What makes a frequent volunteer?

Predicting volunteer commitment in a community services organisation

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the reasons behind some volunteers donating more of their time than others, or the factors associated with volunteer 'commitment'. Although there is a substantial body of research looking at the factors that distinguish volunteers from non-volunteers, there is less research on the factors that may explain differences in the commitment of volunteers. Understanding the factors associated with volunteer commitment is important for organisations that rely on volunteers as well as for a healthy civil society.

This paper examines volunteer frequency which is an important dimension of commitment among people who volunteer at The Smith Family, a large non-profit organisation involved in community services. It applies multivariate techniques to examine the relative influence of socio-demographic characteristics, socio-economic and labour market status, social participation and motivations for volunteering, on volunteer frequency. The results support a multidimensional model of volunteer commitment that includes both sociological and psychological variables. The final section discusses four key implications of the findings for volunteering in community services.

INTRODUCTION

Understanding the factors that may be associated with volunteer commitment is important for organisations that rely on volunteers for their activities and may assist their volunteer recruitment and management strategies. At a wider level, volunteer commitment is also important for a healthy civil society (Lyons & Hocking 2000). Much of the recent research and policy interest in volunteering, however, has been more concerned with understanding the factors that may be associated with the extent of volunteering and its pattern over time (Lyons & Fabiansson 1998; Wilkinson and Bittman 2001; Zappalà 2000a).

Volunteer commitment can be understood in several ways:

- as the number of hours a volunteer contributes in a certain time period. For instance, Lyons and Hocking (2000) define 'Highly Committed Volunteers' (HCVs) as all those who volunteer on average more than 300 hours per year or six hours per week. In another study, volunteer commitment was examined in terms of the number of hours individuals volunteered each month for one particular organisation (Zappalà & Burrell 2002a)
- as the number of years a person has volunteered for a particular organisation, or a volunteer's 'length of service' or 'loyalty' for a particular organisation (Zappalà & Burrell 2002b)
- as the number of times per year that a person volunteers for the same organisation, or *volunteer frequency* (Zappalà Parker & Green 2001).

This paper examines the last point, volunteer frequency, among people who volunteer at The Smith Family, a large non-profit organisation in community services. The second section discusses the approach taken to modelling volunteer commitment in the context of previous research. The third section describes the data and methods used to estimate the effects of a range of socio-demographic, socio-economic, social participation related and motivational variables on

volunteer frequency. The fourth section discusses the key findings from the analysis, while the final section discusses some of the main implications of the findings for non-profit organisations that rely on volunteers.

MODELLING VOLUNTEER COMMITMENT

There has been little research on volunteer commitment in Australia (see Lyons & Hocking 2000 for an exception). Most studies of volunteering have focused on how particular groups of variables are associated with volunteers compared with non-volunteers. Studying volunteer commitment seeks to examine how these same variables influence volunteering behaviour among a group of people who already volunteer for a particular organisation or program.

We adopt a socio-psychological approach to understanding volunteer commitment (Zappalà & Burrell 2001, 2002). Stated simply, such an approach is one that accepts that insights from both sociological and psychological research should be taken into account in studies of philanthropic behaviour. This approach draws on the work of David Horton Smith (1994), who in a valuable review of the literature, showed that while several models that attempt to explain volunteering have been put forward, most studies focus on only one set of factors in their empirical estimations.

Models and hypotheses that have been put forward to explain the rate of volunteering, for instance, include:

- the dominant status model. This model predicts that people who volunteer are 'characterized by socially approved or "dominant" statuses, such as higher education, greater income, middle age, married status, longer time in the community, and more children under eighteen in the household' (Smith 1994, p.254)
- the discretionary time model. This maintains that whether or not people volunteer depends on the amount of discretionary time they have available. For instance, single parents with young children are less likely to volunteer than those with partners, and people working longer hours will be less likely to volunteer than those who work fewer hours or are not in full time employment (Smith 1994)
- the social participation model which focuses on the importance of social and religious participation in providing opportunities and the motivation for people to volunteer (Jackson et al. 1995).

Smith argued that any model of volunteering should analyse all relevant groups of variables, including the availability of socio-economic resources, discretionary time, people's religious and associational ties, as well as the individual attitudes and personalities of the volunteers.[1] Concluding his review, he stated:

> The literature on the context, personality, and situation [of volunteers] is thin. Relatively few sociological researchers are familiar with such variables or consider them relevant. Perhaps sociologists are reluctant to intrude on another discipline's territory and variables. The same holds for psychologists' study of personality: they hesitate to study context or attitudes at the same time. Boundaries between disciplines keep us from extending our understanding of volunteer participation (Smith 1994, p.256).

Drawing on the insights from studies on the rate of volunteering that have been influenced by the above models, five specific categories of variables were included in this study.[2]

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Age: The relationship between age and volunteering varies according to whether the volunteer rate or commitment is being examined. The young and the old tend to have lower rates of volunteering while the middle-aged have higher participation rates (ABS 2001). The relationship between age and volunteer commitment, however, tends to increase with age, with some surveys finding hours undertaken peaking for people in their early seventies before decreasing again (ABS 2001; Wilkinson & Bittman 2001). In other words, older volunteers are more likely to be highly committed (Lyons & Hocking 2000).

Geographic location: Most studies show that the volunteer participation rate is higher in rural areas than metropolitan areas (ABS 1996, 2001a; Evans & Kelley 2000; Smith 1994). The relationship between geographic location and volunteer commitment, is less clear with studies suggesting either no effect, or at

best, a small positive association between commitment and living in a rural area (Lyons & Hocking 2000; ABS 2001; Evans & Kelley 2000). Related to geographic location is the length of time a person has resided in a particular area or community. Studies suggest that the longer a person has resided in a particular community the greater the likelihood that they will be involved in voluntary work (Smith 1994; Baum et al. 1999).

Gender, marital status and ethnicity: According to the assumptions of the 'dominant status model', males should have higher rates of volunteering than females. This is not borne out, however, in most studies of volunteering. Previous research suggests that females are more likely to volunteer, as well as having slightly higher levels of commitment compared with their male counterparts (ABS 2001; Evans & Kelley 2000; Lyons & Hocking 2000). Many studies also show that people who are married or partnered have a higher volunteering rate compared with people who are single (ABS 2001). In contrast, some studies find volunteering may be higher among the widowed (Baldock 1990; Jackson et al. 1995). Having children may also be associated with volunteering at different stages of the life cycle. Studies show that while couples with dependent children have high volunteer rates, they have low rates of volunteer commitment in terms of annual volunteer hours (ABS 2001). Finally, most studies of formal volunteering suggest that the Australian-born (and those who are overseas born of English speaking background) have a higher rate of volunteering as well as contributing a greater number of volunteer hours compared with people from non-English speaking background (ABS 2001; Lyons & Hocking 2000).[3]

SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

Socio-economic status (SES) refers to a person's overall social position as determined by their achievement in education, occupational status, and income and wealth. In general, studies have tended to find that people with higher socio-economic status are more likely to volunteer (Smith 1994; Evans & Kelley 2000; ABS 2001). Those with higher SES may have more resources that enable them to volunteer. The relationship between SES and volunteer commitment is less clear, however, as those with higher incomes may be more likely to be employed on a full-time basis than those on lower incomes (e.g. students, unemployed, the retired) and hence have less discretionary time available to devote to volunteer episodes.

LABOUR MARKET STATUS

A strong and consistent finding in studies of volunteering is that those people not in the labour force (e.g. retirees) are more likely to volunteer as well as having higher levels of commitment compared with those that are in full-time employment, that is, the discretionary time model. Australian evidence in support of this model has been weaker in terms of the rate of volunteering (ABS 2001; Warbuton, Le Brocque & Rosenman 1998), but stronger with respect to volunteer commitment (ABS 2001; Lyons & Hocking 2000).

SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

Religious and associational membership and involvement is generally associated with higher levels of volunteering (Smith 1994; Jackson et al 1995; Sundeen & Raskoff 1994). It has also been found that 'the more one participates in one kind of socio-culturally approved discretionary time activity, the more one will tend to participate in other kinds of such activity, including volunteer participation' (Smith 1994, p.255). Australian research has found that volunteers are more likely to attend a social club, hobby group or self-help/support group (Baum et al 1999). This study also found that civic participation was significantly higher for volunteers than non-volunteers for both individual civic activities (e.g. attending a council meeting) and collective civic activities (e.g. involved in a resident or community action group). Greater civic and social participation through clubs and groups may provide more opportunities to volunteer or it may produce greater civic engagement, stimulating people's willingness to volunteer (Baum et al 1999). A recent study of Australian volunteers also found that those attending church weekly volunteered more than others who did not, although regular church attendance was not related to volunteer commitment (Evans & Kelley 2000).

MOTIVATIONS FOR VOLUNTEERING

It is this final category of variables – the reasons people volunteer, that add the psychological dimension

Table 1: Functions served by volunteering and their assessment on the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI)

Function	Conceptual definition	Sample VFI item
Values	The individual volunteers in order to express, or act on, important values like humanitarianism.	I feel it is important to help others.
Understanding	The volunteer is seeking to learn more about the world or exercise skills that are often unused.	Volunteering lets me learn through direct, hands-on experience.
Enhancement	One can grow and develop psychologically through volunteer activities.	Volunteering makes me feel better about myself.
Career	The volunteer has the goal of gaining career-related experience through volunteering.	Volunteering can help me to get my foot in the door at a place where I would like to work.
Social	Volunteering allows an individual to strengthen his or her social relationships.	People I know share an interest in community service.
Protective	The individual uses volunteering to reduce negative feelings, such as guilt, or to address personal problems.	Volunteering is a good escape from my own troubles.

Source: Clary and Snyder (1999, p.157)

to the sociological factors discussed above. The functional approach to volunteer motivation focuses on 'the needs being met, the motives being fulfilled and the social and psychological functions being served, by the activities of those people who engage in volunteer work' (Clary and Snyder 1991, p.123). Using the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) survey, six categories of motivations or psychological functions met by volunteering have been identified (Clary and Snyder 1991, 1999; Clary, Snyder & Stukas 1996; Clary et al. 1998). These six functions and a corresponding sample VFI question are summarised in Table 1.

Findings based on the VFI have generally shown that the most important functions served by volunteering are values, understanding, and enhancement. The less important functions are those related to social, protective and career motivations. The profile of motivations, however, varies according to volunteers' characteristics, for example, demographic, socio-economic status and type of volunteering. Longer serving or more committed volunteers, for instance, may also develop different motivational profiles compared with volunteers that are relatively new or only volunteer occasionally (Clary et al 1996).

Respondents to the TSF survey were asked to rate each of the 30 statements that make up the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) along a four-point scale (not at all important, not too important, somewhat important, and very important). An option was also allowed for 'don't know/not applicable'. Each individual factor was entered as a separate variable based on the mean score achieved on a four-point scale. The higher the average score for each factor, the more important the factor.[4]

DATA AND METHOD

The data for this study comes from a national survey of all known volunteers at The Smith Family (TSF) conducted in May 2000. The Smith Family is a public-serving, non-profit organisation founded by volunteers in 1922, and it continues to rely on the skills and time of almost 2000 volunteers for many of its activities. Volunteers work in a broad range of Smith Family programs and undertake a wide variety of tasks that includes: sorting clothes, conducting interviews with people in financial crisis, packing hampers, and mentoring tertiary students.[5] On the one hand, the

demographic profile of volunteers at The Smith Family is similar to the traditional 'charities' that operate in the community services sector (Zappalà, Parker & Green 2001). Almost three-quarters of TSF volunteers are women, with almost one-third of all volunteers aged over sixty; almost two-thirds are married or in a de-facto relationship, and the majority of volunteers are not in the paid labour force. On the other hand, TSF also has a large number of volunteers whose profile is more consistent with what has been termed a 'social enterprise' model of volunteering (Zappalà 2001). For instance, almost two-thirds of volunteers are aged between 20 and 59 years, and almost one-third are in full-time employment in primarily professional occupations.

The survey asked questions relating to the reasons people volunteer at TSF (the VFI), the nature and extent of their volunteer activity (e.g. program areas, tasks performed, hours volunteered), socio-demographic information as well as to aspects of their community and religious involvement. A response rate of 53 per cent was achieved which was high given that no reminder follow-up letters were sent to volunteers.[6] The analysis reported in this paper is based on 426 responses.[7]

Table 2: Summary statistics for frequency of volunteering

Frequency of volunteering	N	%
Less than a few times per year	266	62
More than monthly	160	38
Total	*426*	*100*

The measure of volunteer commitment (the dependent variable) used for the analysis was based on volunteers' responses to a question as to how often they undertook volunteering activities at TSF (i.e. volunteer frequency). Respondents could tick one of seven options: once a year, a few times a year, monthly, fortnightly, weekly, a few times a week, every day. Volunteers were classified as 'Infrequent' (0) if they had volunteered less than a few times per year or once per year while 'frequent' volunteers (1) were categorised as those who contributed their services on a 'more than monthly' basis. Table 2 suggests that just over one-third of volunteers were 'frequent'. Summary statistics for all the independent variables are contained in the Appendix.

In order to determine the extent to which each category of variables influenced commitment while keeping the effects of other variables constant, we ran a binomial logistic regression on volunteer frequency. This approach allows us to estimate the 'pure' or isolated effects of, for instance, age, on the frequency of volunteering, adjusted for the effects of other variables. The interpretation of the model is based on the non-linear independent variables being set at their mean (standard convention).

FINDINGS

The results of the logistic regression are summarised in Table 3, estimating the extent to which socio-demographic, labour market status related, socio-economic, social participation related and motivational variables contribute to a volunteer's frequency. With respect to the independent variables, the Wald test of significance showed that the coefficients were statistically significant for at least one variable in each of the five broad factors outlined above.

In terms of socio-demographic characteristics, only age was statistically significant. Of the three socio-economic status measures, only the level of household income was statistically significant. A volunteer's labour market status, in particular, whether they were in full time or part time employment, or were a full time student was a statistically significant predictor. Only one of the three social participation related variables (volunteering for other organisations) was statistically significant. Finally, four of the six motivational factors (career, social, values and enhancement) were significantly associated with volunteer frequency.

To facilitate interpretation of the logit model the Beta coefficients in Table 3 were converted into predicted probabilities. This also had the advantage of allowing the observation of the influence of variables that may not necessarily have been statistically significant. Holding all variables constant at their mean, an 'average' volunteer would have a 40 per cent predicted probability of being 'frequent'. Table 4 shows the change in predicted probabilities of being a frequent volunteer at TSF based on each particular characteristic.

Table 3: Logistic regression equation predicting frequency of volunteering at TSF

Independent Variables	ß	S.E.	Wald	Exp (ß)
Female	0.164	0.437	0.141	1.178
Age 30 to 39	-1.476	0.832	3.145	0.229
Age 40 to 49	0.935	0.759	1.515	2.547
Age 50 to 59	1.530*	0.769	3.954	4.618
Age 60 plus	-0.554	0.854	0.421	0.575
NESB	0.008	0.742	0.000	1.008
Married	0.881	0.504	3.060	2.414
Children under 18 at home	0.267	0.532	0.252	1.306
Urban	-1.476	0.761	3.756	0.229
Years in current local area	0.002	0.015	0.018	1.002
Full-time employment	-4.082***	0.584	48.872	0.017
Part-time employment	-1.820***	0.493	13.647	0.162
Unemployed	-0.943	1.035	0.830	0.390
Studying	-2.499*	1.164	4.610	0.082
Annual income	-0.606***	0.173	12.309	0.546
Occupational Status (1-4)	-0.399	0.214	3.480	0.671
University qualifications	0.798	0.457	3.052	2.220
Associational membership	0.262	0.393	0.446	1.300
Volunteer for other organisations	-0.737*	0.372	3.912	0.479
Church attendance	-0.315	0.449	0.491	0.730
Career	1.116**	0.350	10.189	3.052
Social	-0.864*	0.345	6.262	0.421
Values	-0.874*	0.366	5.717	0.417
Understand	0.381	0.344	1.230	1.464
Enhance	1.211**	0.457	7.019	3.358
Protect	0.013	0.459	0.001	1.013

Notes:
i) * $p<.05$; ** $p<.01$; *** $p<.001$

ii) The model Chi-square statistic was significant ($x^2 = 338$, $df = 26$, $p<.001$), while the Hosmer and Lemeshow test showed adequate fit between the data and the model (Goodness-of-Fit $x^2 = 14.02$, $df = 8$, $p = .08$).

Table 4: Effects of characteristics upon the predicted probability of being a frequent volunteer at TSF

Characteristics	Predicted probability	Percentage difference
Age		
30 to 39	18	
40 to 49	58	40
50 to 59	68	50
60 plus	30	12
Sex		
Female	42	
Male	38	4
Ethnicity		
NESB	40	0
ESB	40	
Marital status		
Married	47	
Single	27	-20
Children <18		
None	39	
More than 1	45	6
Geographic location		
Rural	72	
Urban	37	-35
Years in local area		
3 years	40	
20 years	41	1
Income		
< $10 000	81	
$10K to $30K	70	-11
$30K to $50K	56	-25
$50K to $70K	41	-40
$70K to $100K	28	-53
>$100K	17	-64
Education		
Uni. Qualifications	51	
No Uni. Qualifications	32	-19
Occupational status		
Very low	56	
Low	46	-10
High	36	-20
Labour market status		
FT	4	
Not FT	70	66
PT	13	
Not PT	47	34
Studying	6	
Not Studying	44	38
Unemployed	21	
Not unemployed	41	20
Social participation		
Vol. for other org.	31	
TSF vol. only	48	17
Assoc. membership		
Member of assoc.	44	
Not member of assoc.	38	-6
Church attendance		
Regular	35	
Non-regular	42	7
Motivations		
Career (1–4)	46–93	
Social (1–4)	51–7	
Values (1–4)	85–29	
Enhance (1–4)	10–82	
Understand (1– 4)	27–54	
Protect (1–4)	40–41	

With all other variables held constant at their mean, Table 4 shows that the predicted probability of being a 'frequent' volunteer at TSF increased with age. Compared to the reference group (those aged 20– 29 years) those aged 30–39 years had an 18 per cent predicted probability of being a frequent volunteer. The predicted probability increased to 58 per cent for volunteers aged 40–49 years, and peaked for those aged 50–59 years at 68 per cent (statistically significant). The predicted probability of being a frequent volunteer decreased to 30 per cent for those aged over 60 years.

The geographic location variable bordered on statistical significance with the findings supporting the conventional wisdom that volunteers who live in rural areas are more likely to be committed compared with those who live in urban areas. Volunteers who lived in rural areas had a higher predicted probability of being frequent (72%) compared with volunteers who lived in urban areas (37%).[8]

With regard to other significant characteristics, volunteers with *lower* household incomes had higher predicted probabilities of being frequent than those with *higher* household incomes. A volunteer with an

income between $10 and $30 thousand, for example, had a 70 per cent predicted probability of being frequent compared to 17 per cent for a volunteer with a household income over $100 thousand. Volunteers that were employed full time had a significantly lower predicted probability of being frequent (4%) than those not employed full time (70%). Similarly, a volunteer who was employed part-time had a significantly lower predicted probability of being frequent (13%) than those not employed part-time (47%). The predicted probability of being frequent was similarly low for volunteers who were studying full-time (6%), compared with those who were not studying full-time (44%). The unemployed had a lower predicted probability of being frequent (21%), compared with volunteers who were not unemployed (41%). The predicted probability of being frequent was highest (79%) for the reference group (those not in the labour force).

With respect to the social participation variables, volunteers that also volunteered for other organisations had a lower predicted probability of being frequent (31%) than those that only volunteered at TSF (48%). So while volunteering might lead to further volunteering in general, it is not surprising that those who volunteered for other organisations had less time to give at TSF. So being an infrequent volunteer at one organisation (TSF) does not necessarily mean having lower levels of civic involvement or volunteer commitment at other organisations.

Finally, the analysis showed that people's motivations for volunteering are significantly related to frequency, with four of the six psychological functions being statistically significant. Volunteers that were primarily motivated by career or enhancement functions had higher predicted probabilities of being frequent compared with those for whom these functions were less important. A hypothetical volunteer with a score of 4 for the career function (i.e. career reasons are strong drivers for volunteering), for instance, had a 93 per cent predicted probability compared with someone with a score of 1 for the career function (46%). Similarly, someone with a score of 4 for the enhancement function had an 82 per cent predicted probability of being frequent compared with someone with a score of 1 (i.e. enhancement function is not important). In contrast, those with high scores for the values and social functions (i.e. those who were primarily motivated by values and social motivational profiles) had significantly lower predicted probabilities of being frequent (29% and 7% respectively), compared with volunteers for whom these motivations were not important (85% and 51% respectively).[9]

IMPLICATIONS

The above results raise several policy implications with respect to volunteer commitment in community services organisations.

APPEALING TO THE 'BOOMER' GENERATION

The changing age structure of the population in Australia (as well as in many other OECD economies) has led to an increasing focus on the attitudes and behaviour of the 'baby boom' generation (generally regarded as those aged 50–59 years). The pessimistic view, influenced by U.S. research, is that we may see a decline in philanthropic behaviour among 'boomers' (Putnam 2000). It is argued that the baby boom generation has less sense of civic responsibility and engagement compared with the pre-war generation. The optimistic view is that what we are witnessing is not necessarily a decline in volunteering among boomers but a change in the motivations for volunteering. In other words, 'baby boomers' may continue to donate their time through reasons related to self-interest rather than through a broader sense of civic duty (Heartbeat Trends 2001). Given that baby boomers are the largest group entering retirement at the moment, the ground for an increase in volunteering activity and commitment may therefore be quite fertile. The findings from this study, namely, that boomers were the most committed, would tend to support the more optimistic view of boomer behaviour.

A key challenge for organisations that rely on volunteers, however, is how and whether they can change their existing volunteer recruitment and management strategies to continue to attract the increasing (and committed) boomer generation. This might require organisations changing the types of volunteer opportunities they make available to the potential pool of volunteers in this age group. Recent focus-group research with this age cohort suggests that any recruitment messages should explicitly identify the benefits of volunteering (especially how it can be personally fulfilling) to the volunteer (Esmond 2001; Heartbeat

Trends 2001). Furthermore, volunteer programs may need to be redesigned so they include opportunities for education and training, feedback and evaluation, and clearly communicate the overall goal to be achieved (Esmond 2001; Heartbeat Trends 2001). Boomers need to feel valued and challenged in their volunteer experience and secure in the knowledge that they are contributing to something worthwhile through groups that are open, supportive and professionally managed (Esmond 2001). Boomers' attitudes to volunteering are similar to their attitudes towards paid work and there may be a need to adjust the role to fit their skills rather than fit the person to the job (Heartbeat Trends 2001). They are more likely to be attracted to volunteer programs that also offer learning opportunities as well skill sharing with the target group.[10] Care should be taken, however, in the management of existing older volunteers. In particular, there is a risk that older more 'traditional' volunteers may not want or be able to make the transition to more 'social enterprise' styles of volunteering (Encel & Nelson 1996; Zappalà 2001; McDonald & Warburton 2000).

VOLUNTEERING IS NOT JUST A 'MIDDLE-CLASS' ACTIVITY

The conventional wisdom (reinforced by most studies and findings on the relationship between volunteering and socio-economic status) is that volunteering, especially in community services, is primarily a middle-class activity. In particular, the 'lady bountiful' stereotype of the volunteer was associated with women who may not have been in the labour force but had husbands or fathers in relatively higher status occupations (Baldock 1990). The findings from this study provide little support for this view, suggesting that those volunteers with lower SES have higher commitment compared with volunteers with higher SES. This also supports the view put forward by some researchers that volunteering in Australia has crossed class and socio-economic boundaries (Baldock 1990; Oppenheimer 1997). Volunteering stereotypes may need challenging.

This finding also has implications for recent policies that promote community renewal and regeneration through approaches such as 'place management' (Zappalà & Green 2001). Simply, place management provides a spatial framework for an outcome-driven approach to addressing disadvantage for a specific geographic place, such as a neighbourhood or housing estate. Communities that are resource poor may have the potential to harness people who are willing to donate their time in a sustained way to projects that develop their local capacities. Having people with local knowledge who can commit their time to such local projects is vital to ensuring the success of place management initiatives. Volunteers from lower socio-economic backgrounds may also have a better ability to identify with the problems and needs faced by disadvantaged people and communities that place management initiatives attempt to address (Johnson & Taylor 2000). The challenge for non-profit organisations and governments involved in coordinating such initiatives is to once again improve their understanding of how to provide volunteer opportunities for people in the locations where these projects or programs are occurring. Organisations involved in 'place' initiatives, especially in rural and regional areas, need look no further than where they are conducting their activities for suitable and committed volunteers.

ENCOURAGING EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS

Labour market status was a key predictor of volunteering commitment, with those in full-time employment much less likely to be frequent volunteers compared with those who were not in the labour force. This may suggest the need for policies and programs that facilitate volunteering among those in the workforce. One development that in part addresses this issue is employee volunteering. Employee Volunteer Programs (EVPs) are increasingly being developed to assist companies in the recruitment, retention and development of employees as well as for marketing, communications and public relations purposes often in alignment with 'corporate giving programs'. One study of EVPs in the U.S., found that 81 per cent of companies supported employee volunteering as a core business function (Point of Light 2000).

While not as widespread as in the U.S., EVPs are attracting increasing attention among some companies and the community sector in Australia (CCPA 2000; Zappalà 2001). A recent survey conducted of the top 100 companies in Australia found a relatively high degree of support for employee volunteering, with 61 per cent of companies stating they had poli-

cies that support employee volunteer activity (Cronin & Zappalà 2002). The more popular types of EVPs supported by companies included: paid release time for volunteer activity, unpaid release time for volunteer activity, formal employee volunteer programs and pro-bono arrangements. Less popular were employee secondments to non-profit organisations. This study concluded, however, that although companies in Australia are developing new methods of Corporate Community Involvement that break away from traditional philanthropic practices in favour of partnerships with non-profits, there is still room for companies and non-profit organisations to develop partnerships that provide for greater involvement and participation from employees (Cronin & Zappalà 2002). The further growth of EVPs may assist those in full time employment to increase their level of commitment to volunteer activity.

ADOPTING MORE SOPHISTICATED VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

This study suggested that volunteer commitment was influenced by the reasons that motivated people to volunteer. The conventional view that highly committed volunteers are motivated primarily by altruism was not supported by our findings. Indeed, in terms of commitment, the opposite was the case. This may not be so surprising, as an altruistic urge can be met through a once off or occasional volunteer experience. People who volunteer for career or self-esteem reasons, however, may require a more regular and intensive volunteer activity to fulfil their needs.

There is now extensive research that shows that a better understanding of the motivational profile of volunteers can significantly assist volunteer recruitment, retention and management (Clary et al 1996, 1998). Nevertheless, few Australian community service organisations use such information with respect to managing their volunteer base. The findings reported in this paper suggest that eliciting commitment from their volunteers may require community service organisations to become more responsive to satisfying a wider and more complex set of motivational needs. Making use of 'motivational' type information will become particularly important in the context of the previous discussion on baby boomers and the development of EVPs. Further research into the reasons employees participate in EVPs, for instance, will also be important if community sector organisations are to tap into this potential reservoir of volunteers (Lee 2001).

CONCLUSION

So what makes a frequent volunteer? The findings presented in this paper suggest that a range of socio-demographic (age), socio-economic (income), time (labour market situation), participation (volunteering for several organisations) and motivational factors are associated with volunteer frequency (at least for one particular community service organisation). In brief, they support a socio-psychological approach to volunteer behaviour (Smith 1994; Zappalà & Burrell 2001, 2002). The findings also suggest that the factors that may lead people to become volunteers (the volunteer rate) may not be the same as those associated with volunteer commitment. The use of logistic regression techniques allowed the relative influence of these factors to be examined in terms of predicted probability analysis.

While caution should be taken in generalising the findings to the wider population of volunteers, as this study was based on volunteers in one community service organisation, several implications for community service organisations and public policy were outlined. These included:

- the need for organisations to appeal to and meet the needs of the baby boomer generation, in particular, changing the types of volunteer opportunities they make available to the potential pool of volunteers in this age group and ensuring that they identify the personal benefits of volunteering, and include opportunities for education and training
- challenging the stereotype that volunteering is only for the middle-classes and making the most of local volunteer resources from disadvantaged communities and locations
- the need to encourage the development of Employee Volunteer Programs (EVPs)
- the need for community service organisations to make more use of 'motivational' type information with respect to recruiting potential volunteers as well as managing their existing volunteer base.

Appendix

Table A1: Summary statistics for socio-demographic variables

Variable	Variable type	N	%
Age	Nominal		
20 to 29	(reference category)	44	10
30 to 39	(1 if 30–39; 0 all other ages)	92	22
40 to 49	(1 if 40–49; 0 all other ages)	105	25
50 to 59	(1 if 50–59; 0 all other ages)	107	25
Over 60	(1 if > 60; 0 all other ages)	78	18
Sex	Nominal		
Male	(0)	155	36
Female	(1)	271	64
Ethnicity	Nominal		
Australian born & ESB	(0)	395	93
NESB	(1)	31	7
Marital status	Nominal		
Single	(0)	131	31
Married	(1)	295	69
Children under 18 at home	Nominal		
None	(0)	302	71
1 or more	(1)	124	29
Geographic location	Nominal		
Rural	(0)	42	10
Urban	(1)	384	90
Years in current local area	Ratio	**Mean**	**SD**
	(1-75)	16.41	13.66

Table A2: Summary statistics for socio-economic status variables

Variable	Variable type	N	%
Gross annual household income	Ordinal		
Less than $10,000	1	21	5
$10,001 to $30,000	2	69	16
$30,001 to $50,000	3	76	18
$50,001 to $70,000	4	64	15
$70,001 to $100,000	5	82	19
More than $100,000	6	114	27
Occupational Status*	Ordinal		
Very low status	1	101	24
Low status	2	72	17
High status	3	152	36
Very high status	4	101	24
Education	Nominal		
Tertiary qualifications	1	198	46
No tertiary qualifications	0	228	54
Labour Market Status	Nominal		
Full-time	(1 if FT; 0 all other)	203	30
Part-time	(1 if PT; 0 all other)	76	15
Unemployed	(1 if unemployed; 0 all other)	18	4
Retired/home duties	(reference category)	119	45
Studying	(1 if student; 0 all other)	10	6

* Responses to a question on volunteers' current or last regular occupation were coded to four-digit level using ABS ASCO codes. These were in turn divided into occupational status quartiles using the ANU scale of occupational status. The ANU scale of occupations assigns scores from 1 to 100 to each occupation based on the characteristics of the job, the skill level required and its prestige rating (McMillan & Jones 2000). A volunteer whose occupation was listed in the bottom quartile, for instance, was given a score of 1, while one whose occupation was listed in the top quartile was given a score of 4.

Table A3: Summary statistics for social participation and religious variables

Variable	N	%
Associational membership		
1 or more	165	39
None	261	61
Volunteer for another organisation		
1 or more	185	43
None	241	57
Religious activity		
Less than once a month	323	76
At least once a month	103	24

Table A4: Summary statistics for motivational variables

Variable	Mean	SD	*a*
Values	3.44	0.56	.71
Understanding	2.60	0.74	.49
Enhancement	2.45	0.65	.55
Protect	1.57	0.58	.81
Social	1.50	0.65	.59
Career	1.36	0.67	.43

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ENDNOTES

1 Smith (1994) listed five specific 'categories of variables' that should be included in models of volunteering: contextual (factors that characterise the environment of an individual); social background (socio-economic status, gender, family structure & size, age, ethnicity, employment status); personality; attitudes (motivations such as altruism); situation (e.g. being asked or encouraged to join a volunteer group); and social participation (participation in societal discretionary time activities).

2 While grouped somewhat differently, these five categories capture most of the variables and characteristics noted by Smith (1994).

3 While people from non-English speaking and Indigenous backgrounds have lower rates of formal volunteering they may have higher rates of informal volunteering within their own communities (see Kerr et al 2001).

4 Reliability analysis conducted for each of the six VFI factors (see Table A4) suggested good internal consistency.

5 See Zappalà et al 2001 for further details on the survey and the nature of volunteering at TSF.

6 Two modes of distributing the survey were used. The questionnaire was mailed-out to 1,513 volunteers whose primary volunteer activity meant they did not regularly visit a TSF Centre (e.g. Christmas hamper and toy packing and delivery, tertiary student mentors). The questionnaire was distributed personally through TSF Centre managers to 406 volunteers who volunteer on a regular basis at TSF premises (e.g. emergency help caseworkers, clothing workers). The response rate for the mail-out survey was 44% and 81% for the handout survey, giving an overall response rate of 53%. Overall, there were 989 usable responses.

7 As only cases where data was available on the full set of variables used in the regressions were used, 563 respondents were excluded as they did not complete at least one of the questions in the survey that pertains to this particular analysis. Questions that were not completed (in rank order) were: occupation (212), income (152) and educational qualifications (101). While only eleven respondents did not complete any of the questions that related to their motivations for volunteering, there were 322 respondents that failed to answer all items pertaining to at least one VFI factor (meaning that a mean score could not be calculated for that particular factor). Overall, the distributions of the reduced sample used here were similar to that of the overall sample (see Zappalà, Parker & Green 2001 for details).

8 In an earlier specification of the model where age was entered as a continuous variable, geographic location was significant at the 5% level with all other variables behaving in a similar fashion to those in Table 3 (Zappalà & Burrell 2001 p.15). The slide into insignificance in this model may be due to the relatively large standard errors on the location variable.

9 Predicted probability estimates may also be used to calculate the likelihood of being a frequent volunteer at TSF for a hypothetical person with particular characteristics. For instance, the probability of being frequent for a volunteer who is female, aged between 50 and 59, has an income between $10,000 and $30,000 and lives in a rural area is 97%. In contrast, a male volunteer aged 30 to 39 who lives in an urban area, with an income between $50,000 and $70,000 has a 15% predicted probability of being frequent.

10 It would be interesting, for instance, to examine whether existing programs that target 'older' volunteers, such as *Grandfriends* and *Experienced Hands* in NSW meet 'baby boomer' expectations.

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