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Pepperdine University

Graduate School of Education and Psychology

IN SEARCH OF BEST PRACTICES: A CASE STUDY OF A VOLUNTEER-LED  
NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION'S FAILURE TO DELIVER AID

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Leah Weiner

November 2011

June Schmieder-Ramirez, Ph.D. - Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

Leah Weiner

under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Doctoral Committee:

June Schmieder-Ramirez, Ph.D., Chairperson

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Todd Bouldin, J.D.

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated:

To my family – Francine, Marc, Tikvah, Shira and Mara Weiner

To my husband – David Jacobson

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is with great pleasure that I write these acknowledgments and thank those that have supported me in my journey of education and research of the nonprofit sector. These following individuals helped me complete my dissertation and coursework, allowing me to put my theories to practice and improve the effectiveness of voluntary nonprofit organizations.

To my dissertation committee members:

Dr. June Schmieder-Ramirez, my dissertation chair and professor, whose encouragement throughout this process helped me stay focused and brought this dissertation to completion.

Judge John Tobin, committee member and professor, whose great insight improved the quality of my dissertation.

Professor Todd Bouldin, committee member and professor, whose guidance and conversations helped improve my dissertation.

To the Pepperdine Writing Center:

Regina Meister, Manager of the Writing Support Center at Pepperdine University, guided me through the process of writing my dissertation and three years of coursework. When I look back during my four years at Pepperdine, I realize that one of the greatest skills I learned at Pepperdine was writing. Thank you Regina, for your time and valuable insight!

And most of all to my family:

My father, Marc Weiner, you pushed me to pursue a doctorate in education and called me almost every day during the program to brainstorm possible dissertation topics, review my assignments, discuss possible presentation topics and generally plot - how - I will one day be a sought out leader in a field that I love so much! I am done with school now – but keep the phone calls coming!

My mother, Francine Weiner, you gifted me with an education, sending me to countless tutors when I was young, so that later in life I could do anything I wanted. You would be so proud to know that one of your daughters completed her doctorate. One of your greatest tips was always reminding me to read my papers out loud so that I would catch my writing mistakes.

My husband, David Jacobson, proposed to and married me during this four year education pursuit and led me to this rich case study. You also very patiently handled all my technology stressors such as two broken laptops, the purchase of a new one and dealing with the detailed pagination for my comprehensive exam.

## VITA

Leah Weiner

**EDUCATION**


---

Pepperdine University, Los Angeles, California	2011
<b>Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership and Development</b>	
California State University-Northridge, Northridge, California	2007
<b>Masters in Public Administration and Nonprofit Management</b>	
University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, Wisconsin	2003
<b>Bachelor of Arts in International Relations, Latin American Studies, and Political Science</b>	

**EXPERIENCE**


---

Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, Los Angeles, California	2011 - present
<b>Senior Development Officer, Planned Giving</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manage a portfolio of 250+ planned giving donors and prospects</li> <li>• Cultivate relationships and steward existing donors to increase affinity to the Cedars-Sinai</li> <li>• Respond to inquiries from planned giving donors regarding planned giving vehicles</li> <li>• Collaborate with other Cedars-Sinai departments and community organizations to engage donors in hospital events, lecture series and programs.</li> </ul>	
Life Steps Foundation (LSF), Culver City, California	2009 - 2011
<b>Director of Development</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oversee fundraising for senior centers, children centers, low-income housing and adult day centers serving 12,500 clients with a annual budget of \$12 million</li> <li>• Manage state &amp; federal government grant writing focused on youth education and aging population with Alzheimer's and dementia related illness and adults with severe disabilities (2-4 grants per month) securing between \$1,000 to \$100,000 in grants</li> <li>• Establish relationships with foundations, corporate and individual donors in California through special events</li> <li>• Initiate annual Stepping Up to Change Lives public relations campaign to market LSF's programs and services across the state of California</li> <li>• Develop new policies, procedures and structural frameworks related to marketing, fundraising events, fundraising strategies, grant writing, internal communications, public relations and community events</li> <li>• Lead team of development and Information Technology staff members, consultants, interns and volunteers</li> </ul>	
KEEN LA, Los Angeles, California	2007 – 2011
<b>Executive Director</b>	

- Launched Los Angeles chapter which provides recreational and educational opportunities for underserved and low income children (2 – 18) with physical and cognitive disabilities (autism, down syndrome, cerebral palsy) and life threatening illnesses (cancer, leukemia).
- Recruited and trained network of 2000+ volunteers providing one-on-one attention to KEEN participants
- Oversaw large scale fundraising events securing between \$1,000 to \$35,000
- Cultivated relationships with community organizations, foundations, high level city officials in Southern California to promote KEEN's programs and services
- Developed seven member board of directors and seven member advisory board with a give or get of \$5,000
- Established strong network of partners and high net worth donors in finance, entertainment, law, local government and hospitality industries
- Created year long internship program and oversaw 10+ interns and staff members
- Oversaw development of KEEN LA business development plan and worked with Board of Directors to create a KEEN LA strategic plan to position organization to be financially independent

Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, Santa Monica, California 2005-2007

**Leadership Development Coordinator**

- Launched Los Angeles office (start-up) which provided leadership training for young professionals in Los Angeles
- Created tutoring program for seniors preparing to take their citizenship exam, recruited and trained tutors
- Coordinated annual west coast scholarship program for refugees pursuing higher education in U.S
- Assisted with developing membership programs to increase individual donor base in Los Angeles
- Developed educational programs raising awareness about various refugee populations, The Dream Act and Comprehensive Immigration Reform

UCLA Hillel, Los Angeles, California 2004-2005

**Jewish Campus Service Corps Fellowship**

- Supervised and hired interns to plan arts, community service and cultural events for students
- Facilitated student leadership development through planning retreats, community service projects and social events

Indiana University Hillel, Bloomington, Indiana 2004-2005

**Jewish Campus Service Corps Fellowship**

- Supervised and hired interns to plan arts, community service and cultural events for students
- Facilitated student leadership development through planning retreats, community service projects and social events

Indiana University: Department of Student Leadership, Bloomington, IN 2003-2004

**Adjunct Instructor**

- Served as adjunct instructor for freshmen service learning course to develop community organization and leadership skills of students

**PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS**

---

Progressive Jewish Alliance – Los Angeles, California 2007-2011

**Jeremiah Fellowship Cohort Participant and Chair of Alumni Council**

- Participated in PJA's year-long leadership development program learning about social justice issues in the city of Los Angeles. Also, served as the Chair of the Alumni Council overseeing the 7 member council with the purpose of re-engaging alumni of the program.

Jewish Federation – New Leaders Project, Los Angeles, California 2007-2008

**Cohort Participant**

- Completed year long leadership development program learning about community issues in the city of Los Angeles

Young Nonprofit Professionals Network, Los Angeles, California 2007-2008

**Chair Member**

- Organized professional development and social events for non-profit professionals in the Los Angeles area
- Assisted with developing organizational strategic plan to increase organizational presence in Los Angeles

Junior League of Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California 2006-2008

**Member**

- Assisted with organizing city-wide fundraising events
- Participated in community wide service events

## ABSTRACT

Across the globe, many long-term social service and infrastructure projects of nonprofits are managed by volunteers who freely donate their time to provide aid. Some of these organizations are referred to as voluntary nonprofit organizations with membership being voluntary. As a result, turnover impacts the ability of many volunteer-led nonprofits to achieve their goals. The unique characteristics of volunteers combined with volunteer turnover requires a volunteer-led nonprofit to use organizational models and best practices that align with the needs of a volunteer membership. Unfortunately, current research on the nonprofit sector focuses primarily on paid-staff nonprofit organizations as oppose to volunteer-led.

This qualitative case study provides information for leaders to manage challenges that predominately occur within a volunteer-led nonprofit. Theories related to volunteerism, organizational management, structure and culture were explored in the study. The purpose of this research was to: (a) review the obstacles that hinder voluntary nonprofit organizations in accomplishing their mission, (b) understand perceptions of volunteer leaders and (c) identify best practices enabling volunteer-led nonprofit organizations to effectively accomplish their mission. From existing research and through data collection, the lead investigator developed conclusions that could be used to train volunteer-led nonprofits. All of this research was based upon the literature review, previous studies and qualitative analysis of a particular volunteer-led nonprofit organization.

The methodology used consisted of a qualitative case study, allowing the lead investigator to analyze a particular volunteer-led nonprofit organization, Sustainable

Communities. The lead investigator reviewed organizational documents including a PowerPoint presentation and supplemental notes created by leaders from Sustainable Communities. In addition, 8 individuals from the organization were interviewed by the lead investigator. Upon completion of the data collection, the information from the organizational documents was coded and then interpreted.

Based on the review of organizational documents and interviews with participants in the study, the lead investigator found several obstacles hindering the volunteers from successfully completing their mission including: (a) the turnover of volunteers, (b) the transition of new volunteers, (c) the corruption within partnering organizations, and (d) the project scope was too aggressive for organization's infrastructure. Additionally, the lead investigator discovered information on how the leadership managed the organization's volunteers. Lastly, through this research study, best practices for volunteer-led nonprofit organization were explored and specific needs of the organization were discussed.



## **Chapter I: Introduction**

Volunteer-led nonprofit organizations provide essential aid to communities in need; however the good intentions of volunteers do not guarantee the successful completion of volunteer-led projects. As a group, volunteers may rehabilitate homes for those stricken by disaster, provide relief to refugees in war torn countries or provide health care to the ill. Voluntary organizations have been an integral part of American society by building community, giving citizens a chance to pursue shared goals, influencing policy, and providing much needed services to disadvantaged communities locally and abroad where private enterprise and governments fail (Gronberg & Paarlberg, 2001; Lawrence & Mayer 2000; Skopcol, Ganz, & Munson, 2000). Disadvantaged communities and groups throughout the world depend on voluntary nonprofit organizations for their services ranging from provision of basic needs to assistance in recovering from natural disasters (Gronberg & Paarlberg, 2001). Sometimes the delivery of these services is hindered by organizational obstacles including volunteer turnover and ineffective organizational structures. Since nonprofits offer much needed services, it is essential that leaders of volunteer-led nonprofits be successful in their efforts. Therefore, volunteer-led nonprofits need guidance in overcoming problems that impede them from successfully delivering aid to communities in need.

### **Background of the Problem**

Even though many communities rely on the services of voluntary nonprofit organizations, many nonprofits that provide aid struggle with accomplishing their mission (Herman, 2005; Wilson, 2000). A voluntary nonprofit is an organization led by volunteers who have come together to fulfill a nonprofit's mission and purpose (Smith &

Shen, 1996). Some volunteer-led nonprofits struggle because their members oversee long-term technical projects that may last 6 months to 2 years (Herman, 2005). During a long term project, a nonprofit may be hindered by the obstacles of volunteer turnover or ineffective organizational structures (Clary, Snyder, & Ridge, 1992; Denison & Mishra, 1995; Herman, 2005; Jamison, 2003; Kushner & Poole, 1996; Lynch, 2000; Smith & Shen, 1996). These obstacles may prevent volunteer-led nonprofits from operating at their highest capacity.

**Volunteer turnover.** Volunteer turnover occurs in all voluntary organizations since members donate their time on a semi-permanent or temporary basis with changing commitment levels due to work, family or personal reasons (Adams, Schlueter, & Barge, 1988; Herman, 2005; Jamison, 2003). Due to the semi-permanent nature of volunteers, turnover may produce the following challenges for voluntary organizations: (a) a loss of resources, project and organizational information, (b) an increased workload for remaining volunteers to find replacement volunteers; and (c) a loss of donations or commitments from partnerships cultivated by the exiting volunteers (Clary et al., 1992; Herman, 2005; Jamison, 2003; Lynch, 2000). Consequently, turnover may cause voluntary organizations to fall short of accomplishing their goals.

Volunteer turnover occurs both in urgent and non-urgent projects. One example of an urgent project would be when volunteers set up temporary housing for survivors of natural disasters. Alternatively, an example of a non-urgent project would be when volunteers educate a developing community about sustainable water management practices and provide guidance by teaching how to build an electrical water pump. During these urgent and non-urgent projects, volunteer turnover may occur as a result of:

(a) inadequate training related to volunteer roles and responsibilities, (b) volunteers' family or work obligations, and (c) unmet volunteer goals such as social needs or professionals networking opportunities (Bartley, 2007; Clary et al., 1992; Herman, 2005;; Jamison, 2003; Skoglund, 2006; Wilson 2000).

Voluntary organizations encounter these aforementioned factors related to turnover for many reasons. For example, the following scenario demonstrates how the first factor, a lack of training contributes to turnover and negatively affects a volunteer's experience. In disaster relief projects, volunteers may be emotionally impacted by the images they see on television or stories they read in a newspaper, so they seek out a voluntary organization with which to get involved. However, when the volunteers begin to participate in the disaster relief effort, they may not be able to take the emotional or physical burdens of working on a project in a disaster area due to improper training or difficult working conditions (Bartley, 2007). Additionally, some volunteers may leave an organization because of work commitments or family issues, which is an additional factor related to turnover. Many volunteers are young professionals or adults who have additional responsibilities beyond their roles as volunteers in a nonprofit (Herman, 2005). When volunteers make a commitment to help a nonprofit, they may not always anticipate other outside obligations. Lastly, some volunteers may find that they are not satisfied with their experiences within the organization due to the nonprofit not meeting the volunteers' personal needs or goals. For example, in a study led by Haski-Leventhal and Bargal (2008), the authors interviewed a volunteer involved in a social service nonprofit who felt alienated by other volunteers because of members' interactions and conversational style. As a result, the volunteer left the organization to find a new

volunteer opportunity. Hence, despite good intentions, leaders of voluntary nonprofit organizations may not meet their organizational goals because of inadequate training, volunteers' personal commitments, and unmet volunteer goals or needs. Unfortunately, many nonprofit organizations operate without the ability to manage the consequences of volunteer turnover (Herman, 2005; Skoglund, 2006). Thus, when volunteer organizations encounter turnover of volunteers who hold important leadership positions, there is no infrastructure set in place for group members to seamlessly provide services.

**Organizational structures.** An organization's structure enables members to understand their roles and responsibilities, which aid groups in goal accomplishment (Robbins, 2004). The structure of an organization provides volunteers with the following: (a) a framework for understanding the group's leadership levels, (b) the delegation of roles and responsibilities, and (c) a decision making process (Ghiselli & Siegel, 1972; Kushner & Poole, 1996; Porter & Lawler, 1965; Robbins, 2004). Several problems may arise if organizations do not have a cohesive organizational structure. First, if volunteers are not aware of the designated leaders within an organization, then the members may not know who is in charge or how to interact with others in the group. Secondly, if members' roles and tasks are not clearly defined, volunteers may be confused about their purpose within the organization (Robbins, 2004). Thirdly, volunteers within nonprofit need to understand how decisions are made and who has authority. If levels of authority and decision making processes are not clear, then any group member could make a decision without informing others in the organization (Strauss, 2002). Hence, a cohesive organizational structure will provide voluntary nonprofits with a framework to pursue their organization's mission (Kushner & Poole, 1996).

Another important element of developing a nonprofit's structure is that it should reflect the organization's mission and accommodate the inherent characteristics of its volunteers, including the semi-permanent nature of volunteers as well as their social and personal needs. If a group's structure does not reflect the values and traits of the organization's members, then people will most likely disengage from the nonprofit (Schein, 1992). Hence, an organizational structure that reflects the group's personal goals and needs will aid the group members in achieving their mission (Drucker, 1992; Schein, 1992).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Across the globe, many long-term social service and infrastructure projects of nonprofits are managed by volunteers who freely donate their time to provide aid. Many volunteers who manage these projects may not have a long-term commitment to the organization where they volunteer. Therefore, volunteer turnover is a recurring challenge in volunteer-led nonprofits. Typically, voluntary organizations experience a 25% to 50% turnover rate amongst their volunteer membership (Herman, 2005). Most of the existing conceptual and organizational models for nonprofits are more relevant to staff-led as opposed to volunteer-led nonprofits. Therefore, the obstacle of turnover is further compounded by the fact that some voluntary organizations utilize structures that do not reflect the inherent characteristics or needs of their volunteers, (McClusky, 2002; Smith & Shen, 1996). Inherent characteristics or needs of members within voluntary nonprofit organizations may include: (a) the semi-permanent nature of their leaders, (b) group members' aspiration to make an impact, (c) desire for social interaction, (d) volunteers' aspirations for leadership opportunities, and lastly, (e) the need to be included in the

group decision making process. These unique characteristics of volunteers require volunteer-led nonprofit organizations to use organizational models and best practices that are relevant to volunteers' needs which ultimately differentiates research between a paid staff nonprofit and a volunteer-led nonprofit. Overall, a volunteer-led nonprofit is extremely dependent on its volunteer members to accomplish its mission; therefore the needs of the members must be met.

### **Statement of Purpose**

This study aims to provide information for volunteer-led nonprofits to manage challenges that predominately occur when an organization is led by volunteers. In this study, theories related to volunteerism, organizational management and structure, as well as organizational culture are explored. A case study qualitative approach was used to understand the experiences of leaders in a voluntary nonprofit organization. The purpose of this study was to: (a) explore the obstacles that hinder voluntary organizations in accomplishing their mission, (b) understand the perceptions of volunteer leaders, and (c) identify best practices that will enable volunteer-led nonprofit organizations to effectively accomplish their mission. From existing research and through the collection of data, the lead investigator will develop generalizable conclusions and interpretations based upon this case. These conclusions will aid organizational leaders in managing recurring obstacles, allowing these organizations to be equipped to accomplish their missions.

### **Questions Guiding the Research**

The following questions guided the lead investigator throughout this study

1. What obstacles hinder volunteers from accomplishing their organization's mission?

2. How does the leadership of Sustainable Communities, a volunteer-led nonprofit organization, manage and interact with its volunteer membership?
3. Based upon the literature review, what best practices are utilized by volunteer-led nonprofit organizations?
4. Based on the data collected, what are the needs of the organization being studied?

### **Theoretical Frameworks Guiding the Study**

Integral to the concept of volunteerism are the core theoretical frameworks that guide this research including the functional approach to volunteerism (Clary et al., 1992; Clary, Snyder, & Stukas, 1996) and the volunteer process model (Omoto & Snyder, 1995). Provided is a brief overview of each theory and how they relate to best practices of volunteer nonprofits. The functional approach to volunteerism seeks to understand the specific psychological and social needs that volunteers try to satisfy. These specific volunteer needs researched by Clary et al. (1992) include: (a) values, (b) understanding, (c) esteem, (d) career, (e) social, and (f) protection all of which will be explored further in this research. Through several studies, it was determined that if specific needs of volunteers are not fulfilled, they will disengage from the organization (Clary et al., 1992; Clary et al., 1996). When leaders are aware of their volunteers' needs, they will be better able to satisfy them and reduce turnover.

The volunteer process model (Omoto & Snyder, 1995) provides a rationale for why members continue to volunteer within nonprofits. Omoto and Snyder determined that a volunteer's involvement within an organization is divided into three stages; antecedents, experiences and consequences. The antecedent phase is a catalyst that causes an individual to volunteer. The experience phase is what "prompts or deters" a

volunteer's continued commitment (Omoto & Snyder, 1995, p. 678). Lastly, the consequence phase relates to how members' volunteering experiences influence their future behaviors and attitudes. Moreover, when the volunteer experience is defined as a process, it allows leaders to reflect on their members' involvement in the organization.

**Process versus change frameworks.** This research is being guided by theoretical frameworks that are process rather than change oriented. Within the field of organizational theory, many models are focused on implementing planned change within an organization such as Kotter's (1996) eight steps of change model or Cooperriders and Srivastava's (1987) theory of appreciative inquiry. Kotter's theory provides organizational leaders with a roadmap to initiate and implement planned change within an organization with the ultimate goal of ensuring that the new initiatives are "anchored into the organizational culture" (p. 170). Alternatively, appreciative inquiry is a method that group members can use to seek out the best aspects of their organization. Through this process, members can determine the current state of the organization and what they want to achieve in the future based on their successes. While both of these theories are integral to the study of organizational leadership, this particular research study utilizes process oriented models that focus more on the specific methods that leaders of volunteer-led nonprofits utilize to conduct the operations of their organization. Ultimately, the goal of this study is to provide information about best practices to leaders of volunteer-led nonprofits.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant for leaders and members of volunteer-led nonprofits and academics. Ideally, this research provides leaders of voluntary nonprofit organizations



with best practices in terms of volunteer management and accomplishing their organization's mission while adding to the theoretical body of knowledge related to voluntary nonprofit organizations. Additionally, this research aims to help inform leaders of volunteer-led nonprofits so they can learn from others' experiences and understand the importance and ramifications of managing a volunteer base. This study may also aid volunteer leaders in understanding their role as it relates to cultivating volunteers, delegating responsibilities and managing obstacles that may arise during a long-term project. Lastly, this study aims to increase the body of knowledge on the management of voluntary nonprofits. Current research on the nonprofit sector focuses primarily on paid-staff nonprofit organizations even though volunteer-led nonprofit organizations outweigh paid-staff nonprofit organizations seven to one (Amis & Samuel, 1974; Smith & Shen, 1996). Overall, communities locally and abroad will benefit by leaders of volunteer-led nonprofits having access to this information since so many individuals rely on services provided by voluntary nonprofit organizations.

### **A Volunteer-led Nonprofit's Struggle to Provide Aid**

Provided is an overview of a tsunami relief effort which highlights the struggles endured by Sustainable Communities, a voluntary nonprofit organization. In 2006, a group of 15 professionals who volunteer with Sustainable Communities led an international relief effort as result of the December 2004 tsunami that devastated a wide swath of Southeast Asia. At this time, many other nonprofits were also responding to the disaster. The following story detailing the volunteers' experience is a synopsis from a local chapter's public website and blog. All names of individuals, locations and organizations have been changed to protect the identities of those involved.

The volunteers of this particular Sustainable Communities chapter are not alone in the difficulties they faced during the duration of their project. There are many volunteer-led nonprofit in the United States that have experienced similar obstacles when implementing projects. During the recovery efforts of Hurricane Katrina, the earthquake in Haiti and the tsunami relief efforts in Southeast Asia, many volunteer-led nonprofit organizations encountered similar difficulties as described below (Bartley, 2007; Cranmer, 2005; Krin, Giannou, Seppelt, & Walker, 2010). The experiences of the volunteers involved in Sustainable Communities served as an impetus for this study.

### **NGO Seeks Aid From Sustainable Communities Headquarters**

A rural fishing village in Indonesia suffered damaged homes, ground-water contamination and roadway destruction as a result of the tsunami's ravages. Within days of the disaster, Helping Others, an Indonesian non-governmental organization (NGO), applied for assistance from the headquarters of Sustainable Communities to obtain help for the fishing village. The mission of Sustainable Communities is to improve the quality of life in developing countries through sustainable projects in areas such as water, sanitation and construction. Additionally, Sustainable Communities has the following organizational configuration: a national headquarters with paid staff, a volunteer board of directors, and geographically dispersed volunteer-led chapters (Figure 1).



*Figure 1.* Organizational chart

In January 2005, when Helping Others applied for aid, Sustainable Communities headquarters did not have a pre-existing relationship with this organization and had not yet developed an investigation process for unknown NGOs. In February 2005, Sustainable Communities Headquarters referred the project to the New York chapter because of the volunteers' desire to help with the devastated region.

### **Visit to Indonesia: Volunteers See the Devastation**

In June of 2005, the Sustainable Communities New York chapter president, Josh Baxter, and vice president, Scott Shephard, visited the fishing village for a feasibility assessment study of the Indonesian Housing Project. In July 2005, upon their return, with no formal presentation and no vote by the Sustainable Communities New York chapter general membership, Baxter and Shephard formally accepted and enlarged the Indonesian Housing Project from five to 16 houses. Unfortunately, the Indonesian government had only committed to providing \$4,000 to construct the first five homes. This meant that the all-volunteer New York chapter would be required to fundraise an additional \$78,000 within a year to cover additional project and travel expenses - a difficult feat for volunteers with little fundraising experience.

### **Project Scope Too Aggressive**

For the first 18 months of the project, from July 2005 to December 2006, Sustainable Communities New York chapter president (Baxter) and vice-president (Shephard) handled all correspondence with the NGO program officer concerning project management and timelines. During the first year of the project, Baxter and Shephard made timeline promises to the NGO program officer on behalf of Sustainable Communities. At that time, other Sustainable Communities New York chapter

volunteers began to report that the project scope was too aggressive for the organization's resources and the proposed project delivery timeline was not feasible.

### **Leadership Transitions**

In February 2007, when the Sustainable Communities New York chapter held its yearly elections, new leaders were elected and set to assume their positions in April 2007. At that time, former president Baxter and vice-president Shephard, who initially accepted the Indonesian Housing Project, abruptly left the organization with no explanation or leadership transition. In addition, other key volunteers that had been closely involved in the project also departed at the same time as Baxter and Shephard. Faced with many project problems such as a lack of funds, an aggressive timeline, loss of project information and the departure of key volunteers, the newly elected leaders decided that all future decisions for the Indonesian Housing Project were to be made by all project volunteers on a consensus basis. As more volunteers became actively involved with decision making processes and management of the Indonesian Housing Project, the severity of the problems quickly became apparent.

### **Difficulties with NGO**

In April 2007, Sustainable Communities -New York president Lydia Barnett traveled to Indonesia to help manage the project, but she quickly encountered an uncooperative NGO officer. She observed that the only involvement the NGO officer wanted with the project was to manage the finances of the project. In addition, she had difficulties getting the officer to assist with launching the project. The previous project leadership had not indicated the depth of the NGO officer's dishonesty. The remaining

volunteers spent a significant amount of time uncovering existing problems within the project.

### **New York Chapter Communicates Problems to Headquarters**

In August 2007, after having invested 2 years worth of volunteer efforts, Sustainable Communities -New York contacted Wilson, Senior Project Manager at Sustainable Communities headquarters to discuss project termination. Wilson recommended to the volunteers that they should try to salvage the project and not abandon their efforts. The volunteers created a more realistic project timeline and determined that an additional 2 years would be needed to fundraise \$78,000 and construct the houses. The group decided that they would only remain with the Indonesian Housing Project, if the NGO could comply with the new timeline. The NGO did not accept this new timeline and sent a “cease and desist” letter to the Sustainable Communities -New York volunteers. Thus, despite thousands of donated volunteer hours and to the frustration and disappointment of the Sustainable Communities -New York chapter, the project was terminated in December 2007. In the end, the volunteers were not able to help the village, they lost their financial investment, and the villagers did not receive any aid. In conclusion, this example serves as the impetus for developing best practices to help volunteer led nonprofit organizations engaged in long term projects.

### **Additional Remarks**

While this story highlights the difficulties Sustainable Communities encountered within their housing project, it should be noted that the group did successfully complete a water management project helping the villagers gain access to clean drinking water. Unfortunately, the housing project that was led by Sustainable Communities was

impacted by both internal organizational challenges and outside influences all of which will be discussed in the study.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms are defined for this study:

- *Centralized Organization*: A centralized organization is one that has a select few appointed individuals involved in the leadership and decision making of the overall organization. Examples of centralized organizational structures or leadership styles include: (a) autocratic leadership style, (b) bureaucracies, and (c) tall or hierarchical organizations (Ghiselli & Siegel, 1972; Porter & Lawler, 1965; Yukl, 1994).
- *Decentralized Organization*: A decentralized organization is one that has many individuals involved in the leadership and decision-making processes of the organization. Decentralized organizations tend to have higher levels of commitments among their organizational members because group members perceive that they have a greater stake in the organization. Examples of decentralized organizational structures or leadership styles include: (a) democratic leadership, (b) shared leadership, and (c) flat organizations (Ghiselli & Siegel, 1972; Porter & Lawler, 1965; Yukl, 1994)
- *Effective Nonprofit Organizations*: One theorist argues that the “formulation of a universally acceptable theory or corresponding methodology for the assessment of effectiveness in organizations does not exist” (Webb, 2001). However, others define nonprofit organizational effectiveness as the “extent to which an organization fulfills its stated objectives and purpose” (Smith & Tannenbaum,

1965, p. 78). Furthermore, other researchers explain that studying the organizational effectiveness of a voluntary nonprofit organization can be difficult because of its semiformal nature, differing views of the multiple stakeholders, and the difficulties inherent in measuring the accomplishment of a mission statement (Herman, 2005; Herman & Renz, 1998; Smith & Shen, 1996). However, some nonprofit industry professionals and academics have created organizational indicators of effectiveness including mission and goal accomplishment and nonprofit organization's impact on the clients it serves (Denison & Mishra, 1995; Herman & Renz, 1998; Smith & Shen, 1996).

- *Ineffective Nonprofit Organizations*: While many researchers debate the definition of an effective nonprofit organization this is not the case with ineffective nonprofits. Common characteristics of ineffective nonprofits include the inability of the organization to fulfill its stated mission or purpose, and an overall lack of focus or direction provided by the leadership. Other defining traits include a lack of understanding regarding common goals, high turnover of volunteers and low commitment from organizational members (Denison & Mishra, 1995; Eckland, 2004; Herman & Renz, 1998).
- *Leadership*: One theorist states that “leadership is the ability to influence a group toward the achievement of goals,” (Robbins, 2004, p. 130).
- *Nonprofit Organization*: A nonprofit refers to a “legally constituted nongovernmental entity incorporated under state law as a charitable or not-for-profit corporation that has been set up to serve some public purpose and is tax

exempt according to the IRS (Wolf, 1999, p. 21). A nonprofit organization exists to “bring about change in individuals and society,” (Drucker, 1992, p. 3)

- *Organizational Structure*: Organizational structures refer to the way in which “tasks are formally divided, grouped and coordinated,” (Robbins, 2004, p. 178). Furthermore, organizational structures provide a framework for social interaction within a group as well as a means for group members to understand the flow of information within an organization (Kushner & Poole, 1996).
- *Paid-Staff Nonprofit Organization*: A nonprofit is designated as a paid staff nonprofit if paid staff members perform the majority of the organization’s work (Smith & Shen, 1996)
- *Theme*: A theme within this study refers to the result of recurring responses or statements from interview questions given by participants in the study. These themes are equivalent to findings in the study.
- *Volunteerism*: Volunteerism is defined as the act of an individual giving his or her time to help a community organization or nonprofit fulfill a mission, goal or program (Jamison, 2003).
- *Volunteer*: A volunteer is an individual who donates his or her time to benefit an organization or community (Wilson, 2000). A volunteer’s involvement may be provided “over an extended period, or intense work on an ad hoc basis,” (Rozario, 2006, p. 33).
- *Volunteer-led/voluntary Organization*: A volunteer-led organization or voluntary organization refers to a nonprofit organization governed by an all volunteer membership, it is self-governing, independent of the government and although it



may include some part-time staff, it is overwhelmingly managed by volunteers (Dartington, 1996; Parson & Hailes, 2004; Smith & Shen, 1996).

- *Volunteer Management:* Volunteer management refers to the sector of industry professionals who manage volunteers in nonprofit organizations through the development of volunteer recruitment, retention, and training techniques (Ellis, 2000).
- *Volunteer Motivation:* This term refers to the sources of inspiration that cause individuals to freely donate their time to an organization to benefit a cause, group, or individual. Factors causing people to be motivated to volunteer include personal/social needs, altruism, personal beliefs, and opportunities to network professionally (Brown & Zahrly, 1989; Clary et al., 1992; Hibbert, Piacentini, & Dajai, 2009).
- *Volunteer Retention:* Volunteer retention refers to the ability of an organization to keep its members active through various means such as recognition of group members, leadership development and training (Jamison, 2003).
- *Volunteer Turnover:* Volunteer turnover refers to the occurrence of members leaving an organization due to dissatisfaction, unmet expectations or other obligations (Jamison, 2003).

### **Limitations of the Study**

The following limitations existed for this study:

1. The population is limited to one volunteer-led nonprofit organization.
2. The study is subject to weaknesses inherent in conducting interviews and reviewing of organizational documents.

**Assumptions of the Study**

The following assumptions were made in implementing this research study:

1. The participants in this study will answer all interview questions honestly.
2. Responses from the participating volunteers will accurately reflect perceptions of their volunteer-led chapter.

**Organization of the Study**

This study includes five chapters. Chapter 1 includes the statement of the problem, background of the problem, purpose and significance of the study, research questions, definition of terms, limitations of the study and organization of the study. Chapter 2 highlights the literature related to the following: (a) nonprofit organizations, the voluntary sector and their overall impact (b) volunteerism, and (c) concepts and theories related to organizational structures. Chapter 3 highlights the methodology of the study, research design, data collection methods and data analysis process. Chapter 4 provides an overview of the data collected and best practices for the organization being studied. Chapter 5 offers an overview of the research study and conclusions.

## **Chapter II: Review of Selected Literature**

The primary objective of this literature review is to explore best practices that will help nonprofit organizations accomplish their mission and to examine organizational structures, cultures and processes that align with the characteristics of voluntary nonprofit organizations. To achieve this objective, the literature review will include three sections: (a) voluntary nonprofit organizations, (b) volunteerism, and (c) organizational structures common to voluntary nonprofit organizations. The first section offers an overview that analyzes the role of volunteer-led nonprofits in providing social services, the impact of nonprofits on local economies in the United States, and nonprofit industry standards. This first section will also examine the distinguishing characteristics of volunteer-led nonprofit organizations, contrasting them with paid-staff nonprofit organizations. The second section on volunteerism offers an in-depth analysis of volunteer motivation, retention, turnover, cultural norms of voluntary nonprofit organizations, and the ability of a volunteer to accomplish the organization's mission based upon the nonprofit's culture. The third section discusses a variety of organizational structures and examines how these structures serve as the means for managing the day-to-day operations of a voluntary nonprofit organization. Hence, this overview will provide an opportunity to understand best practices within volunteer-led nonprofit organizations.

### **Overview of Nonprofit Organizations**

Nonprofit organizations fill a void left by private enterprise and government institutions by offering critical human services (Gronberg & Paarlberg, 2001; Herman, 2005; Weisbrod, 1977). Many nonprofits are led by a purpose-driven mission to help underrepresented segments of society, such as those living in poverty, those living with

disabilities, or those who are otherwise disadvantaged. As a result of a purpose-driven mission, nonprofits collectively have a large impact on society (Gronberg & Paarlberg, 2001; Toepler, 2003). This section includes an overview of the following: (a) the impact of the nonprofit sector, (b) the operational rules for nonprofits, and c) the role of mission statements in guiding nonprofits. This overview highlights society's reliance on volunteer-led nonprofits, thereby demonstrating the need for these organizations to successfully accomplish their mission.

**Impact of the nonprofit sector.** By delivering critical services to the public, nonprofits are an integral force in the United States and communities abroad (Drucker, 1992; Herman, 2005; Lawrence & Mayer 2000; Wolf, 1999). In 2008, there were over 1.8 million registered nonprofit organizations in the United States, representing a diverse set of interests including religion, education, the environment, and social, health and human services (Herman, 2005; Parsons & Hailes, 2004; Wing, Pollack, & Blackwood, 2008; Wolf, 1999). In addition to these areas of interest, nonprofits also offer international aid and assistance (Herman, 2005; McCleary & Barro, 2008). Furthermore, organizations with an international focus have significantly expanded since the early 1990s as a direct result of globalization, improved communication technologies, and increased interest in global issues (Herman, 2005; McCleary & Barro, 2008).

Through the delivery of critical services, nonprofit organizations play a major role in society by helping disadvantaged groups of people and by assisting local economies (Gronberg & Paarlberg, 2001; Toepler, 2003; Wing et al., 2008). According to Gronberg and Paarlberg (2001), "Nonprofits affect societal conditions by their ability to undertake collective action for public or mutual benefit" (p. 687). For example, a nonprofit

organization attracts volunteers because individuals are provided with the opportunity to help disadvantaged groups in society gain access to resources. Volunteer-led nonprofits like Sustainable Communities give volunteers the opportunity to use their skills to help communities gain access to safe drinking water or shelter. The ability of nonprofits to impact society is evident by the fact that 50% of human services in the United States are provided by nonprofits (Herman, 2005). Nonprofits are able to provide these services because almost all citizens in the United States will volunteer at a non-profit at one or more points in their lives (Denhardt & Grubbs, 1999; Herman, 2005).

Nonprofits also have an impact on local economies. In 2006, the nonprofit sector contributed \$666.1 billion to the United States economy. Nonprofits also represent about 10% of jobs in United States (Wing et al., 2008). Additionally, the nonprofit sector annually contributes “1.1 trillion dollars in economic spending in the United States” (Wing et al., 2008, p. 121). It is evident from these facts that nonprofits provide much needed services and aid local economies. Even though there are 1.8 million United States based nonprofits providing various services, all of these groups are guided by specific rules and regulations (Parson & Hailes, 2004; Wolf, 1999).

**Operational rules for nonprofits.** The guidelines that nonprofit organizations must adhere to are very specific. As a result, scholars and practitioners often refer to nonprofits as the third sector, which separates nonprofits from for-profit businesses and government (Herman, 2005; Wolf, 1999). In order for organizations to qualify for 501(c)(3) nonprofit status, they must follow specific regulations set forth by the United States Internal Revenue Service. The regulation most relevant to this study is that all nonprofits must have a mission to serve the public (Herman, 2005; Kendall & Knapp,

1996; Parsons & Hailes, 2004; Wolf, 1999). This requirement to have a mission statement ensures that the nonprofit sector exists to help and serve the public (Wolf, 1999).

**The role of mission statements.** A mission statement is an underlying principle that serves as the source of inspiration, and guidance for the board, staff, and volunteer members of a nonprofit organization (Drucker, 1992; Kouzes & Posner, 1987; McDonald, 2007; Wolf, 1999). All activities conducted within a nonprofit should be related to its mission statement. A nonprofit's goal is to fulfill a mission statement rather than turn a profit, which is the primary goal of the business sector (Wolf, 1999). In fact, a nonprofit exists solely to pursue its mission (McDonald, 2007). When founders of a nonprofit develop their mission, it "must be operational" (Drucker, 1992, p. 4), otherwise the founders' goals will not come to fruition. For example, the mission statement of Sustainable Communities was developed in such a way that volunteers can visualize the types of projects they will help lead. Additionally, the mission of Sustainable Communities is narrowly focused to ensure that projects fall within specific parameters. Overall, a well-crafted mission statement is concise, inspires commitment from followers, and communicates the organization's purpose to the community (Drucker, 1992; Kouzes & Posner, 1987). Hence, nonprofits with clear, motivating missions tend to be change-oriented, innovative, and focused (McDonald, 2007).

**Volunteer-led nonprofit organizations versus paid-staff nonprofit organizations.** Nonprofits are managed either by paid-staff or volunteers. Nonprofit organizations led by volunteers are referred to as *voluntary nonprofit organizations* or *volunteer-led nonprofit organizations*. In contrast, nonprofits run by staff are referred to

as paid-staff nonprofit organizations. A paid-staff nonprofit and a volunteer-led nonprofit are distinguished by the individuals who do the majority of the work in the organization. If an organization includes some paid-staff but volunteers manage the day-to-day operations, the organization is considered volunteer-led (Smith & Shen, 1996). Volunteer-led nonprofit organizations differ significantly from paid-staff nonprofit organizations because the leadership of the former is voluntary rather than paid (Farmer & Fedor, 1999; Herman, 2005; Smith & Shen, 1996). These two types of nonprofits have different operational needs in terms of strategies and structures (Herman, 2005; McClusky, 2002; Smith & Shen, 1996).

### **Distinguishing Features of Volunteer-led and Paid-Staff Nonprofits**

Several studies have analyzed the differences between volunteer-led and paid-staff nonprofit organizations. Specifically, this literature review will cover the different structural roles, personnel practices and individual motivating factors within volunteer-led and paid-staff nonprofit organizations. Motivating factors describe personal reasons that prompt an individual to join a nonprofit. Structural roles of group members in an organization describe how volunteers or staff members function, including their positions and interaction with others in the organization (Mintzberg, 1983; Robbins, 2004). In analyzing the contrasts of personnel practices between volunteer-led and paid-staff nonprofits, the following will be reviewed: (a) interview selection process, (b) accountability of group members, and (c) evaluation procedures of individuals in a group. Lastly, the motivating factors that will be analyzed refer to the personal reasons that prompt an individual to join a nonprofit. Overall, the stark differences between volunteer-led nonprofits and paid-staff nonprofits in the areas of structural roles, personnel

practices, and motivation impact how these types of organizations manage their day-to-day operations.

**Structural roles.** The structural roles of volunteers in a volunteer-led nonprofit differ from the roles of staff members in a paid-staff nonprofit (Farmer & Fedor, 1999; Herman, 2005; Pearce, 1983; Smith & Shen, 1996; Starling, 2005). For the purposes of this study, this section will explore an individual's role and social interactions among group members in a nonprofit. In a volunteer-led nonprofit organization, group members experience more role uncertainty and less interaction with other individuals as compared to employees in a paid-staff nonprofit organization (Smith & Shen, 1996). Hence, role uncertainty and volunteer interactions have an impact on the operations of a voluntary nonprofit organization.

**Role uncertainty.** Role uncertainty refers to the ambiguity of a group member's task within an organization which occurs due to poorly defined roles or lack of oversight (Ellis, 2000; Farmer & Fedor, 1999; Jamison, 2003; Lynch, 2000; Robbins, 2004; Wright & Milesen, 2008). Some volunteers may join an organization and take on a role without a clearly defined position description (Jamison, 2003). Other times, leaders of voluntary nonprofits may decide to start a project without determining the roles of all involved members (Lynch, 2000). If volunteer-led nonprofits like Sustainable Communities begin a project without assigning committee or leadership positions to its members, this will likely result in the volunteers not being able to donate their skills to their full capacity (Ellis, 2000; Herman, 2005; Wilson, 2000).

Role uncertainty can have damaging effects on goal accomplishment and volunteer retention (Herman, 2005; Jamison, 2003). When volunteers are unaware of



their responsibilities, this results in individuals being unable to participate in meaningful ways, ultimately leading to role uncertainty or dissatisfaction (Jamison, 2003; Lynch, 2000). When volunteers feel that their roles lack meaning or purpose, they are more likely to disengage from the organization. This turnover impacts the overall effectiveness of a nonprofit and will be discussed in-depth later in the literature review.

Role uncertainty does not occur as frequently among paid-staff nonprofit organizations because employees are often hired to fulfill specific tasks and given detailed job descriptions (Starling, 2005). Since role uncertainty frequently occurs within voluntary organizations, many organizational leaders work hard to overcome this recurring challenge by delegating volunteers or staff to provide training for new volunteers or by creating specific roles for all volunteers (Ellis, 2000; Herman, 2005; Wilson, 2000). Despite these efforts, role uncertainty is a common occurrence, ultimately impacting a volunteer-led nonprofit organization since group members feel ineffective in accomplishing the mission.

**Volunteer interactions.** Interaction amongst volunteers in a volunteer-led nonprofit occurs less frequently than among employees in a paid-staff nonprofit (Ellis, 2000; Farmer & Fedor, 1999; Jamison, 2003; Lynch, 2000; Smith & Shen, 1996; Stoecker, 2007). Individuals within a volunteer-led organization often only interact with one another during meetings or events, whereas paid-staff members often interact with one another on a daily basis (Farmer & Fedor, 1999; Smith & Shen, 1996; Stoecker, 2007). As a result, this daily interaction among staff members serves as a constant reminder of ongoing project and organizational goals.

The lack of consistent interaction within voluntary nonprofit organizations impacts the volunteers and ultimately the organization. For example, within volunteer-led nonprofit organizations, tasks are sometimes forgotten during the time between committee meetings. As a result, leaders must be responsible for following up with group members to ensure they accomplish of their tasks between meetings. In addition, organizational leaders of volunteer-led nonprofit organizations must also motivate their volunteers to stay focused between meetings (Lynch, 2000). Within a volunteer-led nonprofit like Sustainable Communities, problems can become more complicated if there is a lack of communication due to inconsistent meetings or busy volunteer schedules, all of which are common to volunteer-led nonprofit organizations (Herman, 2005). Hence, interaction or lack thereof within a voluntary nonprofit organization has the potential to impact the ability of a nonprofit to fulfill its mission.

**Motivation of volunteers versus paid-staff.** Volunteers and paid-staff have different motivations for being involved in a nonprofit organization. Volunteers have social, personal, or altruistic reasons for joining a nonprofit, whereas staff members are motivated by the opportunity for meaningful employment (Clary et al., 1992; Farmer & Fedor, 1999; Herman, 2005; Wolf, 1999). The motivating factors that prompt volunteers to seek out opportunities within nonprofit organizations will be discussed later in the literature review. The differences between these motivation factors are that a paid staff member is more likely to stay in a position even if it is not the best fit because he or she receives financial reimbursement. In contrast, if volunteers are not satisfied with their involvement in a nonprofit, they will most likely leave and look for other opportunities

(Jamison, 2003). Overall, a volunteer's relationship is more flexible than an employee/employer relationship within a nonprofit.

**Personnel practices.** Personnel practices within a volunteer-led nonprofit organization differ from the personnel practices in a paid-staff nonprofit organization (Farmer & Fedor, 1999; Herman, 2005; Starling, 2005). The most distinct and relevant personnel practices for the purpose of this study include the interview selection process, accountability and evaluation procedures for group members.

**Interview selection process.** An interview provides organizational leaders the opportunity to learn about the skills of potential volunteers or employees (Starling, 2005). However, not all voluntary organizations have the resources or time to interview all potential candidates (Hollwitz & Wilson, 1993). Typically, volunteers self-select to be involved in a nonprofit, seeking out organizations that align with their own personal beliefs or looking for opportunities that match their experience (Clary et al., 1996). Volunteers may find out about an opportunity from a colleague, at marketing presentation, at a community fair or through attendance at a social recruitment event. Ultimately, during these recruitment and social events, organizational leaders learn about the experiences of the volunteers through casual conversations. While not ideal, the ability of organizational leaders to interview volunteers depends on the organization's resources.

Despite these challenges, there are a few positions that typically require interviews in a volunteer-led nonprofit organization such as a board or committee chair position (Herman, 2005). For example, some volunteer-led nonprofit organizations may require potential board members to submit an application, resume, or references or take

part in an interview with other board members. This interview process enables volunteer-led nonprofit organizations to ensure that potential leaders have the appropriate skill set for their future roles. Alternatively, in paid-staff nonprofit organizations the interview process is more formal (Starling, 2005). Typically, all potential employees are put through a rigorous interview process because of the anticipated long-term financial relationship. Overall, the interview process impacts the day-to-day operations of a nonprofit organization resulting in individuals having a key role in fulfilling an organization's mission.

**Accountability.** Enforcing member accountability in volunteer-led nonprofit organizations is significantly different than enforcing accountability in paid-staff nonprofit organizations (Farmer & Fedor, 1999; Herman, 2005). Leaders of voluntary nonprofit organizations have few means to ensure that volunteers complete their tasks or projects. Volunteers are not reimbursed monetarily for their services and often have no obligations to the organization where they volunteer (Lynch, 2000; Wilson, 2000). Thus, leaders have very little leverage to get volunteers to accomplish their tasks. Task completion in volunteer nonprofit organizations occurs in a variety of ways including (a) a result of the volunteer's altruistic beliefs to help fulfill an organization's mission, (b) through positive reinforcement from leaders to volunteers, and (c) as a result of follow-up on the part of organizational leaders (Herman, 2005; Jamison, 2003; Lynch, 2000; Wilson, 2000). Volunteer-led nonprofits like Sustainable Communities may be able to recognize their members on the organization's website which can serve as a source of appreciation or motivation. Alternatively, in paid-staff nonprofit organizations, there is an expectation that employees will fulfill all requested deliverables, if they want to remain

employed. However, in voluntary nonprofit organizations, there is little recourse if volunteers do not follow through with their tasks. Overall, accountability can be a challenge for voluntary nonprofit organizations (Herman, 2005; Lynch, 2000; Wilson, 2000). This challenge serves as an impetus to ensure that organizational structures promote accountability for group goals.

**Evaluation.** The evaluation process differs significantly between a volunteer-led nonprofit organization and a paid-staff organization (Ellis, 2000; Farmer & Fedor, 1999; Herman, 2005; Starling, 2005). For both volunteer-led and paid-staff nonprofit organizations, evaluating the members' abilities to fulfill their tasks as well as the organization's mission and purpose is important to improving an organization's effectiveness (Ellis, Reid, & Barnsley, 1990; Herman, 2005; Wolf, 1999). Despite the necessity of evaluating nonprofit organizations, it does not always occur due to a lack of time and resources (Ellis et al., 1990).

If evaluation of a volunteer occurs in a voluntary nonprofit organization, it may happen in the form of a debriefing upon the completion of an event or project. Alternatively, some voluntary nonprofit organizations hold yearly elections for leadership positions, so if a volunteer is not fulfilling his or her role, there are opportunities to replace the ineffective volunteer. On rare occasions, a volunteer may be asked to leave a position, if he or she is not a good fit with other members in the organization (Fox & Sheehan, 2009). Alternatively, for paid-staff nonprofits, evaluation of employees typically occurs during yearly reviews (Jawahar, 2006). Thus, evaluation gives employers an opportunity to review past performances of employees and gives employees an opportunity to improve. Overall, the distinct characteristics of the structural roles,

motivations, and personnel practices vary greatly between staff-led and volunteer-led nonprofit organizations. These differing characteristics significantly impact the overall operations of voluntary nonprofit organizations.

To summarize, Table 1 highlights the best practices within volunteer-led nonprofit organizations discussed thus far in the literature review. These best practices focus on the operational rules of the nonprofit sector related to mission statements, structural roles for volunteers, and lastly personnel practices such as the interview selection process, accountability, and evaluation of volunteers.

Table 1

*Best Practices Related to the Overview of the Nonprofit Sector*

Concepts	Best Practices	Theorists
Operation Rules of the Nonprofit Sector: Mission Statements	To help and serve the public.	Drucker, 1992
	Source of innovation	Kouzes & Posner, 1987
	Provides guidance for group members	McDonald, 2007
	Communications the organization's purpose to the community	Wolf, 1999
Structural Roles	Provide Training for volunteers	Farmer & Fedor, 1999
	Create specific roles and position descriptions for volunteers	Herman, 2005
		Smith & Shen, 1996
Personnel Practices		Pearce, 1983
	Interview volunteers to ensure they are good fit for the organization.	Herman, 2005
	Debrief with volunteers upon the completion of event or projects	Hollowitz & Wilson, 1993
	Positively reinforce volunteers	Jamison, 2003
	Leaders should follow up with volunteers to ensure task completion	Lynch, 2000
	Starling, 2005	
	Wilson, 2000	

The information in this chart serves as an overview to highlight the best practices for volunteer-led nonprofits including operational guidelines, structural roles and personnel practices of volunteer-led nonprofit organizations. Overall, volunteer-led nonprofit organizations are more successful when they have mission statements that inspire commitment from followers and provide clear direction for those involved in the organization (Drucker, 1992; Kouzes & Posner, 1987). Additionally, leaders of volunteer-led nonprofits must strategize to integrate their volunteers into the operations of the organization. As identified in the best practices chart, integration may occur by providing volunteers with training related their tasks and also ensuring that volunteers have specific roles and position descriptions. Integrating group members ensures that volunteers have a meaningful experience and are able to effectively assist the organization (Farmer & Fedor, 1999; Herman, 2005; Smith & Shen, 1996; Pearce, 1983). Lastly, as identified in Table 1, it is essential for leaders of volunteer-led nonprofits to implement specific personnel practices thus allowing organizational leaders to recruit individuals that are a good match with the organization's mission. Some of the best practices researched regarding personnel issues include interviewing volunteers, debriefing with volunteers after large projects, following up with volunteers and positively reinforcing volunteers involved in the organization (Herman, 2005; Hollowitz & Wilson, 1993; Jamison, 2003; Lynch, 2000; Starling, 2005; Wilson, 2000). In conclusion, studies have shown that leaders of volunteer-led nonprofits who utilize these above best practices are more able to successfully accomplish their mission (Farmer & Fedor, 1999; Herman, 2005; Smith & Shen, 1996; Pearce, 1983).

Overall, the first section of the literature review provided an overview of the impact of the nonprofit sector, operational rules for nonprofit organizations, and the differences between volunteer-led nonprofit organizations and paid-staff nonprofit organizations. This section also addressed the significant differences between volunteer-led and paid staff nonprofit in regards to the structural roles, personnel practices and motivational factors of individuals.

### **Volunteerism**

Provided is an overview of the key concepts related to volunteerism including volunteer motivation, volunteer turnover and volunteer retention. Each concept is connected to various theoretical foundations and models including: (a) the economic model of volunteerism, (b) the functional approach to volunteerism, and (c) the volunteer process model. Additionally, volunteer turnover will be explored through the perspective of the functional approach theory to volunteerism. Lastly, volunteer retention will be examined from the perspective of the role identity theory. These theories provide a context in which to understand the type of organizational processes, structures and cultures that align with a nonprofit accomplishing its mission and meeting volunteers' needs.

### **Volunteer Motivation**

According to Govekar and Govekar (2002), there is no single contributing factor or theory that explains the rationale for volunteer motivation. For example, individuals seek out volunteer opportunities because of their personal beliefs, altruistic nature to help others, in order to develop professional and leadership skills, and to network for future employment (Brown & Zahrlly, 1989; Catano, Kelloway, & Pond, 2001; Clary et al.,



1996; Hibbert et al., 2009). In addition to these sources of volunteer motivation, several theories exist to explain the phenomenon, including the functional approach theory, volunteer process model and role identity theory (Clary et al., 1996; Omoto & Synder, 1995; Penner & Finkelstein, 1998). Understanding an individual's motivations will allow leaders to place volunteers in positions that suit their interests. Organizations are more successful when leaders are able to identify the strengths of their members and place them in positions that most fully utilize their skills (Buckingham, 2005). Given this best practice, organizations like Sustainable Communities could create a volunteer intake form to learn more about the interests and motivations of their volunteers. Based upon research studies, if leaders are able to understand their volunteers' desires, they are more likely to create an organizational culture that will best suit the needs of group members (Buckingham, 2005; Clary et al., 1996; Schein, 1992).

**Help a cause and fulfill a personal belief.** Individuals are motivated to volunteer so they can fulfill a personal belief or help out after a significant event (Clary et al., 1996; Catano et al., 2001; Hibbert et al., 2009). Often leaders of nonprofits will receive a significant increase of volunteer inquiries after signature events such as natural disasters because volunteers are moved by the devastation (Steffen & Fothergill, 2009). For example, after the 2001 terrorist attacks in New York, citizens in United States were emotionally impacted by images they saw on television prompting them to volunteer to help people impacted by the devastation. Similarly, after the December 2004 tsunami that hit Southeast Asia and the earthquake that hit Haiti in 2010, leaders of relief organizations received a sharp rise in volunteers inquires about how to help the ravaged areas (Bartley, 2007; Cranmer, 2005; Krin et al., 2010). These are examples of volunteers

donating their time due to a signature event or because of their personal beliefs.

Alternatively, volunteers are also motivated to get involved in community service as a result of altruism.

**Altruism.** Individuals consistently cite altruism as a motivating factor when explaining their reasons for volunteering (Hibbert et al., 2009; Omoto & Snyder, 1995; Piliavin & Charng, 1990). Altruism refers to the idea that individuals help others to benefit the community without the expectation of a reward in return (Pivlian & Charng, 1990). Hence, people take part in volunteer activities because they believe that volunteering will improve society (Hibbert et al., 2009). Overall, altruism serves as a source of motivation for volunteers who serve the community.

**Building connections for future job opportunities.** Lastly, many volunteers seek out opportunities to develop their professional skills or make connections for future job opportunities (Brown & Zahrlly, 1989; Hibbert et al, 2009; Clary et al., 1996). Volunteer-led and paid-staff nonprofit organizations often provide opportunities for their members to network and interact with professionals from various industries (Wolf, 1999). Typically, volunteers donate their time to a nonprofit in the hopes of finding employment at the organization where they volunteer. For example, some volunteers may lead a marketing project with the goal of securing a position at a similar nonprofit or to use this project as part of their portfolio for the future (Herman, 2005). Hence, factors that serve as sources of motivation for volunteers include: (a) helping out after a signature event and fulfilling a personal belief, (b) altruism, and (c) building connections for future job opportunities. In addition to these motivational factors, there are also theoretical foundations that describe the impetus of volunteer motivation.

## **Theoretical Foundations of Volunteer Motivations**

There are several theoretical foundations of volunteer motivation including: (a) the economic model of volunteerism (Brown & Zarhrly, 1989; Menchik & Weisbrod, 1987; Ziemek, 2005), (b) the functional approach to volunteerism (Clary et al., 1992, Clary et al., 1996), and (c) the volunteer process model (Omoto & Snyder, 1995). An explanation of these theories will illuminate the reasons why individuals volunteer for nonprofit organizations. Additionally, strengths and criticisms of each theory will be provided.

**Economic model of volunteering.** Several scholars have developed economic theories explaining the rationale behind volunteer motivation, describing how volunteering benefits an individual's potential for future employment (Menchik & Weisbrod, 1987; Ziemek, 2005). Menchik and Weisbrod (1987) theorized an economic model of volunteering which suggests that while the act of volunteering does not directly provide monetary gain for individuals, volunteering does develop a person's future earning power. An individual's earning power increases as a result of volunteering because of the on-the-job experience, training, and the potential to network for future employment. In addition, Ziemek (2005) theorized that the act of volunteering can increase a volunteer's market value by developing his or her leadership skills. Hence, while volunteering itself is unpaid, individuals gain these aforementioned benefits through their volunteering experiences.

The economic model of volunteerism has its strengths and weaknesses. One strength of this theory is that it demonstrates to leaders of nonprofits that one way to retain volunteers is through developing members' future earning power. Unfortunately, a

criticism of this theory is that not all individuals join a nonprofit for professional development, so this theory may only apply to certain volunteer-led nonprofits. Overall, the implication of this theory is that some volunteers get involved in nonprofits to enhance their future employment potential. Therefore, nonprofits must provide social and educational opportunities that allow volunteers to network for potential job opportunities or develop their leadership skills (Ziemek, 2005). These networking opportunities are necessary if nonprofit leaders want to keep their volunteers engaged in the organization (Brown & Zahrlly, 1989). Overall, there must be a balance between volunteers developing their career potential and helping further the nonprofit's mission.

**Functional approach to volunteering.** Another theory that explains the rationale for volunteer motivation is the functional approach to volunteerism. By developing the functional approach theory, Clary et al. (1992) sought to understand the psychological and social needs that individuals try to satisfy through volunteering. When developing this theory, Clary et al. created the volunteer function inventory to determine what motivates volunteers. The inventory consists of 30 questions focusing on why individuals volunteer which can offer a great deal of useful information for leaders of voluntary nonprofit organizations. Based upon the volunteers' responses, scores are calculated and correlated to the following six functional needs that correspond to the volunteers' motivations: (a) values, (b) understanding, (c) esteem, (d) career, (e) social, and (f) protective. Each of these needs represents a difference source of motivation. The *values* function represents volunteers' desire to help others in a meaningful way because of their altruistic beliefs. In addition, the *understanding* function symbolizes the volunteers' interest in expanding their knowledge of the world while the *esteem* function represents

volunteers' desire to feel important. Alternatively, the *career* function corresponds to volunteers' desire to build upon their professional skills. Furthermore, the *social* function refers to volunteers' interest in developing their interpersonal skills and belonging to a social group. Lastly, the *protective* function indicates volunteers' desire to alleviate or escape any personal guilt they may hold as a result of their status in society (Clary et al., 1992). Hence, the functional approach, highlights the various needs that volunteers hope to fulfill through the act of volunteering.

As a theory, the functional approach has its strengths and weaknesses. One strength of this theory is that it provides leaders of organizations with clear-cut guidelines regarding the needs that volunteers are looking to fulfill. Often, leaders of volunteer-led nonprofits have more experience fulfilling the mission of their organizations than they do understanding their volunteers' motivations (Herman, 2005). A criticism of the functional approach theory is that the theorists do not explain how leaders of volunteer organizations can fulfill these six psychological and social needs for their volunteers. Many leaders of volunteer-led nonprofits often lack this crucial information. The functional approach theory has implications both for voluntary organizations and their volunteers (Clary & Snyder, 1991; Clary et al., 1992; Clary et al., 1996). If one or more of the functional needs are not fulfilled during a volunteer's experience then the individual is more likely to disengage from the organization. Alternatively, individuals whose needs are fulfilled by their volunteering experience will remain active longer than their unfulfilled counterparts (Clary et al., 1996). Another implication of the functional approach theory is that if organizational leaders are aware of their volunteers' desires, the leaders can retain volunteers by placing members in positions that match the individuals'

motivations, ideally increasing volunteer satisfaction (Clary et al., 1992). Hence, if organizational leaders understand and fulfill one or more of their volunteers' functional needs, voluntary organizations may be able to decrease their turnover.

**Volunteer process model.** The last theory, volunteer process model, developed by Omoto and Snyder (1995), explains volunteer motivation and the reasons why volunteers stay involved in a nonprofit organization. The volunteer process model is divided into three stages: (a) antecedents, (b) experiences, and (c) consequences. The antecedent phase is described as a catalyst that prompts volunteers to get involved in an organization. The catalyst may be an individual's personality attributes, personal or social needs, or circumstances. The second stage of the volunteer process model focuses on the experiences that "prompt or deter" (Omoto & Snyder, 1995, p. 678) a volunteer's commitment. Omoto and Snyder further explain that if volunteers are satisfied with their work, they will likely continue their involvement. The third and last stage of the volunteer process model focuses on consequences. For example, a volunteer's experience in an organization can influence his or her future behavior. As a result of their volunteering experience, individuals may donate to a cause, seek out a long-term leadership position, switch careers, or even alter their political beliefs (Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008)

The volunteer process model has strengths and weaknesses. The volunteer process model provides a clear-cut overview of why volunteers stay involved in an organization. This information can be valuable for leaders of volunteer-led nonprofits who may have little experience managing volunteers. A criticism of the volunteer process model is that the theory provides little practical information for how to get volunteers to the

consequences stage. Many leaders of nonprofits do aspire to change volunteers' future behaviors and attitudes, which often occurs in the second or third stage of the model. This theory has applications for leaders of volunteer-led nonprofits since it demonstrates to leaders the stages that volunteers go through to become fully invested in an organization. Overall, understanding volunteers' motivations provides leaders of volunteer-led nonprofit with the necessary information to ensure that the nonprofit has a culture that the volunteers seek. An organization's culture is important because if it does not coincide with the needs of group members, then individuals will most likely disengage and volunteer turnover will likely occur (Jamison, 2003; Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005; Omoto & Snyder, 1995; Schein, 1992).

### **Volunteer Turnover**

Volunteer turnover occurs for a variety of reasons in a nonprofit and has implications for the overall day-to-day operation of an organization. Turnover occurs because of volunteers' unmet personal or social needs, dissatisfaction with the leadership of the organization, or outside personal commitments such as family or work (Jamison, 2003; Lynch, 2000; Omoto & Snyder, 2002; Skoglund, 2006). The functional theory suggests that volunteer turnover will occur if individuals' needs are not satisfied (Clary et al., 1996). For example, volunteers may seek out opportunities to make new friends or fulfill personal needs. If these expectations are not met, then the volunteers will most likely leave the organization (Skoglund, 2006). Turnover may also occur if volunteers feel that the leadership of the organization lacks direction or has the wrong focus (Omoto & Snyder, 2002). Lastly, family obligations or demanding work schedules may hinder volunteers from being as active as they desire, ultimately forcing them to withdraw from

the organization. Within nonprofits like Sustainable Communities, leaders may see a decrease in volunteer involvement of members when projects conclude or around the holiday season. In addition to these contributing factors that explain volunteer turnover, there is also a theoretical explanation. Despite normal turnover cycles, if organizational leaders are able to fulfill their volunteers' needs, the organization will then be able to retain its members for a longer time (Ellis, 2000). Therefore, it is crucial for leaders of organizations to understand and fulfill their volunteers' needs. Otherwise, turnover will occur, resulting in problems for the organization (Clary & Miller, 1986).

There are several organizational problems that may occur as a result of volunteer turnover, including (a) decreased volunteer morale, (b) loss of organizational and project information, and (c) the need for additional resources to recruit and train new volunteers (Clary et al., 1992; Cuskelly & Boag, 2001; Jamison, 2000; Omoto & Snyder, 1995; Skoglund, 2006). All of these problems have implications for the day-to-day operations of the volunteer-led nonprofit organization. Turnover within a voluntary nonprofit organization can cause a decrease in volunteer morale for a multitude of reasons. Volunteer morale refers to an individual's level of emotional satisfaction towards a voluntary nonprofit organization (Clary et al., 1992; Omoto & Snyder, 1995). One reason that turnover decreases morale is that the remaining volunteers are required to take on extra responsibilities from past volunteers (Skoglund, 2006). This extra workload causes additional stress on the remaining volunteers. Secondly, volunteers within nonprofits typically develop friendships with others in the group. So, when individuals leave a nonprofit, morale may decrease since the remaining volunteers may lose their personal relationships with the exiting volunteers. Overall, decreased volunteer morale can impact



the cohesion of volunteers in an organization. When key volunteers leave, there is often a loss of significant project and organizational information. As a result, the remaining volunteers spend a significant amount of time reviewing the tasks or projects that were coordinated by the exiting volunteers (Cuskelly & Boag, 2001). This assessment and review period requires additional effort for the remaining volunteers. Consequently, a loss of key volunteers causes a delay in the forward movement of other projects, since some of the remaining members' time is spent reviewing the past history of projects.

When key volunteers leave an organization, the remaining volunteers must take time to recruit and train new volunteers (Ellis, 2000). Recruiting new volunteers requires resources from the organization for marketing at community fairs or to organize social and outreach events to attract new volunteers. While recruitment is always a continuous effort, it is even more important after the loss of key volunteers (Herman, 2005). Furthermore, recruitment is a time-consuming effort because all new volunteers must be properly trained so they understand the organization and their roles within it (Ellis, 2000). Overall, the recruitment and training of volunteers requires the use of additional resources from the organization.

### **Volunteer Retention**

Leaders of voluntary nonprofit organizations need to focus on volunteer retention to ensure their members continue to stay involved. Volunteer retention decreases volunteer turnover, ensures consistency in leadership and provides continuity for program management (Catano et al., 2001; Dutta-Bergman, 2003; Grube & Piliavin, 2000; Lynch, 2000). Furthermore, volunteer retention ensures that volunteers feel good about their role within the organization. There are various methods that organizations use to retain

volunteers including volunteer trainings, appreciation events, and social networking opportunities (Herman, 2005; Wolf, 1999). Leaders of nonprofits create these types of experiences for their volunteers with the goal of member retention (Lynch, 2000).

Overall, through these retention efforts, volunteers will recognize that they are valued by others in the organization and may be more likely to stay involved.

**Role identity theory.** The concept of volunteer retention has been linked to the role identity theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Grube & Piliavin, 2000; Charng, Piliavin, & Callero, 1991). The theory of role identity explains that, as volunteers give their time to an organization, they begin to personally identify their specific role to that particular organization (Grube & Piliavin, 2000). For example, a volunteer may take on the role of social events coordinator or may provide training to new volunteers. These volunteer experiences contribute to the development of their identity in the organization (Charng et al., 1991).

The role identity has its strengths and weaknesses. For leaders of volunteer-led nonprofits, this theory provides an overview of how to get volunteers to closely identify with their organization. A criticism of the role identity theory is that some volunteers within an organization may never hold a specific position in an organization with which to identify. Therefore, this theory may not be relevant to some organizational leaders. There are also positive implications of this theory; for example if volunteers believe their role is important for the success of the organization, then volunteers' self-esteem will most likely increase. This increase in self-esteem deepens the commitment of the volunteers' roles in the organization (Charng et al., 1991). Thus, the emotional connection keeps the volunteers engaged longer and has a positive influence on the

organization, since volunteers feel encouraged by their contributions (Grube & Piliavin, 2000). Overall, volunteer retention strategies and the positive emotions volunteers receive from their roles within an organization keep individuals engaged.

### **Organizational Culture**

An organization's culture is a set of shared values, beliefs and expectations that guide group members as they work together to fulfill their organization's purpose (Jaskyte, 2004; Robbins, 2004; Schein, 1992). Organizational culture forms through a group's shared experiences, interactions, conversations and rituals (Pettigrew, 1979; Schein, 1992). In addition, key leaders of an organization may shape a group's culture and set the tone for how members interact with one another (Hofstede, 1980). Hence, an organization's culture impacts how individuals communicate, make decisions and accomplish their goals within the organization (Hofstede, 1980; Jaskyte, 2004; Lewis, 2002; Liao-Troth, 2001; Ott, 1989; Pearce, 1983; Pettigrew, 1979; Robbins, 2004; Saffold, 1988; Schein, 1992;). To understand the relevance of organizational culture within volunteer-led nonprofits, it is important to examine the following topics: (a) the historical foundations of organizational culture, (b) the impact of organizational culture on group members, (c) a review of cultural norms within volunteer-led nonprofit organizations, and (d) the effects of a destructive organizational culture.

**Historical foundations.** Several key theorists including Deal and Kennedy (1982), Hofstede (1980), Pettigrew (1979), and Schein (1992) shaped the study of organizational culture. Pettigrew, who was the first to discuss organizational culture, analyzed an English boarding school and explored how the institution developed its culture through shared experiences and events such as leadership transitions and

structural changes. Pettigrew's first article, *On Studying Organizational Cultures* served as a catalyst for further research on organizational culture.

Another influential theorist, Hofstede (1980) interviewed over 10,000 employees IBM in 70 countries to examine employees' national origins and their cultural values in the workplace. He concluded that employees have various cultural dimensions relevant to the workplace including power distance, individualism, masculinity and uncertainty avoidance. Hofstede further discovered that employees have varying levels of these cultural dimensions based upon their national origins. Some justifiably critique Hofstede's initial research as non-generalizable because it was restricted to only IBM employees (McSweeney, 2002). However, many academics highly value Hofstede's work and its contributions to the study of organizational culture (Fang, 2007; McSweeney, 2002; Orr & Hauser, 2008).

Other influential theorists include Deal and Kennedy (1982) who analyzed organizational culture within the context of corporations. Deal and Kennedy are known for describing organizational culture as "the way things get done" (p. 56) within a group. Additionally, Deal and Kennedy also developed a cultural scale model that measures an organization's culture based on their proclivity to take on new risks and their response to feedback.

Lastly, Schein (1992) discussed how culture is shaped, how it can be observed, and the difficulty inherent in changing an organization's culture. Schein is lauded for defining three levels of organizational culture: (a) artifacts, (b) espoused values, and (c) basic underlying assumptions. Artifacts are cultural components of an organization such as the way people dress or how members interact. These artifacts can be seen by an

outside observer, but may not easily understood unless one is a member of the actual organization and has firsthand knowledge of the culture. Espoused values are the beliefs to which an organization's leaders may be committed but do not actually practice in their everyday operations. For example, some nonprofits may believe in democratic decision-making, but in practice only a few leaders make decisions for the entire organization. Lastly, underlying assumptions are the essence of an organization's culture, the basic theories that all members within a group use to manage their day-to-day operations. These assumptions are extremely difficult to change and are often followed unconsciously as members become fully integrated into an organization (Schein, 1992). Some critique Schein's earlier work related to the theory of organizational culture, citing that he "doesn't describe how these cultural concepts can be used by practitioners" (Wilkins, 1985, p. 373). However, Schein's theories have impacted how academics, group members and leaders reflect on their own cultures. In conclusion, Deal and Kennedy (1982), Hofstede (1980), Pettigrew (1979), and Schein (1992) laid the historical foundations for the study of organizational culture.

**Impact of organizational culture.** Organizational culture is pervasive and influences all aspects of an organization's operations, including group behavior and goal accomplishment (Schein, 1992). For the purposes of this research, this section will provide an overview of various studies from the nonprofit sector demonstrating how organizational culture influences group members (Jaskyte, 2004; Lewis, 2002; Liao-Troth, 2001; Ott, 1989; Pearce, 1983; Robbins, 2004; Saffold, 1988; Schein, 1992). Carmeli (2005) conducted a study analyzing the relationship between organizational factors such as "job challenge, trust, innovation, communication and social cohesiveness"

(p. 180) and the behavior of group members. The purpose of Carmeli's study was to understand the impact of these aforementioned organizational factors and employee's withdrawal behaviors such as dissatisfaction or turnover. The participants involved in his study included social workers from various nonprofits. To ensure reliability and validity, Carmeli surveyed participants from nonprofit organizations varying in size and location. From this study, he determined that employee withdrawal behaviors, such as dissatisfaction or turnover were a result of an organization's culture. Furthermore, Carmeli concluded that employee behaviors' leading to continued involvement increased if the employees were given complex and diverse job tasks. Lastly, Carmeli found a positive relationship between employee retention and high levels of trust within an organization. This is relevant to volunteer-led nonprofit because organizational leaders want to learn ways to create a culture that leads to continued volunteer participation and retention (Herman, 2005; Lynch, 2000; Omoto & Snyder, 1995).

Hare and O'Neill (2000) conducted another relevant study highlighting the relationship between group members' behavior and organizational culture. Their research analyzed the organizational culture of a small, rural nonprofit college. Hare and O'Neill's qualitative study included several in-depth interviews with 14 part-time and full-time academic staff members. Through their research, Hare and O'Neill determined that group members may harbor negative feelings if members think the culture of the organization is untrustworthy. Additionally, group members' negative feelings may cloud their ability to understand the organization's mission and vision. Ultimately, Hare and O'Neil determined that a member's negative reactions or lack of affiliation within an organization can lead to turnover. Lastly, Hare and O'Neill concluded that when an

organization lacks a sense of group unity, this can lead to frustration among members within the organization. This study is relevant because it shows the connection between a hostile organizational culture and member turnover.

In another study, Liao-Troth (2001) conducted a quantitative analysis of the differences in attitudes between volunteers and employees in a nonprofit hospital. This study was based upon initial research led by Pearce (1983) that focused on the differences in “job attitudes and work motivation between volunteers and employees doing similar tasks” (p. 646). Pearce examined eight organizations including two news agencies, two human service organizations, two family planning clinics and two fire departments. Pearce interviewed volunteers and paid staff all conducting similar tasks at different organizations. Pearce determined that volunteers doing the same work as employees were more likely to receive praise for their work, feel satisfied and be less likely to leave the organization. Pearce’s study differs from that of Liao-Troth’s who analyzed volunteers and employees from only one organization. Liao-Troth surveyed 108 volunteers and employees at one hospital, 67 of the volunteers were volunteers and 41 were paid-staff. The volunteers and employees Liao-Troth interviewed worked along-side one another and on similar tasks. Liao-Troth found that both volunteers and paid employees within this one hospital held similar attitudes regarding levels of commitment to the organization and perceptions of fairness. One critique of Liao-Troth’s study was that the sample of volunteers studied was limited to White females, which Liao-Troth and other academics felt was not a representative sample (Washington, 2002). Overall, both Liao-Troth’s and Pearce’s studies highlight volunteers’ attitudes towards their tasks and place within an organization.

Another study led by Jaskyte (2004) researched group members innovativeness given the organizational culture in which the individuals operate. Jaskyte surveyed 247 employees from 19 different human service nonprofit organizations via questionnaire. For the purpose of Jaskyte's study, innovation was defined as an individual's ability to "implement an idea, process, system or structure into an organization's prevailing practices" (p. 158). The results of the study suggest that in order for organizations to be more innovative, leaders need to demonstrate to their followers, that they are ambitious, socially adept, and process-oriented. These leadership styles will impact group members' behavior thereby bringing forth more innovation within an organization. This study is relevant to volunteer-led nonprofits because if volunteers feel they cannot implement their ideas within an organization, they will likely disengage (Clary & Miller, 1986; Cuskelly & Boag, 2001; Ellis, 2000; Lynch, 2000).

In summary, Carmeli's (2005) study highlights the relationship between organizational factors and employee withdrawal behaviors, whereas Hare and O'Neill's (2000) emphasizes members' perceptions in a hostile organization. Additionally, Liao-Troth's (2001) and Pearce's (1983) studies highlight the attitudes of volunteers toward their work tasks. Lastly, Jaskyte (2004) study addresses the impact of organizational culture and innovation. Overall, the reviewed studies illustrate how organizational culture impacts volunteers within a nonprofit organization.

**Cultural norms of volunteer nonprofit organizations.** All organizations, even volunteer-led nonprofits, have different organizational cultures. However, in spite of these differences, there are several cultural norms that volunteers expect when they join a volunteer-led nonprofit. These norms are often related to volunteer tasks, group



interaction and the organization's values (Haski-Levanthal & Bargal, 2008; Herman, 2005; Omoto & Snyder, 2002). In terms of volunteer tasks, voluntary nonprofits typically provide direct experiences for their volunteers as well as hands-on projects. Within volunteer-led nonprofits like Sustainable Communities, volunteers often have the expectation that they will be able to participate in projects that allow them to use their skill set. When projects are delayed as a result of funding cuts or other obstacles, volunteers may get frustrated and disengage. Additionally, within volunteer-led nonprofits there are often strong emotional values tied both to the volunteer's experience and within group member interactions. The following paragraphs will provide an overview of a study analyzing these aforementioned cultural norms within volunteer-led nonprofit organizations.

Haski-Leventhal and Bargal (2008) conducted a qualitative study focused on the tasks, cultural norms, and social interactions within voluntary nonprofit organization. Their research was facilitated by a 2-year field study observing 24 volunteers involved in a nonprofit that aided homeless children. Through this study, it was determined that as volunteers engaged in fulfilling the organization's mission, the volunteers' emotions, perceptions, and knowledge were significantly altered by their first-hand experiences. As a result, the tasks the volunteers took on within the organization directly impacted their lives. This finding is similar to the core ideas of the volunteer process model, one of the previously discussed guiding theories of volunteerism.

Additionally, according to Haski-Leventhal and Bargal (2008), volunteer organizations are "characterized by having strong social values that influence the organizational culture" (p. 74). In the study, the researchers observed that these social

values influenced the volunteers as they pursued the mission of the organization and interacted with other group members. For example, some members felt excluded from others in the group as a result of other volunteers' communication styles. Haski-Leventhal and Bargal found that even though volunteers are active within a nonprofit, "they may not always feel affiliated to the organization" (p. 70) because of the group culture. Hence, this lack of affiliation may occur because veteran volunteers may have cultural norms that make new volunteers feel unwelcome (Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008). Overall, Haski-Leventhal and Bargal's study highlights how an organization's cultural norms can impact a volunteer's experience in an organization.

**Destructive organizational cultures.** Some organizations may have a culture that is destructive to group members' morale, ultimately hindering the organization from accomplishing its goals. Destructive cultures are considered toxic and create a constant state of crisis within the organization (Appelbaum & Roy-Girard, 2007; Coccia, 1998; Dunlop & Lee, 2004; Flynn, 1999; Saffold, 1988). Destructive organizations have the following characteristics "(a) inability to achieve group goals, (b) ineffective problem solving processes, (c) inadequate internal communication, (d) waste resulting from bad decisions" (Appelbaum & Roy-Girard, 2007, p. 18). Typically, organizations have these characteristics as a result of policies and the leadership styles of the people in charge (Dunlop & Lee, 2004). Ultimately, these characteristics lead to high turnover, relationship conflicts and failure to accomplish group goals (Appelbaum & Roy-Girard, 2007; Coccia, 1988; Flynn, 1999). Overall, a destructive organizational culture can penetrate all aspects of an organization.

**Impact of destructive organizational cultures on volunteer-led nonprofit organizations.** Some volunteer-led nonprofits have destructive organizational cultures that impacts volunteer retention and goal accomplishment (Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008). This destructive organizational culture is often a result of the operational norms within the organization. Some norms of a destructive organizational culture include a decision-making process led by a few select volunteers, few opportunities for social interaction, lack of volunteer appreciation and poor communication among group members (Clary & Miller, 1986; Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008; Herman, 2005; Jamison, 2003; Omoto & Snyder, 2002, Wilson, 2000). Volunteers join an organization to get involved in a cause important to them, so they want to feel involved in the decision making process of the organization. If they are not able to help make decisions, volunteers will feel alienated from the organization (Jamison, 2003). Additionally, if volunteer-led nonprofits do not provide opportunities for social interaction, then group members who joined to gain friendships will likely disengage. Moreover, volunteers want to feel valued for their hard work and dedication. If volunteers are not appreciated, they will feel undervalued and most likely find other volunteer opportunities (Wilson, 2000). Lastly, active volunteers want to be kept informed of organizational information, projects, and upcoming events. If important information is not communicated to group members, individuals will feel as through they are not a part of the organization (Ellis, 2000; Herman 2005; Robbins, 2004). Overall, it is important for volunteer-led nonprofit organizations to have a culture that reflects the volunteers' desires and expectations.

## Best practices: Volunteerism

Table 2 provides a summary highlighting best practices within volunteer-led nonprofits as they relate to volunteer motivation, volunteer turnover, volunteer retention and organizational culture. These best practices were collected through the various theories discussed in the volunteerism section.

Table 2

### *Best Practices Related to Volunteerism*

Concepts	Best Practices	Theorists
Volunteer Motivation	Leaders of volunteer-led nonprofits should provide volunteers with opportunities that allow: individuals to fulfill their personal beliefs volunteers to build connections for future job opportunities volunteers to increase their earning potential through on the job training networking opportunities volunteers to develop their interpersonal skills individuals to help in meaningful ways volunteers to expand their knowledge of the world	Brown & Zahrlly, 1989 Clary, Snyder & Ridge, 1992 Clary, Snyder & Stukas, 1996 Menchik & Weisbord, 1987
Volunteer Turnover	To reduce volunteer turnover organizational leaders must: Provide organizational direction Ensure that volunteers' needs are satisfied	Clary, Snyder & Ridge, 1992 Clary, Snyder & Stukas, 1996 Herman, 2005
Volunteer Retention	Provide volunteers with specific roles so they develop a personal identity with the organization Offer volunteer appreciation events within the organization Coordinate social networking events Provide volunteer trainings	Ashforth & Mael, 1989
Cultural Norms of Voluntary Nonprofit	Offer hands on projects so that volunteers will build strong emotional ties to their experiences with the organization and other group members	Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008 Herman, 2005 Omoto & Snyder, 2002

Volunteer-led nonprofits are more effective at retaining their members when the volunteering experience fulfills an individual's personal beliefs, builds connections for future job opportunities, increases earning potential through on-the-job training and expands the volunteers' overall knowledge of the world. Furthermore, to reduce turnover within volunteer-led nonprofit, organizational leaders should utilize the best practices of providing trainings for volunteers and organizing social networking and appreciation events in order to increase the volunteers' bond to the organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Clary et al., 1992; Clary et al., 1996; Herman, 2005). Lastly, another best practice in terms of cultural norms in a volunteer-led nonprofit focuses on providing experientially based opportunities so that group members will develop strong emotional ties to the organization (Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008; Herman, 2005; Omoto & Snyder, 2002)

### **Summary of Volunteerism**

In conclusion, the second section of the literature review focused on volunteerism providing an overview of volunteer motivation, volunteer turnover, volunteer retention, and organizational culture. As explained previously, volunteer motivation serves as a source of inspiration for individuals seeking opportunities to become involved in a nonprofit. The theoretical foundations discussed in this section include the economic model of volunteering, the functional approach to volunteering, the volunteer process model, and the role identity model (Clary et al., 1996; Herman, 2005). Also reviewed were theories and studies related to volunteer turnover, which refers to the phenomenon of volunteers leaving an organization as a result of unmet personal or social needs,

dissatisfaction with the organization, or personal obligations (Clary et al., 1996). This section also addressed volunteer retention, a strategy that organizational leaders use to ensure the continued involvement of volunteers. Several retention methods include volunteer trainings, appreciation events, and social networking opportunities (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Herman, 2005; Wilson, 2000). Lastly, another key concept covered in this section was organizational culture which refers to a set of beliefs or shared values that guide members of an organization as they work together to fulfill their purpose (Schein, 1992). The overview of organizational culture highlighted several important theories from the following experts including Deal and Kennedy (1982), Hofstede (1980), Pettigrew (1979), and lastly Schein (1992). This second section provided an in-depth analysis of best practices related to the various components of volunteerism.

### **Organizational Structures**

This final section of the literature review covers organizational structures that provide group members with a framework to understand the following objectives: (a) relationships among individuals in the organization, (b) levels of management and leadership, and (c) direction of communication (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Ghiselli & Siegel, 1972; Kushner & Poole, 1996; Mintzberg, 1983; Papadimitriou, 2002; Porter & Lawler, 1965; Robbins, 2004). Since structures are a means to manage an organization's day-to-day operations, leaders of organizations must utilize structures that bring forth "consistency and harmony" (Mintzberg, 1983, p. 3) and coincide with the organization's environment, size, complexity of tasks, skills of group members, and identities of members (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Ghiselli & Siegel, 1972). The goal of aligning an organization's structure with its environmental characteristics is to accomplish the

objective of coordinating group members' interactions and managing organizational goals. If an organization's structure improves group morale, then this improvement will help group members accomplish the organization's goals (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Alternatively, structures may have a negative effect if they stifle the creativity of group members or make it easier for managers to control their subordinates (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Through a group's structure, members can achieve their organization's objectives (Ghiselli & Siegel, 1972; Robbins, 2004).

Studying an organization's structures offers group members and leaders a glimpse of past experiences within a group and a perspective on the organization's ability to achieve its stated goals (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Denison & Mishra, 1995; Robbins, 2004; Schein, 1992). To understand the importance of organizational structures within nonprofits, the following will be discussed: (a) an overview of the historical theoretical foundations of organizational structures and theories, (b) an analysis of several organizational structures utilized within nonprofit organizations, and (c) a review of various research studies conducted within the nonprofit sector focused on organizational structures.

**Historical foundations of organizational structures.** The theoretical foundation of how organizations function is based upon research led by several theorists including Frederick Taylor, Kurt Lewin, and Max Weber (Denhardt, Denhardt & Aristigueta, 2002; Starling, 2005; Yukl, 1994). Taylor (as cited in Denhardt et al. 2002) is referred to as the founder of scientific management, a theory that focuses on the division of labor in the workplace. Taylor analyzed workflows and determined the most efficient ways for employees to complete their work-related tasks. For example, Taylor studied steel

workers and determined that certain workflows could make workers more efficient. Through his research, Taylor argued that employees' tasks within an organization should be standardized to ensure efficiency. Another central tenet of Taylor's studies was that organizational efficiency erodes when leaders or management act in ways that disregard the welfare of subordinates (Yukl, 1994). Some justifiably critique Taylor's theory because it can give the perception that employees are simply machines. In a volunteer-led nonprofit like Sustainable Communities, Taylor's theories could create a tense environment for members who want to feel supported and have a stress free volunteer experience. However, since volunteer-led nonprofit organizations are often short on resources, organizational leaders could probably relate to Taylor's ideas of being innovative to promote efficiency.

Another influential theorist, Max Weber developed the concept of the workplace bureaucracy, the major features of which include: (a) division of labor, (b) hierarchy of authority, (c) system of rules regarding the rights and duties of employees, (d) the impersonality of interpersonal relationships, (e) promotion and selection based on technical competence (Starling, 2005; Yukl, 1994). The notion of bureaucracy typically conveys images of rigid managers and sterile work environments, not necessarily relevant to volunteer-led nonprofits. Many critique bureaucracies for being inefficient at accomplishing tasks and void of emotion (Starling, 2005). Despite this concept of rigidity, the ideas of division of labor and a system of rules regarding duties or employees are relevant to task completion within nonprofits. In a nonprofit, division of labor may consist of dividing up tasks via committees or project groups. Lastly, a system of rules regarding duties of employment may refer to the processes that organizations use to



ensure that volunteers accomplish their tasks and feel safe doing so. Overall, Weber's theories impacted the study of organizational theory, paving the way for more research on this topic.

Lewin's (1951) research on planned organizational change is referred to as the unfreezing, change and refreezing model. In this theory, change within an organization involves three distinct stages. The first stage, *unfreezing*, is a driving force that initiates change, thereby altering the stability of the organization. The second stage, *change*, occurs when the leadership initiates new policies into the organization. The third stage, *refreezing*, occurs when the organization's members have been able to integrate the changes into their daily routine (Lewin, 1951). Other theorists such as Lippitt, Watson and Westley (1958) have elaborated on Lewin's research, further developing Lewin's theory from three stages into seven including scouting, entry, diagnosis, planning, action, stability, evaluation, and termination. While change models are necessary to integrate new initiatives within an organization, this research primarily focuses on models related to processes. Overall, Lewin's original planned change theory provides a general framework for understanding how organizations manage planned change.

Other more recent theorists have contributed to the study of structures within organizations and will be discussed in this literature review include: (a) Blanchard, Carlos and Randolph (1999), (b) Bolman and Deal (2003), (c) Pearce and Conger (2003), (d) Mintzberg (1983), (e) Porter and Lawler (1965), (f) Ghiselli and Siegel (1972), (g) Helgesen (1995), (h) Kushner and Poole (1996), (i) Schein (1992), (j) Pearce and Manz (2005), and (k) Vroom and Yetton (1973). These more recent theorists have developed

concepts regarding the impact of structures on individuals within a group and goal accomplishment of organizations.

**Importance of studying organizational structures.** Examining an organization's structure provides an opportunity to understand the processes that organization uses to accomplish its goals as well as inefficiencies (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Ghiselli & Siegel, 1972; Kushner & Poole, 1996). Analyzing an organization is an integral part of resolving problems within a group (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Many organizational problems occur as a result of inappropriate structures used by the group's leaders (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Hence, the structure and design of an organization has enormous consequences on its overall effectiveness (Kushner & Poole, 1996). If leaders are able to adjust their organization's structures to better suit their needs, this change can have a profound impact on the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2003).

**Decentralized organizational structures.** This section will review decentralized organizational structures which are a type of organizational arrangement that increases the span of control among group members (Ghiselli & Siegel, 1972; Pearce & Conger, 2003; Porter & Lawler, 1965; Standley, 2001). Two distinct features of a decentralized structure include the ability for all group members to have authority in decision-making and open communication among all individuals in the organization (Standley, 2001). The following sections will review three examples of decentralized organizational structures: shared leadership, professional bureaucracy, and the web of inclusion. Hierarchical organizational arrangements will not be analyzed since these structures are not often found within voluntary organizations.

***Shared leadership.*** Shared leadership is one type of organizational structure used by organizations to disperse responsibility and ownership of the group's mission among group members (Pearce and Conger, 2003; Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003; Pearce, 2004; Pearce & Manz, 2005; Spillane, 2005; Yukl, 1994). Several key theorists (Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003; Pearce & Conger, 2003; Spillane, 2005) explain that the theoretical foundations of shared leadership are based on the following: (a) concepts discussed by Mary Parker Follett (1919), (b) participative decision making (Vroom & Yetton, 1973), (c) self-managed work teams (Manz, Keating, & Donnellon, 1990) and (d) empowerment (Blanchard et al. 1999).

Mary Parker Follett's (1919) writings focused on participative leadership, which laid the foundation of shared leadership well before this concept was discussed in organizational theory. Follett (1919) writes:

the greatest contribution a citizen can make to the state... is to join his thought with that of others so that the issue shall be productive. If each of us exhausts his responsibility by bringing his own little piece of pretty colored glass, that would make a mere kaleidoscope of community. (p. 580)

Follett (1919) further suggests that specific situations within organizations may warrant different types of leaders to take charge based upon their knowledge and skills. Follett's ideas led the way for shared leadership, a theory that was developed many years later within organizational theory.

Vroom and Yetton (1973) developed a decision making model that helps organizational leaders determine when to enlist the participation of their subordinates in making decisions. Their model was designed to help leaders make decisions more efficiently within an organization (Randolph & Blackburn, 1989). The model includes a

series of questions that helps a leader determine if a decision should be made unilaterally by a few leaders or via consensus with many people participating. When leaders enlist their subordinates in decision making, this is typically referred to as participative decision making. Vroom and Yetton suggest decision making requires greater participation from group members if the following occur: (a) there is a need for a high quality decision, (b) all group members can substantially contribute to the final decision, (c) the organization needs complete support by all members regarding the final decision, and (d) the decision making process will not create a lot of conflict among group members. This model helps organizational leaders determine when it is appropriate to include many group members in making a decision. Hence, Vroom and Yetton's concept of participative decision making relates to the concept of shared leadership where decision making is distributed throughout an organization.

Self-managed work teams, another concept that relates to shared leadership, describes the phenomenon of team members taking on organization roles previously delegated to leaders at the top (Manz et al. 1990). Self-managed work teams gives workers "a high degree of autonomy and control over their behavior and actions" (Manz et al., 1990, p. 15). Self-managed work teams can be found in organizations that require their employees to accomplish complex tasks (Manz & Sims, 1987). Hence, self-managed work teams are related to shared leadership in that group members are empowered to serve in a leadership role previously delegated to leaders at the top of the organizational hierarchy.

Empowerment, a concept discussed by (Blanchard et al., 1999) serves the purpose of educating group members to take on more responsibilities in an organization. For

empowerment to occur, leaders must provide adequate training, increase autonomy of group members, encourage information sharing and replace hierarchies with a team structure (Blanchard et al., 1999). Hence, the concept of empowerment delegates responsibility to more members within an organization, similar to shared leadership. Overall, Follet's (1919) participative leadership, Vroom and Yetton's (1973) decision making model, self-managed work teams and the concept of empowerment all contribute to the theory of shared leadership.

Shared leadership, one type of decentralized organizational structure is used interchangeably with the concepts of: (a) team leadership (Pearce & Manz, 2005), (b), democratic leadership (Spillane, 2005), and (c) distributed leadership (Spillane, 2005). Shared leadership allows multiple group members to lead an organization and make decisions, and increases communication among group members regardless of their position in the organization (Burke, Fiore, & Salas, 2003; Kramer, 2006; Pearce & Sims, 2002; Spillane, 2005; Yukl, 1994). By dispersing responsibility, shared leadership gives group members the autonomy to make decisions even if they are working independently on a project (Burke et al., 2003). A volunteer-led nonprofit like Sustainable Communities has members traveling abroad to work on projects, some of whom may need to make decisions independently if they are working alone. Therefore, some autonomy is necessary. Often members of a volunteer-led nonprofit organization work independently on their tasks or projects. Additionally, a shared leadership structure allows for volunteers in any position to assume tasks and take on various responsibilities (Pearce & Manz, 2005). This fluidity of leadership is often necessary in an organization using shared

leadership, especially if a key leader leaves and is unable to continue performing his or her tasks.

As a theory, shared leadership has its strengths and weaknesses. One strength of shared leadership is that the organizational arrangement provides groups with an alternative to the typical hierarchy and can alleviate leaders of their positions if they can no longer continue with the organization. A criticism of shared leadership is that it can be difficult to integrate into an organization because of the wide distribution of power (Pearce & Conger, 2003). Various studies have been conducted that focus on the impact of shared leadership within organizations.

One study led by Kramer (2006) demonstrates the positive impact of shared leadership within a nonprofit theater production company. In this organization, the director failed to follow through with her tasks and members of the theater began to complain of a lack of direction within the organization. Due to this disarray, the remaining veteran members formed a shared leadership structure. Kramer observed that within the organization, all the veteran members took turns serving as leaders:

At any given moment, the leadership may not have appeared to be shared, as one individual took charge of the group; however, viewed over time, leadership within this organization was shared as various individuals assumed leadership roles. Thus, shared leadership is not an end state to be accomplished, but rather an ongoing process of balancing leadership roles over time. (p. 159)

This example highlights how shared leadership can be integral to continuity within an organization, specifically when a key leader leaves or stops performing adequately.

One of the most influential studies on shared leadership was conducted by Pearce and Sims (2002), who investigated 71 change management teams at a large automobile manufacturing firm. This study analyzed the effectiveness of work teams using shared

leadership versus vertical leadership. The overall purpose of this study was to examine the leadership of the teams and make recommendations to the organization enabling the future success of a team-based approach. Researchers collected data from employees and managers via questionnaires which were distributed before and after a 6-month time period. Through their studies, Pearce and Sims determined that “shared leadership was found to be an important predictor of team effectiveness” (p. 183). Furthermore, Pearce and Sims explained that shared leadership is “an important ingredient in teams that are responsible for complex tasks” (p. 184). In this study, they also suggested ideas for future research such as studying how situational factors may impact teams using shared leadership. Overall, their research has limitations in that only one organization was studied and the teams analyzed were autonomous, thus the results may not be generalizable to other types of groups. In conclusion, these studies by Kramer (2006) and Pearce and Sims (2002) demonstrate that organizations using a shared leadership structure must have a need for dispersing responsibility, bringing forth group cohesion, and allowing member autonomy.

***Professional bureaucracy.*** Another example of a decentralized organizational structure relevant to volunteer-led nonprofit organization is the professional bureaucracy studied by Mintzberg (1983), an author and academic in the field of organizational management. A professional bureaucracy is an organizational arrangement found in large-scale nonprofits such as hospitals, health care and social service organizations and public universities (Currie & Procter, 2005; Honingh & Hooge, 2009; Mintzberg, 1983). The standard operating procedures of a professional bureaucracy are developed outside the organization. Professional bureaucracies employ highly skilled professionals who are

given a lot of autonomy to make decisions (Germov, 2005; Mintzberg, 1983).

Employees in a professional bureaucracy become experts in their field through years of extensive training and sharing information with colleagues (Mintzberg, 1983; Currie & Procter, 2005). Through this education, “the skills and knowledge of their profession are formally programmed into the would-be professional” (Mintzberg, 1983, p. 190). Since individuals in a professional bureaucracy have very technical tasks, there is not a lot of standardization in their work processes. These characteristics impact group members and the overall management of the organization.

Employees within a professional bureaucracy are often put in the position of working independently and closely with the clients they serve, thus requiring autonomy in decision-making. Doctors, engineers, social workers or professors are examples of types of employees in a professional bureaucracy. These professions require individuals to make decisions independently, specifically because problems that arise within these fields require their technical expertise. A professional bureaucracy is different from Weber’s previously discussed concept of bureaucracy because a professional bureaucracy relies on individuals in charge of projects to make decisions independent of the leaders at the top of the organization (Mintzberg, 1983). One limitation of the professional bureaucracy is that implementing systematic changes within a professional bureaucracy can be difficult because most individuals work independently (Mintzberg, 1983; Honingh & Hooge, 2009).

The following qualitative case study analyzes the professional bureaucratic structure in relation to employee behavior. As discussed previously, most research focused on the nonprofit sector relates to staff-led nonprofit organizations. However,



some conclusions from this study may relate to large scale volunteer-led nonprofit organizations. Currie and Proctor's (2005) study analyzes the organizational performance of nonprofits in the health care field, specifically examining the behavior of middle managers and how organizations may intervene to develop the capacity of middle managers. The researchers used three different case studies for their data collection, interviewing both middle managers and executives. Currie and Proctor found that middle managers felt isolated from the rest of the organization. Additionally, they discovered that middle managers learn more when they interact with others in the organization. Lastly, Currie and Proctor learned that when middle managers thought that the organization's structures and processes were supportive to their daily routine, the employees were then able to make a greater impact. One could easily parallel the middle managers feelings of isolation with volunteers' dissatisfaction related to not being able to make social or professional connections in a nonprofit. The general overview of professional bureaucracy and Currie and Proctor's study in particular highlight another example of a decentralized structure that is relevant to voluntary nonprofit organizations.

***Web of inclusion.*** Another example of a decentralized organizational structure that is relevant to nonprofits is the web of inclusion, which was developed by Sally Helgesen (1995), author and expert on women's and organizational leadership. A web of inclusion is described as a "process, model, a way of thinking about tasks and solving problems as they arise" (p. 24) in an organization. Helgesen developed this concept by observing organizations in the health care and technology sectors that utilize integrated and matrix-based structures. A web of inclusion has several defining characteristics,

including: (a) a redistribution of power within the organization, (b) an increase in empowerment, (c) communication, and d) participation among group members.

Organizational leaders that use the web of inclusion believe in empowering members to make decisions independently when necessary to accomplish shared organizational goals. Additionally, leaders that utilize the web of inclusion encourage participation among group members and utilize open communication. Helgesen (1995) explains that if an organization limits communication amongst employees or restricts the sharing of information this may lead to decreased morale among members in the organization. One strength of the web organizational structures is that group members feel more informed and included within the organization. Generally, organizational leaders that utilize a web of inclusion typically have regulations that bring forth the sharing of information, open communication and networking among employees.

While the web of inclusion has its strengths, some academics are critical of Helgesen's work. Herron (1996) claims that Helgesen's concept of the web of inclusion lacks a strong theoretical foundation. Herron argues that "Helgesen's clear bias against bureaucracy reveals her lack of knowledge of management theory" (1996, p. 761). Additionally, Herron explains that Helgesen does not discuss the "potential disadvantages, leading others to the unlikely conclusion that webs are awfully easy to implement" (p. 760). Hence, some feel theorists feel that Helgesen's web of inclusion is pertinent to bringing forth an inclusive and open workplace while others feel her concepts lack a theoretical foundation.

## Best Practices: Organizational Structures

To summarize, Table 3 highlights the best practices within volunteer-led nonprofit organizations related to organizational structures. The topics covered in this section included an overview of organizational structures and various types of decentralized structures.

Table 3

### *Best Practices Related to Organizational Structure and Volunteer-led Nonprofits*

Concepts	Best Practices	Theorists
Organizational Structure	Utilize structures that coincide with the organization's environment, complexities of task and skills of group members.	Helgesen, 1995 Honingh & Hooge, 2009 Mintzberg, 1983
Decentralized Structure	Provide opportunities for all group members to have authority in decision-making Disperse ownership and responsibility among group members Allow for empowerment of volunteers in any position to assume tasks and responsibilities Autonomy in decision making Empowering individuals to make decisions and accomplish organizational goals. Operating with open communication.	Burke, Fiore & Salas, 2003 Donnellon, 1990 Helgesen, 1995 Manz, Keating & Pearce, 2004 Pearce & Conger, 2003 Pearce & Sims, 2002 Spillane, 2005

As explained previously, volunteer-led nonprofit organizations are most successful when organizational leaders utilize structures that coincide with the organization's environment, complexities of task and skills of group members (Helgesen, 1995; Honingh & Hooge, 2009; Mintzberg, 1983). Furthermore, leaders of organizations that utilize decentralized structures are most successful when the following occur: (a) ownership is dispersed amongst group members, (b) volunteers in any position are

empowered with the responsibility to accomplish organizational goals and make decision, and lastly (c) the organization operates with open communication (Burke et al., 2003; Helgesen, 1995; Manz et al., 1990; Pearce, 2004; Pearce & Conger, 2003; Pearce & Sims, 2002; Spillane, 2005).

### **Summary of Organizational Structures**

In summary, the third section of the literature review provided an overview of organizational structures and the importance of studying an organization's structure. This section also reviewed the various types of decentralized structures commonly found in volunteer-led nonprofit organizations including shared leadership, professional bureaucracies, and the web of inclusion. Shared leadership is an organizational structure used by leaders to disperse responsibility and ownership of the group's tasks (Manz et al., 1990; Pearce, 2004; Pearce & Conger, 2003; Pearce & Sims, 2002). To review, a professional bureaucracy is an organizational arrangement found in large scale nonprofits such as hospitals, health care and social service organizations, and public universities (Currie & Procter, 2005; Honingh & Hooge, 2009; Mintzberg, 1983). Professional bureaucracies employ highly skilled professionals who are given a lot of autonomy to make decisions (Germov, 2005; Mintzberg, 1983). Lastly, the web of inclusion is an organizational arrangement that incorporates a matrix-like structure thereby redistributing power within the organization, while increasing communication and participation among group members (Helgesen, 1995). Table 4 provides a summary of all the best practices from the literature review.

Table 4

*Summary of Best Practices*

Concepts	Best Practices	Theorists
Operation Rules of the Nonprofit Sector: Mission Statements	To help and serve the public. Source of innovation Provides guidance for group members Communicates the organization's purpose to the community	Drucker, 1992 Kouzes & Posner, 1987 McDonald, 2007 Wolf, 1999
Structural Roles	Provides training for volunteers Create specific roles and position descriptions for volunteers	Farmer & Fedor, 1999 Herman, 2005 Pearce, 1983 Smith & Shen, 1996
Personnel Practices	Interview volunteers to ensure they are good fit for the organization. Debrief with volunteers upon the completion of event or projects Positively reinforce volunteers Leaders should follow up with volunteers to ensure task completion	Herman, 2005 Hollowitz & Wilson, 1993 Jamison, 2003 Lynch, 2000 Starling, 2005 Wilson, 2000
Volunteer Motivation	Leaders of volunteer-led nonprofits should provide volunteers with opportunities that allow: Individuals to fulfill their personal beliefs Volunteers to build connections for future job opportunities Volunteers to increase their earning potential through on the job training Networking opportunities Volunteers to develop their interpersonal skills Individuals to help the organization in meaningful ways Volunteers to expand their knowledge of the world	Brown & Zahrly, 1989 Clary, Snyder & Ridge, 1992 Clary, Snyder & Stukas, 1996 Menchik & Weisbord, 1987
Volunteer Turnover	To reduce volunteer turnover organizational leaders must: Provide organizational direction Ensure that volunteers' needs are satisfied in the organization	Clary, Snyder & Ridge, 1992 Clary, Snyder & Stukas, 1996 Herman, 2005

*(table continues)*

Concepts	Best Practices	Theorists
Volunteer Retention	Provide volunteers with specific roles so they can develop a personal identity and connection to the organization Offer volunteer appreciation events within the organization Coordinate social networking events Provide volunteer trainings	Ashforth & Mael, 1989
Cultural Norms of Volunteer-Led Nonprofit Organizations	Offer hands on projects so that volunteers will build strong emotional ties to their experiences with the organization and other group members	Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008 Herman, 2005 Omoto & Snyder, 2002
Organizational Structure	Utilize structures that coincide with the organization's environment, complexities of task and skills of group members.	Helgesen, 1995 Honingsh & Hooge, 2009 Mintzberg, 1983
Decentralized Structure	Provide opportunities for all group members to participate in decision-making Disperse ownership and responsibility among group members of organization Allow for empowerment of volunteers in any position to assume tasks and responsibilities Autonomy in decision making Empowering individuals to make decisions and accomplish organizational goals. Operating with open communication.	Burke, Fiore & Salas, 2003 Donnellon, 1990 Helgesen, 1995 Manz, Keating & Pearce, 2004 Pearce & Conger, 2003 Pearce & Sims, 2002 Spillane, 2005

### Summary of Literature Review

In summary, the literature review included three sections focusing on: (a) voluntary nonprofit organizations, (b) volunteerism, and (c) organizational structures common to volunteer-led nonprofits. The section on volunteer-led nonprofits provided an overview of the sector's role in providing social services and its impact on local economies in the United States. The second section on volunteerism explored volunteer motivation, retention, turnover and the impact of an organization's culture on its

members. The third and final section reviewed organizational structures and examined how these structures serve as a means to manage the day-to-day operations of a voluntary nonprofit organization.

### **Chapter III: Research Design and Methodology**

The methodology used in this research involved a qualitative instrumental case study approach. The purpose of a qualitative study is to “explore, explain or describe a phenomenon of interest” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 33). This chapter provides an explanation of this study’s research design, population, data collection method, and data analysis process.

#### **The Design of the Study**

Qualitative research studies have specific characteristics allowing researchers to explore the “complexities and processes of organizations” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 57). The lead investigator used a qualitative case study because this type of analysis allows for: (a) information to be gathered in a natural setting; (b) multiple types of rich data to be collected; (c) an opportunity to learn about past events from the participant’s perspective; and (d) the researcher to develop an understanding of a particular phenomenon and provide insights, interpretations or generalizable theories related to the case being studied (Creswell, 2009; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Hence, the characteristics of a qualitative study create a holistic approach, allowing researchers to “develop a complex picture of the issue under study” (Creswell, 2009, p. 176).

The aforementioned characteristics of qualitative research are relevant to this study. Collecting data from participants in a natural setting allows a researcher to interact with a participant in his or her own environment. In a qualitative study, a researcher typically collects multiple forms of data through interviews, observations and documents rather than depending on one source of data (Creswell, 2009). For this study, the lead investigator gathered data from interviews and organizational documents.



Additionally, a qualitative study offers a researcher the opportunity to learn about past events from the participant's perspective (Creswell, 2009). In qualitative studies, information from the participant's perspective is typically gathered through open-ended questions. When participants respond to open-ended questions, their responses provide a researcher with "a source of raw data and reveal a depth of emotion" (Patton, 2002, p. 21). Through the collection of raw data, researchers are able to understand the participants' perspectives related to the core issues being studied (Creswell, 2009). For this research, a single case study approach allowed the lead investigator to analyze the issue and formulate interpretations or generalizable assertions about the case. In this study, the particular case of interest is a volunteer-led nonprofit organization and the processes by which the members accomplish their organization's mission. Overall, this instrumental case study approach allows a researcher to develop generalizable interpretations surrounding the specific case being studied. By using a qualitative approach, a researcher was able to collect raw data, make interpretations, draw conclusions and create theories from the sample population.

A qualitative study is both interpretative and holistic (Creswell, 2009). Through qualitative analysis, researchers can "make an interpretation of what they see, hear and understand" (p. 179). After the researcher gathers participants' perspectives, "multiple views of the problem emerge" (p. 176) and conclusions can be drawn. A qualitative study is also holistic because a researcher can "report multiple perspectives, identify many factors involved in a situation and then develop a complex picture of the problem" (p. 176). From a qualitative study, a researcher is able to get a full view of the participant's

perspective on the issues studied, understand the organizational environment in which the volunteers operate, and develop a generalizable interpretation related to the case.

### **Research Questions**

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What obstacles hinder volunteers from accomplishing their organization's mission?
2. How does the leadership of a voluntary nonprofit organization like Sustainable Communities manage and interact with its volunteer membership?
3. Based on the literature review, what best practices are utilized by volunteer-led nonprofit organizations?
4. Based on the data collected, what are the needs of the organization being studied?

### **Description of the Population**

This particular voluntary organization was chosen to be studied because the lead investigator was peripherally aware of the challenges that the organization had with its Indonesian Housing Project. When the organization began to have problems within this project, the lead investigator saw this as an opportunity to learn from the experiences of the volunteers and organization.

For the purposes of this study, the research population consists of individuals from over 200 chapters of a volunteer-led nonprofit focused on international development. Volunteers within this organization are full-time professionals typically ranging in age from 25-50. The majority of the volunteers in this particular research population hold a masters or undergraduate degree in engineering with professional experience ranging from 2-20 years.

In qualitative studies, a sample of the entire research population is analyzed. A sample population consists of a “relatively small selection” (Rowntree, 1991, p. 26) of an entire research population. In this study, the sample population analyzed included volunteers from one particular chapter of Sustainable Communities. Twelve participants were invited to participate in the study. All participants in the study needed to be current members of Sustainable Communities with at least 1 year of experience and involvement in a long-term project within the organization. Participants in the chapter being studied were between the ages of 25 - 40 and approximately 90% are professionals in science or technology-based industries.

### **Presentation to Sample Population**

To recruit the participants in the study, the lead investigator gave a presentation to the leadership team of the Sustainable Communities chapter involved in the Indonesian Housing Project. The lead investigator then contacted the president of the Sustainable Communities chapter to obtain permission for this recruitment presentation (Appendix A). To ensure participation of volunteers in the study, a 10-minute presentation was held at a Sustainable Communities General Membership meeting. This presentation covered: (a) the purpose of this study, (b) the time commitment required for the participants in this study, and (c) the lead investigator’s role in the study (Appendix B). In the presentation to the volunteers, the researcher explained that the purpose of this study was to learn about the volunteers’ experiences as leaders of a volunteer-led nonprofit. The lead investigator also discussed that the interview required about 20 to 35 minutes of the volunteer’s time. At the end of the presentation, the lead investigator asked 8 to 12 volunteers to participate in the study and collected their contact information including

phone number and email address to follow up with them individually for the interviews. Hence, the goal of this presentation was to recruit volunteers to participate in the study.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection was conducted in two phases including interviews with volunteer participants and a review of specific organizational documents. The lead investigator obtained preliminary verbal permission by the leadership of the voluntary nonprofit organization to conduct the research. From this presentation given to the organization, the lead investigator recruited eight volunteers to participate in one-on-one interviews. Additionally, the lead investigator reviewed specific organizational documents that brought forth themes related to the research questions. The following sections provide an overview of the data collection procedures.

**Interview.** An interview with open-ended questions serves as the most basic form of data collection in a qualitative study (Patton, 2002). For this study, the lead investigator developed eight opened-ended interview questions that drew upon themes from the literature review and the main research questions. These questions were analyzed by two independent professionals who hold doctoral degrees with over 20 years of experience in the nonprofit sector and a solid understanding of qualitative statistics. Additionally, the lead investigator conducted a mock interview with a volunteer to test the validity of the questions. The data collected from this mock interview were not used for data analysis nor were they included in the results of the study.

A mock interview and a professional review of the interview questions ensure validity of the data collection instrument (Creswell, 2009; Huck, 2008; Patton, 2002). Validity assures that the instrument being used accurately reflects what a researcher is

trying to measure or study (Huck, 2008). Interview questions that are poorly worded can negatively impact the quality of the research data because they do not bring forth in-depth narratives from interviewees in the study (Creswell, 2009). After the professionals reviewed the questions, they were asked to provide feedback and recommendations for any necessary changes. Based on the responses from the interviewee in the mock interview the researcher made the necessary changes. For example, some questions were altered to become more open-ended resulting in a potential interviewee to more easily elaborate on their experience in the organization. Through the mock interview and professional review, the lead investigator revised the questions accordingly.

**Protocol for interview.** The purpose of conducting interviews is to gather historical organizational information from participants to learn about past events and experiences. For this study, the lead investigator conducted interviews with eight volunteers. Volunteers were given the option of telephone or in-person interviews. All the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by a professional with over 10 years of experience in transcribing recorded interviews. All respondents participating in the interview was informed that their personal information would remain confidential. Additionally, all participants in the study received an informed consent form (Appendix C). Once collected, the informed consent documents were kept in a secured lock box accessible only by the lead investigator. All questions in the interview were asked consecutively and follow up questions were asked for clarification if necessary. Overall, the interviews in a research study serve as a valuable means of collecting rich data about the processes, culture and obstacles the volunteers encounter in a nonprofit as they pursue the organization's mission.

**Organizational documents.** Organizational documents play an important role in qualitative studies by “enabling a researcher to obtain the language and words of the participants” (Creswell, 2009, p. 175). For this study, the lead investigator sent a letter (Appendix D) to request permission from the previous Sustainable Communities president to review a PowerPoint presentation created by the chapter leadership highlighting their perceptions of the factors causing the Indonesian Housing Project to fail. By reviewing the PowerPoint presentation, the lead investigator was able to glean an understanding of the volunteers’ perspective in their pursuit of the organization’s mission. This organizational document was reviewed, providing further explanation surrounding the events and experiences of the volunteers. To summarize the data collection procedures, Table 5 gives an overview of the two methods used in this study.

Table 5

*Summary of Data Collection Procedures*

Data Collection Method	Procedures Included
Interview	The lead investigator used open ended questions and interviewed eight participants. Questions were tested for validity. Interviews were conducted over the phone. All interviews will be audio recorded. Participants signed an informed consent document.
Organizational Documents	The lead investigator gained access to a previous PowerPoint presentation. The lead investigator received consent from the organization to review this document. This document allowed the lead investigator to learn more about the volunteers’ perspectives and organizational history.

## **Data Analysis**

The data analysis process in a qualitative study allows a researcher to interpret and draw conclusions from the information collected. Data analysis for a qualitative study includes several steps: (a) “organizing and preparing the data for analysis, (b) reading through the data, (c) coding the data, and lastly (d) interpreting the data” (Creswell, 2009, pp. 184-189). Once the data was collected for this study, the interviews were transcribed, relevant information from the organizational documents was categorized and field notes from the observation were typed. Table 6 serves as a reference for how the data were analyzed and the research questions that correspond to specific data collection methods and interview questions. Upon completion of the initial analysis, the lead investigator re-read through all the data to determine a general understanding and to interpret general themes from the information collected (Creswell, 2009). Extracting general themes from the data was a part of the coding process.

The coding procedure “involves taking text gathered during the data collection process, segmenting sentences into categories and labeling these categories with a term based in the language of the participants” (Creswell, 2009, p. 186). Some academics think that information should be categorized into predetermined codes whereas others think the information should be categorized into emerging codes (Creswell, 2009; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). For this research, the information was coded into emerging codes, which are themes that become apparent once a researcher starts to analyze the data. The overall purpose of the coding process is to interpret the data, illustrate a description of the organization, and analyze themes from the particular case (Creswell, 2009).

Table 6

*Data Analysis*

Research Question	Research Questions	Data Source	Analysis Method
1	What obstacles hinder volunteers from accomplishing their organization's mission?	Review of organizational documents and review of responses from question 1 through 8 that were relevant to RQ 1.	Coding Process
2	How does the leadership of voluntary nonprofit organization, specifically Sustainable Communities Worldwide, manage and interact with their volunteer membership?	Interview questions 1 and 3	Coding Process
3	As compared with best practices from the literature review, how does the voluntary nonprofit organization being studied oversee their tasks and responsibilities in order to accomplish their mission?	Interview questions 4, 5, 6 and literature review	Coding Process
4	Based on the data collected regarding this organization's strengths and weaknesses, what are the needs of this organization?	Interview question 2 and review of responses from question 1 through 8 that were relevant to RQ 1.	Compare practices of organization from data collected with best practices from literature review

**Coding the Data**

In this study, the lead investigator used the aforementioned coding method to analyze the data collected from the interviews and review of the organizational document



for research questions 1 through 4. This process allows a researcher to categorize the data and then determine the implications of the categories created. The first step in the coding process is to analyze all the data and develop categories for coding (Table 7). The lead investigator reviewed the interview question responses for similarities, highlighting interviewees comments that were frequently discussed. To extrapolate further information from the data, the lead investigator developed sub-categories, highlighting themes within the phenomenon being studied. Through this process emergent categories were developed. Overall, this coding process allows a researcher to discover and link emerging themes (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The themes that emerged from the study will be discussed in Chapter 4 and conclusions will be discussed in Chapter 5.

### **Protection of Human Subjects and Organization**

The lead investigator took necessary steps to ensure protection of the human subjects participating in this study. All participants volunteered to take part in this study. The lead investigator ensured that all participants were aware of their rights and provided them with an informed consent letter and information about the protocol of the interview (Appendix C). The lead investigator made sure that every participant filled out an informed consent form. Additionally, to protect the identity of the organizations involved, all names and locations were changed. The lead investigator also asked the leadership of the volunteer-led chapter to sign a document (Appendix E) stating that they allowed the research regarding the organization to be conducted. To protect the privacy of the participants in the study, only the lead investigator had access to the signed informed consent documents and recordings of their interviews. Overall, these safeguards ensured protection of the participants.

### **Summary of Research Methodology**

In summary, this is a qualitative study using two data collection methods including one-on-one interviews with eight participants and a review of specific organizational documents. Upon completion of data collection, the information was coded and then interpreted. Once this information was interpreted the lead investigator was able to draw conclusions and ask further questions related to the study.

## Chapter IV: Findings and Data Analysis

The purpose of this chapter is to report the results of the data collected from the research study. After reviewing the essential components of volunteerism, volunteer motivation, volunteer turnover, volunteer retention, cultural norms of volunteer-led nonprofits and organizational structures, this study sought to determine best practices of volunteer-led nonprofits. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What obstacles hinder volunteers from accomplishing their organization's mission?
2. How does the leadership of Sustainable Communities, a volunteer-led nonprofit organization, manage and interact with its volunteer membership?
3. Based on the literature review, what best practices are utilized by volunteer-led nonprofit organizations?
4. Based on the data collected, what are the needs of the organization being studied?

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section, data analysis highlights the following: research questions that guided the study, the process used by the lead investigator to code for themes, observations made by the lead investigator and demographic data from the interviewees. The second section reports findings that were discovered by reviewing specific organizational documents. The third section details information regarding the leaders of the organization and their interactions with volunteer members. The fourth section highlights findings related to best practices within the volunteer-led chapter. The last section reports data detailing the organization's needs going forward.

## **Data Analysis**

The following section on data analysis highlights information regarding the coding process, observations from the interviews and demographic data of the interviewees. To maintain confidentiality, when interviewees referred to specific individuals, places or locations, the names were changed or removed to protect all parties involved. Upon completion of the interviews, the lead investigator replayed the tapes and constructed verbatim transcripts of the interviewees' responses. These responses were then arranged in a spreadsheet and grouped together based on interview questions so that the lead investigator could see all the responses to each question.

**Coding for themes.** The lead investigator took several steps to code for themes from the data collected. After transcribing the eight interviews from the audio recordings, the lead investigator provided a duplicate copy to a qualified reader helped review the responses. All the responses from the interviewees were grouped based on the research and interview questions. These responses were then analyzed for content and themes.

During the coding process, the lead investigator noted phrases and words that were common among the different responses. These are highlighted later in the study. The lead investigator and reader spent one week reviewing all the information that had been transcribed from the interviews. The phrases and words that were the most common were then grouped into themes and put into a matrix so that the information could be used later. These aforementioned steps taken by the lead investigator served as a method to code for themes.

***Developing emergent themes.*** Responses from the interview questions that were consistently identified within the response matrix eventually became the emergent themes

for each respective research question. For example, if a majority (five out of eight) of the interviewees had common responses to research question number one then these particular responses became an emergent theme. Alternatively, any responses that were outliers or not congruent with other data were not included in the matrix as emergent themes.

**Lead investigator's remarks regarding the interviews.** The lead investigator had several observations regarding the interviews during this research study. The interviews varied in length from 25 – 45 minutes, which were depended on the communication style of the interviewee. All of the eight interviews conducted over the phone were recorded. All interviewees expressed willingness to participate and answer honestly. Some of the interviewees shared elaborate stories and examples in their responses whereas other interviewees provided answers that were more succinct. During the interview process, all the interviewees were able to answer every question that was asked of them.

**Interviewees' demographic data.** This section highlights the relevant demographic data regarding the individuals interviewed for the study. Eight volunteers were interviewed from one organization for this research study. Four of the volunteers interviewed were male and four were female. The interviewees had volunteered for the organization for 2 to 6 years and all had at least 5 years of professional experience in a science-based profession. All of the individuals that participated in the study were still involved in the organization either as a volunteer or in a leadership capacity at the time of the interviews.

### **Analysis and Findings of the Data**

The analysis and findings for each research question will be discussed in sequence throughout the remainder of this chapter. Research question one focused on the obstacles that hindered the volunteer-led nonprofit organization from accomplishing their mission. Research question two focused on how the leadership of the organization managed its volunteer membership. Research question three highlighted the best practices utilized by volunteer-led nonprofit organizations. Lastly, research question four illuminated the needs of the organization being studied.

### **Theme and Content Analysis**

The lead investigator reviewed specific organizational documents from the volunteer-led chapter and emergent themes from interview questions one through eight with the intention of extracting information related to obstacles that hindered the chapter from pursuing its mission. The particular document reviewed was a PowerPoint presentation with notes developed as a result of the chapter's failed project. The presentation was created by the organization's chapter leaders after the project collapsed. The chapter leadership decided to make a presentation to the community at large so that similar organizations and like-minded volunteers could learn from the chapter's challenges and experiences. Both the lead investigator and reader reviewed the presentation to extract common themes.

**Obstacles identified.** The following provides an overview of the theme and content analysis related to the first research question in the study. Upon reviewing the organizational documents and emergent themes from the interview questions one through eight, the lead investigator determined the following categories and sub-categories of

themes from the organizational documents. These categories and sub-categories highlight the obstacles that hindered the organization from accomplishing their mission. Table 7 highlights the various themes related to research question number one in this study, specifically the obstacles that hindered the voluntary nonprofit organization from accomplishing its mission. These identified obstacles reviewed in the organizational documents are congruent to other findings in studies that analyze challenges in volunteer-led nonprofit organizations (Dutta-Bergman, 2003; Farmer & Fedor, 1999; Herman & Renz, 1998).

Table 7

*Obstacles Identified and Themes from Research Questions #1: What obstacles hinder volunteers from accomplishing their organization's mission?*

Obstacles	Themes
Turnover of volunteers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Loss of information when volunteers abruptly left organization</li> <li>2. Shortage of volunteers to complete the tasks related to the project</li> <li>3. Changes in morale of volunteers</li> </ol>
Transitioning new volunteers into leadership positions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Learning curve steep for new volunteers</li> <li>2. No infrastructure in place to train new volunteers</li> </ol>
Corruption within partnering NGO	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. No system in place for determining credibility of partnering NGO</li> <li>2. Lack of internal communication regarding corruption of NGO</li> <li>3. No guidance from headquarters on how to handle difficult situation or tensions with partnering NGO.</li> </ol>
Scope of project too aggressive for organization's infrastructure	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Scope of project too demanding for the number of volunteers involved in project</li> <li>2. Timeline of project too demanding for the volunteers involved with the project</li> <li>3. Lack of resources to complete project with specified timeline</li> </ol>

**Leadership of organization.** The following provides an overview of the theme and content analysis related to the second research question in the study. The lead investigator asked two interview questions that were designed to identify how the leaders of Sustainable Communities interacted with and managed their volunteer members. The first interview question asked respondents to highlight their leadership role, projects they led, and decisions they helped make. The second interview question asked how volunteer turnover impacted the organization. Responses from the interview questions that had the strongest relevance and richest information related to the research questions are discussed below.

***Theme: Chapter leadership used general membership meetings as a recruitment and retention method.*** Seven respondents shared that the leadership of Sustainable Communities utilized the general membership meetings as a method of recruiting and retaining volunteers. For example, one interviewee shared:

In my viewpoint, the general membership meetings were an opportunity for members of the leadership team to generate commitment from our chapter volunteers. From my recollection, during the meetings, the leadership team recruited volunteers to take on specific responsibilities within our chapter so that we had additional support to move forward and implement our projects. In my opinion, if we could not get commitment from the new volunteers at the general membership meetings then we were not successful in recruiting volunteers.

Another interviewee noted:

The Steering Committee members and project leads played a large role in determining the content for the general membership meetings. As a committee, we spent weeks preparing for each meeting. The meetings were a success if 45-50 members attended and if we left the meetings with determined concrete action steps for new volunteers to get involved. At a typical meeting, our project teams would report on the status of their projects, we would bring in a speaker from the community to lead a discussion on an important topic in our field and we always provided dinner since the meetings were after work. Then after the meetings, there was time for our Steering Committee and project team leads to meet with



new volunteers. Looking back, the general membership meetings were one of the stronger aspects of our organization.

These interviewee responses highlighted the use of general membership meetings as a recruitment and retention method.

*Theme: Lack of trainings for volunteers.* Five respondents shared that there was a need for volunteers to receive more training and guidance from the Steering Committee and national office so that members would be better prepared to serve the organization. It should be noted that while interview questions one and two did not specifically relate to the national office, many interviewees often referred to challenges they had with the headquarters when discussing volunteer turnover.

One respondent shared:

Since we were a new chapter, we needed the national office to provide us with more guidance to accomplish such a large project. It seemed like we always had questions for the national headquarters related to fundraising and managing our relationship with the NGO. I remember it was very difficult to get a prompt response from the national office. Often, we had to wait a week or two to hear back via email and this made it difficult to handle situations that needed immediate attention.

Gosh, I remember when I was in India and the Program Officer from the NGO sent me a cease and desist letter. I was told by --- to get off the property within 48 hours. To my knowledge, this was the first time this had happened to a chapter within the entire international-wide organization at large and it still took the national office a week to respond to my email after I explained what happened. And this wasn't a small matter. We had the largest project in the entire organization. This was a stressful project for us and our chapter needed more guidance from national.

Another interviewee stated:

Soon after I purchased my ticket to the project country, I became the project lead. After becoming more involved in the organization, I then became President. Before taking on this role, I received little guidance from the previous President. He just left. After about a month or so, it became clear to me that I would not have the chance to gather past project information from him. As I started doing work on the ground in the project county, it was also clear that I did not have

adequate experience. I had not been given any information or training related to differences in gender roles and I did not anticipate that being female would cause so much tension in working with the NGO program officer. In hindsight, I think inter-cultural training should have come from the national office. I think that we needed more guidance on how to manage our relationship with the program officer from the NGO, who later turned out to be slightly corrupt. The scope of the project and lack of training caused a lot of stress and tension amongst all the volunteers.

These interviewee responses highlight the lack of training or guidance that was provided for the volunteers.

*Theme: Lack of cohesive structure or procedures.* Five of the eight respondents shared that the steering committee had not developed a cohesive structure or step-by-step procedures to serve as a guide for members within the organization to accomplish the chapter's mission. For example, one respondent explained:

Our chapter did not have the structure set in place to handle the quantity of work that the housing project required. We didn't have enough project team leads given the timeline demands and scope of work related to the project or volunteers to accomplish the tasks that needed to get done.

Another interviewee shared:

During the housing project, our chapter was only a couple years old. As we started to work on our project, it was clear that we did not have systems in place to handle new volunteers or even the ability to delegate the large scope of work that was involved in the Indonesian Housing project. In my opinion, our chapter was too aggressive with our project timeline given our resources and experience. It seemed like project deadlines were set without discussion or strategy.

Another respondent noted:

At the time of the Indonesian Housing Project, our chapter was new and we did not have a strong team dynamic. Our Steering Committee members did not have a shared history of working together. In my view, I think that if more project procedures were set in place, this would have helped us when we encountered specific problems during the project. We did not know how to manage the fundraising efforts or the difficult relationship with our NGO. I think a how-to guide for fundraising would have been helpful. Also, we needed policies that would have aided us when working with less than honest NGO rather than individual judgment calls. I think that guidance from chapter policies and

procedures would have helped our Steering Committee to be a more cohesive leadership body. As I mentioned before, I became very active in another chapter after I moved away and this is definitely a lesson that I took with me and shared with the chapter that I began working with in ---.

These interviewee responses highlight the lack of cohesive structure and procedures within the volunteer-led chapter.

*Theme: Creating a welcoming and committed environment.* Six of the eight explained that the leadership of the organization created a welcoming environment for all the volunteers. One respondent shared:

Once I became more involved in the chapter, I made some strong friendships with others in the group. We had a lot of fun hanging out and getting to know one another. Everyone was really nice and looking to make new friends. I think this is partly why I stayed involved so long. There were a couple of us volunteers that attended the organization's regional and national conferences, which further developed our commitment to the group.

Another respondent explained:

Everyone within the chapter was so committed to completing the project. I think everyone's passion for international development and sustainability ensures follow through within our projects. In addition, the type of volunteers that become involved in our organization are very self-selecting with a high caliber of professionalism.

Another interviewee noted:

Some of the active volunteers on the Steering Committee would coordinate volunteering events, such as Habitat for Humanity day, this was a chance for all the volunteers to get to know one another outside of our project teams. I think that this brought us closer together. I know that the more active leaders wanted to reduce some of the stress within the chapter that was caused by the difficult project and these volunteer social events helped in that way.

These interviewee responses highlight the leadership's focus on creating a welcoming environment for the chapter volunteers.

In summary, the following themes related to research question #2: How does the leadership of Sustainable Communities, a volunteer-led nonprofit organization, manage and interact with its volunteer membership?

- Chapter leadership used general membership meetings as a recruitment and retention method.
- Lack of trainings for volunteers.
- Lack of cohesive structure or procedures.
- Creating a welcoming environment.

**Best practices.** The following section provides an overview of the theme and content analysis related to the third research question in the study. The lead investigator asked three interview questions that were created to identify best practices utilized by volunteer-led nonprofit organizations. The first question asked the respondents to describe the leadership structure of the organization, decision making, and communication process among volunteers. The second question asked the interviewees to discuss how the group's structure influenced the volunteers' ability to pursue the chapter's mission. The third question asked respondents to identify when the volunteers started to become aware of problems within the Indonesian Housing Project. Findings from the interview questions that had the strongest relevance to the research questions are provided below.

***Theme: decision making in organization was participatory and evidence based.***

Six of the eight respondents shared that the leadership of the organization created a culture within the chapter where many volunteers participate in the decision making

process. In addition, volunteers shared that decisions made were often dictated by evidence and information gathered by the volunteer participants. One respondent shared:

At our general membership meetings, we informed all the volunteers about decisions that the steering committee had made. Then, we tried to get the volunteers to help us implement the ideas. We also solicited feedback from all the volunteers so that everyone felt committed to the decisions being made.

Another respondent noted:

I remember that decisions within our organization were typically made in the following way, the President would lead the meeting and bring up topics that he felt were relevant to the chapter and the group members would discuss the topics and come to a democratic vote if a decision needed to be made. Prior to the meeting, the President would solicit feedback from steering Committee members for meeting agenda topics. I remember that the president or secretary would send out an email with decisions made from the meeting soliciting additional feedback if we needed to move forward and some of the more active members were not present.

These interviewee responses illustrate the decision-making processing within the organization.

***Theme: culture of shared leadership responsibility.*** Several participants indicated that the organization had a culture of dispersing or sharing leadership responsibilities among all chapter members. One respondent shared,

Since our chapter was run by volunteers, we really tried to offer everyone the potential of serving as a leader within our organization. Our chapter was only as effective as the number of volunteers we had involved working on our projects.

Another respondent shared:

While President, I always felt that there were so many tasks to accomplish within the chapter that were not even related to our projects. I felt that our organization would be better equipped if we could tap as many volunteers to serve in leadership positions. This way, if someone stopped volunteering, we would not be scrambling to replace the volunteers, we would be able to continue working on our project led by the exiting volunteers and also focusing on the other tasks that needed to get done.

Another interviewee noted:

Being that we were an all volunteer chapter, we tried to delegate tasks to new volunteers so they would feel committed and it was really important that everyone involved took on some leadership responsibility. Otherwise, we were never going to complete the projects that we had taken on with the chapter. We had such an aggressive timeline that we needed all the help from volunteers we could get.

These interviewee responses highlight a culture of dispersing and sharing leadership responsibilities among members within the chapter which relates to the third research question in this study. In summary, the following best-practice themes were discovered as a result of the data collection. These below themes were a result of the third research question, Based on the literature review, what best practices are utilized by volunteer-led nonprofit organizations?

- Decision making in organization was participatory and dictated by research.
- Culture of shared leadership responsibility.

**Needs of the organization.** The following section provides an overview of the theme and content analysis related to the fourth research question in the study To identify the needs of the organization being studied, the lead investigator asked one interview question and in addition reviewed all of the responses from the interviews conducted. Responses from the interview questions that had the most relevant and richest information are provided below in addition to the themes from the data.

***Mechanisms to improve internal communication.*** Six of the eight respondents indicated that the organization needed additional mechanisms to improve internal communication. One respondent shared:

Our chapter did not have any consistent approach to communicating with volunteers. I think that this directly correlates to the fluctuation in our volunteer membership. We sent out e-newsletters once a month but depending on the volunteer in charge, the newsletter may not have been sent out. I do remember

there was more communication among the leadership team when problems arose during the Indonesian Housing Project. We communicated more via email and with some of the members via phone and with the national office. But I wouldn't say that we had one specific strategy for communicating that we always turned too. I think because our chapter was so new, we were still working out these types of internal issues within our organization. The difficulties within the Indonesian Housing Project definitely helped us reflect and work towards fixing our management and communication challenges.

Another respondent stated:

It became apparent that some members were frustrated by the challenges of keeping everyone informed regarding the project. So, we decided to manage our information via an online project management site. The site is for internal members only and allows our chapter to understand what is going on within our project. Also, if more than one volunteer is using the site there is the ability for an online chat option. We are trying to use more web based tools so that everyone up to date, aware of our project status and has access to the same information. In my opinion, this website has helped us improve our communication within the chapter.

Another interviewee noted:

Our Steering Committee members communicated the most during our Steering Committee meetings. In between meetings, we would touch base via email or phone. Sometimes, if we needed to make a decision in between our meetings, someone sent out an email with the problem or decision to be made. The sender would offer a couple solutions so that we all could address the problem or requested feedback if no solution was already created.

These responses highlight the organization's need to improve its internal communication based on the member's experiences as volunteers.

***Theme: Ability to track historical information.*** Five of the eight respondents expressed a need for the organization to have a system of tracking historical information related to their projects and chapter. One respondent shared:

When we encountered problems during the Indonesian Housing Project there was never really a discussion about keeping track of the data. After the project collapsed, it was clear that we needed a system to track information about contacts we had made in the host community, decisions made regarding the project and the rationale behind them or maybe even a "how to guide" for our overall project. While I realize that all these ideas may not be feasible to complete,

looking back it could have been as simple as having every involved volunteer just keeping a simple journal or jotting down notes and emailing them to the president as they worked on the project and encountered anything out of the ordinary.

Another interviewee noted:

When I came in as president, our chapter was in the midst of the managing the largest project in the history of the entire organization. There was so much information that needed to be passed from volunteer to volunteer and we had no real mechanism set in place to accomplish this feat.

Another interviewee shared:

During the Indonesian Housing Project, I don't remember one specific method that we used to track or communicate information about the project or any challenges that we were having with our NGO. When we had meetings, a volunteer member would take notes and email them along to other members in the group. It would have been better if we had created a formal system of sharing our organizational knowledge among volunteers.

These aforementioned responses illustrate the need for the organization to track historical information.

***Theme: More formal infrastructure within the organization.*** Through reviewing the interview transcripts, the lead investigator and reviewer determined that the participants were also expressing a need for the organization to create a more formal organizational infrastructure.

One respondent noted:

As volunteers, we were really committed to the mission and following through with projects that we initiated. I think that our strong commitment may have hindered our success. We had committed to taking on and completing the Indonesian Housing Project. It was difficult for us to be aware of, acknowledge and handle the problems as they occurred within our project since we were so committed to seeing the project through to the end. I do think that a more formalized infrastructure within the organization would have help all the volunteers be more aware of the obstacles that impeding us from building the houses.



Another interviewee shared:

I think a lot of the volunteers working on the Indonesian Housing project got burnt out. We had invested so much time and resources into this project and it just didn't get past the design phase. While the project was happening, we were really focused on finishing the houses and helping the community. We had tunnel vision. I think if our chapter had more policies and procedures in place, we would not have continued on with the project as long as we did.

To reiterate, the above information relates to research question four: Based on the data collected, what are the needs of the organization being studied? In summary, the participants expressed the following needs for their organization:

- Mechanisms to improve internal communication
- Ability to track historical information
- More formal infrastructure within the organization.

### **Summary**

In summary, several key themes were identified related to the research questions within this study. First, the specific obstacles identified that hindered the chapter from completing the project, included: (a) volunteer turnover, difficulties in transitioning new volunteers into leadership positions; (b) corruption of the partnering NGO; (c) an aggressive timeline; and (d) scope of project given the chapter's capacity and infrastructure. Second, there were specific methods that the chapter leadership did or did not employ when leading and interacting with their volunteer members: (a) the chapter leadership used general membership meetings as a recruitment and retention method, and (b) creating a welcoming environment for volunteers. However, neither the chapter leadership nor the national headquarter office provided adequate trainings for volunteers. Furthermore, the leadership did not create structure or procedural methods to complete organizational tasks. Thirdly, in discussing best practices with the volunteers, the

following themes were identified: (a) decision making in organization was participatory and dictated by information gathered from volunteers, and (b) the organization had a culture of sharing leadership responsibilities. Lastly, the needs of the organization included: (a) mechanisms to improve internal communication, (b) ability to track historical information and (c) more formal infrastructure within the organization. Conclusions from this research study and recommendations for forward action steps are provided in Chapter V.

## Chapter V: Conclusions

This chapter provides a summary of the study and important conclusions from the data presented in Chapter IV. Also included in this chapter is an explanation of action steps related to the case studied and recommendations for future studies.

### Overview of the Problem

The lead investigator conducted a qualitative case study to analyze challenges that occurred within a long-term international development project managed by a voluntary nonprofit organization. Across the globe, many long-term social service and infrastructure projects of nonprofits are managed by volunteers who donate their time to provide aid. Many volunteers who manage these projects may not have long-term commitments to the organizations where they volunteer. Typically, voluntary organizations experience a 25% to 50% annual turnover rate among their volunteer membership (Herman, 2005).

Most of the existing nonprofit conceptual and organizational models are more relevant to staff-led rather than volunteer-led nonprofits. Therefore, the problem of turnover is further compounded by the fact that some voluntary organizations utilize structures that do not reflect the inherent characteristics or needs of their volunteers, (McClusky, 2002; Smith & Shen, 1996). Inherent characteristics or social, emotional and financial needs of members within voluntary nonprofit organizations may include: (a) group members' aspirations to make an impact, (b) desire for social interaction, (c) volunteers' aspirations for leadership opportunities, and (d) inclusion in the group decision making process. Overall, a volunteer-led nonprofit depends greatly on its volunteer members to accomplish its mission. This study illustrates that organizational

leaders need to understand conceptual models for voluntary nonprofits in order to meet their members' needs.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study was to: (a) explore obstacles that hinder voluntary organizations from accomplishing their missions, (b) understand the perceptions of volunteer leaders, and (c) identify best practices that enable volunteer-led nonprofit organizations to effectively accomplish their goals. The lead researcher chose a qualitative case study approach to conduct the research. This study investigated Sustainable Communities, a volunteer-led nonprofit organization engaged in a long-term international project that ultimately failed due to significant challenges.

### **Research Questions**

Four research questions guided the study:

1. What obstacles hinder volunteers from accomplishing their organization's mission?
2. How does the leadership of Sustainable Communities, a volunteer-led nonprofit organization, manage and interact with its volunteer membership?
3. Based upon the literature review, what best practices are utilized by volunteer-led nonprofit organizations?
4. Based on the data collected, what are the needs of the organization being studied?

### **Theoretical Frameworks Guiding the Study**

The theoretical frameworks guiding this study included the functional approach to volunteerism (Clary et al., 1992; Clary et al., 1996) and the volunteer process model (Omoto & Snyder, 1995). Provided is a brief overview of each theory and how each can

be applied to the topic of best practices of volunteer nonprofits. The authors of the functional approach to volunteerism theory sought to understand the specific psychological and social needs that volunteers try to satisfy by volunteering. According to Clary et al. (1992), these needs of volunteers include: (a) values, (b) understanding, (c) esteem, (d) career, (e) social, and (f) protective. The *values* function represents volunteers' desires to help others in a meaningful way because of their altruistic beliefs. In addition, the *understanding* function represents the volunteers' interest in expanding their knowledge of the world while the *esteem* function represents the volunteers' desire to feel important. Alternatively, the *career* function corresponds to the volunteers' desire to strengthen their professional skills. Furthermore, the *social* function refers to the volunteers' interest in developing their interpersonal skills and belonging to a social group. Lastly, the *protective* function indicates the volunteers' desire to alleviate or escape from any personal guilt they may hold as a result of their status in society (Clary et al., 1992). Hence, the functional approach highlights the various needs that volunteers hope to fulfill through the act of volunteering. In several studies, researchers found that if volunteers' specific needs were not fulfilled, they would disengage from the organization (Clary et al., 1992, Clary et al., 1996).

The other theoretical framework that the investigator used is the volunteer process model, whose authors Omoto and Snyder (1995) provide a rationale for why members choose to volunteer for a nonprofit. Omoto and Snyder determined that a volunteer's involvement with an organization is divided into three stages: antecedents, experiences, and consequences. The antecedent phase is a catalyst that motivates an individual to volunteer. The experience phase is what "prompts or deters" a volunteer's continued

commitment (Omoto & Snyder, 1995, p. 678). Lastly, the consequence phase refers to how members' volunteering experiences influence their future behaviors and attitudes. Moreover, when the volunteer experience is defined as a process, leaders can then reflect on their members' involvement in the organization. These frameworks guided the lead investigator in determining conclusions related to the study.

### **Research Methodology**

The methodology used by the lead investigator for this study included a qualitative instrumental case study approach. Qualitative research studies have specific characteristics allowing researchers to explore the "complexities and processes of organizations" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 57). In this study, the lead investigator used a qualitative case study because it allowed for: (a) information to be gathered in a natural setting, (b) multiple types of rich data to be collected, (c) an opportunity to learn about past events from the participants' perspective, and (d) the researcher to develop an understanding of a particular phenomenon and provide insights, interpretations, or generalizable theories related to the case being studied (Creswell, 2009; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Furthermore, in a qualitative study, a researcher typically collects multiple forms of data through interviews, observations, and documents rather than depending on one source of data (Creswell, 2009). For this study, the lead investigator gathered data from interviews and organizational documents.

Organizational documents play an important role in qualitative studies by "enabling a researcher to obtain the language and words of the participants" (Creswell, 2009, p. 175). For this study, the lead investigator requested a PowerPoint presentation and supplemental documents created by the chapter leadership highlighting their

perceptions of the factors that caused the Indonesian Housing Project to fail. By reviewing the organizational documents created by the volunteers, the lead investigator was able to understand the volunteers' perspective of pursuing the organization's mission and learned about consistent themes within the organization. The organizational documents that the researcher reviewed offered further explanation surrounding the volunteers experiences.

Additionally, this qualitative study provided the lead investigator with the opportunity to learn about past events from the participants' perspective (Creswell, 2009). In qualitative studies, information is typically gathered through open-ended questions from the participants' perspective. Responses to open-ended questions provide a researcher with "a source of raw data and reveal a depth of emotion" (Patton, 2002, p. 21). Through the collection of this raw data, researchers are able to understand the participants' perspective related to the core issues being studied (Creswell, 2009). For this research, a single case study approach allowed the lead investigator to analyze an issue and formulate interpretations and generalizable assertions about the case. Overall, this instrumental case study approach allowed the lead investigator to interpret the specific case being studied.

### **Review of Data Analysis**

The lead investigator reviewed specific organizational documents and interviewed eight active volunteers from the organization being studied. The organizational documents included a PowerPoint presentation with supplemental notes. This presentation was created by leaders within the volunteer-led chapter and was presented to other organizations interested in international development with the purpose of educating

like-minded individuals based on the volunteers' experiences. Consistent concepts within the organizational documents were put into a matrix and then coded for recurring themes. The interviews with the chapter volunteers included eight open-ended questions. All interviews were conducted over the phone and ranged from 25 - 45 minutes in length. The lead investigator transcribed the interviews for the data analysis process. The transcribed data were then put into a matrix and analyzed, allowing the lead investigator to determine several emerging themes related to the research questions. Findings from the interview questions and organizational documents that correlated with the research questions are discussed below. The themes and findings from the data analysis process include: (a) obstacles that hindered the organization, (b) leadership of the organization, (c) best practices for volunteer-led nonprofit organizations, and (d) needs of the organization going forward. The themes identified within the data analysis correlate to previous research discussed in the literature review and the data collected.

### **Conclusions and Findings related to Literature Review**

The following sections provide a discussion of the themes that arose from the data analysis that closely relate to the two main theoretical frameworks, including the volunteer process model and the functional approach to volunteerism. In addition, the lead investigator provides recommendations that could aid Sustainable Communities in mitigating the various obstacles discovered through the research study.

**Obstacles that hindered the organization.** The lead investigator identified specific obstacles that hindered the volunteer-led chapter from completing its mission, including a lack of resources, volunteer turnover, ineffective internal communication, and a lack of training for volunteers. These obstacles are similar to challenges that other



nonprofit organizations have encountered, which ultimately impact an organization's effectiveness (Herman, 2005; Jamison, 2003; Lynch, 2000; Omoto & Snyder, 1995; Wilson, 2000). Highlighted below are findings from the literature review and this study detailing how these obstacles impede volunteers from accomplishing the mission and goals of an organization.

***Lack of resources.*** A lack of resources within an organization will impact the ability of volunteers to fulfill a nonprofit's mission. Several studies show that nonprofit organizations have limited resources, so it is imperative for volunteer-led nonprofits to be aware of the resources needed to complete a project before committing to it (Herman, 2005; Jamison, 2003; Lynch, 2000). If volunteers believe that they will be unsuccessful in completing project goals then this will lead to a decrease in volunteer morale. Unfortunately, volunteers in Sustainable Communities lacked the necessary resources to complete their project, as Omoto and Snyder (1995) discussed negative experience may deter individuals from continuing to volunteer. Organizations like Sustainable Communities could benefit from developing a project assessment tool to gain an understanding of the necessary resources required to complete a potential project.

***Ineffective internal communication.*** The lack of consistent interaction within voluntary nonprofit organizations impacts the volunteers and ultimately the organization. Within a volunteer-led nonprofit like Sustainable Communities, situations can quickly deteriorate if there is a lack of communication due to the busy schedules of the volunteers, a recurring challenge in volunteer-led nonprofit organizations (Herman, 2005). Studies have found that inadequate internal communication among group members can cause a destructive organizational culture, leading to volunteer turnover

(Appelbaum & Roy-Girard, 2007; Clary & Miller, 1986; Haski-Leventhal & Bargal, 2008; Herman, 2005; Jamison, 2003; Omoto & Snyder, 2002; Wilson, 2000).

Additionally, the functional approach to volunteerism shows that volunteers join an organization to fulfill their social needs, which often go unmet in destructive organizational environments. Organizations like Sustainable Communities could benefit from increasing communication among volunteers and utilizing different technological tools to improve their communication such as an e-newsletter, intranet, or social media applications such as Facebook or Twitter.

**Training.** Training volunteers is a crucial component of a strong volunteer-led organization as it can reduce turnover, build commitment among volunteers, and reduce role uncertainty (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Clary et al., 1992, Clary et al., 1996; Herman, 2005; Wolf, 1999). Training allows volunteers to understand their purpose, gain knowledge about organization's mission and build connections among other volunteers. Furthermore, it is also important to note that international development projects often occur in devastated areas that can bring forth strong emotional feelings and reactions from volunteers; thus, training can prepare volunteers for the emotional or physical burdens they might experience (Bartley, 2007). As studies and the data suggest, organizations like Sustainable Communities will benefit from an increase of volunteer trainings.

**Volunteer turnover.** Volunteer turnover is a common occurrence as most voluntary organizations experience a 25% to 50% annual turnover (Herman, 2005). Unfortunately, many nonprofit organizations operate without the ability to manage the consequences of volunteer turnover (Herman, 2005; Skoglund, 2006). Therefore, when

organizations encounter turnover of volunteers who hold important leadership positions, there may not be an established infrastructure that would allow volunteers to seamlessly continue providing services. Findings from the literature review are consistent with the challenges that Sustainable Communities encountered as a result of its volunteer turnover. Table 8 details themes related to volunteer turnover that emerged from the review of organizational documents and interview responses, which are also consistent with findings in the literature review and theoretical frameworks guiding the study.

Table 8

*Themes Related to Volunteer Turnover*

Obstacles	Themes
Turnover of volunteers	Loss of information when volunteers abruptly left organization Shortage of volunteers to complete the tasks related to the project Changes in morale of volunteers
Transitioning new volunteers into leadership positions	Learning curve steep for new volunteers No infrastructure in place to train new volunteers

**Recommendations regarding obstacles.** Based on the findings of this study and needs of the organization going forward the lead investigator is providing the following recommendations related to the following obstacles: (a) lack of resources, (b) inadequate internal and external communication, (c) lack training, and (d) volunteer retention and turnover. To ensure that the volunteer-led chapter retain volunteers and reduces volunteer turnover, the leadership of the chapter should consider the following:

- *Project management:* A project management tool could help volunteers understand whether their organization has the infrastructure and capacity to complete its stated goals. The project management assessment tool may include:

(a) a timeline required by the local community and timeline assessment determined by the volunteer-led chapter; (b) a budget and resource document including the necessary finances, volunteers, and supplies to complete a project; and (c) an explanation of whether the goals of project are in alignment with the mission or organization. Overall, an assessment tool may help volunteer leaders assess their chapter's resources.

- *Events and internal communications*: Events should occur on a consistent basis so that the leadership of the organization is continually doing outreach for new volunteers and building a community among its existing volunteers. The chapter leaders should create a calendar in advance to schedule social and educational events, general membership meetings, trainings, fundraisers, and steering committee meetings. Planning ahead is beneficial to the organization as it allows volunteers to effectively promote and market their events to the general public. The organization should have an online calendar/e-newsletter and post about upcoming meetings, events, and general information. This tool can aid in the organization's marketing and outreach.
- *Volunteer training and transitions*: New volunteers need to feel connected and committed to the organization as soon as they get involved. One way to bring forth commitment among volunteers is for volunteer leadership positions to have very specific tasks and duties. As role identity theory suggests, volunteers that are provided with clear guidelines in terms of the goals of their position and deliverables are better able to succeed in achieving their tasks. Often individuals may vacate their volunteer positions abruptly, leaving little transition time for

volunteers to transfer their information or knowledge. Thus, organizations need to have either a data management system online or guidebook detailing project information including: organizational and individual contact information with additional information, challenges, budget information, needed resources, project timelines, and important decisions previously made about the project. Most importantly, this information needs to be tracked on a regular basis as it can be too cumbersome for volunteers to provide all this information in a short time period.

- *Volunteer retention:* Organizational leaders should provide quarterly social and educational events for volunteers seeking out these types of opportunities. Social events could consist of volunteer opportunities outside of the organization's typical projects such as Habitat for Humanity days or other community projects. Educational events could consist of education salons, networking opportunities to meet others in the volunteers' profession, or film screenings related to the volunteers' interests. The chapter should delegate the coordination of social and educational events to an individual who serves as the Volunteer Outreach Chair whose specific role is to coordinate social and educational events for the purpose of building commitment and retention among volunteers.

### **Leadership of the Organization**

Through this study, the researcher identified specific themes that were related to how the leadership interacted with the volunteer membership. Below are the relevant themes related to the literature and findings from the data collection in the study.

**Creating a welcoming environment.** Volunteers often join organizations to belong to a social group and develop new relationships; therefore, it is important for nonprofit members to create a welcoming environment so that volunteers will stay engaged in the organization (Brown & Zahrly, 1989; Clary et al., 1992; Ziemek, 2005). If volunteer-led nonprofits do not provide opportunities for social interaction, then group members who joined to gain friendships and network for potential job opportunities will likely disengage. Moreover, volunteers want to feel valued for their hard work and dedication. If leaders of organizations do not recognize their volunteers, members will feel undervalued and most likely find other volunteer opportunities where they feel valued (Wilson, 2000). In speaking with the individuals from Sustainable Communities, it was clear that the organizational leaders created a welcoming environment by arranging social events, having one-on-one conversations with new volunteers, and planning volunteer recognition events. Overall, these efforts by the volunteers aided in retaining group members and developing commitment among individuals in the organization.

**Lack of cohesive organizational structure.** As discussed in the literature review, organizational structure provides group members with a framework to understand: (a) relationships among individuals in the organization, (b) levels of management and leadership, and (c) direction of communication (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Ghiselli & Siegel, 1972; Kushner & Poole, 1996; Mintzberg, 1983; Papadimitriou, 2002; Porter & Lawler, 1965; Robbins, 2004). Since structures are a means to manage an organization's day-to-day operations, leaders of organizations must utilize structures that bring forth "consistency and harmony" (Mintzberg, 1983, p. 3) and coincide with the organization's environment, size, complexity of tasks, skills of group members, and identities of

members (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Ghiselli & Siegel, 1972). The goal of aligning an organization's structure with its environmental characteristics accomplishes the objective of coordinating group members' interactions and managing organizational goals. If an organization's structure improves group morale, then the organizational environment will help the group members accomplish the organization's goals (Bolman & Deal, 2003).

During the interviews, the lead investigator discussed various aspects of the organization's structure with the volunteers. From their responses, it was evident that the organization's lack of a cohesive structure prevented them from accomplishing their intended group mission. The group could have benefited from a more cohesive structure.

**Recommendations for leadership of the organization.** To ensure that the leadership of the volunteer-led chapter can overcome challenges due to a lack of cohesive structure or procedures. The chapter leadership should consider developing a committee structure so that individuals in the organization understand their purpose and tasks and have the ability to manage day to day operations. Table 9 outlines the lead investigator's suggested committee structure. To ensure shared responsibility, each committee chair should also serve on the chapter's Steering Committee and have an equal vote in making decisions for the organization. Each chair and leadership position should have a 1 ½ year term limit, which will allow ample time for the volunteers to learn their roles and recruit additional volunteers to replace chair position. In addition, each committee should develop policies and procedures as they relate to the tasks they oversee, or the committee chairs should communicate with the national headquarters staff to request specific information related to their tasks that already exists. This additional information will be important when a volunteer needs to leave his/her position in the middle of a term.

Moreover, since there is not one uniform organizational structure across all 300 Sustainable Communities chapters, this suggested structure can serve as one method to improve their cohesiveness as an organization.

Table 9

*Best Practices: Organizational Structures for Volunteer-Led Chapters*

Committee/ Positions	Tasks and Functions
Fundraising Committee	<p>The purpose of the Fundraising Committee is to oversee the chapter's overall fundraising efforts. To accomplish this, the committee's responsibilities are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish a fundraising plan that is in alignment with the chapter's project goals and incorporates appropriate fundraising vehicles (e.g. special events, grants, corporate sponsors)</li> <li>Monitor fundraising efforts to be sure that ethical practices are in place, that donors are acknowledged appropriately, and that fundraising efforts are cost-effective.</li> </ul>
Events Committee	<p>The purpose of the Social Events Committee is to oversee the social and educational events for the chapter with the goal of improving retention rates and building commitment amongst volunteers within the chapter. To accomplish this goal, the committee's responsibilities are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plan and organize social/education events that are in alignments with the mission and goals of the chapter</li> </ul>
Finance Committee	<p>The purpose of the Finance Committee is to monitor the chapter's budget. The Finance Committee tasks should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To assist the Treasurer in preparation of the budget, to help develop appropriate procedures for budget preparations and assure consistency between the budget and the organization's plans.</li> <li>To report to the Steering Committee any financial irregularities, concerns or opportunities.</li> <li>To recommend financial guidelines to the Steering Committee regarding upcoming projects</li> </ul>

*(table continues)*



Committee/ Positions	Tasks and Functions
Training Committee	<p>The purpose of the Training Committee is to ensure that new volunteers and active volunteers taking on leadership positions understand their roles in regards to the overall mission/goals of the organization. To accomplish this purpose, the committee's responsibilities are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coordinate with the National Headquarters office to receive information regarding annual training and conferences</li> <li>Collaborate with National Headquarters office to create General Orientation for chapters which could include handbook for new volunteers, 1 – 2 hour training held two times a year for volunteers.</li> <li>Recruit volunteers from chapter to attend annual conferences</li> <li>Provide overview of organization, mission, goals and committee structure at monthly general membership meetings</li> <li>Provide question and answer session at General Membership meetings for new volunteers</li> </ul>
Projects Committee	<p>The Projects Committee exists to ensure that current projects and potential projects align with the chapter mission and goals and are completed within an appropriate time frame. Typical responsibilities for the Projects Committee should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Oversee pre-assessment process for new projects ensuring that the chapter has the organizational capacity, resources, volunteers and time to complete the project.</li> <li>Recruit volunteers to participate in project committees.</li> <li>Development of specific committees related to projects.</li> <li>Communicate with project leads and National Headquarters regarding challenges/current status of projects.</li> <li>Serve as the liaison between chapters and partner NGO in the project country.</li> <li>Track project information on an e-database such as Google Documents or other software program available to all volunteers.</li> </ul>

*(table continues)*

Committee/ Positions	Tasks and Functions
Nominations/ Development Committee	<p>The Nominations is responsible for the general affairs of the Chapter's committees. Tasks may include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recruitment for Committee Chair positions and committee members</li> <li>Develop and promote information regarding committee descriptions and committee positions to the general public and volunteers within the chapter</li> <li>Assist with transition of new volunteers in committee positions</li> <li>Work with committee to develop policies and procedures for each committee</li> </ul>
President	<p>The President is responsible for the overall leadership of the organization. Tasks include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Oversee the Steering Committee meetings</li> <li>Facilitate the process of making decisions and strategic plans for the organization</li> <li>Organize the general membership meetings</li> </ul> <p>The Vice-President is responsible for being second in command if the President is not available. Tasks for the vice-president include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Manage and ensure that Committee chairs and members are actively fulfilling their goals</li> <li>Communicate with the national headquarters</li> </ul>
Vice-President	<p>The Vice-President is responsible for being second in command if the President is not available.</p> <p>Tasks for the vice-president include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Manage and ensure that Committee chairs and members are actively fulfilling their goals</li> <li>Communicate with the national headquarters</li> </ul>

### **Best Practices for Volunteer-led Nonprofit Organizations**

As discussed in the literature review, shared leadership is one type of organizational structure used to disperse responsibility and ownership of a group's mission among group members (Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003; Pearce, 2004; Pearce & Conger, 2003; Pearce & Manz, 2005; Spillane, 2005; Yukl, 1994). By distributing responsibility, shared leadership gives group members the autonomy to make decisions even if they are working independently on a project (Burke et al., 2003). In a volunteer-

led nonprofit like Sustainable Communities that has members traveling abroad to work on projects, some volunteers may need to make decisions independently if they are working alone, necessitating a certain degree of autonomy. During the interviews, respondents explained that the chapter utilized a shared leadership approach in dispersing responsibilities among their volunteers. Volunteers also shared that this approach was one strategy they used in handling volunteer turnover.

### **Interesting Findings from the Interviews**

Of note, there was an additional interesting topic discussed during the interviews that the lead investigator had not intentionally set out to research. Several volunteers discussed the challenges they encountered with the national headquarters offices of their organization including: (a) lack of oversight or training from national headquarters staff for local chapters, (b) delayed communication from national headquarters staff, and (c) a lack of visible presence in overall leadership. Many volunteers felt that these challenges impacted their ability to accomplish the organization's tasks.

### **Future Research**

Based on the findings collected from the research methodology and the recommendations presented there are additional areas of research that could be conducted explored to improve the best practices of volunteer-led nonprofit organizations. One specific area for additional research includes the relationship and support between a national headquarters and its affiliate chapters. Findings showed that the relationship between the chapter and the national headquarters could have been improved, which would have helped the chapter volunteers complete their overall mission. The volunteers felt that they needed more support from the national headquarters staff and it was evident

that the national headquarters did not have the organizational capacity to provide enough support and guidance to all of their chapters. This additional research topic could provide additional information regarding best practices for leaders of volunteer-led nonprofits.

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## APPENDIX A

### Interview Questions

1. Describe your participation in Sustainable Communities Worldwide including your leadership role, time involved in the organization, projects you have led or assisted with and important decisions you had helped make within the organization.
2. How does volunteer turnover impact your organization?
3. What systems or procedures exist within your organization to handle transitions when volunteers join or leave the organization?
4. How would you describe the leadership structure of your organization? In what ways has your organization's structure influenced your group's pursuit of the organization's mission?
5. What is the decision making process for the organization?
6. How do volunteers communicate with one another in the organization when making decisions?
7. During your involvement in the Indonesian Housing Project, when do you first realize there was a problem?
8. Does your organization's structure hinder or help volunteers in communicating the problems with the project?

#### **Definition of Terms:**

*Organizational Structure:* Organizational structures refer to the way in which “tasks are formally divided, group and coordinated,” (Robbins, 2003, p. 178). Furthermore, organizational structures provide a framework for social interaction within a group as well as a means for group members to understand the flow of information within an organization (Kushner & Poole, 1996).

*Volunteer Turnover:* Volunteer turnover refers to the occurrence of members leaving an organization due to dissatisfaction, unmet expectations or other obligations (Jamison, 2003).

## APPENDIX B

## Letter to President of Sustainable Communities Worldwide

First Name, Last Name  
Street Address  
City, State, Zip

To Whom It May Concern,

I am doctoral student at Pepperdine's Graduate School of Education and Psychology studying Organizational Leadership. I am writing a dissertation that focuses on the experience of volunteers as leaders within volunteer-led nonprofit organizations. I have been working in the nonprofit sector for the past seven years and have been a doctoral student studying volunteerism within the nonprofit sector for the past three years.

I would like to conduct a brief ten minute presentation at an upcoming General Membership Meeting to recruit eight volunteers to participate in my dissertation study. At the presentation, I would like to inform potential participants about the purpose of this study, their role in the study and my role as the lead investigator. I am looking to recruit eight volunteers to participate in answering ten open-ended questions. This interview will be recorded and will most likely take twenty to thirty-five minutes of the participant's time. The information provided by your volunteers will remain confidential as will the name of your organization.

Please let me if it will be possible to do this presentation as well as a day and time that works well for your organization.

Thanks,

Leah Weiner

Pepperdine University

## APPENDIX C

## Script for Presentation

Hello,

My name is Leah Weiner and I am a doctoral student at Pepperdine's Graduate School of Education and Psychology studying Organizational Leadership. In addition to my studies at Pepperdine, I currently work in the nonprofit sector serving as the Director of Development for Life Steps Foundation. In this role, I work with my volunteers on daily basis.

I am here today to present to you information about the purpose of my research study and to recruit eight to twelve volunteers from your organization to participate in an one-on-one interview. The purpose of my study is to learn about your experiences as volunteer leaders of a voluntary nonprofit organization. The questions in my interview will focus on your experiences a volunteer, your organization's processes including leadership structure and how you all make decisions. The interviews will be over the phone and recorded. Most likely the interviews will last twenty to forty-five minutes. Your personal information will remain confidential. Please let me know if you are interested in serving as a participant in this study.

## APPENDIX D

## Informed Consent

Please read this consent document carefully before you decide to participate in this study.

**Purpose of the research study:**

The purpose of this study is to learn about the volunteers' experiences as leaders of a volunteer-led nonprofit organization. This proposed research study is being conducted in partial fulfillment for the requirements of a doctoral dissertation at Pepperdine University. The lead investigator conducting this proposed research study is Leah Weiner who is in Pepperdine's GSEP Organizational Leadership program. The study is being faculty supervised by Dr. June Schmieder-Ramirez.

**What you will be asked to do in the study:**

Each participant will be asked a series of 8 questions. Some participants will be asked follow up questions if necessary for clarifications purposes. All interviews will be audio recorded. It is okay if you are unable to answer every question in the interview.

**Time required:**

Twenty five minutes to forty minutes

**Compensation:**

There will be no compensation for volunteering to participate in this study.

**Confidentiality:**

Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. Your name will not be used in any report and your responses will be kept confidential.

**Recording:**

All interviews will be audio recorded. The tapes will be disposed of once the interviewees responses have been compiled into the data collection process. Upon completion of the study, all recordings will be deleted thus destroyed.

**Data Security:**

All forms containing a participant's name will be secured in a lock box. Only the lead investigator will have a key to this secured locked box. Additionally, only the lead investigator will have the personal identification code to access the playback of the interviews. This code will also be kept in the secured lock box.

**Voluntary participation:**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no penalty for not participating.

**Right to withdraw from the study:**

You have the right to withdraw from the study at anytime without consequence.

**Additional Information:**

The only foreseeable risk associated with participation in this study is the amount of time involved in participating in the interview and the chance that reflecting upon experience in the organization may stir up emotions.

**Benefits:**

The benefits of this proposed research study are societal in nature most likely adding to the body of literature regarding this topic. They are no direct benefits to the participants involved in this proposed research study.

**Agreement:**

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the procedure and I have received a copy of this description.

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Lead investigator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Information

Lead investigator: Leah Weiner Email: [REDACTED]  
Faculty Supervisor: June Schmieder-Ramirez E-mail: [REDACTED] Phone  
Number: [REDACTED]

If I have questions about my rights as a research participant, I may contact Pepperdine University  
Graduate and Professional Schools Institutional Review Board (GPS IRB) at [REDACTED] or at  
[REDACTED].



## APPENDIX E

## Letter to President of Sustainable Communities

First Name, Last Name  
Street Address  
City, State, Zip

To Whom It May Concern,

I am doctoral student at Pepperdine's Graduate School of Education and Psychology studying Organizational Leadership. I am writing a dissertation that focuses on the experience of volunteers as leaders within volunteer-led nonprofit organizations. I have been working in the nonprofit sector for the past seven years and have been studying volunteerism within the nonprofit sector for the past two years.

As part of my research, I would like to obtain the following documents: a PowerPoint presentation that was presented in a public forum in 2009 highlighting information about your organization's participation in the Sustainable Communities project.

Please let me know if it will be possible to obtain these documents for my research.

Thanks,

Leah Weiner

Pepperdine University

## APPENDIX F

## Consent to Study Organization

**Purpose of the research study:**

The purpose of this study is to learn about the volunteers' experiences as leaders of a volunteer-led nonprofit organization.

**What the organization will be asked to do in the study:**

A local chapter of Sustainable Communities will provide the lead investigator with access to 8-12 participants for interviews in person or over the phone. Additionally, the chapter leadership will provide access to the lead investigator of a PowerPoint presentation.

**Confidentiality:**

The identity of all participants will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. Any names used in this research paper pertaining to locations, organizations or individuals have been changed. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, all documents with participants names will be destroyed. Only fictitious names will be used in the report.

**Voluntary participation:**

The participation of this organization in this study is voluntary. There is no penalty for not participating.

**Right to withdraw from the study:**

You have the right to withdraw from the study at anytime without consequence.

**Agreement:**

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the procedure and I have received a copy of this description. By signing this document, I agree that the lead investigator has done everything in her power to ensure confidentiality of the organization and will not hold the lead investigator accountable for results of the study.

Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Lead investigator: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_