note:* Adapted from Ellis (2006)

Research by International City/County Management Association (ICMA, 2010) has indicated that fiscal stringency in local governments has led officials to promote the use of volunteers in public service delivery to meet public needs and compensate for public sector cutbacks (Nesbit & Brudney, 2013). Other major events such as natural disasters also have increased the use of volunteers in public sector setting (Choudhury, 2010). Nesbit and Brudney (2007, 2013) also have identified population and jurisdiction size as having an influence on the use of volunteers, where smaller jurisdictions tend to use volunteers in public safety, and larger ones in health and human services and cultural and arts programs. Their research did not find any relationship between any particular government region and the use of volunteers. In this

research, local governments had as their primary goal the engagement of citizens based on the mission statements of the volunteer programs involved in this study.

Choudhury (2010) examined the link between public volunteerism and the role of local government agencies in attracting and managing volunteers. Using a purposive sample, Choudhury recruited 37 volunteer program administrators to participate in an email survey. He found that although volunteers are widely valued by public agencies, most agencies underutilize their capacities in attracting and valuing their contributions due to lack of knowledge in administering proper volunteer management strategies. That is, 25 out of the 37 respondents indicated lack of knowledge of best practices in volunteer management. In addition, it was found that matching volunteer interests to organizational needs was a significant challenge for managers. Local governments should evaluate their capacity in order to properly manage volunteers. Choudhury also suggested (2010, p. 599):

The lack of investment in attracting volunteers stands out as a fundamental weakness in the management capacity of local public agencies to effectively attract, use, and value volunteers as an integral part of their operation

An example of this weakness is the lack of written job descriptions for volunteer positions. He also found that public agencies were underutilizing volunteers in emergency management and homeland security-related programs. These tend to be areas that volunteers flock to during times of need, and the mismanagement of volunteers, in turn, may lead to issues such as help not reaching the most vulnerable (elderly).

In a longitudinal study using interrupted-time series analysis, Brudney and Gazley (2002) tested the assumptions of cost savings and the impact that volunteer program has had on paid staff. Their study was based on a Small Business Administration (SBA) volunteer program — the Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE). They did a 42-year analysis of SBA and its



SCORE program and found evidence to support the assumption that volunteer use in government programs increased service levels. The authors also found that SBA's use of SCORE increased its service level. The hypothesis that government volunteers were a threat to paid staff was not supported. However, in a 13-year study examining the attitudes of public agency staff to volunteers, Gazley and Brudney (2005) found that even though the attitudes of managers have changed towards using volunteers to viewing them as important in the delivery of services that government could otherwise not provide without the participation of volunteers, their staff still resisted the involvement of volunteers in the agency. The study did not give any reasons as to why staff resisted the involvement of volunteers in public agencies.

In a recent study by Dover (2010), it was clear, however, that staff resistance has been substantial and may continue to be. For example, Dover citing Brudney (1990a) asserted that the "most serious impediment to a successful volunteer program is the likely indifference or worse, outright opposition of regular personnel to volunteers" (p. 33). Dover also cited Holmes (2003) in a study of museum volunteers who pointed out that the staff had an economic model of volunteering (i.e. saving money), whereas the volunteers had a leisure model. Brudney (1990b) asserted that public agency staff "place an emphasis on universal selection, fair and equitable treatment of clients, and provision of due process – and volunteers who may be more focused on outcomes and individual service recipients" (p. 240). In an even more pointed distinction, Dover reported that volunteers thought "quality service should be friendly, passionate, enthusiastic, caring, courteous, and helpful, whereas for staff, service should be professional, accurate, timely, and reliable" (p. 240). Dover (2010) saw essential conflicts between the institutional logic of public service staff vs. the individual logic of volunteers. In particular he cited three institutional logics: 1) the logic of professionalism including autonomy, specialist skills, and permanence; 2)

the logic of new public management including cost-benefit, risk-taking, and quality; and 3) the logic of community participants including diversity, access, and voice. He concluded that the implications of this conflict of logic were that volunteers without specialist experience could only fulfill support roles and thus their commitment and influence would always be subject to close supervision and inspection. In addition, he highlighted protective collective agreements by local labor unions that were threatened by volunteer engagement. Beyond that, there was a potential clash of voluntary staff identity that could undermine permanent staff. Moreover, the public service staff was put in an untenable position of choosing between content professionalism of the department vs. professionalism of volunteerism as department goals. From the above, the cost of accepting and involving volunteers may be high and uncertain.

#### Volunteer Programs in Local Government

Volunteer programs in local government can be an important means to bridge the gap between serious societal issues, limited funding, and can leverage existing public services to meet community demands (Fredericksen & Levin, 2004). Volunteer programs also assist various departments within the local communities by providing opportunities for students (middle and high school) to engage in their community, work to restore natural habitats, maintain trails, monitor animals, and extend the reach of several other departments, including the police in enforcing codes. Further, three major forces seem to drive the motivation of local government to involve volunteers: 1) cost savings—volunteering is a way to keep services affordable or to improve the quality of these services (Brudney, 1990a); 2) citizen engagement—volunteering is a way to develop or maintain social cohesion (Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008); and 3) improvement in the quality of life of citizens and individual volunteers (Wilson & Musick, 2000).

## Local Government Volunteer Areas

Rehnborg (2005) asserted that volunteers are engaged in “museums (31%), cultural and arts programs (27%), programs for the elderly (17%) and in the delivery of public safety” (p. 97). Other research by Nesbit and Brudney (2013) has also reconfirmed that the most common area of volunteer use is in culture and arts. Nesbit et al. (2013) further noted that “the greatest volunteer use is culture and arts: 21.5% of municipalities use volunteers in such programs” (p. 36). Overall, most local governments use volunteers to provide some sort of public service. Other common areas of volunteering include public safety, youth programs, and education.

## Local Government Volunteer Programs in Texas

The mission of local government volunteer programs in Texas is to encourage citizen participation in meeting community member needs while enhancing local quality of life. Local government volunteer management programs are organized and managed by elected City Managers. Local government volunteer programs involve costs and legal complexities organizations must take into account before introducing volunteers into the workforce. Local government volunteer programs are different from philanthropic groups because the budget, policies, procedures, and purposes of the program are set forth and governed by specific regulations and statutes. For example, Texas Government Code (Chapter 2109) provides that: “A governmental entity that provides human and social services shall use volunteers, if feasible, to assist in providing services of a high quality” (Texas Government Code, Chapter 2109, § 2109.002). The Texas Code includes a significant number of volunteer management best practices in Section 2109.002, including awards recognizing the work of the volunteers, insurance protection for volunteers, and reimbursement of volunteer expenses. A major reason cited in the Texas document for creating volunteer programs is for local government to engage

citizens, yet there is no indication of how and to what degree these programs achieve this goal or even if the Texas program as a whole has this as a goal. The current study will examine the challenges volunteer coordinators face when engaging citizens.

### Citizen Engagement

Research concerning civic engagement for this research is spread across disciplines such as sociology, political science, and education, making definition, how to sustain it, and what factors lead to it difficult. While there is a lack of consensus on the definition of civic engagement, this research uses Erlich's (2000) definition:

Working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes. (p. vi)

This definition includes citizens involved in both political and community-based activities. Further, it focuses on behaviors that can be measured. According to Zukin et al. (2006), citizen engagement has two mutually dependent dimensions: individual and organizational. The core of individual citizen engagement is the creation of citizens who know how to use their skills, expertise, and knowledge to better their communities, while the organizational core of citizen engagement is the creation of an infrastructure that links citizens to their community through a reciprocal relationship (Zukin et al., 2006). Local governments have an affirmative obligation to create opportunities for citizen involvement in the administration of their local community (Roberts, 2004; Stivers, 1990). Local governments make institutional arrangements for citizen involvement by creating volunteer programs to facilitate information flow between citizens and local government programs (Thomas, 1999).

Citizen engagement as indicated by Callanan (2005) has an element of interaction of citizens with administrators, concerned with public policy decisions and public services. In this

sense, citizens are regarded as having significant influence on important decisions in their community (Roberts, 2004). Putnam (2000) noted that citizen participation such as voting, volunteering, and participation in community and social activities has been declining. Texas, for example, ranks 42 out of 50 states and Washington D.C. in volunteering and civic engagement (Volunteering America, 2013). The low rate of volunteering in Texas could be attributed to gated communities and residents giving monetarily to causes rather than physically getting involved. Unfortunately, Volunteering America does not have data that is specific to cities of interest in this research.

Few can dispute that volunteers provide added services that the government would have eliminated or reduced due to fiscal problems. Community projects are supported by collective action that are not under the scope of a nonprofit organization, but housed under a municipal government. Collective action binds the community together for a common purpose (Brudney & Meijs, 2009), and volunteerism serves as the bridge for individuals to move beyond wanting to do good for their community to accomplish the needs of their community. The supply of volunteers is contingent on people coming forward in the spirit of community responsibility and commitment (Sagawa, 2010). Awareness of community problems and public support is important for change to occur. For example, citizen watch groups working with law enforcement have been important catalysts in improving neighborhoods. Thus, citizen participation through volunteering can create the leadership needed to affect change (Sagawa, 2010). The design and management of volunteer programs to promote citizen participation should take into consideration opportunities that facilitate the interaction with volunteers within the community and government agencies. The literature addressed several factors that may facilitate this relationship, such as information sharing (Thomas & Streib, 2003), developing civic skills like

serving on community boards (Wilson, 2000), and fostering of trust (Thomas & Streib, 2003), as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 *Citizen Participation Literature Review Summary*

<b>Participation Category</b>	<b>Definition, Author</b>
Serving on community boards	Participation is defined as developing the civic skills of citizens (Wilson, 2000)
Collaborating with peers	This type of participation is seen as having community-building focus for the purpose of spurring individual or collective action as well as building or sustaining democracy (Brudney & Meijis, 2009)
Decision making	Views citizen participation as part of the decision making process a process where information is collected and disseminated in compliance with the law, facilitating fairness, and negotiating between interests to arrive at a better decision (Creighton, 2005)
Interaction with public officials	Participation from this perspective is seen as making use of formal and informal social networks/relationships for mutual gain (Callahan, 2005)

*Note:* Adapted from Brudney & Meijis, 2009; Callahan, 2007; Creighton, 2005; Thomas & Streib, 2003; Wilson, 2000.

Further, participation can be seen as a form of volunteering because the act of participation is un-coerced and the volunteer experience often represents a tendency to be social and thus affects their engagement within their community. In order to determine what makes a participating citizen, citizen participation is looked at from the perspective of volunteering for this research.

### Volunteer Retention and Turnover

Retention, according to Herman (2010), is an organization's ability to maintain volunteer participation and reduce high volunteer turnover. McCurley and Lynch (2005) asserted that the first six months of the volunteer experience is critical to retention, because it is during this timeframe that the greatest loss of volunteers occurs. This is not necessarily an unusual statistic

as compared with the 50% of hourly workers who leave within the first 120 days (Krauss, 2010), and 50% of all senior managers hired from outside firms who turn over within the first 18 months (Smart, 1999). In practical reality, most employees have 90 days to prove themselves as a new hire (Bauer, 2010). In the private sector volunteer retention is the result of making volunteers feel good about themselves and the task assigned to them (Lynch, 2000). McCurley and Lynch (2005) suggested that when the volunteer experience is good and the volunteer feels good, then the likelihood of them continuing is high. However, whenever there are factors beyond the control of volunteer coordinators, turnover occurs. Volunteers may leave the program because of various reasons such as relocation, full-time employment, becoming a parent or full-time student, or because they experience illness (Jamieson, 2003). Turnover listings are sometimes defined as inactive volunteers (Jamieson, 2003). Inactive volunteers are those with prior connection with the organization they volunteer with but have reduced their number of hours (per week or month) within the last year or have stopped volunteering completely for the organization.

Yanay and Yanay (2008) conducted a study that examined the relationship between management practices, motivation, and volunteer retention rates. The authors conducted a two-year longitudinal study of emergency hotline volunteers. They discovered that after volunteers participated in training activities that were motivationally enriching, they failed to derive any personal gains or benefits from remaining involved in the organization and as a result, they quit volunteering with the organization. The implication from this research finding is that retention can be negatively affected when organizations do not offer volunteers motivationally enriching activities.

Research by Hustinx and Handy (2009) sought to understand volunteer retention and recruitment by focusing on the volunteer's attachment to a multipurpose and multi-branch organization. In order to answer the question on whether volunteers were attached to an organization as a whole or whether they developed allegiances to a program or the regional unit within which they participate, the Red Cross in Flanders, Belgium was used as the research site. Survey questions and face-to-face interviews were conducted as a means to gather data. The findings indicated that when recruiting volunteers into complex organizations, managers should be careful of using the mission of the organization as a means to attract volunteers. Further, the research found that when volunteers are retained through continued volunteering, they have a better appreciation of the mission of the organization and form an allegiance with the organization as a whole.

Volunteer management structure, programs, and practices are necessary for creating effective local government volunteer capacity (Hager & Brudney, 2004b). The capacity of an organization to manage volunteers can be linked to outcomes that include retention. Thus, the literature suggests that the quality of the volunteer management affects retention. Organizations must plan and budget for such activities as orientation, training, assigning tasks, supervising, evaluating, supporting, and retaining volunteers (Dicke & Ott, 2003; Forsyth, 1999; Hunter, 2004; Slaughter & Home, 2004). Wymer and Starnes (2001) argued that retention is an especially crucial issue when organizations need volunteers with specific skills, or use those who must be intensively trained for the long term.



## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

Chapter three describes the research methods used in this study. It begins with an introduction to the chapter and rationale for using qualitative methodology, followed by participant and sample, and the procedures of data collection and analysis. A description of each section is outlined below.

#### Introduction

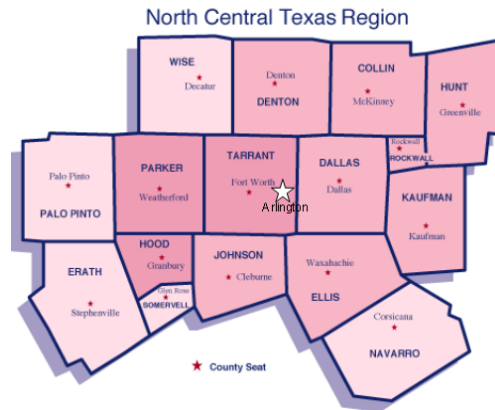
The use of qualitative research methods to gather and analyze data has increased significantly in popularity over the years (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Qualitative research methods are developed to meaningfully gain insight from localized environments (Howitt & Stevens, 2000). Others have also indicated that qualitative research is useful in discovering the meaning that people give to events they experience (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Further, qualitative approaches are useful in studies that seek to understand perceptions and subjective beliefs (Charmaz, 2006, 2008) and for studies that have not been well explored (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This approach was taken because of the research information gap that exists from the perspective of local government volunteer coordinators. Using qualitative research methods, this research provides answers to questions related to the challenges in managing volunteers from the perspectives of volunteer coordinators.

What this means for this research is that careful attention was paid to the nuances in managing volunteers and the implications of these challenges in local government volunteer programs. As indicated by Charmaz (2006), applying a grounded approach within qualitative method of inquiry allows for the study of “how — and sometimes why — participants construct meanings and actions in specific situations” (p. 130). This type of investigation allows for the

subtleties of human experience to float to the surface (Denzin, 1997). As a result of this, researching and making sense of the lives of others is a challenging and layered endeavor (Denzin, 1997).

### Participants and Context

This research was conducted in the North Central Texas region. Twenty volunteer coordinators from 20 local government volunteer programs participated in this study (see Appendix B). The study population is public volunteer programs located in North Central Texas. There is no list of local public sector volunteer programs, nor is there a standard practice for their use common to a significant number of local governments. However, the National Association of Volunteer Programs in Local Government (NAVPLG) is a membership organization that local government volunteer programs may decide to join. The main purpose of NAVPLG is to strengthen volunteer programs through leadership, education, advocacy, networking, and information exchange (NAVPLG, 2014). Currently, the association has 114 members representing various states and cities within the United States. NAVPLG provides a natural setting for recruiting participants because they advocate best practices in volunteer management. An internet search of NVAPLG revealed that only three out of the 114 current members were located in North Central Texas. These three volunteer coordinators are in Plano, Allen, and McKinney, Texas, and each agreed to participate and provide introduction to other non-NAVPLG members in the North Central Texas Region (NCTR).



*Figure 2. North Central Texas Regional Map courtesy of the NHNTC Region*

Local government volunteer coordinators were chosen as the object of this research because they were in a better position to describe what works in volunteer management and retention in local government volunteer programs, and whether and to what extent there is a disconnect between theory and implementation of volunteer management practices. These volunteer coordinators were of particular interest because of the context in which they manage volunteers. They are a specialized group of individuals working in cities that are proactive enough to have stand-alone volunteer programs. They are uniquely situated in that they provide resources to various city agencies and departments in the form of volunteers. They communicate with almost all levels of city government and leadership in meeting the needs of the city. This group of individuals may also be able to provide answers to why retention remains a problem even when best practices to volunteer management are utilized. Further, they are responsible for controlling and managing human resources issues that may arise with volunteers. Because of their unique position in local government, understanding what they do, the kind of support they have or may not have, the political and legal challenges, and what it means for them to be volunteer coordinators in the context of local government is important because they know what

works and what does not. They add value to the conversation on volunteer management practices because of their central location in local government.

Ultimately, the volunteer coordinators I interviewed varied in volunteer management experience and tenure as volunteer coordinators. These individuals shared a variety of experiences and provided rich information for the study.

### Population Sample

For this research, purposeful sampling was used for recruiting participants. Purposeful sampling involves the selection of participants according to the needs of the study (Glaser & Strauss, 1992). This means that the researcher chooses participants who can give a “richness of information” that is appropriate for detailed research (Glaser & Strauss, 1992, p. 256). The selection criteria for inclusion in this study were professionals who were responsible for managing volunteers and who could express their experiences as they relate to the phenomena being studied – the challenges in managing volunteers in local government. Previous research has identified management practices deemed effective in managing and retaining volunteers (Brudney, 1999, 2003; Cuskelly et al., 2006; Hager & Brudney, 2004a, 2004b; Meijs & Brudney, 2007); however, none of these researchers have directly interviewed local government volunteer coordinators to know what the real issues and challenges are in managing and retaining volunteers using these identified practices. It has been assumed from previous research that implementation of these practices will lead to the desired outcome; yet, without the voice and unique perspectives of these volunteer coordinators, we may not know what practices are seemingly working and what are not.

Volunteer coordinators were selected for this study for their depth of knowledge about broad city policies, objectives, projects, programs, limitations, and liaison with city officials and

contacts, as well as their familiarity with the skills, capabilities, and limitations of volunteer prospects and participants in various city programs. Those with over one year of service are in a position to reflect upon the pros and cons of past and present efforts concerning the use of volunteers by city governments. Public officials at higher levels of local government management are likely not to have as strong a grasp on program history and details because they are managing many managers, such as volunteer coordinators, as their principal responsibility and do not have volunteers as direct reports; nor do volunteers that report to the volunteer coordinators have as comprehensive a perspective on city objectives and limitations.

Volunteer coordinators in local government are not required to raise money on behalf of their agency, unlike in nonprofit organizations, but they have the responsibility to establish and maintain good relationships with other city agencies and the public, which is essential for engaging citizens to view the program in a positive light and critical to retaining volunteers.

These groups of individuals are important to this research because their perspective on the art of volunteer management can reveal the daily challenges that go into managing volunteers, suggesting changes in rules and regulations that can impact the program, and engaging the public for volunteerism. Volunteer coordinators in this study also have specific management responsibilities such as working with each city department/agency in developing job descriptions that are specific to that agency; they create a vision that draws in volunteers and can inform taxpayers on the success/impact of the program by measuring the achievement of volunteers.

#### Data Collection Procedure

In order to understand how volunteer coordinators experience the challenges in managing volunteers, I felt it would be prudent to use a two prong approach to gather data. I utilized two

sources of data collection procedure: survey and semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were the primary data collection method because they helped get an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences. Survey questions were incorporated to gather data on participant characteristics, use of best practices, and level of challenges in using best practices. Cope (2009) postulated that there is nothing particularly new about this approach. She observed that the use of multiple methods to collect and interpret qualitative data has a long tradition in many of the social sciences. This section begins by describing the participation procedures, research instruments for data collection, qualitative instrument, procedures for telephone interviews, and survey data. To best capture and organize participant experiences in managing volunteers, a two-part method of data collection will be utilized – survey and semi-structured interviews.

### Participation Procedures

Participant recruitment began with three volunteers from the NAVPLG website, located in North Central Texas. An email was sent to these volunteers summarizing the purpose of the study and inviting them to participate. All three responded to the email stating that they would be interested in participating. These volunteer coordinators were also asked to provide introductions and information of other volunteer coordinators in local government not in the NAVPLG database but in their social network. Using contact information provided by the three volunteer coordinators, potential participants received a recruitment email describing the purpose of the study and an invitation to participate. Overall, 30 volunteer coordinators responded indicating a willingness to participate. Though the response was overwhelming, a thorough screening of participants meant that I had to exclude some of the participants because they did not meet the

selection criteria. Based on the criteria set by the study, I ended up with 20 volunteer coordinators for inclusion in the study.

*The inclusionary criteria for this study were limited to:*

- Over one year full-time experience in a comparable capacity as a volunteer coordinator for a public or nonprofit employer;
- Has been responsible for planning, organizing, and directing volunteer programs associated with the association's board of directors, committees, and departments;
- Has organized, coordinated, and managed the recruitment of volunteers for the board, various committees, departments, and association programs;
- Has worked with social, civic, and local organizations to develop partnerships, where appropriate, to develop and/or utilize volunteers;
- Bachelor's degree in social sciences, communication, or related field;
- Has prior experience creating and implementing volunteer programs and training; and
- Has been and is comfortable in a highly visible position between upper management and a large staff of volunteers as a liaison.

A follow-up email was sent to all volunteer coordinators who agreed to participate in the study. Participants were sent the survey after receipt of their acceptance letter. After receiving the survey, an email was sent to participants to confirm the date and time of the semi-structured interview. Interviews were scheduled at a time that was convenient for the volunteer coordinator.

Attention was given to fulfilling all the requirements of University of North Texas Institutional Review Board (IRB) before formal data collection begins. Written consent was obtained before a volunteer coordinator participated in the study, and steps were taken to protect their identity. This involved the use of pseudonyms such as "Coordinator A," "Coordinator B,"

and so on. Each participant was told that he or she was free to depart from the study at any point, and an explanation of the data collection and storage process was provided.

### Research Instrument

Data collection occurred through a two-part process – survey and telephone interviews with local government volunteer coordinators. Survey consisted of 50 questions lasting approximately 20 minutes. Interviews varied between 30 and 40 minutes and consisted of 19 semi-structured interview questions.

#### *Survey Questionnaire*

Survey questions included background information on volunteer coordinators such as their experience, level of education, and their knowledge of best practices. Questions also included information on volunteers in the program, level of challenge in using best practices, as well as questions related to level of challenge in involving volunteers. Survey questions were based on the research questions and literature review of volunteer management best practices. The survey questions were 20 minutes long; see Appendix A. The survey was prepared in Qualtrics, an online survey software.

#### *Telephone Interviews*

I utilized semi-structured telephone interviews as the second part of the data collection process. The semi-structured interview allows the researcher to gain information from the participant regarding the phenomenon being study by allowing them to share their own social reality (Creswell, 2013). Using semi-structured interviews provided me the opportunity to gain a variety of perspectives and understand the experiences of the volunteer coordinators as well as their objective reality as it relates to managing volunteers in the context of local government. Thus, following the survey, telephone interviews were conducted with the volunteer



coordinators. The semi-structured interview provided a more in-depth understanding of the challenges involved in volunteer management by focusing on research questions as well as asking for clarification on answers provided on the survey. The interviews varied between 30 and 40 minutes long and were digitally recorded in order to be transcribed. The interviews were based on questions that concentrate on volunteer management challenges and strategies for managing and engaging volunteers. The interview questions included questions related to volunteer management, best practices, and citizen engagement. The interview questions in relationship to the research questions are described in Table 2.

Table 2 *Interview Questions Based on Research Questions*

Research Questions	Interview Questions
<b>RQ#1:</b> What managerial and political challenges do local government volunteer coordinators face in retaining volunteers?	What managerial challenges do you face in coordinating volunteers? What political challenges do you face in managing volunteers? What other challenges apart from managerial (political) do you face in managing volunteers?
<b>RQ#2:</b> What challenges are local government's volunteer coordinators facing in using volunteer management best practices for volunteer retention?	What education have you received about best practices? What are some of the challenges you face in retaining volunteers?
<b>RQ #3:</b> What strategies and best practices are helpful in retaining volunteers in local government?	Have you been educated that what is shown below are best practices for volunteer management? If not, you may still be using practices that fall into this list, and include others not listed that you use.
<b>RQ#4:</b> What challenges do local government coordinators face in engaging citizens in volunteerism?	Regarding the best practices you offer, please indicate your level of challenge. If high challenge, what is facilitating the high the high challenge ? What are the three most important challenges you have in engaging citizens?

To keep the semi-structured interviews on task, an interview guide was created (Appendix C). The purpose of the interview guide was to keep the focus on acquiring information on volunteer management challenges, experiences in using volunteer management practices, as well as challenges in engaging volunteers. Specifically, I probed volunteer coordinators with questions relating to the level of challenge involved in managing volunteers, political challenges in managing volunteers in the local government context, and level of challenge in engaging citizens with the goal of uncovering what was facilitating or hindering these challenges. When the design of the interview guide was completed, I conducted telephone interviews with the 20 volunteer coordinators. Each participant signed the inform consent form which served to remind them that participation in the study was voluntary. I also informed the participants that the semi-structured interviews would be audio recorded in order to be transcribed.

### Data Analysis

Qualitative research allows the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied, and it is the most appropriate research methodology for this study since my study is concerned with how volunteer coordinators experience the challenges in managing volunteers. Given that qualitative methodology uses context, individual experience, and subjective interpretation, generalizability is not possible (Heppner, Kivlighan, & Wampold, 1999), nor was it a goal of this study. A deductive grounded theory approach to data analysis is used to analyze the qualitative data in this research. Grounded theory is a research approach that is “grounded in data systematically gathered and analyzed” (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p.85).

Immediately following each interview, I transcribed the interview data for analysis. While transcribing each interview, my focus was on translating the narratives into recorded

words and more specifically on the substance of the stories being told. Each word was precisely recorded as uttered by the interviewee. After the transcription of all 20 interviews, I had 250 pages of typed data, double spaced. The code and coding description are in Appendix D.

Once I finished transcribing the interviews, I used a grounded theory approach to data analysis as indicated earlier which was influenced by Charmaz (2005) and Strauss & Corbin (1990).

Throughout the data analysis process, I organized data into logical and organized categories to manage recurring themes. During this coding process, preliminary codes became evident across the interviews, and I then began the open coding process. With open coding, I collapsed all similar codes into categories and organized them according to themes. The categories were added as the analysis progressed to account for all the themes that were emerging from the data.

While reading through the transcripts, I made notes in a new word document when I identified themes and issues relating to my research questions and noticed important insights from participants. All participants' narratives were compared to pull themes from the data and create categories for analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1999). During this process, I was able to identify 28 codes and ended up with five themes that were collapsed into four specific themes. I focused on relationships that extended across categories, looking at how different and similar the themes are.

After this analysis, I looked over the categories once more to streamline them in order to begin compiling the results of the study. I also focused my analysis on looking for emerging themes and comparing them to my chosen theoretical perspective and the research questions guiding the study. The next chapter is the discussion of the results of how volunteer coordinators express the challenges in managing and engaging volunteers as well as strategies that would lead to retention in the context of local government.

## Limitations

There are some limitations identified with this research which has to be acknowledged. The number of participants in this study was limited, but their perspective is unique, making it acceptable because they provided information that is relevant to the study of volunteer management and citizen engagement in local government volunteer programs. The low representation should not serve as a problem, because the findings can be transferred to other contexts. However, caution should be taken in each instance of generalization.

Another methodological limitation was the sampling choice. The choice of sampling – purposive – was meant to uncover rich qualitative data that would add to the phenomenon being studied. Further, the researcher limited the study participants to local government that had stand-alone volunteer programs not affiliated with other city departments such as Parks and Recreation or Libraries. Thus the search for participants left out organizations not inclined to join organizations such as NAVPLG. So although volunteer programs in local government were examined, only standalone programs were included in the final sample. Perhaps future studies can examine volunteer management challenges in all local government volunteer programs.

This research examined volunteer management challenges in local government, and the level of challenge volunteer coordinators face in engaging and retaining volunteers. The research did not examine the challenges department heads have in managing volunteers within their departments. Information received from various sources – coordinators, department heads, and staff, - may influence the management of volunteers and how to engage them.

This study has revealed that finding meaningful work for volunteers and communication between volunteer coordinators and department heads were major challenges faced by volunteer coordinators. For example, the study results suggests that lack of communication between

volunteer coordinators and department heads can be frustrating and lead to volunteer retention problems. Understanding how and in what ways communication impedes volunteer retention can help volunteer coordinators develop better retention and engagement strategies.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS AND RESULTS

This chapter provides findings to the research questions previously stated in this study. Specifically, the aim of this study was to explore the challenges that volunteer coordinators have in managing volunteers and the strategies they have developed to engage, attract, and retain local citizens as volunteers in local government. Four research questions were explored: 1) What are the managerial and political challenges in volunteer management and retention for local government volunteer coordinators? 2) What challenges are local governments' volunteer coordinators facing in using volunteer management practices? 3) What strategies are helpful in retaining volunteers in local government volunteerism? 4) What challenges do local government volunteer coordinators face in engaging citizens?

Data collection was conducted using a two-prong approach – a survey and a semi-structured telephone interview. The data from both data collection instruments were collected and analyzed in response to the research questions posed in chapter one. Because sampling was purposive, only twenty surveys were sent out to participants who agreed to take part in the study. All responses from the survey were usable for this dissertation. Data analysis consisted of descriptive statistics as well as in-depth qualitative analysis of the 20 interview transcriptions and 19 follow-up interview transcriptions.

#### Survey and Interview Results

The survey was completed by the 20 participants, each of whom indicated their informed consent before filling out the survey (see Appendix D). Their responses were analyzed, producing aggregate results in the form of descriptive statistics. In addition to demographic information about the participants, the survey results also included their responses to questions

about best practices and citizen engagement. Descriptive statistics was used for the survey analysis of the data. Descriptive analysis is often used to describe and present data in a meaningful way so that patterns may emerge (Creswell, 2009).

As shown in Table 3, there were 16 female and 4 male participants in the study. Half (50%) of the participants had between 2 and 7 years of volunteer management experience, while half (50%) reported having 8 or more years of volunteer management experience. In terms of education level, 80% reported having a bachelor's degree and 20% held a master's degree. A large majority (80%) of the participants reported receiving special training or certification in volunteer management. The 20 volunteer coordinators in the study are categorized by the following demographics presented in Table 3:

*Table 3 Participant Demographic Characteristics*

Characteristic	Category	<i>N</i>	%
Gender	Male	4	20%
	Female	16	80%
Volunteer management experience	2-4 years	6	30%
	5-7 years	4	20%
	8-10 years	3	15%
	10 or more years	7	35%
Education level	Bachelor's degree	16	80%
	Master's degree	4	20%
Training level	Special training or certification	16	80%
	No special training or certification	4	20%

Table 4 presents the data collected concerning volunteer management practices of participants' organizations and shows the number and percentage of participants reporting the use of these specific best practices. Not surprising, all of the volunteer coordinators indicated that their program operated on a budget provided by their city. Ninety-five percent of the respondents indicated that they provide recognition activities for their volunteers, yet only 25% provide any form of annual evaluation of volunteers of volunteers to gauge how volunteers are faring within

the program or how the program can help volunteers. While 70% of volunteer coordinators provide basic training of volunteers, only 20% provide ongoing training of volunteers. Further, only 5% of volunteers receive new volunteer orientation from the volunteer coordinators. This seems to indicate once volunteers learn the ropes of where they will be placed at the basic level they are left to their own devices. This goes against the principle of resource development if volunteers are to be cultivated to add value to the department and provide them with meaningful work. Though 60% of participants conduct active outreach to recruit new volunteers, 40% do not perform such activity. Again, this seems less about targeted recruitment and more about filling positions with willing bodies. Seventy-five percent of volunteer coordinators noted that they receive support from high-level public officials, and 25% indicated that they do not. For a program that was created to aid in community development and social inclusion (100% have written policies), it was expected that 100% of participants would receive support from public officials. Only 35% of participants indicated that they have newsletters for volunteers, and 1% noted that they provide volunteers the opportunity to manage other volunteers. While volunteering brings benefits to the program, these are volunteer management activities that are meant to bring benefits to the volunteers if we are to consider volunteering a mutual exchange. Sixty percent of the programs provide liability insurance that protects their volunteers, and 45% provide reimbursement for work-related expenses. While volunteer coordinators want to create an inclusive environment for volunteering, these volunteer management practices would seem to be barriers to prospective volunteers that would discourage their participation.



Table 4 *Local Government Volunteer-Management Practices*

Management practices		<i>n</i>	%
Recognition activities for volunteers	Yes	19	95%
	No	1	5%
Formal record-keeping	Yes	20	100%
	No	0	0%
Basic volunteer training	Yes	14	70%
	No	6	30%
Written policies governing volunteer program	Yes	20	100%
	No	0	0%
Active outreach to recruit new volunteers	Yes	12	60%
	No	8	40%
Received support from high-level officials (e.g. dept. managers, etc.)	Yes	15	75%
	No	5	25%
Formal job descriptions for volunteers	Yes	14	70%
	No	6	30%
Ongoing or in-service training for volunteers	Yes	4	20%
	No	16	80%
Liability insurance coverage for volunteers	Yes	12	60%
	No	8	40%
New volunteer orientation	Yes	5	25%
	No	15	75%
Reimbursement for work-related volunteer expenses	Yes	9	45%
	No	11	55%
Budget for volunteer program	Yes	20	100%
	No	0	0%
Volunteers manage other volunteers	Yes	1	5%
	No	19	95%
Newsletter for volunteers	Yes	7	35%
	No	13	65%
Annual or other evaluation of volunteers	Yes	5	25%
	No	15	75%

Citizen engagement was the topic of the next four questions in the survey, with results presented in Table 5. All the volunteer coordinators (100%) surveyed responded that their program provides opportunities for volunteers to meet with public officials. However, when asked whether they provide volunteers with engagement activities related to serving on advisory

boards, only 25% indicated that their program does. While 85% of the coordinators indicated that their program provides opportunities for citizens to serve on community boards, only 5% provide an opportunity for citizens to collaborate on community projects. This goes against the core of citizen engagement, which is the creation of citizens who know how to use their skills, expertise and knowledge to better their communities.

Table 5 *Community Engagement Opportunities Provided by Local Governments*

Community engagement		<i>N</i>	%
Provide opportunity for volunteers to serve on community boards	Yes	17	85%
	No	3	15%
Provide opportunity for volunteers to collaborate on community projects (e.g., beautification, policing, citizen patrols, etc.)	Yes	5	25%
	No	15	75%
Provide opportunity for volunteers to serve on advisory committees	Yes	5	25%
	No	15	75%
Provide opportunity for volunteers to interact with public officials	Yes	20	100%
	No	0	0%

The survey questions also explored the level of challenge that volunteer coordinators experience in using certain citizen engagement activities in their programs, with responses presented in Table 6. These challenges are furthered explored in the qualitative analysis of the data. The participants were asked questions that probed them on the factors that were facilitating or hindering their level of challenge with these community engagement activities for volunteers.

Table 6 *Challenges Associated with Coordinating Community Engagement Activities for*

*Volunteers*

Citizen engagement activity	Amount of challenge experienced by participant when coordinating activity	<i>N</i>	%
Volunteers on community boards	More challenging	15	90%
	Less challenging	2	10%
Volunteer collaboration with peers on community projects	More challenging	5	25%
	Less challenging	0	0%
Volunteers on advisory boards	More challenging	4	20%
	Less challenging	1	5%
Volunteer interaction with public officials	More challenging	5	25%
	Less challenging	15	75%

### Qualitative Analysis of Interviews

Twenty participants were interviewed individually in audio taped telephone interviews, following the qualitative interview protocol and questions in Appendix E. The 20 interviews were transcribed and printed out so the researcher could read the rich material that the participants shared repeatedly. Following the steps of data analysis and coding procedures recommended by qualitative researchers Creswell (2009) and Charmaz (2006, 2008), the researcher moved from the early stages of becoming familiar with the data as a whole to the more detailed analysis stage of coding the material manually. The coding process naturally led to the emergence of themes, which together created a narrative describing the meaning of the experiences of the 20 participants who were interviewed for this research. Follow-up phone interviews were conducted with 19 of the participants to clarify and extend their responses to the questions in the initial interviews. Participants responded with deeper insights into questions about volunteer management practices; additionally, participants clarified many responses that had been incomplete or superficial in the original interviews. The results of the qualitative analysis will now be presented.

## Codes and Themes Emergent from the Interview Analysis

The coding process revealed 28 codes, which appeared throughout the interview transcripts in the participants' responses to the interview questions. Each code was given an acronym; the acronyms were used to manually code the printed interview transcripts. See Appendix F for a complete list of codes. Next, these codes were grouped into themes. After analysis, five main themes were seen to recur throughout the interview transcripts. The five initial codes — the components of volunteer management programs, the challenges of volunteer management, the best practices of volunteer management, the challenge of finding meaningful work for volunteers, and the challenge of coordination between volunteer coordinators and local government managers — were collapsed into four specific themes. These themes coincided with the research questions and theoretical framework guiding the research. The themes were:

1. The challenges of volunteer management
2. The best practices of volunteer management (see appendix A, as identified by Brudney (1999), Hager and Brudney (2004), and Cuskelly et al. (2008))
3. The challenges of engaging citizens
4. Strategies for retaining and engaging volunteers

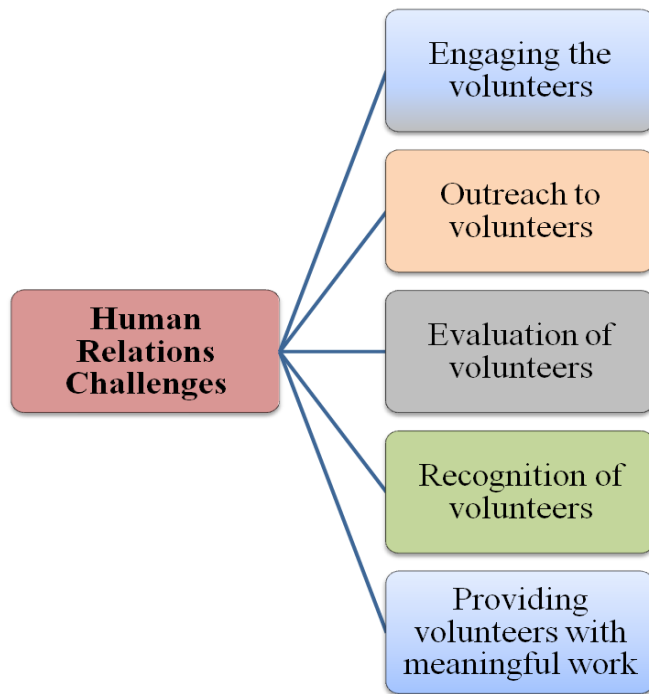
The themes identified in the data analysis fell into three different parts of the study structure. Part 1 concerns *human relations challenges* and includes things like volunteer engagement, retention, and finding meaningful work for volunteers. Part 2 concerns the *bureaucratic best practices of volunteer management* and includes things like training, newsletter, budget, evaluation of volunteers, and tracking volunteer hours. Part 3 concerns *volunteer program challenges* and includes things like visibility of the program, showing the

impact of the program, and other challenges unique to the context of local government such as adjustment of volunteer coordinators from private sector to the public sector and showing the value of volunteers to taxpayers. This section presents the themes with supporting quotes from respondents to provide their unique perspectives, thereby providing a more holistic view of components of volunteer management programs.

### Part 1: Human Relations Challenges

At the core of managing volunteers is the ability to make sure that they are engaged, recognized for their contributions as well as finding meaningful work. All of these will help in retaining volunteers. Local government volunteer programs, however, operate around a bureaucratic structure characterized by rules and regulations, written policies and procedures, and a centralized chain of command. Because of this context, volunteer coordinators are held accountable to the rules governing the volunteer program as they manage volunteers, which makes human relations activities challenging. Participants spoke often about the challenging aspects of the volunteer management programs that they lead.

When asked about the biggest challenges they encounter in engaging volunteers, participants most often mentioned *engaging the volunteers, outreach to volunteers, keeping volunteers happy, providing recognition for volunteers, evaluation of volunteers, and providing volunteers with meaningful work*. Additionally, communication, the needs of the departments and volunteers were each mentioned once as challenges the coordinators experience in engaging volunteers. This is depicted in Figure 2.



*Figure 2. Human Relations Challenges*

#### *Engaging volunteers*

Ryan et al., (2001) have noted that people would initially take part in a volunteer program for altruistic reasons, but will stay with the program if they perceive social benefits. From the analysis, volunteer coordinators seem to struggle with whether retention is tied to engagement and how to best gauge engagement. This is a very significant piece of information considering that 75% of the survey respondents do not conduct an annual evaluation of their volunteers. The evaluation of the volunteers would uncover reasons behind why volunteers were not staying and what activities they would rather be engaged with. Engaging the citizens so that they want to become volunteers is essential, noted participants:

It is just very hard to gauge engagement when you have a problem retaining them in the first place. I think one of the trainings I went to stated that retention is an indication of citizen engagement. I'm not sure I quite agree with that. I mean, I can retain volunteers, but I have to keep them engaged by giving them the assignments they want not to necessarily keep them, but for them to tell others about the program, talk about us, and get others to the website or to our office (Coordinator O).

Participants spoke further about engaging volunteers:

We have such a high turnover. I think that really is the bottom line. If citizens were staying, I think we would know that we are keeping them engaged. We have a pretty good grip on the younger volunteers, but then they go to college, start new careers and then what? Turnover is high (Coordinators T).

Sculpting a meaningful experience for the volunteer can be a challenge especially when working with schedules that are so varied—both the agency and the volunteer (Coordinators H).

Speaking about the importance of recruiting and engaging new volunteers for serving on community boards, Coordinator T further noted:

We can't seem to reach the younger volunteers. These are the ones we really want on these community boards as we see our city change. We see a lot of families, young families moving into our city and we would like to have them on these boards. My challenge is getting them engaged! (Coordinator T)

The inability of the volunteer program to inspire and engage volunteers leads to the problem of retention. Volunteer coordinators struggle to find young volunteers who can be set up to sit on community boards. Since these programs were set up with the mission of civic engagement, the normative management function should be to focus on encouraging and developing a sense of social cohesion that volunteers are important to the community. This was echoed by some of the program coordinators when they noted that they have struggled to demonstrate the impact of the program.

#### *Outreach to volunteers*

Organizations are generally discerning about where and how they recruit volunteers. They often position themselves where they would find prospective volunteers to meet the needs

of their organization, such as online or through word of mouth. In the context of local government, volunteer coordinators noted that they often relied on other volunteers, online websites, and colleagues. An informant spoke about the program's outreach to recruit new volunteers:

I would say we do active outreach, but 'really active,' I don't find myself making too many meetings with specific people. A lot of it is done . . . I could be in the office and send over email or over the phone (Coordinator J).

### *Recognition of volunteers*

Participants brought up recognition as an important component of the volunteer program and essential to engaging and retaining volunteers. In particular, participants noted that recognition could be formal, such as when they held their annual recognition dinner, or informal with a verbal thank you or email. Recognition of volunteers is an integral part of every volunteer program. Participants also noted:

... It's what everyone says in all the volunteer trainings ... that recognition, making sure that you're recognizing, reinforcement, and showing your appreciation. I think that is important for volunteer retention. Letting them know how valued they are in what they do, whether it's at the Library level, the advisory board level or beyond, or the individuals helping with programming. I would say the recognition and finding that good match is a win/win for both parties (Coordinator G).

People volunteer because they want to know what they are doing has an impact. And volunteers will not stay if they don't feel appreciated (Coordinator E).

We do an annual appreciation event. This is our big yearly formal event where we get to showcase our volunteers and invite the local community and volunteers and their families (Coordinator A).

### *Annual evaluation of volunteers*

An evaluation of volunteers, preferably annually, provides an opportunity to figure out what problems may have led to volunteers leaving the program. It may also serve as a kind of recognition:



They are evaluated at different locations, depending on where they're at. Again, some of them are less extensive evaluations than others, depending on the complexity of the position and also the duration of the volunteer, because sometimes volunteers are in and out for a short time. Others stay with us for a long long time (Coordinator L).

### *Meeting the volunteers' needs*

Volunteer coordinators reported challenges in matching volunteers with decision-making positions on advisory committees and community boards. Within the context of managing volunteers in the public sector, providing volunteers with these opportunities to sit on boards and making the match of volunteer to the right board or committee can be difficult for coordinators, who are trying to meet the needs of the volunteers as well as the city and organization.

Most of the requests we get for getting on boards are very specific. Volunteers want a specific board and some of these boards are already set in the numbers they want. I think the specificity of the request is the challenging part (Coordinator C).

The challenge is though I have many positions and requests for volunteers to serve on advisory boards, I have a hard time filling them. People want to serve on community boards and not on advisory boards. Don't ask me why but that's just how it is here (Coordinator S).

I think it has been a case of timing, believe it or not. We kept having very high turnover on advisory committees and we couldn't figure out why. We tried many other things including recruiting more and from various areas. The turnover continued. It was a chance encounter with a volunteer one day in the aisle of a local grocery store who in passing mentioned that they wish the hours of the advisory committee's meeting were different and a light bulb went off! It is still a challenge because we are trying to find a common ground for all: the volunteers, the department, and my office, so that it's a win-win for all (Coordinator F).

One participant related a story of a volunteer's experience that was not fulfilling the volunteer's needs:

I did want to share one story with you, too, that was kind of horrifying to me. I found someone through . . . She came in to start a once a week, 3 hours a week, job in the department, and their filing was really far behind. She sat there basically just fuming, while she worked on the filing, while she says that she watched the people (who were supposed to guiding her) idling on the internet and . . . chatting. She felt really used.

She called in when she couldn't come once. Then I think maybe another time before she said, "I have to be honest, you know. I just really wasn't doing great, because I watched them sit around while I was doing their work." When I shared that with the department, the boss of course was horrified, and then she said that she implemented a system where they (staff) took turns doing the filing, and now they're getting that done. That was another experience that I had that was unexpected (Coordinator J).

#### *Recognition of volunteers*

All participants cited recognition as a key aspect of successful volunteer programs:

Funding, getting the volunteers together, recognition that is of value to volunteers (Coordinator D).

We do an annual appreciation event. This is our big yearly formal event where we get to showcase our volunteers and invite the local community and volunteers and their families (Coordinator A).

#### *Volunteer Orientation*

The scope of orientation includes providing volunteers with the necessary information and tools needed to do well in their respective positions. This process requires informing volunteers of the expectations of the department and also allowing volunteers to voice what they expect from their position. Each orientation can be structured formally or informally. In this regards, informants noted that:

We do this with all our volunteers. It provides an opportunity to meet the volunteers, let them ask questions, put them at ease and listen to what they want to do. It's amazing because this is when you learn about what people really think about what the program is about or what we do (Coordinator D).

Orientation is very important to this program because this is when we get to tell our volunteers about what our mission is and what they will be doing once they start. Because we do this individually, it becomes very time consuming. I would love to start doing this in groups and handing them brochures, but because of budget, I don't think I will be able to do that (Coordinator T).

#### *Matching volunteers to positions that are a good fit*

In their national survey on charitable organizations, Hager and Brudney (2004) found that there were several factors that heighten the volunteer experiences. They noted that engaging the

volunteer, retention, and matching the volunteers to the right task were factors that enhanced the volunteer experience. Here, these factors are all under the volunteer management challenges because they describe the way coordinators can use vital volunteer management strategies to make volunteers feel and be an integral part of the organization. The data analysis found that all participants spoke about the challenges and importance of matching the right volunteer to the right position in one way or the other:

Citizens come to us with different requests about where and how they want to serve their community. Some requests are very specific and it makes it hard to place volunteers. . . . Now, we have to screen and make sure we send them the right individuals. (Who said?)

### *Retention of volunteers*

Creating a positive volunteer experience seems to be the central theme around which retention is organized. All of the organizations sampled varied in age and size, and their strategies to retention differed similarly. The life of a local government volunteer program is very volatile, as revealed by the analysis, with high volunteer turnover, funding crisis, and engagement issues seemingly the norm. All of these factors affect retention. Retention of volunteers was found to be a challenge for the volunteer coordinators:

Retention is always an issue, especially now. I have noticed that though people want to help, they do not want to commit long term to an organization. Now, don't get me wrong, we have had some volunteers who have been with us for decades, but the new volunteers these days do not want to tie themselves to any long-term commitment (Coordinator H).

I think the key to retaining volunteers is putting the right people in the right position (Coordinator Q).

### *Recruiting volunteers*

Recruitment is about selecting a volunteer to be part of the program through a specific process outlined by the department needing the volunteer. Recruitment can happen because the volunteer coordinators have a strategy for recruitment or because the program is so good by

reputation that volunteers bring in more volunteers. Forty percent of the respondents to the survey had indicated that they did not conduct any active recruitment; however, a vast majority during the interview has noted that they were very visible within the community. When asked about recruitment, one respondent noted that:

Recruiting the right number of volunteers is usually a challenge for us because we are a midsize city—maybe large city some would say—and our program has only two staff to fill all the needs. So recruiting can be a challenge for us (Coordinator K).

Although recruitment does not occur in a fluid manner with these volunteer programs, and most do not carry out specific recruitment strategies on purpose, volunteer coordinators are aware of, and seem to count on, their visibility within the community and volunteers seeking out the program.

#### *Volunteers sitting on community boards*

Some volunteers aspire to sit on community boards and receive satisfaction in having that opportunity. This theme, however, did not fit neatly into other categories, but it provides the coordinators an opportunity to engage with citizens:

Offering leadership opportunities for . . . making sure that to retain them we offer them opportunities where they are seen as leaders, where they have training . . . we have volunteers that run for city councils, and they participate in city affairs (Coordinator H).

There is an opportunity to serve on various community boards. These boards are very specific with their recruitment needs. . . . Lots of people want to get on a board (Coordinator I).

We pride ourselves in providing a vast array of opportunities for our citizens. We try to provide opportunities that show them how important their thoughts and ideas are to making our city vibrant. One of the best ways we have determined is through community boards (Coordinator K).

Communication between departments and the volunteer coordinators was mentioned by several participants as a challenge. Coordinator M further noted:

There are a couple different city departments that are housed at city hall. Then, there's the fire department, there's three fire stations, there's a police department, that kind of stuff. Then, really, it's a representative from each of those departments that works with the volunteers as well. Say, the police person, even when their volunteers are over there, are they keeping track of their volunteer's hours and entering them into the same database? Stuff like that, I've been working and trying to figure that out (Coordinator M). *Human Relations Management – Challenges*

The willingness of volunteers, which is expressed in their motivation to donate their time, is a sign of their involvement as citizens in their communities as well as the potential of their future contribution. Therefore, managing these volunteers in an efficient way is important not only from the human resource perspective but the wider perspective of citizen engagement. When done correctly, volunteer management should foster in volunteers the need to contribute to social changes in their communities. Based on the analysis, volunteer coordinators indicated that they were faced with challenges in managing the human relation needs of volunteers in local government. During the interviews, participants were probed to further clarify what these challenges were and what was facilitating the challenges. Participants noted that they struggled to provide recognition activities for volunteers. Participants noted that:

I am not sure whether it is high level or just a challenge. We don't have the money to accommodate all the volunteers we have. I understand each department thinks they have the best volunteers but we have no means of recognizing them all. The best we can do is have their names in our website since we do not have a newsletter like some other program (Coordinator B).

I think the challenge for us has been focusing on our attention on monetizing the contributions of our volunteers instead of really finding other ways to appreciate their efforts. It took me going to a training to see how I had tied recognition of the volunteers to our program budget. After that training, I realized the challenge will now be how creative I can be in coming up with ideas! The volunteers never told us we had to buy them something, yet here we are also lamenting our limited budget (Coordinator T).

Volunteer programs should highlight the importance of their program and should also provide recognition to their volunteers; however, coordinators seem constrained by their budgets and their assumption that volunteers are only interested in material recognition. Although public recognition sounds good, recognition can also be informal such as sending a thank you email to volunteers. Further, the literature on volunteer management suggests that recognition is tied to volunteer retention, but these programs do not have retention as a goal of their mission; rather, their goal is citizen engagement. Also all of the participants brought this up, indicating that they are aware of this as part of the best practices. As one participant indicated:

I can't separate recognition from retention. They should be talked about as a team; they just go together, and if either piece is missing then it's not going to work (Coordinator H).

Finding meaningful work for volunteers was considered a challenge for volunteer coordinators, and this could be tied to the fact that they do not provide evaluations of volunteers, especially when they leave the organization to understand their motives for leaving. When local government volunteer programs understand why people would want to give up their time, then they would train them and place them in positions that mean added value to the volunteer experience.

Communication or lack of seems to be the problem between the volunteer coordinators and the various departments. Sixty-five percent and 75% of the respondents in the survey indicated that they did not provide newsletters or annual evaluations respectively of their volunteers. They noted their challenges as:

There's an evaluation, but it's not feedback, necessarily, on their skills. The evaluation that I'm taking from volunteers is on the program, especially those that are exit surveys for anybody who decided to drop their volunteer role. I like to know how they felt about everything. I still feel as though I'm learning some of those things, how this was done in the past and how I'm tailoring it to my own program, in a way (Coordinator C).

I just don't have the resources to do a newsletter or an evaluation. If I have another staff or even volunteer, then I can concentrate on doing these (Coordinator F).

Participants were further probed on their challenges with engaging volunteers. Though 85% (of the 20 volunteers) indicated that they did provide the opportunity for volunteers to serve on community boards, a vast majority (90% of the 17) observed that they found it challenging.

Three participants observed:

I don't know if it's a challenge or that those opportunities do not come up than often and when they do we have too many applications than we have placements for. Sometimes we have many of these engagement activities but not many volunteers. On top of that, we only have so many community boards in the city. It becomes frustrating when people only send in an application for that particular position and you have to tell them none is available but can't get them to volunteer somewhere else in their city (Coordinator N).

Volunteers often want to serve on community boards because it they are concerned about something and by getting engaged and serving, they hope to make a difference. The problem is sometimes they want to serve a specific agency and there is no way I can guarantee that especially if that agency is not even in need of a volunteer. I can't place you where there is no need (Coordinator D).

Most of the time we actually work with other local nonprofits in the area who also have needs to have boards positions filled. These organizations are within our communities and we do post these positions online on our website. The challenge is sometime filling all those positions. We tend to have a unique problem in this regard. I tell colleagues at meetings that I can't fill community board's positions and they look at me... Most programs have many applications and few positions but for some reason, people in my city do not want to take advantage of these positions. At one time we thought, maybe it was the timing of the meetings but that was addressed. I really can't tell you why (Coordinator T).

From the analysis, volunteers seem to desire to volunteer for the community boards that would benefit them and not just the program. This can create a friction as observed by how frustrated and overwhelmed the volunteer coordinators responded to the probe. While some of the volunteer coordinators were challenged by the specificity of the volunteer position, another participant observed that:

...we have too many of these boards needing volunteers and we can't keep up with the demand. That's really the bottom line. I don't know how else to put it (Coordinator R).

The volunteer programs have a mission to engage citizens. As part of that mission, they provide engagement opportunities to volunteers. While the analysis indicated that only 25% provided volunteers the opportunity to collaborate on community projects (e.g. beautification, policing, citizen patrols, etc.), they all found this to be a challenge. Participants expressed strong challenges with this aspect of managing and providing engagement opportunities. They expressed these challenges as:

I just don't know how to go about it .... I have joined an online association and this association will supposedly have webinars on all kinds of trainings and we are also encouraged to share the kinds of trainings we want to see. We can post questions and see whether someone has done what you are looking for answers to (Coordinator R).

Many of our volunteers volunteer with other agencies and would like to get the members of those agencies with our program. We have been working really hard to figure out the best way to bring some of the projects they want to work on, and that would benefit our city on the table. The constraint is trying to get the volunteers to agree on which project to work on. I understand they came up with the project, but prioritizing we have found is a problem. My office end up doing too much work for an idea that was not ours to begin with (Coordinator H).

It's just getting all the volunteers together at the same time. We get calls that they want to collaborate on projects, we have a project that one group started which was great. They get together once a month, identify a home that needs sprucing up whether its paint, weeding or just basic yard maintenance. The group does that. We coordinate and take pictures for the website. That's our most successful group yet. I still have not been able to do that yet. There is interest, but I can't tell you how I coordinated that group – I could use the inspiration right now (Coordinator T).

Coordinator T further indicated:

We have wonderful citizens who come up with brilliant ideas. I find that sometimes it takes a while to find enough like-minded people to get the project off the ground. That's about the most challenging and I have to say a little heartbreaking because some of these ideas are just meant to help the community (Coordinator T).

Although volunteer coordinators believed that the programs were fulfilling its mission by providing engagement activities for volunteers they were also overwhelmed on how to provide these activities. Some felt that they lack the expertise and knowledge to provide the engagement



activities for volunteers. On the other hand, others felt that these activities were not a priority for the program because volunteers couldn't come up with one that would directly benefit the city.

Participants felt that though their program was well managed, there were still some challenges they encountered. When probed, they expressed the challenge they face in providing engagement activities. Of the 25% who found providing opportunities for volunteers to serve on advisory boards, 4 (20%) found it more challenging to actually provide such service. Participants expressed that the advisory boards sometimes are not very welcoming to volunteers. Some participant put it this way:

I can tell you this, both the volunteers and the committees have their requirement on who they want on their board and what type of board they want to serve... Well volunteers tend to want me to place them on these decision-making boards and sometimes though they are a good fit, the boards may not want volunteers who will be actively involved in the decision-making process but rather as observers (Coordinator D).

Yes, this has been a challenge for me and I had to reach out to other volunteer coordinators to see how they were managing this particular issue. I thought maybe it was unique to our city. I found out it was not. I think it has been a case of timing believe it or not. We kept having very high turnover on advisory committees and we couldn't figure out why. We tried many other things including recruiting more and from various areas. The turnover continued. It was a chance encounter with a volunteer one day in the aisle of a local grocery store who in passing mentioned that they wish the hours of the advisory committees meeting were different and a light bulb went off! (Coordinator O)

I don't think we have a challenge with providing the volunteers with these opportunities. The challenge is we can't seem to keep them on these advisory boards. The irony is that we are in a process of setting up an advisory board of volunteers to find out why (Coordinator D).

Yes, the challenge is that advisory boards want community members to give their inputs to make sure that decisions are weighed from many different perspectives. But, what happens is that expectations are not clear and we get calls from volunteers stating that they are not expected to make any decisions but rather be honorary members. I think the idea board resonates with volunteers as being part of a decision making board and that their voice should count for something. I get these calls, and I am not sure who to call. Do I call the agency and say "hey, let my volunteers speak" or should I just let them speak to the volunteers? It's challenge I tell you (Coordinator A).

The context in which these volunteers work makes it imperative for the city to show support, and the best way is usually to be present at events honoring volunteers. Though all the volunteer coordinators responded that they provided opportunities for volunteers to interact with public officials, 25% found it challenging to provide said opportunity. Most indicated that they did not go out of their way to seek out public officials because the programs tend to be isolated. As one participant observed:

It's only a challenge when we can't get one top official to attend some of our events to showcase the work we do for the city! (Coordinator E)

## Part 2: Bureaucratic Best Practices of Volunteer Management

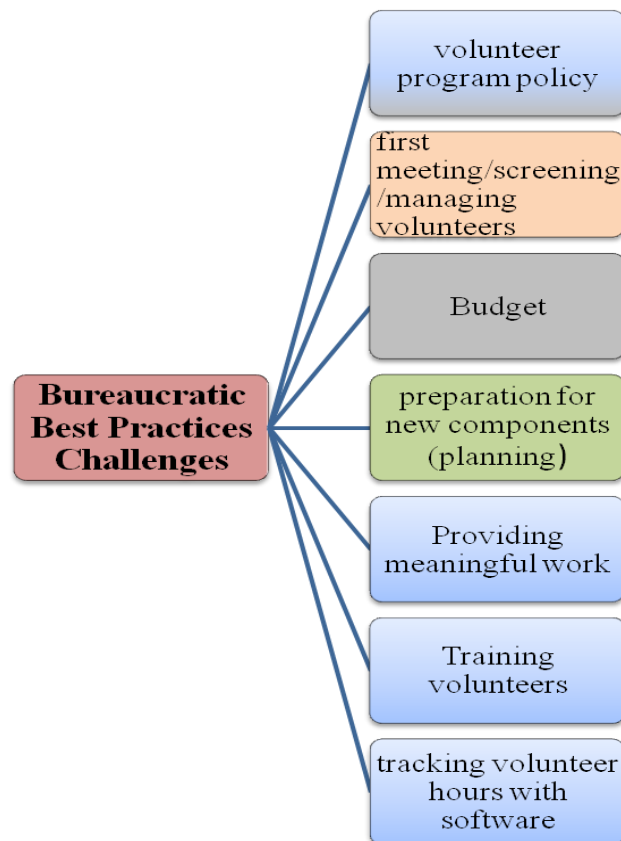
A cornerstone of a successful volunteer program has been structured around a set of management practices (Brudney, 1999; Hager & Brudney, 2004b; Silverberg, 2004). These practices are thought to be necessary for ensuring the retention of volunteers (Brudney, 1999; Cuskelly et al., 2006; Hager & Brudney, 2004b). Data analysis showed that participants spoke about aspects of their volunteer management programs that are considered to be best practices. Serving as volunteer coordinators within the public sector affects how these coordinators are able to apply best practices within the context of a city program. The volunteer coordinators' in-depth insights about these practices allowed for rich material to emerge during the interviews and showed these best practices as they are occurring in volunteer management programs.

These best practices include:

- Volunteer program policy
- First meeting /screening/managing volunteers
- Budget
- Preparation for new components (planning)

- Tracking volunteer hours with software
- Training volunteers

It is noteworthy that the same concepts and codes that appear frequently as challenges of volunteer program also appear in the category of bureaucratic best practices of volunteer management. Participants spoke often about these specific best practices of volunteer management, as they experienced them in the volunteer management programs that they lead. These are depicted in the figure below.



*Figure 3. Bureaucratic Best Practices Themes*

### *Volunteer program policy*

Volunteer program policy was identified in the volunteer program challenges as a key aspect that guided the actions of volunteer coordinators. Volunteer program management encompasses different human management strategies that volunteer coordinators use to effectively manage and show the effectiveness and impact of the program. The volunteer program policy helps to guide the volunteer program and answer blurry questions which may or may not have been made cleared to the volunteer coordinator upon being hired. In this study, respondents indicated that the volunteer policy serves as a guide and provided answers to questions that may arise. Informants noted:

I look at the policy as my guide. Whenever I am in doubt, I whip it out and look it over. For example, we had the opportunity to get some money from an organization in town. I was not sure about it, and I had to get this book out. Which was a good thing because it turned out, we couldn't accept it! (Coordinator C)

The volunteer program is written into the municipal volunteer guide, pages 18-20. That makes it very easy on us to justify the existence of the program. It is part of the city business plan. I think we are lucky that our program was actually written into the municipal plan, so we avoid the politics (Coordinator E).

### *Managing volunteers*

The process of selecting and introducing a volunteer into the volunteer program is an ongoing process for volunteer coordinators; for volunteers, however, this occurs only once for them. Volunteer management and building a relationship with volunteers is a dynamic presence between volunteers and the volunteer program, with volunteer management acting in tandem with building relationships. Here, the process of managing volunteers includes training, orientation, recruitment, recognizing volunteers and receiving support for the volunteer program.

Participants noted that because they work in a local government program, there are certain aspects of their volunteer programs that are different than if they were managing volunteers in a nonprofit setting. Participants noted that:

Well, I actually thought that with my over 15 years in managing volunteers in the nonprofit sector that it would be easy to translate the lessons learned from the nonprofit sector into the local government level, Boy, was I wrong! I couldn't translate the lessons learned from my previous position as a volunteer coordinator in the nonprofit sector. One challenge I had to overcome was the constant reporting, trying to always remember the rules, making sure I always report to the city what was spent, how, on what and so forth. I mean I had to be accountable in my previous capacity, but I had discretion (Coordinator I).

...daily management challenges including lack of a sufficient budget that would enable us carry out our duties effectively. If I am being honest here, budget is a big one for us we really can't do much for our volunteers when we don't have the budget to recognize them. Last year, for example, I had to use gift cards I had received from some city function I had attended – I handed these to our volunteers as a thank you for your service. Now, the volunteers didn't know this, but I did and it drove me crazy. I wrote to the mayor, still waiting to see if we will get more money (Coordinator P).

Volunteer management processes can relate to the challenges involved in managing volunteers and to whether and for how long volunteers are willing to stay within the volunteer program. Here, the data analysis indicated that training, tracking volunteer hours, communication between departments and volunteer coordinators, and the overall volunteer experience were all inclusive of the process of volunteer management challenges. One participant pointed out the importance of properly managing volunteers and of respecting that volunteers are a valuable resource to the program and to the city:

I don't think retention is an issue so much as proper management of volunteers. We do what we can but volunteers have such limited time that if you don't manage them right the first time, they are gone and that's a resource you don't want walking out the door (Coordinator I).

Along with managing volunteers, coordinators also spoke about the challenges of tracking and managing volunteer hours. Tracking volunteer hours was often cited as a challenge and one participant observed that:

A lot of this volunteer management for us is just capturing volunteer hours. There are so many people who are volunteering for us and even with a volunteer management system it still . . . getting a good, accurate number of hours. It's such a huge group, too, and a variety of different kinds of opportunities for people, which is kind of tough to manage (Coordinator M).

#### *Volunteer program's budget*

Speaking of resources, one participant discussed the volunteer program's budget and the issue of accountability to the public:

We do have a budget for the program, and like many volunteer programs in the public sector we struggle with the limited budget we have. It does cover our expenses and that's a good thing, considering we don't do any fundraising at all. As a public and government program, we are not allowed to seek funds from the public. We have to show accountability for the money they have already entrusted us with (Coordinator G).

#### *Preparation and planning for new programs*

Participants mentioned preparation and planning for new programs or components as one best practice their program follows. One participant noted a lesson learned when preparation was not adequately made:

Do not start a process when you are not ready for it! For example, we implemented our software when we were clearly not ready, and I tell you, I was overwhelmed (Coordinator D).

#### *Training volunteers*

Though training was provided to volunteers, not all volunteer coordinators provided this as part of the components of the volunteer program. Training of volunteers varies from one program to another. Some informants noted that:

Training isn't always offered to every volunteer. That's one thing I'm working on still getting my head wrapped around, because there's not necessarily one thing that would pertain to all volunteers, unless it's just education on the city. That's something I'm

hoping to provide in the near future, is just general information on the city but job-specific, it's more depending upon what the volunteer is volunteering for (Coordinator E).

On the other hand, another informant described the extensive training that participants receive:

Each position has different training depending on what . . . the training is more or less extensive depending on the nature of their volunteer work, because we do all types of volunteering. Everything from park clean-ups, working at the nature center as a guide, to working at the botanic gardens as a gardener. It depends on what position you're placed in, but yes every position does have some training but the extensiveness of the training is dependent on the position (Coordinator O).

#### *Tracking volunteer hours*

Good record-keeping is essential to volunteer management programs:

Tracking volunteer hours and meeting the various needs of the volunteers and the departments. Tracking the hours, I can show the impact of the volunteer program and citizens can see the impact of their work. People like knowing their hard work pays off (Coordinator J).

#### *Training volunteers for the right position*

Participants mentioned the importance of clarifying the position and then providing training to the volunteer, if needed:

Clarifying for volunteers what their roles are and describing the job for the position to the volunteers . . . It is important to develop job descriptions for every position that is advertised. That way, potential volunteers know what is expected of them before they start. This can help increase satisfaction and productivity allowing us to retain the volunteers (Coordinator F).

Matching the right people to the right department and ensuring that the volunteers are treated justly can be a challenge. . . . No matter what, an engaged and happy volunteer will want to keep coming back to experience that feeling of making a difference (Coordinator A).

Several participants indicated that they do not provide training for the volunteers, but that the departments where the volunteers will be volunteering are encouraged to do the training.

One participant explained:

Since we are a large city, we tend not to provide trainings for the volunteers. We find that it is not feasible and quite challenging to try to train all the volunteers from our department. We encourage the departments to train their volunteers. We do the basic during orientation by laying down the expectations and what the mission of the program is. I think most volunteers come in knowing what to expect (Coordinator A).

### *Best practices in volunteer management challenges*

Although respondents expressed that they were knowledgeable about the best practices, they also expressed a few challenges with using them as coordinators. First, participants were probed further on the challenges they expressed on providing training to volunteers, and then the challenges they faced in providing community engagement activities for volunteers. Specifically, they were questioned on why they found it more challenging to train volunteers and also to get volunteers involved on community boards.

From the analysis, most participants (80%) had indicated that they did not provide ongoing trainings for volunteers. This high percentage should not be surprising because volunteer coordinators would have to anticipate the training needs of each department in order to provide the trainings. Further, if volunteer coordinators are expected to train volunteers for each department, this would put undue strain on an already difficult schedule. I probed these volunteer coordinators further during the semi-structured interview to provide clarifications as to why these trainings were not offered and what was the reason behind it. These informants observed that:

I wish we really could provide the trainings, but the truth of the matter is we have so many placements that it would be near impossible to meet the training needs of all the volunteers and departments. And it is expensive! Don't get me wrong, some departments are short staffed and would ask us to do the training, I am just as short staffed as they are. The whole training issue becomes so where do you want to move the problem? Do you want to leave it with us or send it back to them? If we keep passing the buck and eventually two things happen, the volunteer gets tired of the back and forth and drops out which we never wanted in the first place because it looks bad. I try to avoid that at all cost (Coordinator K).

Training isn't always offered to every volunteer. That's one thing I'm working on still getting my head wrapped around, because there's not necessarily one thing that would



pertain to all volunteers, unless it's just education on the city. That's something I'm hoping to provide in the near future, is just general information on the city but job-specific, it's more depending upon what the volunteer is volunteering for (Coordinator M).

Though participants noted that they felt volunteers could benefit from more training, they lacked the time to conduct trainings for volunteers, felt overwhelmed, and the skills of the volunteers far outpaced theirs at times. They also felt that the lack of communication between the department and the volunteer program was constraining them and posed a challenge to how training was done and by whom. As observed by a participant:

I don't think we could train the volunteers that come in. They are so different and their skills vary as well. Besides, I doubt I have the right qualifications to be training these volunteers. I am a one-person team with a part-time person who works 15 hours a week. I will be overwhelmed if I had to take that on (Coordinator H).

People often volunteer as a means to develop skills, utilize their abilities, receive training, undergo instruction, be in touch with professionals and gain professional experience (Ryan et al, 2000). Often, volunteering provides a window of opportunity for realizing those aims that they have which may or may not be achieved in other environments. The data suggests that these coordinators feel like they do not have the professional expertise or time to offer training to volunteers who will not be in their office but somewhere else in the city. The above findings also suggest that training is cost and resource prohibitive to the volunteer coordinators and asking volunteers to give up extra time for training is not something that would go over well. However, the data also suggest that volunteer coordinators are willing to learn how to streamline training volunteers so that both the department and the volunteers gain from the experience.

From the viewpoint of the volunteer coordinators in the study, trainings are challenging because they eat into the limited resources that are available. Volunteer coordinators do not want to gather all volunteers for a training that would ultimately only fulfill the training needs of select

departments and volunteers; they believe that a more selective approach to training would be appropriate. However, they have yet to figure out how to do that. Training is essential to the volunteers and the program because it helps the volunteers efficiently perform their duties and allows the program to show that volunteers need some level of competency to work within the city.

When people are clear on what the expectations are, it makes it easier for them to perform the task. However, 30% of respondents noted that they had challenges in providing formal job descriptions to volunteers. Volunteer coordinators were asked during the semi-structured interview to provide more detail and clarity into what was facilitating this challenge.

The respondents observed that:

The challenge is about the time it takes to update all the various job descriptions and postings. They keep changing because departments have different needs. I am short staffed, and once we fall behind on those, it takes a while to catch up. So the website may have postings that are a few weeks old and when citizens call to volunteer for that position it is no longer available. This happens because we didn't have the time to update the website with new job postings and needs (Coordinator K).

Another informant noted that:

Every position that is requested, we craft a posting base on the requests from the department. These are then sent back to the department to edit and make changes. The challenge is the turnaround time. We get calls from the department asking us that they need someone urgently, but how can we send you anyone when we have not received the edited job posting and description from you? They the department that is, wants us to go by what they emailed us, but we have found that sometimes things get lost in translation (Coordinator Q).

As noted from the above, participants expressed their frustrations about being overwhelmed and under-staffed as well as getting the right information from city departments to craft job descriptions.

### *Political challenges*

When asked to describe the political challenges encountered in managing volunteers in local government, 17 of the 20 participants gave negative responses, stating that they encountered no political challenges or that they would prefer not to answer the question.

Three participants replied to the question with specific examples of political challenges, which included:

You might have some issues where agencies are competing for the same volunteers or vying for attention and funding from the same sources, but we haven't seen a ton of that.

Apart from some officials using the program as their personal PR, we have great support from everyone in the city. No challenges here. We have to abide by the rules like all city departments and operate within the letter of the law. That's about as political as we get! (Coordinator S)

Political? Well, maybe they may not promote it if they felt like citizens were dominating the advisory boards. (Coordinator E)

### *Strategies for volunteer retention*

Coordinators were also probed on the challenges of retention and to provide strategies for retention. When asked about the important strategies they employ in retaining volunteers, participants most often mentioned matching the volunteer to the right position [ $n = 8$ ], keeping volunteers happy [ $n = 7$ ], providing recognition for volunteers [ $n = 6$ ], providing volunteers with meaningful work [ $n = 4$ ], communication with volunteers and departments [ $n = 3$ ], engaging volunteers [ $n = 3$ ], and providing training for volunteers [ $n = 2$ ]. Additionally, tracking volunteers and volunteer hours, networking with other volunteer coordinators, meeting the needs of volunteers and departments, and visibility for the volunteer programs were each mentioned once as strategies that the volunteer coordinators use to retain volunteers. The common goal and theme among the participants' strategies for volunteer retention was to keep volunteers happy by

matching them to the right position and providing training for them, so that they can perform meaningful work that is appreciated and recognized. With these components in place, as well as good communication with volunteers and departments, volunteer coordinators hope to retain their volunteers.

### *Newsletter*

Some programs feature a newsletter written for volunteers:

Some departments might send out something like a newsletter to their core volunteers (Coordinator A).

We do not have a volunteer newsletter specifically for the overarching department. Certain areas or branches do, like the botanic gardens does reach out to their volunteers through newsletters, things like that, and I think the nature center does as well (Coordinator I).

### *Matching volunteers to the right position*

Participants mentioned recruiting, screening, and training new volunteers for positions that are well suited to them as vitally important:

One thing that will help to retain a volunteer is matching their skills and their interests to their volunteer position. If they find that they're doing mundane work and they don't enjoy it, they're not going to stick with the program (Coordinator O).

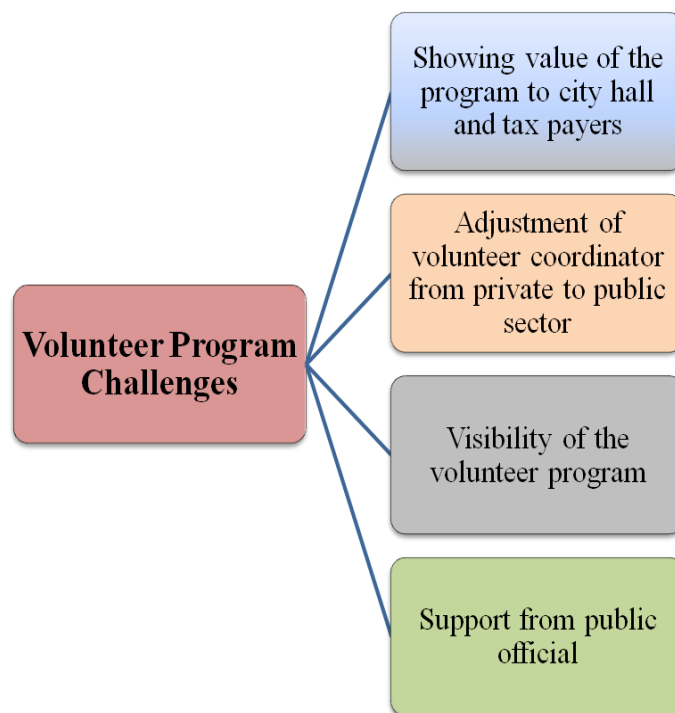
The key to retaining volunteers is putting the right people in the right position (Coordinator Q).

When you place the right person in the right position, then it can be awesome, but if you don't place the right person in the right position, then sometimes it's not a good experience for the organization or the person (Coordinator C).

## **Part 3: Volunteer Program Challenges**

In launching a stand-alone local government volunteer program, local governments must hire a volunteer coordinator to oversee the program and establish guidelines that are specific to the program. Because the authority for local governments to establish volunteer programs comes from the state (Ellis, 2006) and from local policy-making city councils, there is a need for them

to be accountable and transparent. Volunteer coordinators have responsibilities such as recruitment, screening, training, supervising, recordkeeping, and acknowledging the efforts of volunteers. Budgets may be used for building and managing effective programs, which includes the software that tracks volunteer hours. Sound autonomous management skills are needed to inspire, motivate, and retain volunteers. Salaries for volunteer coordinators are paid for by the cities that hire them. This city appropriation assumes that volunteer coordinators are held to certain standards of accountability and transparency as city employees. The challenges of the volunteer management programs therefore refers to practices that affect the functions and impact of the program such as visibility of the program, showing the impact of the program to the public as well as city officials, showing value of volunteers to taxpayers and to city hall, support from high-level officials, and communications between volunteer coordinators and department heads.



*Figure 4. Volunteer Program Components*

From the analysis, the data suggests that volunteer programs in local government are met with many challenges including, but not limited to, support from high-level officials and the city, showing value of volunteers to taxpayers and to city hall, visibility of program, the adjustment of volunteer coordinators to the public sector context, and showing the value of the volunteer affected the effectiveness of the program

### *Support from City*

In reference to challenges of the volunteer programs to access support from public officials, informants observed that:

High-level officials support the program because it is good for public relations, but very few of them actually know anything about the program (Coordinator S).

When providing recognition, we invite public officials and some do not even acknowledge our invite. It would be nice for my volunteers to see their public officials at these events so that they feel that what they do for the city has some value (Coordinator R).

Another informant had a different view of the supportive nature of the city officials:

We have a well-established program and the support from the city has just been tremendous. In this regards I wouldn't say we have any challenges with the city (Coordinator N).

### *Showing value of volunteers to taxpayers and city hall*

Several participants spoke about the importance of conveying the value of their volunteers to both taxpayers and the city officials. Again, the context in which the volunteering is taking place, within city programs, plays an important role and makes it crucial that volunteers' value is acknowledged.

We need to show taxpayers how much support they get from volunteers. . . . I would really like to show the taxpayers how much money volunteers are saving them. I would also like to show city hall how much we saved by spending the money to train volunteers to serve the city in a meaningful way (Coordinator S).

### *Visibility of volunteer program*

A good image is important to contributing to the recruitment process. The image portrayed can be developed through building good relationships with volunteers who then spread the organization's good image and recruitment process to others (Choudhury, 2010). The visibility of the volunteer programs was mentioned by many participants, who observed:

I know people know we exist . . . they come in to volunteer (Coordinator M).

I think we are very well known. When you visit the city's website, we are very visible (Coordinator Q).

Yes... the program needs more visibility. There is only so much you can ask from the program. Let me put it this way, you want the program to perform a miracle for the city, yet you want it to stay in the background (Coordinator L).

### *Managing the needs of volunteers and departments*

Participants often mentioned the importance of managing the needs both of the volunteers and the city departments that use the volunteers.

It is important to manage the unique nature of this relationship—making sure volunteers are happy and stay and making sure that the department gets the benefit of the volunteer labor and expertise (Coordinator G).

### *Volunteer Program challenges – challenges*

The 25% of the coordinators who indicated that they did not receive any support from public officials were probed further to reveal why this was such a challenge. The goal was to uncover their perspectives. One of the respondents who struggled to answer this question finally observed that:

I can't say we do and I can't say we don't. I mean, if we had problems, we can go to the mayor's office and request help, but it's not like they go out of their way to make sure we are doing ok. We get our budget and pretty much left alone until they need statistics to show at council meetings how well the program is doing and how much the program is saving the city. So, it's hard to say we don't get support, because I think there are other

department heads that really care about this program! I guess that's why I couldn't answer with an unequivocal yes (Coordinator A).

These coordinators know the importance of the management practices, yet they are overwhelmed and run the risk of losing volunteers in order to make sure all positions within the city departments are filled.

### *Limitations of volunteer programs*

This theme could not fit neatly into any of the categories, but it emerged throughout the interview process. Several participants noted the limited resources and staff and how this affects their ability to run their volunteer programs. Their work as volunteer coordinators in city government is important and multifaceted, and they are keenly aware of their limitations as city employees.

We have limited funding. We have limited resources (Coordinator D).

We used to have more staff, now it is just me and one part-timer. That's not enough considering the demand. That makes it a little challenging (Coordinator J).

We are a growing city and as we grow, one individual cannot handle the volume of requests that comes through the program (Coordinator D).

The challenge really is the lack of money. There is so much I want to do for these men, women, children (yes, children!), teens, and newcomers into our community who give of their time and knowledge but as a city employee I am limited to the budget. . . . There is only so much you can do. I have been able on occasion to use gifts that were given to the city. These would be sent down by the mayor's office. I get so excited when they come, I don't ask where they are from. They are usually not much, just gift cards worth a few dollars, but it's a few dollars more than what I had before (Coordinator A).

### *Comparing Long-Time Volunteer Coordinators with Newer Volunteer Coordinators*

Because 50% of the participants reported having between 2 and 7 years of volunteer coordinator experience and 50% reported having 8 or more years of experience in the field, I investigated whether these two groups of volunteer coordinators might report different experiences. However, data analysis revealed that the number of years of experience in volunteer



management did not result in different responses to the survey and interview questions. The participants who had more years of volunteer coordinator experience reported the same challenges, concerns, and successes as did those who had fewer years of experience.

### Summary

Colleen (2006) report annual volunteerism is declining and will continue to decline at an average of 20% per year. While the decline is a cause of concern for volunteer-involving organizations, it does raise some important points to reflect upon, especially for those managing volunteers. Are the bureaucratic management practices in local government volunteer programs a barrier to potential volunteers? Local government volunteer programs have as their mission engaging citizens, yet the volunteer management practices seem to be in direct conflict with this mission. The structure of the program and the context seems to justify potentially turning volunteers away because they do not fit into the needs of the program. While volunteering is often seen as a win-win for the volunteer and the organization, the analysis seems to indicate that the win scale is tipped towards the program.

After completing all of the data analysis processes, a general structural description emerged “that expresses the shared or general aspects of the phenomenon as experienced by all participants” (Hein & Austin, 2001, p. 8). This structural description will be further described in Chapter 5. Conclusions from this rich material will be discussed in Chapter 5, as well as recommendations for further research and guidance for those professionals who seek to improve volunteer management programs or other programs.

## CHAPTER 5

### ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This research focused on challenges in managing volunteers in local government from the perspectives of volunteer coordinators. Twenty volunteer coordinators in local government volunteer programs were surveyed and later questioned in a semi-structured telephone interview about what they believe to be the challenges in managing volunteers in local government and the strategies they have developed to engage, attract, manage, and retain local citizens as volunteers in local government. This chapter presents the discussion of the findings in relations to the research questions and theories presented in Chapter 2.

Four research questions were explored:

1. What are the managerial and political challenges in volunteer management and retention for local government volunteer coordinators?
2. What challenges are local governments' volunteer coordinators facing in using volunteer management practices?
3. What strategies are helpful in retaining volunteers in local government volunteerism?
4. What challenges do local government volunteer coordinators face in engaging citizens?

#### Discussion of the Study Survey Results

Data analyses from the survey questions were discovered and themes of the volunteer coordinators' lived experiences emerged from a qualitative analysis of the interview questions.

Four contextual factors were revealed from the data analysis of survey questions:

1. Participant demographic characteristics (shown in Table 3)

2. Local government volunteer management practices (shown in Table 4)
3. Community engagement opportunities provided by local governments (shown in Table 5)
4. Challenges associated with coordinating community engagement activities for volunteers (shown in Table 6)

#### *Summary of Participant Demographic Characteristics*

In the survey analysis portion of the study, most of the volunteer coordinator participants were female (80%), with substantial time on the job (70% with 5 years or more years of experience) (see Table 3). All participants possessed college degrees and the majority (75%) possessed special training or certification in the field of volunteer management. All participants lived and worked in a large region within the state of Texas. This suggests that most of the participants had substantial lived experience as volunteer coordinators within local government agencies and therefore could offer credible accounts of that experience.

#### *Local Government Volunteer-Management Practices and Implications for the Conceptual Model*

Local governments in this study where the study participants were employed appeared to offer moderate support for voluntary services. Although the majority of the 15 local government management-practices (9 or 60%) surveyed in this study provided support in the facilities where the volunteer coordinator study participants were employed, many (6) of the supported practices (9) that were provided at high levels appear to be legal requirements of the formal bureaucracy that were required for the protection of local government programs instead of practices that truly offered specific support to the volunteers. All of the participants noted that they were involved with formal recordkeeping, had written policies that govern the program. All interviewees agreed that they had written policies that guided their actions and would use these policies in times of

doubt. Coordinator C explained, “I look at the policy as my guide. Whenever I am in doubt, I whip it out and look it over.” In accordance with the nature of bureaucratic organizations posited by Weber (1947) the increased hierarchical atmosphere of the organization cause volunteer coordinators to work to make sure that the rules are followed. Seventy percent of respondents provided basic training of volunteers as well as formal job descriptions for volunteers. Further, 60% provided liability insurance coverage for volunteers. At the same time, all volunteer coordinators expressed that they had a budget for the volunteer program even if it was limited and hindered other activity such as recognizing volunteers.

Regular communication with volunteers is most commonly done in volunteer management (Hager & Brudney, 2004b); however, this research uncovered that communication between volunteer coordinators and department heads where volunteers work is an important volunteer management tool that was lacking. This was due in part to the structure of the volunteer program which was highly centralized and flawed because its placement in local government often hindered information. The interviewees felt that the flow of information was restricted and they yearned for better communication between them and department heads, especially as it related to training volunteers. Further, the management practices that were provided by less than a majority of the local governments where the volunteer coordinator study participants were employed (40%) appeared to be practices that would be costly or would involve substantial responsibility: ongoing or in-service training for volunteers, new volunteer orientation, reimbursement for work-related volunteer expenses, volunteers managing other volunteers, newsletter for volunteers, and annual or other evaluation of volunteers.

Bureaucratic organizations are often seen as ideal type organizations (Weber, 1947) and effective for management and obtaining specific objectives. Although organizations in this study

do not have an elaborate bureaucratic structure and protocols with boards and trustees, the context in which they work — local government — is highly bureaucratic by nature. Weber (1947) has indicated that bureaucracy is “the most rational known means of carrying out imperative control over human beings” (p. 337). However, in the case of volunteer management, human relations have to be taken into consideration.

While most of the volunteer management practices were in place to support the organization achieve its objective, just a small handful (3) of management practices appear to be specifically supportive of the volunteers: recognition activities for volunteers (95%), active outreach to recruit new volunteers (60%), received support from high-level officials, in this case department managers (75%). This is in contrast with human relations theory that is concerned with the development of volunteers in order to boost performance and productivity of the organization. The hierarchical structure has led organizations that are so structured to become impersonal to members and thus alienating its members (Baines, 2010; Woolford and Curran, 2011). What this means for local government volunteer programs is impersonalizing the volunteer experience that, in turn, leads to retention issues. As noted by Coordinator H, “Retention is always an issue, especially now. I have noticed that though people want to help, they do not want to commit...”

#### *Community Engagement Opportunities Provided by Local Governments*

Research tends to support the understanding that volunteers want to be reassured, in various ways, that they are essential to the organization (Yanay & Yanay, 2008). Yet, opportunities provided by local governments for citizens to engage with the broader community were very limited, also suggesting moderate support for volunteers (see Table 5). Although local governments provided engagement opportunities for volunteers to serve on community boards

(85%), those opportunities were very limited and there were long waiting lists; and although there were also opportunities for volunteers to interact with public officials, many of these opportunities were infrequently scheduled such as at once-a-year events. Similarly, although local governments provided opportunities for volunteers to collaborate on community projects (e.g. beautification, policing, citizen patrols, etc.), volunteers knew that those opportunities were extremely limited (75%); and although there were opportunities to serve on advisory committees, volunteers also knew that those opportunities were extremely limited. This kind of moderate support is suggestive that local governments did not prioritize community volunteer participation very highly.

#### *Challenges Associated with Coordinating Community Engagement Activities for Volunteers*

Challenges associated with coordinating community engagement activities for volunteers by volunteer coordinators were substantial for many of the activities (see Table 6). When the results of the survey shown in Table 5 are compared with the results shown in Table 6, there is congruence with the commentary described for each of the four activities. Volunteer coordinators procuring positions for volunteers on community boards was seen as quite challenging, with 75% reflecting on the fact that although the engagement opportunity existed, it was challenging to fulfill it. Similarly, volunteer coordinators procuring positions for volunteers on community projects was seen as challenging, as were procuring positions for volunteers on advisory boards. Procuring volunteer interaction with public officials was the only engagement activity not seen by volunteer coordinators as very challenging. This suggests that volunteer coordinators in these local governments were having a moderately difficult time not only coming up with engagement activities but also in providing enough of them. Engagement on community

boards and advisory boards and collaboration with peers could also be seen as much more desirable than simply having informal meetings with public officials.

### Discussion of the Study Interviews

Several themes of the volunteer coordinators' lived experiences emerged from the qualitative analysis of the interview questions under a three-part study structure:

Part 1: Human relations challenges

Part 2: Bureaucratic best practices of volunteer management

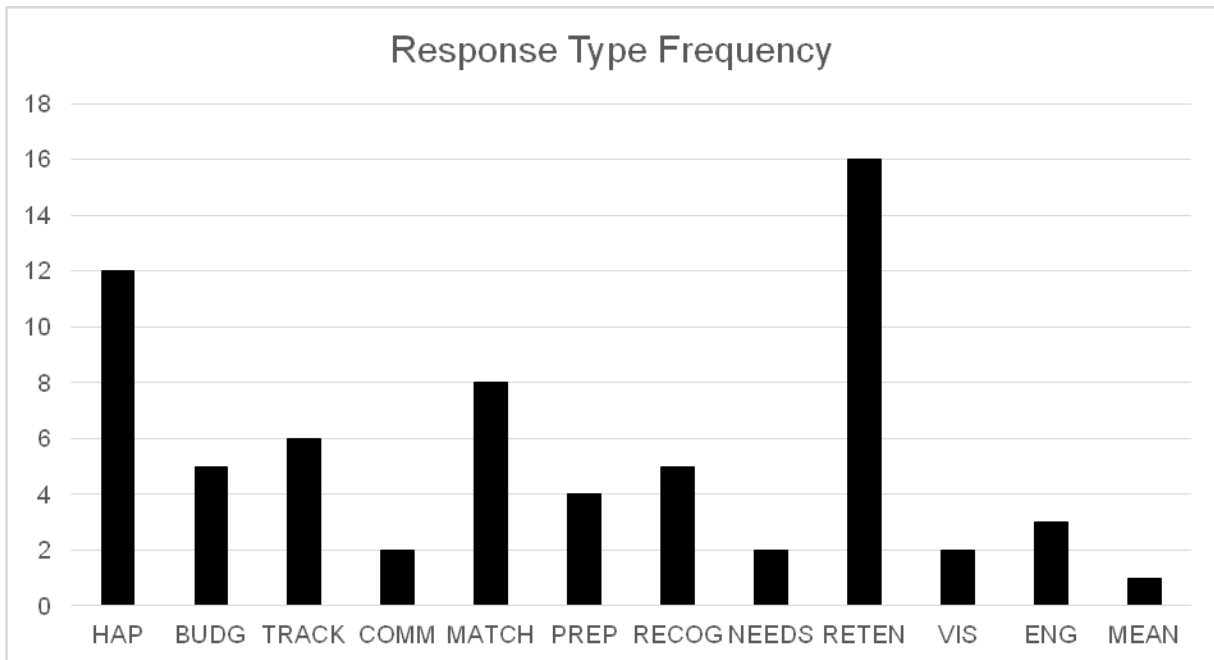
Part 3: Volunteer program challenges

The volunteer coordinator occupies a unique position in city government as a liaison between community volunteers and a bureaucratic government structured and organized by a charger, myriad of statutes, and department protocols and objectives. This position calls for recruitment, engagement, screening and vetting, orientation, matching with department opportunities, monitoring, tracking, recordkeeping, department visibility, recognition, retention, follow-up, and evaluation of all the volunteers that the local government places. In addition, the volunteer coordinator is responsible for meeting with department managers periodically to learn the needs and opportunities of various local government departments for volunteer services, disseminating information about volunteer availability and skills, and gathering and tracking data on the status of volunteer services. One way this job is made challenging is the difficulty of tracking the volunteers, especially in large local government organizations with many volunteers. Tracking is needed to keep up with job completion, volunteer availability, volunteer skill sets, requests for volunteers in different departments, and evaluation of volunteer performance. Computerized tracking systems exist, but many volunteer coordinators in this study did not have them.

### *Volunteer Program Challenges*

With such a wide array of challenges, nearly every volunteer coordination function had the potential for being considered a significant challenge, so summing up all functions was the challenge. However, because the most important management challenges are to be considered as the key components in line with the semi-structured interview questions, the array of the most frequently mentioned components in the interviews deserves attention. Figure 5 illustrates the frequency of responses given by the volunteer coordinators for various challenges of the volunteer management programs as a result of compiling the coding. They are what have been considered by the study group of volunteer coordinator participants as *the most important challenges of the volunteer management program*. Challenges that had single mentions by the study participants were not included in Figure 5. These frequencies were derived directly from the interview transcript responses. For example, the following statement made by Coordinator A was paraphrased to say, “Need software to track volunteer number and department assignments.” This was coded as TRACK. Statements by all 20 participants were paraphrased and coded in this manner and were then counted to obtain a frequency distribution. The sum of these codes = 55 responses (see Appendix G).





*Figure 5. Study Participants' Perception of the Most Challenging Components of Volunteer Management Programs in this Study. HAP - Volunteer happiness is key for attracting and retaining volunteers; BUDG – Limited budget and staff resources; TRACK – Tracking the number of volunteers, volunteer hours, and assigned departments; COMM – Communication between departments and with volunteers; MATCH – Matching volunteer skills/interests with the right position; PREP – Adequate preparation prior to implementing new software or programs is important for program success; RECOG – Recognition and appreciation of volunteer contributions is key for attracting and retaining volunteers; NEEDS – Matching department needs with available volunteers; RETEN – Attracting and retaining volunteers; and VIS – Program visibility among public officials and private citizens is important for program success; ENG – Engaging the volunteers enough ; and MEAN – Providing the volunteers with meaningful work.*

This selection and array of particular components of the volunteer management program suggests that those functions listed in Figure 3 are among *the most important challenges of the volunteer management program* and the most important theme of Part 3 of the study based upon frequency of response to interview questions.

#### Human Relations Challenges

The challenges thought to be the most important can also be seen at a glance in the frequency responses in Figure 5, which on the surface are: HAP – volunteer happiness, MATCH – matching volunteer skills/interests with the right positions and RETEN – attracting and

retaining volunteers. Viewed from a broader perspective, however, several of these related concepts could be combined to sum an even more substantial response. In particular, the most important concept that rises to the level of what could be the most important theme is *the challenge of finding meaningful work for volunteers*. Meaningful work is a concept that is closely related to the codes: Matching volunteer skills/interests with the right position (MATCH); volunteer happiness is key for attracting and retaining volunteers (HAP); attracting and retaining volunteers (RETEN); matching department needs with available volunteers (NEEDS); engaging the volunteers enough (ENG), and providing the volunteers with meaningful work (MEAN). This combination of matching volunteer skills/interests with the right position, volunteer happiness is key for attracting and retaining volunteers, attracting and retaining volunteers, matching department needs with available volunteers, engaging the volunteers enough, and providing the volunteers with meaningful work thus includes six of the 12 most important components and sums to a total frequency of 48 out of 66, or 72% of all the responses. In effect, the volunteer coordinator participants have collectively said that if the challenge of providing meaningful work by volunteer coordinators is met, all other things being equal, they will have fulfilled the most important challenge of their job. This suggests that *the challenge of finding meaningful work for volunteers* is the most important challenge and theme of Part 2 of the study.

Next in importance as a challenge to these volunteer coordinators is TRACK (6 – 9%) or tracking the number of volunteers and volunteer hours. This code is also closely related to COMM (2 – 3%) – communication between departments and with volunteers, PREP (4 – 6%) – adequate preparation prior to implementing new software or programs, and NEEDS (2 – 3%) – matching department needs with available volunteers. The larger idea here is that a volunteer

coordinator is first and foremost a liaison role. This is a position that requires *coordination between volunteers and local government managers* as previously described. Coordination between volunteers and local government managers requires TRACK, COMM, and PREP usually for tracking, and NEEDS, which come up routinely and can be changed or modified at a moment's notice. The sum of these codes is a total of 14 out of 66, or 21% of all the responses. This suggests that *coordination between volunteers and local government managers* is also one of the most important challenges and themes of Part 2 of the study.

#### *Bureaucratic Best Practices of Volunteer Management*

Nine out of the 12 codes presented in Figure 3 are listed as the most important of the best practices of volunteer management in their local public agencies, including the most frequently mentioned as the most important components: HAP (keeping volunteers happy), RETEN (retaining volunteers), MATCH (matching volunteers with the right job), RECOG (recognizing volunteers), TRACK (tracking volunteer hours), PREP (being prepared before introducing new practices), NEEDS (meeting the needs of volunteers), ENG (engaging volunteers), and MEAN (finding meaningful work for volunteers). Six on the list are the same six found to be most important challenges of human relations challenges in managing volunteers: MATCH (matching volunteers with the right job), HAP (keeping volunteers happy), RETEN (retaining volunteers), NEEDS (meeting the needs of volunteers), ENG (engaging volunteers), and MEAN (finding meaningful work for volunteers). Three of the four on the next most important challenges of volunteer management coordination between volunteers and local government are also on the list: TRACK (tracking volunteer hours), PREP (being prepared before introducing new practices), NEEDS (meeting the needs of volunteers). This suggests that what is on the best practices list is congruent with what is considered the most important challenges of the volunteer

coordinator. Put another way, this suggests that both *the challenge of finding meaningful work for volunteers* and *coordination between volunteers and local government managers* are considered the most important themes of Part 3 of the study.

Although not listed as the most important to the volunteer coordinators, many of the best practices described in the literature review — for example, by Brudney (1999), Cuskelly et al. (2006), and Hager and Brudney (2004a) — are being performed by the local government agencies that employ the volunteer coordinator study participants. These best practices include screening, recognition activities, liability insurance, training, written policies and data collection.

What was not being practiced in many of these local governments included professional development to volunteers, training paid staff to work with volunteers other than the volunteer coordinator, annual measurement of the impact of the volunteer programs, planning, and evaluation of volunteers. In addition, budgets were reported to be very limited for many things, such as reimbursement for expenses, newsletters, and community outreach, and training was quite limited to informal occurrences. If these programs were to be evaluated by the professionalization criteria of Fisher and Cole (1993), one might say that the programs operated by the local government's agencies in Texas were moderately professional, but had a ways to go before being considered professional. These results also suggest that what has been considered to be best practices for voluntary management in the literature review was not included as important priorities for these local governments. This is then also considered as one of the important themes of Part 3 of the study.

### *Study Results in Relation to Research Question One*

What are the managerial and political challenges in volunteer management and retention for local government volunteer coordinators?

Although there were many managerial challenges in volunteer management and retention for local government volunteer coordinators shown in Figure 5, two in particular stood out as study themes: 1) *the challenge of finding meaningful work for volunteers* and 2) *coordination between volunteers working in specific government departments and their local government managers*. These top the list of challenges and are a synthesis of a number of related challenges, described above.

Only 15% of the 20 volunteer coordinator study participants disclosed any political challenges. Even when probed further in the semi-structured interview there was an overall lack of enthusiasm to answer the question. The lack of response or refusal of the volunteer coordinators to disclose political challenges suggested that there were substantial challenges to disclosing this kind of information.

### *Study Results in Relation to Research Question Two*

What challenges are local governments' volunteer coordinators facing in using volunteer management practices?

Volunteer management practices that were not used or minimally used are suggested to be those posing the greatest challenges. There could have been many potential reasons for the non-use or minimal use of volunteer management practices, a number of which are known to be best practices in the literature. Paradoxically, the greatest management challenges identified by the researcher were not those that were minimally used or not used, but were those two themes

described as *the challenge of finding meaningful work for volunteers and coordination between volunteers working in specific government departments and their local government managers.*

#### *Study Results in Relation to Research Question Three*

What strategies are helpful in retaining volunteers in local government volunteerism?

The major themes identified in the study suggest that the two most important retention strategies are related to finding meaningful work for volunteers and improving coordination between volunteers *working in specific government departments* and their local government managers. Two strategies stood out in meeting those challenges: (a) matching volunteers to jobs to find a good job fit, and (b) engagement of the volunteers in the work they individually find meaningful. Matching depends upon good coordination and communication that requires an information tracking system up to the task. Engagement depends upon good screening to discover the interests, skills, experience, and capabilities of volunteers, attracting volunteers to the local government program, and outreach. Training and professional development could also enhance engagement. Limited budgets, management resistance, and politics possibly constrain spending on these elements that could enable volunteer coordinators to fulfill these actions. For example, spending to acquire software capable of tracking better could fulfill the objectives.

#### *Study Results in Relation to Research Question Four*

What challenges do local government volunteer coordinators face in engaging citizens?

Engaging citizens to volunteer or to spend more time volunteering were the two concepts that were explored in this study to address this question. Although some volunteers spend many years volunteering in local government positions, the majority of volunteers spend less than a year volunteering before they quit. This brevity of service is one of the major challenges that local government volunteer coordinators face in engaging citizens to volunteer.

Improving engagement as a challenge is seen as related to the two challenge themes found in the study: *the challenge of finding meaningful work for volunteers* and *coordination between volunteers working in specific government departments and their local government managers*, which have been discussed previously. Improving engagement has other dimensions that have been previously described, such as training to perform various types of work, development of volunteers through longer term training, and community outreach to increase citizen interest in the community services performed by local government for the benefit of the community. The challenge of engaging citizens has been met with financial as well as management barriers and behavior. Budgeting is, in part, a political process and few insights were made available in this study because participants would not answer questions about it. Management's reluctance to invest in training might be understandable given the short time many citizens remain in voluntary roles on average. Engagement can also be related to the kinds of jobs that are offered to volunteers. Jobs that do not hold the interest of volunteers can limit retention.

### Summary

By nearly all means of measurement employed in this study, support for volunteer programs by local governments in NCTR was seen by the lived experiences of volunteer coordinators as falling below expectations. Contrary to high expectations provided by local government officials, support for voluntary services was seen as moderate. Chief among the reasons given was relatively poor communications between department heads, where most volunteers spend their time working, and volunteer coordinators. Additionally, in mostly all potential management practices that involved monetary investment by local government, participation was lacking ongoing or in-service training for professional development,

orientation, reimbursement for work-related expenses, management, newsletter, annual evaluations, community engagement, and tracking software for department assignments. Only a handful of management practices appeared to support voluntary services: recognition, recruitment outreach, and senior management verbal support. Moreover, the two most important challenges facing volunteer management were the challenge of finding meaningful work for volunteers and improving coordination between departments to find the best fit between volunteers and engaging work to hold their interest. The challenge of finding meaningful work for volunteers and improving coordination between departments was viewed as the most important because it was not being accomplished and these were the primary determinants of retention. In the sixth and final chapter, the researcher provides two recommendations, implications for practice, theory and research, limitations, and conclusions.



## CHAPTER 6

### RECOMMENDATIONS, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

#### Recommendations

Although this was primarily a qualitative research study whose results by definition would normally not be able to be generalized, the results are so clear and unequivocal that two suggestions are offered without reservations as recommendations based upon the interview and survey results in Chapter 4 and findings and discussion in Chapter 5.

Recommendation 1. Local governments in NCTR could find it beneficial to revisit and rethink the cost-saving premises they may have made and relied upon that volunteer programs provide positive net cost savings benefits to the communities they serve, particularly in times of substantial economic challenges such as in the national recession of 2007-2008. Alternative premises could be to build a volunteer program that encourages and enables engaging in local government programs built on the idea of strengthening community relationships, contributing value to community resources and helping others, as well as seeking opportunities for personal growth such learning new skills, enriching personal experiences, and building personal and professional associations with others.

It is understandable why local governments would be attracted to the possibility of escalating volunteer programs during severe economic downturns, such as the impact of the 2007-2008 recession that the country continues to recover from 7-8 years later. In such times when local government revenues are likely to be declining relative to their fixed or rising operating costs, so-called free voluntary labor can be expected to increase in attractiveness as pressure to conserve operating capital progresses. Unfortunately, the premise that volunteer labor is free or even low cost is likely to be seriously flawed. Although this study did not establish

precisely what the expected comprehensive economic costs of such services could or would be, it did uncover through personal interviews and survey findings what categories of costs might be expected, including the following: recruitment, orientation, reimbursement, initial and ongoing in-service training, investment, coordination, newsletters, inter and intra-department management, communication, recognition, supervision, evaluation, insurance risk premiums, labor union friction, retention, record keeping, recognition, infrastructure, opportunity cost, incentives, motivation, turnover, good will, citizen dissatisfaction, disengagement and disappointment. In short, the sum of these initial investments and ongoing operating costs could represent nearly all, or more than all, of public employee costs over time. The data suggests that the premise based upon economic benefit to the local government is flawed in that voluntary turnover is high, coordination is substantially challenged, government investments have been substantially limited, recordkeeping and tracking are unsatisfactory, morale is low, citizen expectations have not been met, and most recommended best practices —such as ongoing training, recognition, and provision of interdepartmental support — have not been fulfilled.

Recommendation 2. If local governments in **NCTR** decide to continue their voluntary programs, they might consider limiting these programs to a size and scale that would enable them to provide a higher level of support and coordination than they have been providing in the recent past or are willing and able to offer in the future.

Volunteer programs are by their very nature more challenging than local governments in Texas may have recognized. The key concept is here voluntary. When programs are voluntary, they are by definition elevated to a higher level in which the volunteer has the privilege and prerogative of deciding how sustainable their participation will be. Voluntary means that organizations have no economic or legal hold on them other than to provide work that sustains

their interest, incorporating sufficient challenge and psychological benefits in return for their donated efforts and loyalty. To this point, the local governments in this study were not able to hold volunteers in their positions much longer than a year before the volunteers quit. This record speaks volumes by implication, reflecting how many of the job offerings may have been minimally engaging, underwhelming, and even boring — jobs not even paid workers were willing to do. This suggests that jobs were principally offering undesirable tasks. Additionally, these results suggest that expectations by local government volunteer coordinators may have been over-promised and under-delivered. Additionally, it could be that these local governments targeted an oversized volunteer program that they could not afford to support because their entire operating plan was flawed from the start. If this was the case, a more realistic approach might be to either limit the scale of the program to a more manageable scale or eliminate it entirely unless and until a strong commitment has been made to sustain the program in the long term.

Another way of looking at it is if local governments should decide to take on a voluntary program, they might consider initiating such a program during stable or rising economic periods when they can commit to a strong financial, systemic, administrative and political and mission support structure comparable to what non-profit organizations offer volunteers.

### Implications for Practice

The suggestion put forth in this study, as shown in Figure 5 in Chapter 5, that there could be different challenge weightings put on the various components of volunteer management programs has implications for practice. If this suggestion is confirmed by future studies, then there could be better and more intelligent use of limited local government resources directed at those challenges that have greater applications to other local government programs. Accordingly, if it is also confirmed by future research that improving engagement is seen as related to the two

challenge themes found in the study, *the challenge of finding meaningful work for volunteers* and *coordination between volunteers and local government managers*, then greater emphasis could be made by local governments to place a priority on refining the execution of these two components before all others.

Applying some of the conclusions from this research study, volunteer coordinators could explore the ways that volunteers define and experience “meaningful work.” In order to better understand the experiences of their volunteers, volunteer coordinators could investigate what individual volunteers experience as meaningful in their positions. Such an emphasis would be a way to highlight volunteers’ meaningful work. Department newsletters could feature stories and interviews with volunteers who find meaning in their volunteer work. Outreach to potential new volunteers could also emphasize the concept of meaningful work, and awards and recognition for volunteers could echo the emphasis on meaning. Additionally, volunteer coordinators who conduct exit interviews with volunteers who are leaving their volunteer position could ask the departing volunteers about their experiences of meaningful volunteer work. In these ways, volunteer coordinators could take the findings from this research and use them to better understand and engage their volunteers.

Beyond this, should these results be confirmed by future research, it would be valuable to take a fresh view of best practices that have been suggested by other researchers. It may be the case that some best practices are better than others or deserve earlier or greater attention and more resources as they pose greater challenges to local government volunteer coordinators.

## Implications for Theory

This study integrated two theoretical models — bureaucratic model and human relations model — to understand the challenges in managing and engaging volunteers in local government. The study responses suggest that one motivating factor — *altruism* — and two formal theories and their practices — *bureaucracy and human relations* — should be considered to be candidates to explain the lived experiences of the volunteer coordinator study participants in Texas. That is to say the study outcomes suggest that all three factors may play some role in motivating and explaining volunteer behavior to initially volunteer, continue to volunteer, and to withdraw from voluntary effort. How much of a role each factor plays was not the focus of this study, although frequency distributions were collected, analyzed, and presented in the Chapter 5. Rather, among the most important of study objectives in selecting to conduct a qualitative study was the intention to get below the surface to discover underlying motivations that may be escaping the view of alternative study approaches that do not allow for a depth of candor in response because of biasing factors or other barriers. In particular, the question of how to improve volunteer recruitment and retention in connection with existing management practices was put before a group of seasoned volunteer coordinators.

The study suggests that sometimes the best efforts of volunteer coordinators can be frustrated by bureaucratic structures and lack of support from public officials. Volunteer coordinators are guided in their work by policies from their council. On the other hand, the council is also constrained by pressure to respond to citizen concerns while being politically savvy and making advantageous choices. Bureaucratic structures are perhaps one of the most frustrating part of working in local government. Undertaking simple projects such as greening a local park could involve communicating with several departments, often with different policies,

permits, and opposition simply because of lack of a better communication channel between volunteer coordinators and other local government departments. Further, the bureaucratic structures found in local government have top down systems of communication with clear lines of responsibility and accountability. As the findings of this study show, communication between volunteer coordinators and other department managers is a challenge. The system may get the work done, but it impedes the work of the volunteer coordinators in how they decide to get volunteers involved in an organization. A problem that may arise is that volunteers may decide to get involved in another volunteer organization.

Volunteer contribution to public organizations is unique in that it is complementary to that of paid staff. As noted earlier in Chapter 1, volunteer programs and the involvement of volunteers in local government is often done to meet expanding needs and create meaningful engagement with citizens (ICMA, 2010). However, if these programs are to meet the goals of engaging citizens and expanding service delivery, then, the hierarchical structure has led organizations that are so structured to become impersonal to member and thus alienating its members (Baines, 2010; Woolford and Curran, 2011). What this means for local government volunteer programs is the impersonalization of the volunteer experience which in turn leads to retention and engagement issues. The local government context thus creates an environment for managing volunteers where numerical value is placed on volunteers, such as number of volunteer hours worked, instead of on cultivating relationships that would lead to retaining volunteers.

The findings cannot be generalized to the wider population of voluntary services provided to local governments because of the qualitative research approach taken; however, these findings are suggestive of the power of existing theory to predict future behavior. The study findings suggest that although altruism may play a vital role in accounting for the initial

recruitment of volunteers, bureaucratic theory and practice could be playing the stronger role in explaining the way volunteerism is structured and carried out. Additionally, human relations theory and practices may be playing the strongest role in manifesting voluntary retention and its counterpart — turnover. All three play a part in each phase of the volunteer experience within local government; however, altruism appears to have a different weighting in these three phases.

### Implications for Future Research

Additional research could be helpful to confirm the findings of this research and to carry it further, going beyond the limitations experienced in this study. Focusing on the human relations challenges of volunteer management, for example, could also be done in different regions of the country where there is more of a volunteer culture and more people volunteer. The findings of this research indicate that retention of volunteers as well as finding meaningful work is a challenge for local government volunteer coordinators (See Figure 5). Although volunteerism for the entire U.S. has declined since the U.S. recession of 2007, the ranking for Texas dropped more relative to 11 other states from a ranking of 34<sup>th</sup> to 43<sup>rd</sup> of 51 states. It is also notable that Texas ranked 47<sup>th</sup> of 51 states in what was termed a “Civic Life Index” which is a composite score of 12 indicators of civic engagement (Volunteering in America, 2007). This decline has important implication for volunteer retention if local government programs are to compete for a limited pool of volunteers compounded by other challenges they face. Thus, it would be valuable to know if the same results that were produced in this study also happened in other states where volunteer participation rates have been higher. Research might also be done in different regions of the country where volunteerism has been in greater use for longer periods of history to see if there are different challenge components. Research might also be done where there have been different economic and political priorities placed upon the communities in which

local governments utilize volunteers. Research could also be done to discover why general volunteerism for all purposes appears to be so low relative to other parts of the U.S., why volunteerism has declined so precipitously in the past 8 years since 2007, and why Texas ranks below most all other states in volunteerism for civic projects, functions and organizations.

Future research could focus on these two critically important components: *finding meaningful work for volunteers to do* and *coordination between volunteers working in specific government departments* and their *local government managers*. Qualitative interviews consisting of open-ended questions could be the foundation of the data collection process, and researchers could interview not only volunteer coordinators, but also the volunteers and the local government department managers, as they seek to learn more about the coordinators', volunteers', and managers' lived experiences. Local government department managers might identify different viewpoints that volunteer coordinators did not see and correct the challenges.

#### Limitations

This study was limited by a number of factors that ultimately could have had an effect on the outcome. Telephone interviewing was decided upon because of the logistical challenges of traveling long distances to cities that are spaced widely apart in Texas. Face-to-face interviewing may have improved the communication process and enabled the researcher to gain more insights. Some of the issues, such as the concept of challenges or engagement, were intentionally not defined precisely so that they could be open ended in nature. Unfortunately, posing questions this way resulted in responses that were fragmented by the many different interpretations that could be made. Perhaps in the future, the concepts of challenges and engagement could have been more tightly defined to limit some of the wide variation that resulted.



## Conclusions

This qualitative “lived experience” study outcome has suggested that there are some challenges of volunteer management — difficulties requiring special effort — that appear to be greater than others. In particular, it has been suggested by this research that *the challenge of finding meaningful work for volunteers* and the *coordination between volunteers working in specific government departments* and their *local government managers* are the most important challenges for local government volunteer coordinators in Texas above all others. Should this suggestion later be confirmed by further research, it would imply that best practices that have been portrayed in the voluntary management literature as having equal weight should be modified and prioritized to weight greater challenges with more emphasis so that local governments’ actions implementing best practices can be more targeted, cost effective, and produce greater benefits.

APPENDIX A  
VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Volunteer Management Theme	Best Practices
<b>Planning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Provide role or job descriptions for individual volunteer</li> <li>b. Maintain a database of volunteers' skills, qualifications and experience.</li> <li>c. Record keeping of volunteer service hours</li> </ul>
<b>Recruitment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Match the skills, experience and interests of volunteers to specific roles.</li> <li>b. Fill key volunteer positions by matching position to volunteer skills.</li> <li>c. Actively recruit volunteers from diverse backgrounds (e.g., minority ethnic groups, people with disabilities)</li> </ul>
<b>Screening</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Verify the accreditation of all volunteers.</li> <li>b. Conduct suitability checks of volunteers (e.g., child protection).</li> </ul>
<b>Orientation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Introduce new volunteers to people with whom they will work with.</li> <li>b. Conduct orientation sessions for specific groups of volunteers (e.g., committee members).</li> <li>c. Organize orientation meetings for new or continuing volunteers.</li> </ul>
<b>Training and Support</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Provide support to volunteers in their roles (e.g., assist with the resolution of conflicts).</li> <li>b. Assist volunteers to access training outside the program.</li> <li>c. Reimburse volunteers for "out of pocket" expenses</li> </ul>
<b>Recognition</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Evaluate the performance of volunteers</li> </ul>
<b>Performance Management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Recognize outstanding work or task performances of individual volunteers</li> </ul>

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Adopted from Hager and Brudney,

APPENDIX B  
RECRUITMENT EMAIL

**Dear Respondent:**

My name is Amina Sillah, a PhD candidate in the Department of Public Administration at the University of North Texas (UNT). I am conducting a research entitled " **EXPLORING VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR: WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES IN MANAGING VOLUNTEERS IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT?**" The purpose of this study is to provide answers to research questions pertaining to managerial and political challenges involved in managing local government volunteers and challenges involve in engaging citizens as volunteers. Strategies for retention in volunteer programs in local government will also be investigated. It is hoped that the information gained will be useful for local government volunteer managers to improve practices. It is hoped that through this examination retention rates can improve and theory related to it can be strengthened.

Your participation as a volunteer coordinator is important for this research because it will help us better understand volunteer management practices and strategies for volunteer retention. We hope that the findings of the study can be used to help us better understand and improve volunteer retention in local government volunteer programs.

I highly value your inputs to help us better understand how to improve volunteer retention in local government volunteer programs and would like to invite you to participate in this study. Your participation requires that you participate in a 20 minute survey followed by a 30 minute phone interview. If you have any questions about the study, please contact Amina Sillah at [aminatasillah@my.unt.edu](mailto:aminatasillah@my.unt.edu), or 214-994-0845. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you for your help and again, I hope that you will choose to participate in this short survey. Your remarks are important to this research

Sincerely,

Amina Sillah  
University of North Texas  
Department of Public Administration  
Chilton Hall, 242  
[aminatasillah@my.unt.edu](mailto:aminatasillah@my.unt.edu)

## APPENDIX C

### SURVEY

You have been selected to participate with a research at the University of North Texas entitled “Public Sector Volunteer Management Challenges” This survey is being used for research purposes in order to learn more about the challenges in managing and retaining volunteers in local government volunteer programs. The survey should take no longer than 20 minutes to complete. Please note that responses to the survey will be anonymous and only aggregated responses will be used for analysis. If you have any questions about the study, you may contact Amina Sillah, at aminatasillah@my.unt.edu. Thank you for your time and assistance.

**Please begin the survey by indicating your consent below.**

I consent

I do not consent

**The following are demographic questions about you. Please fill in the blanks or check the appropriate items.**

1. How long have you been managing volunteers?
  - ☐ 12 months or less
  - ☐ 2-4 years
  - ☐ 5-7 years
  - ☐ 8-10 years
  - ☐ 10 years or more
2. How long have you held your current position? (years)  
  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. How would you describe your current employment situation?
  - ☐ Paid - Part-Time
  - ☐ Paid- Full-Time
  - ☐ Volunteer –uncompensated
  - ☐ Volunteer – stipend
4. Which of the following best describes the **highest level of education** you have completed?
  - ☐ Bachelors Degree (major field\_\_\_\_\_)
  - ☐ Masters Degree (major field, i.e., MBA\_\_\_\_\_)
  - ☐
  - ☐ PhD (major field\_\_\_\_\_)
  - ☐ Other (\_\_\_\_\_)
5. Have you received training or education in volunteer management for which you have a certificate or academic degree?
  - ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No
6. Are you Male or Female?
  - ☐ Male
  - ☐ Female

***Below are set of questions related to volunteer retention in your program***

**How do you track the number of volunteers in your program?**

7. How many volunteers did you have in calendar year 2014?  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. Of those volunteering over calendar year 2014, how many are still volunteering with your organization?  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. On average, how long (months) do volunteer stay with your organization?  
\_\_\_\_\_

### **Volunteer Management Practices**

**The questions in this section are related to volunteer management. Please use the scale provided to answer these questions. In managing volunteers, does your organization offer the following practice? What levels of challenges are associated with the practices that you use (high/low). Please explain any challenges that you frequently encounter\_\_\_\_\_**

10. Recognition Activities for Volunteers
- ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No

Level of Challenges if any (high/low) please explain \_\_\_\_\_

11. Formal Record-Keeping on Volunteers
- ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No
12. Basic Trainings for Volunteers
- ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No

Level of Challenges if any (high/low) please explain \_\_\_\_\_

13. Written Policies Governing the Volunteer Program
- ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No

Level of Challenges if any (high/low) please explain \_\_\_\_\_

14. Active Outreach to Recruit New Volunteers
- ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No

Level of Challenges if any (high/low) please explain \_\_\_\_\_

15. Support from High-Level Officials (departmental managers, city elected officials) for the Volunteer Program
- ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No

Level of Challenges if any (high/low) please explain \_\_\_\_\_



16. Formal Job/Position Descriptions for Volunteers

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Level of Challenges if any (high/low) please explain \_\_\_\_\_

17. Ongoing or In-Service Training for Volunteers

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Level of Challenges if any (high/low) please explain \_\_\_\_\_

18. Liability Insurance Coverage for Volunteers

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Level of Challenges if any (high/low) please explain \_\_\_\_\_

19. Orientation for New Volunteers

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Level of Challenges if any (high/low) please explain \_\_\_\_\_

20. Training for Employees Who Work with Volunteers

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Level of Challenges if any (high/low) please explain \_\_\_\_\_

21. Reimbursement for Work-Related Expenses of Volunteers

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Level of Challenges if any (high/low) please explain \_\_\_\_\_

22. Budget for the Volunteer Program

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Level of Challenges if any (high/low) please explain \_\_\_\_\_

23. Volunteers with Responsibility for Managing Other Volunteers

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Level of Challenges if any (high/low) please explain \_\_\_\_\_

24. Newsletter for Volunteers

- ☐ Yes

- No

Level of Challenges if any (high/low) please explain \_\_\_\_\_

25. Annual or Other Evaluation of Volunteers

- Yes
- No

Level of Challenges if any (high/low) please explain \_\_\_\_\_

### **Citizen Engagement**

**Part of the mission of your organization is to engage citizens in the affairs of the city. The questions in this section relates to citizen engagement. In managing volunteers, do you engage them in city affairs by offering...?**

26. Opportunities to serve on community boards

- Yes
- No

27. Collaborate with other volunteers (peers) on community projects (i.e., grass roots efforts, Keep City X beautiful, community policing projects, citizen patrols, policy study circles, etc.)

- Yes
- No

28. Decision making (Advisory Committees)

- Yes
- No

29. Interaction with public officials

- Yes
- No

### **Citizen Engagement Challenges**

**For the citizen engagement activities that you indicated you offer, please indicate your level of challenge in using them.**

30. Serve on community boards

- High
- Low

31. Collaborate with peers (informal relationships that lead to grass roots efforts, community policing, citizen patrol, etc.)

- High
- Low

32. Decision making (Advisory Committees)

- High
- Low

33. Interaction with public officials

- High
- Low

APPENDIX D

QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND QUESTIONS

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

City/County Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Personnel Interviewed and Designation: \_\_\_\_\_

Time of interview: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Interview Guide**

**Introduction Script:** The goal of this study is to learn about volunteer management challenges. You have been selected for participation in this study based on your experience for managing volunteers. Your participation is voluntary; you can let me know if you want to stop participating anytime; your name and your county/city's name will not be used in the study. Your interview is going to be digitally recorded for purposes of accuracy and these will be coded for security and confidentiality. Please let me know if you have any questions before we begin our conversation. I would like to begin by asking questions related to volunteer management.

#### ***Volunteer Management Practices***

***The following questions deal with challenges and possible solutions with regard to volunteerism in local government and more specifically within your organization. I would like to now ask you some questions about volunteer management at your organization.***

1. Have you been educated that what were shown on the survey are practices for volunteer management?
2. If so, where did you receive this education?

#### **Probe**

If not, you may still be using practices that fall into this list and include others not listed that you use

#### ***Best Practices of Volunteer Management Challenges***

I am very interested ***in better understanding volunteer management practices. You indicated in the survey that your organization offer these practices. In using these volunteer management practices.....***

3. Describe to me the managerial challenges you face in managing volunteers in local government.
4. Of these challenges you described, what are the two most challenging?
5. Can you describe the political challenges you encounter in managing volunteers in local government?
6. Are there other challenges apart from managerial and political that you wish to share?
7. Is volunteer retention an issue in your organization?

#### **Probe Questions**

- Why do you think volunteer retention is an issue in your organization?
- As a result of your experiences, what do you think are the two most important strategies in retaining volunteers?

#### ***Questions linked back to survey***

8. You indicated that you offer the following volunteer management practices (which will be listed back to them) and had high challenges in using them. What is facilitating the high challenge?
9. You indicated that you offer the following best practices (which will be listed back to them) and had low challenges in using them. What is facilitating the low challenge?

### ***Citizen Engagement Challenges***

I am interested in understanding citizen engagement in local government volunteer programs. I would like to ask you about citizen engagement.

10. In your estimate, how is your organization regarded in the community?
11. As a result of your experiences, what are the three most important challenges you have in engaging citizens?

### ***Linked to survey***

12. Regarding the engagement activities you offer volunteers (read back to them) and which you indicated you had high level of challenges in implementing, what is facilitating the high challenge?
13. Regarding the engagement activities you offer volunteers (read back to them) and which you indicated you had low level of challenges in implementing, what is facilitating the low challenge?

### **Probe Questions**

- Is engaging citizens an issue at your organization?
- Why do you think engaging citizens is an issue?
- Are there other engagement activities you offer that are not listed?

## APPENDIX E

### CODES

ADJ	Adjustment of volunteer coordinator from private to public sector
AWARDS	Awards/recognition for volunteers
BDS	Sitting on community boards
BUDG	Budget
CHG	Making changes in the program: a risk
COMM	Communication between departments of the city and volunteer program
DOC	Document/policies can be challenging to update
ENG	Engaging the volunteers enough
EVAL	Hard to provide annual evaluation of volunteers
FIRST	First meeting/orientation
HAP	Happy volunteers, rewarding, right fit
LIM	Limited funding, resources
MAN	Volunteer guide or policy
MATCH	Match the right job to the right volunteer/good fit
MEAN	Providing volunteers with meaningful work
MGMT	Managing volunteers (one-time vs. ongoing), managing the system or lack of system
NEEDS	Needs of volunteer/needs of departments, managing their needs
NET	Network, talk to others in industry about their volunteer programs and yours
NEWS	Newsletter
ONE	One person running the volunteer program alone, overwhelmed
OUT	Outreach to volunteers
PREP	Preparation: don't start a new process until you're ready
RECOG	Recognition of volunteers
RETEN	Retention of volunteers; strategies for retention; challenges
SUPP	Support from high-level officials, city
TRACK	Tracking volunteer hours with software, or lack of software to track hours
TRNG	Training volunteers: challenging
VALUE	Showing value of volunteers to taxpayers and to city hall
VIS	Visibility of program

## APPENDIX F

### CODED PARTICIPANT RESPONSES TO CHALLENGES QUESTIONS



Coordinator	Description	Code
1	Need software to track volunteer numbers and dept. assignments	TRACK
	Communication bw dept. is lacking	COMM
	Visibility showing taxpayers and city effects of volunteer contributions	VALUE
	Volunteer numbers reflect citizen engagement	HAP
	Engaging citizens requires more visibility, and keeping volunteers happy	VIS
	No political challenges	-
	Low numbers of volunteers	ENG
2	High numbers of volunteers	ENG
	Tracking volunteer hours, meeting the various needs of the volunteers and the depts.	TRACK
	Matching dept. needs to volunteer skills	MATCH
	Retention is a problem. Many do not commit long term.	RETEN
	Happy volunteers are important for retention	HAP
	Preparedness, re: implementing programs/software	PREP
	No political challenges	-
3	Visibility-showing taxpayers and city effects of volunteer contributions	VIS
	Retention is a problem, many don't commit long term	RETEN
	Need software to track volunteer numbers and dept. assignments	TRACK
	Tracking one-time vs. ongoing volunteers difficult	TRACK
	No political challenges	-
	Haven't thought about retention as a goal	RETEN
	Citizen engagement needs funding, resources management and organization	BUDG
4	Poor communication w/ volunteers training, questions indicate no training, confusion	COMM
	Demand for jobs is greater than staff resources to organize volunteers	RETEN
	Retention is a problem, many don't commit long term	RETEN
	Retaining volunteers means recognizing and appreciated their value	RECOG
5	Staff treatment and appreciation of volunteers is a managerial challenge	RECOG
	Tracking volunteer hours and meeting the various needs of the volunteers and the depts.	TRACK
	Retention means matching skills/interests to position and communicating appreciation	MATCH
	Retention is a problem, many don't commit long term	RETEN
	Volunteer number reflect citizen engagement	ENG
6	Tracking volunteer hours and the various needs of the volunteers and the depts.	TRACK
	Challenge of placing right person I the right position	MATCH
	Key to retention is right placement, proper training, recognition	TRNG
7	Capacity building, finding anc. Creating positions for volunteers is a challenge	RETEN
	Challenge of placing right person in right position	MATCH
	Retention means giving leadership opportunities	RETEN
	Happy volunteers important for retention	HAP
	Retention not an issue, lots of long-term volunteers	RETEN
8	Challenge is attracting volunteers	RETEN
	Happy volunteers important for retention	HAP
	Preparedness, re: implementing programs/software	PREP

Participant	Description	Code
9	Challenge is attracting volunteers	RETEN
10	Budget is a challenge especially w/ volunteer recognition	BUDG
	Retention means giving opportunities to make an impact	RETEN
11	Budget is a challenge especially w/ volunteer recognition	BUDG
	Retention means giving opportunities to make an impact	HAP
12	Matching dept. needs to volunteer skills	NEEDS
	Challenge of placing right person in right position	MATCH
	Happy volunteers important for retention	HAP
	Retention means volunteer recognition	RECOG
13	Challenge is attracting volunteers	RETEN
	Retention is a problem, many do not commit long term	RETEN
	Matching dept. needs to volunteer skills	NEEDS
14	Happy volunteers important for retention	HAP
15	Challenge is attracting volunteers	RETEN
	Happy volunteers important for retention	HAP
16	Challenge of placing right person in right position	MATCH
	Happy volunteers important for retention	HAP
	Preparedness, re: job descriptions	PREP
17	Happy volunteers important for retention	HAP
	Challenge of placing right person in right position	MATCH
	Challenge is attracting volunteers	RETEN
18	Limited budget/resources	BUDG
	Challenge is attracting volunteers	RETEN
	Challenge of placing right person in right position	MATCH
19	Retention means volunteer recognition	RECOG
20	Retention means volunteer recognition	RECOG
	Happy volunteers important for retention	HAP
	Meaningful work for volunteers	MEAN
	Preparedness, re: job descriptions	PREP

## APPENDIX G

### APPROVED IRB



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THE OFFICE OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND COMPLIANCE

July 2, 2015

Supervising Investigator: Dr. Lisa Dicke  
Student Investigator: Amina Sillah  
Department of Public Administration and Management  
University of North Texas

Re: Human Subjects Application No. 15256

Dear Dr. Dicke:

As permitted by federal law and regulations governing the use of human subjects in research projects (45 CFR 46), the UNT Institutional Review Board has reviewed your proposed project titled "Public Sector Volunteer Management Challenges." The risks inherent in this research are minimal, and the potential benefits to the subject outweigh those risks. The submitted protocol is hereby approved for the use of human subjects in this study. **Federal Policy 45 CFR 46.109(e) stipulates that IRB approval is for one year only, July 2, 2015 to July 1, 2016.**

Enclosed is the consent document with stamped IRB approval. Please copy and **use this form only** for your study subjects.

It is your responsibility according to U.S. Department of Health and Human Services regulations to submit annual and terminal progress reports to the IRB for this project. The IRB must also review this project prior to any modifications. **If continuing review is not granted before July 1, 2016, IRB approval of this research expires on that date.**

Please contact Shelia Bourns, Research Compliance Analyst at extension 4643 if you wish to make changes or need additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "CT", followed by a long horizontal line.

Chad R. Trulson, Ph.D.  
Professor  
Department of Criminal Justice  
Chair, Institutional Review Board

CT/sb

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS®

1155 Union Circle #310979 Denton, Texas 76203-5017  
940.369.4643 940.369.7486 fax [www.research.unt.edu](http://www.research.unt.edu)

PROUDLY USING ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE PAPER

University of North Texas Institutional Review Board

Informed Consent Form

Before agreeing to participate in this research study, it is important that you read and understand the following explanation of the purpose, benefits and risks of the study and how it will be conducted.

**Title of Study:** *Public Sector Volunteer Management Challenges*

**Supervising Investigator:** Dr. Lisa Dicke (Professor), University of North Texas. The Department of Public Administration and Management.

**Student Investigator:** Amina Sillah (PhD. Candidate), University of North Texas. The Department of Public Administration and Management.

**Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of the study is to try to provide answers to research questions pertaining to challenges involved in managing local government volunteers and challenges involved in engaging citizens as volunteers. The strategies for retention in volunteer programs in local government will also be investigated. It is hoped that the information gained will be useful for local government volunteer managers in to improve practices.

**Study Procedures:** If you agree to the study, you will be asked to take part in an online survey that will last approximately 20 minutes and a telephone interview that will last approximately 30 minutes. A link to the survey will be provided to you via email should you agree to participate in this study. The telephone interview will be audiotaped and the interviewer will take notes. This is done for data analysis.

**Foreseeable Risks:** Your participation in this online survey involves risks to confidentiality similar to a person's everyday use of the Internet. There are no foreseeable risks involved with the telephone interview.

**Benefits to the Subjects or Others:** We expect the project to benefit you by identifying volunteer management challenges that numerous volunteer coordinators at the local government level face. This research may also add to existing body of literature on public sector volunteerism, and our understanding of volunteer management best practices that may be effective for managing and engaging volunteers.

**Compensation for Participants:** None

**Procedures for Maintaining Confidentiality of Research Records:** Information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential. Confidentiality will be maintained through the separation of any personal identifiers of your information (name, position, city and county name). Volunteer coordinators will be coded Coordinator A, Coordinator B, and so forth.

Office of Research Services  
University of North Texas  
Last Updated: July 11, 2011

Page 1 of 2

APPROVED BY THE UNT IRB  
FROM 7/2/15 TO 7/1/16

Additionally, the data will be kept confidential in a password protected computer accessible only by the researcher. Audio files of the interview will also be kept confidential in a password protected personal computer accessed only by the researcher as they are being transcribed. Dr. Lisa Dicke, Supervising Investigator for this study, will secure the transcribed audio files and ultimately dispose of the information in accordance with university policy. Her contact information is found below.

**Questions about the Study:** If you have any questions about the study, you may contact Dr. Lisa Dicke at 940-891-6793 or Amina Sillah at (214) 994-0845.

**Review for the Protection of Participants:** This research study has been reviewed and approved by the UNT Institutional Review Board (IRB). The UNT IRB can be contacted at (940) 565-4643 with any questions regarding the rights of research subjects.

**Research Participants' Rights:** Your signature below indicates that you have read or have had read to you all of the above and that you confirm all of the following:

- Amina Sillah has explained the study to you and answered all of your questions. You have been told the possible benefits and the potential risks and/or discomforts of the study.
- You understand that you do not have to take part in this study, and your refusal to participate or your decision to withdraw will involve no penalty or loss of rights or benefits. The study personnel may choose to stop your participation at any time.
- You understand why the study is being conducted and how it will be performed.
- You understand your rights as a research participant and you voluntarily consent to participate in this study.
- You have been told you will receive a copy of this form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Participant

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

You must sign and email this form to aminatasillah@my.unt.edu. An electronic signature is also acceptable.

APPROVED BY THE UNT IRB  
7/2/15 TO 7/1/16  
[Signature]

Office of Research Services  
University of North Texas  
Last Updated: July 11, 2011

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