

Altruism, Networking or T-shirts? An Empirical Investigation of Factors that Motivate and Satisfy Volunteers in a Major Sport Event

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Many sport organizations need to recruit a cadre of motivated volunteers to help organize special events, and then they need to keep these volunteers satisfied so that they will continue their support in the future. But what motivates volunteers to contribute their time and talents to a certain sport event, especially in light of increasingly busy lifestyles in modern society and an increasingly crowded field of events and activities in need of volunteers? And what keeps volunteers coming back year after year? Do they do it for altruistic desires such as the need to “give back” to the community or “pay forward”? Or opportunities to network and socialize? Or is it just for the free t-shirts and food?

These questions about motivation and satisfaction are becoming more important for the sport organizations that rely on volunteers for support. Conventional wisdom is that the United States has a strong history of voluntary associations and volunteerism, but statistics from the Bureau of Labor Statistics indicate that only about one in four Americans (26.3 percent) volunteer each year (Volunteering in the United States, 2010 and 2011). Further, recent studies have found that about two-fifths of individuals who have volunteered in one year decide not to volunteer the following year (Hager & Brudney, 2004; UPS Foundation, 1998). These hard facts on volunteerism in the United may be eye-opening – even disturbing – for sport the organizations that rely on volunteers as a critical resource in effectively implementing events and activities.

This study presents results of a 2012 survey of a large number of volunteers for the Cincinnati Flying Pig Marathon Weekend (n=1,109). During the past 14 years of this event’s existence, Flying Pig organizers have surveyed runners and walkers extensively, but this is the first time that they have surveyed volunteers. In 2012, the Flying Pig attracted about 23,000 individuals who participated in a full marathon with a relay option (26.2 miles), a half marathon (13.1 miles), a 10-kilometer race (6.2 miles), a 5-kilometer race (3.1 miles) and/or kids’ “fun runs.” Organizers recruited about 4,000 volunteers to help put on these events, working on tasks such as setting up and tearing down the Expo and finish line, distributing race packets to runners and walkers, passing out water and sport drinks along the course, handing out medals and food at the finish line, and so on.

The survey instrument was developed based upon a review of literature on volunteer surveys, particularly those involving sport events, along with discussions with the Flying Pig executive director and volunteer coordinator regarding their need for feedback and information. In particular, the items focused on various factors that may have motivated individuals to volunteer for the Flying Pig, their degree of satisfaction with the event overall, and some specific aspects of their volunteer experience such as their tasks, shifts, t-shirts, etc. Regarding motivation, the survey instrument included 28 items from the Special Event Volunteer Motivation Scale (SEVMS) – developed by Farrell, Johnston and Twynam (1998) – and ten items adapted from the Volunteer Motivation Scale for International Sporting Events (VMS-ISE) – developed by Bang and Chelladurai (2003).

Since 1998, the SEVMS has been used to study volunteer motivation and satisfaction at major sport events, such as the 2002 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games in Salt Lake City, Utah (Reeser, Berg, Rhea & Willick, 2005) and the 2006 National Special Olympics in Ames, Iowa (Khoo & Engelhorn, 2011). Its motivation items tend to fall into four broad categories: 1) purposive, or a desire to contribute to the event and the community, 2) solidarity, or social interaction and networking, 3) family or other traditions, and 4) commitments that link personal skills and expectations to volunteering.

In 2003, Bang and Chelladurai extended the research on sport volunteers with a study of volunteers at an international sporting event – the 2002 FIFA World Cup. Based on a factor analysis, these authors developed the

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VMS-ISE, which includes the following six factors or components of volunteer motivation: 1) expression of values, or concern for the event and others in society, 2) patriotism, or pride in and love of the country, 3) interpersonal contacts, or interacting with people and forming friendships, 4) personal growth, or gaining new perspectives and feeling needed and important, 5) career orientation, or gaining experience and contacts, and 6) extrinsic rewards, or getting free uniforms, food, accommodations and admission.

The survey of Flying Pig volunteers was administered online, based on Dillman's seminal work on survey design (2000 and 2008) and using SurveyMonkey as the survey management tool. The Flying Pig executive director sent a series of three messages to all volunteers for which the organization had email addresses. One message was a pre-notification to potential respondents two days prior to the second message, which had the link to the survey on SurveyMonkey. The third message was a post-notification – or a reminder or follow-up message – that was sent to potential respondents one week after the email message with the survey link.

Our proposed presentation at NASSM 2013 will begin with a broad overview of results from the Flying Pig volunteer survey regarding motivation and satisfaction. In addition, it will include factor analyses of the SEVMS items and of the VMS-ISE items, comparing the results to earlier studies using these scales. It will conclude with a discussion of “lessons learned” in terms of volunteerism and volunteer management related to sport organizations and sport events.