

Scouts and UWA Research Project



Summary of Volunteer Survey 2017

Introduction to the Research Project

In 2016, UWA started a research project with Scouts to develop successful evidence-based practices and strategies to improve volunteer engagement and retention. For the development of these practices and strategies we started the annual volunteer engagement survey. This summary describes the results of the second Scouts volunteer engagement survey. The purpose of this summary is to 1) describe the results we found in this volunteer survey, 2) connect the findings from this survey to the findings from the previous survey, and 3) provide an update on the practices and strategies that are being developed based on the survey results. The summary of the previous survey can be found on the research project website: <http://uwascoutsresearch.com/documentation/>

Survey Participation

The 2017 volunteer engagement survey was distributed in seven Scouts branches (Scouts ACT, NSW, SA, TAS, VIC, WA and QLD) and was available from October to December 2017. Altogether, 2,599 (13%) of the invited volunteers completed the entire survey. These volunteers occupied all types of volunteer roles encountered in Scouting: 71% were Leaders of Youth, 21% were Adult Helpers, 24% were Leaders of Adults and 14% were Committee members. It is interesting to note that 44% of the participating volunteers occupied more than one role at the same time (hence the total percentages being greater than 100). Finally, 1,207 (43%) volunteers who completed this engagement survey had also completed the previous survey in 2016. This group allows an investigation of change over time by matching responses from both surveys.

Participation to the previous volunteer engagement survey was higher (20%) than participation to this survey (13%). This could be caused by the fact that this is the second survey and that the novelty is wearing off, or that volunteers felt they had already shared their opinion. To offset this sentiment, extra rewards were offered to repeat participants. Moreover, all branches actively supported the survey by actively advertising and endorsing it. The response rate is still satisfactory, especially because anecdotal evidence suggests that not every invitation was sent to active volunteers, nor was read by every recipient. The response rate therefore seems to be a low estimate.

A Cautionary Note. We compared the demographics of the survey participants to those of the average Scouts Leader in the participating branches. We found that the survey participants were very equal in terms of gender (46% female) and age (45-54 years) to the average Leader of Youth. However, on average, the survey participants reported that they had been with Scouts for nearly 12

years whereas the average Leader tenure at Scouts is approximately 7 years. This suggests that those who have been with Scouts for longer were more likely to complete the survey. Therefore, we wish to note that the sample may not be entirely representative of the typical Scouts leader.

Findings of the Volunteer Engagement Survey 2017

The volunteer engagement survey uses a number of questions to measure feelings and behaviours that are likely to affect volunteers' intention to stay in Scouts. Compared to last year's survey, the core of the survey remained the same. However, perceptions of empowering leadership were removed and volunteering work characteristics were now included. Figure 1 gives a schematic presentation of the scales that were used in the survey. This figure also describes how the scales are expected to relate to each other.

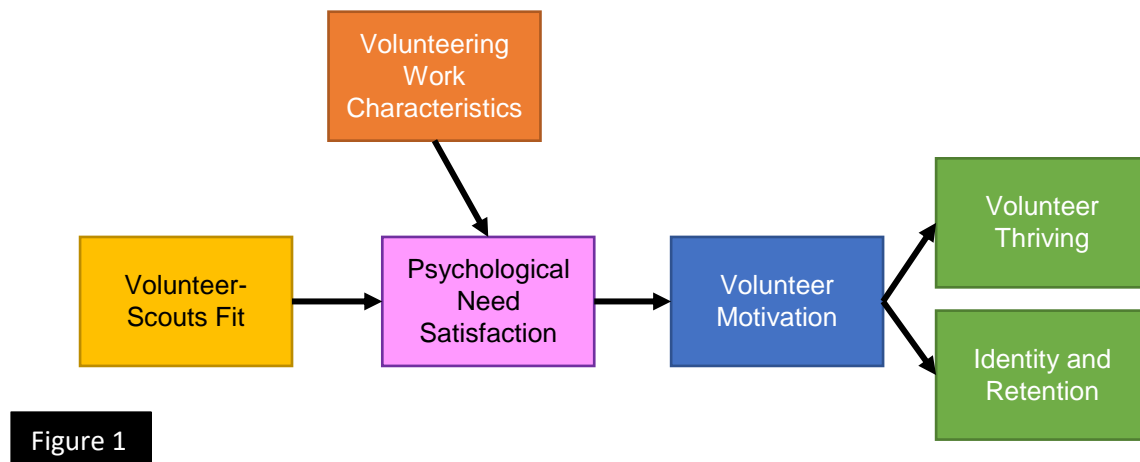


Figure 1

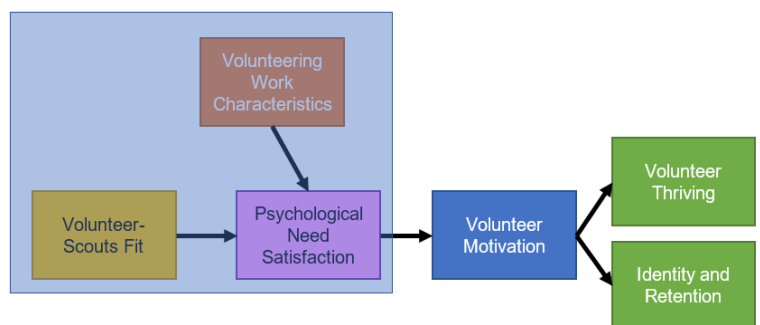
On the average, volunteers perceived a good fit between themselves and Scouts. This means that volunteers generally felt that their needs were being met by Scouts and that they were able to meet the demands from Scouts. Moreover, volunteers who were only a Leader of Youth felt they fit slightly better with Scouts than volunteers in different roles.

In this year's survey, volunteer work characteristics were measured for the first time. These characteristics describe the way the volunteering role is generally structured. Among these volunteering work characteristics are 1) how much autonomy a volunteer receives, 2) the variety the volunteering role offers, 3) the support and feedback the volunteer receives, and 4) how significant the volunteer considers his/her role. On the average, volunteers indicated that their roles offered them a lot of variety and social support. However, the amount of work method autonomy and feedback were moderate. To enrich the role of volunteers, these are two areas that could be

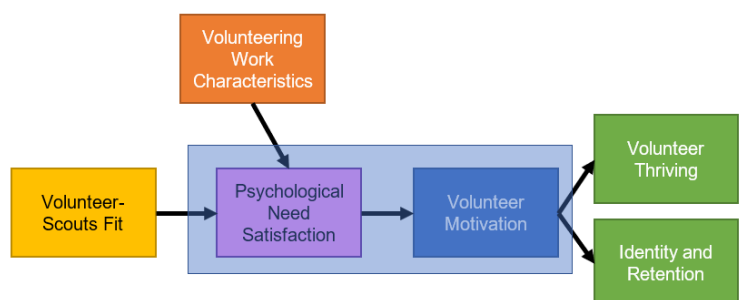
developed further. Volunteers who were only a Leader of Youth generally experienced richer volunteer roles, scoring their volunteering work higher than other volunteers in Scouts on nearly every work characteristic.

Volunteers whose **psychological needs** are satisfied feel competent, autonomous and related to others during volunteering activities. The feeling of competence refers to the sense of being capable of performing the volunteering work effectively. The feeling of autonomy refers to the sense of being able to make decisions and having choice in how to undertake volunteering work. Finally, the feeling of relatedness refers to the sense of feeling connected and having meaningful relationships with others while volunteering. In general, the volunteers at Scouts felt that their need for competence and relatedness were well satisfied. However, the need for autonomy was only moderately satisfied. Need satisfaction is important to sustain motivation in volunteering and therefore it seems prudent to consider ways in which the volunteers' needs for autonomy can be satisfied even more. Altogether, Leaders of Youth felt that their needs were slightly more satisfied than other volunteers.

Psychological need satisfaction was clearly related to **fit** and **volunteer work characteristics**. Moreover, specific types of need satisfaction were affected by different work characteristics. The feeling of competence was mostly related to task significance and skill variety. The feeling of autonomy was naturally related to the amount of autonomy the volunteers experienced. Finally, the feeling of relatedness was mostly related to social support and feedback from others.

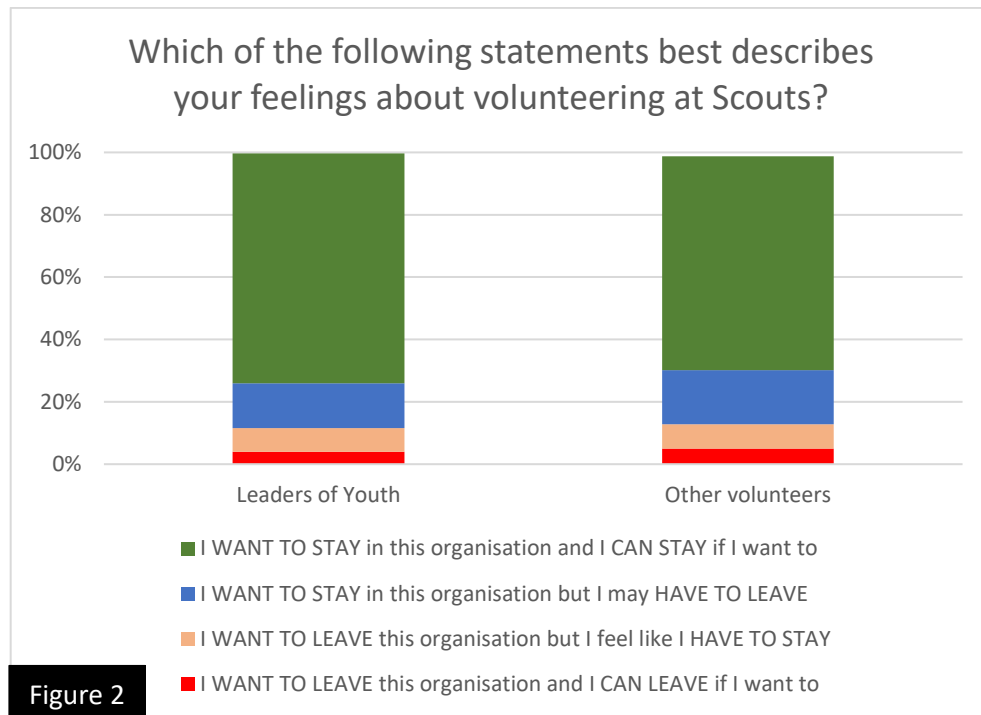


The survey results indicated that Scouts volunteers are typically highly **motivated** by a sense of responsibility and enjoyment. The volunteers also indicated that they are not motivated by the expectations of others or a sense of guilt if they would not



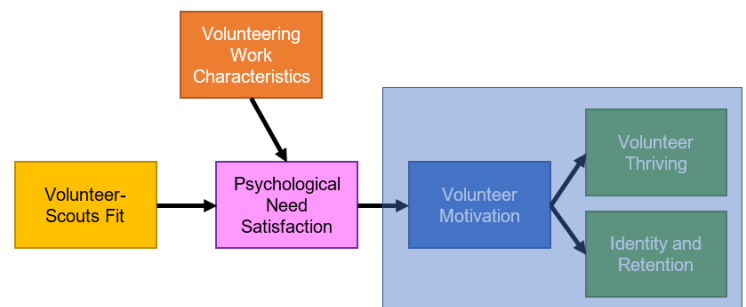
volunteer. Compared to other volunteers, Leaders of Youth were slightly more motivated by a sense of responsibility and enjoyment, but equally unmotivated by the expectations of others or a sense of guilt. Moreover, all three **psychological needs** were equally important in predicting the volunteers'

motivation. This indicates that all psychological needs should be satisfied to optimally motivate Scouts volunteers.



Finally, the survey results indicated that Scout volunteers generally have high intentions to stay with Scouts, and most expected to still volunteer for Scouts for the next two years. Still, about 12% of the participating volunteers indicated that they want to leave Scouts, however, the majority of this group felt that they could not leave (see Figure 2). Moreover, Scout volunteers experienced a moderate degree of thriving (i.e. they felt energised by volunteering and they were learning/growing). Finally, most volunteers identified with Scouts moderately. This means that most volunteers felt like a typical Scouts volunteer and related to the successes and failures of Scouts as if they were their own. Leaders of Youth were slightly more positive than other volunteers in terms of intentions to stay, thriving and identification with Scouts.

The motivation of the volunteers was clearly related to intentions to stay, thriving and identification. The motivation to volunteer out of enjoyment and purpose were most positively related to all three outcomes (i.e., wanting to stay with Scouts,



feelings of thriving and identifying with Scouts). Volunteering that was motivated by the expectations of others or a sense of guilt was barely related to any of the outcomes. A complete lack

of motivation was negatively related to these outcomes, meaning that unmotivated volunteers were keen to leave.

In short, the results of this year's volunteer engagement survey painted approximately the same picture as last year's survey. Volunteers at Scouts generally feel that they **fit** well and that their **needs are satisfied**. These feelings lead to the volunteers feeling **motivated** and ultimately to **thriving, wanting to stay and identifying with Scouts**.

Combining the Findings from 2016 and 2017

As mentioned in the introduction, 1207 volunteers completed the volunteer engagement survey in both 2016 and 2017. The opinions expressed by these volunteers are especially valuable, because they allowed an investigation of changes in engagement from 2016 to 2017. For example, if the motivation of volunteers increased, did their intention to stay also improve? Additionally, we also looked at which volunteers left since 2016 and tried to predict this turnover from their responses to the 2016 survey.

Changes in volunteer engagement from 2016 to 2017

Figure 1 shows a schematic presentation of how the different aspects of volunteer engagement relate to each other. In addition to testing this model of volunteer engagement with the survey data from one year we were able to test it with differences from one year to the next year. From a research perspective, this is a much better test of the quality of a model than to look at the data from just one year. This means that - if the expected model is confirmed - the conclusions can be much firmer.

Overall, we found that, when evaluated with a combination of the 2016 and 2017 data, the model remains accurate in describing the psychological processes behind volunteer engagement and retention. That means that we can indeed explain why the intentions to stay with Scouts change. In short, if volunteers experienced more **fit** in 2017 than they did in 2016, this improved their feelings of **psychological need satisfaction**. If volunteers' **needs were satisfied** more than they were in 2016, this improved good motivation (i.e., the volunteers' **motivation** to volunteer because of a sense of purpose and enjoyment). Finally, if the good motivation of volunteers improved from 2016 to 2017, this improved **thriving, identification with Scouts and intentions to stay with Scouts**. In short, these findings show that improving feelings of fit and need satisfaction have positive consequences for volunteer engagement and retention.

In this research project, we are currently attempting to improve feelings of fit and need satisfaction through three different interventions: 1) Recruiting for fit, 2) Improving the newcomer training experience, and 3) Enhancing knowledge sharing. These interventions are described later in this report.

Explaining volunteer turnover with the results from the 2016 survey

In both volunteer engagement surveys, we have asked volunteers about their intentions to stay with Scouts. However, intentions are not synonymous to actions. Therefore, we investigated if the results from the 2016 engagement survey could be used to predict if volunteers were still in Scouts one year later. About 9% (309) of the volunteers who participated to the 2016 engagement survey had left Scouts one year later.

The intentions to stay with Scouts, which volunteers had voiced in 2016, were indeed related to actually staying in Scouts as a volunteer. Moreover, both the satisfaction of the needs for competence, autonomy and relatedness, and the motivation of volunteers in 2016 were predictive of their actual turnover. In short, the measures included in the volunteer survey predict who leaves Scouts. This conclusion is especially important for this research project, because the ultimate goal is to improve volunteer engagement and retention by influencing volunteers' feelings of fit, need satisfaction and motivation. We are currently attempting to improve these sentiments in through three different interventions: 1) Recruiting for fit, 2) Improving the newcomer training experience, and 3) Enhancing knowledge sharing.

Three Interventions to Improve Volunteer Engagement and Retention

The main purpose of this summary is to describe the main findings from the volunteer engagement surveys. This section builds on this summary by providing an update on the three interventions that the research team is working on to improve volunteer engagement and retention, which is the final goal of this research project. The overall aim of these three interventions is to improve either **fit** or **need satisfaction** of volunteers at Scouts which should ultimately lead to improvements in the engagement and retention of volunteers.

Improving recruitment

In February 2017, Scouts Victoria, with the assistance of the UWA-Scouts research group, launched a targeted recruitment campaign (called LeaderBuild) that accurately describes the role of a Scouts Leader. This campaign aims to attract volunteers who will **fit** well in Scouts and, as such, should improve future Leaders' intentions to stay with Scouts. For this recruitment campaign, Scouts Victoria and the UWA-Scouts research team revised the recruitment materials that were available to

Scouts (Group) Leaders and build a training to help Scouts Leaders with recruiting people who should fit well in Scouts. While redesigning the materials, to create realistic expectations, we described both the opportunities and demands of Scouts to: 1) Explain what volunteering at Scouts offers and 2) state what volunteering at Scouts requires. The intention of these messages is that they will attract people who fit well with both the demands and opportunities in Scouts. Additionally, we conducted several market research studies to also identify the most attractive descriptions. The campaign is currently in full swing and the goal is to evaluate the effectiveness of this campaign by the end of 2017.

Improving training

The National Scouts Training Team, assisted by the UWA-Scouts research group, is working on improving the online training experience. Based on the results from the 2016 survey, the UWA-Scouts research group compiled a set of recommendations to improve the online training for Leaders of Youth. After meeting with representatives of the National Training Team, it was decided that the main focus would be on 1) developing a clear roadmap for the online training, 2) collect information of user experience via an online training evaluation, and 3) potentially starting an online forum on which the trainees can discuss their experiences and learning. These improvements should have a positive effect on newcomer **need satisfaction** by providing the opportunity to feel competent (by giving clear instructions) and related (by allowing the trainees to connect with other trainees online) on a platform that already emphasises autonomous learning. The goal is to have most improvements implemented halfway through 2019, which should also allow the research team to evaluate the effect of the improvements on newcomer engagement.

Introducing knowledge sharing groups

Finally, together with Scouts WA, the UWA-Scouts research group started a Community of Practice (CoP) pilot on 'Including children with special needs in Scouting'. A CoP is a small group of volunteers that develops and shares knowledge on a specific topic through regular meetings. The primary aim of a CoP is to allow Leaders to develop best practices on a topic they find important together with a group of likeminded Scout volunteers. As a side product, these groups should also improve member **need satisfaction** and **motivation**. Unfortunately, the pilot did not succeed; time was too great a barrier for participation. The goal is now to revisit the format in which the CoP takes place and evaluate when and why similar initiatives in Scouting have been successful. For this purpose we asked volunteers, in the 2017 engagement survey, if they are part of a group that resembles a CoP and if/why that group is effective. We are planning to start a new CoP pilot based on the responses from the survey.



We would like to thank all who completed the survey (again). Your opinion helped us to provide valuable suggestions to Scouts, hopefully making your volunteering more enjoyable in the end.

Thank you!

For more information visit <http://uwascoutsresearch.com>