



# Volunteer Motivation & Engagement

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PennState Extension



# Agenda

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## Trends in Volunteerism

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## Generational & Cultural Differences

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## Volunteer Motivation

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## Volunteer Engagement & Communication

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## Tips & Strategies



## Community Development &gt;

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Research Article

# Importance of organizational volunteer retention and communication with volunteers during the COVID-19 pandemic

Suzanna Windon , Daniel Robotham &amp; Ann Echols

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## In this article

[ABSTRACT](#)[Introduction](#)[Literature review](#)[Purpose and  
research objectives](#)[Method](#)

## ABSTRACT

We used the online survey method to explore the relationship between the importance of volunteer retention during the COVID-19 pandemic and organizational volunteer communication practices among nonprofit organizations' leaders of local communities. The target population for our study was 696 nonprofit organizational leaders. The response rate was 10.6%. Organizational volunteer communication practices explain 63% of the importance of organizational volunteer retention during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the challenges posed by COVID-19, organizations placed significant value on effective organizational communication practices, especially in developing trusting relationships with volunteers, encouraging free-flowing communication, and listening to volunteers. Outreach educators and volunteer

<https://doi.org/10.1080/15575330.2023.2186457>

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[Race and Inclusion in Volunteerism: Using Communication Theory to Improve Volunteer Retention >](#)

Denise Sevvick Bortree et al.  
Journal of Public Relations Research  
Published online: 28 May 2014



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## **Importance of Organizational Volunteer Communication**

Organizational volunteer communication practices explain 63% of the importance of organizational volunteer retention during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **TOP-3 items**

- Listening and paying attention to volunteers
- Promoting accurate and free-flowing horizontal communication between employees/volunteers
- Being open to ideas



# Journal of Human Sciences & Extension

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## What Explained Nonprofit Organizations' Satisfaction with Volunteer Retention During the COVID-19 Pandemic?

[Suzanna R. Windon, The Pennsylvania State University](#)

[Daniel Robotham, The Pennsylvania State University](#)

[Ann Echols, The Pennsylvania State University](#)

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### Abstract

The purpose of this quantitative study was to investigate nonprofit organizations' satisfaction with volunteer retention during the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants were 74 nonprofit organizations' leaders who participated in the online survey. The response rate was 10.6%. We found that the overall mean score for satisfaction with organizational retention of volunteers during the COVID-19 pandemic was 3.50 (SD = .98), and the importance of volunteer management practices was 3.52 (SD = .96). Most nonprofit organizations were proactive (38.8%) and reacted promptly (52.2%) while addressing the organizations' response to the pandemic. Approximately 10.3% of the variation in satisfaction with organizational retention of volunteers during the COVID-19 pandemic could be explained by the importance of volunteer management practices and organizational response to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, within the final model, only one factor was a significant predictor of satisfaction with organizational retention of volunteers during the COVID-19 pandemic, namely, organizational response to the COVID-19 pandemic ( $\beta = -.304$ ;  $p = .014$ ). Recommendations for future research discussed. Implications for volunteer management and leadership studies faculty, University Extension educators, human resources practitioners, and local nonprofit organizations' leaders are also presented.

### Recommended Citation

Windon, S. R., Robotham, D., & Echols, A. (2022). What Explained Nonprofit Organizations' Satisfaction with Volunteer Retention During the COVID-19 Pandemic?. *Journal of Human Sciences and Extension*, 10(1), 9. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54718/YIUB2599>

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# Organizational Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

***Table 6. Organizational Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic***

<b>Items</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
The organization proactively acted to address the situation ahead of time	26	38.8
The organization actively collected external data and reacted promptly	35	52.2
The organization waited on others' early success stories before reacting	2	3
The organization was reluctant to react and waited for the majority to react before it acted	3	4.5
The organization was skeptical and one of the last to react	1	1.5
Total	67	100

# Top 3 Volunteer Management Practices

61% Providing trainings for all staff and volunteers

67% Matching the skills, experience, and interests of volunteers to specific roles

68% Supervising volunteers (building relationships, mentoring volunteers, checking the status of work)





# Volunteer Statistics

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- 25.1% volunteered between 2017 (63 million, 7.9 billion hours, median 52 volunteer hours) and contributed \$184 billion of service
- Age: 35-45 (28%) and 20-24 (18.4%)
- Women volunteer at higher rates (27.8%) than men (21.8%).
- Race: white (26.4%), blacks (19.3%), Asian (17.9%), Hispanic (15.5%)



# Volunteer Statistics

- 42.1% of people became volunteers with their main organization after being asked to volunteer.
- Organizations: religious (34%), educational or youth-related services (26%), social or community organizations (14.9%, health organizations -7.3)





## Volunteer Statistics

- The rate of formal volunteering through organizations dropped by seven percentage points, from 30 percent in 2019 to 23.2 percent in 2021, during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **23.2 % or 60.7 million people** formally volunteered with organizations between September 2020 and 2021; They served an estimated **4.1 billion hours** with an **economic value of \$122.9 billion**.





# Volunteer Statistics

- The rate drop was substantially larger for women (8 percentage points) than for men (5 percentage points)
- Generation X (ages 41 to 56 in 2021) had the highest rate of all generations.
- People ages 16-17 had the highest rate of all age groups at 28%, followed by people ages 45 to 54 at 27%.
- Parents with children under 18 formally volunteered at a higher rate (30%) than those without children (21%).

Source: <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2023/01/volunteering-and-civic-life-in-america.html#:~:text=Trends%20in%20formal%20volunteering%202019,highest%20rate%20of%20all%20generations>.

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<https://pixabay.com/photos/idea-choice-success-lightbulb-bulb-3845389/>





# Generational Values of Volunteers

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# Theoretical Foundation – Generation Theory: Generational Cohort Theory

## Definition and Origin

Cultural theory attributing cohort differences to values and attitudes (Pilcher, 1994)  
Originated from Karl Mannheim's pursuit of social knowledge free of social class

## Key Concept

Individuals born at the same time share similar developmental experiences  
Forms a 'natural view of the world'

## Influence of Historical Events

Important events and social changes affect values, attitudes, beliefs, and inclinations

Theoretical  
Foundation –  
Generation Theory:  
Strauss-Howe  
Generational Theory  
(Strauss & Howe,  
1991)

**Strauss-Howe Generational Theory**

- Characterizes historical generations through cyclical changes called 'turnings' (Strauss & Howe, 1991).
- Explains how attitudes and values are shaped in individuals and groups. (Espinoza et al., 2010)
- Generations categorized as heroes, artists, prophets, and nomads

**Heroes Generation**

- Responds to skeptical nature of previous generation
- Rebuilds institutional life in response to perceived threats

**Artist Generation**

- Post-crisis era generation

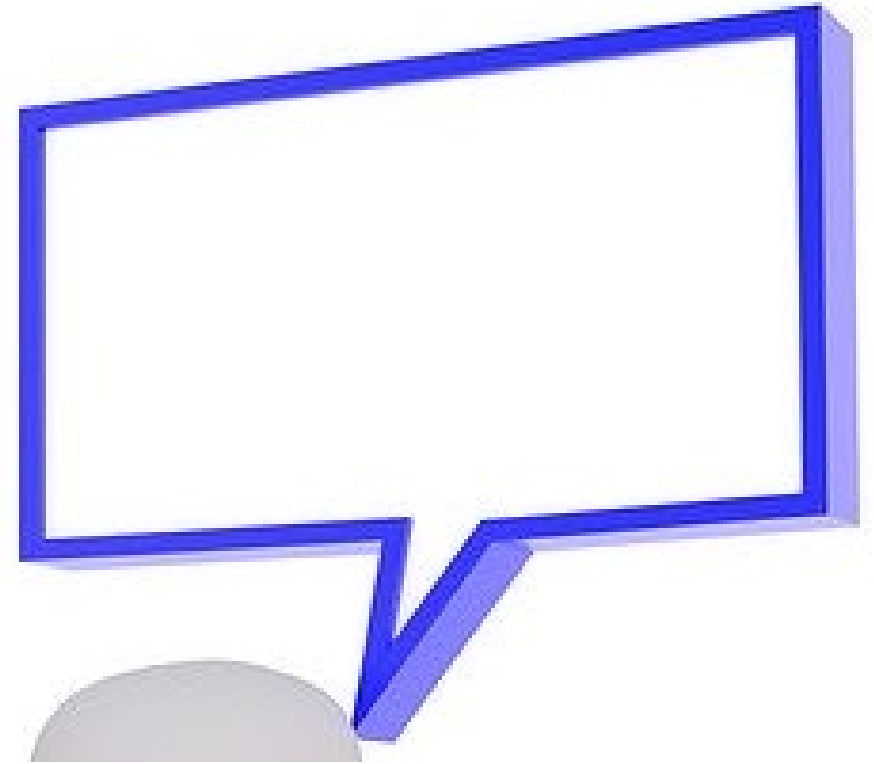
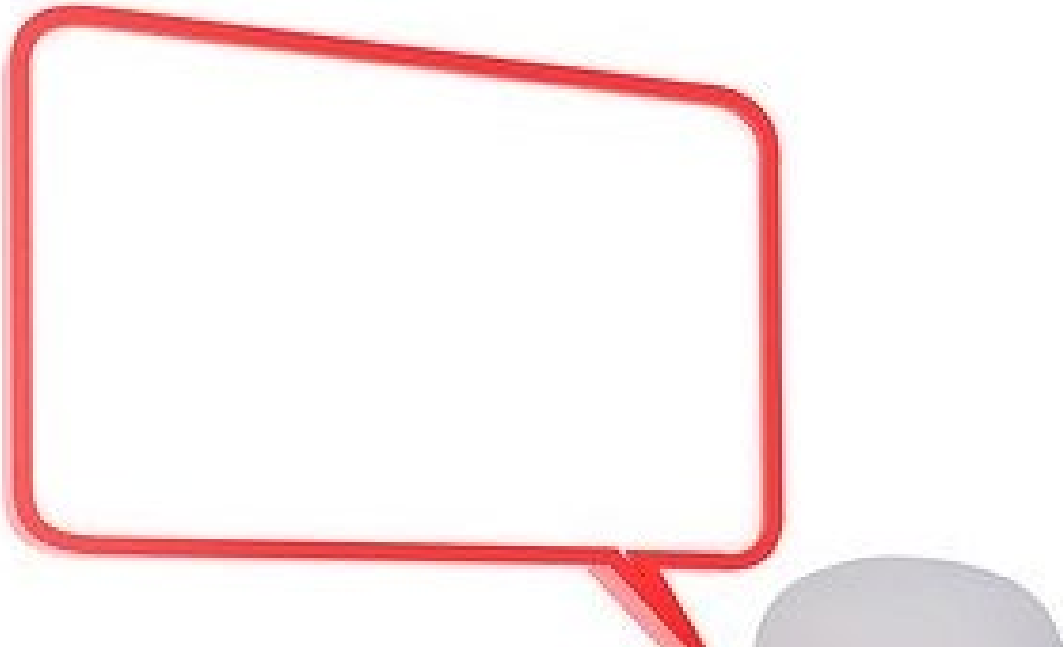
**Nomad Generation**



# Generational Time Periods

Authors	Silent Generation	Baby Boomers	Generation X	Generation Y	Generation Z
Strauss and Howe (1991)	1925 – 1942	1943 – 1960	1961 – 1981	1982 – present	-
Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak (2000)	1922 – 1943	1943 – 1960	1960 – 1980	1980 – 2000	-
Marston (2007)	1920 – 1946	1946 – 1964	1965 – 1979	1980 – 2000	2001 – present
Tapscott (2009)	-	1946 – 1964	1965 – 1976	1977 – 1997	-
Espinoza (2010)	-	1946 – 1964	1965 – 1977	1978 – 1996	-
Howard, T. R. (2016)	1925 – 1945	1946 – 1964	1965 – 1980	1981 – 2000	2001 – present

# Why do people volunteer in the first place?



# Why do people volunteer in the first place?

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To help a family member

---

To do something different than their daily job

---

For Fun!!

---

To keep skills alive

---

As an excuse to do something they love

---

To donate their professional skills

---

As a family tradition

---

Because is no one else does it

---

To get the meals, transportation, or other benefits

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Windon, Suzanna R.; Awan, Mariah K.; and Radhakrishna, Rama (2024) "4-H Volunteers Leaders' Turnover Intention," *Journal of Youth Development*: Vol. 19: Iss. 1, Article 6.  
Available at: <https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/jyd/vol19/iss1/6>



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### 4-H VOLUNTEERS LEADERS' TURNOVER INTENTION

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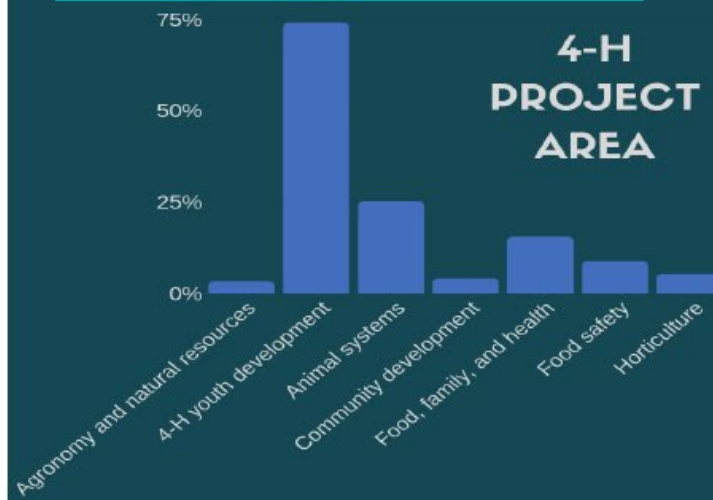
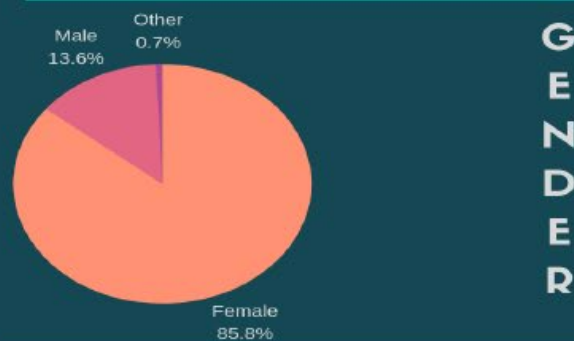
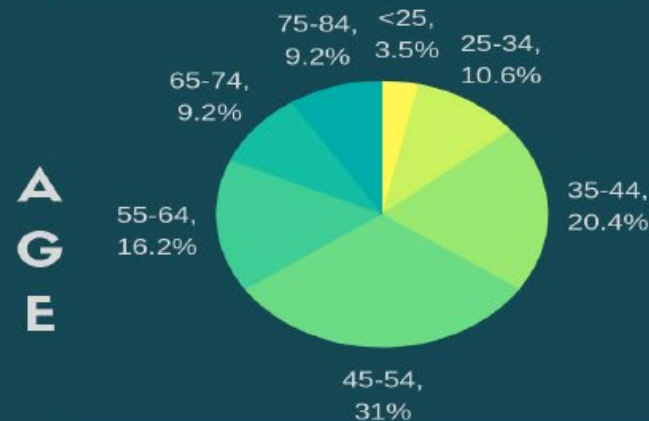
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## DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES OF 4-H COMMUNITY LEADERS



## WHY DO VOLUNTEERS LIKE WORKING WITH PENN STATE EXTENSION?



PROGRAMS ARE RELEVANT TO THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY

93.0%



VOLUNTEER SERVICE WAS WORTHWHILE

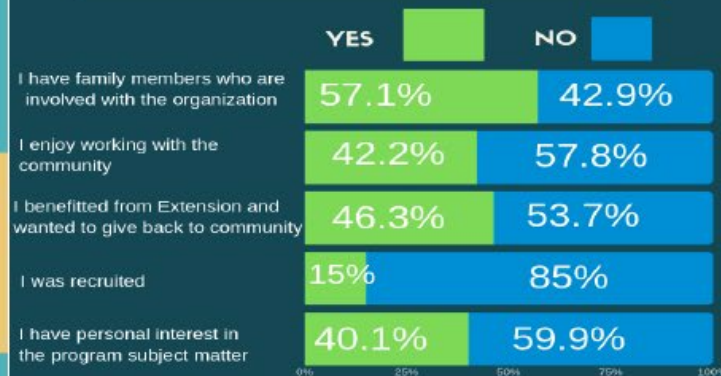
93.9%

LEARN NEW THINGS BECAUSE OF BEING A VOLUNTEER

92.5%



## WHAT CAUSED YOU TO BECOME AN EXTENSION VOLUNTEER?



### INTENTION TO REMAIN A VOLUNTEER



### RETAINING 4-H VOLUNTEER LEADERS

- ☐ Consider how volunteers can be retained after the program is over
- ☐ Ensure volunteers have ample time to perform tasks
- ☐ Maintain a positive leadership climate
- ☐ Work to emphasize volunteer benefits of being involved in the program
- ☐ Emphasize potential career and professional skills that volunteers may gain by continuing involvement



I have family members who are involved with the organization

57.1%

42.9%

I enjoy working with the community

42.2%

57.8%

I benefitted from Extension and wanted to give back to community

46.3%

53.7%

I was recruited

15%

85%

I have personal interest in the program subject matter

40.1%

59.9%

0%

25%

50%

75%

100%

# Generational Values: Baby Boomers

- Values community engagement and civic duty
- Sees volunteering as a way to give back and stay active in retirement
- Motivated by a sense of responsibility to their community
- Desires to make a meaningful impact on society
- Characterized by commitment to long-term volunteer roles
- Often dedicates significant amounts of time to organizations they support



(Snyder & Omoto, 2008)

## Generational Values: Generation X

- Personal Development
- Motivated by opportunities for personal growth
- Seek roles that build transferable skills
- Flexible Scheduling
- Value opportunities that fit into busy lives
- Balance work and family commitments
- Professional Growth
- Look for roles that offer professional development
- Interested in networking opportunities

# Generational Values: Generation Y

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## Desire for Social Impact

- Driven by passion for causes
- Seek flexible and short-term opportunities

## Motivated by key issues

- Environmental sustainability
- Social justice
- Community development

## Preference for Tangible Results

- Immediate and visible outcomes
- Collaborative projects with peers

## Integration with Social Lives

- Use of social media to promote causes

## Characteristics/lifestyle/values

### Generation Z

- Digital natives - highly connected, use communications and media technologies
- New conservatives, embracing traditional beliefs, valuing the family unit, self-controlled, and more responsible.
- Value authenticity and realness.
- Redefining face-to-face via Facebook, Facetime, etc.
- Extremely altruistic, caring deeply about the environment and global humanitarian issues.

## Generation Values: Generation Z

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- **Generation Z Overview**
  - Born from 2001 to present
  - Witnessing significant events like the Obama children in the White House
  - Experiencing global terrorism, school violence, and economic uncertainty
- **Volunteerism Perception**
  - Volunteerism seen as valuable and not just for retirees
  - Organizations need to diversify roles to attract Generation Z



# Implications of Generational Values

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- **Baby Boomers** value community engagement and civic duty, and prefer stable, ongoing roles with community impact
- **Generation X** seeks personal development, work-life balance, and flexibility
- **Millennials** are driven by difference-making and dynamic projects, and are motivated by social impact, collaboration, and innovation
- **Generation Z** values diversity, inclusivity, and immediate results, and is motivated by social justice and quick outcomes



# Trends in Volunteerism

- Where have all volunteers gone?
- What motivates people to volunteer?
- Why are people less likely to volunteer?
- What is up with the younger generations of volunteers?



# A Profile of a New Breed of Volunteers

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- Often volunteers for multiple organizations
- Wants flexibility
- Expects to experience personal and professional development
- Will not tolerate working alongside incompetent volunteers
- Is tech-savvy
- Doesn't want to be micromanaged



# Strategies to Embrace Interests



## Personalized Engagement

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- Match volunteer roles to individual interests.
- Allow volunteers to lead initiatives related to their passions.
- Implement regular feedback mechanisms to align roles with volunteer motivations.



# Recognition and Development



Celebrate achievements  
that align with volunteer  
interests.



Offer training programs  
catering to diverse interests  
and skills.



## Leveraging Digital Platforms

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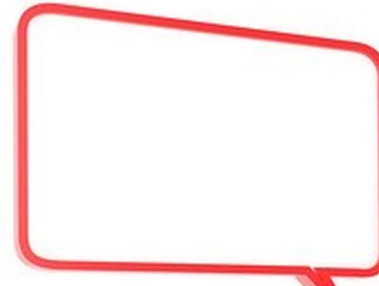
- Use digital platforms for engagement and tracking progress.
- Provide flexible scheduling and remote volunteering options to accommodate different lifestyles.



# Across Culture

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- **In your opinion, what are cultural barriers?**

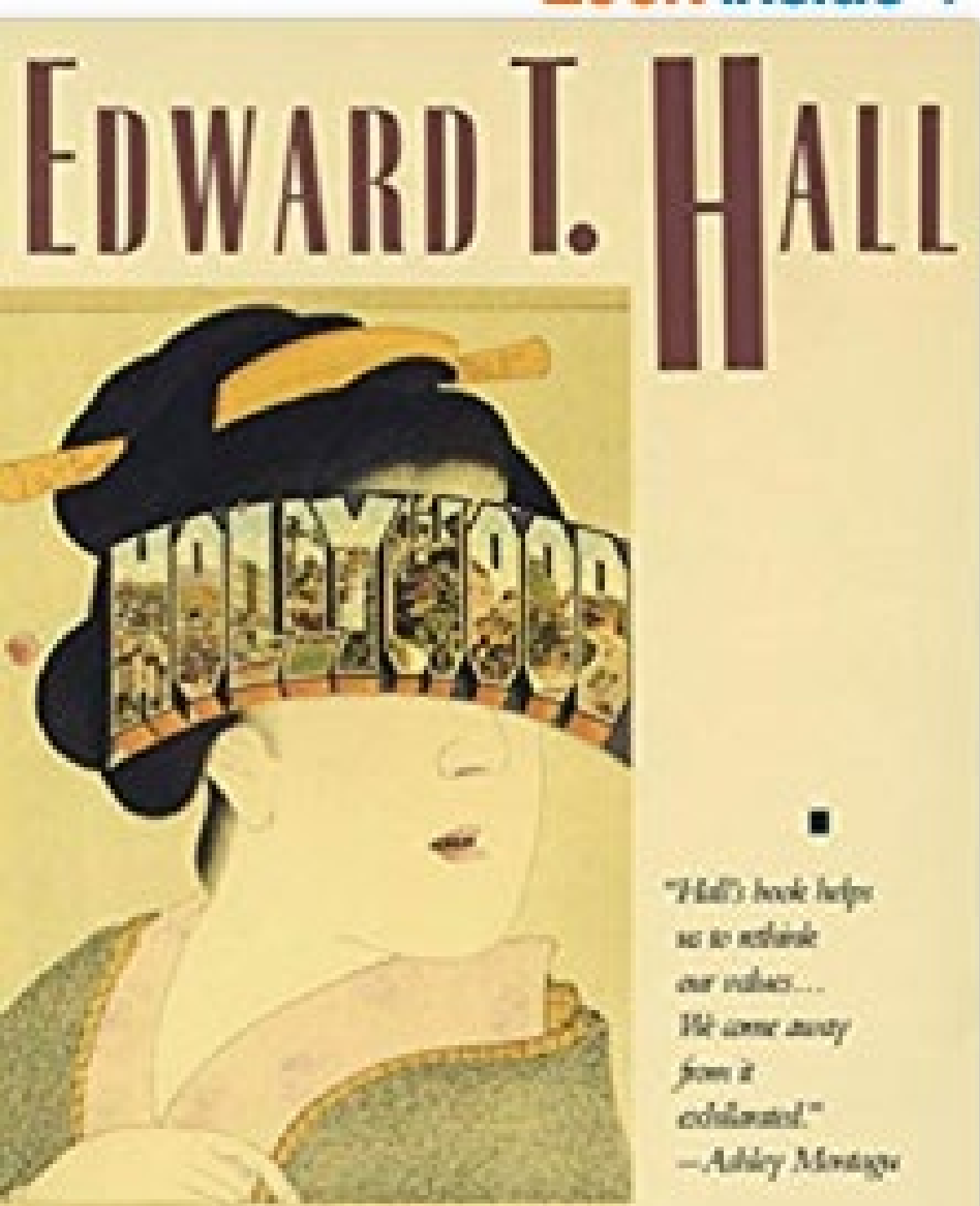


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## Hall's Model of Cultural Values

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- Communication Context
- Time
- Space

### 10% Visible culture

External culture: food, facial expression, language, music, visual arts, festivals

### 90% Invisible culture

Internal culture: norms, rules, notion of “self”, beliefs, perceptions, assumptions, thought process, etiquette, attitude, values, expectations, desires, attitude toward social status, emotional response, nature of friendship, gender roles, religion, views on raising children, leadership style





# EXAMPLES ...

DELIVERING EDUCATION YOU CAN TRUST





Source: <https://pixabay.com/illustrations/brand-pepsi-drink-cold-sticker-2625450/>

**Come alive! You're In  
the Pepsi Generation!**

- Pepsi will bring your ancestors back from the dead (Taiwan)
- Resurrection (Chinese)



Source: <https://www.autoinfluence.com/classic-car-profile-chevy-nova/>

Chevrolet, Chevy  
Nova or Chevy II

- In Spanish – “Nova” means - “It won’t go.”

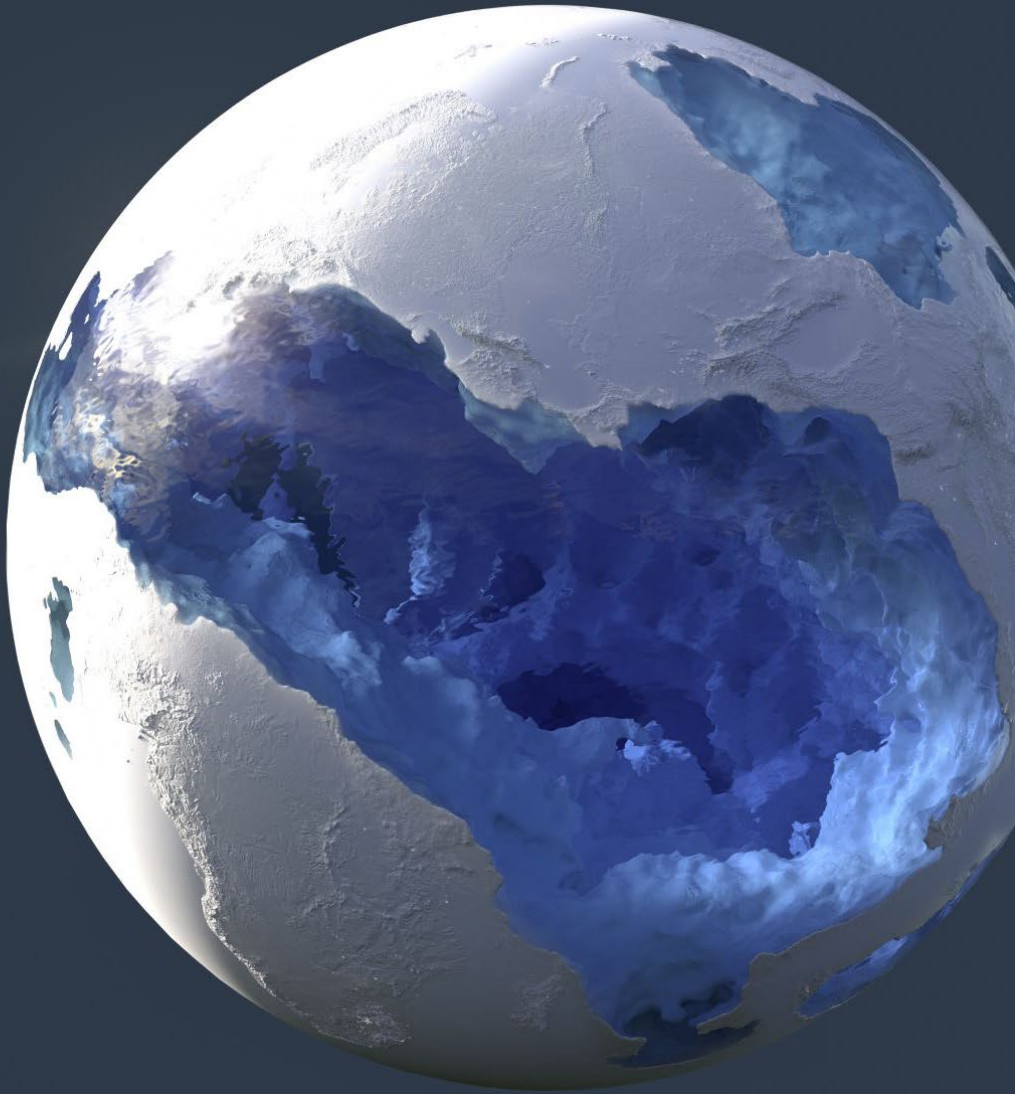
## EXAMPLE:

### Latino Community within the U.S.

#### Six Subgroups:

- Cubans
- Mexicans
- Puerto- Ricans
- Spaniards
- Central Americans
- South Americans





# Spanish-Speaking Countries

- Argentina
- Belize
- Bolivia
- Brazil
- Chile
- Columbia
- Costa Rica
- Cuba
- Dominican Republic
- Ecuador
- El Salvador
- Guatemala
- Honduras
- Mexico
- Nicaragua
- Panama
- Paraguay
- Peru
- Puerto Rico
- Spain
- Uruguay
- Venezuela

# The Latino Cultural Spirit (Rodriguez, 2007)

## **Interaction tendencies:**

Collectivism,  
Communication,  
Maintain Positive Social  
Relationship, Friendly &  
Respectful

## **Spirituality & family:**

Familism, Avoiding  
Personal Conflict,  
Religion, Time

**Sense of identity:** Ethnic  
Identity, Cultural  
Identity, Assimilation,  
Acculturation





# Value Differences

Latino Values	Anglo Values
Based on Catholicism, Spanish colonialism, & respect for tradition	Based on Puritan, Protestant, and Calvinistic Thinking of a new & free America
Interdependence	Independence
Family First	Me First
Family helps family	Helping self helps family
Work hard	Work smart
Sacrifice	Pay your duties
Stability	What's new? What's next?
I accept life's problem	I solve life's problem
Small success is good	Big success is better
Whatever God wants	The sky is the limit
I hope to achieve	I believe I will achieve
Give respect	Earn respect

# What to take into consideration?

---

- Unique experience
- Ethnic roadblocks may limit their ability
- Fear of rejection
- Opportunity may see as a risk
- Cultural factors may discourage take risks/higher responsibility (prefer to play it safe)
- Wait patiently for improvements (less aggressive behavior)
- A tendency to be misunderstood
- Feel uncomfortable to receive individual acknowledgement (credit their family & friends for success)



# Tips:



Emotional support that meets their empathy, kindness, love, and trust needs



Instrumental support that helps them do their job more effectively



Informational support to deal with personal and professional problems



# Position Description

*for episodic or traditional volunteers* (Cassill and colleagues' (2012) )

---

- Position title, the goal of position, and benefits of serving as a volunteer
- Sample of required activities
- Project title and timeframe
- Length of volunteer commitment (one day, one week, month, year) and hours of involvement (hours per day, week, month, or year)
- Schedule (specific time or flexible) and location
- Detailed qualifications
- Training information
- Supervisor's name, title, and contact information

# Question

**Briefly describe how you retain your volunteers.  
How do you get them to stay?**



# Volunteer Communication & Engagement

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# The Role of Volunteer-Friendly Environment in Retaining Volunteers is Huge

Pleasant and Comfortable Environment for Our Volunteers are Important



- A. Acknowledged immediately with a friendly smile?
- B. Ignored until they press the issue?

---

When a volunteer enters your facility, are they:



During the gathering, does your staff:

# During the gathering, does your staff:



**Involve your volunteers in  
conversation**



**Ignore the volunteers**



# A Letter

---

*Dear Sarah,*

*We really missed you at our last meeting. We appreciate your input into our discussion and how much we all depend on your expertise.*

*Thanks,*

*Ralph (Chairman)*

- She didn't send her letter of resignation
- Your role is to create a culture that stimulates the inner motivation of each volunteer





# What can you do from the outside to arouse that inner motivation?

- Discover what motivates volunteers?
- Give regular feedback. Without feedback volunteers don't know where they stand
- Offer special privileges or perks. Perks help retention
- Send volunteers to conferences
- Provide on-the-job vocational training



# Strategies for how to effectively communicate

- Get to know your volunteers
- Be specific
- Be polite
- Host group meetings and get-togethers
- Give volunteers opportunities to voice opinions

## Strategies to improve trust-based communications

---

- Create and share a clear message.
- Shoot for accuracy and transparency.
- Make communication consistent.
- Ensure employees and volunteers feel secure.
- Encourage collaboration.
- Make yourself available
- Foster a sense of community.



# Tips on how to engage with volunteers through tech

---

1. Engage volunteer via social media (share short story that ties in with your mission)
2. Quality vs. Quantity (be brief, people will read posts with 80 or less characters, one post /per day or two posts per week – be consistent)
3. Online tools that help you communicate with volunteers:
  - Content of work tasks, to keep up with everything – use Evernote  
<https://evernote.com/>
  - Collaborate with Dropbox, <https://www.dropbox.com/> 2GB is free; syncs changing drafts of the document content with your volunteers



# Tips on how to engage with volunteers through tech

---

4. Real time collaboration via Google Docs, give volunteers access to other volunteer calendar and documents to collaborate in real time

5. Use Doodle, <https://www.doodle.com> to identify time for your meeting, and use Google Calendar or other platforms for creating a meeting

6. Use a free online platforms for surveys -

- Survey Monkey <https://www.surveymonkey.com/>
- Google Forms <https://www.google.com/forms/about/>

7 Using Hootsuite your volunteers can work together to manage multiple social media profiles <https://hootsuite.com/>



# Journal of Human Sciences & Extension

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## Examining Volunteer Management Needs and Preferred Professional Development Delivery Methods Among Extension Educators

[Suzanna Windon, Pennsylvania State University](#)

[Mariah Stollar, St. Lawrence Elementary School](#)

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### Abstract

The purpose of this quantitative study was to investigate Penn State Extension educators' volunteer management needs and desirable professional development delivery methods. The participants were 92 Extension educators who participated in the online survey. The response rate was 47.4%. We found that the top five most preferable volunteer management content area needs among educators were volunteer communication, motivation, training, risk management, and coaching. The most desirable delivery methods of volunteer management content were webinars, one-time in-service training, factsheets, and series of workshops. The point-biserial correlation coefficient was used to show the correlation between specific volunteer management content area and professional development delivery method. Face-to-face training was preferred for topics such as needs assessments, utilization, teaching ethics and ethical decision making, motivation, coaching, risk management, and communication. Published content was the most preferred delivery method for topics such as writing position descriptions, selection, teaching ethics and ethical decision making, and risk management. Online education was a preferred delivery method for most topics, with the exception of marketing skills and utilization. Staff development personnel should consider these preferred delivery methods when designing training programs for Extension educators. Such consideration will enhance training effectiveness and learning.

### Recommended Citation

Windon, S., Stollar, M., & Radhakrishna, R. (2021). Examining Volunteer Management Needs and Preferred Professional Development Delivery Methods Among Extension Educators. *Journal of Human Sciences and Extension*, 9(2), 7. <https://doi.org/10.54718/PBFG9558>

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## TOP 5 Preferable Professional Development Needs among Extension Educators

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Communication with volunteers (73.9%),



Volunteer motivation (68.2%),



Training volunteers (67.4%),



Risk management (64.4%)



Volunteer coaching (58.8%).



## TOP 3 Preferred Professional Development Delivery Methods



Webinars (70.8%),



One-time in-service (in-person) training (64.1%),



Factsheets (62.9%).



# ACTIVITY

---

## **Describe your vision on your current or future volunteer program**

Describe briefly a current situation where you see an opportunity to enhance your volunteer program. Use strategies that you have learned during this session. If you do not have a current volunteer program, reflect on what you can do to have a successful volunteer program. (The key is to apply the concepts we have learned to a real situation.)

## **How can you characterize your current or future volunteer program?**

Why your program needs volunteers, goals and objectives for volunteer achievement, how many volunteer leaders do you have

## **Brainstorm a list of five examples – Where would you look for volunteers?**

## **How will you motivate volunteers to stay? Please write down a few ideas**

## **Please reflect on what changes do you expect to see in your volunteer program after this presentation**



# Subscribe to Volunteer Management & Leadership Tip Email



## RESOURCES

*Extension Articles – Penn State Extension*

Suzanna Windon <https://extension.psu.edu/suzanna-windon-ph-d>

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**Growth and Hope: A Recipe for Optimism and Organizational Success** <https://extension.psu.edu/growth-and-hope-a-recipe-for-optimism-and-organizational-success>

**Negative Factors Affecting Telework and Strategies for Virtual Teamwork)**  
<https://extension.psu.edu/negative-factors-affecting-telework-and-strategies-for-virtual-teamwork>

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