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**DRIVERS OF ENGAGEMENT FOR VOLUNTEERS IN A NONPROFIT**

**A Research Project**

**Presented to the Faculty of**

**The George L. Graziadio**

**School of Business and Management**

**Pepperdine University**

---

**In Partial Fulfillment**

**of the Requirements for the Degree**

**Master of Science**

**in**

**Organization Development**

---

**by**

**Katherine Bates**

**August 2017**

This research project, completed by

KATHERINE BATES

under the guidance of the Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the faculty of The George L. Graziadio School of Business and Management in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE  
IN ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT

Date: August 2017

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## **Abstract**

Volunteers represent an important resource to many nonprofit organizations. Keeping volunteers committed and engaged is as significant a goal to nonprofits as keeping paid employees committed and engaged is to for-profit companies. This study identified the factors that affect engagement for two volunteer leadership councils at one nonprofit organization. Engagement levels for 19 volunteers were assessed using a validated survey and 5 participants from each council were then selected for follow-up interviews about factors that affect their engagement. Findings indicated that both councils were similarly engaged in their work at the nonprofit. Meaningful work, intrinsic rewards, desire to make a difference, organizational commitment, attachment to the mission, perceived supervisor support, rewarding interpersonal relationships, extrinsic rewards, challenging work, and other job characteristics increased engagement. Performing disliked activities, unrewarding interpersonal relationships, lack of time to volunteer, and other factors decreased engagement. Practical recommendations and suggestions for continued research are offered.

## **Acknowledgments**

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Engaged employees have consistently been shown to be more productive, profitable, and safe; healthier; and less likely to turnover (Fleming & Asplund, 2007; Wagner & Harter, 2006). A highly engaged workforce has been shown to lead to better business outcomes, including higher customer satisfaction, productivity, and profits and lower employee turnover (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002). An abundance of research exists highlighting the importance of employee engagement on the performance of an organization. Highly engaged employees are the ultimate prize for employers because, simply put, they outperform others (Towers Perrin, 2003). Organizations are keen to understand the factors that impact engagement because disengaged employees can cost organizations millions in lost revenue and profitability, high turnover costs, and theft (Wollard, 2011).

Engagement is defined as “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption” (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, & Bakker, 2002, p. 74). Engagement is driven by several components, including job characteristics (e.g., support from colleagues and supervisors, performance feedback, skill variety, autonomy, and learning opportunities), rewards and recognition, perceived organizational and supervisor support, distributive and procedural justice (Saks, 2006), and personal resources (Albrecht, 2010; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2009a, 2009b). Organizations that are attentive to these factors can help enhance their employees’ engagement.

A highly engaged workforce is not exclusively for private sector companies. Nonprofit organizations also need and want highly committed and engaged workforces,

especially when many rely on the support of volunteers. In 2015, approximately one in four adults (24.9%, 62.6 million people) volunteered 7.8 billion hours, equating to approximately \$184 billion in worker time (Corporation for National & Community Service, 2015). Although the volunteer rate in America has declined from 26.8% in 2011 to 24.9% in 2015 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016), volunteering remains an important activity for Americans (Corporation for National & Community Service, 2015) and likely provides economic value to those organizations that rely on volunteers to function.

Volunteers represent an important resource for nonprofits as they provide critical support to help nonprofits conduct programs, raise funds, and serve clients (Corporation for National & Community Service, 2011).

Volunteerism represents a type of active social participation, which presents nonprofits with the unique challenge of managing goodwill, initiative, and the responsibilities of people who voluntarily choose to take on responsibilities outside their everyday personal lives without any economic reward (Vecina, Chacón, Sueiro, & Barron, 2012). Research indicates 35% of people who register with a volunteer organization leave before the end of their first year, with the average duration of volunteer service around 18 months (Dávila, 2008). Nonprofits potentially face greater volunteer difficulties amid a continued decline in volunteerism in America, decreases in government funding, and increases in the demand for nonprofit services. These conditions heighten the challenges nonprofits face in meeting community demand (Independent Sector, 2016). Thus, one of nonprofits' greatest challenges is ensuring that volunteers remain satisfied and committed enough to fill needed positions in community programs (Cnaan & Cascio, 1998; Okun & Eisenberg, 1992; Omoto & Snyder, 1995; Penner & Finkelstein, 1998; Vecina, Chacón, Marzana, & Marta, 2013).

While workplace engagement among paid employees has become a well-known construct to scholars and practitioners alike (Christian, Garza, & Slaughter, 2011), far less research has been conducted on volunteer engagement (Vecina et al., 2012). The differences between paid employees and volunteers have prompted some researchers to question the applicability of engagement concepts to volunteers (Cnaan & Cascio, 1998; Farmer & Fedor, 2001). Researchers argue that the substantial differences concerning workers' and volunteers' (a) motivations to seek work (Cnaan & Cascio, 1998; Farmer & Fedor, 2001; Vecina & Chacón, 2005), (b) earned incentives for job performance (Farmer & Fedor, 2001), and (c) costs of leaving the work (Cnaan & Cascio, 1998) preclude any comparisons across the two groups. Nevertheless, a few similarities do appear to exist. For example, volunteers, like paid employees, commit time and effort (Vecina et al., 2012), and they work in an organizational context (Chacón, Vecina, & Dávila, 2007). Additionally, volunteers experience both the rewards and the costs present in all organizations (Vecina et al., 2012).

An assessment of volunteer engagement could help nonprofits and other organizations that rely on volunteers to obtain a more comprehensive and integrated understanding of volunteers' overall perceptions of their work and commitment to charitable organizations. Given the various challenges facing them, nonprofits may want to do all they can to engage and retain their volunteers.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to diagnose the engagement levels of two volunteer leadership councils within one nonprofit organization. Two research questions were explored:

1. What is the nature of the engagement of council members?

## 2. What factors affect council members' engagement?

For the purpose of this study, engagement was defined as “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption” (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 74). Engagement levels were assessed using a validated assessment. Interviews were used to uncover engagement drivers. Although study results indicate next steps for enhancing council members' engagement, such discussion and planning fall outside the scope of this research project.

### **Study Setting**

The nonprofit examined in this study was founded in the early 2000s with a mission to empower and educate youth related to financial responsibility. The nonprofit's current list of programs includes its youth and parent financial education, youth entrepreneurship event, community service day, and a young adult awards night. The organization also hosts an annual fundraising gala.

The nonprofit is led by a chief executive officer, who manages much of the day-to-day operations of the business with the support of the board of directors, and parent advisory council (PAC) and leadership council (LC)—collectively referred to as *the councils*. Financial presenters also help support the organization teaching classes during the summer youth financial education institute. Currently, no full-time paid staff members support the chief executive officer in carrying out the organization's day-to-day operations. However, part-time volunteers are brought on board as needed and when available. Between 2009 and 2014 (the last year for which public financial information is available), contributions to the organization have grown approximately 19% per year, while the number of children aged 7 to 18 who have participated in the youth financial education program over the years has totaled approximately 4,000. The present

researcher has had the privilege of being involved with the organization since 2007 as a financial presenter teaching a class on responsible use of credit.

**The leadership council.** The LC, also referred to as the junior board, was created in 2012 to provide upwardly mobile professionals with the opportunity to develop new skills and broaden their professional and personal networks while supporting the organization's mission of youth financial education. Additionally, the LC was created to cultivate new leadership and a pipeline of future board members. LC member roles and responsibilities include but are not limited to: (a) serving as ambassadors for the youth financial education program; (b) raising awareness and visibility of the organization and connecting financial and non-financial (e.g., pro bono skills and services) resources to the organization and its programs; (c) helping host events and activities, including the annual fundraising gala; (d) recruiting new LC members; (e) and helping build the organization's base of community service volunteers.

Three individuals who were hand-selected by the chief executive officer started the LC in 2012. The remaining 12 members joined over the last several years. Total LC membership is 15 professionals from various industries, including finance, marketing and sales, education, and consulting. Two co-chairs act as LC leadership and have the responsibilities of making sure initiatives and projects are completed, goals are reached, and that communication occurs between the chief executive officer and LC members. The LC also has secretary and treasury positions. Two committees—the membership committee and social media committee—also operate within the LC.

All LC members are volunteers and pay annual dues of \$100. Each member also must commit to either sell another \$900 in tickets for the annual fundraising gala or donate the balance. The LC meets monthly via conference call and quarterly in person.

The chief executive officer joins the meetings when time permits. Communication between LC members occurs primarily via email. The LC co-chairs typically deliver organizational updates and requests for assistance from the chief executive officer.

**Parent advisory council.** The PAC also was created in 2012 to (a) increase the engagement of current and alumni parents, (b) recruit children for the summer institute, and (c) grow network of non-financial resources.

The PAC's membership is comprised of 13 dues-paying parents, whose children have attended the financial summer institute. Annual member dues are \$50. The parents are from various industries, including finance, marketing and sales, education, and consulting.

The PAC is led by a chair and co-chair, who report to the chief operating officer. The chief operating officer serves as liaison between the PAC and chief executive officer to assure that initiatives and projects are completed and goals are reached. Other PAC leadership positions include recording secretary, corresponding secretary, treasurer, parent coordinator, new member coordinator, co-community partnership coordinator, political outreach advocate, and social media chair. Four committees—the registration/orientation committee, resources committee, fundraising/philanthropy committee, and membership/recruitment committee—operate within the PAC.

**Engagement levels.** In the spring and fall of 2016, the chief executive officer observed and believed that members across both councils were not motivated. She wanted them to step up, do more, and to take more ownership of their activities. Unmotivated or disengaged volunteers have the potential to adversely affect many facets of a nonprofit organization and undermine service to the target community. Ensuring that



the organization's volunteers are happy and engaged is particularly critical because the organization has no paid staff.

### **Significance and Application**

Researchers have found that job satisfaction and engagement contribute to organizational profitability (Harter et al, 2002; Hewitt Associates, 2004; Keiser, 2000; Towers Perrin, 2008). In general, companies with high employee engagement and satisfaction report higher levels of innovation and customer satisfaction and lower rates of absenteeism and attrition. Within nonprofits such as the study organization, high volunteer engagement may yield stronger investments of personal energy from council members and an improved capability to support organizational operations. Highly engaged council members also may help increase recruitment, thereby increasing the organization's resources for teaching, mentoring, fundraising, and potentially hiring paid staff.

Moreover, the study organization's success depends on the active participation of council members. Understanding what factors promote volunteer engagement can help increase the organization's and each council's efficiency and productivity. This research also adds to the growing body of research on volunteer engagement.

### **Study Outline**

This chapter provided an overview of engagement and explained why high volunteer engagement is critical to the success of volunteer organizations in general and specifically to the study organization. Chapter 2 reviews the literature on nonprofit advisory councils, employee engagement, and volunteer engagement. Chapter 3 describes the methods used in the study. Chapter 4 reports the survey and interview results, and Chapter 5 provides further discussion of the results and the implications of the research.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

The purpose of this study is to diagnose the engagement levels of two volunteer leadership councils within one nonprofit organization, and to determine the factors that affect their engagement. This chapter will provide a review of literature relevant to the study, including a discussion of nonprofit advisory councils and engagement for both paid employees and volunteers.

#### Nonprofit Advisory Councils

An advisory council for a nonprofit is a group of volunteers selected for their unique skillsets, expertise, or access to various resources (e.g., people, funds) that is formed to provide guidance or advice to a board of directors in support of achieving a specific aspect of the nonprofit's mission (Maude & Heap, 1997) and to more effectively govern the organization (McNamara, 2008). Advisory councils may also be formed to bring high status members of a community with influence in to a nonprofit with the aim of attracting funds to the organization. For certain board members, an advisory council may be an effective means of keeping them connected with their experience and expertise to a nonprofit after their term has ended.

**Functions.** Once a need or area of focus has been determined for an advisory council, a nonprofit's board of directors will want to clearly define its role and mission and then empower it to carry out its directive (Maude & Heap, 1997). An advisory council is not part of the board, nor is it a task force encumbered with time-consuming responsibilities. An advisory council is a group whose role is to provide guidance and advice to the board on a specific aspect of the mission and to outline the *what* and *how* of

achieving its directive. The advisory council does not perform any management functions or make management decisions, nor does it have any legal responsibilities.

Advisory councils may be formed to advise nonprofit boards in support of a variety of different aspects of a nonprofit's mission, including but not limited to the development of a new program, expansion or evaluation of a current program, support for a program that is not self-supporting, or establishment of an endowment (Maude & Heap, 1997). For example, regarding the expansion of a current health service program, the advisory council may advise a board on "defining the services to be expanded, how those components will complement the current program, and how the expansion will better serve targeted patients" (pp. 24-26). Implementation of any recommendations would be carried out by other members of the nonprofit.

Advisory councils are important to nonprofit organizations in that they provide a board with specific expertise in areas that advance the nonprofit's mission. For example, a nonprofit may establish an advisory council to secure funding to create a new program (Maude & Heap, 1997). Having an advisory council to focus on a specific area of a nonprofit's mission allows the board of directors to stay focused on the nonprofit's overall mission.

**Staffing.** Members of a nonprofit advisory council are selected because they possess unique skills, expertise, and access to resources in line with its intended directive or objective. Individuals with education and experience or significant interest in the objective of an advisory council are model candidates (Maude & Heap, 1997). Additionally and ideally, these members would have a passion for the mission, ability to work well with others, and can-do attitudes. For example, a New England agency serving homeless and low-income clients wanted to set up a consumer advisory board with the

objective of increasing “the influence of clients in agency and community decision making” (Cohen, 1994, p. 743). The board of directors appointed a program committee to implement this objective. The program committee consisted of members from a social work agency, board members, and social work faculty at local universities. Two members also “had expertise in the field of homelessness, and had conducted an extensive research project involving agency clients” (p. 743).

### **Employee Engagement**

Although a growing body of research has been conducted on employee engagement by academics and practitioners (Shuck, Ghosh, & Zigarmi, 2012), no widely agreed upon definition is currently in use (Shuck, 2011). Academic literature provides a number of different definitions of engagement (Saks, 2006). Kahn (1990), considered one of the academic parents of employee engagement (Welch, 2011), describes personal engagement as “the harnessing of organization members’ selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances” (p. 694). Kahn (1990) identifies three psychological conditions that are needed to bring organization members to their work roles: meaningfulness (relating to an element of work), safety (relating to an element of the social system) and availability (relating to individual distraction). Kahn proposes that employees’ perceptions of these conditions influence their psychological experience of work, which ultimately impacts how much they express themselves through their behavior in their role performances.

Another often cited definition of engagement was developed by Schaufeli et al. (2002), who defined engagement as “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption” (p. 74). Schaufeli et al.

characterized (a) *vigor* as high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one's work, and persistence in the face of difficulties; (b) *dedication* as a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge; and (c) *absorption* as being fully concentrated and deeply engrossed in one's work, whereby time passes quickly and one has difficulty detaching from work. Schaufeli et al. further characterized engagement as "a more persistent and pervasive affective cognitive state that is not focused on any particular object, event, individual, or behavior" (p. 74).

Engagement also has been defined as the opposite of or positive antithesis to burnout (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Maslach et al. suggested engagement was characterized by energy, involvement, and efficacy—the direct opposites of the three burnout dimensions of exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy. Engagement and burnout research conducted by Schaufeli, Bakker, and Salanova (2006) found that the core burnout factors of exhaustion and cynicism were negatively correlated with vigor and dedication.

Saks (2006) extended Kahn's concept of engagement to include both job and organizational engagement, and further suggested social exchange theory could provide insight on why individuals respond to antecedents (i.e., Kahn's psychological conditions) with varying degrees of engagement. Social exchange theory says that if a person does well by others, the others are more likely to do well by him or her (Schneider, Macey, Barbera, & Martin, 2009). This leads to more trusting and loyal relationships and commitments (Saks, 2006). Thus, employees who perceive higher levels of support from their organizations are more likely to respond with greater levels of engagement in their jobs and in the organization. Employees who perceive lower support or unfavorable

treatment from their organization are more likely to feel angry and vengeful and to respond with lower levels of engagement (Shantz, Alfes, Truss, & Soane, 2013).

Macey and Schneider (2008) define engagement using a nomological network that involves three engagement constructs (trait, state, and behavioral) and identifies work and organizational conditions that should facilitate state and behavioral engagement.

Christian et al. (2011) defined work engagement as “a relatively enduring state of mind referring to the simultaneous investment of personal energies in the experience or performance of work” (p. 95). Engagement refers to a psychological connection with the performance of work tasks and includes the self-investment of multiple dimensions of personal resources (physical, emotional, and cognitive) in work investment so that the experience is simultaneous and holistic (Christian et al., 2011; Kahn, 1992; Rich, LePine, & Crawford, 2010).

Towers Perrin (2003) defines engagement as “employees’ willingness and ability to contribute to company success . . . [or] the extent to which employees put discretionary effort into their work, in the form of extra time, brainpower and energy” (p. 1). Further, full engagement requires employees’ sense of mission, passion and pride that motivates them to give that all important discretionary effort . . . as well as the resources, support and tools from the organization to act on their sense of mission and passion” (p. 4), which suggests engagement is two-way in nature.

Robinson, Perryman, and Hayday (2004) state that an engaged employee is one who has a positive attitude towards its organization, an awareness of the business and its operations, and a propensity to work with colleagues to improve performance for the benefit of the overall organization. Robinson et al. also incorporate responsibility on the

part of an organization to cultivate engagement, which suggests a two-way relationship between employer and employee.

Erickson (2005) viewed engagement as

a concept above and beyond simple satisfaction with the employment arrangement or basic loyalty to the employer . . . engagement is about passion and commitment—the willingness to invest oneself and expend one’s discretionary effort to help the employer succeed. (p. 14)

Although numerous definitions of engagement have been provided, the concept of engagement is beginning to converge and may be thought of as high levels of personal investment in the work tasks performed on a job (Christian et al., 2011; Kahn, 1990; Macey & Schneider, 2008; May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004; Schaufeli et al., 2002). For the purpose of this study, engagement was defined as Schaufeli et al. (2002) defined it “a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption” (p. 74), in line with the converging definition of engagement noted above.

**Related constructs.** Within the research, engagement has been associated with other well-known constructs such as job satisfaction, job involvement, and organizational commitment (Maslach et al., 2001). Research conceptualizes that all these elements share similar conceptual space (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Shuck et al., 2012) and proposes that job satisfaction, job involvement, and organizational commitment focus on different factors of the psychological state of engagement (Macey & Schneider, 2008).

Job satisfaction may be described as a state of satiation based on human needs fulfilled by an organization (Erickson, 2005; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Macey, Schneider, Barbera, & Young, 2009; Maslach et al., 2001; Shuck et al., 2012), which is based on an evaluative judgment about job conditions or characteristics (Christian et al.,

2011; Locke, 1976; Rich et al., 2010; Russell et al., 2004; Shuck et al., 2012; Smith, Kendall, & Hulin, 1969; Weiss, 2002). Rich et al. (2010) note that engagement differs from job satisfaction in that rather than being a state of contentment, engagement “reflects the simultaneous investment of cognitive, emotional, and physical energies in such a way that one is actively and completely involved in the full performance of a role” (p. 622). Job satisfaction does not capture this relationship an individual has with the work itself (Maslach et al., 2001). Wollard (2011) proposed:

satisfaction is a much lower threshold than engagement, employees can be satisfied with a job because it pays the bills and is close to home but that does not guarantee that they are physically, mentally, and emotionally invested in the organization’s success, the hallmarks of employee engagement. (p. 527)

Recently, research has provided some empirical evidence supporting this distinction, although findings vary. Saks (2006) found that job and organization engagement predicted job satisfaction, while Macey and Schneider (2008) determined satisfaction and engagement were correlated and proposed satisfaction was a component of engagement.

Researchers most often define job involvement as a person’s psychological identification with his or her work or job (Cooper-Hakim & Viswesvaran, 2005; Kanungo, 1982; Rich et al., 2010; Schaufeli et al., 2002). May et al. (2004) propose job involvement “is the result of a cognitive judgment about the need satisfying abilities of the job, which is tied to one’s self-image” (p. 12). Job involvement represents the degree to which job performance is central to a person’s identity (Christian et al., 2011; Kanungo, 1982; Lodahl & Kejner, 1965). Engagement differs from job involvement in that engagement refers to how individuals employ themselves in the performance of their work roles (May et al., 2004). Moreover, engagement involves the active use of emotions



and behaviors in addition to cognitions. As compared to job involvement, engagement represents a more complex and thorough construct regarding an individual's relationship with work (Maslach et al., 2001). There is agreement among researchers that engagement and job involvement share the same conceptual space (Harter et al., 2002; Macey & Schneider, 2008; May et al., 2004; Saks, 2006), as well as the premise that they are distinct constructs. Research by Hallberg and Schaufeli (2006) found work engagement and job involvement to be empirically distinct constructs. May et al. (2004) suggested engagement could be considered an antecedent to job involvement in that individuals who experience deep engagement in their roles should come to identify with their jobs.

Organizational commitment has been most commonly defined as a person's attachment or attitude towards an organization as a whole (Brooke, Russell, & Price, 1988; Christian et al., 2011; Saks, 2006; Maslach et al., 2001) that results from shared values, goals, and interests (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002; Mowday, 1998). Organizational commitment also encompasses an individual's willingness to exert energy in support of the organization, to feel pride in being an organizational member, and to have personal identification with the organization (Saks, 2006). Engagement differs from organizational commitment in that it represents perceptions based on the work itself, unlike organizational commitment, which is focused on the organization (Maslach et al., 2001). Engagement is not an attitude like organizational commitment, but rather a construct that represents the degree to which an individual is attentive and absorbed in the performance of their roles (Saks, 2006). Engagement is also a broader construct in that it involves a holistic investment of the entire self in terms of cognitive, emotional, and physical energies (Christian et al., 2011). Research also suggests engagement and organizational commitment are distinct

constructs. Research by Hallberg and Schaufeli (2006) indicated that work engagement and organizational commitment are empirically distinct constructs. Macey and Schneider (2008) proposed organizational commitment was a component of state engagement.

Understanding the relationships between engagement and job satisfaction, job involvement, and organizational commitment is important when considering what is being measured and what measurement or tool is most appropriate.

**Importance.** A review of the literature reveals employee engagement is important for several reasons and benefits both organizations and their employees. Significant attention has been given to the relationship between engagement and an organization's bottom-line. Harter et al. (2002) conducted a meta-analysis of 7,393 business units and found a significant relationship existed between employee engagement and improvements in customer satisfaction, productivity, profit, employee retention, and safety, which ultimately would lead to better business results. Similarly, in a study of 50 global companies over a 1-year period, Towers Perrin (2008) found that the companies with high employee engagement had a 19% increase in operating income and almost a 28% growth in earnings per share. Conversely, companies with low levels of engagement saw operating income drop more than 32% and earnings per share decline over 11%. In a 3-year longitudinal study of 40 companies, Towers Perrin found a spread of more than 5% in operating margin and more than 3% in net profit margin between the companies with high employee engagement and those with low engagement. Companies that are able to better engage their people also deliver better business performance. Hewitt Associates (2004) found employee engagement was 20% higher at companies achieving double-digit growth compared with single-digit growth companies. Buckingham and Coffman (1999) of the Gallup Organization found that business units with a heavily

committed workforce outperform business units with a less committed workforce (Keiser, 2000). Disengaged workers can cost for-profit companies millions in lost productivity and profits. In 2013, Gallup indicated that actively disengaged employees cost the U.S. economy \$450 billion to \$550 billion in lost productivity per year (Sorenson & Garman, 2013).

Research on the benefits of employee engagement indicates engagement may result in positive health and positive feelings towards work and organization. Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter, and Taris (2008) proposed that engaged employees often experience positive emotions, including happiness, joy, and enthusiasm and experience better psychological and physical health. Additionally, engaged employees create their own job and personal resources (e.g., support from others) and transfer their engagement to others. Gallup (2006) found engaged employees felt more creative and were more likely to feed off the creativity of their colleagues, suggesting idea generation among engaged employees could be amplified in a team setting.

**Antecedents to engagement.** A review of the literature indicates there are two groups of primary antecedents to engagement: job resources and personal resources. Job resources refer to those physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that (a) reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs; (b) are functional in achieving work goals; or (c) stimulate personal growth, learning, and development (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Bakker et al., 2008; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Job resources enhance engagement because they foster employees' growth, learning, and development (relating to intrinsic motivation) and because they are instrumental in achieving work goals associated with extrinsic motivation (Bakker et al., 2008).

Examples of job resources include job characteristics, rewards and recognition, perceived organizational and supervisor support, and distributive and procedural justice (Saks, 2006). Research has demonstrated that job characteristics such as autonomy, skill variety, social support from colleagues and supervisors, performance feedback, and learning opportunities have been consistently and positively associated with work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2007). Collectively, these characteristics promote experiences of meaningfulness, and individuals who experience meaningfulness tend to feel worthwhile, useful, valuable, and able to give themselves to their work role and to others (Kahn, 1990; Rich et al., 2010).

Meaningfulness underlies meaningful work, which Steger, Dik, and Duffy (2012) characterize as a psychological state comprised of the following elements: psychological meaningfulness, meaning making through work, and motivations for the greater good. Other researchers define meaningful work as job and other workplace characteristics that facilitate the attainment or maintenance of one or more dimensions of meaning (Fairlie, 2011), where meaning entails issues of “life meaning, purpose, and coherence” (Ryff, 2000, p. 132). Common dimensions of meaning include having a purpose or goals, living according to one’s values and goals, autonomy, control, challenge, achievement, competence, mastery, commitment, engagement, generativity or service to others, self-realization, growth, and fulfillment (Fairlie, 2011). Kahn (1990) linked meaningfulness to engagement, noting that “people vary their personal engagements according to their perceptions of the benefits, or the meaningfulness, and the guarantees, or the safety, they perceive in situations” (p. 703). Work becomes meaningful as employees feel that they are receiving a return on their invested energies. Additionally, it is important that “individuals are able to clearly see the impact of their work; therefore, work tasks must

be viewed as valued, useful, and worthwhile by the individual, organization, and leader” (Serrano & Reichard, 2011, p. 180).

The second group of primary antecedents relates to personal resources. Personal resources are positive self-evaluations that are linked to resiliency and refer to individuals’ sense of their ability to control and impact their environment successfully (Hobfoll, Johnson, Ennis, & Jackson, 2003). Personal resources enhance engagement through higher intrinsic motivation to pursue goals, which triggers higher performance and satisfaction (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008; Luthans & Youssef, 2007). Examples of personal resources include self-efficacy, optimism, resilience, hope (Bakker, Albrecht, & Leiter, 2011; Serrano & Reichard, 2011), and organizational-based self-esteem (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2007).

Research conducted by Xanthopoulou et al. (2009b) found that personal resources appear to connect job resources with engagement and, in turn, with performance. Additionally, Xanthopoulou et al. (2009b) have shown that job and personal resources are mutually related and that personal resources can be independent predictors of work engagement. Thus, employees who score high on optimism, self-efficacy, resilience, and self-esteem are well able to mobilize their job resources and generally are more engaged in their work (Bakker, 2011).

The factors that have been shown to decrease engagement are situational factors that are in opposition to job and personal resources. For example, Maslach et al. (2001) found that a lack of social support is linked to burnout and, more importantly, lack of support from supervisors compared to support from coworkers. Kahn (1990) found that managerial reluctance to loosen their control sent a message that their employees were not to be trusted and should fear overstepping their boundaries. That fear was

compounded when managers were unpredictable, inconsistent, or hypocritical. A perceived lack of organizational and supervisor support may decrease a person's level of psychological safety and decrease their level of engagement. Lack of feedback and lack of participation in decision making also have been linked to burnout (Maslach et al., 2001). Lack of autonomy also is correlated with burnout, although the strength of the relationship is weaker (Maslach et al., 2001).

### **Volunteer Engagement**

Much less research has been conducted on volunteer than worker engagement (Vecina et al., 2012), and differences in several factors between paid employees and volunteers have prompted some researchers to question whether engagement concepts based on paid employees apply to volunteers (Cnaan & Cascio, 1998; Farmer & Fedor, 2001). Volunteers are distinct in that they are motivated by service or social needs rather than material, calculated, or instrumental motivations (Cnaan & Cascio, 1998; Farmer & Fedor, 2001; Vecina & Chacón, 2005); volunteers are not compensated economically with a salary or bonus and thus cannot be motivated by economic rewards or sanctions (Cnaan & Cascio, 1998); volunteers can leave at-will without the concerns of where their next paycheck or health benefits are coming from; and most volunteers only work a few hours a week, meaning that compared to full-time employees, organizational colleagues and environments have relatively less impact on them. Rarely are volunteers held to performance standards or receive performance appraisals (Farmer & Fedor, 2001), so there's no incentive for them to do a job well, and some may set aside an organization's norms and values for their own because they are not being paid to do the job (Fagan, 1986).

In the volunteering field, it has been suggested that engagement could be better conceptualized as the experience of the work activity, rather than a behavior driven by connection with the work role (Tims, Bakker, & Xanthopoulou, 2011; Vecina et al., 2012). As such, most research on volunteer engagement has focused on the following related concepts: organizational commitment, satisfaction, and intention to remain (Vecina et al., 2012). Research has demonstrated that satisfied volunteers contribute more in terms of hours and donations (Farmer & Fedor, 2001), and they are more likely to remain as volunteers in the short term (Chacón et al., 2007). Volunteers who feel more committed to an organization and who have developed a role identity about being a volunteer also are more likely to continue volunteering (Dávila & Chacón, 2004; Grube & Piliavin, 1996; Piliavin & Callero, 1991). Less satisfied volunteers may reduce their contributions (i.e., hours and donations) to an organization (Farmer & Fedor, 2001) or may simply leave with little to no recourse.

Research has shown that organizational commitment and satisfaction share a similar conceptual space with engagement but are, in fact, distinct constructs that relate to different aspects of engagement (Saks, 2006; Shuck et al., 2012). Intention to remain is of particular interest to volunteer research as it has been shown to predict duration of service, which is a key outcome for volunteer organizations (Chacón et al., 2007). As Farmer and Fedor (2001) point out, volunteer administrators appear to believe that volunteers will contribute something to the organization as long as they stay, and that some effort is better than none. Thus, it is reasonable to theorize that never-ending duration of service (permanence) would be the ultimate objective of organizations that rely on volunteers (Vecina et al., 2012). Permanence would mean that (a) volunteers

enjoy their experience, (b) recipients receive the sustained help they need, and (c) organizations manage the process effectively.

Volunteers, like paid employees, perform work activities to which they commit time and effort (Vecina et al., 2012) and, more importantly, do so in an organizational context (Chacón et al., 2007). Kirsh, Hume, and Jalnodon (1999) went further to note that “most volunteers (perhaps as high as 85 percent) work as part of an organization” (p. 449). Moreover, some “volunteers work for the same organizations, in the same structured roles, with some of the same people, often for years” (Grube & Piliavin, 2000, p. 1108). According to some authors (Chacón & Vecina, 2002; Grube & Piliavin, 2000; Penner, 2002), most research on volunteers remains focused on the individual and has largely ignored the fact that most volunteering takes place within organizations (Hidalgo & Moreno, 2009). While volunteers do not receive pay for the work they do, similar to paid employees, volunteers experience both the rewards and the costs present in all organizations (Vecina et al., 2012).

Although there are notable differences between volunteers and paid employees, the two share similarities with respect to organizational context. Further, a review of the literature reveals similarities in the antecedents to engagement (e.g., job characteristics, rewards and recognition, perceived organizational and supervisor support, distributive and procedural justice, personal resources) for both volunteers and paid employees. Cnaan and Casio (1998), Gidron (1985), and Lammers (1991) found that variables including task achievement (related to job characteristics), relationships with other volunteers (related to job characteristics), and the work itself best discriminated between those volunteers who stay and those who leave their jobs. Spitz and MacKinnon (1993) found that Big Brother-Big Sisters volunteers who completed the expected period of



service scored higher on intelligence, imagination, self-assurance (related to personal resources) and trust (Cnaan & Cascio, 1998). McGee (1988) suggested that recognition and symbolic incentive awards (related to rewards and recognition) can improve morale and productivity among volunteers (Cnaan & Cascio, 1998). Vecina, Dávila, and Chacón (2005) found that, compared to volunteers who left before finishing their first year, those volunteers who remained working after 6 years evaluated their tasks as having better defined objectives (related to perceived organizational and supervisor support) and that the tasks were less repetitive, more significant, and more useful to others (related to job characteristics). Other research demonstrated that social networks (related to job characteristics), organizational support (related to perceived organizational and supervisor support), positive task (related to job characteristics) and training (related to perceived organizational and supervisor support) are highly significant predictors of the intention to remain a volunteer (Hidalgo & Moreno, 2009). Review of other literature suggested two kinds of organizational variables should have an impact on volunteerism: (a) an individual member's perceptions of and feelings about how he or she is treated by the organization (related to perceived organizational and supervisor support), and (b) the organization's reputation and personnel practices (related to distributive and procedural justice; Penner, 2002).

As previously discussed, research on paid employee engagement found job demands (e.g., work overload, emotional demands) may lead to exhaustion and burnout, the opposite of engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Organizations employing volunteers also make job-related demands of their volunteers. Volunteers are prone to contribute less to organizations whose demands for time and effort exceed what the volunteer is willing to give (Farmer & Fedor, 2001). Farmer and Fedor (2001) found that

these volunteers contributed less to an organization in the form of fewer hours worked per month and lower donations, and were rated lower in overall contribution by executive directors. Snyder and Omoto (1992) found that despite having engaged in satisfying and rewarding volunteer work, volunteers who left the organization said they felt that volunteering had taken up too much time.

Further linking volunteer with paid employee engagement, research conducted by Vecina et al. (2012) shows that engagement does significantly explain both satisfaction and organizational commitment for volunteers. Further, volunteer engagement could be understood as vigor, dedication, and absorption, as defined by Schaufeli et al. (2002), and that volunteer engagement is a relevant variable for explaining the popular volunteer constructs of satisfaction and organizational commitment. In a later study, Vecina et al. (2013) supported previous findings that organizational commitment was related to intention to remain over the long term, and expanded current research to find engagement was related to psychological measures of well-being (i.e., self-acceptance, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth). Further,

it can be stated that if nonprofit organizations wish their volunteers to remain, then there must be a focus on developing a feeling of commitment to organizations, but if they want volunteers to feel positively about themselves and about their lives, then they need to make sure that they feel engaged in what they are doing. In the former, strategies to communicate organizational values, objectives and results can be useful to promote identification. In the latter, designing meaningful tasks and establishing mechanisms to solve problems can make the difference in feeling good. (p. 299)

Keeping volunteers both committed and engaged is of critical importance to nonprofits. If unsatisfied or disengaged with their work, volunteers can leave a nonprofit with very little recourse. High rates of volunteer attrition could be problematic for nonprofits as this can result in costs to the nonprofit in the form of donations, time, and

energy to recruit and train new volunteers, and further puts at risk the provision of services to the communities they serve (Vecina et al., 2012). Given the noted shared similarities in the job and personal resources and cited research, engagement as defined by research based on paid employees should be a reasonable construct by which to determine and measure volunteer engagement in a nonprofit. The present study contributed to existing research as it identified the nature of engagement and engagement drivers for volunteers using a definition of engagement based on paid employees.

Volunteerism is actively and deliberately sought out by many people (Omoto & Snyder, 1995) for a variety of reasons. Some people volunteer to express their personal values or to satisfy humanitarian obligations to help others (Batson, Ahmad, & Tsang, 2002; Clary et al., 1998; Omoto & Snyder, 1995), whereas others are motivated to volunteer due to concern for their communities (Omoto & Snyder, 1995). In their research, Clary et al. (1998) identified six motivational functions for which volunteering serves to satisfy. The motivations to volunteer include the (a) opportunity to express altruistic and humanitarian concerns for others, (b) the desire to learn new experiences, (c) the desire to be with one's friends or participate in activities deemed favorable by important people, (d) the opportunity to gain new skills to prepare for a new career, (e) the desire to reduce guilt about being more fortunate than others, and (f) growth and development.

## **Conclusion**

The literature reviewed in this chapter provided a detailed description of the characteristics of nonprofit advisory councils and discussed the definitions and antecedents to engagement for both paid employees and volunteers. The next chapter describes the methods that were used in the study.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methods**

The purpose of this study was to diagnose the engagement levels of two volunteer leadership councils within one nonprofit organization. Two research questions were explored:

1. What is the nature of the engagement of council members?
2. What factors affect council members' engagement?

This chapter describes the methods used in the study. The research design is presented first, followed by an overview of the research setting and description of participant recruitment procedures. Confidentiality and consent procedures are then outlined and the procedures for collecting and analyzing data are described.

#### **Research Design**

This study utilized a mixed method research design. Mixed method designs combine both qualitative and quantitative research approaches, allowing for the leveraging of strengths of both approaches while mitigating their respective weaknesses (Punch, 2014). The result is a blend of rich accounts with quantifiable measurements. Quantitative research can provide the hard factual data that can identify trends and facilitate comparisons, while qualitative research brings sensitivity, meaning, and context. Mixed method approaches also can be better suited for smaller sample sizes. Qualitative research additionally allows for more flexibility in questioning participants.

#### **Background of the Setting**

In a May 2016 discussion between the researcher and the study organization's chief executive, the executive speculated that the LC was not motivated. She provided examples such as failure to adequately plan the first young adult awards event (the event

was rescheduled twice and she ultimately took a more active planning role), being delinquent on annual dues, and not fulfilling their fundraising commitments for the annual gala. She wanted them to take initiative, take ownership of their responsibilities and activities, and simply do more.

Two months later, the executive leader voiced similar concerns about the PAC. She noted their failure to plan their own signature event for parents (it never got off the ground) and being delinquent on annual dues. She additionally noted that volunteers across both councils neglected to adequately leverage their non-financial resources, did not advocate for the organization enough, failed to adhere to their council bylaws, relied too heavily on her for information and to get things done, and unnecessarily included her on communication to “keep her in the loop.”

The lack of volunteer engagement was both intriguing and concerning to the researcher, as the councils were quite different in numerous aspects, yet apparently shared a lack of motivation. This was even more concerning because the two councils constitute the executive’s primary form of support for certain organizational activities such as award ceremonies, children’s events, education workshops, flagship summer youth programs, and the financial education institute. The councils also are responsible for fundraising for the organization. It follows that disengaged volunteers have the potential to significantly and adversely affect organizational operations and the organization’s ability to serve its community. Moreover, requiring the chief executive to carry out the organization’s operations (e.g., planning events) limits her ability to focus on her primary responsibilities of developing relationships and securing donations. The alternative of simply not holding events potentially limits the organization’s ability to achieve its mission and decreases its opportunities to engage and build relationships with

its community. Ensuring that volunteers are happy and engaged is critical to the study organization given its reliance on these volunteers for operation.

### **Participant Selection**

The research population consisted of all the volunteer members of the study organization's two councils (n = 28). All volunteer members were contacted electronically using a recruitment email (see Appendix A) and were invited to participate in the online engagement survey. The recruitment email outlined the study purpose, described the study (including the survey and interview), and the nature of participation.

From all participants, the researcher selected five members from each council by randomly pulling names out of a hat and invited them to participate in a follow-up interview to obtain further details on specific engagement drivers. Prospective participants were sent a follow-up email notifying them that they were selected and a request was made to schedule an interview time. One member from each council declined participation in the interview and was replaced using the random selection and invitation procedure.

### **Confidentiality and Consent Procedures**

The study was conducted within the oversight of Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board. The researcher completed the human subjects training requirement on September 24, 2015. The study was approved to proceed on June 1, 2017.

Several measures were taken to ensure participants' identities were protected: each participant was assigned a pseudonym, personal identifiers were removed during transcription of the interviews, audio recordings were destroyed once transcribed, and data were stored on a password-protected computer in the researcher's residence.

Given the exempt nature of the study, a consent statement that did not require a signature (see Appendix B) was sent to the members of both councils as an attachment to the recruiting email. Additionally, before each interview, participants were asked to confirm they had received the consent form.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected using an online engagement survey and semi-structured interviews. These procedures are described in the following sections.

**Survey.** Numerous tools have been developed to measure engagement. Two of the most extensively used are the Maslach Burnout Inventory General Survey (MBI-GS; Schaufeli, Leiter, Maslach, & Jackson, 1996) and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2010; Schaufeli et al., 2002). The MBI-GS consists of 16 items (Schaufeli et al., 2002) that measure engagement based on opposite scores of the three burnout dimensions: energy (low scores on exhaustion), involvement (low scores on cynicism), and efficacy (high scores on professional efficacy; Bakker et al., 2008).

The UWES is one of the most popular measures of engagement (Bakker et al., 2011) and is comprised of a 17-question survey that measures the three engagement dimensions of vigor, dedication, and absorption. It has been validated in countries across Europe, North America, Africa, Asia, and Australia (Bakker, 2009). Confirmatory factor analyses in all the investigations showed that the fit of the hypothesized three-factor structure to the data was superior to that of alternative factor models (Bakker et al., 2011). In addition, the internal consistencies of the three dimensions proved to be sufficient in each study (Bakker et al., 2011). Schaufeli, Bakker, and Salanova (2006) developed the UWES-9, a 9-question survey version of the UWES-17, which was validated cross-nationally and demonstrated that the three dimensions were moderately,

strongly related. Mills, Culbertson, and Fullagar (2012) supported this conclusion in a study that showed the UWES-9 yielded much the same results as the UWES-17.

Participants' engagement levels were measured in this study using the UWES-9 due to its wide validation, its direct measures of the three engagement dimensions, and its conciseness.

All volunteer members ( $N = 28$ ) were sent a link to the online survey, where 19 out of 28 total volunteer members completed the survey, for a 67.9% response rate.

**Interviews.** Participant interviews were conducted using the script presented in Appendix C. The questions were designed to gather information about the nature and extent of participants' involvement in the organization and to gain insights about the factors that inspire and energize them to volunteer as well as those factors that detract from their vigor to participate.

The script promoted consistency in the introduction and subsequent questioning of participants. However, as is the benefit of qualitative methods, flexibility was used to ask follow-up questions to gain clarity on certain responses.

Interviews were conducted one-on-one via video and audio conference. Each interview lasted 40–60 minutes. All 10 participants granted permission for the researcher to record the conversation, and 9 interviews were successfully recorded. One interview excludes data on two questions when both the primary and secondary recording devices failed concurrently.

### **Data Analysis**

The engagement survey data were aggregated by the survey administering company, Survey Monkey. Descriptive statistics were then calculated to determine the



combined engagement level for both councils and the engagement levels for each council.

Interview data were transcribed and analyzed using the following steps:

1. The researcher read and reread each transcript in its entirety to familiarize herself with the data, asking herself, “What is this about?”
2. The researcher then read each transcript and performed initial coding procedures, noting topics as they emerged and writing them next to the relevant text. These initial codes were determined based on meaning units obtained from the data, and then aggregated into a single document.
3. The researcher reviewed the initial codes to identify themes in the data and descriptions of volunteers’ experiences around their engagement provided in the interviews.
4. Once the coding was complete, the researcher reviewed the codes to ensure they reflected the data gathered.
5. A saturation level for each theme was determined.
6. Lastly, validation of the data was performed by two additional reviewers. The reviewers read and reviewed the data and discussed their respective findings with the researcher. The researcher then reviewed and made adjustments to the coding as needed.

## **Summary**

This chapter described the methods used to gather and analyze the data for this study. An online engagement survey was used to measure 19 volunteers’ engagement related to the study organization. Interviews were then conducted with five members of each council to gather more specific data on the factors that affect their engagement at the study organization. Descriptive statistics were calculated for the survey data, and the interview data was examined using content analysis. The next chapter reports the findings.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Results**

The purpose of this study was to diagnose the engagement levels of two volunteer leadership councils within one nonprofit organization. Two research questions were explored:

1. What is the nature of the engagement of council members?
2. What factors affect council members' engagement?

This chapter reports the results of the study. Findings are reported for each research question in order. The nature of the councils' engagement is reported first, followed by a discussion of the factors that affect their engagement.

#### **Nature of the Engagement**

The UWES 9-question survey was administered online to measure the current council members' engagement levels. Participants were provided with a set of nine statements (three statements related to each of the three components of engagement—vigor, dedication, and absorption). Items asked participants to indicate how often they experienced each statement. Answer choices were: always, very often, often, sometimes, rarely, almost never, or never.

Eleven out of 15 members of the LC and 8 out of 13 members from the PAC, for a total of 19 members, participated for a 67.9% response rate (see Table 1). Two participants from the LC submitted partially completed surveys; the first answered one question, the second answered nine questions.

Moderately high scores were reported for the nine statements relating to engagement. These scores indicate that the members of both the LC and PAC are often to very often engaged with their work at the study organization. The statement, "I am proud

of the volunteer work that I do [here]” had the highest mean of 5.44, suggesting the members of both councils experience or feel dedication from the pride in the work they do for the study organization very often to always, on average. The statement, “I get carried away when I am volunteering [here]” had the lowest combined mean of 3.50, suggesting members of both councils are absorbed in their volunteer work sometimes to often, on average. Included in this average are three members of each council who reported they never to rarely get carried away when volunteering at the study organization. Standard deviations ranged from 0.67 to 1.64, suggesting participants responded in line on some statements and were more widely dispersed on others.

Overall, dedication as a factor had the highest mean of 5.07 (LC) and 5.00 (PAC). These scores suggest LC and PAC members are dedicated to their volunteer jobs at the study organization very often. Vigor had a mean of 4.48 (LC) and 4.25 (PAC), suggesting LC and PAC members experience high levels of energy often to very often when doing their work for the study organization. The mean for absorption was 4.17 (LC) and 4.25 (PAC). These scores suggest LC and PAC members are absorbed in the work they do for the study organization often to very often.

### **Factors Driving Engagement**

Ten participants (five LC, five PAC) were interviewed for the study. The interview sessions ranged from 40 minutes to 60 minutes. Key factors driving engagement are presented in Tables 2-4.

**Table 1*****Engagement Survey Results***

Survey Statements	LC			PAC			Total		
	N	M	SD	n	M	SD	N	M	SD
Overall	10.0	4.60	1.05	8.0	4.50	1.07	18.0	4.54	1.06
Vigor	10.3	4.48	0.76	8.0	4.25	0.66	18.3	4.38	0.73
When volunteering [here], I feel bursting with energy	11.0	4.36	0.77	8.0	4.13	0.60	19.0	4.26	0.71
At my volunteer job [here], I feel strong and vigorous	10.0	4.40	0.80	8.0	4.00	0.50	18.0	4.22	0.71
When I get up in the morning on the days I'm scheduled to volunteer, I feel like going to [the study organization]	10.0	4.70	0.64	8.0	4.63	0.70	18.0	4.67	0.67
Dedication	10.0	5.07	0.81	8.0	5.00	0.82	18.0	5.04	0.82
I am enthusiastic about my volunteer job [here]	10.0	4.80	0.87	8.0	4.88	0.78	18.0	4.83	0.83
My volunteer job [here] inspires me	10.0	4.80	0.60	8.0	4.88	0.93	18.0	4.83	0.76
I am proud of the volunteer work that I do [here]	10.0	5.60	0.66	8.0	5.25	0.66	18.0	5.44	0.68
Absorption	9.7	4.17	1.31	8.0	4.25	1.39	17.7	4.21	1.35
I feel happy when I am volunteering intensely [here]	9.0	5.00	0.82	8.0	4.75	0.97	17.0	4.88	0.90
I am immersed in my volunteer work [here]	10.0	4.10	1.14	8.0	4.50	0.71	18.0	4.28	0.99
I get carried away when I am volunteering [here]	10.0	3.50	1.43	8.0	3.50	1.87	18.0	3.50	1.64

Scale: 0 = never, 6 = always; LC = leadership council, PAC = parent advisory council

**Table 2*****Key Factors Driving Engagement—Both Councils***

Driver	LC N = 5	PAC N = 5	Total N = 10
Meaningful Work	5	3	8
Intrinsic Rewards	4	4	8
Desire to make a difference	1	5	6
Organizational Commitment	3	3	6
Attachment to the Mission	3	1	4
Perceived Supervisor Support (job characteristic)	1	3	4
Rewarding Interpersonal Relationships (job characteristic)	4	0	4
Extrinsic Rewards	2	1	3
Challenging Work	1	2	3
Role Characteristics	0	2	2
Task Variety	1	1	2
Autonomy	1	0	1

LC = leadership council, PAC = parent advisory council

**Table 3*****Key Factors Driving Engagement—Leadership Council***

Driver	n
Meaningful Work	5
Intrinsic Rewards	4
Rewarding Interpersonal Relationships (job characteristic)	4
Attachment to the Mission	3
Organizational Commitment	3
Extrinsic Rewards	2
Desire to make a difference	1
Perceived Supervisor Support (job characteristic)	1
Autonomy	1
Challenging Work	1
Task Variety	1
Role Characteristics	0

*N* = 5

**Table 4*****Key Factors Driving Engagement—Parent Advisory Council***

Driver	n
Desire to make a difference	5
Intrinsic Rewards	4
Meaningful Work	3
Organizational Commitment	3
Perceived Supervisor Support (job characteristic)	3
Challenging Work	2
Role Characteristics	2
Attachment to the Mission	1
Extrinsic Rewards	1
Task Variety	1
Rewarding Interpersonal Relationships (job characteristic)	0

*N* = 5

**Meaningful work.** The first of the top two engagement drivers reported by eight participants, including all five PAC members and three LC members, was meaningful work. Meaningful work entailed work that was deemed significant and having an impact by the participant. One LC participant stated:

Last year, I volunteered to help set up and attend the Institute's graduation ceremony. Seeing and hearing from the students and their parents speak about their experiences made me realize how engaged these kids were and the value [this organization] was giving back to the community. It was the first time I really felt like my work was having a serious impact on the lives of others.

A PAC member reported:

The kids were delivering meals to the elderly through Meals on Wheels. It was so nice to see the response from the elderly people receiving the meals. They were so excited to see the kids giving them the meals, and they were so grateful. I think that really impacted the kids.

**Intrinsic rewards.** The second of the top two engagement drivers reported by eight participants, including four LC and four PAC members, was intrinsic rewards in the work experience. Intrinsic rewards entailed an emotional charge fueled by a sense of accomplishment, competence, and/or value. One LC member said:

[The kids] are eager to learn. They are excited about learning. They come with a lot of questions. They want to have fun. They enjoy being there and I think that's what makes it rewarding for me, it's their involvement that makes it exciting.

A PAC member commented:

During the Youth Leadership Directors session, I was making sure that they were on the right footing, offering up my assistance answering questions whenever they need it. That's really the fun stuff when someone looks to you and asks you for advice, or asks you "Well how did you deal with this issue?" Or, "This is what I've come up with? What do you think about it?" I derive a great sense of joy and esteem being able to give someone advice or my thoughts on a particular issue.

**Desire to make a difference.** Six participants, including one LC member and five PAC members, cited having a desire to make a difference as the third driver of engagement. Desire to make a difference entailed the desire to make an impact on the population being served. One PAC member stated:

I participate in orientations, workshops and various other volunteer activities to help young people get the idea of [this organization's] tenets: learn, earn, save, invest and donate. Each piece that [I] help teach, to me, is helping to equip our youth with the tools that make this [world] better.

The LC member stated:

I felt spreading the word about the [organization's] app through my social media channels and my peer group would have an impact advancing financial literacy to the target population because everyone has a smartphone nowadays. Not everyone can afford the summer financial institute or lives in New York City and can attend it in person.

**Organizational commitment.** Six participants, three from each of the councils, noted organizational commitment was a driver of engagement. Organizational commitment included participants' attitude towards the organization as a whole and their willingness to exert energy in support of the organization. An LC member stated:

[This] is an organization that, in my opinion, has very few flaws. We have great leadership, great strategy and I truly believe in the mission. Every person that I can help or any way that I can help the organization help other people, I'm very gung-ho about and won't hesitate to participate.

A PAC member noted:

During presentations and while participating in fundraisers, I've told the story of my involvement with [the organization] many times. I'm very proud of the relationship that I have with [the organization] and I'm happy to have contributed to the organization's growth from where it was 10 years ago.

**Attachment to the mission.** Four participants, which included three LC members and one PAC member cited attachment to the mission as an engagement driver. An attachment to the mission means the participant agrees with the values and purpose of the organization and believes the work he or she is doing is in alignment with delivering the mission. One LC member noted:

My motivation to the organization is not necessarily the aspects of the work, but because I believe in the cause. I definitely believe in and want to contribute to the mission of [this organization]. I think that [this organization's] mission and the population that it serves is very near and dear to my heart with its mission. I wish I had the kind of financial education at that age provided to me. If I can help them in any way get ahead of where I was at their age, then, you know, I feel like I'm giving back to a good cause.

Another PAC member stated, “The mission of the organization and the founder and chief executive officer speak to my vigor. . . . It’s financial literacy for young people. That’s important.”

**Perceived supervisor support.** Four participants, one LC member and three PAC members, reported perceived supervisor support as an engagement driver. Perceived supervisor support included the support of ideas, open communication and being valued by leadership. One PAC member commented:

The contact with the [chief executive officer] was pretty regular. She used me as a sounding board for new initiatives, ideas, and problem solving. I felt my opinions and ideas were valued, because she consulted with me often. It helped me feel more connected and more engaged.

The LC member noted, “Communication with the [chief executive officer] is great; she has an open-door policy. I’m able to interact with her and understand the overall goals of the organization, which keeps me absorbed.”

**Rewarding interpersonal relationships.** Four LC members cited rewarding interpersonal relationships was a key engagement driver. Only LC members identified this factor as an engagement driver. Rewarding interpersonal relationships included those relationships that were fun, enjoyable, engaging and supportive. One LC member noted:

I lose track of time when I’m with my LC members discussing [the organization’s] business or upcoming events . . . The best part of a recent planning session was that everyone was so locked in and focused . . . I get excited when I know I’m going to be interacting with other LC members.

Another LC member said:

I genuinely enjoy working with the LC, it’s one of the two drivers that help me to stay engaged. . . . We genuinely have a lot of fun together. We laugh a lot, joke around and prank-joke on each other. . . . I’m around a group of well-educated, successful professionals that look like me . . . [and] there is something empowering about that.



**Extrinsic rewards.** Three participants, including two LC members and one PAC member, cited extrinsic rewards as a driver of engagement. Extrinsic rewards entailed recognition by leadership or volunteer colleagues. One LC member said:

I was working with the outgoing social media chair [on developing social media content for the app launch]. And [I] really just jumped right in. I think that [the outgoing social media chair, an LC member] and the [chief executive officer] were surprised with the turn around. They were like, “Oh wow. You did this in this time.” I was super proud of that.

The PAC member mentioned:

When you’re the lead or in charge, you want to make sure you do whatever you can to make sure [the initiative] is successful. . . . At the end of the day, it’s my name behind it, and I don’t want [anyone] to say, “[PAC member] did a half-ass job,” or, “He didn’t do what he needed to do. He wasn’t fully engaged or committed.” . . . You want to make sure that, at the end of the day, they look at you and say, “Okay, yeah, you helped me out to advance the goals and visions of the organization.”

**Challenging work.** Three participants, including one LC member and two PAC members, cited challenging work as a driver of engagement, which included work that required problem solving in various circumstances. A PAC member noted:

Getting people to participate [in the organization] is one of the hardest things to do, because you talk to people [at length about the organization] and they’ll say, “Oh, yeah, that’s good,” but getting them to take the next step and enroll their child is the hardest part. In a way, it motivates you a little bit more, it’s almost like sales. It just takes a lot of time and effort, and you just have to keep persistent.

The LC member stated:

There is a challenge trying to figure out [each child’s characteristics] and trying to cater to them differently. You might have a day that you win. You might have a day that you lose, where you weren’t able to control the children or direct them the way you wanted. . . . Watching their transformation from the first day, the ones who weren’t talking are talking more, the one who was talking too much is talking less, and, collectively, there’s this cohesiveness where go into the classroom, you say, “this is a smart bunch!”

**Other job characteristics.** The remaining other job characteristic engagement drivers were cited by one or two participants and included, role characteristics, task variety, and autonomy.

### Factors Decreasing Engagement

The table below highlights the key factors participants cited decreased engagement.

**Table 5**

#### *Key Factors Decreasing Engagement*

Factor	LC N = 5	PAC N = 5	Total N = 10
Performing disliked activities	4	3	7
Unrewarding interpersonal relationships	0	4	4
Lack of time to volunteer due to work and personal demands	0	3	3
Other factors	3	0	3
• Lack of creative solution thinking	1	0	1
• Lack of role clarity	1	0	1
• Long-term nature of organizational impact	1	0	1

LC = leadership council, PAC = parent advisory council

**Performing disliked activities.** Seven participants, including four LC members and three PAC members, noted that performing disliked activities was a key factor that decreased their engagement. Performing disliked activities included administrative or mundane activities or activities participants found uncomfortable and anxiety provoking.

An LC member mentioned:

Administrative items are the only items that feel like a time suck. You just wish you were doing something else to help the organization further along. They're obviously things that need to be done, but they're repetitive and mundane. They're the only things that take away from that vigor.

One PAC member noted:

One of the toughest things has always been calling people to get them engaged. That's one of the things we've had trouble with, the fact that we need to rally

other people to do things or to support the organization. Getting on the phone, having a list of people to contact that sometimes can be a bit of a drudgery to have to do that.

**Unrewarding interpersonal relationships.** Four PAC members reported unrewarding interpersonal relationships as a factor that decreased their engagement.

Unrewarding interpersonal relationships were those relationships with perceived lack of colleague support. One PAC member noted:

There are a lot of times where, as chairman of the PAC, there were things that needed to be done, and you're counting on working with the other parents. Everyone's level of engagement is not the same, so there are tasks that we're saying we're going to do, but you can't really hold people to it. They're volunteering. If they have the time, they do it, and if they don't do it, you're kind of stuck. I've found that challenging and frustrating, at times.

Another PAC member said

[My energy is depleted] when I don't get support from the people on our committee. . . . When we're having a meeting and we say "we," we mean all of us have to do this. You get the same four or five people always stepping up to the plate. To some degree I feel it's unfair to have people say, "I'm on PAC" and never show up for a meeting or call in to a conference call.

**Lack of time to volunteer due to work and personal demands.** Three participants, all PAC members, noted that lacking time to volunteer due to work and personal demands decreased their engagement. One PAC participant noted, "Besides [this organization], I am a part of other organizations, so [I] can't really commit as much time as [I] want to make the impact [I] would like, because [I'm] still raising the child or doing something with them." Another PAC participant commented:

You have to divide your work time with your volunteer experience, your family life, and other responsibilities. It means putting [this organization] in a particular compartment and being able to vacillate between all of those worlds. So, [I] don't have the opportunity to dedicate a lot of time and [I] feel a little negative thinking in that, "Oh shoot, I could have stayed on this conference call longer," or "Maybe I could have called more board members," or "Maybe I could have put out more feelers out to individuals who want to participate with [this organization]." There are just not enough hours in the day."

**Other factors decreasing engagement.** The remaining three factors were mentioned by the same LC member as factors that decreased her engagement, which included lack of creative solution thinking, lack of role clarity, and the long-term nature of organizational impact.

### **Summary**

This chapter presented the results of the study. First, regarding the nature of engagement, the survey results suggest that, overall, both councils are moderately to highly engaged in their work at the study organization. Collectively, both councils are most engaged by their dedication to and pride in the work they do for the study organization (related to Schaufeli et al.'s [2002] dedication element of work motivation), followed by the energy they receive from (vigor, per Schaufeli et al. [2002]) and absorption (absorption per Schaufeli et al. [2002]) they feel in their work with the study organization.

Second, regarding the factors impacting engagement, the participants collectively reported nine key drivers and three key detractors of engagement. Over half of total participants cited meaningful work, intrinsic rewards, desire to make a difference, and organizational commitment as the top four key drivers of engagement. Thirty to forty percent of participants cited attachment to the mission, perceived supervisor support, rewarding interpersonal relationships, extrinsic rewards, and challenging work as key drivers of engagement, to round out the top nine.

The top engagement drivers for each council differed slightly. The LC reported the following top five key drivers: meaningful work, intrinsic rewards, rewarding interpersonal relationships, attachment to the mission, and organizational commitment. The PAC reported the following top five drivers: desire to make a difference, intrinsic

rewards, meaningful work, organizational commitment, and perceived supervisor support.

Finally, the participants reported three key factors that decreased engagement, including performing disliked activities, unrewarding interpersonal relationship and lack of time to volunteer due to work and personal demands.

## Chapter 5

### Discussion

The purpose of this study was to diagnose the engagement levels of two volunteer leadership councils within one nonprofit organization. Two research questions were explored:

1. What is the nature of the engagement of council members?
2. What factors affect council members' engagement?

This chapter reviews the study conclusions and interpretations, recommendations, limitations, and directions for future research. This chapter concludes with a summary of the learning.

#### Conclusions and Interpretations

Conclusions were drawn related to each research question. These conclusions are described in the following sections.

**Nature of current engagement levels.** The study results suggest that members of both councils have moderately high engagement. These findings bode well for nonprofit organizations and suggest that volunteers are feeling engaged while performing their work at the study organization. Engaged volunteers feel more positively about themselves and their lives (Vecina et al., 2012) and are more motivated (Hallberg & Schaufeli, 2006; Vecina et al., 2012). The study organization heavily relies on volunteers to support the execution of its mission; thus, the relatively high levels of volunteer engagement should benefit the organization.

**Shared factors driving engagement.** Study results suggest that a few engagement drivers are common to both volunteer groups within the study organization. Both LC and PAC members reported organizational commitment, meaningful work, and

intrinsic rewards within their respective top five engagement drivers. These results suggest a portion of the volunteers' overall engagement is driven by (a) shared commitment to the larger organization and a willingness to exert energy accordingly (Macey & Schneider, 2008), (b) shared belief in the value of the work and its impact, and (c) positive emotional benefits experienced from doing the work. These findings indicate that a core set of engagement drivers unite the volunteers across the organization.

Existing literature additionally has shown associations between organizational commitment and volunteer engagement (Vecina et al., 2012). Meaningful work reflects that the job characteristics, value, and impact of the work make it meaningful (Steger et al., 2012). Intrinsic rewards reflect the sense of meaning, choice, competence and progress from one's work (Thomas & Tymon, 2009), which are promoted by job resources. The present study confirms what researchers previously found regarding these engagement drivers and further contributes to the research on engagement drivers within a nonprofit organizational context. This is notable, given that most research on volunteers has focused on the individual and largely has ignored the fact that most volunteering takes place within the organizational context (Hidalgo & Moreno, 2009). Further study into what specifically creates meaning for the work, what specifically drives the intrinsic rewards, and what factors drive volunteers' organizational commitment could provide insights about what the nonprofit is doing right as it continues to grow and build on its strengths.

**Different factors driving engagement.** In this study, the two groups identified different engagement drivers and assigned varying relative importance to similar drivers: LC members cited rewarding interpersonal relationships and attachment to the mission in its top five, while PAC members cited desire to make difference and perceived supervisor

support. Nevertheless, both groups reported similar engagement levels. These findings suggest that other dynamics may be influencing engagement and need to be considered or identified. The implication here is that each key engagement driver identified by each council also should be considered in the broader context of other groups and the organization. The present study contributes to current research by highlighting the implication that nonprofit leadership should be sensitive to understanding the differences in the organization's subgroups.

**Other dynamics influencing engagement.** Rewarding interpersonal relationships was cited as an engagement driver by four of the five interviewed LC members. Although no PAC member identified this factor as a driver, four of the five PAC members cited the opposite factor (unrewarding interpersonal relationships) as decreasing engagement. These results suggest a disparity in the types of relationships being experienced in each council and that PAC members may be operating at less than optimum levels, thus foregoing the benefits of higher engagement from rewarding interpersonal relationships compared to LC members. Given the study organization's heavy reliance on its PAC members to help recruit for the organization's classes, it is critical that PAC members develop the relationships that will foster their ability to work together and ensure full class enrollment.

Literature on factors that promote volunteer engagement notes that rewarding interpersonal relationships create safe and trusting environments wherein people are more willing to bring their whole selves to their work (Kahn, 1990). In turn, work environments are fostered where people feel they belong and respond by working harder to support the team. The present study contributes to current research by showing how interpersonal relationships (whether positive or adverse) affect different volunteer groups



within the same nonprofit. Continued research about the specific factors promoting rewarding interpersonal relationships in the LC and those factors sustaining unrewarding interpersonal relationships in the PAC may generate insights to help improve the relationships in the PAC.

***Perceived supervisor support.*** Three PAC members identified perceived supervisor support as a key driver of engagement, compared to only one for the LC. The results suggest that PAC members respond positively to support from the organization's leader. It may be important to note that three of these responses are from the current or past chairs of each of the councils. The implications are that certain members may feel more engaged due to their positions as chair, while others may not. One rank and file LC member did mention she would like to engage in more frequent communication with leadership in the future.

Past research similarly identified trust in supervisors as an engagement driver, explaining that employees' work motivation emerges from perceived supervisor support and trust in supervisors (Wang & Hsieh, 2013). The relationship between leaders and volunteers may be even more salient in fostering volunteer commitment, as volunteers can leave an organization at will (Catano, Pond, & Kelloway, 2001). The study contributes to current research by highlighting how perceived supervisor support may differ between two groups based on position and relation to leadership. Further investigation into leadership style and inter-council interactions may provide more insights about the impacts of leadership on volunteer engagement within the same nonprofit.

***Desire to make a difference.*** Desire to make a difference was cited by all five interviewed PAC members as an engagement driver, while only one LC member cited

this factor. Desire to make a difference aligns with a core underlying motivation for volunteerism: People are motivated to volunteer to express humanistic values of increasing the welfare of other individuals (Batson et al., 2002; Clary et al., 1998; Omoto & Snyder, 1995). Other motivations to volunteer include concern for the community, the desire to gain new experiences, the desire to be with one's friends or to participate in activities deemed favorable by important people, the opportunity for skill building in preparation for a new career, the desire to reduce guilt about being more fortunate than others, and growth and development (Clary et al., 1998).

The present study results suggest there is a stronger motivating factor to make a difference among the members of the PAC as compared to members of the LC. The implication for differences in key engagement drivers for different groups within one nonprofit is that one initiative to enhance volunteer engagement may only work on some volunteers and not others. Understanding the factors that move people to volunteer and keep them engaged is critical for nonprofit leaders so they may be more able to provide the opportunities for volunteers to experience the benefits of volunteering that speak to their specific motivations. Clary et al. (1998) found that volunteers who received benefits from volunteering that matched their primary functional motivations for doing so were more satisfied with their experience and also intended to continue to volunteer in both the short and long term.

The present study contributes to current research by highlighting how differences between the groups in the same organization can have different motivational factors underlying the engagement. Additional study into the underlying motivations of volunteers could provide further insight to help nonprofit leadership create more robust volunteer engagement exercises that speak to a greater number of volunteers.

*Attachment to the mission.* More LC members (n = 3) noted attachment to the mission as a key engagement driver, compared to PAC members (n = 1). According to Brown and Yoshioka (2003), three basic principles influence employee attitudes toward the mission: awareness, agreement, and alignment. An organization's mission must be salient in employees' minds, meaning employees must agree with the expressed purpose and values of the organization (Kristof, 1996). Employees also need to see a connection between their work and the fulfillment of the mission (Mason, 1996). Being in alignment with the values and purpose of the organization suggests that attachment to the mission also feeds the underlying motivation to volunteer of expressing one's humanistic values or increasing the welfare of other individuals (Batson et al., 2002; Clary et al., 1998; Omoto & Snyder, 1995).

The present study contributes to current research by highlighting how differences between the groups in the same organization can have different factors of motivation underlying the engagement. Similar to desire to make a difference, research about volunteers' underlying motivations could provide further insight to help nonprofit leadership create more robust volunteer engagement exercises that speak to a greater number of volunteers.

**Factors decreasing engagement.** The top factor decreasing engagement for both LC and PAC members was performing disliked activities. The second two factors, cited only by the PAC, were unrewarding interpersonal relationships and lack of time to volunteer due to work and personal demands. The study suggests a common theme among these factors in that they all appear to reduce certain job resources that drive engagement. Impacts to job resources suggest that both councils may not be as engaged

as they could be, with the PAC being more affected. For example, one PAC member's comments related to unrewarding interpersonal relationships were:

Working with a group of people who are not always on the same page and who tend to reflect on the negative side of things depletes my motivation. I'm not in the mood to sit around and have conversations with people who are saying, "Well, we can't do this. We've never done that. We can't do this. No, that didn't work so we shouldn't do it." I tune them out, I count to 20, I doodle on a pad, various things to work on my level of patience.

Current literature supports these findings as follows: Respondents described performing disliked activities as mundane, drudgery, and anxiety provoking—the opposite of those job characteristics that create challenge and meaning in one's work (Kahn, 1990). Unrewarding interpersonal relationships, the opposite of rewarding interpersonal relationships, may compromise the sense of safety in being oneself. Moreover, volunteers may find themselves spending more energy resolving interpersonal conflicts than on the job (Wildermuth & Pauken, 2008). The lack of time to volunteer due to work and personal demands decreases one's psychological availability to fully invest themselves in their work role (Kahn, 1990).

The present study contributes to existing literature by providing additional supporting data to these assertions and also highlights the differences in factors decreasing engagement between two volunteer groups within one nonprofit. Further study into the factors underlying the differences could provide further insight into how to minimize disliked activities and develop more rewarding relationships to enhance engagement of both councils.

**Engagement-performance disconnect.** Last year, the chief executive officer expressed concerns that the LC and PAC were not motivated because initiatives hadn't been implemented, annual dues were late, and fundraising targets were missed. However,

the results of the engagement survey suggest the two councils are moderately to highly engaged in their work with the organization. This implies a disconnect between the chief executive officer's expectations for performance (the outcome of the councils' level of engagement) and council members' self-reported engagement. The present study does not explore the factors that may be contributing to the disconnect. A recommendation has been provided in the next session as a first step.

### **Recommendations**

Four recommendations are provided to help nonprofit leadership enhance volunteer engagement levels. These are described in the following sections.

**More programming.** The first recommendation is to co-create additional programs with volunteers concerning opportunities to impact the children of the nonprofit. This act would support the three key core engagement drivers common to both councils. For example, volunteers could invite the children of the nonprofit to spend a half day at their office to learn about their industry. Programs for the children speak to the three key core engagement drivers in the following ways: (a) most participants' responses describing meaningful work involved engagement with and impact of the programs on the children; (b) co-creating programs with volunteers provides opportunities for volunteers to pursue their desired activities, which potentially increases intrinsic rewards; and (c) organizational commitment is strengthened because programs are the heart of fulfilling the organization's core values, purpose, and mission, with which many participants are aligned.

**Inventory of motivational factors and desired activities.** The second recommendation is for leadership to create a process to inventory motivational factors and desired activities for all new and existing volunteers, with the intention to align them

with the execution of organizational goals. For example, a survey could be administered to all existing volunteers to gather the initial information. Second, the same or similar survey could be included as part of the onboarding package to new volunteers. Third, as part of each quarterly council discussion, an agenda item to discuss the motivational factors could be incorporated into the meeting to keep the inventory up to date and to discuss in real time how to structure activities and opportunities to provide benefits to volunteers' functional motivations.

**Team building opportunities for the parent advisory council.** The third recommendation is for leadership to work with the PAC co-chairs to create opportunities for team building. The study results indicated that four of the five PAC members cited unfavorable interpersonal relationships as the top factor that decreased engagement. No participants cited rewarding interpersonal relationships as an engagement factor. This suggests the PAC could potentially be more engaged if more rewarding interpersonal relationships were present. Several measures could be taken to achieve this. First, an offsite PAC team building workshop could be conducted. Second, shorter team building exercises could be incorporated into the PAC's regular monthly meetings. Third, technology could be leveraged to send daily or weekly engagement alerts containing games or exercises that could build the team remotely.

**Reconciliation of engagement-performance disconnect.** The fourth and final recommendation is for leadership, the LC, and the PAC to align on the achievement of performance expectations. First, leadership should gain clarity about the roles, responsibilities, and goals for the LC and PAC. Second, based on this clarity, leadership should clearly define performance expectations to meet those goals for both the LC and PAC. Third, to gain buy-in, leadership should discuss with the LC and PAC how to best

achieve the goals, including the need for any additional resources they may require. Leadership should be ready and willing to act upon the results of this discussion to support both councils moving forward.

### **Limitations**

A primary limitation of this study was the small sample size of volunteers, taken from one small nonprofit organization that has only one salaried employee (the chief executive officer). Results may differ for larger nonprofit organizations that employ paid staff or operate in different industries.

A second limitation of the study is that the researcher has been a volunteer of the study organization for the past 10 years and knows some of the participants interviewed. Although the researcher took measures to mitigate bias in the data, such as validating initial coding, the risks of researcher and participant biases remained.

A third limitation of the study was the lack of complete data. Both the primary and secondary recording devices failed during one of the interviews. The researcher was unaware of the technical malfunction due to environmental factors and thus lost approximately 10 minutes of data, covering two interview responses. In future studies, handwritten notes should be taken alongside recording devices in the event that multiple devices fail.

### **Directions for Additional Research**

Given the small sample size and size of the nonprofit, the primary direction for additional research is to explore the differences in engagement levels of different groups of volunteers within larger nonprofits that have paid employees in order to substantiate or extend the findings of the present study.

## **Summary of Learning**

Volunteers continue to represent an important resource for nonprofits, as they provide critical support to help nonprofits conduct programs, raise funds, and serve their communities. It is essential that nonprofits keep their volunteers committed to the organization and engaged.

Last year, the chief executive officer of the study organization was concerned about the motivation and lack of productivity of her two volunteer leadership councils. This study examined the factors that affected volunteer engagement across the two councils to determine how the chief executive officer could enhance volunteer engagement going forward. The study found that both the LC and PAC were similarly engaged in their work at the nonprofit and that both similar and different drivers affected their engagement. A comparison of the different factors between the two councils and within the context of the overall organization revealed some areas where engagement potentially could be improved.

The recommendations provided were focused on supporting the shared key volunteer engagement drivers and addressing the potential engagement gaps in an effort to ultimately enhance volunteer engagement across the organization.



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## Appendix A: Recruitment Script Template

Dear [Name],

My name is Katherine Bates, and I am a master's student in the Graziadio School of Business and Management at Pepperdine University. I am conducting a research study examining engagement of nonprofit volunteers and you are invited to participate in the study. If you agree, you are invited to participate in an online engagement survey consisting of nine questions, which pertain generally to how energized, enthusiastic or immersed you may feel while doing your volunteer work for [the study organization]. Following the survey, you may be randomly selected to participate in a follow-up interview to gather more detailed information about specific drivers of volunteer engagement. The online survey is anticipated to take no more than 15 minutes and the interview is anticipated to take 60 minutes. Interviews will be audiotaped to help increase the accuracy of data collection.

Participation in this study is voluntary and you may opt out at any time. Your identity as a participant will remain confidential during and after the study. To ensure participants' identities are protected, your interview responses will be coded with a pseudonym, and any personal identifiers will be removed from the transcript data, which will be maintained separately, so it cannot be linked back to you. Additionally, the audio recordings of the interviews will be destroyed once they have been transcribed. If you do not wish to be audiotaped, you may still participate in the study, however the length of the interview may increase to over 60 minutes to account for manual note taking.

If you have questions or would like to participate, please contact me at [contact information].

Thank you for your participation,

Katherine Bates  
Pepperdine University  
Graziadio School of Business and Management  
Master Student

## Appendix B: Consent Statement

### PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY Graziadio School of Business and Management

#### INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

#### DRIVERS OF VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT FOR A NONPROFIT

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Katherine Bates (the “investigator”), current master’s student, and Julie A. Chesley, PhD, faculty advisor at the Graziadio School of Business and Management at Pepperdine University, because you are a member of either the Leadership Council or Parent Advisory Council for [the study organization]. Your participation is voluntary. You should read the information below, and ask questions about anything that you do not understand, before deciding whether to participate. Please take as much time as you need to read the consent form. You may also decide to discuss participation with your family or friends. You will also be given a copy of this form for your records.

#### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to diagnose the engagement levels of volunteer leadership within [the study organization]. The study will explore the nature and drivers of engagement of council members.

#### STUDY PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete an online engagement survey consisting of nine questions, which should take no more than 15 minutes to complete. The questions pertain generally to how energized, enthusiastic or immersed you may feel while doing your volunteer work for [the study organization]. A link to the online survey response will be sent to you via email and your responses to the survey questions will remain confidential.

Additionally, five participants from your respective council will be selected randomly, much like drawing a name from a hat, to be interviewed to gather more detailed information about specific engagement drivers for volunteers. The interview will be conducted via video conference (e.g., Google Hangout, Skype, Zoom) or conference call and is anticipated to take 60 minutes. The interview will be audiotaped to help increase the accuracy of data collection. To ensure your identity is protected, a pseudonym will be assigned to your interview responses, and any personal identifiers will be removed from the transcript data, which will be maintained separately. Additionally, the audio

recordings of the interviews will be destroyed once they have been transcribed. If you do not wish to be audiotaped, you may still participate in the study, however the length of the interview may increase to over 60 minutes to account for manual note taking.

### **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

The potential and foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study involve minimal risks, which include risks that a person is likely to encounter in daily life activities but not more. These risks may include fatigue, boredom, and feeling uncomfortable with certain questions. Given the questions pertain to volunteer engagement, there may be other risks such as social harm and reputation risk in the event of a breach of confidentiality.

### **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

The potential benefits to you as a participant may include a heightened awareness of what drives your engagement in the volunteer work you do for [the study organization]. Further, a potential benefit to society may include a more highly engaged volunteer workforce that enhances the delivery of [the study organization]'s services to the community.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

The records collected for this study will be confidential as far as permitted by law. However, if required to do so by law, it may be necessary to disclose information collected about you. Examples of the types of issues that would require me to break confidentiality are if disclosed any instances of child abuse and elder abuse. Pepperdine's University's Human Subjects Protection Program (HSPP) may also access the data collected. The HSPP occasionally reviews and monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research subjects.

Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential. A pseudonym will be assigned to your interview responses, and any personal identifiers will be removed from the transcript data, which will be maintained separately. Additionally, the audio recordings of the interviews will be destroyed once they have been transcribed. Additionally, the data will be stored on a password protected computer in the principal investigator's place of residence. The data will be stored for a minimum of three years.

### **SUSPECTED NEGLECT OR ABUSE OF CHILDREN**

Under California law, the researcher(s) who may also be a mandated reporter will not maintain as confidential, information about known or reasonably suspected incidents of abuse or neglect of a child, dependent adult or elder, including, but not limited to,

physical, sexual, emotional, and financial abuse or neglect. If any researcher has or is given such information, he or she is required to report this abuse to the proper authorities.

### **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

Your participation is voluntary. Your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study.

### **ALTERNATIVES TO FULL PARTICIPATION**

Your alternative is to not participate. Your relationship with [the study organization] will not be affected whether you participate or not in this study.

### **INVESTIGATOR'S CONTACT INFORMATION**

You understand that the investigator is willing to answer any inquiries you may have concerning the research herein described. If you have any other questions or concerns about this research, you understand that you may contact:

Katherine Bates—[contact information] or  
Julie A. Chesley—[contact information]

### **RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT—IRB CONTACT INFORMATION**

If you have questions, concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant or research in general please contact Dr. Judy Ho, Chairperson of the Graduate & Professional Schools Institutional Review Board at Pepperdine University [contact information].

### **Appendix C: Interview Script**

I want to thank you for volunteering to speak with me today. As you know, I'm a Master's Student with Pepperdine University's Master's of Science in Organization Development program. The data collected will be used towards my thesis (a requirement for graduation) and provided to the Leadership Council to consider in support of its ongoing training and development.

The purpose of this study is to diagnose the engagement levels of volunteer leadership within [the study organization]. The study will explore the nature and drivers of engagement of both the Leadership and Parent Advisory council members.

The interview is anticipated to take 60 minutes and it will be audiotaped to help increase the accuracy of data collection. To ensure your identity is protected, a pseudonym will be assigned to your interview responses, and any personal identifiers will be removed from the transcript data, which will be maintained separately. Additionally, the audio recordings of the interviews will be destroyed once they have been transcribed. If you do not wish to be audiotaped, you may still participate in the study, however the length of the interview may increase to over 60 minutes to account for manual note taking.

Before we start, I would also like to first confirm you received and read and understand the contents of the consent form previously sent, and second do you have any questions? If not, I'll start the recording.

## Interview questions

### **Background:**

- A. How long have you been involved with [the study organization]?
- B. What is your primary contribution to this organization?
- C. How has your involvement with [the study organization] shifted since you began?
- D. What factors influence your continuing relationship with [the study organization]?

### **Questions (stories):**

1. Tell me about a time that you were excited to put in your time and energy for [the study organization]. What was going on, who was involved, what was your role, etc? (*Vigor*)
2. Tell me about a time when you felt like the work you were doing with [the study organization] made a difference. What was going on, who was involved, what was your role, etc? (*Dedication*)
3. Tell me about a time when you felt deeply engrossed in the work you were doing for [the study organization]. What was going on, who was involved, what was your role, etc? (*Absorption*)

### **Detailed questions (engagement drivers):**

As it relates to the three questions above, I am interested in gathering additional details around the drivers of your engagement with [the study organization].

#### **First is...**

***Vigor:** high levels of energy and mental resilience while working, the willingness to invest effort in one's work, and persistence even in the face of difficulties.*

#### **Detailed questions:**

4. What aspects of the work that you do with [the study organization] contribute to your energy, mental resilience and willingness to invest time [here]?
5. What aspects of the work that you do [here] deplete your energy, mental resilience and willingness to invest time [here]?

#### **Second is...**

***Dedication:** a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge*

#### **Detailed questions:**

6. What aspects of the work that you do with [the study organization] contribute to your sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge here at [the study organization]?
7. What aspects of the work that you do with [the study organization] depreciate your sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge here at [the study organization]?

#### **Lastly is...**

***Absorption:** being fully concentrated and deeply engrossed in one's work, whereby time passes quickly and one has difficulties with detaching oneself from work*

#### **Detailed questions:**

8. What aspects of the work that you do with [the study organization] contribute to you being fully concentrated and deeply engrossed in your work at [the study organization]?
9. What aspects of the work that you do with [the study organization] impede you being fully concentrated and deeply engrossed in your work at [the study organization]?