

DIALOGIC COMMUNICATION AS A WAY OF  
RECRUITING AND RETAINING VOLUNTEERS ONLINE

A RESEARCH PAPER

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	i
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	4
Dialogic Communication.....	13
Research Questions.....	15
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY.....	17
Categories of Analysis.....	18
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS.....	20
Other Findings.....	23
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION.....	25
Research Questions.....	26
Implications for Indiana Museum Websites.....	28
Best Practices.....	29
Conclusions.....	30
REFERENCES.....	34
LIST OF APPENDICES	
Appendix A: Code Sheet.....	36

## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

Nonprofit organizations are constantly facing the challenge of recruiting and retaining volunteers. This study examines, through content analysis, the websites of Indiana Museums to determine what strategies are being used to assist in the recruitment and retention of volunteers as well as determine what the websites may be lacking.

The purpose of this study is to obtain useful information which may help support the questions behind retention and recruitment of volunteers by analyzing one of the main recruiting and marketing tools, the museums' websites. By compiling findings through content analysis, this study hopes to gain a better understanding of strategies or missing fragments that may assist in the recruitment and retention of volunteers. There has been a growing lack of volunteers over time, and older individuals have become the archetype for volunteers in many nonprofit organizations. Also, by studying the content of the web pages, we are able to get a better picture of the organization, and what unique characteristics may be needed in terms of Internet-based communication concerns to better recruit and retain volunteers. The goal in analyzing the websites of high traffic volunteer industries, in this case museums, is to observe trends among web pages and to define effective strategies to address negative trends and promote those that are positive.

The study also addresses the importance of dialogic communication and whether the Indiana websites practice dialogic communication.

This research is important to the future of the nonprofit museum industry. Without the availability of the volunteer force, the services offered by many nonprofit organizations would simply cease to exist (Dutta-Bergman, 2004). Public relations is very important in establishing relationships between an organization and its key audiences. It also plays a key role in helping business industries, such as nonprofit organizations; create strong relationships with its customers. Public relations is especially important to nonprofit organizations because it works to raise awareness of their needs and programs, fund raising and increasing patronage of their services. This research is important in determining what nonprofit organizations can do to retain and recruit volunteers and how public relations can help to accomplish that goal. Having a well executed and strategic public relations plan and using proactive communication can help nonprofit agencies reach their volunteer recruitment and retention goals.

Maintaining long-term volunteers is an important component in recruiting new volunteers. Public relations serves an important role by building positive relationships between the organization and volunteers, both realized and potential. This positive relationship can lead to long-term volunteers and through word of mouth, they can help recruit new volunteers. This study is important in order to observe what nonprofit organizations are doing to help retain volunteers as well as what they can be doing.

The key to an organizations success in recruiting and retaining its volunteers is to have an understanding of its audience such as their motives, demographics and goals.

This study will help determine whether Indiana museum websites try to obtain any of this important information.

## **Chapter II**

### **Review of Literature**

Public relations plays a large role in the nonprofit sectors. McPherson (1993), states that nonprofit organizations are constantly having financial difficulties addressing certain needs, especially in some organizations, these are vital pieces that allow the organizations to run smoothly. Nonprofit organizations need to maximize their potential while minimizing costs. Nonprofit organizations could also use cost effective strategies such as press releases to reach their public. McPherson (1993) indicates;

If you work for a nonprofit, try putting the words A Not-for-Profit Organization on the nameplate of your press release. Why? The media were once required to cover a certain amount of nonprofit news. They're no longer obligated, but old habits are hard to break! Looking further into laws and guidelines and trying to cut corners is a beneficial strategy for nonprofit organizations (Pg. 42).

Many studies emphasize the importance of stretching the nonprofit dollar. By implementing public relations tools and strategies organizations can get better coverage for their buck. There are beneficial ways for nonprofit organizations to benefit off of services and media relations available to them without all the money involved. These steps are helpful ways to look at nonprofit organizations strategies at gaining volunteers and to aid in possible strategies to use without the concern for money.

McPherson (1993) states that by addressing your press release and looking for help at public relations departments of large companies that may be supportive nonprofit

organizations can become more cost effective in getting their message across. McPherson (1993) states;

Need volunteers? If you work for a nonprofit and need a regular pool of volunteers, consider sending an article to a local company newsletter asking for volunteers. Newsletter editors are always looking for submissions. Plus, it makes the company look good-volunteering in the community.

Applications for successful public relations strategies could ultimately just be taking a broader look into the organization. Swift (1985) states;

Although the usual public relations textbook usually includes sections geared to special audiences-like hospitals, churches, manufacturers, or sports centers-the PR practitioner and educator addressing the needs of particular groups may find it more helpful to consult publications produced by the groups themselves. In order to better understand an organization a practitioner should look into media messages and or publications already written or conducted by the prior organization (Pg. 4).

According to Adams (1983), research shows that public relations is vital to nonprofit organizations in areas such as fundraising. Nonprofit organizations need to find ways to raise money to run their organization. Public relations also plays an important role in the distribution of media messages and promotional campaigns. Public relations is important to nonprofit organizations by helping establish relationships between the organization and its publics, as well as effective communication skills. "In public relations, however, where results are often intangible, it is important to develop ways by which everyone can measure his or her individual performance in contributing to the museum's fulfillment of its purpose and goals" (Adams, 1983).

The recruitment and retention of volunteers is a growing problem for nonprofit organizations. According to Morton (2006), it is important for an organization to segment their publics in order to better understand the typical volunteer. Volunteers can be

segmented by their demographics, generational information, life stage information, and social class (Morton, 2006). By understanding their publics' values, demographics, and social life, organizations will have a better chance at recruiting and retaining volunteers. "By identifying characteristics that are shared in multiple segments, we can build a more complete picture of volunteers and begin to understand how to target them for our organizations" (Morton, Pg. 43).

Looking at the statistics from the Department of Labor (2009) the volunteers in the above stated segments show a continual trend. According to the Department of Labor (2009), statistics show that an estimated 61.8 million people, or 26.4 percent of the population, volunteered in the United States in 2008. The study from the Department of Labor (2009) also shows a drop in volunteers from previous years.

According to Morton (2006), knowing a volunteers' generational background as well as demographics, social class and lifestyle information is extremely important in order to successfully recruit and retain volunteers. Morton further states that studies show the target volunteer audience is likely a white female between the ages of 35 and 44, likely married with some education and with children under the age of 18. In a 2005 survey conducted by the United States Department of Labor (2009), approximately 65.4 million Americans volunteered in the period from September 2004 to September 2005, which represented approximately 28.8 percent of the population (Morton, 2006).

The Department of Labor (2009) study shows that there has been a steady decline in volunteers between the years 2004 and 2008. Persons aged between 35-44 have shown to be the consistently higher volunteering age group closely followed by those 45-54 years of age.

In affiliation with the study of demographics and lifestyles of the typical volunteer it is as important to study their psychographic profile which suggests a way of life, a way of doing things, such as activities, interests, and opinions of consumers (Dutta-Bergaman, 2004). In order to recruit and retain volunteers, organizations must understand the individual and focus on communication strategies. According to Dutta-Bergman (2004), factors in health issues such as smoking and exercising may reflect a high level of active personal responsibility and self efficacy which are key variables of volunteers. Education is a common characteristic of the average volunteer.

Existing research brings to surface key demographic variables that are significant predictors of volunteering. Among these demographic variables, education is the most consistent predictor of volunteering. Education boosts volunteerism by heightening awareness of problems, increasing empathy, and building self confidence. Volunteering outlets need to highlight the individual's responsible commitment to the community as well as incorporate communicative strategies which are appealing to different aspects of a responsible lifestyle (Dutta-Bergman, 2004).

Carraciolo (2003) states that volunteers need to be recognized and rewarded through learning experiences and career building opportunities. Volunteer energy; or the motivating variables that make an organization look attractive to a volunteer are very important to the recruitment and retention of volunteers. Nonprofit organizations are facing challenges in trying to meet these motivating variables. "Ultimately, it matters not what motivated the commitment or the benefit derived-what matters is that a volunteer made a difference" (Caracciolo, Pg. 8). Some of the most important motivation factors are altruism, achievement, affiliation, influence and recognition (Caraciolo, 2003).

According to Caraciolo (2003), volunteers need a certain energy or incentive to volunteer their time. Incentives don't have to be objects or monetary items. Caraciolo (2003) also discusses the importance of recognition and self fulfillment as some of the many important motivating variables. The ability for an individual to build their career or business is an incentive that is attractive to volunteers. There are many issues facing the volunteer such as time and talents not being utilized to the volunteers' satisfaction. Other issues that may negatively effect the recruitment and retention of volunteers are family life, generational differences as well as social life (Caraciolo, 2005).

According to Bussell and Forbes (2002), the key to an organizations success in recruiting and retaining its volunteers is to have an understanding of motives of its target group of volunteers (Pg. 248). Every volunteer has a motive for donating their time. The goal for the organization is to determine that reason and find ways to support it. Volunteers seek out opportunities that fit with their own needs and goals (Clary & Snyder, 1999). This is important for organizations to grasp so that they can offer opportunities to fit more needs and goals. Again, it is important to know your public so you can identify what needs and goals to offer.

According to a study by Clary, Ridge, et al. (2008), there are six major functions that motivate volunteers. Those functions are *values*, *understanding*, *enhancement*, *career*, *social* and *protective*. With the *value* function, the individual volunteers in order to express or act on important values like humanitarianism. The *understanding* function is about being able to be hands on and learning through experience. The *volunteer* is seeking to learn more about the world or exercise skills that are often unused. The *enhancement* function is more psychological. An individual can grow and develop

psychologically through volunteer activities. The *career* function gives the volunteer the goal of gaining career-related experience through volunteering. The *social* function allows volunteers to strengthen their social relationships. Finally, the *protective* function allows the volunteer to reduce negative personal problems. By understanding the public and understanding their function, nonprofit organizations have a better chance of establishing successful relationships.

With the amount of volunteers diminishing, it is imperative for organizations to maximize volunteer retention (Gaskin, 1998). Nonprofit organizations need to find new ways to retain the volunteers they have. Trying to train new volunteers may be costly as well as time consuming. To retain volunteers could save resources, while at the same time, increasing productivity (Millette & Cagne, 2008). Current volunteers likely already understand the mission and needs of the organization and can assist in training new volunteers to save time as well. According to Hobson, Rominger, et al. (1996), creating a volunteer-friendly environment in the organization has proven to enhance retention. When a volunteer enjoys the environment around them and takes pride in what they do, they are more likely to stay around. They may also influence other people to volunteer as well. Existing volunteers are an important recruitment tool, and organizations should recognize the value and utilize their volunteers efficiently. There are many other ways to create welcome and retaining environments for volunteers. Organizations can offer incentives and practice good dialogic communication among many other tactics.

Websites are important tools for nonprofit organizations. It is a cost effective and powerful medium in reaching a large audience. Yeon et al (2005) states

Since the early 1980s when the Reagan government cut a considerable amount of financial support to the nonprofit sector, nonprofit organizations have suffered from a persistent fiscal squeeze, and thus many nonprofit organizations generally rely on donated money and volunteer staffs to operate their programs. As such, the internet-as a cost effective medium-can potentially help nonprofit organizations boost their volunteer, donor and fund-raising opportunities through effective website management. (p.63)

According to Yeon et al, (2005), a content analysis of the top 100 nonprofit organizations shows that not many of those organizations are volunteer friendly. The study also found that volunteer-related pages are more frequent on the websites of higher-ranking nonprofit organizations rather than on websites of lower-ranking nonprofit organizations (Yeon et al, 2005).

There is a great need for organizations and public relations to be proactive. In order to draw volunteers and make an organization stand out, organizations need to take steps in the proactive direction. They need to continuously make themselves known and promote their causes and purpose. According to Yeon et al, (2005), studies show that on the top 100 nonprofit organizations sites, the web features leaned more towards donors to an organization rather than to volunteer relations.

According to Leonard (1984), there are many useful public relations tools organizations can implement while recruiting and retaining volunteers. It is important for nonprofit organizations to highlight the positive strategies that corporations implement and look at the uses of surveys and incentives that large corporations use to draw and retain volunteers. If they are able to emulate just some of those strategies that are working through inexpensive means, they may have a better chance at their goal (Leonard, 1984).

Leonard (1984) focuses closely on the need and importance of corporate volunteer councils and how they can assist with the problems facing corporations with regards to volunteerism. One idea Leonard proposes is to match employee skills to volunteer openings. This type of volunteer program is a public relations strategy that could be beneficial to the nonprofit organizations.

Recognition programs are another strategy that can assist in the challenge of recruiting and retaining volunteers. There are many important volunteer programs such as community involvement grants to organizations in which employees already volunteer their time, clearing houses, as well as referring staff to volunteer placement councils. Many corporations have found that participation in a city-wide volunteer council both strengthens the effectiveness of their own program and serves to guide other corporations in developing one (Leonard, 1984).

As of 1984 there were 15 corporate volunteer councils and 8 more in the developmental stage. These councils can benefit an organization by showing them that many types of volunteer programs are available. Leonard (1984) states that company volunteer programs operate in one of two ways. Either they identify and support employees already involved in community service or they serve to match employees with specific volunteer opportunities. The ability to implement these strategies could be very beneficial in the recruitment and especially the retention of volunteers.

In order to recruit and retain volunteers, organizations must implement a good management plan (Goodlad and McIvor, 1998). Managing your business effectively is very important to effectively recruit volunteers. Good management involves good practice and principles as well as successfully implementing volunteer handbooks,

agreements and job descriptions, which are helpful tools in recruiting volunteers effectively.

Goodlad and McIvor (1998) found that there are case studies that exemplify best practices in programs in the USA and Canada upon which practitioners can draw from to be successful. The need to set and evaluate a purpose or objective for the volunteer as well as for the organization is important. There are different ideas for setting up important guidelines as well as expectations for not only the volunteers but also the organization as a whole including staff and visitors. Some of the ideas discussed were feedback from volunteers, concluding observations on the management of the organization as well as motivation and support of volunteers.

According to Goodlad and McIvor (1998), it is important for organizations to see volunteers as an audience as well as a resource. Goodlad and McIvor (1998) define volunteers as an audience by stating that volunteers are recipients of enjoyable experience. These include opportunities to learn, to meet other people, and to assist others. Research indicates that museum volunteers find their work rewarding because they are offered a learning experience.

Goodlad and McIvor (1998) also state that volunteers are defined as a resource because museums are recipients of volunteers' time, a gift which has unique qualities but also incurs costs. This quality of service is difficult to surpass and an invaluable, unique asset to museums as they compete with profit-centered leisure industries. It is important to see volunteers not only as individuals with needs and motivations, but also as an

audience and a resource. By defining individuals in this way public relations strategies can be created to support and better recruit volunteers.

### **Dialogic Communication**

Dialogic communication is based on communication with or between people. It is characterized by the element of inclusion by acknowledging the other person. It is important for nonprofit organizations to establish dialogue and a relationship with current and potential volunteers. One way of establishing effective relationship management between an organization and its volunteers is through two way and dialogic communication (Kent & Taylor, 1998). Dialogic communication is an important step in understanding how organizations can build relationships that both serve organizational and public interests (Kent & Taylor, 1998), in this case being both current and potential volunteers.

Dialogic communication is an important factor when looking at establishing relationships between Indiana Museums and their volunteers. By establishing a relationship and acknowledging the other person, the retention and recruitment of volunteers may be stronger. A collaborative environment within a relationship indicates there will be a strong chance of success of the relationship becoming one of task-accomplishment (Blake & Mouton, 1985). Meaning that what the organization set out to do they are more likely to accomplish by practicing dialogic communication.

Dialogic communication includes five important features; *mutuality* which is the recognition of organization-public relationships; *propinquity*; the temporality and

spontaneity of interactions with publics; *empathy*, which is the supportiveness and conformation of public goals and interests; *risk*; the willingness to interact with individuals and publics on their own terms; and *commitment*, the extent to which an organization gives itself over to dialogue, interpretation and understanding in its interactions with publics (Kent & Taylor, 1998).

Museums can benefit from practicing and succeeding in these five elements. Creating relationships with your publics increases effectiveness and productivity. Mutuality and recognition, as well as establishing an organization-public relationship, is the first step in succeeding.

Kruckeberg and Stark (1988) describe empathy as a necessary aspect of community building. Kent and Taylor (1998) indicate that public relations practitioners have the ability to create, adapt and change relationships through the Internet, establishing a virtual community through dialogue. The museum organizations have the opportunity to build a community through dialogue and change the relationships they have with their public of interest by adapting to the changes over the years. With the internet being a large medium to gain and retain volunteers, museum organizations need to establish this virtual community to gain a better chance at succeeding in their task-accomplishment.

Commitment, in the sense of dialogic communication, refers to the maintaining of the relationship between an organization and its public (Kelly, 1998). It is essential in managing effective relationships. Trust and credibility are two important elements when trying to establish a successful relationship with your public. Commitment in an organization-public relationship establishes trust, credibility and a sense of connection.

Having this commitment can help museums maintain their volunteers as well as help draw them in.

Propinquity establishes that similarity of thought in a dialogic setting is not only concerned with the present, but is forward looking as well (Anderson 1994). Propinquity can allow museums to relate to their public both in the present as well as in the future. By relating to volunteers and establishing that similarity in values and goals, the museum may have a better chance at establishing a stronger relationship and aid in the recruitment and retention of volunteers.

### **Research Questions**

By studying past and present research the following research questions can be determined. Through the literature much research and theories have been found further research is needed to expand off of these ideas. The proposed research questions are the holes in the findings and could benefit organizations with further research.

#### **RQ1:**

What online strategies are nonprofit organizations in Indiana using to attract young (under 40) volunteers?

#### **RQ2:**

How can nonprofit organizations in Indiana use the web to better engage current volunteers?

#### **RQ3:**

Would webpage features and content, if applied effectively, help in the recruitment and retention of volunteers?

**RQ4:**

Which nonprofit organizations in Indiana best utilize web-based dialogic communication?

## **Chapter III**

### **Methodology**

The study consisted of a content analysis of the websites of 46 Indiana museums in order to study the retention and recruitment of volunteers in nonprofit organizations. The focus was to examine how accessible each website was for potential, as well as current, volunteers. It also examined whether the communication focus of the website was on volunteer recruitment and retention or on financial donations. There were a total of 75 Indiana museums that were found on <http://www.visitindiana.net/museum.html>, a list compiled by the Indiana Tourism Bureau. From those museums only 46 had websites.

Indiana museums were chosen for two reasons. The first was to establish a finite number of instances to examine whether dialogic communication was being used on nonprofit websites. The second reason for selecting the population was for the matter of convenience, as the researcher is from Indiana. The key to an organizations success in recruiting and retaining its volunteers is to have an understanding of its audience such as their motives, demographics and goals. Coders looked to see whether the websites tried to obtain any of that information.

The purpose of this study was to determine which web tools were being utilized for the purpose of recruiting and retaining volunteers. The key to an organizations

success in recruiting and retaining its volunteers is to have an understanding of its audience such as their motives, demographics and goals. Coders looked to see if the organizations' tried to obtain any of that information through their site. Coders were directed to determine what web tools were being utilized that would attract current and potential volunteers. They were also directed to determine if the Websites addressed volunteer motives, demographics, goals, and incentives. Coders were instructed to note any of these findings on their code sheet.

### **Categories of Analysis**

Coders were instructed to look for information consistent with content analyses conducted by Kent and Taylor (1998) and by Supa (2005). However, coders were additionally directed to look for information on each museum website that pertained to volunteer information. A code sheet is included in Appendix A.

The study also looked at what was needed of the volunteer. The presence or absence of requirements of the volunteer and whether or not there are any incentives to volunteering were also examined. By looking at these key factors, it can help to determine what kind of relationship the museum has with their volunteers. Offering incentives for their time and listing requirements including age, training and education may be important factors for potential volunteers considering which organization they may wish to become involved with. Knowing what to expect from each other as well as recognition and appreciation is an important communication tool the museums can convey through their website.

The study also focused on financial donations. It looked at whether the museum websites offered links to donor information and whether that link was accessible on their homepage making it easy to donate. Again, this is important to see how easily accessible the museum has made it to people wanting to make donations. The analysis also determined whether there was a mission statement solely focused on donors. As well as with the volunteers, the study looked at the ability for donations to be made online as well if contact information of an organizational representative was made available for potential donors.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Results**

Through a content analysis, a total of 46 Indiana museums were coded to determine how accessible and user friendly they were for volunteers. The study looked at how volunteer focused each website was as well as their focus on donations.

**RQ1: What online strategies are not-for-profit organizations in Indiana using to attract young (under 40) volunteers?**

The Indiana museum websites that were studied did not use online strategies effectively to attract younger volunteers. They lacked volunteer information and accessibility. Only (75%) of the websites included requirements for the volunteers. Age was one of these requirements, but not all those museums that listed requirements had a minimum or maximum age listed. The Indianapolis Museum of Art and Indianapolis Children's Museum established a more open and accessible site that might draw a younger crowd. Their sites were fun and they offered mission statements that were geared toward a multigenerational audience.

This was a problem area that the study has exposed for the Indiana museums. There was nothing that stood out that was aimed at bringing in a younger crowd. Most of the Sites lacked enough information to draw any crowd.

**RQ2: How can not-for-profit organizations in Indiana use the web to better engage current volunteers?**

Out of forty-six total websites only nineteen (41%) offered links to volunteer information. Of those nineteen websites with links to volunteer information, sixteen of them (84%) have the link accessible on their homepage.

Eleven of the nineteen Websites (57%) that contain a volunteer link have a mission statement solely for the purpose of the volunteers aside from the overall organization's mission statement.

A website was coded as offering positions as long as they listed a job category or specific task. Some websites stated they needed clerical work and some were more specific and gave the position title. Both of these were considered as having positions listed. Of the nineteen volunteer websites, twelve of them (63%) listed volunteer categories or specific volunteer opportunities. Eight of those twelve websites (66%) listing volunteer positions also listed the description of each job to better inform the individual what the position entailed. Only two of those twelve (2%) websites offered information on hours and availability.

Also, of the twelve websites there were a total of 113 positions listed averaging nine positions for each. Most of the twelve websites only offered a few positions, yet there were several that had many positions listed. Only nine of the twelve (75%) websites offering position information, included requirements for the position. Requirements included any necessary training, experience, education or any other requirement an individual should have or they would prefer for each position.

Of those nineteen websites with volunteer links, fifteen of them (79%) offer the opportunity to sign up online. Being able to sign up online to volunteer includes being able to submit an application to volunteer electronically as well as being able to print or access the paperwork to submit for volunteer opportunities whether it is electronically or by other means.

**RQ3: Would Web Page features and content if applied effectively help in the recruitment and retention of volunteers?**

There are seventy-five Indiana museums and only forty-six of them (61%) had a supporting web page. In a time that is very dependent on new technology and the internet, museums can benefit from taking advantage of effectively applying web page features and content.

Only six of the nineteen websites (31%) offering volunteer information listed incentives for becoming a volunteer.

Out of the nineteen websites offering volunteer links, seventeen (89%) of them offered contact information for the volunteer. Eight of those seventeen (47%) websites included contact names. Sixteen of the seventeen (94%) included email addresses for additional information. Fourteen of the seventeen (82%) websites included phone numbers and only one of the seventeen websites (5%) included a picture of the contact people.

Nonprofit organizations can better utilize the web by establishing ways to create relationships with their public. They can create web based communities by creating blogs for current volunteers to interact with each other. They can create ways to interact with their volunteers to gain insight from them. The museums studied could make their

websites more accessible to their publics by making the websites more informative. All the websites should offer volunteer links on the homepage.

**RQ4: Which not-for-profit organization in Indiana best utilizes web-based dialogic communication?**

Of the Forty six total Indiana museum websites studied, the Indianapolis Children's Museum and the Indianapolis Museum of Art were the most volunteer focused websites. The Indianapolis Children's Museum had a volunteer link on the homepage as well as a mission statement for the volunteers. It was one of the few websites that listed the description of the specific volunteer opportunities as well as a way to sign up online to volunteer for those positions. The only downfall from that website was that it didn't offer contact names, phone numbers or pictures of the contacts.

The Indianapolis Museum of Art also listed opportunities available to volunteers as well as descriptions and requirements needed for those positions. The website did not offer availability for the positions nor did they have contact names or pictures. These were the two websites out of the forty-six that met the most criteria from the content analysis.

**Other Findings**

The content analysis also looked at the museums focus on donors. Since volunteering is in a way donating to the organization, it was important to see if museums focused more of their resources on financial donations or volunteer donations.

Twenty one out of the forty six (45%) websites being coded offered a link to donate financially whether it is through a membership or contribution. Twenty of those

twenty one (95%) websites had a donation link located on its homepage. Eleven of the twenty one (52%) websites offering links for donations had its own mission statement. The mission statement was geared toward donors apart from the organization's overall mission statement. Fourteen of the twenty one (66%) websites had option to donate online. Most of these options included being able to make an electronic payment. Thirteen of the twenty one (62%) websites offered some sort of contact information for donor.

## **Chapter V**

### **Discussion**

Membership is the backbone of any nonprofit organization and recruitment and retention is the constant challenge facing every volunteer leader today. Volunteerism is viewed as essential in the success of an organization which is why this study is important in determining what organizations can do to retain and recruit volunteers. Recruiting volunteers is a constant challenge for nonprofit organizations. Actively recruiting new volunteers, along with actively retaining active volunteers, are mission critical activities for any volunteer-based organization.

This study explored what web tools nonprofit organizations, in this case Indiana Museum Websites, were utilizing as well as lacking in the recruitment and retention of volunteers. The study also addresses the importance of dialogic communication and whether the Indiana websites practice dialogic communication. The purpose of this study was to obtain useful information which may help support the questions behind retention and recruitment of volunteers by analyzing one of the main recruiting and marketing tools, the museums' websites.

## Research Questions

Taking a risk to assist in the achievement of goals is a method that museum organizations may benefit by doing. By showing a willingness to interact with individuals and publics on their own terms, there is a greater sense of community and the opportunity to build a stronger relationship between organization and volunteers. Though risk may come with unpredictable and dangerous outcomes, it may also allow the organization to recognize the strangeness of others therefore creating a better understanding of the other. The understanding becomes important in establishing relationships and therefore assumes that the risk is positive (Supa, 2005).

Dialogic communication is especially important for the web-based side of museums, but can be an important tool overall. Communication is potentially difficult through the Internet, and the establishment of dialogue on a static site may be even more difficult. Museums should take steps to address and use the established elements of web-based dialogue. By establishing a supportive community based museum, taking risks, establishing similarity in values as well as demonstrating a commitment to one another, an organization can flourish and meet their goals.

Nonprofit organizations can better utilize the web by establishing ways to create relationships with their public. They can create web based communities by creating blogs for current volunteers to interact with each other. They can create ways to interact with their volunteers to gain insight from them. The museums studied could make their websites more accessible to their publics by making the websites more informative. All the websites should offer volunteer links on the homepage.

The sites could also offer a special link for current volunteers that offers inside information of the museum as well as upcoming events and possible job opening and volunteer openings. The Sites could also find a way to establish recognition and gratitude for their volunteers. A beneficial strategy that the organization could do for both current and potential volunteers is to create a page for current volunteers to tell their story. This is a way for volunteers to be recognized and tell what donating their time has done for them as well as the museum. These stories could reach out and aid in the recruitment of volunteers as well.

The organizations could also create a mission statement for volunteers to address the need for them to donate their time as well convey why it is important for the organization. This creates a sense of understanding between the organization and its public.

An important tool museum organization could utilize is to list job postings as well as define those jobs in terms of what each job entails, requirements and hours and availability. A very important web page tool that would be beneficial in the recruitment and retention of volunteers is the ability to sign up to volunteer online. Making this process easy and accessible to potential or current volunteers is a positive risk for museums to take. After studying the Indiana museums it seems obvious that web page features would aid in the recruitment and retention of volunteers. A feature that would benefit the organization as well as the volunteer is to list incentives for volunteering. Individuals are donating their time and want to do it for a good reason. The incentives don't have to be monetary, if it is possible for a museum to offer discounts or free

memberships to its volunteers it is a simple and beneficial way to show appreciation and again build on that relationship they need to establish.

Museums need to have a surplus of contact information to reach out to a larger audience. They should have email information, phone numbers and the names of the people they need to contact. There should also be pictures of the people that they are contacting which helps to make it more personable. The study looked at the accessibility of contact information for potential or current volunteers. The contact information was broken down by different mediums which include whether the website offered contact information in general, contact names, emails, phone numbers and pictures of the people which you can contact. The contact information had to be for volunteers only in order to be counted.

The opportunities are endless for museums using the web as a tool. The most important thing missing from these museums was a sense of community and personalization. They lacked many of the essential components to recruit and retain volunteers, but none of them went above and beyond to make it their goal.

### **Implications for Indiana Museum Websites**

Nonprofit organizations need volunteers in order to achieve and maintain their goals. Volunteers are an integral part of the organization. The research looks at what websites should be utilizing and through a study of content analysis, it demonstrates what it is these websites are lacking. This information should open several doors of opportunity for nonprofit organizations. By simply understanding the motivating factors of volunteers, organizations can offer more attractive opportunities.

The research also highlights that though times have changed, many organizations haven't adapted to the new target audience. By understanding this new information and the new needs of current and potential volunteers, organizations can use different tactics to achieve their goals. It is important for organizations to stay in tune with the changing times and consistently meet the needs of their volunteers.

Communication plays a large role in the success of nonprofit organization. Organizations can better establish communication skills with volunteers. Having management practices and policies in place as well as constantly reviewing and enhancing them can allow organizations to be more efficient. This study highlights important communication tools that organizations can use to be successful in the recruitment and retention of volunteers.

### **Best Practices**

There are many directions nonprofit organizations can take to better fulfill their goal of volunteer recruitment and retention. The trend of the Indiana websites was lack of resources for both current and potential volunteers. Nonprofit organizations can recruit and retain volunteers by practicing successful management and organizational skills. These organizations can utilize their websites to their benefit by making them convenient for both current and potential volunteers.

Organizations should invest in recognizing volunteers, providing training and professional development for them, and screening volunteers and matching them to organizational tasks. These practices can assist in increasing retention of volunteers because they all center on enriching the volunteer experience. In addition to adopting

certain management practices, organizations can provide a culture that is welcoming to volunteers, allocate sufficient resources to support them, and enlist volunteers in recruiting other volunteers. All of these practices help organizations to achieve higher rates of retention (Brudney, 1999).

Successful recruitment convinces people to give their time and energy to the organization and will match a volunteer's needs with the needs of the organization. Organizations should adopt policies and procedures which reduce risk as well as clarify responsibilities and ensure service consistency. An effectively managed volunteer program will provide the organization with appropriately placed volunteers whose efforts advance the organization's mission. By having a risk management plan in place, an organization is more likely to retain their volunteers. The plan should always be reviewed and updated when necessary ("Standards of practice," 2009).

Recruitment efforts often start in-house with current volunteers. Current volunteers can be a great source of new volunteers. Many non-profits already maintain a list of supporters and interested individuals. Contacting these supporters through either a direct mail campaign or advertisements placed in a newsletter is a great way to further involve people who are already committed to the organizations mission. Volunteer recruitment and retention needs to be intentional and ongoing (Witham, 2007)

## **Conclusions**

Through the content analysis of the 46 Indiana Museums it can be determined that most of the museums had a larger focus on the financial donations rather than

volunteering. Most of the websites did not contain a mission statement focusing on the volunteer. Many of the websites were lacking a list of incentives for the volunteers.

There is a problem in the recruitment and retention of volunteers in the nonprofit organizations. By studying the 46 Indiana Museums websites, it can be determined that there are many areas that may play a large role in this problem. The mission statement is a very important element that should be added to the websites. People like to know the purpose of volunteering and they need a reason to be needed and know what their time is worth. Most of these websites failed to mention why they needed people to donate their time and what it could do for their organization and for other people.

This is also the same with mentioning incentives. Someone may be more likely to donate their time if they know they will get something in return whether it be a free membership or a discount. If an organization is able to offer any incentives, then it could be an effective method in gaining and retaining volunteers.

More and more people are using the internet to communicate and be involved. Most of the websites offered ways to sign up online. Many of those websites allowed the individual to print out the documents but not submit them online. Offering a way to sign up online is a step in the right direction yet it would be more beneficial if they could find a way to allow people to submit the documents online as well.

Though many of the websites listed positions online, most of the positions listed were not specific. They listed categories in which they have used volunteers for. The websites need to give people specific positions that are open and keep them current. Position descriptions are also another important part of attracting potential volunteers. Museums need to let people know what exactly it is they are volunteering their time for.

This is also true for listing requirements. There needs to be a mutual understanding of what is required of a volunteer. This understanding will allow both the museum and the volunteer to know what to expect from each other. Going into a position knowing what is expected of you could help the effectiveness and productivity.

Dialogic communication plays a large role in establishing organization-public relationships. This study has shed light on the areas in which the nonprofit organizations, in this case Indiana museums, could focus more attention on. There needs to be a stronger community based relationship, especially online. The relationship needs to convey trust and credibility. The organizations need to take more of a risk and reach out to their public in new and different ways. They need to target their public and find ways to relate to their values and goals. The websites studied lacked the important elements of communication. The majority of the Sites gave minimal information useful to volunteers and did not establish any sense of relationship or connection to their public.

Museums trying to recruit volunteers need to convey themselves as a credible and worthy organization. Volunteers are giving their time and museums need to acknowledge that and express gratitude. The organizations also need to be much more informative than what this study has shown. There was a lack of positions listed, many of those positions did not give detail or communicate to the volunteer what, or if any, requirements were necessary. It is the same with trying to retain current volunteers. The Sites did not have any recognition or acknowledgment of their volunteers. There was no community established for volunteers to interact with one another or share concerns with the organization.

One of the issues discussed in this paper was the age of the typical volunteer and how organizations can gain a younger public. As discussed by Kent and Taylor (2002), propinquity is an important element in communication. By knowing the public that the museum is trying to address and creating similarity and a likeness with that group can help attract a different crowd. Many nonprofit organizations have not changed their tactics for recruiting and retaining volunteers along with the changing times. Many people who used to stay home are now working and there are many other environmental changes that affect the 'new' volunteer versus what organizations have been used to. In order to gain a younger group, museums need to change their tactics to adapt with their new public.

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# Appendix A

## Code Sheet

### Code Sheet for Indiana Museums

<b>1</b>	<b>Volunteer Link</b>	
	Y	Yes
	N	No
<b>2</b>	<b>On the homepage</b>	
	Y	Yes
	N	No
<b>3</b>	<b>Volunteer Mission Staement</b>	
	Y	Yes
	N	No
<b>4</b>	<b>Donor Link</b>	
	Y	Yes
	N	No
<b>5</b>	<b>Donor link on homepage</b>	
	Y	Yes
	N	No
<b>6</b>	<b>Donor Mission Statement</b>	
	Y	Yes
	N	No
<b>7</b>	<b>Sign up online to volunteer</b>	
	Y	Yes
	N	No
<b>8</b>	<b>Sign up online to Donate</b>	
	Y	Yes
	N	No
<b>9</b>	<b>Volunteer positions listed</b>	
	Y	Yes
	N	No
<b>10</b>	<b>How many positions</b>	
	1	1
	2	2
	3	3
	4	4
	5	5
<b>11</b>	<b>Position Descriptions</b>	
	Y	Yes
	N	No
<b>12</b>	<b>Availability (Hours and Days)</b>	
	Y	Yes
	N	No
<b>13</b>	<b>Contact Information for Volunteers</b>	
	Y	Yes
	N	No

- 14**            **Contact Names**  
Y Yes  
N No
- 15**            **Email for Contacts**  
Y Yes  
N No
- 16**            **Phone Numbers**  
Y Yes  
N No
- 17**            **Pictures**  
Y Yes  
N No
- 18**            **Contact Information for Donors**  
Y Yes  
N No
- 19**            **Requirements Listed (age, training, education)**  
Y Yes  
N No
- 20**            **Incentives Listed**  
Y Yes  
N No