



Volunteering Auckland

Where Volunteering Begins



Enhancing Communication
Processes for Better
Volunteer Engagement
in Non-profit Organisations:
Issues and Challenges

Gay Marie M. Francisco
Politics and Policy Internship
University of Auckland
Politics and International Relations
School of Social Sciences

Forward

Volunteering Auckland [VA] has been operating for 25 years this year. During that time we have referred over 30,000 plus individuals to our member NGO organisations to a range of voluntary opportunities.

Over the last two years we have been becoming more immersed in the online space for referrals of potential volunteers, that is, putting people in touch with an NGO organisation who needs volunteers via an online process.

Prior to the increase in our online systems we were able to contact each person, individually, to ascertain an outcome of what happened with each referral. As numbers increased dramatically with the launch of our new CONNECT online database system, from 1,200 to over 4,500 in the first year, we found that we could not personally contact each individual.

We introduced an online automated feedback [outcomes] system [AFS] in January 2014 to ascertain what was happening to the volunteer referrals we were making to our member NGO organisations. The communication was primarily through the volunteer.

Examining the data we find that we had very little information of the attempted contact rate or outcomes recorded overall from the NGO's point of view. The first objective, therefore, was to reduce the overall NFU [No Follow Up] rate and more accurately access attempts by NGOs to contact volunteers.

Volunteering Auckland engaged an Auckland University Masters student to assist with a research project to ascertain, from our research, what are the current communication processes and practices utilised by NGOs in engaging volunteers, and what is impacting on this process. This research paper is the result.

People want to volunteer and we have learnt that first contact and first impressions matter!

Cheryll Martin
General Manager
Volunteering Auckland
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Enhancing Communication Processes for Better Volunteer Engagement in Non-profit Organisations: Issues and Challenges

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper looks into the communication and engagement processes with volunteers of non-profit organisations as well as government policies on volunteering, to determine if these support effective volunteer engagement.

Volunteering Auckland (VA), a non-profit organisation based in Auckland, New Zealand, serves as the link between organisations that need volunteers and people who have an interest in volunteering through its recruitment and referral service. It would like to know about the outcome of its referrals of volunteers to volunteering opportunities. However, its records show that a large number of referrals fall under the 'No Follow-up' (NFU category). NFU means that VA did not get feedback either from the organisation or from the prospective volunteer about the outcome of the referral. From the period starting 1 July 2014 to 30 June 2015, 7068 or 79.19% out of a total of 8925 referrals fell under the NFU category.

Given this situation, the objective of this report is to identify the factors which contribute to the high NFU rate and gain an understanding of the organisations' volunteer communication process. Situating this within the larger framework of volunteer communication and engagement in the non-profit sector and the impact of public policy to volunteering, the report also seeks to address the claim that competitive challenges impede non-profit organisations from pursuing programs that are in line with their mission, specifically, those related to promoting volunteering.

Key Findings

How do non-profits communicate with prospective volunteers?

- Email is extensively used by organisations to communicate with potential volunteers.
- Most respondents advised that they only contacted prospects once, and four times was the highest number that an organisation tried contacting a prospect.
- While most of the respondents answered that this was due to time constraints and workload, some even commented that they would have liked to spend more time talking with prospects if they had the luxury of time. The point remains that the initial interaction with prospects was reduced to transactional communication.

What are the barriers which hinder member organisations from reporting the referral outcome to VA?

- Not knowing that they (the organisations) were supposed to advise VA of the outcome
- Lack of time to make a report about the outcome
- It takes some time for the organisation to know if the prospect is actually placed
- Lack of admin support personnel who can help in preparing such reports
- Organisations do not have a system in place to monitor where their volunteers come from (source of volunteers) and the status of the volunteers (at what stage are these prospects/volunteers in the process).

Do government policies support effective volunteer engagement?

- There is a disparity between the Government Policy on Volunteering (Department of Internal Affairs, 2002) and reality. While the government's policy states that it encourages good practices in volunteer management, there is no concrete evidence as to how volunteering fits into the framework of most programs and initiatives.
- Delays in government processes such as police and Ministry of Justice checks serve as a barrier to volunteering. The proposed charging of certain police services may serve as another obstacle to volunteer engagement.

Recommendations

Micro Level: VA and the non-profit organisations

- VA to regularly communicate with its member organisations the kind of information it needs and when the organisations should submit them
- Organisations to develop a system of monitoring their volunteers
- Organisations to include volunteer engagement as one of their performance outcomes
- Organisations to engage with prospective volunteers while they wait for the results of their volunteering applications

Macro Level: Policies and processes should support volunteering

- Government policies in support of volunteering should be made explicit in its programs.
- The government should not only review legislations but also its processes and procedures to assess if there are barriers to volunteering.

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale

Volunteering Auckland (VA), a non-profit organisation based in Auckland, New Zealand, serves as the link between organisations that need volunteers and people who have interest in volunteering through its recruitment and referral service. Member organisations receive volunteer referrals from VA while persons interested in volunteering register with VA in order for them to be referred to organisations needing their services.

While VA's role technically ends as soon as the member organisation receives the required details about prospective volunteers, it would like to know the outcome of the referral as well. VA obtains this information in two ways: first is by sending an email to the prospective volunteers three weeks from the date of the referral to ask them about the outcome and second is through the advice of the member organisations. However, VA's records show that a large number of referrals fall under the 'No Follow-up' (NFU category). NFU means that VA did not get feedback either from the organisation or from the prospective volunteer about the outcome of the referral. From the period starting 1 July 2014 to 30 June 2015, 7068 or 79.19% out of a total of 8925 referrals fell under the NFU category. Simply put, VA does not have any idea as to what happened to 79.19% of its total referrals for this period.

Given this situation, the objective of this report is to identify the factors which contribute to the high NFU rate and gain an understanding of the organisations' volunteer communication process. Research findings on volunteering focusing on volunteer engagement and satisfaction suggest that the initial interaction of organisations with volunteers is crucial as it significantly affects the overall recruitment and retention process (Herman, 2010; Hobson, 2007). Thus, organisations are advised to put a lot of thought and effort on the first point of contact if they would like to attract the kind of volunteers that will have long-term contribution to the organisations' goals and objectives. This report aims to determine possible ways of improving the communication and monitoring process between the organisations and VA and between the organisations and volunteers.

Situating this within the larger framework of volunteer communication and engagement in the non-profit sector and the impact of public policy to volunteering, the report also aims to examine the impact of competitive challenges such as fund sourcing to non-profit organisations. Dolnicar, Irvine, and Lazarevski (2008) argue that certain public policy developments in recent years have led non-profit organisations to compete for funding resulting in "changes in organisational culture, structures and routines" (p. 115). The report seeks to address the claim that competitive challenges impede non-profit organisations from

pursuing programs that are in line with their mission, specifically, those related to promoting volunteering.

1.2 Volunteering in New Zealand

Citing Gaskin and Davis Smith, the New Zealand Department of Internal Affairs Community, Voluntary and Sector Policy defines volunteering as unpaid work, freely undertaken by a person to benefit another who is usually not a member of one's immediate family (Department of Internal Affairs, 2015). New Zealand has an active pool of volunteers. March 2004 figures show that New Zealand's non-profit sector is a \$9.8 billion industry. Of this, NZ\$3.3 billion represents the value added by volunteer work (Sanders et al., 2008). Sanders et al. claims that with volunteers making up about two-thirds of the non-profit sector workforce, New Zealand's rate of volunteer participation is exceptionally high compared with the 40 other countries in their study.

The Department of Internal Affairs' Quarterly Volunteering and Donating Indicators report (2014) shows that close to 35% of the respondents in the survey conducted through the quarter ending 30 September 2014 volunteered for at least one hour during this period, the highest volunteering rate in the country in the last five years. Of those who volunteered 59% were female while 41% were male. The report also indicated that those between the ages of 30-39 undertook the most volunteer work.

1.3 Report Structure

Section 2 of the report presents a review of literature starting with studies on volunteer communication and engagement. It presents the framework and prescribes strategies that organisations could employ in order to engage volunteers with a special focus on the initial stages of interaction. The second part of the review presents the most recent literature on the impact of policy developments on non-profits in general. Section 3 explains the methodology used in the report while section 4 presents the key findings. Section 5 discusses how the key findings respond to the questions and relate to the literature firstly on the micro level— answering the question: Are present processes at the organisational level promoting volunteer engagement? Secondly, on the macro level, which answers the question, are government policies and procedures promoting volunteering and encouraging effective volunteer engagement? The first part of the discussion draws key findings from primary sources which are the responses of participating organisations on the email questionnaire and face-to-face discussions, while the second part draws both from the primary and secondary sources which are academic articles and reports about the non-profit sector and volunteering in New Zealand. Section 6 concludes and section 7 offers recommendations.

2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature on volunteer communication and engagement highlights the significance of the primary stages of interaction with volunteers. Hobson, Rominger, Malec, Hobson, and Evans (1997) proposed a volunteer-friendliness model for non-profit organisations composed of four elements that relate to the stages of the volunteer process. These elements are “(1) Attraction and Recruitment, (2) Initial Interaction with Agency Staff, (3) Volunteer Utilization and Assignment, and (4) Post-Volunteering Follow-Up” (p. 28). For the first two stages, they emphasised the importance of the initial information communicated to potential volunteers. Stressing that organisations “do not have a second chance to make a first impression” (p. 33), they provided guidelines that staff members must bear in mind during the preliminary stages of interaction. They also suggested that staff members who are involved in the first two stages should learn how to secure the commitment of a prospect to volunteer if there is a fit in the organisation and make it a point to refer the prospects to other organisations if their qualifications did not match the present need. Using the framework by Hobson et al., Hobson and Heler (2007) conducted an empirical study to determine the impact of staff treatment to volunteer satisfaction. Results of the study reveal that there was a positive correlation between the volunteers’ perception of staff treatment and satisfaction and that satisfaction was correlated with the intent to continue volunteering.

Although there was no debate about the impact of sound volunteer management practices to the recruitment and retention of volunteers, there was a dearth of research about how routine interactions influence volunteers’ decisions to be involved with organisations (Liao-Troth, 2008, p. 245). While these seemingly mundane activities contribute to volunteers’ enjoyment and satisfaction, there is a lack of observational case studies that examine these behaviours (Liao-Troth; Smith & Cordery, 2010).

This project aims to contribute to the conversation on the significance of communication, particularly in the initial stages of interaction with volunteers. Most of the literature such as those discussed in this paper examine the impact of communication from the point of view of the volunteers. These studies prescribe the ways by which non-profits should communicate with volunteers and prospective volunteers. There are no studies yet which specifically assess the barriers of communication from the point of view of the organisations. While the paper is focused on VA and a small number of its member organisations, other non-profit organisations may learn from their experiences.

Relating this to the larger debate on the impact of government policies to volunteer organisations, literature suggests that policies implemented in recent years, which encouraged more involvement from the non-profit sector in the delivery of social services,

led to the corporatisation of non-profit organisations. Corporatisation refers to how non-profits operate in a manner similar to corporate or business entities. While there are those who argue that the non-profit sector must look at performance outcomes in the same way that corporate entities look at their bottom line (Rothschild, 2012), there are concerns on how these outcomes should be measured. This review takes a look at some of the recent literature and examines the implications of these developments to volunteering.

Paton (2003) describes how non-profits have to cope with the pressures of performance measurement because governments which tap their services have found a way to “manage performance without managing organisations” (p. 14). He expressed concerns about how measurements have become tools mainly undertaken to demonstrate the achievement of predetermined goals and that organisations tended to accept them as given. He argued that these policies are moulding non-profits into an entirely different type of entity which he calls the “regulated social enterprise” (p.14). Macmillan and Townsend (2006) concur, claiming that the new millennium ushered in an expanded and more complex role for the UK voluntary sector which they referred to as the ‘community turn’. The ‘community turn’ established structures and created policies that paved the way for the community including the non-profit sector to have more involvement in the delivery of public services. While this development has its perceived advantages such as cost savings, efficiency, and enhanced participation of the community in governance, the consequences of handing over responsibilities to the community that previously belonged to the welfare state, remain unclear. The impact of these policy developments not only to the beneficiaries but also to the organisations is an area that has not received much attention.

Drawing from the notion of the expanded role of public sector volunteer organisations, Dolnicar, et al. (2008) studied how a non-profit organisation in Australia responded to this new policy environment by specifically examining the impact of competitive grant funding to the organisation’s mission. Their findings reveal that the demands of work related with competitive grant funding have negative implications to the organisation such that its people perceived that the “organisation’s mission is compromised” in its quest to acquire more funds (p.115). Smith (2008) offers a similar view with that of Dolnicar, et al. and Paton (2003), contending that there is a link between raising funds and performance measures since most institutions require agencies to meet certain standards of performance in order for them to continue receiving financial support.

Finally, placing the issue within the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, the study by Sanders, Tennant, Sokolowski and Salamon (2008) which consists of surveys and statistical data comparing the New Zealand non-profit sector with that of 40 other countries, concluded that

although government funding support for non-profits in New Zealand is relatively small compared with others in the study, the majority of the respondents in the survey expressed concern about maintaining their independence in the light of government policies which promote contracting services. The respondents, composed of leaders from the non-profit sector in New Zealand, also conveyed that they felt the “increased social pressures towards ‘professionalisation’ (p. 32). These findings are echoed in the study of O’Brien, Sanders, and Tennant (2009) which reveals that in contracting services, the partnership between the government and the non-profit sector is often lopsided with the government mostly determining what and how outcomes should be measured. They concluded that while there is move towards a more balanced system wherein the organisations can give their inputs on performance measurement, it cannot be determined yet whether this will be an effective collaboration since this effort is still in its early stages.

3: METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach was utilised for the research project. A list of open-ended questions were sent by email to contact persons of the top thirty NGO organisations with the highest NFU rate [Not Followed Up – no outcome received at VA regarding the referral of an individual to a voluntary opportunity]. This top 30 NGOs represents 4605 NFU cases out of 5685 referrals. Eighteen NGO organisations representing 3002 NFU cases out of 3767 referrals sent their responses. To gain a better understanding of the answers given by the respondents, a request was sent for a face-to-face discussion to those that sent an email response. Six NGO organisations representing 1080 NFU cases out of 1321 referrals agreed to elaborate on the items that they had mentioned in their email responses and shared their thoughts about issues related to those that were asked in the email questionnaire. Most of the respondents were Managers / Coordinators of Volunteers within their respective organisations, however, the majority of them had other assignments aside from their volunteer coordinator functions.

A thematic analysis was conducted of the email responses and discussion transcripts. Thematic analysis is one of the most common methods of analysing data in qualitative research. It identifies and examines patterns that are significant in answering the research question across the dataset. The NVivo software was used in coding and analysing the data.

The conclusion and recommendations were based on the results of the analysis of the data from the primary sources and the findings in the review of secondary sources.

4: FINDINGS

How do non-profits communicate with prospective volunteers?

When asked about what they do after VA sends them the contact details of prospective volunteers, almost all of the respondents replied that they send information about the organisation and the role to the prospects via email. One respondent replied that they wait for the prospect to contact them while another one answered that they called prospects by phone. The volunteer services manager of this organisation – a hospice – responded that they communicate with a potential volunteer by phone to determine the prospect's suitability for the role.

Most of the respondents answered that email was their preferred means of communication with prospective volunteers. Three respondents said that they believed calling prospects by phone was the best way to communicate, while two answered that they preferred to use both email and phone when communicating with potential volunteers.

The use of email as the primary means of communication with potential volunteers is driven mainly by the desire to be more efficient. One respondent who works part time answered, "I found that we play phone tag all week if I make calls and leave messages". One respondent replied that while she believes that having a phone conversation was a good way to communicate with prospects, she had limited time to call them as she had other tasks to fulfil since volunteer coordination was not her main role. Another respondent explained that each method served a purpose, saying:

Via phone is great as it is a little more personal than an email and you can talk to the volunteer to find a bit more about them and what they want to do. Email is also great to send detailed descriptions and information about the role that they can refer back to.

All but one of the respondents replied that they made sure contact was made with the potential volunteers referred by VA within seven days after receiving their details from VA, with most of them replying that they contacted the prospects within 24-72 hours after receiving VA's email. One respondent replied that they do not contact the prospects but wait for the prospects to contact them instead.

Most respondents advised that they only contacted prospects once, and four times was the highest number of times. A number of respondents replied that if the prospect had qualifications that were suitable for the role they were trying to fill, then they would usually contact that person more than once. From the discussions, the volunteer's place of residence emerged as an important factor which organisations considered in their

recruitment. Most of the participants commented that any volunteer who lived too far from the area where they needed to serve were usually difficult to retain so that was why they did not exert much effort in contacting them compared with someone who lived nearer the area. When asked about the possibility of those prospects who lived further away may be willing to travel, most of the participants answered that they give people who were willing to travel the opportunity to volunteer but they were also aware that many of them might fall off. One participant commented: “If they’re willing to travel they’re willing to travel, but we’ve also seen that people might be willing to travel in theory but in practice, it is a nightmare.”

What are the barriers which hinder member organisations from reporting the referral outcome to VA?

The majority of the respondents did not advise VA of the outcome of the referral. The reasons they gave are as follows:

- Not knowing that they (the organisations) are supposed to advise VA of the outcome
- Lack of time to make a report about the outcome
- It takes some time for the organisation to know if the prospect is actually placed
- Lack of administrative support personnel who can help in preparing such reports

Knowing if and when a volunteer was actually placed was a challenge for a number of organisations. One respondent answered that the definition of the word ‘placed’ needed to be clarified. In the case of their organisation, there were several steps which a volunteer had to go through before actually starting volunteer work and she would like to know at what stage VA considers a prospect as ‘placed.’ Another respondent replied that she did not know what happened to a prospect after she sent their details to other people in the organisation who were in charge of the succeeding stages of volunteer engagement. This large organisation had several roles for volunteers and there were different managers who utilised the volunteers’ services. The volunteer coordinator mainly handled the initial stage of the process—that is, receiving volunteer applications and sending the details of the applicants to the requesting departments. She would not know what happened to an applicant unless the managers gave her a status report. Presently there is no system in place in this organisation to monitor this process.

From these discussions, it appears that the nature of the role also had significant impact on the monitoring of volunteers. Volunteers for one-off event roles that required a large number of people such as street appeals, could be difficult to monitor because of the large number of people who signed up. The task of checking if those who signed up actually volunteered could take up much time and effort.

Related to the issue on the impact of time to placement of volunteers was the waiting time before a volunteer started work. The respondents gave the following reasons why volunteers needed to wait before they were able to start volunteering:

Police check/Ministry of Justice (MOJ) criminal conviction history check results

A number of respondents replied that waiting for police check results can take up to eight weeks. If a police/MOJ clearance is required for the role, the volunteer cannot start until this requirement is met.

Nature of the role

There were roles which required all volunteers to attend training sessions before they could start their volunteer work. Some sessions were scheduled weeks or months from the date when the potential volunteer had been referred by VA to the organisation.

The number of volunteers needed varies

One organisation replied that they took volunteers depending on need. This need varied based on different factors such as the number of volunteers who dropped out of the program and the number of persons needing help.

When asked if the issue of waiting time was being communicated to the prospects upfront, a number of the discussion participants replied in the negative. One participant responded that she was concerned that telling the prospects upfront about the long wait may discourage them from volunteering.

Some organisations acknowledged that while they knew they needed to send an update to VA about the outcomes of the referrals, they lacked the time to do so. Three organisations suggested that VA could send a table or spreadsheet with a list of names of referrals so that the organisations could easily encode the status of the referral. One respondent answered that VA used to send a list of names of all referrals which made it easier for their organisation to give a status update but since she no longer received this list, she thought that VA no longer needed the information. She further stated that she would not have the time to go through each name without a list from VA.

During the face-to-face discussions with the selected respondents, they were asked if an online system wherein all the VA member organisations would have their own login, which would allow them to update the status of each referral would be useful for them. All participants answered that such a system would definitely be helpful.

Another significant finding was that all participants in the face-to-face discussions replied that their organisations did not have a system in place to monitor where their volunteers came from or the source and status of the volunteers—that is, at what stage were these prospects/volunteers in the process. One organisation advised that they were just starting to develop this system. This organisation had two staff members who were involved in the whole process, from recruitment to the termination of the volunteer's services, which made it easier for them to track their volunteers. Three organisations relied on their email trail to determine the sources of their referrals, one used Microsoft Outlook Tasks to monitor her volunteering prospects, and another used a manual logbook. None of the participating organisations had a comprehensive automated system of tracking volunteers from referral to placement to termination. Some organisations with multiple sites or sister organisations were asked if they compared notes on volunteer tracking processes with their counterparts – most of them replied in the negative. One participant answered: "We don't talk about it comprehensively but I do have a fair idea of what they are doing."

What is the government's policy on volunteer engagement?

The New Zealand government has a policy that supports volunteer engagement. The policy clearly states that it is committed to:

Encouraging community and voluntary organisations to develop and maintain good practice in supporting and involving their volunteers; Reducing barriers associated with volunteering in legislation, policy and practice; Supporting initiatives to increase understanding of, and to disseminate information about, volunteering (Department of Internal Affairs, 2002).

There were also government initiatives on promoting volunteering and encouraging good practices in the voluntary sector. Among these is the 2001 Statement of Government Intentions for an Improved Community-Government Relationship (SOGI) which was signed by the Prime Minister and the Minister Responsible for the Community and Voluntary Sector. The SOGI recognised the importance of partnership between the government and the community, voluntary, and iwi organisations and acknowledged that collaboration could take various forms. However, results of the study by O'Brien et al. (2009) show that representatives from non-profit organisations outside of Wellington who took part in the study did not have any idea about the SOGI and even government personnel who were in-charge of coordinating with non-profits did not have an understanding of the implications of SOGI to their roles and responsibilities.

In 2003, the government likewise established the Office for the Community and Voluntary Sector as part of the Ministry of Social Development. The office has worked on programs in

partnership with community and non-profit organisations. Among these are projects, research, and publications on good practices about “funding, accountability, participation in policy, promoting generosity and volunteering” (O’Brien et al., 2009).

5: DISCUSSION

Do present systems encourage communication and engagement with potential volunteers?

At the organisational or micro level, our findings suggest that they do not.

Firstly, almost all of the organisations which participated in this study answered that they used email as the primary mode of communication with potential volunteers and that most of them contacted prospects only once. The message that they sent via email mainly contained information about the organisation and the roles. Very few responded that they took time to talk to the prospects by phone. While most of the respondents answered that this was due to time constraints and workload, some even commented that they would like to spend more time talking with the prospects if they had the luxury of time, the point remains that the initial interaction with prospects was reduced to transactional communication. The participants in the discussion pointed out that if the prospect’s qualifications matched their need, then they would most probably contact this person more than once if they did not receive a response in the first instance but in most cases, there was no follow up to check if the prospects received the first email to begin with.

Secondly, on many occasions, prospects had to endure the long wait between the time of first contact and the point when the organisation advised them about the outcome of their application. Although this length of time was beyond the control of the organisations in the case of slow processing of police or MOJ clearances, in most instances, there was no evidence of communication between the organisation and the prospects during this time. Some organisations even commented that it was usually the prospect who called them to follow up on the status of their volunteering application.

Finally, the lack of a system of monitoring or tracking inquiries and volunteers suggests that volunteer engagement and communication was not part of their performance measures which needed to be met by the organisations that are part of this study. As the literature emphasises, most measures were imposed by government or private institutions providing funding to non-profit organisations (Paton, 2003; Sanders et al., 2008; Smith, 2008). VA has endeavoured to establish a system of measuring and tracking its referrals because such is part of its performance outcome being an agency which provides volunteer recruitment and

referral services. However, for other organisations which mainly utilise volunteers to meet their desired outcomes, findings reveal that volunteer engagement continues to be a means to an end and not an end in itself.

Moving on to the macro or national policy level, our findings indicate that present programs and practices do not support volunteer communication and engagement. While the government's policy on volunteering states that organisations are encouraged to "develop and maintain good practice in supporting and involving their volunteers" and that the government is committed to minimise "barriers associated with volunteering in legislation, policy and practice" (Department of Internal Affairs, 2002), the role of volunteering within specific programs supported by the government remains unclear. As in the micro level, there is the tendency to regard volunteering primarily as a way to achieve outcomes—volunteers provide the knowledge, talents, and skills needed for the delivery of services.

As for the barriers on volunteering, one specific example which illustrates how government procedures hamper volunteer engagement is the slow processing of police checks and MOJ records. Since a number of volunteer roles required police checks, prospects had to wait for around eight weeks because of these processing delays. With the introduction of the amendments to the Policing Act 2008, which will allow for charging of certain police services (New Zealand Parliament, 2014), non-profit organisations express concerns about its impact on volunteering. This early, many organisations are already lobbying that volunteers and staff of non-profit organisations be exempted from paying police-vetting charges.

6: CONCLUSION

Studies show that New Zealand has an active and growing pool of volunteers. Volunteers contributed enormously to community and nation building. However, while the non-profit sector and the government recognise this, results of this study show that there is limited effort both on the micro or organisational level and the macro or governmental policy level to promote effective volunteer communication and engagement. Considering that the organisations that participated in this study are heavily dependent on volunteers for their programs, most of their communication with prospective volunteers can be described as transactional. It is likewise surprising that most of them do not have a system in place to monitor the status of their volunteers. As for the macro level, there is a disparity between the government's policy on volunteering and reality. While the government's policy states that it encourages good practices in volunteer management, there is no concrete evidence that shows how volunteering fits into the framework of most programs and initiatives. Moreover, delays in government processes such as police and MOJ checks serve as a barrier to

volunteering. The proposed charging of certain police services may serve as another obstacle to volunteer engagement.

7: RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Micro Level: VA and the non-profit organisations

- VA to regularly communicate with its member organisations the kind of information needed and when it should be submitted

The findings of this study suggest some member organisations are not aware that they need to update VA about the status of their referrals. A reminder such as an email, specifically for this purpose, may be sent at a frequency which VA decides to be most appropriate.

VA should also simplify its ways for members to submit their reports. The positive response of all respondents to the idea of an online system, which gives member organisations their own login and lets them update the status of referrals shows that organisations are willing to report on outcomes as long as it did not require much time and effort to do so.

- Organisations to develop a system of monitoring their volunteers

A system of monitoring would aid the volunteer coordinators in communicating with all potential and existing volunteers at all stages of the process. This would also make it a lot easier for the organisation to have a seamless transition when there are changes in the organisation's structure such as when a volunteer coordinator or manager resigns or transfers to another division.

There are various options which organisations may consider, depending on the size of their volunteer base. For larger organisations, there are software vendors that offer packages for volunteer management. Smaller organisations may look into free database management systems. However, while utilising technology is one approach that organisations may want to consider, they are reminded to proceed with caution. There was a word of advice from VA's IT consultant, Tim Wiley, "anyone who will be involved in any computerisation effort must understand the entire process first before embarking on automation."

Still another option that organisations may look into is to tap their existing volunteers with IT know-how to develop a volunteer monitoring system that suits their needs. A volunteer who is already familiar with the organisation and its processes may have some ideas on the kind of system that would work. For VA, this route worked well. Its present system was developed

by a volunteer with an IT background who had already been engaged in the work and service delivery of VA.

It would greatly benefit organisations if they could take a step back and assess their present volunteer communication and engagement processes, have an honest assessment of its status and develop a plan on how to improve it.

- Organisations to include volunteer engagement as one of their performance outcomes

While volunteer engagement may not be one of the performance outcomes that organisations are required to meet, they should initiate to include it as a performance indicator considering the contribution of volunteers and volunteering in the delivery of their services. In order to meet this outcome, organisations may be required to identify a person who is responsible for the recruitment and mobilisation of volunteers and in developing their Volunteer Involving Program (VIP). This should give volunteering the due importance it deserves.

- Organisations to engage with prospective volunteers while they wait for the results of their volunteering applications

Firstly, organisations need to see how they can address the long waiting time between the point of first contact and the time when the organisation advised prospective volunteers about the outcome of their application. Having an assessment of the volunteer recruitment and placement process may help in determining how this length of time can be shortened. For circumstances beyond the organisations' control such as the processing of police or MOJ check results, organisations may think of ways to engage with prospects such as sending them an email updating them about the status of the application with invitation to participate in one-off events or training opportunities.

7.2 Macro Level: Policies and processes should support volunteering

- Government policies in support of volunteering should be made explicit in its programs

The government should include measures on volunteer engagement in performance outcomes for its contracting services and grant-giving programs.

Standards and performance measures for grants and funding should consider how volunteering fits into the program's framework. In this sense, volunteering is not only regarded as a means to an end (e.g. getting the work done by volunteers) but an end in itself

(e.g. how the volunteer work has provided the volunteer with new skills, an avenue to share knowledge and talents, among others).

This is crucial, because based on the literature, non-profits align their performance measures with that of the donors, grant-giving bodies, and government institutions providing funding.

- The government should not only review legislations but also its processes and procedures to assess if there are barriers to volunteering

The New Zealand government's policy on volunteering states that it is committed to "reducing barriers associated with volunteering in legislation, policy and practice" yet the reality is that volunteers are prevented from rendering work because of the delays in the processing of police and MOJ checks. Moreover, the proposed amendment to the Policing Act 2008, which will allow for charging of certain police services, is another potential barrier to volunteering. The proposed amendment in the law must be carefully studied in the light of volunteer work. The respondents in this paper all agree that charging volunteers or volunteer organisations for police checks undermines volunteering.

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Appendices

A. List of Participating Organisations (in alphabetical order)

Age Concern Counties Manukau Inc	Lifeline Aotearoa [Auckland]
Alzheimers Auckland Charitable Trust	New Zealand Breast Cancer Foundation
Brothers in Arms	NZ Red Cross Inc -Auckland Services Centre
Conservation Volunteers New Zealand	Red Cross Refugee Services
Elizabeth Knox Home & Hospital	SPCA Volunteer Auxilliary
Foundation for Youth Development	StarJam Charitable Trust
Garden to Table Trust	Volunteering Auckland
Girl Guides New Zealand - Upper North Zone	West Auckland Hospice
IT's Accessible Trust	Youthline Support Centre

B. Email Questionnaire

- 1) What process do you use when we refer a volunteer to you?
- 2) How long after the initial referral from Volunteering Auckland (VA) do you try to make contact with the volunteer?
- 3) How do you communicate with the volunteer?
- 4) How many times do you try to contact a referred volunteer?
- 5) What do you feel is the most effective way to communicate with the referred volunteers?
- 6) How and when do you let VA know the result/outcome of a referral?
- 7) What are the barriers to you contacting VA about the results/outcomes of referrals?