

VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT

in

COMMUNITY SPORT CLUBS

A Study of Volunteers’ Perceptions



FINAL REPORT

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and Sport Alliance of Ontario 2005

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Executive Summary

This study comprised Phase 2 of a larger project on community sport volunteers. The purpose of the study was to investigate volunteers' perceptions of community sport organization practices and needs with regard to volunteer management. The specific focus was on volunteer recruitment, training, support, evaluation, recognition, and retention.

Telephone interviews were conducted with a sample of 90 volunteers representing 49 clubs in 8 sports from 19 small and large communities across Ontario. The sports included in the study were: Badminton, Basketball, Curling, Hockey, Soccer, Softball, Track & Field, and Volleyball. The small communities included: Timmins, Parry Sound, Perth, Renfrew, Madoc, Orillia, Goderich, Port Elgin, Owen Sound, and St. Thomas. The large communities included: Sudbury, Thunder Bay, Ottawa, Toronto, Windsor, Guelph, London, St. Catharines, and Hamilton.

1 Background

1.1 Interview Participants. Of the 90 volunteers, 13 (14.5%) were coaches, 38 (42%) were executive or board volunteers, 13 (14.5%) were administrators, and 26 (29%) were both coaches and executives. They had been with their club an average of 11 years, and 53 (71%) had a child or spouse involved. Seventy-three participants (81%) were from large communities and 17 (19%) were from small communities.

Just less than half of the participants (45%) had been asked to get involved, 41% offered their services, 13% started the club themselves, and 1% were involved as a requirement of club membership. The most common reasons why the participants started volunteering were: (1) Child was involved (33%); (2) Saw a need (29%); (3) Wanted to help provide a positive activity for children (21%), Was a former player and/or love the sport (21%); (4) Feel a responsibility to volunteer in the community (15%); and (5) Have the skills (12%), Can make a difference/change in the club (12%). There was some variation in these reasons by the participants' sport and role.

The most common reasons why the participants have stayed with their club were: (1) Opportunity to stay connected in and promote the sport (20%), Helping kids develop (21%), Providing positive activity for kids (20%), Positive, social working environment (18%), Meeting a need in the club (20%), Enjoyment (20%); and (2) Have the skills to offer (12%), Making a difference in the club (12%), Child still involved (15%). There was some variation by volunteer role. The most common reasons why participants might eventually leave were: (1) Child is no longer involved (36%), Heavy time commitment (31%); (2) Negative environment because of politics and parents (21.5%), Conflict with family responsibilities (21.5%), Time for new people and ideas (17%); and (3) Other reasons: Conflict with work (9.5%), Conflict with other volunteering (9.5%), Conflict with other leisure (12%), No longer a member (12%). There was some variation by volunteer role.

1.2 Community Sport Clubs. The average length of time the clubs had been in existence was 23 years. They had, an average of 55 volunteers (ranging from 2 to 200 volunteers), and 11 clubs (27%) had a paid staff person.

Sixty percent (60%) of participants felt their club did not have enough volunteers to get the work done. Their club was particularly lacking executive and administrative volunteers (42%) and coaches (29%).

2 Volunteer Recruitment

2.1 Difficulty Getting Volunteers. Most participants (69%) said their club had difficulty getting volunteers. Many (35.5%) said there was difficulty getting coaches, because people do not feel they have the skills or ability to coach and the club tends to agree, and because of the heavy time commitment involved. Many (31%) said there was difficulty getting executive volunteers, because of the heavy commitment right off the bat, and board work is behind the scenes rather than working with kids directly. Participants identified the main reasons for the difficulty getting volunteers in general as conflict with family and work, and making a regular commitment.

2.2 Addressing the Challenges of Getting Volunteers. Two-thirds of participants (67%) said their club tries to do something to deal with the perceived challenges to getting volunteers. The use of assistant coaches and role sharing is the main way that clubs try to reduce the burden of the heavy time commitment. Offering coaching clinics, or cover expenses for coach training, as well as two-way communication and encouragement, is the main way clubs try to assist volunteers (especially coaches) develop their skills and abilities. Other strategies to try to overcome the barriers to volunteering include financial incentives, such as honoraria, and reduced or free registration for children.

2.3 Recruiting Volunteers. Almost all participants (90%) said their club does something to recruit new volunteers. The most common methods were: (1) word of mouth requests (77%; e.g., direct invitation to an individual, formal presentation to members and parents), and (2) written requests (68.5%; e.g., club website and newsletter, newspaper ads, flyers or posters, in child's registration package). The large majority of participants (83.5%) indicated that their club also targets its recruiting efforts. The most common targets were: (1) parents (43%), (2) former athletes (31%), and (3) former volunteers, and individuals with specific skills (13%). The most common recruiting messages were that the club needs help, the club appreciates help, and volunteers are important to the club.

2.4 Volunteer Succession. Over half of the participants (56%) said that their club has some form of plan for replacing volunteers. This ranges from casual inquiries about whether volunteers are returning next year and subsequently recruiting to fill any expected gaps, to formally grooming assistant coaches to be head coaches or executive volunteers for the president's position. The

remainder (34%) said their club does not do anything formal for volunteer succession and tends to “go by the seat of our pants”. However, many felt it would be worthwhile with a larger or growing club.

2.5 Interviewing and Screening. Half of the participants (51%) indicated that their club interviews and/or screens its new volunteers. Half of those (50%) said the club does a police background check, but mostly with coaches, and half (50%) conduct some form of interviews, again mostly with coaches, to determine ability and potential fit with the club. The half of participants (49%) who indicated that their club does no interviewing or screening said that their club is small and volunteers are handpicked, everyone who volunteers is well known to the board, or it is left to the person recruiting to determine a volunteer’s capabilities. Concerns with the process had to do with complicating the recruitment process and adding to the workload of an already over-extended board, and turning off prospective volunteers. Nevertheless, interviewing and screening were considered to be valuable to learn who the club is dealing with, avoiding weak or non-committed volunteers from the start, and really knowing who is taking over the more sensitive roles (e.g., head coach, treasurer).

3 Orientation, Training and Development

3.1 Role clarity. Most participants (76%) said the volunteers in their club have a clear understanding about what they are expected to do. This role clarity was attributed mostly to a club constitution, job descriptions, and rules and procedures, as well as an initial orientation and subsequent regular meetings to keep volunteers informed. Those who indicated that some role ambiguity and confusion exists (24%) said it was with regard to technical expectations for coaches, new volunteers who had not caught on to the unique aspects of the club, deviation from club policies and job descriptions, confusion when having to cover for other volunteers, and overlap in volunteer roles.

3.2 Volunteer Manual. Forty percent (40%) of participants reported that their club has a manual or guidebook for volunteers, although half said it is exclusively for coaches (e.g., game rules and regulations, practice schedules, coaching tips). Of the remaining participants (60%), 20% thought there should be some sort of club manual in place; containing, for example, the club’s constitution, policies and procedures, job descriptions, code of conduct, budget procedures and expense claim forms.

3.3 Orientation for New Volunteers. Most participants (71%) reported that their club has some formal orientation for its new volunteers. Orientation appears to be more common for coaches than other types of volunteers. The main way in which clubs orient their volunteers is by having the person start out in an assisting role (e.g., assistant coach, committee members rather than chair). Other ways include being mentored on the job and coaching clinics. The remaining participants (29%) said that executive volunteers in particular tend not to have any formal orientation to the club because they were recruited/

elected for their skills and expertise, and they are expected to know what is involved and to hit the ground running.

3.4 Professional Development for Veterans. Most participants (69%) said their club offers or supports further training for its veteran volunteers, however this is almost exclusively focused on coaches. The most common support for professional development for coaches was covering expenses to attend clinics (75%), although 30% of participants noted that it was a financial and logistical struggle to help coaches in this way. A few participants (18%) said their club runs its own coaching clinics, although 21% indicated that it was a challenge to get coaches to commit the time to participate. Only 9% of participants indicated that their club supports or provides professional development opportunities for its executive volunteers. Again, it was expected that these volunteers already have all the skills they require, and any necessary training takes place through committee work. The approximately one-third of participants (31%) who said their club does not offer any professional development explained that there were no funds for this activity and/or it was not a priority use of funds within the club.

4 Support and Retention

4.1 Help With Tasks. Almost all participants (97%) said their club assists its volunteers with their tasks. The most common means of support were: (1) Support to coaches (51%; e.g., athlete registration, booking facilities and referees, setting schedules, providing equipment), (2) Volunteers help each other out (47.5%; e.g., pick up the slack, tasks are spread around, coaches help each other, support within each team), (3) Support from the president and executive (45.5%; i.e., open communication, president is approachable and helpful, executive volunteers are at the field, board helps deal with parents), (4) Cover expenses (21%; e.g., for travel, phone, supplies), and (5) Regular meetings (17.5%).

4.2 Volunteer Manager. Just less than half of the participants (45%) reported that their club has some sort of volunteer manager. Most indicated that the club president fills this role (64%) and fewer indicated that it was the job of the head coach or a coaching coordinator (28%). The remaining participants (55%) said there is no single person for this role. Of those, 77% described recruiting and overseeing volunteers as a shared responsibility within the club, particularly within teams or leagues or program/event units (e.g., tournaments, fundraising, banquet). Half of the participants whose club does not have a volunteer manager thought a volunteer coordinator or “go to” person would be useful.

4.3 Difficulty Keeping Volunteers. Most participants (87%) felt their club had no difficulty keeping volunteers; once they were in, they were there to stay for a while. This was felt to be particularly the case for coaches, but also a core group of executive volunteers that tended to stay on. Nevertheless, participants described the most common reasons why volunteers do leave as: (1) Child is

no longer involved (36%), (2) Heavy time commitment (16%), and (3) Conflict with others (10%; e.g., personality clash, dealing with parents), Lifestyle change (e.g., moving, 10%; change in work responsibilities, 8%; change in family responsibilities, 5.5%). Participants further indicated that their club tends to do little to try to overcome these challenges because, again, keeping volunteers is not really a concern, and those who leave either do not belong (because they cannot make the time commitment) or they have paid their dues.

5 Evaluation and Feedback

5.1 Evaluation and Feedback to Volunteers. Only 25% of participants indicated that their club does any formal evaluation of its volunteers. The most common ways were: (1) Parent and/or player survey of coaches (50%), (2) Coaches and board meetings where feedback is provided on one's work (17%), and (3) General club survey that includes questions about coaches, board members and other volunteers (11%), Election process (11%). The remaining participants (75%) said their club only has informal evaluation and feedback, primarily through recognition of volunteers' efforts (38%; positive feedback only) and/or verbal feedback on volunteers' performance (38%; positive and negative feedback). A number of concerns about evaluating volunteers were noted, including the difficulty evaluating volunteers and the need to be delicate and sensitive with people who are giving their time freely. However, 49% of participants felt that there should be (more) formal evaluation of volunteers, to the benefit of the organization and the individuals themselves.

5.2 Volunteer Feedback to the Club. About two-thirds of participants (63%) reported that their club has a formal mechanism in place to allow volunteers to provide feedback to the club. The main and most effective way was through regular coaches and board meetings, and the annual general meeting. All of the participants (100%) said their club welcomes informal feedback, which typically occurs on an adhoc basis when problems arise, always verbally, and reflects open communication in the club. Many indicated a preference for more formal mechanisms, especially formal requests for input from volunteers and a formal forum in which to present their comments.

6 Recognition and Rewards

Most participants (85%) reported that their club has in place a formal means of recognizing and rewarding volunteers. The most common means were: (1) Volunteer appreciation night and/or year-end banquet (55%), (2) Special volunteer awards (36%), (3) Club clothing or a gift (28%), and (4) Recognition and/or rewards within the team (17%). The remaining participants (15%) said their club has nothing formal in place, because of a lack of time and money for organizing or providing recognition events or awards, and/or it was not a priority for the club to spend money on volunteers. Nevertheless, almost half of the participants (48%) thought their club should be doing something (more) to recognize and reward its volunteers.

7 Overall Attitudes

7.1 “Best Thing”. According to the participants, the “best thing(s)” about volunteering with their club was: (1) Working with kids (32%), Helping kids by providing a good experience in a positive activity (30%); (2) Good people are involved (16%), Positive work environment (18%); and (3) Contributing to a successful organization (14%). There was variation by volunteer role in the “best thing” about volunteering.

7.2 “Worst Thing”. According to the participants, the “worst thing(s)” about volunteering with their club was: (1) Time commitment involved (31%), (2) Dealing with parents (25%), and (3) Lack of volunteers to do the work and volunteers don’t carry through on their commitments (13%). There was some variation by sport in the “worst thing” about volunteering.

8 Key Challenges to Volunteering in the Future

According to participants, the key challenges for volunteering in their club in the future were: (1) Getting enough volunteers for the existing work and for the club to grow (34%), (2) Getting volunteers who can commit to the time and can be trusted to follow through (20.5%), (3) Getting qualified and quality volunteers (18%; especially coaches) and (4) Other recruiting challenges: Getting younger volunteers (11.5%), True “volunteers” (7%) and New volunteers with fresh ideas (6%).

9 Support, Information and Resources

Participants requested help with: (1) Guidelines, tips and best practices on volunteer recruitment, retention, selection, training, and/or recognition (36%), (2) Any new information from which the club could pick and choose what it needed (13%), and (3) Specific areas (about 10% each): promoting community awareness of volunteering, samples or templates or organizational documents, coaching development through local clinics in isolated communities, fundraising. They would like to receive this information or support particularly via: (1) Workshops, seminars or clinics (33%), (2) E-mail and/or paper documents (31% and 26%, respectively), and/or (3) Website or CD (17%), Provincial sport organization (17%).

Introduction

Purpose

This study is part of a larger project focusing on community sport volunteers in Ontario. The intent of the project is to gain a better understanding of sport volunteers, in order to help nurture and support these individuals who are the backbone of amateur sport in our communities. The long term goal of the project is to stabilize and ultimately increase the number of volunteers involved in community sport, and thus ensure the capacity of those organizations to serve.

Phase 1 of the project resulted in a report describing *A Profile of Community Sport Volunteers* (Doherty, 2005)¹. It presents a demographic and psychographic profile of community sport volunteers, describing who volunteers and why. The profile was developed primarily from data on sport volunteers extracted from the 2000 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering, and Participating. A number of issues related to community sport volunteering were also identified.

The study presented here represents Phase 2 of the project, which focuses on volunteer perceptions of community sport organization practices and needs with regard to volunteer management (i.e., recruitment, training, support, evaluation, recognition, and retention). It was of particular interest to identify the challenges and needs of sport volunteers themselves, and the challenges and needs of their clubs with regard to volunteer management. Telephone interviews were conducted with community sport volunteers for this purpose. Where possible, the findings are compared to the profile of community sport volunteers developed in Phase 1.

Method

Stratified sample. One objective of the study was to ensure a stratified sample that represents, at least in part, the diversity in community sport volunteers and clubs across Ontario. Key factors were considered to be type of sport (individual and team), size and location of community (small and large, in five regions), and volunteer role (coach, executive/board member, and administrative or other supporting role). These variables and sub-groups are listed in Table 1. It was also the intent to ensure variation in the sample by volunteer family involvement (child or other family member involved, and not involved) and by volunteer years with the club (new and veteran volunteers). It was not possible to consistently collect this particular information ahead of time, however these factors were measured in the study and taken into consideration in the final analysis.

¹ *A Profile of Community Sport Volunteers* (Doherty, 2005) is available at www2.prontario.org/prontario/publishedarticles.html or from the contacts listed on p. 2.

Table 1. Stratified Sample Variables and Groups

Variable	Groups				
Sport	Individual	Team			
Community size	Small	Large			
Community location	Northern	Eastern	Central	Southwestern	Golden Horseshoe
Volunteer role	Coach	Executive	Other		
Volunteer family involvement	Child/spouse involved	No child/spouse involved			
Volunteer years with club	New	Veteran			

Sports in the sample. Several factors were used to select the eight sports included in the study: (a) both individual and team sports, (b) sports with a relatively high participation rate, (c) sports with clubs found in both small and large communities, and across the province, (d) balance of sports played by males and females, and (e) the sports that rely primarily, if not exclusively, on volunteers. The following eight sports were included on that basis: *Badminton, Basketball, Curling, Hockey, Soccer, Softball, Track & Field, and Volleyball*. Five of these sports (badminton, curling, hockey, soccer and softball) are among the top 10 sports in which Canadian adults participate in clubs (Sport Canada, *Sport Participation Report*, 1998). Three of these sports (basketball, hockey, and soccer) are among the top five sports for the participation of Canadian youth ages 5-14 years (Sport Canada, 1998). Track and field was included because it is an individual sport, in which both males and females participate, and it has a long history of club volunteerism. Volleyball was selected as the eighth sport because it also has a relatively high participation rate, by both males and females, and was likely to be found in both small and large communities across the province.

Communities in the sample. Communities were identified for this study based on size and location. In order to sufficiently distinguish and then identify small and large communities, Statistics Canada definitions were applied. A large community was considered to be a “Census Metropolitan Area” (CMA), which is defined by Statistics Canada as an urban core with a population of 100,000 or more and its adjacent municipalities. Canada’s largest cities are classified as CMAs. A small community was considered to be a non-CMA community or what Statistics Canada also defines as a “rural fringe” community. This would include smaller communities that are not directly adjacent to a CMA. To ensure volunteers in clubs across Ontario were included, small and large communities in five regions identified by the Ontario Trillium Foundation were included. The five regions and the selected communities are listed in Table 2.

Table 2. Communities in the Sample, by Size and Location

Region	Large	Small
Northern	Sudbury Thunder Bay	Timmins Parry Sound
Eastern	Ottawa	Perth Renfrew Madoc
Central	Toronto	Orillia
Southwestern	Windsor London Guelph	Goderich Port Elgin Owen Sound St. Thomas
Golden Horseshoe	St. Catharines Hamilton	

Instrument. An interview guide was developed in order to collect background information about the study participants and their club, and to measure their perceptions about what their club does, and should do, for volunteer recruitment, training, support, evaluation, recognition, and retention. The interview guide was pilot tested with a sample of five volunteers to check for clarity and flow of questions (see interview guide in Appendix A).

Procedure. Using the stratified sampling framework, a list of potential telephone interview participants was developed. The Project Manager identified sport clubs in the designated communities through the provincial sport organizations and the internet. If a particular (usually small) community did not have an organized club for a given sport, then another small community in the same region was considered. In large (and sometimes small) communities where there was more than one club in a given sport, one club was randomly selected. That is, in most cases, one club for each sport in each community was identified. The Project Manager got in touch with the contact person indicated for each of the selected clubs, described the study, and requested a list of club volunteers as well as any information that could be provided about each volunteer's role in the club, years with the club, and whether they had a child or spouse involved. Again, this information was not always provided. Typically, the club contact person asked each volunteer about their willingness to be involved, and then provided those names and telephone contact information to the Project Manager.

Three study assistants conducted the telephone interviews. Each was assigned two or three sports, and provided with the corresponding list of potential interview participants. They were instructed to attempt to complete interviews with one to three volunteers per club. Interviews were conducted between April and August, 2005. All interviews were conducted by telephone and were audio-recorded with the participant's prior permission. Interviews lasted 30 to 60 minutes, and were transcribed verbatim.

Analysis. The interview transcripts were reviewed in full, and responses for each interview question were compiled and tallied. Variations in responses were considered according to participants' sport, community size and location, volunteer role and years with their club, and whether their family was involved. To ensure participant and club confidentiality, no volunteers or clubs are identified by name in this report.

Findings

This section begins with a background description of the participants and their sport clubs. Then, the perceptions of the interview participants with regard to volunteer recruitment, volunteer orientation, training and development, volunteer support and retention, volunteer evaluation and feedback, and recognition and rewards are presented. The findings also include a section on the participants' perception of the "best thing" and "worst thing" about volunteering with their club. The section concludes with a presentation of what the participants perceived to be the key challenges in the future with regard to volunteering, and what support, information or resources they could use to help address those challenges.

Variations by sport, community size or location, volunteer role, and family involvement are noted where appropriate. Samples of direct quotes from the participants are provided in order to give "voice" to those participants and provide further context for the findings. Considerations for practice that stem from the findings are also presented throughout this section. This is certainly not a comprehensive list of suggestions, but rather a beginning point for further discussion. Further interpretation is welcome and expected.

1. Background

This section provides a description of the interview participants and their clubs.

1.1 Description of Participants

A total of 90 community sport volunteers from 8 sports and 49 clubs in 19 Ontario communities participated in the interviews. Of those, 73 volunteers (81%) were from large communities (London, Ottawa, Thunder Bay, Sudbury, Toronto, Windsor, Hamilton, St. Catharines, Guelph) and 17 (19%) were from small communities (Parry Sound, Renfrew, Port Elgin, Owen Sound, Timmins, Goderich, Perth, St. Thomas, Orillia, Madoc). A description of the interview participants by sport, community size and location, role, years with their club, and family involvement is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Description of Interview Participants

Variable	N	%	Variable	N	%
Sport			Volunteer role		
Badminton	7	8%	Coach	13	14.5%
Basketball	9	10%	Executive/Board member	38	42%
Curling	11	12%	Administrator (e.g., team manager, convenor) ¹	13	14.5%
Hockey	6	7%	Coach and Executive	26	29%
Soccer	10	11%			
Softball	16	18%			
Track & Field	14	15%			
Volleyball	17	19%			

Variable	N	%	Variable	N	%
Community size			Years involved with club ² (average 11 years, range 1-50 years)		
Small	17	19%	Less than 5 years	22	26%
Large	73	81%	5-10 years	29	34%
			11 or more years	34	40%
Community region			Family involvement ²		
Northern	14	15.5%	Child/spouse currently involved	53	71%
Eastern	13	14.5%	Child/spouse formerly involved	12	16%
Central	8	9%	No child/spouse involved	10	13%
Southwestern	39	43%			
Golden Horseshoe	16	18%			

¹ An administrator is a volunteer involved in a formal administrative role that is not a board position

² Not all participants answered all questions. Data are based on those who responded.

In addition to the findings reported in Table 3, it should be noted that interview participants were from small and large communities in all sports except softball (large communities only). With regard to family involvement, it is notable that 16% of the interview participants had a child or spouse that had been involved at one time but was no longer involved while the volunteers themselves stayed on. Those with no child or spouse involved in the club were most likely from curling and track and field organizations.

The volunteers that took part in the study differed somewhat from the typical profile of community sport volunteers, as reported in *A Profile of Community Sport Volunteers* (Doherty, 2005). The comparisons are provided in Table 4.

Table 4. Comparison of Sport Volunteers and Study Participants

Variable	Study Participants	Typical Sport Volunteers ¹
Gender		
Male	57%	64%
Female	43%	36%
Role ²		
Coach	43.5%	60%
Executive	71%	42%
Years with club	Average 11 years	Average 3-5 years

¹ Based on data reported in *A Profile of Community Sport Volunteers* (Doherty, 2005) from Phase 1 of the project.

² Percentage of coaches based on coaches and executive/coaches. Percentage of executive volunteers based on executives and executive/coaches.

The relatively greater proportion of women in the study may be associated with the relatively fewer coaches, as men are more likely to be found in that role. The study volunteers were involved with their club substantially longer than typical sport volunteers. Volunteers who had a longer involvement in their club may have been identified in

particular by the club contact person, and/or may be those most willing to talk about their club and volunteering (i.e., willing to be interviewed).

How participants became involved. Interview participants indicated that they initially became involved equally through being asked by someone in the club (45%) and offering their services to the club (41%). Several participants said that they first offered to help, then they were asked later to do more. Thirteen percent (13%) indicated that they had started the club themselves, and 1% became involved as a requirement of being a member. The latter reflects the situation in at least a few of the curling clubs, where club members are required to take their turn in helping run the club and its events. There was no other variation by sport, and no variation by volunteer position.

In *A Profile of Community Sport Volunteers* (Doherty, 2005), it is noted that sport volunteers are most likely to become involved “through their children”. Offering one’s services likely explains how a substantial proportion of parents become involved because of their kids. It is reassuring that people (mostly parents) are just as likely to offer their services as they are to wait to be asked. However, we can expect that even if one simply offers their services, they must be aware of opportunities that are available to be involved.

Why participants became involved. Participants provided a variety of reasons why they became involved as volunteers with their club. Many participants provided multiple reasons. The most common reasons for becoming involved are listed below, in order of frequency:

1. My child is/was involved (33%).

“We didn’t have any, there was no soccer up here. So I started it so my eldest daughter would have a place to play.”

“Basically because of my son.”

“Mostly because my kids were involved.”

“Kids. Is there any other reason?”

While this was the most common reason, it was not the exclusive reason for becoming involved. Most participants cited reasons beyond “I’d be there anyway”. At the least, they recognized a need and how they could help.

“Because my kids were in it so I was there anyway. I’d go see the games so why not help the cause if you can.”

“I’ve always become involved with things because my kids were involved and then, I guess, I recognize that there’s a job that has to be done and people have got to do it.”

“He said, ‘we don’t have a coach in your age division.’ So I figured I was going out anyways, I might as well coach. So that is how it worked out. I played basketball for a lot of years.”

2. I saw a need (e.g., for coaches, to keep club going) (29%).

“I knew they needed help.”

“The first reason was the team needed a manager.”

3. I wanted to help provide a positive activity for kids; there was a need in the community for this type of program (21%).
I was a former player; I love the sport; volunteering is a way to give back and stay connected to the sport (21%).

“There just wasn’t enough opportunity for kids at the age of under 15 for sports other than really ‘heavy competitive’ sports.”

“I enjoy seeing children involved in sports rather than stuck at home in front of the TV or computer.”

“The prime reason was to provide an opportunity for kids to get involved in the sport of track and field in this area. There were plenty of opportunities in other sports. For kids interested in track, though, there was nothing outside of the school system.”

“To enhance the game of basketball in our community. Coaching is one of my loves, so I wanted to, coaching and basketball are both my two loves.”

“I played my whole life. It is a great sport. If you get playing, you can play for a long time. . . We had no youth volleyball [in the community], only basketball and hockey.”

“The main reason of course is I love track and field. I’ve been in it for over 23 years now. It is a love for the sport. I do get something back in that I really appreciate when people do well. But I do like to feel that I’m putting a lot back into the sport that gave me a lot.”

“I was done participating in the sport, but didn’t feel I was done with the sport. I wanted to give something back.”

4. I volunteer; I feel a responsibility to contribute to my community (15%).

“I have a tendency to volunteer. . . I have a long history of being a volunteer throughout sports.”

“I think it is important to help out.”

“I thought, you know what, for me its about time to perhaps do some volunteer work.”

5. I have skills that can help (12%).
I wanted to, and felt I could, make a difference in the club, make changes, and improve the club (12%).

“I always thought maybe I could make a difference and provide some assistance. I saw areas and opportunities where perhaps some of my skills could assist the association to move forward.”

“[I got involved] because I didn’t like the way it was being run.”

“I’ve been a leader my entire life.”

6. Other reasons: Club members are expected to volunteer (7%). I wanted to be involved in a positive environment (perhaps instead of volunteering elsewhere) (5%).

Variation by sport. At least one-third of the participants in all the sports except badminton and curling indicated they were involved because their child was involved. Beyond that, there appeared to be some variation among participants’ reasons for becoming involved according to their sport affiliation. Volunteers in basketball tended to be former athletes and indicated, more than volunteers in other sports, that they were

involved for the love of the sport. Hockey volunteers were more likely than those in other sports to be involved because they felt they had the skills to help and wanted to make a difference. Curling volunteers were more likely than those in other sports to be involved because it was expected or required of club members. Volleyball and basketball volunteers were most likely involved, and more so than volunteers in other sports, to provide a positive activity for kids and to work in a positive environment. Softball volunteers tended to be involved because their daughter was involved and they wanted to make a difference in the organization.

Variation by volunteer role. In each of the roles, volunteering because one's children are or were involved was the most common reason. Beyond that, coaches tended to be involved because they were former players or they simply had a great love of the sport, and they wanted to work with kids in a positive activity. To a lesser extent they became involved because coaches were needed and/or they felt they could help improve the club. Executive volunteers tended to be involved because they felt they have the skills to help, they wanted to make a difference in the organization, and they wanted to provide an opportunity for kids to be involved in a positive activity. Administrative and support volunteers were most likely to be involved in order to help provide an opportunity for kids. These secondary reasons for becoming involved are primary reasons for volunteers with no children or family involved in the club.

Considerations for practice. The reasons for becoming involved generally correspond with the profile of primary motives of sport volunteers identified in Phase 1 (Doherty, 2005). That is, volunteering to support a cause (sport), to contribute one's skills, and because one is personally affected. The findings here provide further insight by providing a more detailed description of these reasons and identifying their relative importance (see Appendix B for a fuller comparison). The variations by coach and executive volunteer also correspond with these profiles identified in Phase 1 (Doherty, 2005). Having a child involved most likely brings potential volunteers to the club, but there appear to be additional reasons why they ultimately get involved. It is important that the recruiting message reflect the main reasons for volunteering in sport clubs in general, and for certain roles and in certain sports. Recognizing, of course, that these are the primary reasons for most volunteers, but certainly not for all; there will always be individual variation.

Why participants stay involved. Many of the reasons for volunteering in the first place and then staying involved are the same. However, there appears to be a slight shift in the relative importance of these factors, as was suggested in the profile of sport volunteers identified in Phase 1 (Doherty, 2005). Also, a few additional reasons based on the volunteer's experience in the club came to light. Several participants noted multiple reasons for staying on. The most common reasons that interview participants gave for staying involved are listed below, in order of frequency:

1. Volunteering provides an opportunity to stay connected in and promote the sport (20%).
- Helping kids and having a positive influence on their development (21%).
- Helping provide a positive physical activity for kids (20%).
- I enjoy working in a positive, social environment with good people (18%).
- I am continuing to meet an existing need in the club, including the sense that no one else will do it (20%).
- I get a lot of satisfaction from this volunteering (20%).

“For the love of the sport, I guess. . . I love to see people play the sport and to know they are getting proper coaching from someone who is qualified. . . Hopefully they love it and will continue to play.”

“I love the sport. I like seeing the kids play and learning the sport.”

“Making sure the children within this area have a solid base where they can go and enjoy their soccer experience, and that there is a great group of people that work together to try and provide that type of environment.”

“I just love being a part of this group. It’s a great group.”

“For the love of the sport. And I want to see it do well, and I want to help my athletes and the club and how do I, if I don’t do it somebody else might do it but I don’t know how many people can do it.”

“Because I know I’m the only person willing to coach high jump.”

“Who’s going to be there to replace us?”

While it appears the participants stay involved mostly because of positive factors, some remain with the club only because they perceive that no one else will do the work.

2. I have the skills to offer (12%).
- I am making a difference in the club (12%).
- My child is still involved (15%).

“I get a personal satisfaction out of it and also, um, it’s a bit of sense of control. I like, I like feeling like I have some control over how it’s being run.”

“I think we can kind of get a lot more accomplished than what the old Board was doing. . . I’ve got some new ideas and want to kind of see if I can bring them to fruition. . . is really kind of why I continue to stay, to see if I can improve things.”

“While my son is playing I feel, if there is any way that I can have a say in anything happening in the league is to volunteer. And also, you know, it helps a lot of other kids.”

Variation by volunteer role. Executive and administrative/supporting volunteers tended to indicate that they stay because they have skills to offer, they are making a difference in the club, and the need for their help still exists. Also, they enjoy helping provide kids with the opportunity for a positive activity, and they enjoy working in a positive, productive environment. Coaches tended to indicate that they stay because they enjoy having a positive influence on kids and the need for their expertise still exists.

Considerations for practice. These findings parallel what was described in Phase 1 as the most satisfying aspects for sport volunteers; namely, to use one’s skills to make a difference through enjoyable and worthwhile work. The particular variations for coaches

and executive volunteers noted here also correspond with the earlier report (Doherty, 2005); specifically, that coaches are most satisfied by helping athletes and watching them develop, and executives are most satisfied by a good working environment that enables the committee to achieve its goals (see Appendix B for a direct comparison). It is important to recognize what is most meaningful to volunteers, so that the club can ensure these valued opportunities and environment exist and volunteers are more likely to stay.

Why participants might leave. Just over half of the interview participants (55%) indicated that they had not at all considered leaving the club. The remainder (45%) had considered leaving; one-half of those were executive volunteers (47%), and one-third (32%) were volunteers involved in both executive and coaching roles. All of the participants were asked to consider why they might leave at some point, and many gave multiple reasons. For those who had not considered it before, the most common reasons why they might give up volunteering with the club were, in order of frequency:

1. My child is no longer involved (36%). (Notably, many participants who indicated this reason also said they would not necessarily leave when their child does, but it would be a consideration. Several could not think of any other reason why they might leave.)

Heavy time commitment, including too much work and not enough help (31%).

“The only reason I might leave is if my daughter wasn’t playing anymore. I don’t know if I would stay coaching. I might, but I might not.”

“Maybe when my son is out of it.”

“If my son wasn’t involved anymore and I didn’t think I had the time.”

“Only because of the time restraints and making the commitment during the winter.”

2. It is a negative environment, including too much politics and complaints from parents (21.5%).
Conflict with family responsibilities, including too much time away from family, and not being able to watch one’s own child participate because of other club commitments) (21.5%).
It is time for new people, new ideas, and new energy in the club (17%).

“I would only leave if I found that. . . there are always some problem members and this past year they’ve been more vocal with other people but not willing to actually raise and share the issues. So its been a little frustrating. . . I don’t want to deal with that anymore.”

“I love the kids and 90% of the parents are great, and 10% of the parents make you want to walk away. And those 10% are generally very vocal.”

“That is the only thing that will get me out, is when other factors like family start to impinge on it.”

“I think after a certain amount of time, you know, a fresh face, or a new voice is needed.”

“A younger coach could take over and I could play a more supportive role.”

3. Other reasons: Conflict with work responsibilities (9.5%). Conflict with other volunteering (9.5%). Conflict with other leisure time activities, particularly with the onset of retirement (12%). The club is poorly run or there are more positive volunteering opportunities elsewhere (7%). The program is cancelled or the club folds (7%). I am no longer a member or I move away (12%).

Variation by volunteer role. One's child no longer being involved was the most common reason the interview participants gave for why they might leave. Aside from that, most executive volunteers speculated that they would leave because of a conflict with family responsibilities and activities, the heavy time commitment, the politics and parents, and the need for new blood. Most coaches speculated that they would leave because of the time commitment, conflict with family, and conflict with work.

Participants who had considered leaving. For those who had thought about leaving (mostly executive and coach/executive volunteers), the most common reason was the heavy time commitment (32%). The next most common reasons were conflict with family (20.5%), the politics of sport clubs (17.5%), my child is no longer involved (15%), and there should be new people in leadership positions (12%).

"What I'm doing is extremely onerous. . . Imagine yourself on a field with 200 other people around you, with their families and everything, and all the tensions that come from sport. . . If you take the responsibility seriously, you can feel overwhelmed."

"Just burnout. Burnout. I mean, because it just, it becomes too much responsibility and like it becomes your life. . . You spread yourself so thin trying to keep everybody happy."

"I felt like I couldn't go and just and just watch [my own son's] game because people were always coming up to me and asking questions about this, that and the other. . . So I couldn't really just enjoy the game."

"You can only do so much and your ideas and thoughts that you put down, and I have a kind of a goal of three to five years. And then from there its time to find someone fresh to come in with new ideas."

Considerations for practice. When a volunteer's child leaves the club it is not unexpected that the volunteer would leave as well. However, it is not automatic. Many interview participants were not sure if they would in fact leave when their child was done, and 16% of the participants were still involved after their child (or spouse) had left. In that case, it is important to focus on why a volunteer might stay involved. It is equally important to consider things, beyond one's child, that would most likely lead someone to leave, and what the club can do about those conditions. A heavy time commitment (and likely further conflict with family and work) and a negative environment are some of the main reasons why a volunteer would leave, and are something that the club may be able to avoid or at least reduce.

1.2 Description of Community Sport Clubs

A total of 49 sport clubs from small and large communities in the five regions were represented in the study. A description of the community sport clubs by sport, age, number of volunteers, and paid positions is presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Description of Community Sport Clubs

Variable	n	%
Sport		
Badminton	5	10%
Basketball	7	14.5%
Curling	4	8%
Hockey	4	8%
Soccer	7	14.5%
Softball	5	10%
Track & Field	8	16.5%
Volleyball	9	18.5%
Club age (average 23 years, range 1-78 years)	-	-
Number of volunteers (average 55 volunteers, range 2-200)	-	-
Paid position(s) ¹		
Yes (e.g., ice technician, secretary, administrator)	11	27%
No	30	73%

¹ Not all interview participants answered all questions. Data are based on those who responded.

Clubs represented in the study were from small and large communities in all of the sports except softball (large communities only). Participants reported that, in almost all clubs, the majority of volunteers are coaches. Approximately one-quarter (27%) of the clubs had a paid position. There was usually only one paid position and it was usually part-time. Clubs with paid positions were mostly in the sports of curling (36%), soccer (27%) and hockey (18%).

Enough volunteers. Interview participants were also asked if there were enough volunteers in their club for the work to be done. Forty percent (40%) said their club does have enough volunteers, but many added that “we could always do with more,” and numbers are not everything.

“We have a lot of volunteers. We incorporate the parents’ group. We have a big base basically to do all the jobs we need to do.”

“I think, overall, things do get covered okay, but it gets a little draining on people, that’s all.”

“There’s enough volunteers. Do they do enough or volunteer enough? That’s another story.”

The remaining 60% of participants said their club does not have enough volunteers. They felt that there was a shortage of volunteers in all areas of the club.

Lack of executive/administrative volunteers. Interview participants noted a particular lack of executive or board volunteers, and volunteers for heavier administrative roles (42%). There tends to be sufficient help in informal roles, but the clubs need more people willing to commit the time to these leadership and administrative roles. There is a tendency for the same people to stay on, and a few do all the work.

“Well I’d say about a third of the board member positions aren’t being covered. . . If I really wanted to be critical then half, because there’s some things that should be done that aren’t being done.”

“Well, too many people do too much. Like the registrar, he ends up doing a lot of the correspondence stuff. And, like, a lot of our coaches have to get involved, they’re on the board as well as coaching.”

“You can get people to do ‘odds and ends’, but getting someone to step in and take on a planning role for a couple years is hard to get. That is the critical part that really keeps the organization going in the right direction.”

“The ones that are most difficult are coordinating fundraising activities, particularly our bingos and that’s where we really run short on people is coordinating those activities.”

“We have those super volunteers that do two or three jobs. . . There’s a lot of double shifting in jobs.”

“The administrative things related to the organization usually fall onto just a few people.”

Lack of coaches. Participants also noted a lack of coaches, and particularly coaches with expertise (29%). Too few women coaches for girls was also noted.

“Mostly our head coaching spots. Just someone that’s, that knows enough about the game of basketball to institute fundamental skills like we want them to.”

“This is a girls’ organization that has a huge problem getting women to coach.”

Other roles. A lack of volunteers in other roles was noted, especially skilled volunteers (e.g., accountant, webmaster), and consistent help with special events and fundraising (29%).

“There are never enough volunteers. There are never enough because you always want to do more or different things and you need the resources in order to do it. So, you can always use more volunteers, but also more skilled volunteers.”

“Somebody with maybe more a financial or business background could assist certain parts of our association.”

“It would be nice if we could get some consistent showing of manpower.”

Considerations for practice. Insufficient volunteers means existing volunteers are over-extended in their current tasks, and the clubs can’t expand or start new initiatives/ventures (e.g., tournaments, expand teams, fundraising).

“In order for it, the club, to continue at its current rate, we will need more.”

“I would say at a bare minimum, yes, but we could always do with more. So, I think if we wanted to get more accomplished we would need more volunteers.”

“[The board] is so busy running the club that fundraising hasn’t occurred, other than some of the established ventures like bingos. Any new fund raising ventures, or sponsorships, those types of things just haven’t happened.”

“We’re hoping to expand the work that we do. We’ll need more volunteers then.”

2 Volunteer Recruitment

Interview participants were asked to give their perceptions of whether the club has difficulty getting volunteers and, if so, why. They were further asked to describe what, if anything, their club does to address these challenges. Participants were also asked to describe how their club recruits volunteers, whether there is a plan in place for volunteer succession, and whether the club interviews or screens prospective volunteers.

2.1 *Difficulty Getting Volunteers*

The majority of interview participants (69%) indicated that their club has at least some difficulty getting volunteers. This is slightly less than the 60% of participants that said their club does not have enough volunteers, and suggests that, even if the club does have enough volunteers, it is not easy getting them.

The greatest difficulty was reportedly recruiting coaches (35.5%) and executive volunteers (31%). Participants also noted that their club had difficulty getting volunteers for formal administrative roles (e.g., league convenor, referee coordinator) (21%). These reflect roles with more consistent and heavy time commitments. They are also roles that require some expertise, versus more informal volunteer roles such as helping with tournaments or fundraising. However, in total, 21% of participants also noted some difficulty in getting volunteers to work on fundraising, events, and/or behind the scenes for the club. Participants further identified what they considered to be the reasons for the difficulty in recruiting for these roles.

Difficulty getting coaches. The most common reasons cited for the difficulty getting coaches was that people (mostly parents) feel they don't have the skills or ability to coach, including both technical ability, and ability to work with a group of kids of a given age. Interestingly, an equally common reason cited was the difficulty getting people who *do* have the skills, abilities, and qualifications to coach. In other words, parents feel they aren't qualified, and the club volunteers would probably agree that they are not. A third, but less common, reason that interviewees cited for the difficulty getting coaches was the heavy time commitment involved.

"People feel if they don't have the background they can't get involved."

"People aren't comfortable with the technical side of it. . . People don't know the game."

"The parents were not really introduced to the game prior too. . . [Also] they feel when they get up to the older age groups that they no longer have a comfort level to teach the kids because they themselves do not understand the game fully enough to keep them involved."

"Soccer is not yet a cultural phenomenon in North America. . . so there is reluctance on parents, 'I don't know'."

"I think part of it is a lack of expertise of individuals for subject matter. . . Its not just skills in the sport, its also the skills in dealing with individuals of that age. Its not just every individual that can come along and start relating to these kids."

"You just don't want anyone. You want qualified people. To get qualified people that have the background in track and field and know how to coach and how to deal with young people, it is a pretty tough order."

"It is sort of a unique kind of person that is interested in doing it and has the skill set to do it."

Difficulty getting executive volunteers. The most common reason cited for the difficulty getting executive volunteers was the heavy amount of work right off the bat, which would likely be considered intimidating for many individuals. Other reasons included the heavy, regular time commitment, not working directly with kids but being more in the background, the politics involved in running a club, and too few volunteers involved for the amount of work to be done.

“People are overwhelmed.”

“Nobody wants the presidentship, because the president puts too many hours in.”

“It’s a larger commitment [and] its less direct in terms of involvement with the kids, there’s more background work. . . I know there’s a lot of time in meetings and I think its sometimes tougher to attract those kids of people.”

“When they do volunteer, you know, it’s a lot of work and it’s a serious commitment and then you’ve got to put up with all the hassles from the parents.”

“The more and more we do it takes more and more time for the limited number of volunteers.”

Difficulty getting volunteers in general. There were several reasons given to explain the difficulty getting volunteers in general. The most common were: (a) individuals’ likely conflict with family obligations and activities, and (b) conflict with work.

“If people have kids then they have other activities that they’re doing and they might be volunteering for their other kids’ activities that they’re doing and therefore they don’t feel that they have the time to participate.”

“In a lot of families most parents are working now. So they have limited free time, and they are picky about how they want to spend that free time.”

“People just don’t have the time they used to. . . When two parents are working and with a lot of people working shift work. . .”

The next most common reasons were: (c) the difficulty for individuals to make a commitment to volunteer regularly and for a whole season, (d) individuals feel they don’t have the knowledge or ability and club volunteers in turn feel there are few people with the expertise required for some roles, (e) individuals don’t know what is actually involved in volunteering or no one has asked them, or (f) they are simply not interested in helping out.

“Its hard for people to make the commitment to be there every single time, you know, start to finish. Like, time is a problem.”

“Parents are willing to help out because they are going to be there with their child. . . but to take on extra work of any kind, they are really fearful of it.”

“Its getting the younger ones involved. . . sometimes they’re scared of the amount of commitment and the work that’s involved and they would rather just spend more free time with their families.”

“[These roles] involve maybe a little more time and some expertise and knowledge than some curlers have at the moment, or wish to.”

“Part of it, we’re looking for qualified people first of all. . .”

“I think for board type positions, it is hard to find, like sometimes you get people on the board that mean well, but they don’t understand the concept of how to run a business.”

“People just don’t know [about volunteering], maybe they just don’t know what’s involved or how much time you would have to put in; its not a lot of time. . . People just don’t know what’s involved.”

“Maybe a lack of interest as well. Some parents kind of feel like it is a kind of day care. Pay for your child to play and then don’t worry about them. It is not nice to say, but there are a lot of parents with that kind of attitude.”

“I think the word volunteer. . . I don’t think there are a lot of volunteers anymore; having people step up and do things for nothing.”

Considerations for practice. The perceived barriers to getting people involved in community sport volunteering parallel the barriers experienced by non-volunteers as identified in the Phase 1 report (Doherty, 2005; see Appendix B); specifically, that they have no extra time and are unwilling to make a year round commitment. These coincide with the perception of a heavy time commitment involved in sport volunteering. Interestingly, a substantial number (37%) of non-volunteers described in that report (and not specific to sport) had indicated that they were not involved because they had not been asked. This was not mentioned in the current study as one of the main difficulties in getting volunteers. Further, it is noted later in the report that word of mouth is the most common method of recruiting. Together, these findings suggest that the difficulty getting sport volunteers has little to do with them not being asked. Nevertheless, as noted later, who is asked and the message that is sent, are key to effective recruiting.

Notably, lack of skills has not generally been identified as a barrier to sport volunteering. However, as suggested in the research identified in the Phase 1 report, and substantiated here, it is certainly perceived to be a key barrier for becoming involved in coaching.

Participants noted that it is particularly difficult getting coaches and executive or board volunteers. Again, even if the club ends up with enough coaches, it was likely difficult getting those volunteers, and those with sufficient skills and qualifications. Furthermore, a perceived lack of skills is likely what is keeping people away from this role. Clubs, regional associations, and provincial sport organizations need to closely review what they are doing to promote coaching development, particularly for new coaches.

It is important to recognize and attend to the challenges of getting executive volunteers as well. Many of the challenges have to do with sufficient preparation and support to do one's tasks, and ensuring a positive environment where executive volunteers can realize the positive contribution they are making to children's sport, even behind the scenes.

Strategies to address these challenges will also help address the identified difficulties in general. There is little the club can do about conflicts with family and work commitments, except to recognize their existence and provide as much support and flexibility as possible so that an individual may be involved. Strategies used by the interview participants' clubs are described below.

2.2 Addressing the Challenges of Getting Volunteers

Two-thirds (67%) of interview participants said the club does try to make it easier for prospective volunteers by addressing the regular, heavy time commitment required, and their lack of skills as perceived by the club and by the prospective volunteers themselves.

Heavy time commitment. According to participants, the time commitment is addressed primarily by: (a) encouraging and ensuring role sharing. For example, several participants noted that there are always assistant coaches with any team, thus providing help and a backup for the head coach. Several reported that their club invites and

encourages volunteers to split their role with another volunteer or work with a buddy. This is typically for administrative tasks (e.g., convenor) or one-time roles (fundraising events, banquet).

“The teams usually have 2 or 3 coaches, yeah, its usually a minimum of 2 that are working together, so that if somebody does, you know, there are occasions they are involved in business or something else and don’t have the time, well the other person’s there.”

“We try to sign up as many coaches as we can.”

“We often talk about people. . . like couples or people kind of buddy up. You know, ‘you take the first half and you take the next half’.”

“The club has tried to do that with the bingo coordinator’s job, so they’ve tried to lessen the amount. Instead of one person sort of taking total responsibility, they’ve tried to divide it up a bit.”

“Say someone’s time is kind of limited. . . we try to pair them up with someone who’s willing to, say, shoulder two out of four weeks worth of responsibility. . . Like, they’ll try to split the duties.”

Time commitment has also been addressed in different clubs by: (b) shortening the season, and scheduling fewer practices during the week (yet increasing the length of practices so the on-field time doesn’t change), (c) designing smaller tasks to break up the work and spread out the responsibilities (e.g., sub-committees), (d) getting new volunteers involved in more minor and less intimidating roles, (e) providing flexibility in tasks that volunteers can complete on their own time, and (f) reducing the formality of some sub-groups so that there are fewer meetings. These strategies are intended to reduce both the time commitment involved and potential conflict with family and work obligations.

“One of the suggestions. . . is to get people within our executive to have many committees that would draw on people to have a shorter time commitment. So you have a sub-committee going. We think that is a way to not only get input from parents, but at the same time maybe sneak someone into that role.”

“So, in a minor role; you get people to volunteer [first] in a minor role.”

“We just kind of pick nights that don’t conflict with anything.”

“With what I do, basically I do it on my own time, except for meetings that I have to attend.”

“I have had to change what my commitment has been. . . I can’t coach during the regular club rental time. . . and the club is okay with that.”

Skills and qualifications. To meet the difficulty of ensuring that prospective volunteers have, and feel they have, adequate skills to be involved, many clubs provide or offer to pay for formal coach training. Several clubs were also described as providing training and support to prepare new volunteers for their roles through regular two-way communication and encouragement.

“I’ve got every practice outlined, everything they [coaches] need to do is right in a book. As long as they read it the night before and they prepare.”

“We have books. Every time someone does a position, there is a binder for recording the step-by-step descriptions of what the role is. . . It is kind of an ongoing guide. Also, if someone steps in whose kids have just started and they are taking over a position, us old horses will turn around and say ‘don’t forget and do this’.”

“I think it has to be communication and reinforcement and being there to support them. You know, don’t just let a bunch of volunteers go off and be on their own but show up on the day that they’re running a bonspiel, for example, and continue to kind of give them that positive reinforcement.”

Other strategies. Although cost was not considered to be a deterrent to volunteering, several volunteers also noted that their club offers some financial incentives to volunteers. Honoraria to coaches, and free or discounted registrations for children of coaches and board members, were described as strategies to entice new volunteers. One

club was described as requiring a “volunteer deposit”, which one could earn back by volunteering. Notably, a few participants indicated their, or their club’s, discomfort with the idea of providing financial compensation as an incentive to volunteer, because it might attract people for the wrong reasons.

“Financial incentives are always good to try and kind of get people interested in doing something. . . money talks.”

“We have actually had to give financial incentives to our coaches to come out.”

“We have implemented a kind of a fee that you can earn back with volunteer work. . . so this is a way to get people in, you know, and I’m not sure if its going to make a difference ‘cause I’m sure that there are people who will do their very minimum requirements. . . I don’t know if we’re really going to bring anybody on board.”

“The fear that comes out is, well, then we’re going to attract the wrong kind of people to volunteer for positions. People who would only do it for financial gain.”

One participant noted that, as a way of getting parents involved, the club presents them with an ultimatum to volunteer or the program folds.

“So, I basically had to call the parents and say that this is the team your child is on, but there is no coach for it. If someone doesn’t come along and coach, you will get your money back but your child will not be able to play. So you sort of force people into that position.”

No strategies. One third (33%) of participants said their club does not do anything in particular to address the reported difficulties in attracting volunteers. Some said it is because they feel they can’t change the program or make tasks more flexible (e.g., coach, president).

2.3 Recruiting Volunteers

The large majority of participants (90%) described some mechanism for recruiting volunteers.

Word of mouth. The most common method of recruitment was simply word of mouth (77%). This ranges from a direct invitation to certain individuals (from board members, coaches, athletes and parent volunteers), to getting the word out through formal presentations to club members and non-involved parents (e.g., banquet, annual general meeting). A few participants noted the use of e-mail as a means of “direct” ask.

“A lot of one-on-one. It comes down, I think, to the President and some of the other sections to talk to people directly.”

“The coaches always have the big parents’ meeting and, you know, ‘okay, we are going to need everyone jumping in and helping out.’ And I know whenever I’m out [at the field] I always try to work the crowd. We chat and you just try to get people a little bit one-on-one and just tell them about what’s going on and. . . not necessarily trying to push them in but just kind of open their eyes to how much goes on behind the scenes and, ‘boy, we sure could use a hand’ and that sort of thing.”

“I think that way [getting the word out about what the club is looking for] the jobs are explained well and so the people take jobs they feel they can handle.”

“Any techniques you can use to get the individual interested in the activity, and hopefully once they get interested they’ll show some sort of longevity toward volunteering.”

Written requests. The next most common methods (68.5%), which were generally used in combination with word of mouth, included a call for volunteers on the club's website and in the club newsletter (36%), newspaper ads (primarily to recruit coaches) (22%), flyers or posters (22%), and a sign up sheet with the child's registration package (20%).

"During registration, there's another form that gets filled out for parents who feel that they want to provide assistance or volunteer within the association."

Considerations for practice. Written communication is notably less proactive than word of mouth. A notice through a child's registration would be the least passive approach, because presumably parents *will* see it (only parents though). Nevertheless, about one-half of the interview participants said they offered their services in the first place as opposed to being asked directly, which suggests a direct ask is not necessary. Keeping in mind that about one-half of the remaining participants said they were asked directly, it would seem that a combination of written and verbal recruiting methods would ensure there is sufficient breadth and depth of communication.

"Like, putting a notice up on the board or something, well, those days are gone. Now you have to pick up the phone, or go over to them and sit with them and say, 'hey, I got a project here, I need some help, can you help?' That is probably the secret to us getting people out. It is a personal thing that we go over to them and talk to them."

Targeting prospective volunteers. Most participants who described some mechanism for recruiting volunteers, also indicated that they target that recruitment to certain groups (83.5%). The most common targets are listed below, in order of frequency:

1. Parents (43%).

"We explain this to parents when they get their kids involved in the club, is that the kids are the ones that actually play volleyball but we emphasize the parents are now members of the club too, and there's an ownership and responsibility on their part."

"We make it very clear to the parents that their child is joining the club, but they are also joining the club."

2. Former athletes (31%).

"I think that is what they try to do because that is what I was. You know, I knew about the game, so I could help the girls. Sometimes they get coaches and they just do it because there is nobody else, and the kids don't learn as much because they don't have the experience."

"Usually we've had success with some of the young students that have just finished university, getting involved in the program, and sometimes, like, they're there just for a year or two but they're ex-university ball players and the young kids sort of look up to."

"The House League is so cool because kids that are playing in the club come on board as coaches and they are mentoring these young kids and the young kids just absolutely adore the teenage kids."

3. Former volunteers who were no longer involved but had shown interest in the past, and individuals who they know have the skills and qualifications (total 13%).

“I would say certain people are targeted to get involved who seem willing to help out.”

“Once they say yes, then I will go back to them and others as well.”

“I think when they see a volunteer become involved and do a good job they certainly encourage those people to get involved again.”

“Some of the roles, we’re pretty selective at who we would have do it. Like, if you have a treasurer, you want to make sure you have somebody that can count.”

Considerations for practice. The focus on parents and former athletes appears to be a good choice of recruitment targets. The parents “are there anyway” and comprise the greatest proportion of sport volunteers (Doherty, 2005). The focus on former athletes ties into the “love of the sport” as a main reason for being involved, and more likely ensures some volunteer expertise.

Recruitment message. Although not asked explicitly, several participants mentioned the message that is used to recruit volunteers. The most common messages indicated that the club needed help, and would appreciate the help, and stressed the importance of volunteers to the club. The next most common message was informing prospective volunteers about the specific roles that needed to be filled and the job requirements, whether leadership positions, coaching, or more minor roles and one-time tasks or events. The third most common recruiting message was informing and convincing parents of their obligation to support the club now that their child participates.

No volunteer recruitment. The 10% of participants whose clubs do not recruit indicated that they either already have a strong volunteer base to draw from, the organization is very small and their volunteer needs are met, or the club waits for and counts on the volunteers coming forward.

“It’s basically, people who see the club that want to get involved, they come and approach us, so we don’t, you know, pound the pavement or anything. We wait for people to come to us. Because it is volunteer, I don’t want to pressure anyone or make them feel obligated or else, say, they’ll do something and then they’ll regret it later. So, it’s better that they approach you.”

“The senior players play for me and then they come and do the clinics for the kids.”

Considerations for practice. The findings here suggest that both written and verbal recruiting methods should be used, to ensure the message has a sufficiently wide distribution but can be complemented by a more personal and informative ask. The message itself should coincide with what volunteers indicate are the main reasons for becoming involved, beyond “I am there anyway”; that is, seeing that help is needed, an opportunity to provide a positive activity for children, particularly in a sport about which one is passionate, and having the skills, ability and desire to help and make a difference. Communicating as much detail as possible about the requirements and expectations of the volunteer role is also important. Targetting parents and former athletes as those most likely to become involved is also recommended.

2.4 Volunteer Succession

Just over half (56%) the interview participants indicated that their club has some form of volunteer succession plan, ranging from casual inquiries about whether volunteers are returning next year and beginning the subsequent recruiting process, to formally grooming assistant coaches for head coaching positions, or executive volunteers for the president's position. Some clubs have nominating committees to prepare for anticipated vacancies.

"If we know a coach is leaving the following year, we'll be out looking to replace that coach."

"We try to keep ahead of the game a little bit I guess."

"A lot of jobs, other people have an assistant or there's someone kind of in training to move up into it. Or else there's a committee and someone on the committee would take over the job if the person couldn't do it."

"We try to get people who are, you know, sitting on the board to get a sense of moving up the ladder."

"I'm working with the new president, so there's an overlap this year. . . He came on the board and finally made the decision that he would do it and I'd stick around for another year, so there was overlap that way."

Another 10% of participants described their club's volunteer succession plan as inherent in their constitution, where the terms of board members are spelled out, and turnover is controlled. However, none of these interviewees indicated that there is any preparation to fill these vacancies (e.g., recruiting or nominating in advance). Positions are filled based on whoever puts their name forward at election time.

One-third (34%) of participants indicated that their club has no volunteer succession plan in place. Rather, "we go by the seat of our pants." Many felt it would be worthwhile, especially with a growing or larger club.

"They just assume there will be somebody else to step in."

"It is more adhoc. With regards to the coaches, if there is a rumour that someone is leaving, then board members will start approaching other people. But there is no prescribed set of rules for that. . . I think to a degree it works right now, but the club is getting larger and larger and it becomes more difficult."

"You need to begin to tap those [parents] and we've begun, I think, a little better system of long-term preparation for these people."

Considerations for practice. Given the challenges of getting volunteers, especially for coaching and executive or board positions, and the risk to the program if there is no coach and the extra burden on continuing executive volunteers if there are no replacements, it seems wise to plan for volunteer replacement or succession. Planning helps ensure there is sufficient time for recruiting, preparing, and orienting the volunteer for his or her new role, particularly where deficient skills appear to be one of the main challenges to getting volunteers.

2.5 Interviewing and Screening

Interviewing during the recruitment process refers to determining a prospective volunteer's interests and capabilities, their potential fit with the club, and informing the individual about the expectations of the club and for a particular role. Ideally, the prospective volunteer also has an opportunity to find out more about the club and particular roles, and to further determine their interest in being involved.

Screening refers to the process of checking out a prospective volunteer's background, credentials and references, as well as the formal process of police checks.

Half of the interview participants (51%) indicated that their club has some mechanism in place to interview and/or screen volunteers. Half of those (50%) noted that their club conducts police background checks, although almost exclusively with coaches. Half also noted that their club interviews prospective volunteers, particularly coaches. According to the study participants, the purpose of interviewing volunteers was to determine their abilities and potential fit with the club. The processes reportedly ranged from simply checking their qualifications or credentials, to meeting with the individual to get to know them and their perspectives on community sport.

"I think that the role of a coach, who directly impacts the athletes in a very significant way, obviously we have to be careful in terms of allowing their positions to be filled, so therefore I want to talk to them. But something as, I don't want to say insignificant, it is significant, but something such as running a food booth is just show up and hand people a sandwich, we don't need to interview for that."

"To a degree. I will sit and talk to a person, and ask them questions. Normally, you get a pretty good reference from whoever it happens to be."

"For coaches and assistant coaches we definitely do. For just general board members, you kind of know people, and the coaches will give you a heads up on who might be a good person [for the board] to kind of, you know, 'don't go after this person, go after this person, or this person is kind of flakey,' you know."

"Obviously, from recent events in the news and whatever, we are going to want to know who our new treasurer is going to be. Pretty tight."

"They strictly adhere to the police background search for all volunteers and they also do interviews that they appoint committees to interview interested volunteers. Aside from a written application, then, they also face the panel and have an in-person interview."

Some participants indicated that interviews were only conducted with volunteers who were new to the club or unknown to members of the board. One individual noted that a new coach essentially undergoes a trial or probationary period, which serves as a way of "interviewing" them. Two participants indicated that the board "votes in" any new coaches, and that the election process itself is a way of interviewing, screening and selecting volunteers.

"We haven't needed one because most of the people in the club we know. People from outside, I think we ask for references, but usually there is not a problem."

"Well, a police check. . . I think mostly, you know, you're put out there and they keep a close eye. I think a lot of it, you know, you spend a lot of time being an assistant coach."

"At the club level they're elected, so I guess you could say there's a screening level there."

No interviewing or screening. Just less than half (49%) of participants indicated that their club does not have any interviewing or screening process in place. The reasons given were that: (a) the club is small and any volunteers are handpicked, (b) everyone who volunteers is well known to the board and volunteers in positions of greater responsibility (e.g., treasurer) have usually been involved for a long time, (c) the board is a pretty good judge of character and ability without any formal interview or screening, (d) volunteers are club members who are known to the board, or teachers who are already screened, (e) an interview is not conducted because it is left up to the person doing the recruiting to determine a prospective volunteer's capabilities, and/or (f) the activity and program are considered low risk (e.g., program for adults, lots of people around, no travel, general administrative tasks that are difficult to screw up). It was also indicated that the club was trying to get as many volunteers as possible, and would take whoever agreed to be involved.

"We just try and keep it with people that we know, that we're comfortable with."

"We have a lot of teachers who volunteer and, because they're already vetted through the school board, and a lot of them have known each other for a long time, then obviously their experience teaching really, really is an asset, so that really helps a lot."

"Whoever's looking after that particular area tries to determine the capabilities of the person that they're searching out to volunteer."

"It's basically an adult club and the juniors that come are usually with their parents."

"If you get too involved in the interviewing and screening process, you can scare people away."

"I don't think we're at that level that we can actually demand from parents that they have a police check. First of all that they volunteer for a police check, that they have their levels in coaching and stuff like that. We probably wouldn't get them out."

"It's pretty hard to ask somebody to submit themselves to questioning when you're hoping against hope that somebody is going to step in and fill that role."

"It's very time consuming and it turns people off."

"Our biggest challenge is saying 'thank you very much for what you did last year, now somebody else is going to do it'."

Should be interviewing and screening. Some participants who felt interviewing and screening was not necessary indicated that their club would take "any warm body". Others felt it would complicate the volunteer recruitment process, and add to the workload of an already over-extended board, while others felt it was necessary but to be careful not to overdo it as it is a time-consuming process and the club risks turning off volunteers.

Other participants felt that conducting informal interviews was sufficient in a small community where the club essentially knows anyone who would possibly be involved. And some felt it was sufficient to limit interviewing and screening to coaches, because this is the only group that has any real contact with children and coaching credentials are important, while board members have either already been screened as coaches or they are well known in the club as they have come through the system.

Some participants felt that a police background check was not that helpful because it is automatically dated. Nevertheless, several participants supported police checks for all formal volunteers (coaches, executive members and administrators), and interviews for new volunteers, because: (a) it is valuable to learn who the club is dealing with (especially a coach's credentials, philosophy and approach), (b) clubs do get some weak volunteers

that might be redirected from the start, and (c) it is important to know who your treasurer is!

Considerations for practice. This is certainly a challenging aspect of volunteer management. The findings indicate quite a range in interviewing and screening, and it may be reasonable to expect variations in different situations. At the least, clubs should review the intention and potential benefit of interviewing and screening and, if necessary, adjust their perception of this process from one that is a burden to one that is mutually beneficial to the club and the prospective volunteer. This process can be part of building a solid relationship as the club learns more than it would have about the prospective volunteer, and that person learns more about the club.

3 Orientation, Training and Development

3.1 Volunteer Role Clarity

Role clarity. The large majority of interview participants (76%) indicated that volunteers in their club are clear about what they are expected to do. Some participants felt that this was more the case for executive or board volunteers. A few also attributed the role clarity to being a small organization, although three-quarters of the participants, who were from small and large clubs, perceived volunteers to be clear about their roles. The fact that interview participants had been involved with their clubs an average of 11 years may have been a factor in the high proportion who said there was role clarity for club volunteers.

Participants attributed volunteers' clear understanding of their roles to a number of mechanisms, particularly: (a) the existence of a constitution, job descriptions, rules and procedures for the club, and in several cases a club handbook. As well: (b) an initial orientation and subsequent regular meetings were another common means of ensuring clear role expectations.

"A couple of years ago we went very carefully through the job descriptions and updated them so those kinds of guidelines are there."

"There's a constitution, there's specific job descriptions for any of the major volunteer roles; it's all laid out in writing."

"Regular, at least monthly, meetings where verbal information is passed along, copies of the constitution is made available, and there's a general outline of expectations. They don't intend to curb individual creativity in terms of creating an enjoyable atmosphere. But there's certainly a minimal set of expectations."

"Its laid out as to the duties, you know, of the various positions on the board. . . its in the constitution. . . and then we try and be pretty specific about job descriptions."

"Now there was something that I implemented when I was a parent volunteer coordinator; I laid out a job description for each position that we looked for, for the parents so that they knew how many. . . what the time commitment would be. . . We tried to lay it out as easy and quickly as possible. We put everything together like a manual and such for parent managers so they have all the information they need so we can avoid as many questions as possible."

Other ways the clubs promote an understanding of volunteers' roles is through: (c) briefing for event volunteers, (d) specific orientation for executive volunteers, (e) convenors regularly monitoring the leagues and helping coaches, (f) being mentored and learning along the way, (g) executive volunteers already familiar with the system, (h) detailed contracts with coaches and officials, and (i) plenty of club information, and practice and competition schedules in advance.

"We do have an orientation program when a new executive is coming into play, but it hasn't really been fulfilled the past few years. I think there's room for improvement there."

"The house league aspect of it, it's pretty clear. Although we do stop by every week to make sure they're staying on track. . . We have a convenor that goes by every week to make sure everything is going the way it should be."

"There is no written description for those individuals [board volunteers]. Those individuals involved with the board tend to be people that have been involved with the club for several years."

"It's quite clear. There's a schedule, for instance, say, for coaching, you know what nights you have for practices well in advance. You may not know when your tournaments are or where they are right at the beginning, but you'll soon be given that information."

Role ambiguity. Nonetheless, about one-quarter (24%) of the participants indicated that at least some of the volunteers in their club are not really clear on what is expected, and that some ambiguity and confusion exists. Some participants felt this was particularly the case with: (a) coaches with regard to technical expectations.

“I think it’s one of the areas we have to define a little better for the coaches, and a little more structure to that. . . I think we have to provide for the coaches, who are usually new, and they’re the ones doing the majority of the work.”

“One of the things we are finding that coaches are doing is kind of saying ‘we need help coaching. How to teach kids this’.”

Some participants also felt that role expectations were less clear for: (b) new volunteers, including those who transferred from another league (e.g., house league to competitive) or from another club, and had not caught on to the unique aspects of their new situation.

“I know when I took over my position, that first year I was going by the seat of my pants. There was no, you know, guidelines as to what my responsibilities were.”

Other examples of insufficient role clarity among volunteers included (c) deviation from explicit club policies or job specifications, (d) confusion when having to cover for other volunteers, (e) overlap in volunteer roles, and particularly executive roles, in large or growing organizations, (f) being too distant from the members and thus not having a clear sense of their needs, and (g) ambiguity in dealing with external partners.

“I don’t know whether it is confusion as much as sometimes people head off in the wrong direction and we are not constantly monitoring them. We have a fair play policy. . . We have had to re-communicate this sometimes with the coaches.”

“Some of them go outside their boundaries and, ah, infringe on other people’s parts.”

“Sometimes things don’t work out as planned. You know, someone gets sick, or they move, or, you know, job obligations may interfere, so its not always clear but you work with what you have.”

“When you get to be the size that we are now and you have 10 board members, even though they have what are supposedly clearly defined roles, there is sometimes overlap and duplication and, you know, some people will make a decision about something that really isn’t their role.”

“There’s a couple of positions now that are pretty well-defined. People who have done a lot of good work and they’ve organized the information in a nice way. . . But there’s still too much overlap in roles.”

“I don’t get to see, I don’t get out on the night where the bulk of the membership is out. So I’m probably not as connected to the membership.”

“I’d have to say yes [confusion], to some extent, only because we’re in a unique arrangement with the City and the City does some things and yet the Board is being asked to provide some input on some City decisions [facility development], and it then blurs the line. . . we really have no decision making power to the City decisions.”

At least some of these difficulties were attributed to a lack of guidelines or job descriptions. A few participants noted that ambiguity or lack of clarity in board roles in particular presented a barrier to recruiting.

“We typically have a difficult time getting people to run for positions on the board, probably because they are unaware of what it entails.”

Considerations for practice. Role clarity is not perceived to be a big problem, although ambiguity and confusion exist in certain situations. Role clarity is important to ensuring the club and its programs operate efficiently and effectively, and volunteers are not frustrated because of ambiguous or confusing expectations. Role clarity is primarily

attributed to the club having, and communicating, its constitution and job descriptions, as well as (perhaps surprisingly!) regular meetings among coaches and among executive and administrative volunteers. While “learning as you go”, or even by the seat of one’s pants may make sense in some situations, it is likely best if this coincides with more formal guidelines and expectations for each volunteer.

3.2 Volunteer Manual

Although the majority of participants (76%) indicated that volunteers in their club are clear about the expectations of their respective roles, primarily due to the existence of a constitution, job descriptions, and rules and procedures for the club, 60% indicated that their club does not have any kind of manual to assist or direct volunteers. In other words, where these formal documents exist at all, they tend not to be available in one single guidebook or manual. Unsolicited, 20% of these participants indicated that it would be a good idea to have everything in one place.

“I’ve done all kinds of documents that we use over the year that give coaches instruction, give our referees instruction, stuff like that. So we do have something like that, but I wouldn’t go so far as to say a manual. That’s always been one of my desires. . . If we had a paid, technical director position, then that could be that person’s focus instead of all this other [administrative] stuff.”

The remaining 40% of participants indicated that their club does have some sort of manual, with half of those directed exclusively to coaches (i.e., a coaches handbook including, for example, rules and regulations of the game, practice schedules, coaching tips). The remainder of the participants described manuals that range from being limited to the club’s bylaws and constitution, to including policy and procedures, specific job descriptions, a club code of conduct for coaches, executive and other volunteers, as well as players and parents, and an organizational chart.

“I put together a coaches package that tells them what they are expected to do, and what a practice looks like based on [NCCP] level one theory. So they use that as a model.”

“For the coaches they do. They have to go to a two night workshop. They get a manual of the hockey rules and expectations. A manual on practices and a video on practices, that sort of thing.”

“We don’t have a volunteer manual; we do have a coach’s manual. A coach will get a book that has the constitution rules and what’s expected of the coach, I guess, guidelines for coaches.”

“We have a club bylaw that we, like, give to people who are new. And they are asked to read it as well as sign it that they agree with what we have put down on paper.”

“ Well, for everybody in the executive, there is the policy and procedures, for all the coaches there is a house league manual, and for the competitive reps, there is a manual and also a form on which they have to sign-off on, as to what they’re going to do, based on budgets and stuff like that.”

“We have a policy manual that clearly outlines the duty of the official, the fans [parents], the coaches, the executive. . . We try to get one especially to the new coaches.”

“It’s a volunteer manual but it also deals with club members in general and expectations of club members as well as volunteers.”

“We don’t call it a volunteer manual. There is actually a [Club] Guidebook. It is for every member of the club, whether you are an athlete, volunteer, or coach. It does outline expectations in that sense.”

Considerations for practice. A formal manual for all club volunteers (and perhaps for players and parents as well) may be one way that the formal guidelines and expectations of the club can be laid out for everyone. The advantages are that all

information is one place, and updates are (ideally) made consistently and communicated to everyone. The disadvantages are the size of such a manual, and the cost to produce and distribute such a document. Nevertheless, a manual or guidebook may be a good option for many clubs to organize their documentation and ensure it is communicated efficiently and fully to volunteers and possibly members.

3.3 Orientation for New Volunteers

Almost three-quarters (71%) of participants indicated that there is some type of orientation for new volunteers, to get them up to speed. It appears orientation was more common for coaches than other types of volunteers.

The most common approach to orienting volunteers was to: (a) have the volunteer start in an assisting role (e.g., assistant coach, committee member rather than chair). This way they could become oriented to the club and to the position, and be better prepared to take on a more leading role. This certainly coincides with the notion of giving new volunteers more minor roles so as not to overwhelm them.

“Usually you’re put with a coach that’s been there for a while, you know. I think being an assistant coach for a season or two really helps. . . They rely on that more than books or anything else.”

“Someone just starting would start out as assistant coach or assistant manager position.”

Alternatively, new volunteers were expected to: (b) learn on the job, but with a mentor who would provide direct guidance. This was particularly the case for executive and administrative volunteers, as it was deemed to be difficult to try to teach about every circumstance that might come up.

“One would pass on one’s experience, you know, like about running a tournament and, you know, how to run the club.”

“On the board level, I mean, somebody gets elected, their in, so its like government, you know, you change over and people who have been there before try to help the person along with it to get them up to speed.”

“There’s probably 10 million examples you can give somebody, versus on the job training is sometimes the best, ‘we can’t give you the answer before it happens.”

“For some of the younger coaches, I went to their practices and showed them a few things and then invited them to my practices, because they can learn from the more experienced coaches. I think that is a good thing to do.”

For coaches: (c) clinics were described as one way to prepare a volunteer for that role and orient them to the club. Corresponding means of orientation included: (d) the distribution of coaching manuals, guiding handbooks and lesson plans.

“Last year we sponsored level one [coaching certification] within the club. . . We had 25 or 30, I guess, participate in that and the club footed the bill for that because all of these coaches were volunteering in house league.”

Finally: (e) orientation meetings were most common for coaches, but board meetings were also used for orientation when necessary.

“The coaches have training in a coaches meeting. The executive and convenors, we do meet with them as to what is expected and time lines, and things like that.”

For new volunteers who were involved with a team (e.g., team manager, parent volunteer), orientation was typically handled within the team. Event volunteers typically received a briefing before the particular event.

“There is a briefing before they get involved, when they are at the site, when they are recruited they are told what they are responsible for.”

No orientation. Over one-quarter (29%) of participants indicated that no orientation of new volunteers took place in their clubs, and particularly not for executive volunteers. It was expected that executive volunteers would know the ropes by the time they became involved at that level, having worked their way up through the club, and/or because they were recruited/elected based on their experience and expertise. The assumption was that they would hit the ground running.

Considerations for practice. Orientation is important to ensure that volunteers are familiar from the outset with how the club operates, their role in the club, and the club’s expectations. Participants in the study perceived orientation as helping someone get to know the ropes, presumably in addition to providing any available formal documents about the club and the volunteer’s position. This appears to be a good combination, as long as the volunteer does have the formal documents as a reference if his or her role or expectations are unclear. Orientation appears to be less formal for executive and more formal for coaches, when clinics and handbooks and meetings are provided. This appears to be as much to orient new coaches to coaching as to the club itself. The latter aspect – orientation to the club – should not be ignored.

3.4 Professional Development for Veteran Volunteers

Most (69%) interview participants indicated that their clubs provide support for the professional development of their volunteers. However, there was a considerable difference in this support by role, where professional development was supported almost exclusively for coaches.

Coach development. Of those participants who indicated that their club supports professional development for their veteran volunteers, the most common means was through covering expenses for coaches to attend coaching certification courses and clinics (75%). The condition for this support was that the coach had shown some commitment to the club, in terms of years involved and/or intention to remain with the club. In most cases all expenses were covered, although several participants (total 30%) noted that funds were limited for professional development, there was only partial coverage of expenses, or the club was restricted by the remote location of the community (e.g., Northern Ontario).

“Once the people commit to coaching, if you need training, there’s certification you need once you’re in, and because you need to hold a certain level to coach the club, so they gladly pay for all that. Put you through any of that.”

“If we know they’re going to be around, like if they make a commitment, we provide them. . . we pay for technical and practical. . . We’ll pay for their technical courses that they take.”

“Its expensive to send someone down [to Toronto] for 3 or 4 days.”

“We’re just not physically capable [because of distance and expense] to take advantage of all that’s offered.”

“Its inconvenient, you know, in that someone has to leave town for 3 or 4 days, I mean, that they have their own work responsibilities. . . being in the North, that’s one of the difficulties is dislocation.”

A number of participants (18%) said their club hosts its own coaching clinics – to support their coaches, develop the sport further in their community, and to reduce costs associated with professional development. Nonetheless, a few participants noted that it still costs time and money to host clinics, and their own coaches are not necessarily interested in the opportunity. Twenty-one percent (21%) of participants noted that, although coaches are generally supported for professional development, they are reluctant to commit to the extra time.

“We provide coaching clinics throughout. The club pays for individuals to become certified. With the clinics provided by the club, you are strongly advised to participate, yet there is never complete attendance. So, individuals choose to stay away, which is unfortunate.”

“People are too busy. People are just too busy. I mean, even to get them to go for one weekend for level 2, its tough, just real tough to get them out.”

“If it’s a time issue, I would be concerned that telling them there’s more available would only put more time commitment on them.”

Executive volunteer development. In contrast to coaching support, there was reported to be relatively little or no professional development offered for executive volunteers. A few participants (9%) noted that executive volunteers are supported to attend sport-specific seminars (e.g., offered by the provincial sport organization) or general education sessions (e.g., First Aid, Respect-ed, non-profit management training). The most common perception was that executive volunteers already have sufficient skills for the role – they were recruited on that basis – and/or they receive any necessary further training on the job.

“A director of the club, there’s not much, you [already] know a lot of knowledge involved in that.”

“I think if you didn’t have the skills you wouldn’t take it [the volunteer role]. . . So there would be no training for something like that.”

“I think people know what their roles are. They’re not really tough roles, like, there’s nothing too complicated about any of them.”

A few participants weren’t sure what other skills executive volunteers might need. However, several identified a need for skill development in fundraising and sponsorship, finance, general management, working with people, scheduling techniques, time management, and dealing with the new Ontario Privacy Act.

No professional development. For most of the clubs that reportedly provide no support for professional development, the most common reason given by participants was a lack of funds, and/or volunteer development was not a priority use of time or funds. A few noted that, although they don’t financially support their volunteers to become involved in professional development, they do keep people informed of the opportunities.

“The biggest problem is distance. You know, like, if you were a level 2 coach, you’d have to [fly down to Toronto] and that’s very difficult and expensive.”

“This isn’t the NHL. This is a group of people who do it for the love of doing it.”

Considerations for practice. Coaching development is obviously important to the clubs, and is generally well supported, however there is some concern about coaches' interest and willingness to take the time for upgrading. Given that the professional development of coaches is important, there is merit in exploring ways in which the training and development process (i.e., courses, weekend clinics) might be made more appealing. Coaching development is one area of volunteer management where there is variation by community location. Several interview participants from Northern Ontario clubs indicated that their clubs struggle to pay for coaches to attend the clinics that are typically only offered in Southern Ontario. They would like to see greater support for a coaching expert to travel to their communities, rather than trying to get several people to the South.

Professional development was generally not implemented, supported, nor considered necessary for executive volunteers. Nevertheless, a few areas where this group could benefit from some training or information were noted. Rather than dismiss training and upgrading for executive volunteers altogether, creative opportunities for professional development may be considered, that enhance their current skill set and expertise, without adding more of a burden.

4 Volunteer Support and Retention

4.1 Help with Volunteer Tasks

Interview participants were asked what, if any, assistance their club provides to help them do their tasks. Only 3% of participants indicated that the club does not help them; that they are responsible for looking after themselves and doing their own job, including covering any expenses they incur. These individuals were executive and administrative volunteers.

The remaining interview participants (97%) reported several ways in which their club does provide support to help volunteers do their work. The most common ways are listed below, in order of frequency:

1. Support to coaches (51%; e.g., deal with athlete registration, entries, etc., book facilities and referees, set schedules and provide equipment, regular information including rule changes, resources and updates from the provincial association.)

“They provide the fields, facilities, balls and all the officiating and scheduling which is arranged ahead of time through the club.”

“Whatever you need, whether it be equipment, whether it be guidance, whether it be help on the ice, anything you need you just ask.”

“They set up the practice times for you, they provide you with equipment, balls, emergency kits and, depending on how you finish in tournaments, you are reimbursed for a portion of Nationals if you make it that far.”

“I would say they do. Regularly at meetings, new resource materials are identified, there are advisors, perhaps there is an example of officiating, their rule changes and regular updates. So they’re helpful in that manner.”

“We look after the gym allocations, tell them how many tournaments they have, our expectations are fairly clear. We make it pretty easy for coaches to get their job done.”

2. Help each other out (47.5%; e.g., other volunteers pick up the slack, tasks are spread around, coaches help each other out, executive volunteers help each other out and provide a sounding board, there is support within each team).

“Its sort of a team effort, and you do divide the responsibilities amongst people.”

“Everybody tries to help one another. If I can’t do it somebody else will jump in and do it.”

“I have filled in for other coaches if they couldn’t take kids to a tournament.”

“Other coaches seem to help out and will go to any other team’s practice and they really seem to be supportive that way, you know.”

“I’ve had problems, I know we’ve all had problems in the last few weeks, but I’ve had problems with registration in the last month and I had three of the executive jump in and help me.”

“Being able to talk to some of the other board members who have been around for a long time. Some of them are past presidents themselves. There is a lot of knowledge within our older members. I have no problem bouncing issues off of them, bouncing ideas off of them and asking them constantly for feedback.”

“I would say the coaches are quite pleased by the role of the parents [assisting with the team].”

“We work as a team. We work it out.”

3. Support from the president and executive (45.5%; e.g., open communication within the club, president is very approachable and helpful, executive volunteers are at the field, board helps deal with parents, direction and encouragement for volunteers.)

“We sort of have promoted to people, if they have concerns or they have things they wanna discuss with the board, to do it in a written format so that we have all the facts in front of us and its not a he said-she said type of situation. So we do try to be open. . . We sort of have a . . . [contact guidelines]. Its not meant to cut off communication, but its just meant to sort of choose your setting for communication.”

“During the house league, because the majority of the executive who are also volunteer coaching are there on the fields. . . if there are problems they’re usually taken up right there and then.”

“Either myself, [president, or vice-president]. We always stop by the gym at least once every two weeks to make sure everything is going good.”

“The president would pretty much sit in on any problem that came up, and if I’ve got a particular problem and it has to go to the board for a vote, like, the president doesn’t vote, so he’s pretty neutral and a lot of the time, if you have a problem and you go through the proper channels, you can get it worked out.”

“A lot of those functions are basically coordinated through the direction that I give as president. Example, we’ll have a convenor who’s responsible for tournaments. . . I will assist that individual in selecting a tournament committee. . . I would provide guidance based on how they need to organize and structure they way they’re going to do that particular task that’s assigned to them.”

“If you develop an image of being approachable and caring. . . If there was a problem, I would hear about it. I’m confident that if there was something I would need to know, I would hear about it.”

“I did have one parent that was a little upset. I did tell [the president] about it, and he looked into it. We checked it out and it worked out okay.”

“Where they have players on their team they want to get rid of, where players are acting out, or parents are acting out, where they have problems, I try to resolve those problems.”

“He just tells me ‘this needs to be done and I need you to go check it out.’ He keeps telling me I do a good job and stuff. . . So he’s encouraging and let lets me know what needs to be done.”

4. Cover expenses (21%; e.g., for travel, phone, supplies).

“Any out of pocket expenses we’re reimbursed.”

“You are reimbursed for expenses on trips. You get meal money and things like that.”

“Although I don’t have a lot, but if I do have to put out money and such, I’m reimbursed very quickly.”

“They give me whatever I need at home because I do the job, obviously nowadays, more on a computer, so they provide me with a computer, paper, ink, you know, things like that, they provide that in order to keep me as a treasurer.”

5. Monthly/regular meetings (17.5%).

“We meet regularly, once a month, during the year and go over, see how things are going and any updates and this or that and the other thing, and new information, or what have you.”

Considerations for practice. The most often described type of support for volunteer tasks focused on how others in the club can facilitate the coaches’ ability to coach. This was particularly noted by coaches themselves (as a reflection of their appreciation for this support), but also by executive volunteers, which suggests they deem this to be a key element of the executive’s role. The next most common type of support for volunteer tasks focused on how volunteers pitch in to help each other, and particularly that

groups help their members (i.e., coaches help each other, executive volunteers assist and support each other, and there is support within each team). This suggests that there is somewhat of a “culture” within the clubs that reflects an expectation that volunteers will help each other. This is likely fundamental to the efficient and effective operation of the club and its programs. It was also noted earlier as a particularly positive aspect of volunteering and explained why the interview participants stayed involved (positive working environment with good people). Such a culture can be maintained and strengthened through recruiting volunteers that value helping each other as well as the club and the kids, and reinforcing and rewarding this behaviour.

Notably, although a few clubs in this study have a paid staff position, only one participant noted that one way the club assists volunteers is by providing paid staff to help. Nonetheless, paid staff likely provide much of the assistance with booking facilities and registering athletes, as well as picking up at least some of the slack that was identified as most important to the volunteers in this study. The findings do highlight the importance of the president in terms of providing support to the other volunteers; both executives and coaches. Most saw this individual as a leader who attended to their needs and made sure the club structure was in place so that volunteers could work effectively.

Finally, regular meetings, for both coaches and for the board, were consistently identified as a way in which the club helps the volunteer to do his or her task. The meeting is likely an important mechanism for getting the help and support the volunteer needs, and so its value must be recognized and meetings must be effective working sessions.

4.2 Volunteer Manager

Just less than half (45%) of the participants indicated that their club does have one or two individuals responsible for coordinating volunteers. The comments suggest that this was seen as primarily a recruiting role. Most of those participants (64%) described the responsibility for managing volunteers as being under the purview of the club president, perhaps with help from another board member. Several (28%) said it was the responsibility of the head coach or a coaching coordinator, obviously with a focus on the majority of volunteers being coaches. Two clubs were described as having “volunteer coordinators”, although it was noted in both cases that these individuals also have other titles or roles in the club. League co-convenors were identified as volunteer managers in one club; again, with a focus on the coaches.

Over half (55%) of participants indicated that their club does not have one person in charge of overseeing volunteers. The majority (77%) indicated that recruiting is a shared responsibility in which everyone is expected to help out. In the majority of those cases, it was also noted more specifically that each unit within a club oversees its own volunteers. There was a strong sentiment that this was the best way to go, because each unit (e.g., teams, leagues, tournaments, Bingos) knows its needs best and has its own contacts.

“It’s basically everyone’s responsibility as a board member to recognize individuals that want to volunteer and make recommendations at the board level.”

“When there’s a task, someone knows someone – ‘oh, I know’ – and off they go and pursue that.”

“I think everybody is responsible for their own area. So if I was going to do bonspiels and I need volunteers, I would recruit my own volunteers.”

“I think we are more focused with regards to. . . with a subvolunteer within each unit. [For example], volunteer coordinator for the [major tournament hosted by the club], or volunteer coordinator for the banquet, or volunteer coordinator for something else.”

“Not a sole job. The convenors for each of the leagues look after the coaches. I look after all the umpires. The executive looks after each other. So there is not a sole position.”

“Well each area has its own, for instance, we have a vice president of playing, so his responsibility is to recruit and assign coaches to teams. . . We have the parent volunteer manager and her job is to get a volunteer from each team to represent the team on that sub-committee.”

Other reasons given for not designating one individual responsible for overseeing volunteers were either that it was too much for one person (i.e., too much work, and too much to try to know the needs of each unit), or it was not necessary in a small club or where the club already has a strong volunteer base and so recruiting is minimal.

“It would be nice. Its good to have somebody who’s around and willing to help out and do all that sort of thing but when you start getting somebody, you know, making that person responsible, well what happens if things don’t work out, well then just more stuff gets put on them and I think you end up losing your volunteer.”

“I don’t think so, because then they need to know too much about what every single little area is doing, and when you’re asking for someone to volunteer you need to be very specific about how many hours are they gonna be involved, what exactly is their role, what is their commitment, and one person really can’t know all that.”

“I think it would be relatively difficult for one person to get volunteers for each group [e.g., tournament, banquet]. I think each assignment has a different target area that would like to be involved with that particular event.”

“I think the way that we have it split up. . . and that is their person that they talk to and constantly keep up to date with and things like that. I think it is a little more personal that way.”

Nevertheless, half of those participants who indicated there was no volunteer manager thought that it might be useful to have one individual or volunteer coordinator to help centralize and coordinate either volunteers or individuals within each unit responsible for volunteers. This coordinator could be a “go to” person. However, one-third indicated that, despite this being a good idea, there was not likely the time or human resource available to institute such a position.

“I don’t think one, its putting too much on one’s shoulders. Maybe having one contact person.”

“It might be a good idea, to have somebody just as a volunteer trainer, or whatever you want to call it. We have somebody in charge of player development, but maybe have somebody in charge of the volunteers.”

“Of course; how could I say no to that? I’m trying to see if that is my role, trying to find the time to do that.”

“That would be great. It would take a volunteer to implement that. Like, we’re stressed right to the limit. . . Like, even just getting the bare minimum done.”

Considerations for practice. There seems to be considerable support for this not being the purview of one individual, because it would be too much work, and one person can’t possibly know the specific needs of units in a large organization. The common sentiment is that it is better to have a few people or one person within each unit responsible for their own volunteers; they know their specific needs better, several people will have a broader network than just one, and they can provide a more personal touch. Nevertheless, there seems to be support in principle to have one individual coordinating that, if possible.

4.3 Difficulty Keeping Volunteers

Almost all participants (89%) reported that their club has no difficulty keeping volunteers. The common sentiment was that once you had the volunteers, they were there to stay, at least for a reasonable period of time.

“It is not bad after you get them. It is just getting them.”

“Once they volunteer, they stay with the program right through until their child is done.”

“Usually when people start volunteering, they usually come on for a couple of years or so.”

“I think its when they finally decide to go, getting new recruits, that is a much bigger problem.”

“Once you are there, people are willing to carry on.”

The interview participants noted that coaches are most likely to stay involved, although a few indicated that a core group of executive volunteers stays on, and in some cases they simply rotate among the board positions.

“I would say that we have a core group of volunteers. . . that stay on.”

“They have been around for a long time. [Name] used to be president, and now [name] has taken over. . . There is people up at the top there that are interested, so they sort of switch around some of the jobs at the top, and they always have someone to fill them.”

A few participants described a typical commitment as four to six years, which tends to coincide with the length of time that one’s child is involved in the club. It also coincides with the average length of a sport volunteer’s involvement (Doherty, 2005). The common sentiment is that this is a satisfactory, and hoped for, commitment.

“A lot of my coaches have been here for 5 or 6 years.”

“If we could entice someone to come in when their child is young and keep them for that child’ duration with the club, that’s pretty good if you can keep someone for four years.”

“Usually when an athlete gets involved in the club they are here for many years. Most of them that start out in grade 7 are still with us in grade 12. So, really, we have a lot of family commitment where many children go through. It is pretty, 5 or 6 years, I guess.”

“There is a turnover after four years. Once the kids leave the club, the parents will stay for 6 months to a year to help out, but then they will step down.”

The few participants (11%) that did indicate their club has difficulty keeping volunteers described the most frequent turnover with volunteers in non-coaching roles, and particularly parent volunteers and young volunteers (including those in coaching roles).

“Typically those volunteers aren’t coaches, they’re members of the executive. The coaches, by and large, don’t have children participating in it they just have an interest in the sport. So they don’t tend to, they tend to stay longer and they tend to be, they don’t have that transient nature because of with some of the executive, many of the executive members have sons or daughters participating and then they move on when they leave.”

“There’s [executive volunteers] what we talk about, the burnout that transpires. I know we lost about three members last year from our board of directors.”

“There is a huge turnover in the [volunteer] pool largely because they are parents and once their kids are gone. . . They aren’t in love with the sport per se; they are doing it because of their kids.”

“We have had a high turnover of coaches and one of the reasons is some of them are young and out of university and are highly mobile, so they’re moving around. The most stable volunteers are the one’s where the kids are in the organization.”

“Some younger, usually younger person, who’s still playing, or finishing playing, and they want to start coaching and they don’t really know, in my experience, they don’t really know what it’s all about.”

Why volunteers leave. The interview participants reported multiple reasons why volunteers (eventually) leave. The most common reasons, in order of frequency are:

1. Child is no longer involved (36%).

“A lot of times it usually coincides, for a lot of them, when their child stops being involved.”
“Once the child leaves, in most cases we lose the parent.”

2. Heavy time commitment; burnout (16%).

“‘Hang on, time for some of you people to step up to the plate and, certainly, we’ve done our share of duty.’”

“I don’t think people realize the amount of time that you have to put into it.”

“Sometimes the demands are, I guess sometimes people don’t realize how much they have to put in.”

“One is time. . . there’s, you know, too much, too much for them to handle.”

“Registration is always the hard one, and its because its such a time restriction. I mean, you do nothing all year, then maybe for 3 or 4 weeks you pretty much go 24 hours a day. . . That, to my mind, is one of the harder roles to keep people in. . . They only do it for 2 years or so.”

“There’s what we talk about the burnout that transpires. I know we lost about three members last year from our board of directors because they’ve been doing it for 5 or 6 years. They just figured, ‘no, I’m just not going to do it anymore’ because they’re not ready to commit an additional 30 or 40 hours.”

3. Conflict with others (10%; i.e., personality clash, dealing with parents, different philosophies).

Lifestyle change: Moving away (10%; especially younger and retired volunteers), change in work obligations (8%), change in family obligations (5.5%).

“Sometimes its personal reasons; we’ve had a couple of those in the past couple of years. Personality problems between people on committees, and curlers are as persnickety as anybody else. When you’re a volunteer its easier just to walk out; you’re not losing a paycheck.”

“That was the case with the previous president who left before I came in. There was a disagreement, something happened.”

“I think largely it was burnout. [But] sometimes the issue of strong opinions and a disagreement comes up too.”

“You know, we all see what society has become nowadays and its very difficult, you know, and you’re a volunteer and you see it on a soccer field of five year old kids, and people are just yelling and screaming. Yelling at the refs, yelling at parents, yelling at coaches, you know, it’s a crazy world we live in.”

“Personal reasons: kids have graduated from the program, lack of success from a coaching perspective, and also a philosophical disagreement with people in the club; i.e., hard nosed coach versus another philosophy.”

“Well they move away or they get married and then they have other, you know, raising a family has other priorities.”

“If it’s a young person and he’s got a job that requires more time, then he’s gonna leave.”

“A lot of it has to do with job turnover. Whether or not they [coaches] can commit to being it if the guys are put on shift work and they just had a hard time making that full-time commitment.”

“Normally we could lose one a year in terms of a change in work commitment, or possibly if they have another sibling that is off somewhere else. . . and they can’t commit this year because they are off for the season figure skating or something else.”

Other less commonly cited reasons were that the volunteer him or herself was no longer a member in the club, due to injury, age, cost, or lost interest, or the volunteer experienced conflict with other commitments in general (i.e., too busy).

Considerations for practice. It is comforting that very few participants indicated any difficulty keeping volunteers. Getting volunteers appears to be more of a challenge than keeping them. However, there is always turnover, and at times it is less convenient or more disruptive to the operation of the club than others. There is always a cost (time and/or financial) to recruiting and orienting a new volunteer to the club and its programs. Thus, there is merit in understanding why volunteers leave, and considering whether the club should focus efforts on trying to keep them involved. Presumably it is worthwhile keeping experienced and effective coaches involved, given the difficulty recruiting new coaches with expertise, as well as executive and administrative volunteers with experience in given areas, at least until their knowledge can be passed along.

Addressing the challenges of keeping volunteers. When asked further, most interview participants indicated that their club does not really do too much to address these challenges of keeping volunteers. This is not surprising, given that the large majority indicated that their clubs have little difficulty keeping volunteers in the first place. The overwhelming sentiment was that, if the child leaves the parent cannot be expected to stay. Instead, efforts are directed at getting the parent involved in the first place, and hoping they stay involved while their child is a member.

“We always try to encourage people to stay. Often they will for one or two years after their kid has gone. Generally not much longer though. Again, the coaches are there for their love. The pool [of volunteers] is there for their kids. That is just the reality. . . I can’t fault them for that.”

“I think a lot of those are really out of our control, to do anything other than trying to keep new members interested and involved. So when people come, try and get them connected to something so that they will eventually, you know, work into a leadership position.”

Participants also indicated that, if a volunteer leaves because they perceive it to be an overwhelming time commitment, then the club probably does not want that person involved any more anyway. Similarly, if a volunteer has put in their time, needs a break, or feels new people should be involved, then the club is more than willing to thank them for their services and let them go, and hope that perhaps they will return one day.

“Its hard to get people on board to help, I think that one person who doesn’t have the time, it just doesn’t work. So I would say no to that.”

“If someone’s going to volunteer to be a coach, the expectation is that they’re there the three times a week, and if they’re not. . . basically[president] figures they’ve lost interest and their commitment to the club is probably gone.”

“Its kind of hard to do anything, because I think these people have put in their time and I don’t feel that we should kind of push people. Although they often do, because we’ve struggled, so people have stayed on much longer than they have. . . thank them tremendously and hope to kind of keep them in the loop for information purposes and such.”

“Well, if you don’t want to step down, they’ll never turn you away. We have a volunteer appreciation night and a lot of the people who have been there in the past are invited to that, so, I mean, you try to keep your contacts that way. But I think sometimes when a person’s put in, I mean,

your child could literally go for 10 or 12 years, and if you've put in that much time, I think a lot of people just want out."

A few participants indicated that certain volunteer positions cannot be split to allow job sharing and so the time commitment is what it is. However, some participants did indicate that, where conflict or disagreement has led to a volunteer leaving, their club will try to resolve the issue and keep the volunteer on board. And, where possible, some clubs will try to provide a volunteer extra help with their job. However, given the culture of helping and pitching in noted earlier, it is likely that once a volunteer gets to the point that they want to leave the club, no amount of extra help or conflict resolution is going to make a difference. The key is to make sure it does not get to that point. For those who want to stay but cannot because of conflict with other commitments (e.g., job schedule, family activities), the club tries to do something to help them out. Those who are intent on leaving are going to be on their way.

5 Performance Evaluation and Feedback

5.1 Evaluation and Feedback to Volunteers

One quarter (25%) of interview participants indicated that their club conducts a formal evaluation and/or provides formal feedback to its volunteers. All of the remaining participants (75%) indicated that there is at least some form of informal feedback taking place.

Formal evaluation. Of the relatively few participants (25%) who did describe some type of formal evaluation, the most common was in the form of parents and/or players providing feedback on coaches annually through a written survey (50%). The information is analyzed by the board of directors and used for making adjustments to programs and coaching personnel in the subsequent year. Participants indicated that, typically, the only information that gets back to the coaches is with regard to problem areas.

“They did ask for some feedback from the parents, which was nice. If anyone had any questions or concerns, that is kind of good to get it out in the open, type of thing. . . They hand them [surveys] out to the parents, and the parents evaluate the coaches. [But] sometimes parents get a little carried away.”

“We usually have a feedback form to go back to the parents and ask how they would like to change things. . . Then we meet again at the end of the season to see what we can do next year.”

“Each year there is a performance appraisal done by each of the players and they are taken home also to be done by the parents. There is not so much a response if it is done in a positive way, but if there are major problems or complaints then the coach is brought in to talk about them.”

“There is an evaluation process that each player and parent is asked to fill out. . . That comes anonymous to the board, whom would go over that and talk in general terms to the coach if there were any problems. This feedback is used in decisions to rehire coaches.”

“The parent evaluation, and its pretty much there – if you don’t ask for it, we don’t make it public knowledge. . . I [a coach] always ask at the end of the season, because it’s the only, I mean, some people don’t like criticism, they say ‘we’re volunteers, why should we be criticized?’ For myself, I want to know what people are thinking, because then you can either change, or you can do what they like. And I think it’s a good tool if its used in that content.”

A few other examples of formal evaluation that were mentioned by participants include monthly coaches meetings and board meetings at which written and verbal reports are presented thus providing feedback on the volunteer’s work (17%), a general club survey that includes questions about the coaches, board, and other volunteers (11%), the formal evaluation and feedback that takes place during the election process (11%), a year end convenor’s report that includes feedback about the coaches (5%), and individual team meetings at which players, coaches and managers discuss positives and negatives about the team operations (5%).

“Well, when we have our monthly meetings we talk about, each person gives a brief report and so then there are, if there have been problems there will be discussions about it, or if things have gone very well there will be compliments about it.”

“The convenors, they’re all to hand in a report at the end of the year on the coaches. . . It goes to the secretary and if there are any blatant problems I would probably bring it up at the executive. Other than that, again, it’s a privacy thing.”

Informal evaluation. The most common type of informal evaluation and feedback was in the form of recognition to volunteers, ranging from a casual pat on the back, or a “good job” after a specific event, to a “thanks” at the year banquet (38%). Of course, this recognition was always in the form of positive feedback and typically very general.

“We try and praise our volunteers a lot, mainly by acknowledging their efforts at our meetings and at our annual general meeting and in our newsletters that come out. We’re always encouraging and thanking the volunteers in the different areas who’ve done a great job over the years. That’s primarily, I guess, the way we do it.”
I, myself personally, will often spend a lot of time with the people who are volunteering and giving them positive reinforcements and thanks for what they’re doing. But a proper sort of performance appraisal, no, does not happen.”

Casual verbal feedback was also described by many participants (38%) as a source of both positive and negative comments, ranging from very general to fairly specific about volunteer performance. Verbal feedback came from a variety of sources including parents, the executive, the coach coordinator, and other unit heads.

“We do talk. We find, for the most part, the group is really open. Personally, I try to ask at the end what should we change, or what could we change to improve things to keep the league on the upswing.”
“We are always out at the ballparks and are talking to the parents and so on, so they are always visible for the coaches to talk to if they are having a problem.”
“They would just take them aside and say, you know, ‘this was inappropriate or this didn’t work well, or is there some way we can fix this’.”
“If a volunteer wasn’t doing the job properly, then the president would have to step in and talk to the person.”

Should be (more) formal evaluation. Interview participants were asked if the club should do more in the way of evaluation and feedback (keeping in mind that most evaluation and feedback is very informal). Participants were equally divided on this. Half (49%) said yes, more should be done, and the reasons given included the need for a better, more organized sense of what members think, and feedback is important to the running of the club and volunteers’ efforts. Several felt that evaluation efforts should focus on the coaches only.

“I think volunteers should be given something back. Always. You know, like any volunteer.”
“Absolutely. I think it is important for people to feel that they are being valued by their work. Otherwise, they usually give up. What is the point of coming out, if you work your ass off and get no recognition? For some of the people who have challenges in social skills, as hard as it is, they need to be told, otherwise it will impact the program and their outside life.”
“Yeah, I think they should [do more formal evaluation], to let you know what sort of job you’re doing, or what they expect more from you. But definitely it would help with the coaches, give them some feedback, because I know in the previous league I was involved in, the coaches did such a poor job and nobody really stood up. . . the league never took charge of anything like that.”
“Good coaches usually want constructive criticism, and as a coach, and as a guy who started coaching with this club and wasn’t involved with the sport prior to that, the more constructive criticism I can get, the better coach I’ll be.”

However, there were several caveats and challenges identified: (a) evaluation is important but secondary to other key tasks of the board, (b) there is limited or no time or resources to devote to this, (c) what criteria would be used to evaluate coaches and the board, and (d) who would do the evaluation. It was suggested that the evaluator must be credible, and thus be someone with sufficient expertise to be able to judge others, and be someone who

knows particular volunteers best (e.g., president evaluates the board, head coach evaluates other coaches). Further to that: (e) evaluation and feedback must be constructive and ultimately used to improve the club and help the volunteers, and (f) a formal process must be accepted by the volunteers and those doing the evaluating. As well: (g) feedback must go to the volunteers themselves, ideally through one-on-one meetings.

Also, although a great number of participants felt that more formal evaluation and feedback to volunteers should take place, many recognized the difficulty evaluating volunteers, and the need to be delicate and sensitive with people who are giving their time freely.

“Yes, I think so. If its done properly. You don’t wanna upset your volunteers and lose them as a result of it. Yes, you’ve gotta remember that they are still volunteers, but I think that they need to also get feedback as to whether the expectations of the job are being met.”

“Yes, but I would have to clarify that a little bit by saying that I recognize. . . that volunteerism is volunteerism, and its different from giving feedback on someone who is being paid for a job. . . I would not want people to think that they’re being judged. I think that would drive people away, so it’s a fine line. I don’t disagree with the idea, but I’m not sure how I would do that.”

“That’s really tricky ‘cause its, like, well you don’t want a volunteer to not do something good, but on the other hand we need volunteers. But, yeah, there should be feedback.”

“But you have to be gentle with volunteers, because if you start getting heavily critical they go, ‘okay, forget it then’.”

“If you show up, you’re a good volunteer.”

“Its pretty difficult to give a volunteer constructive criticism without taking some of the steam out of their sails.”

That very sentiment was a common reason why half of the participants (51%) indicated their club was doing enough, which in most cases was simply informal feedback. Most felt that it was hard to more formally evaluate volunteers, for the same reasons noted above. These participants also felt that evaluating on an adhoc basis, when problems arose, was sufficient. They felt that the open communication that exists, and the process of listening to and watching what is going on, is enough to ensure there is verbal feedback (both positive and negative). They also felt that formal feedback from parents tends to only be negative. Formal evaluation is too structured, formal and stiff for a recreational organization focused on fun. At least one participant suggested that poor/ineffective volunteers weed themselves out anyway.

Considerations for practice. There is general acknowledgement of the benefits of evaluation and feedback for volunteers, yet there is variation in the methods and degree of formality. The potential benefit of evaluation should be the impetus for clubs to explore strategies for effective evaluation; strategies that take into account who should do the evaluation, how, what should be evaluated, and when. The barriers to implementing and ensuring effective evaluation are the inherent difficulties associated with evaluating volunteers, and the time and resources necessary to implement anything formal. Volunteer evaluation is more likely to be accepted if a good rationale for doing it is presented, and if an effective, consistent, and fair process is put in place that is part of open communication in a club. Suitable evaluation processes for volunteer evaluation in community sport clubs should be explored and shared.

5.2 Volunteer Feedback to the Club

All of the interview participants acknowledged that volunteers have an opportunity to provide feedback to the club on an informal basis. Informal feedback occurs on an adhoc basis (typically when problems arise), always verbally, and as a result of ongoing, open communication. Notably, many participants indicated that they would prefer to see more formal feedback from volunteers, particularly through formal requests for input and a formal forum in which to present that.

“Do we actually go to them and ask them for. . . No, we haven’t done anything like that and I would say that that’s probably actually a good idea to try and kind of see into, as to what they could benefit from and what we could provide to them to help them do their job.”

“That’s probably a weakness on our part. We perhaps don’t ask them for enough feedback and. . . [maybe we should] ask them to provide more feedback.”

Two-thirds (63%) of participants indicated that their clubs provide a mechanism for formal feedback. The most common of these was the opportunity to provide feedback at coach and board meetings, and the annual general meeting. Meetings were considered an effective outlet for volunteers to provide feedback, because they are structured, minutes are taken, and there is an opportunity for group discussion. Invitations and requests for volunteer feedback at these meetings were also considered a formal mechanism for feedback (i.e., not just the meetings, but an invitation/request to give feedback). Several participants also noted that having unit representatives on the board provides a formal and effective mechanism for feedback (i.e., coaching rep, parent volunteer rep, fundraising rep).

“They welcome it [feedback] at every executive meeting.”

“At our coaches’ meetings the doors are wide open for us to say anything. Anything we might want, suggest, request, demand. Anything at all, its an open forum and the coaches’ meetings are with the president himself. So its good, and then he can bring that back to the executive and things can be hashed out there.”

“A lot of stuff that happens in the club happens at these coaches’ meetings.”

“I think what it [meeting] does is it gives us the opportunity that, sometimes you just may be thinking you need direction and at least with another individual making, challenging what you may be doing, gives you the opportunity, ‘yeah, I didn’t think of that, maybe we should be looking for somebody in a particular role’. . . Perspective, or the other side of it. I think its really, really critical.”

“I think we do that [provide feedback] at every meeting.”

“We’re always encouraged to submit ideas and always invited to meetings. So, there’s certainly an ability to voice an opinion.”

“The coaches have a coordinator who is staff and a coaching rep who is another volunteer who represents them to the board. So part of their role is to poll the coaches to see how things are going.”

“One of the members of the board is one of the assistant coaches and its his responsibility to bring issues to the board or to report on the activities of the coaches, assistant coaches to the board, and their concerns, etcetera, etcetera.”

“That goes up through the chain of command. So, if I am on the social committee and I think that something could be improved, I would go up to our social committee board member and she brings it to the board.”

The next most common mechanism for formal feedback from volunteers was an annual feedback form or survey, typically one that is completed by all volunteers and members associated with the club. Other formal mechanisms reported by participants included

requests for feedback from volunteers with regard to specific events ('how did it go?', 'what worked?'), and a specific feedback line made available for comments (this formal mechanism welcomes informal, adhoc feedback).

"We hand out a sheet at the end of the year to get feedback, positive and negative, from our parents, players, and also our coaches."

"Sometimes they will send an e-mail out asking for thoughts on this or that. Which is good."

"Absolutely, we have an e-mail, an address with my home phone number there, there are different areas and its purpose is to receive feedback."

Considerations for practice. Ensuring volunteers can provide feedback, and are invited and encouraged to do so, keeps the lines of communication open within the club – something that is particularly valued by volunteers. It also demonstrates to volunteers that their input is valued. The interview participants appeared to be content for this to continue to happen on an informal basis, although there appear to be mechanisms in place for volunteer feedback to happen more formally. Meetings are a useful forum for formal feedback, and a not uncommon aspect of volunteer organizations anyway. They should continue to be used as a mechanism for ensuring volunteer feedback. As well, formal feedback can be a standard part of any event, program or season wrapup. Clubs need to recognize the benefits of volunteer feedback, and then re-examine whether they have an effective feedback process in place.

6 Volunteer Recognition and Rewards

The majority of participants (85%) indicated that their club does something formal to recognize or rewards its volunteers. The most common means of recognizing and rewarding volunteers are listed below, in order of frequency:

1. Volunteer appreciation night and/or year-end banquet where volunteers are formally recognized and thanked (55%).

“We have a volunteer appreciation night where we just get together on a social basis and that’s basically our thank you for the people that have worked.”

“Periodically, over the last few years, we do have an evening where basically we have food and drinks free to everyone who has volunteered in any sort of capacity throughout the year and then they come to the club and we spend the evening together and such.”

“At the end of the year there is an awards banquet where the executive is recognized and rewarded.”

“We recognize our volunteers at the end of what we call our Sports Night, at the end of every year.”

“They have their year-end banquet, but there might be a word said here and there, but nothing sort of rewards.”

2. Special volunteer awards (36%; e.g., coach of the year, volunteer of the year, award of merit, nomination for city award).

“A lot of times we gave out awards to volunteers who, I had parents who, like, whose children were involved for years. When they stepped down, we just gave them a trophy and stuff like that with his name. Other people who have been helping for a certain number of years as volunteers, we recognized this way.”

“I think there are about three plaques in the club in which we recognize volunteers for. . . They recognize people who have put in, you know, an extra effort in volunteering and at their final meeting of the year they usually give out this award.”

“There are honorary member awards for volunteership and for people that are involved in many aspects of [the sport] . . . Being an honorary member is, of course, quite an honour.”

“Past presidents are always recognized at, we have a tournament in honour of our past presidents every year. So then they’re always invited to the opening ceremony and everything.”

“We normally nominate one of the volunteers each year for the City’s Volunteer of the Year. . . and they have a recognition night.”

“We don’t in particular have acknowledgements and so on, there are other ways, for instance, every year the City has a recognition program. . . so, some of our longer-standing coaches and executive members and so on, we make sure that they’re nominated for that.”

3. Club clothing or a gift, if funds allow (28%).

“I think pretty well the standard things, like uniform, like a jacket or, you know, a sweat top or something like that. Something to show that you belong to a club, and we stand out.”

“It depends on how financially solvent we are at the end of the year. Certainly there is recognition at the awards banquet. A thanks, a key chain, a coat, whatever. It is never a huge thing from a money standpoint. But we aren’t in it for the money.”

“Periodically, I try and get a special gift for people who have volunteered more than five years.”

“If you do serve for twenty years you get a jacket.”

4. Recognition/rewards within the team (17%).

“At the end of the year we have our own individual team parties. . . So it is more an individual thing rather than a club thing.”

“Most teams will organize a year end barbeque, or parents versus kids game, where there is presents for the coaches that the parents and kids buy.”

Other examples of recognizing or rewarding volunteers, each noted by less than 10% of participants included: (a) cover tournament registration and travel for volunteers who continue to participate as well (typically badminton and curling), (b) regular formal thanks at board meetings and the club’s annual general meeting, (c) thanking volunteers in the club newsletter, (d) public thanks at the conclusion of an event, (e) a volunteer dinner after an event, (f) a formal letter of thanks, and (g) recognizing volunteers in the local newspaper and media.

There did not appear to be any variation between recognizing or rewarding coaches versus other types of club volunteers. This is likely the case with formal events or awards, but coaches may be on the receiving end of more informal thanks (e.g., from parents, the board) than are other types of volunteers, such as board members.

No formal recognition or rewards. Only 15% of the participants indicated that their club does not do anything to formally recognize or reward their volunteers. These participants were more likely from basketball than any other sport, although the lack of formal recognition and rewards may be unique to their clubs and not to basketball clubs in general. Notably, most of these same participants felt there should be something more in place. The main reasons given for no formal recognition or rewards were that there was no time or money available for organizing or providing recognition events or awards, and/or it was not a priority for the club (nor for many of the interview participants themselves) to spend money on the volunteers.

“We haven’t got to that level of organization. It is another job altogether.”

“We haven’t really, I guess we haven’t really seemed to find the time to do that kind of thing, and we really should.”

“Not much because it costs money.”

“We attempted a couple of years ago. . . an evening, a social gathering for sponsors and volunteers and I guess it got mixed reviews. The amount of effort, energy, and money that we put off to honour these individuals. I think it could be done differently and we haven’t really had another stab at it.”

“We used to, at the end of the year, whether it’s a banquet or barbeque. . . we used to give them mugs and hats and things, and a lot of coaches said, ‘stop spending money on us, we want it on the kids’.”

“Well last year they had everybody for a dinner. But they didn’t get a good turnout because most of the volunteers said, ‘put it back into the organization for their players. Keep the cost down’.”

Notably, many participants who indicated that their club does do something on a formal basis, also commented on the high cost of providing a year end dinner, or clothing.

Club should recognize and reward volunteers. Interview participants were also asked if their club should do anything to formally recognize or reward volunteers (if they were not already doing so), or if they should do more. Almost half of all participants (48%) thought their club should be doing more. A few participants indicated that at least

some form of formal recognition should take place, not necessarily at great expense but certainly demonstrating some thought and planning to reflect the club's appreciation for its volunteers. Several suggestions for formal recognition were given. The most common recommendations for doing something, or doing more than the current status, were to provide a year end dinner or appreciation night for volunteers or a full club banquet where volunteers could be formally recognized (32%). As well, providing a special award or awards for volunteers was consistently suggested (23%). Other recommendations, each from less than 7% of participants, included: (a) providing clothing, (b) public recognition via club newsletters or the local newspapers, (c) formal recognition within each team, where it counts most, and (d) encouraging recognition by the provincial sport organization where stories may inspire other volunteers. One participant adamantly stated that it is the parents that should give thanks!

The remaining participants (52%) felt that what the club is currently doing is okay. Again, this is with reference to what the club currently offers, which may be nothing or may be a lot. What is most telling are the reasons for just staying with what the organization currently provides. These include: (a) keeping a focus on the kids, (b) keeping costs down so that money can go to the programs and the kids, (c) recognition and rewards is not what volunteering is about anyway, and (d) the best thing to do for volunteers is to just support their efforts – the best reward is a successful year.

Considerations for practice. The general sentiment is that some formal recognition is required (based on the number of participants whose clubs do something, and the number who additionally said they should do something). The interview participants felt there should be more formal mechanisms for recognition, especially banquets or awards, and to a lesser extent clothing, and media or provincial sport organization attention. Again, the majority of participants indicated that their clubs already have a banquet where volunteers are honoured in some form. The focus on formal mechanisms appears to reflect a need to clearly demonstrate to volunteers that the club cares about and values their contribution. These are strong recommendations when one considers they are being made by volunteers themselves. Certainly, there are several benefits to recognizing volunteers in this public forum: It provides an opportunity for participants to directly thank all the volunteers who contributed to the club, including those who work behind the scenes, and those volunteers get to come from behind the scenes to be recognized and to see all the athletes together. It also introduces these potential role models for volunteering to the current athletes who are, hopefully, future volunteers themselves. The presentation of clothing to volunteers can assist with club promotion (if it is worn!), and public identification with the club may be particularly valued by some volunteers.

There is, however, a concern about the cost to the club of providing formal recognition or rewards. Many of the additional examples of formal recognition involve relatively little time or expense, such as recognition in the club newsletter or local newspaper, nomination for a city volunteer award, letters of thanks, or public recognition after an event. Clubs should consider using these less costly mechanisms, and re-consider the need for more expensive banquets, dinners or clothing.

Ultimately, it is important to keep in mind that recognition and rewards is not why volunteers became involved in the first place, it is not why they stay, it is not a reason for leaving and, as will be shown in the next section, it is not one of the “best” or “worst” things about volunteering. So, formal recognition for volunteers can be a part of the club’s mandate but the club needs to determine reasonable ways to achieve this. It is important to keep in mind that providing support to volunteers to do their job can itself be a powerful form of recognition, and helps contribute directly to the club’s overall objectives.

7 Overall Attitudes

7.1 “Best Thing” About Volunteering in this Club

At the end of the interview, participants were asked what the best thing was about volunteering in their club. Several participants cited more than one “best thing”. There was notable variation by position, which is indicated in the list and discussed below. The most commonly cited aspects are listed here, in order of frequency:

1. Working with kids (32%; 87% were coaches).
Helping kids by providing a good experience in a positive activity (30%; 77% were executive/administrative volunteers).

“Its staying involved with the kids. They’re happy to be in sports.”

“The kids’ participation, the opportunity for, you know, boys and girls to better themselves in basketball.”

“To see the way the kids learn how to play. Learning the game, and at the end of the year, they meet other kids, become friends, build friendships and they are learning how to win. Sometimes you don’t win, but at least they are trying hard. I think they learn a lot of life lessons, and I think that is important.”

“Basically, seeing the kids’ progress. Having a chance to be with the kids as they progress up the sport.”

“Working with the kids. I really like the feedback from the kids. I like the interaction with the kids. . . You feel like you belong and the kids, really, a lot of these kids need that kind of thing and when you see that we make a difference to them, you know a lot of these kids don’t have much, and you see the kind of input or impact even that you might have on these kids, its really rewarding.”

“The best thing is the reward of seeing the young kids grow, develop and become adults. Just seeing that happen. Seeing them do well and be successful in their ventures in life, that is the most rewarding.”

“I think its knowing that you’re doing the right thing. You’re helping kids and you get to see this evolve from one level to another, and you’re part of making that happen. So, its giving back and its being part of something for kids.”

“I would say the sense of satisfaction I derive from seeing children reregister because they’ve enjoyed themselves and want to participate again.”

“Watching the kids play.”

“To look at a room full of kids and think that the potential is unlimited if you can create an environment where its okay to make mistakes when you’re learning and to know that you’ve been successful.”

2. Good people are involved (16%; 92% were executive/administrative volunteers).
Positive work environment (18%; 69% were executive/administrative volunteers).

“We have some of the very best people to work with. We have terrific coaches. Our executive are terrific. They work their hearts out.”

“It’s a good group of people that I work with and the cooperation that you get.”

“I think the best thing that I get out of it is when I actually see people also doing, willing, and wanting to volunteer, and trying to want to actually join the different boards and provide me with feedback.”

“The individuals that are involved in this organization are individuals that want to make this, the organization, better, and the sport better.”

“I think it is very rewarding, given that we are working in a huge organization, working together to do things. We are a tight knit community. We like to work with each other.”

“I would think and hope that, if you talk to the people that volunteer in my group, that it is well organized, well run, that there aren’t any problems, that it is fun. That the people involved are decent people.”

3. Contributing to a successful organization or event (14%; 62.5% were executive/administrative volunteers).

“I think it gives a great feeling of satisfaction to know that we’ve been involved and it’s a successful club.”

“When you see that you’ve done a good job. . . you know, I always love it when something works well.”

“It’s a reputable organization. We have always turned out great athletes in our club.”

“Honestly, [that] we are basically self-sufficient and run it ourselves. So, I don’t have any of the regional or community political issues going with it.”

About 10% or less of participants cited each of the remaining “best things”: (a) making social connections (11%), (b) simply filling a need and helping out (11%), (c) being involved in, and promoting and improving, a sport that one loves (8%), and (d) doing something different and developing personally, control over own position, and seeing one’s own kids participate (each less than 5%).

Best thing for coaches. As indicated in the list above, coaches and executive or administrative volunteers differed in what they considered to be the best thing about volunteering. Most (87%) of the interview participants who indicated that working with kids was the best thing were involved in coaching. Seeing kids develop as athletes and grow as individuals, as well as be their best, was the best thing about volunteering for coaches.

Best thing for executive and administrative volunteers. A few things were reportedly the most positive aspects of volunteering for executive and administrative volunteers. Most (77%) of the interview participants that indicated helping kids by providing a positive opportunity was the best thing were executive volunteers. In other words, whereas most coaches indicated that working with kids was the best thing, most executive volunteers indicated that helping kids by ensuring a good experience in a positive activity was the best thing. The difference in the respective roles of these volunteers is evident.

“I’m far removed from the best thing. The best thing is when you’re actually working with the kids. At my level I don’t get a chance to do that. . . From that end, I think just trying to make sure the league runs well. . . That we’ve provided something that is of service to the kids.”

Also, almost all (92%) of the interview participants that indicated working with good people, who make a big commitment to the club and pitch in when needed, was one of the best things were executive volunteers. This holds as well for a positive work environment of open communication and cooperation among volunteers, and contributing to a successful organization or event and watching it grow, where 69% and 62.5% of participants, respectively, were executive volunteers.

Considerations for practice. The best things about volunteering for the interview participants parallel what were identified as the most satisfying aspects of volunteering in sport in Phase 1 (Doherty, 2005; see Appendix B). They also correspond with why the interview participants indicated they continued to volunteer with their club. It is important for clubs to recognize and ensure opportunities for volunteers to experience the “best thing” about being involved. For coaches, this means working with kids and watching them develop and grow. For executive volunteers and administrators who work behind the scenes, it means being involved in providing an opportunity for kids to play (and be coached) and take part in a positive activity, while working with good people in a positive environment of cooperation and communication and, in doing so, contributing to a successful organization.

7.2 “Worst Thing” About Volunteering in this Club

At the end of the interview, participants were also asked what the worst thing was about volunteering in their club. Several participants cited more than one “worst thing”. There was no variation by position, but some variation by sport, which is discussed below. The most commonly cited aspects are listed here, in order of frequency:

1. Time commitment involved (31%).

“Sometimes its too much. I mean, frankly, there are times throughout the year that I’m just overrun. . . But if I do get the luxury of having someone work with me it will be a lot easier.”

“Not being able to do the job that you were asked to do. That probably is the worst thing. You know, for whatever reason, whether you physically can’t do it, or more than you can handle, or whatever.”

“The time, the time commitment, and I think that’s what stops most people from volunteering.”

“There is a lot of work to be done. There is always so many things that need to be done. From that side, it can become frustrating.”

2. Dealing with parents (25%).

“The odd parent that yells at you. . . It is the one thing I really don’t like.”

“Parents. No question. Very demanding.”

“The worst thing is the unappreciative people. The parents that sit back and do nothing but criticize.”

“The parents. People expect so much. It is volunteer. People do the best they can with their time. It is one of the reasons why I left the president role.”

3. Lack of volunteers to do the work, and volunteers that do not carry through on their commitments (13%).

“The lack of help. When something comes up, the same people volunteering over and over and over.”

“The only thing I’d like to see is more individuals becoming involved in volunteering. . . . The workload continues to seem like, all these suggestions to improve [that can’t get acted on].”

“When some of the volunteers aren’t doing necessarily the job that you want them to do and you know that they can do better and you try to encourage them and they don’t. I find it very hard because I want to get rid of a couple of them and I can’t ‘cause I’m struggling to try and kind of get someone to replace them.”

“Some of the coaches say ‘lets do this’ or ‘lets do that’, and you say ‘fine, go for it’ and nothing gets done. They come up with the ideas but don’t want to be part of seeing them through.”

Other worst things each noted by less than 5% of participants included: (a) the bureaucracy in the operations of the club, (b) program limitations due to limited resources (facilities and money), (c) dealing with external partners such as the city, high school, or provincial sport organization), (d) being in a remote community that is isolated by distance and financial limitations from coaching development opportunities, (e) volunteers tend to get taken advantage of and are always asked to do more, (f) a rigid executive board that does not tolerate new ideas or directions, and (g) out of pocket expenses are not covered.

Variation by sport. There was only one variation among participants with regard to the worst thing about volunteering. Those from hockey and softball clubs consistently noted the challenge of dealing with parents, more so than other sports. This may be a function of the particular clubs examined here. Nevertheless, this variation should be considered further to determine whether there is something about these sports that makes having to “deal” with parents more likely and more challenging, and what can be done about that.

Considerations for practice. The worst things about volunteering correspond with why participants said they might leave their club, and their perceptions of why volunteers do leave; that is, the heavy time commitment, and negative environment that includes dealing with parents. The time commitment and amount of work involved was particularly frustrating for the volunteers in this study. The amount of work was considered to be overwhelming at times, and led to frustration when one could not meet the expectations of the role. Interestingly, a lack of other volunteers to help was a less common factor. The interview participants appeared to be more frustrated with their own limitations, or the over-burden of the role, than with the lack of help from others. The implication is that there is too much for one person, more so than not enough helping hands. Of course, the two issues are at least somewhat intertwined, but the volunteer’s focus on their own limitations may be cause for concern. Clubs need to recognize and attend to the toll that the over-burden of work may be taking on their volunteers. A notable proportion of participants also felt frustrated by parents or members who criticize and complain, and particularly those that do not appear willing to help out. More formal mechanisms for feedback from parents and members—mechanisms or processes that are accepted and reinforced—may help to ensure open communication that is so valued within a club.

8 Key Challenges for Volunteering in the Future

Interview participants were asked to identify the key challenges in the future for volunteering in their club.

Recruiting volunteers. There was a consistent focus on recruiting volunteers (77%) as the key challenge for the future. The most common challenges to recruiting were, in order of frequency:

1. Getting enough volunteers for the existing work to be done, and in order to expand the club, programs and/or fundraising (34%).

“Getting volunteers. . . Just spreading out the workload when you do get the volunteers. Getting people to jump in and actually take on the job.”

“The more and more we do, it takes more and more time for the limited number of volunteer we’ve got right now, because we’re still short probably four or five board members.”

“Trying to keep our numbers up, especially even at the executive level because there’s more burnout there than there is at the other levels. Just trying to keep those numbers up, that would be a major challenge.”

“Well we definitely are at a crux where we need to get more volunteers or we are not going to be around, you know.”

“Its going to be getting the volunteers; just continuing to get the numbers, like, just having enough people come forward. The sad thing will be if we don’t have the volunteers then there’s going to be fewer teams. Getting qualified coaches is a real challenge [too].”

“We have done changes in how many teams are allowed. But, again, as we got more teams we had a tougher time finding the coaches to do it. . . and the time commitment.”

“We’re gonna have to find additional sources of revenue. Beyond what we’ve traditionally used. And that’s going to require a lot more volunteers to help with different ways to raise money for the club.”

2. Getting volunteers who have time and can commit to the time, and those who can be trusted to follow through (20.5%).

“Finding people who actually have time to do it.”

“Just to get somebody that’s trustworthy to do the job, I guess.”

“I think getting people to commit to a position of responsibility for an entire season, that’s gonna be difficult. And to get younger people into the club that have the time to do that.”

3. Getting quality and qualified volunteers who are good for the club and the sport (especially coaches) (18%).

“I think finding qualified volunteers, number one, is going to be the first challenge for the club itself. . . to try to get quality people who are qualified and can help, to step forward and volunteer some time.”

“Getting qualified coaches and getting people qualified to do the job.”

4. Other recruiting challenges: Getting younger volunteers (11.5%); True “volunteers” who are involved for others vs. themselves or their kids (7%); New volunteers with fresh ideas (6%).

“Getting younger volunteers. We have to get athletes that have graduated from the program to come back into the program. That is our biggest challenge I feel.”

“I think our key challenge is to get new volunteers; more people on the committee.”

“Key challenges? To keep things as fresh and new. . . But you almost need somebody new in these positions to see it from, with all these people being here for so long they kind of get going down the same road every time.”

“We need new blood coming in, especially on the executive.”

Managing volunteers. Far fewer participants (16%) considered managing volunteers to be a key challenge for the future. Nevertheless, the main concerns were: (a) keeping volunteers focused on the task (especially long term volunteers and those with limited commitment) (22%), (b) the increasing challenge to cover volunteer’s expenses (22%), (c) improved (formal) communication (11%), (d) the increasing formalization and bureaucracy of volunteering (11%), (e) over-burdened volunteers risk burnout (11%), and (f) the catch-22 of giving volunteers more responsibility and ownership in the club yet the increased workload and time commitment which goes along with that (11%).

Other challenges. A variety of additional challenges were noted by a total of 14% of the interview participants: (a) remote community means there is exorbitant financial and time cost to travel outside the region for competition and coaching development (which is an additional stress on coaches trying to run a program); (b) declining membership/participation means declining volunteer pool (members, parents), (c) increasing demands for certification and qualifications limits the pool of qualified and interested coaches, (d) program limitations for coaches because of limited resources due to fundraising challenges, and (e) those who try to run non-profit club and volunteers like a business with employees.

Considerations for practice. Recruiting volunteers was consistently perceived to be the greatest volunteer challenge facing clubs. The critical issues were getting enough qualified and committed individuals to maintain and, ideally, expand the club and its programs. It is important for the club to recognize and address, then, the primary reasons why people become involved in community sport volunteering, who is most likely to volunteer, and barriers to becoming involved.

Managing volunteers was seen by the interview participants to be a secondary challenge for their club. They feel that their club generally does a good job with this, although concerns about time commitment continues to be a common theme. It is important, then, that clubs continue to ensure there are opportunities and an environment where volunteers are supported and recognized in their work, so that they can realize the “best” things, and minimize the “worst” things, about volunteering.

9 Support, Information and Resources to Help Clubs with Volunteering

Interview participants were asked what kind of support, information or resources might be useful to help their club with volunteering, and what is the best way to get that to the club.

What. The most common request (36%) was for a manual or workbook with guidelines, tips, and best practices for volunteer recruitment, retention, selection, training, and/or recognition. An additional 13% of participants were not specific, but rather indicated that any new information on volunteer management would be helpful. The common sentiment was that the participants' clubs were doing many things right already, but they had a need for information in a specific area or they would take what they felt they needed from any new information.

"I would be thrilled to know if there are any secrets, and whether they're secrets or not, how does an organization who is hugely successful in getting volunteers, what are they doing that we're obviously not doing. That's what I would love to know. Whether there really is financial incentives that we have to go after, whether its how our approach, whether it's the non-financial incentives. How can we spark life in people who are longstanding members and might just be a little too settled to want to give that extra hour once a month or three times a year, or whatever, to help out the club. That's what I would like to know."

"The recruitment of that younger person, the 20 to 40 year old. How do we get them into the club and get them connected and involved?"

"Our biggest potential resource for coaches are school teachers and we need to find a way to get them excited about coaching, about the sport, and get them excited about the idea of coming to coach with our club."

"Probably like an outline of even ideas to get people involved and to motivate, like, what motivates people to do this, other than doing it for their kids."

"Maybe outlining what is to be done, what they, or how they can be helping out, what rewards the club could gain from their involvement, that sort of thing."

"What sort of things should be done to create new volunteers. If we had something like that, that would be great."

"It would be interesting to read them and see views from other people. You could always pick and take what you want out of it. I think it would be good. A lot of times what happens is you get people who have been here a long time and get in a rut."

"Maybe what we need is some feedback from an organization like yours [PRO] that talks to all different organizations and see what they do to get people involved."

"I'm all for trying anything, I just don't know if the group of volunteers, if there is different ideas out there, I'm sure we could share something. It is worth a shot."

"We would always be open to finding out what was available in that vein. . . If you had ten different things that were available we would probably like to look at all of them to see if they would assist."

About 10% of participants requested information or assistance in each of the following areas: (a) promoting community awareness of volunteering in sport and in a particular club, (b) samples or templates of common documents (e.g., constitution, board structure), business plans, volunteer role descriptions, club manual, etc., (c) assistance with coaching development through hosting local clinics (esp. in Northern Ontario and isolated locations), and (d) information and tips for helping volunteers with fundraising and getting grants.

"If you had the backing of more people in the community it would really, really help and sometimes the parents, like parents who don't volunteer you just wished that sometimes if they did. . . they would realize its not just that we're taking money. . . That's the thing we're trying to get across to people and it is very difficult."

“A lot of people don’t even know the club exists. If you could make yourself known, I think it draws people; the more people, the easier it is to get people to jump on board. Everyone wants to be part of a successful thing. If you are hardly known or recognized, people are leery to jump on board.”

“I don’t know, other than the fact that their bosses would let them off work when they’re needed.”

“Coming out with template constitutions and stuff like that. That’s going to help. When I started the club I asked them for that kind of stuff and I got garbage. Everything was done from scratch, but now there’s more and more examples to follow.”

“Just what could be done in different roles that people could have and how that would help.”

“I would like the parks and rec to run more of those coaching clinics as they used to run in the past.”

“For a coach to get upgraded, its possible to do it here, but its very difficult; you have to have qualified people. Well most, if not all, of the qualified people are there [Southern Ontario] and they don’t come here.”

How. The most commonly preferred means of getting this information and these resources to the clubs was through workshops, seminars, presentations, and clinics (33%). Although a few participants noted that such events just mean extra time for volunteers, the common feeling was that it was most effective to have a one-on-one session where club volunteers or representatives could ask questions, and also do some networking with other community sport volunteers.

“They’re generally very helpful because, again, you network with other people in different sports.”

“Going one-on-one with people is the most successful way.”

“Seminars. . . So I come back and go over it with some of the people on the board and then get it out to the members.”

“Maybe [the provincial sport organization] sends a group out to do a touring show to various leagues, you know, ‘here are some possibilities to fundraise or some possibilities on how to recognize volunteers or here’s how to nurture.’ You know, like a workshop.”

“I think a workshop. Workshops are more hands-on. And it can be, you know, if you have a good facilitator, it can be a great motivator as well.”

“I think a manual so that if you have a pertinent question you could look it up. But I think it should be started with a session, an information session that people could ask questions and so forth.”

The second most commonly preferred way to get the information was through e-mail (31% and/or paper (26%). While some preferred an electronic document, others wanted something to hold in their hands, and they weren’t sure people would read or print an electronic document. It was expected that an e-mail or paper copy would accompany (or precede) a workshop-type session. Many felt that distribution of materials would be best handled through the club president.

“Our president is the one that gets the information through e-mails or brochures. He is the one that gets the material and passes it out. He e-mails us quite often with anything that is important. He will bring it to the board meeting and have it on the paper for us to discuss.”

“I would personally like to get them both ways because people are not gonna sit down and read a 25 page file, but if they get something on paper in a brochure or some kind of an information pamphlet or a stack of pages printed, they’ll read them. You can’t read a computer in the bathroom.”

“Paper probably would be the best. Its something that you need and need to be able to pass on to the next people.”

“Probably something that was handed to each board member or volunteer. Because if you are told to refer to something, not everyone may do that. But if they are handed something, then maybe they will look at it.”

“I think they [the board] would be receptive. I think the key is who it was sent to. . . The easiest way is to distribute it to the president of the club. . . The onus is on the club administrator to disseminate the information in the club.”

Seventeen percent (17%) of participants felt that their own provincial sport organization was an effective way to communicate information. A similar number (17%) felt that information or resources that could be accessed (and downloaded) from a website, or through a CD would be useful.

“We get a lot of information from the Ontario Track and Field Association. . . information from that source would be good for getting to us.”

“Through Basketball Ontario, they are a good resource. If we do need some sort of things, they seem quite, well, good to work with. They are certainly there if you need assistance.”

“I find the Ontario Curling Association does do a pretty good job. And they know that the volunteers keep a curling club going.”

“Website, so that people could find it there. Send, periodically, to the clubs that this information is available and that you may want to take advantage of it.”

“Having stuff on the internet is probably a good idea. . . But, you know, its getting the message out that these websites are available.”

Notably, several participants felt that information and resources about volunteerism and volunteer management could, and should, be accessed through a community sports council or similar type of association. It would facilitate city-wide communication and networking among volunteer sport clubs, and perhaps help link with non-sport volunteer organizations.

Considerations for practice. Most interview participants indicated a preference for broad guidelines and tips on a variety of topics pertaining to community sport volunteering. Several indicated that they would like to see any new information, and pick what they needed from that resource. A number of specific topic areas were noted as well. Participants indicated a variety of preferred methods for receiving such information, therefore a reasonable recommendation is to provide several alternatives for disseminating the information and resources on sport volunteering. There was greatest support for workshops of some sort, followed by (or in addition to) e-mail or paper documents. The latter could be distributed through the club president, or made available on a website that is promoted to the clubs. Provincial sport organizations were also identified as a good outlet for this information, therefore they could be provided with the information and resources and asked to distribute it to their member clubs. One interesting need is for increased community awareness about volunteering, which could be addressed in a community campaign in concert with other volunteer organizations.

Appendix A

Sport Volunteer Project Phase II Interview Guide

Background

1. How many years has the organization/club been in existence? How many volunteers are involved with your organization/club?
2. Are there enough volunteers in your organization/club for the work to be done?
 - If not, what roles/tasks are not covered?
3. Are there any paid positions in your organization? [not just honorarium positions]
 - If so, what role?
 - Part-time/full-time?
4. How long have you volunteered with this organization?
5. What is your role or roles in this organization?
 - If more than one, what is your primary/main role?
6. How long have you been in this/these particular roles in this organization? [get breakdown for each position]
7. Do you have a child or other family member involved in this sport organization?
8. Why did you start volunteering with this sport organization? [multiple reasons; what was most important]
9. Why do you stay involved? [multiple reasons; what was most important]
10. Have you considered leaving this organization?
 - Why might you leave? [e.g., don't have time to volunteer (i.e., family, work, other leisure activities), role takes too much time (on task? year round?), children no longer involved, lack/declining interest or challenge, involved in other things, organization poorly run, not enough volunteers involved, efforts not appreciated]

Recruitment

11. How did you become involved? [e.g., asked by someone in organization, offered my services, children involved, former athlete, saw notice looking for volunteers]
12. Does the organization provide support to help you volunteer? [e.g., honorarium, covers expenses, flexible schedule]
13. Does the organization have any difficulty getting volunteers?
 - For particular roles/positions? [e.g., board/committee, coaching, fundraising, other]
 - If so, why is there such difficulty? [e.g., people don't have enough time, particular role takes too much time, not interested in long term/extended commitment, people don't have skills to do a particular role, organization doesn't help volunteers in particular role, not interested, organization doesn't ask, people give money instead]
14. Does the organization do anything about these challenges? [related to what identified as key challenges; e.g., smaller tasks, shorter time commitment, flexible schedule, training]

15. Is the organization effective at getting volunteers? (i.e., can get good volunteers, when they are needed, to fill required roles)
16. Does the organization actively recruit volunteers?
 - How? [e.g., direct ask, word of mouth, website or newsletter, advertising]
 - Does the organization try to recruit certain individuals, such as former athletes, parents, friends or family members of volunteers?
17. Is there any process in place for making sure positions will be filled before a volunteer's term is finished? [e.g., training assistant coaches for head coach position, recruiting board members to assume vacant positions]
18. Does the organization have an interview or screening process for volunteers?
 - Should there be such a process in place?

Orientation, training, development

19. Does the organization provide a clear sense of what you are needed/expected to do?
 - Is there any confusion in your role?
20. Does the organization have a volunteer manual? [describe what, how]
21. Does the organization provide any orientation or training for its new volunteers? [describe what, how]
 - Should it provide (more, better) orientation and training?
 - What information should be provided? [e.g., mission statement, goals/plans, organizational chart, job/role description and expectations, accountability, communication/reporting channels, organizational policies, volunteer policies, task-specific skills, safety and first aid, legal liability, fundraising]
 - What is the best way to provide this information? [e.g., informal discussion, formal session/s, manuals – paper, electronic, mentoring, on-the-job training]
22. Does the organization provide any training or professional development for its more veteran volunteers? [describe what, how]
 - Should it provide better/access to training and development?
 - If yes, what should that training/development be?
 - What is the best way to provide this training/development? [e.g., organize/host training courses or clinics, encourage/pay for attendance at courses or clinics, provide professional development manuals/guides]

Volunteer support, retention

23. Does the organization provide ongoing support to help you do your tasks?
 - If yes, what kind of support? [e.g., organizes/coordinates volunteers, access to information, administrative assistance, keeps communication open, helps with conflict resolution, provides leadership/supervision]
24. Are there other ways the organization provides support to help volunteers do their tasks?
25. What (other) kinds of support could/should the organization provide for volunteers?
26. Is there someone in the organization specifically responsible for volunteers (i.e., recruiting, training, support)?

- If yes, what is their position and what do they do?
 - If no, should there be someone in the organization to look after volunteers?
27. Does this organization have any difficulty keeping volunteers?
- For particular roles/positions?
28. Why do volunteers leave this organization? [e.g., don't have time to volunteer, role takes too much time (too difficult, only want limited/short term involvement), children no longer involved, lack/declining interest or challenge, involved in other things, organization poorly run, not enough volunteers involved, efforts not appreciated]
29. Does the organization do anything about these challenges? [related to what identified as key challenges; e.g., smaller tasks, shorter time commitment, training, support to do tasks]
- What, if anything, should/could the organization do?

Performance appraisal

30. Does the organization provide any evaluation or feedback to its volunteers? [e.g., written/verbal, formal/informal, for certain positions]
31. Should the organization provide (more) evaluation or feedback to its volunteers?
- Should there be evaluation/feedback for all positions?
 - Who should do this evaluation? How?
32. Do volunteers have a chance to provide feedback to the organization on how it is doing? Should volunteers have this opportunity? [describe how]

Recognition, rewards

33. What does the organization do, if anything, to recognize or reward its volunteers? [e.g., certificate, public recognition, informal thanks, formal thanks such as a letter, letter of reference, awards, better assignments/promotion, parties or social events, training/professional development opportunities]
34. What should the organization do to recognize or reward its volunteers?

Best practices

35. All things considered, what is the best thing about volunteering with this organization?
36. What is the worst thing about volunteering with this organization?
37. Is there anything your organization does for volunteers that is particularly noteworthy?
38. What are key challenges in the future for volunteering in this organization?
39. What kind of support/information/resources would help your organization with volunteering? [e.g., tips/best practices for recruiting and managing volunteers, workbook, training for volunteers]
40. What is the best way to get that support/information/resources to your organization? [e.g., paper report, electronic report, local presentation, workshop]

Do you have any final comments? Do you have any questions?

On behalf of the Sport Volunteer Project of Parks & Recreation Ontario and the Sport Alliance of Ontario, thank you very much for your time.

Appendix B

A Comparison of the Volunteer Profile Described in Phase 1 and Refined in Phase 2

Variable	Phase 1 Profiles	Phase 2 Findings
<p>Why sport volunteers became involved</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coach • Executive <p>* see also gender, age variations in Phase 1 report</p>	<p>1.Help a cause 2.Use my skills 3.Child is involved</p> <p>Enjoyment, love the sport, use skills, work with kids</p> <p>Use skills, make a difference</p>	<p>1.Child is involved 2.Saw a need 3.Help kids; former player, love the sport 4.I volunteer 5.Have the skills, can make a difference</p> <p>Former player/love the sport, work with kids</p> <p>Have skills, make a difference, provide opportunity for kids</p>
<p>Why sport volunteers stay involved</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coach • Executive 	<p>Satisfying aspects: Use skills, obtain new skills, enjoyable, worthwhile, make a difference in a successful organization, social relationships</p> <p>Helping kids, seeing kids develop</p> <p>Making a difference, achieving goals</p>	<p>1.Staying connected in sport, helping kids, positive social environment, enjoyment 2.Have skills, making a difference, child still involved</p> <p>Helping kids develop, skills are needed</p> <p>Have skills, making a difference, help still needed</p>
<p>Difficulty getting volunteers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coach 	<p>Sport and non-sport: 1.No extra time 2.Unwilling year round 3.Give money instead, not personally asked 4.Not interested, Poor health, don't know how to get involved</p> <p>Perceived lack of skills, amount of work</p>	<p>1.Conflict with family, conflict with work 2.Difficult to make regular commitment, perceived lack of skills/expertise, don't know what is involved, no one asked, not interested</p> <p>1.Perceived lack of skills/expertise, lack of people with skills 2.Heavy time commitment</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Executive <p>* see also gender, age variations in Phase 1 report</p>	Amount of work, lack of help	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Heavy time commitment right away 2. Heavy regular time commitment, not working directly with kids, politics, too few volunteers
<p>Best thing about volunteering in sport</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coach Executive 	<p>Satisfying aspects: Using skills, obtaining new skills, enjoyable, worthwhile, making a difference in a successful organization, social relationships</p> <p>Helping kids, seeing kids develop</p> <p>Making a difference, achieving goals</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Working with kids, helping kids by providing positive activity 2. Good people involved, positive work environment 3. Contributing to a successful organization or event 4. Social connections, filling a need and helping out, being involved and promoting the sport <p>Working with kids, seeing them develop</p> <p>Providing a positive activity, working with good people, positive work environment, contributing to a successful organization</p>
Worst thing about volunteering in sport	Dissatisfying aspects: Poorly-run organization, lack of challenge/interest in volunteer role, too much time, unable to cope, efforts not appreciated	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Time commitment 2. Dealing with parents 3. Lack of volunteers to do the work, volunteers do not carry through