

New Zealand Volunteers: A Snapshot



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Synopsis of Results

According to Volunteering New Zealand (www.volunteeringnz.org.nz), more than one million New Zealanders actively volunteer in the 60,000 plus organisations that make up the community and voluntary sector. What motivates New Zealanders to volunteer and what strategies could be adopted to both recruit and retain them formed the basis of this research.

Responses from over 1700 volunteers in four charities and six sporting organisations from Wellington and Christchurch were received to a confidential mail survey. Two very different profiles emerged when the data was analysed. The typical charity volunteer was female, aged 56+, retired, earning \$20,000 per year, with no children at home. The typical sporting volunteer was male, aged 36 - 55, employed full time, earning over \$50,000 per year with an average of three children at home.

While the profiles were different, their volunteering histories, what motivates them to volunteer and satisfaction with current volunteering were quite similar. Overall, the average length of service of respondents was 8.5 years with more than 80% volunteering on a regular basis. Almost 70% of those responding volunteered for other organisations, be they other charities or sporting organisations or schools, clubs and special interest groups.

Both charity and sport volunteers expressed similar reasons for doing volunteer work: Values and Understanding. Values refer to showing concern for others and causes important to individuals personally; Understanding refers to the desire for self-development and new learning experiences. This is an interesting result, with Values focusing on doing something for other people and Understanding focusing on doing something for themselves.

The study looked at whether increased training, responsibility and out of pocket costs as well as the risk of liability would stop volunteers from taking on certain roles or result in them reducing their volunteer hours. Overall, these issues are not likely to deter future volunteering, a positive result for volunteer organisations. The study also looked at how satisfied volunteers were with their current organisations. Overall and not unexpectedly, the New Zealand volunteers surveyed expressed satisfaction with their organisations and their experiences as volunteers. Two areas that would benefit from increased attention by volunteer coordinators are interactions with paid staff and recognition of individual volunteers when they do a good job.

In terms of recruiting volunteers, being invited by someone in the organisation worked well for charities. Most sporting volunteers were active participants, either themselves or their families. In terms of recruiting younger volunteers, current volunteers had some interesting suggestions from offering incentives such as reduced playing fees to approaching corporations to allow junior staff time off to volunteer. The most common suggestion was also the simplest: ask them and then make them feel welcome.

Methodology

In late 2005, a study was conducted by researchers at Massey University, Palmerston North and Christchurch College of Education, Christchurch into what motivates New Zealand volunteers to donate their time and current levels of satisfaction with their volunteer organisations. The study consisted of a mail survey with one reminder sent to 3107 volunteers in four participating charities in Wellington and six participating sporting organisations in Christchurch. A total of 1695 completed questionnaires were returned for an overall response rate of 56%, after adjustment for questionnaires returned undeliverable.

What follows is an overview of the responses received. For the purposes of this overview report, responses are separated into charities and sporting organisations, with major differences highlighted.

Please note that only major findings are reported and results represent the views of current volunteers who chose to participate. While robust research protocols were followed and statistical analysis conducted, care should be taken when interpreting results.

Profile of Respondents

Respondents were asked a suite of standard demographic questions. What follows are the results for the overall sample with any differences between charities and sporting organisations specifically noted.

Gender:

Overall Sample:	56% male, 44% female
Charities:	71% female
Sports:	72% male

Age:

Overall Sample:	14% aged 18-35; 48% aged 36-55; 35% aged 56+
Charities:	77% aged 56+
Sports:	63% aged 36-55

Education:

Overall Sample:	3% Primary; 49% Secondary; 46% Tertiary
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Employment:

Overall Sample:	67% employed; 24% retired; 7% other
Charities:	65% retired
Sports:	85% employed

Ethnicity:

Overall Sample: 87% NZ European; 7% NZ Maori; 6% other

Income:

Overall Sample: 22% to \$20,000; 36% \$20-50,000; 36% \$50,000+
Charities: 41% to \$20,000
Sports: 46% \$50,000+

Household Composition:

Overall Sample: 13% single; 30% two-person; 57% three-person+
Charities: 47% two-person; 77% no children
Sports: 47% three-person+; 32% no children

Comments:

What emerged were two quite different profiles. The average charity volunteer was female, aged 56+, retired, earning up to \$20,000 per annum and living in smaller households. The average sports volunteer was male, aged 36-55, employed full time, earning \$50,000+ per annum and living in larger households.

Volunteering Behaviour - Past, present and future

The average length of service for the overall sample was 8.5 years, with 84% classifying themselves as regular volunteers (volunteering once a week/month). The average length of service for charity volunteers was 6 years, with 77% classifying themselves as regular volunteers. The average length of service for sports volunteers was 9 years, with 92% classifying themselves as regular volunteers.

For the overall sample, 68% volunteered for other organisations (46% for sports; 39% charities; 38% schools; 33% special interest – multiple responses allowed). For charities, 69% volunteered for other organisations (57% for charities; 48% special interest). For sports, 71% volunteered for other organisations (80% for sports; 45% schools). A slight decrease in volunteering was noted across all volunteering opportunities when responses for the past year were compared with those from the past five years.

Respondents were asked their level of agreement with the following statements about their future volunteering intentions.

Over the coming year I will likely reduce the number of hours I spend as a volunteer.

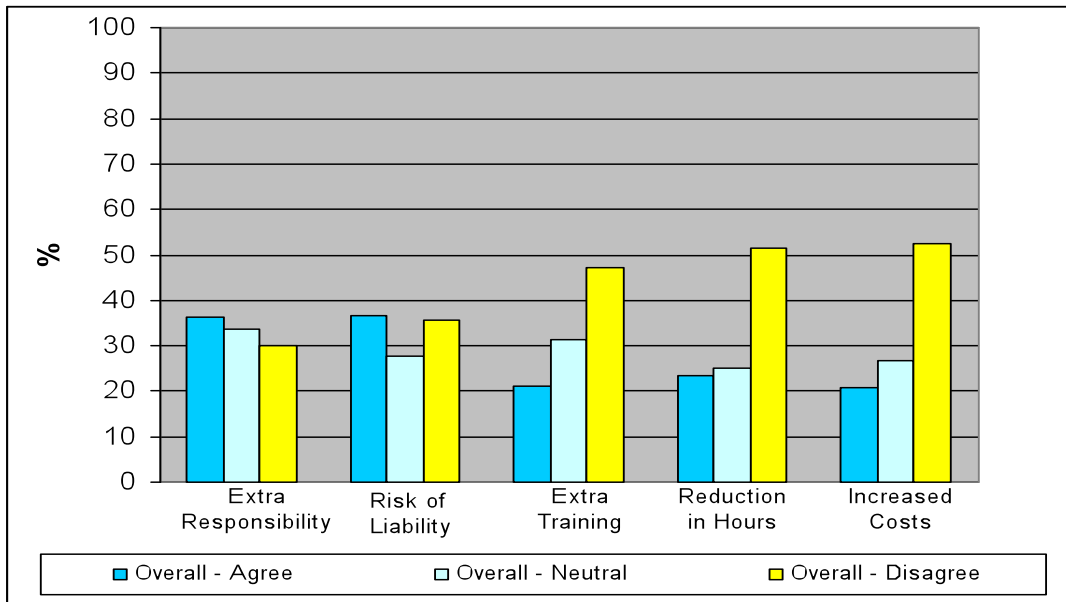
I am not interested in taking on the extra responsibility of some volunteer roles.

Increased out of pocket costs (such as petrol) made me less likely to take on some volunteer roles.

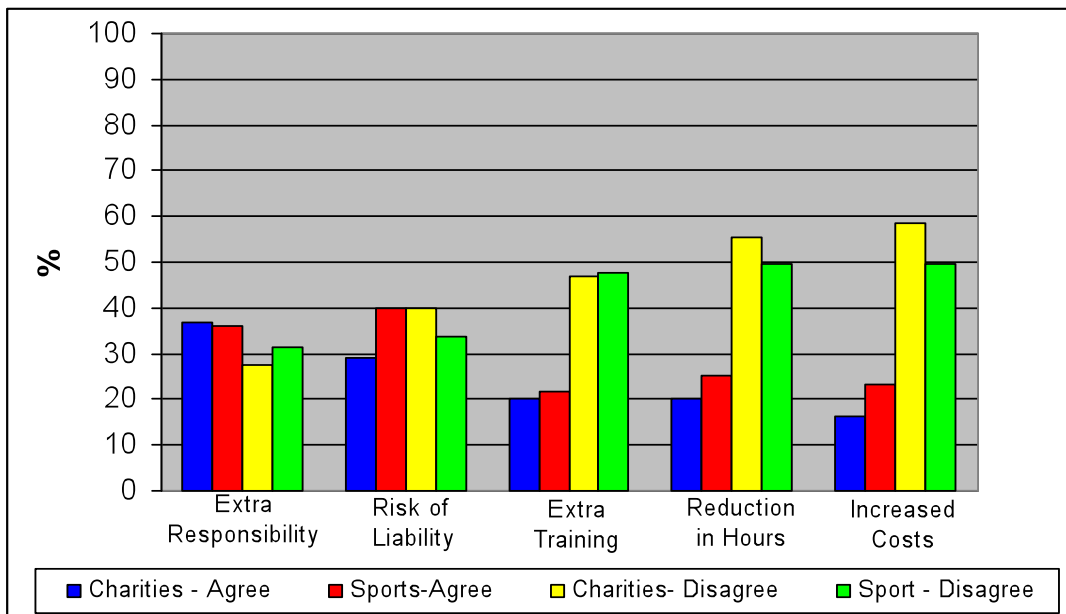
The need for extra training would stop me from taking on some volunteer roles.

Risk of liability would stop me from taking on some volunteer roles.

Overall Sample:



Charities and Sports:



Comments:

Respondents expressing agreement with these statements will likely behave accordingly. For example, those expressing an unwillingness to assume additional responsibility would be reluctant to take on specific volunteer roles requiring an increase in responsibility.

Overall, extra responsibility and risk of liability were the most significant potential constraints. This is the same for both charities and sports.

The specific constraints discussed will likely not affect the volunteering behaviour of those expressing disagreement with the statement. In this case, disagreement indicates that the constraint is not of significance to those individuals and would be unlikely to affect their future volunteering or specific roles undertaken. Overall, increased costs and the need for extra training were not significant potential constraints. A similar result was found for both charities and sports.

For each statement, significant numbers of respondents were neutral. Neutral attitudes tend to be weakly held, meaning they are relatively easy to change. These respondents are particularly susceptible to opinions expressed by other volunteers (either positive or negative) and organisational efforts (positive or negative) such as increased reimbursement for out of pocket expenses. Areas where significant numbers of respondents express neutral attitudes represent opportunities to the organisation.

Volunteers in the overall sample and the charity and sport samples individually did not express strong intentions to reduce their volunteering hours in the coming year.

Volunteer Recruitment

Respondents were asked how they learned about volunteering for their particular organisation.

Overall sample:

Invited to be involved	30%
Self/friends/family already involved	14%
Sought on own	33%
Saw an advertisement	27%*

* some respondents gave multiple responses

Charities:

Invited to be involved	28%
Self/friends/family already involved	18%
Sought on own	34%
Saw an advertisement	28%*

* some respondents gave multiple responses

Sports:

Invited to be involved:	43%
Self/friends/family already involved	66%
Sought on own	20%
Saw an advertisement:	3%*

* some respondents gave multiple responses

Comments:

Based on these results, it would appear that different recruitment strategies may be needed depending on the type of volunteer organisation. For charities, many volunteers sought the opportunity on their own or responded to an advertisement. This suggests the need for

charities to maintain high visibility in their respective communities. For sports, the most productive way to recruit new volunteers would be to invite those who are currently active participants or whose family and friends are already involved. For both, requesting existing volunteers to invite those in their social networks to become involved would be productive ways of recruiting new volunteers.

Volunteer Motivation

According to the functionalist theory of motivation, a particular behaviour such as volunteering can serve a range of functions (different motives or reasons why individuals engage in the behaviour). The Volunteer Functions Inventory developed by psychologists in the United States and validated with volunteers formed the basis of the questionnaire. A suite of five questions was asked for each of the six functions potentially served by volunteering, with the responses analysed for strength and consistency across volunteers. A 5 point Likert scale from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1) was used.

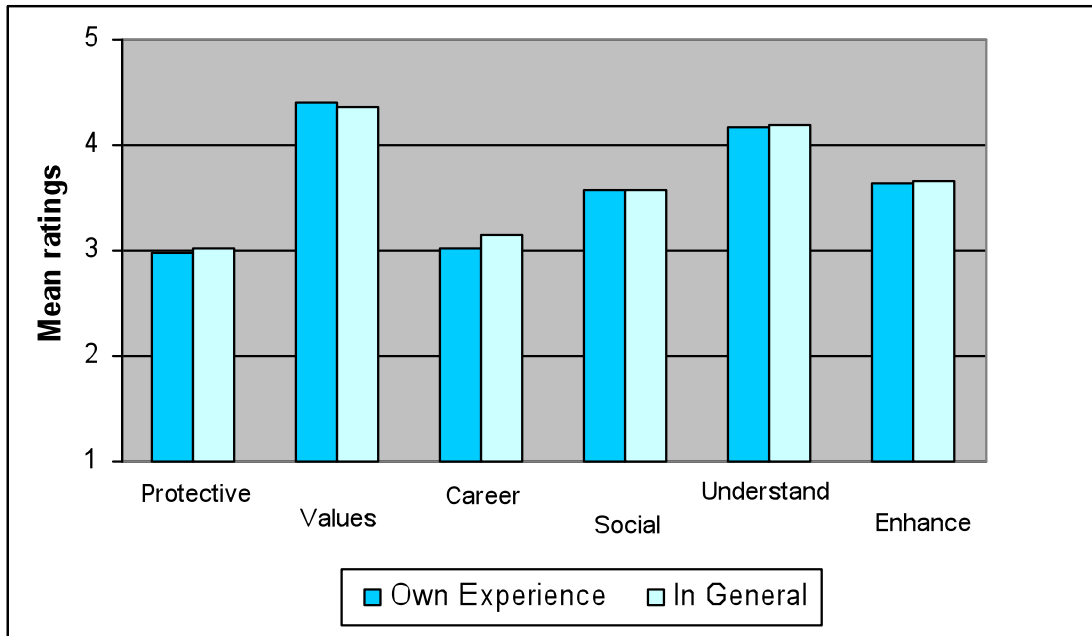
The six functions tested were:

- Protective - volunteering as a form of ego protection and a way to reduce guilt over feeling more fortunate than others.
- Values - volunteering as a way to express personal values related to altruistic and humanitarian concern for others.
- Career - volunteering being a source of career-related benefits.
- Social - volunteering as an opportunity for social interaction and volunteering as an activity viewed favourably by important others.
- Understanding - volunteering as a way to exercise knowledge, skills and abilities and providing opportunities for new learning experiences.
- Enhancement - volunteering as a form of ego development with opportunities for personal growth and enhancement of self-esteem.

Respondents were asked the suite of questions specific to their experience volunteering for the particular organisation and their thoughts about volunteering in general, based on their experiences in other volunteer situations if applicable.

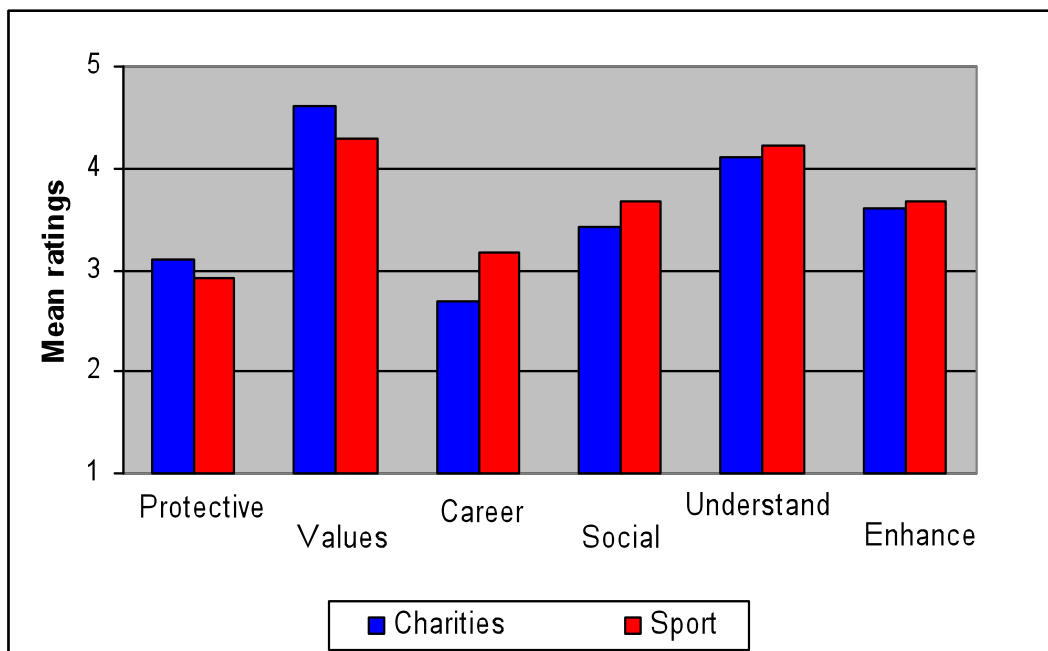
Overall Sample:

The results are illustrated in the following chart, with the darker blue line referring specifically to volunteering for the particular organisation and the lighter blue line to volunteering in general.



The differences between the results for what motivates volunteers in terms of a specific volunteering opportunity (own experience) and volunteering in general were not statistically significant.

Charities and Sports:



Comments:

The strongest motivators for the overall sample as well as charities and sports individually were the Values and Understanding functions. Respondents expressed strong and positive agreement, especially so for Values. This is an interesting duality as Values represents an external focus (concern for others) while Understanding represents an internal focus (skill enhancement and learning).

Enhancement and Social functions were also judged important. Again, an interesting duality as Enhancement represents an internal focus (self-esteem) and Social an external focus (social enhancement). Respondents were neutral relative to Protective and Career functions. For sports, the Career function was slightly more important than the Protective function. For charities, the Protective function was slightly more important than the Career function.

Satisfaction with Volunteer Experience and Volunteer Organisation

Respondents were asked about satisfaction with their particular volunteer organisation. A range of factors generally considered to have an impact on overall satisfaction with an organisation and with the volunteering experience were used.

Satisfaction with the volunteering experience:

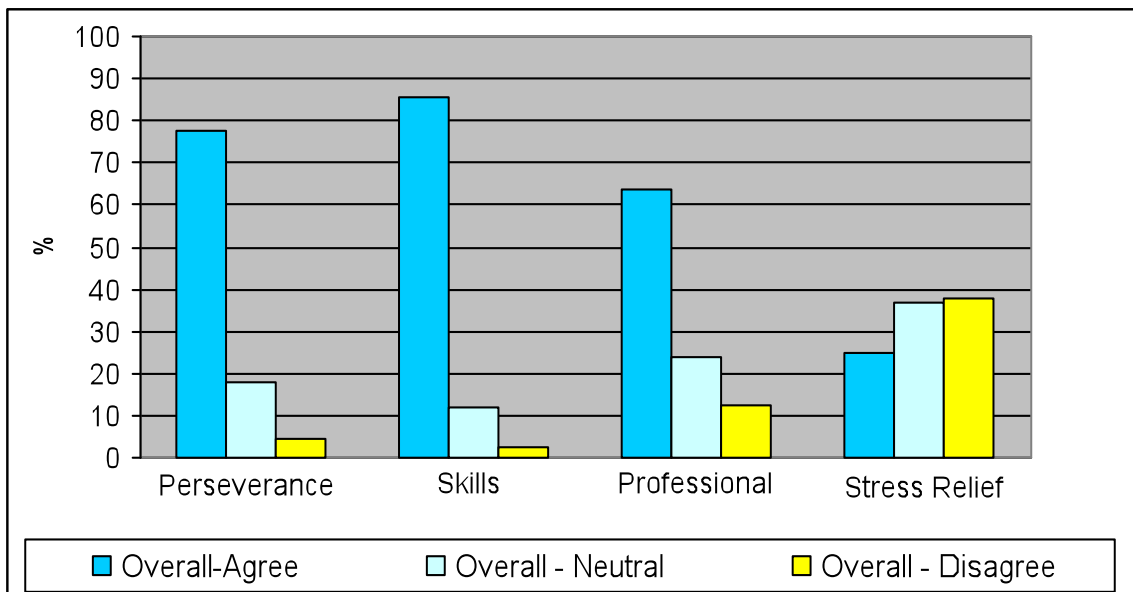
When I experience problems volunteering, I persevere through them.

I consider myself to be a 'professional' in my role as a volunteer.

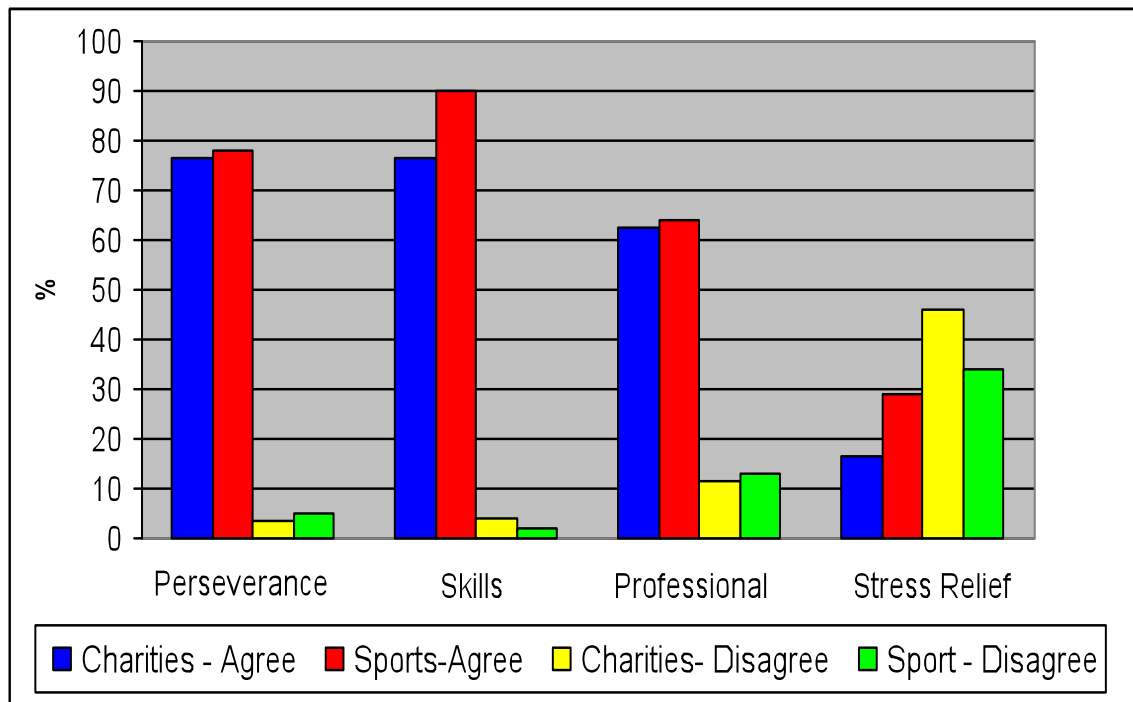
I have learned special skills and gained knowledge and experience from volunteering.

Volunteering allows me time away from my family or work stresses.

Overall Sample:



Charities and Sports:



Comments:

The volunteers surveyed persevere when faced with difficulties in their volunteering, believe they have gained skills and knowledge from the volunteering experience and consider themselves as 'professionals' in their role as volunteers. Interestingly, volunteering was not seen as an escape from the stresses of family or work.

Satisfaction with the organisation:

This organisation ensures that I am adequately trained for my volunteer work.

Communication between paid staff and volunteers is open and honest.

I am encouraged to develop my knowledge, skills and abilities in this organisation.

I feel informed about this organisation and its activities.

The people I work with treat each other with respect.

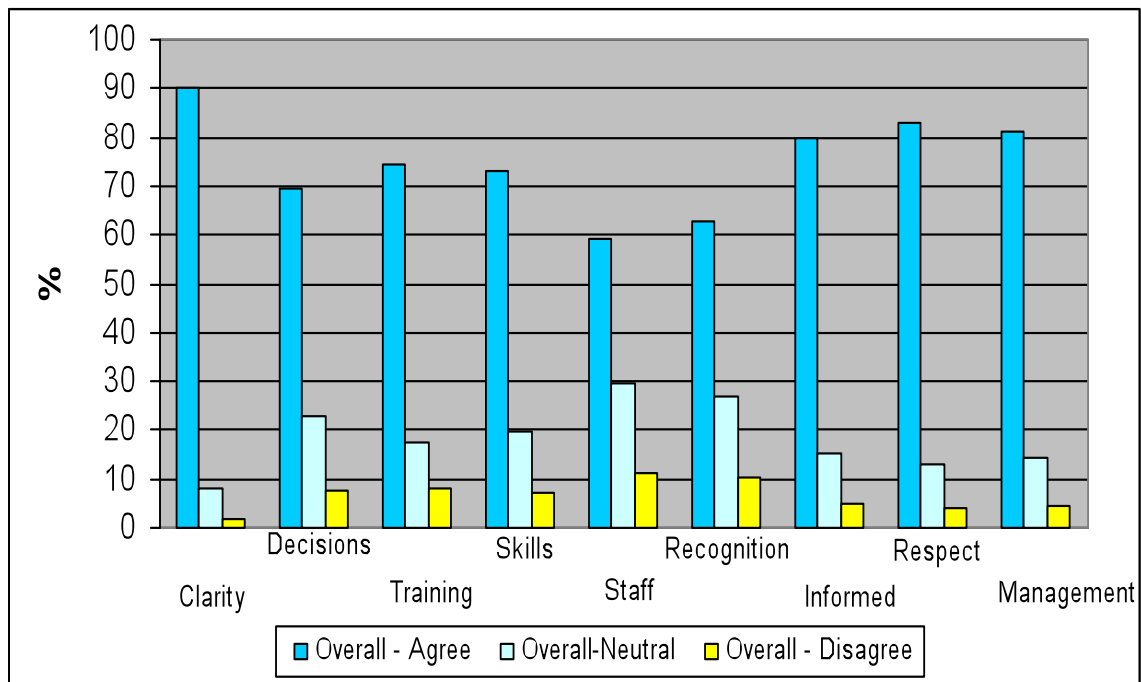
I am clear about the rules and responsibilities of my volunteering.

I am sufficiently involved in decisions that affect my volunteering.

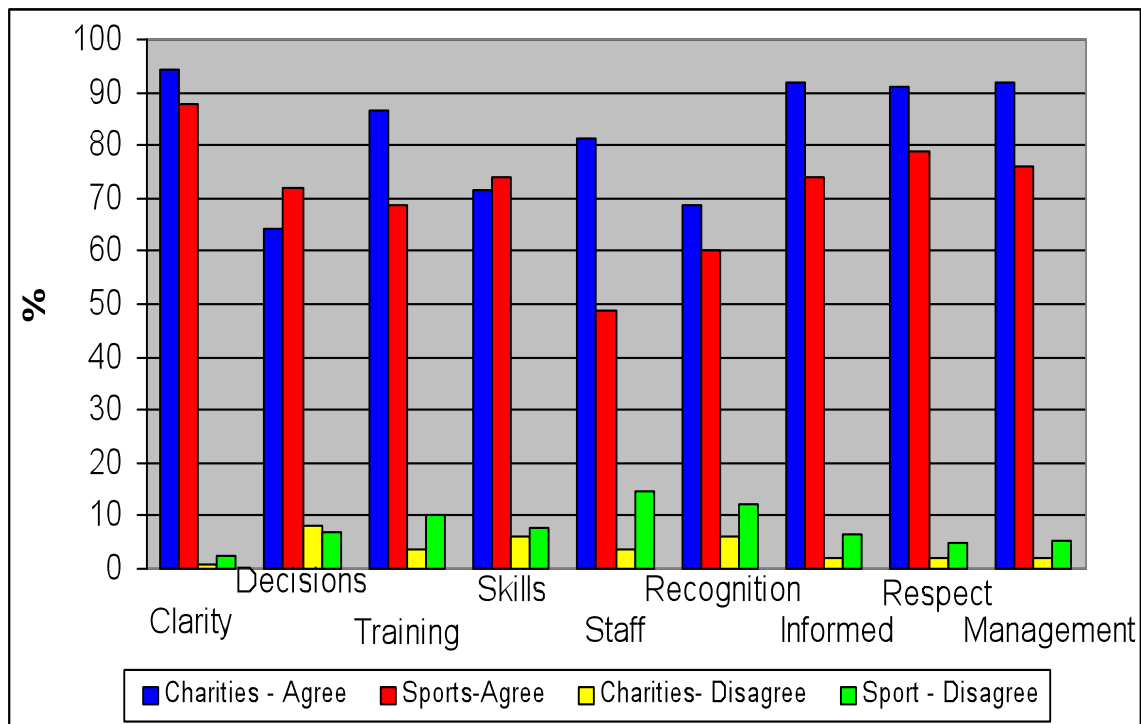
I get recognition when I do a good job.

I have confidence in the management of this organisation.

Overall Sample:



Charities and Sports:



Comments:

It would be expected that satisfaction levels would be reasonably high, evidenced by strong agreement with statements as dissatisfied volunteers would likely cease to volunteer. Overall, high levels of satisfaction and confidence in management were expressed by both charity and sport volunteers. The volunteers were clear about their

specific responsibilities and any applicable organisational rules, involved in decision making as appropriate, felt they are volunteering in an environment of respect, informed about the organisation's efforts and provided with appropriate training.

Two areas where volunteers were less satisfied overall were interactions with paid staff and recognition. Volunteers expressing neutral or negative attitudes would be particularly susceptible to opinions expressed by other volunteers (either positive or negative) and organisational efforts (positive or negative) such as regular newsletters. 79% of respondents use computers at home and 72% at work, representing a way to keep in touch with the volunteers.

Suggestions for Recruiting Younger Volunteers

For charities, while word of mouth and asking friends and family were mentioned, the vast majority suggested that advertising was the best way. There was a feeling that the general public, and in particular its younger members, were not aware of the societal importance of volunteer work or the possibility of gaining work experience/skills through volunteering. It was suggested that charities advertise as widely as possible, going beyond the traditional press to include onsite posters or advertisements in newsletters for schools, universities, church groups, hospitals, youth clubs and sports clubs, perhaps supplemented by on-site presentations. Suggestions were also made about contacting corporations who encourage staff to volunteer or service clubs looking to sponsor volunteer organisations.

For sports, many suggested advertising, stressing the benefits received from involvement - skill development, fitness, progression within the organisation, social networks and potential future career benefits. Most suggested a focus on secondary schools, universities, churches and youth clubs in addition to the popular press. Advertising could be supplemented with Open Days and providing speakers to schools, churches and service clubs. Others suggested targeting current players and their parents - particularly females. However, the overwhelming majority of respondents suggested offering some form of incentive, with suggestions ranging from club branded apparel to petrol vouchers to sports event tickets (free or reduced price). Most suggested making use of high profile coaches and players as role models but also for 'meet and greet' and training/coaching sessions.

Conclusion

Respondents were given the opportunity to provide general comments. While a few negative comments were received, most around interactions with paid staff and recognition, the majority of comments were extremely positive, expressing gratitude for the opportunities provided and appreciation for the efforts of the volunteer coordinators in the organisations. The following are indicative:

‘A very professional organisation - shows respect for staff, volunteers & visitors.’

‘... is awesome to volunteer for...well-organised...supportive...appreciative of their volunteers too.

‘Volunteering is FUN, and ENRICHING, and VALUABLE.’