

Volunteerism at Sporting Special Events: A Comparative Study

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Volunteers make an important contribution to large sporting events (Hamm & MacLean, 2006; Karlis, 2003; Larsen, Montepare, & Donovan, 1992; Strigas & Jackson, 2003; Twynam, Farrell, & Johnston, 2003). In order to maintain efficient operations, sport managers must recognize the importance of volunteer motivations, commitment, and intentions to remain (Cuskelly, 2004). Previous research indicates that without volunteer efforts many competitions would fall short of success (Green & Chalip, 1998). A number of studies have examined the commitment and motivation factors of volunteers across North America (Allen & Meyer, 1991; Cnann & Goldberg-Glen, 1991; Cuskelly, Harrington, & Stebbins, 2003; Fisher & Ackerman, 1998; Unger, 1991). According to Green and Chalip (1998), volunteers within the sport industry commit their time because of their interest in sport and therefore it is appropriate to examine volunteers of specific sport events as unique individuals with distinct motives. Consequently, in order to retain volunteers, motivation and commitment factors must be understood, packaged, and marketed appropriately. Recent studies (Hamm & MacLean, 2006; Karlis, 2003; Larsen, Montepare, & Donovan, 1992; Strigas & Jackson, 2003; Twynam, Farrell, & Johnston, 2003) have thus supported sport-specific research into volunteer motivation, commitment, and intentions factors.

In 2005 Hamm and MacLean surveyed sport volunteers at a large, Canadian women's golf event and found statistically significant differences between dimensions of motivation and commitment to volunteering, thus impacting a variety of factors related to intentions to remain a volunteer. The quantitative and qualitative results demonstrated that volunteers in this particular sport community were interested in two main outcomes: 1) promoting the game of golf, and 2) promoting their community. The results supported Twynam et al. (2003) who suggested that special event volunteers have multi-faceted motivation and commitment factors that are both embedded in leisure and social pursuits. In addition, the survey instrument used (Hamm & MacLean, 2005) generated qualitative responses regarding the intentions to remain golf, sport, and general volunteers. The findings indicated that 49% of the volunteers responding would have also given their time to the sport of curling. This was deemed significant and utilized by the host organization for volunteer recruitment during other events in the region. As well, given the size and movement of the event to other geographical locations each year, it was suggested that a longitudinal approach to data collection that compared groups of volunteers between regions would enhance our knowledge of sport volunteers.

Twynam et al. (2003) recommended that it is necessary to produce and examine comparisons across special event volunteers. Sport volunteers are unique as they tend to be 'fanatics' of the sport for which they volunteer (Green & Chalip, 1998). The event is not a 'cause' for which the volunteer feels a moral obligation to serve. Rather, sport volunteerism is carried out for pleasure and at larger events; the volunteers typically must pay to be involved. The concept of volunteers paying to volunteer is in itself an interesting phenomenon. In addition further research into understanding the factors that are associated with specific sport volunteers and their motivation, commitment, and intentions to remain is compelled by the importance of this human resource given their numbers and impact on event success (Cuskelly, 2004). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to compare and contrast the commitment, motivation, and intentions of two groups of volunteers from the same sporting special event held in subsequent summers at different geographical locations within Canada. A comparison of data sets from events held in 2005 and 2006 is intended as a step in creating a consistent, long term examination of volunteers at this sporting event.

This study examined the 2006 CN Canadian Women's Open, an annual event held every summer in a predetermined, different location across Canada. The motivation, commitment, and intentions survey (Hamm & MacLean, 2005) was distributed to 400 volunteers at their orientation meetings two weeks prior to championship week. Two hundred and fifty-five responded (64%) and were deemed eligible for analysis. Motivation and commitment factors were examined using a modified version of the Special Event Motivation Scale (Johnston, Twynam, & Farrell, 1999) and the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (Mowday, Porter, & Steer, 1982). Intentions to remain were determined by providing each respondent with qualitative, open-ended questions. The respondents were required to indicate their intention to remain as golf volunteers, sport volunteers, and volunteers in general, and were provided the opportunity to expand on reasons for these intentions.

The quantitative results were examined using an exploratory factor analysis and correlations to uncover the motivation and commitment factors of the volunteers and their relationship to one another. These results showed that the volunteers at the 2006 Women's Open were motivated by leisure pursuits and commitment to their community. These results are consistent with

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the 2005 study and indicate that these sport event volunteers are motivated and committed to very distinct factors. Further research is suggested in order to monitor the trends within this event over time.

The qualitative findings were analyzed using a priori coding. The analysis demonstrated that volunteers in this particular sport community are interested in promoting the game of golf. The large majority of respondents (92.6%) indicated they would return as golf volunteers, while 88.3% indicated that they would return as sport volunteers, and 91.2% indicated they would return as general volunteers. In contrast to the 2005 study, no specific link was made to another sport event, however over 60% indicated that linking golf to the community and utilizing their skills were important factors when choosing a volunteer activity. This supports the pursuit of the serious leisure perspective that has been promoted by recent scholars (Stebbins & Graham, 2004; Gibbons, 2006) as a way to address volunteer motivations.

Sport event managers have the role of coordinating the efforts of several hundred volunteers at different locations across the country. As noted, it is thus a vital component of the manager's role to understand how to retain these volunteers (Cuskelly, 1995; Cuskelly, 2004). The findings above demonstrate the benefits of continuing research analyzing special-event volunteers and using these results as comparison across time. Sport event practitioners and researchers can then collaborate their efforts to improve the retention and satisfaction of these volunteers for the future.