Volunteer coordinator pilot

Key findings

Background

"…work of volunteers is often strengthened and the volunteer experience deepened when volunteer work is carefully structured and organized, which often requires the assistance of paid workers."
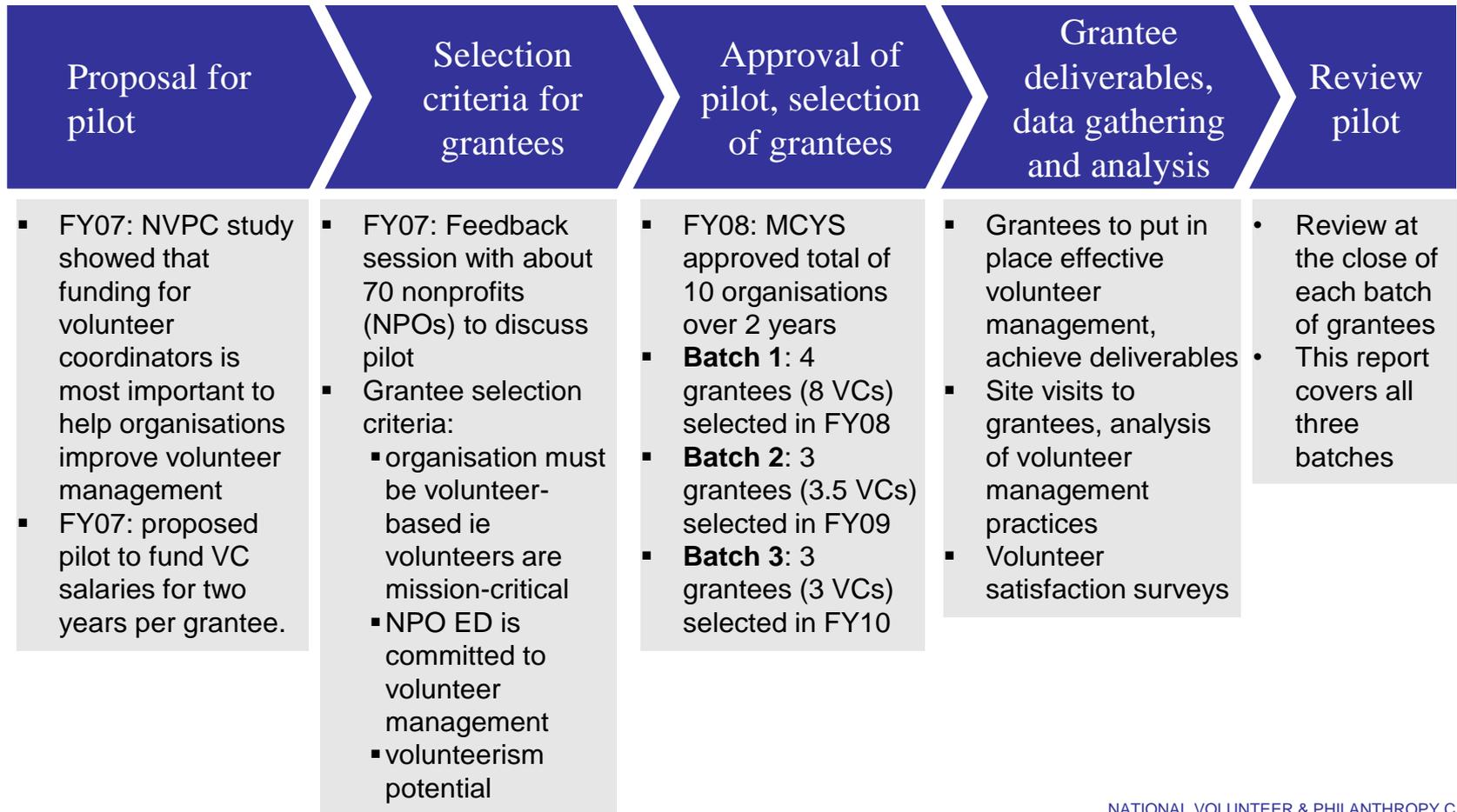
International Labour Organisation (2011)*

Project background

- Funding for volunteer coordinators (VCs) to improve volunteer management in 10 organisations. Each grant was for two years
- 3 batches of grantees: one batch each in FY08, FY09, FY10

Project phases

Proposal for pilot	Selection criteria for grantees	Approval of pilot, selection of grantees	Grantee deliverables, data gathering and analysis	Review pilot

▪ FY07: NVPC study showed that funding for volunteer coordinators is most important to help organisations improve volunteer management
▪ FY07: proposed pilot to fund VC salaries for two years per grantee.
	▪ FY07: Feedback session with about 70 nonprofits (NPOs) to discuss pilot
	▪ Grantee selection criteria:
	  ▪ organisation must be volunteer-based ie volunteers are mission-critical
	  ▪ NPO ED is committed to volunteer management
	  ▪ volunteerism potential
		▪ FY08: MCYS approved total of 10 organisations over 2 years
		▪ **Batch 1**: 4 grantees (8 VCs) selected in FY08
		▪ **Batch 2**: 3 grantees (3.5 VCs) selected in FY09
		▪ **Batch 3**: 3 grantees (3 VCs) selected in FY10
			▪ Grantees to put in place effective volunteer management, achieve deliverables
			▪ Site visits to grantees, analysis of volunteer management practices
			▪ Volunteer satisfaction surveys
				• Review at the close of each batch of grantees
				• This report covers all three batches

Project background

- Among the 10 grantees, 14.5 positions were funded over two years

	No. of VC positions funded	No. of VC positions after funding ended
Grantee 1	2.5	2.5
Grantee 2	1.5	1
Grantee 3	2	1
Grantee 4	2	2
Grantee 5	1	0`
Grantee 6	1	1
Grantee 7	1.5	1.5
Grantee 8	1	1
Grantee 9	1	1
Grantee 10	1	-``
	14.5	**11**

`VC position went to the membership portfolio (made up of volunteers)
``Grantee has not decided whether to fill VC position. In the interim, VC work given to a new hire, a counsellor.

Project background

- VC Pilot was more than just funding
- Research was big part of the pilot
  - Compare volunteer management at start of grant vs end of grant
  - Data mainly qualitative, with some quantitative measures
  - Data collected included
    - Volunteer management practices (checklist)
    - Staff views (interviews)
    - Volunteer views (survey)
- Build grantees' volunteer management capability
  - eg volunteer management framework, checklists and advice

Quantitative results

- Generally, grantees succeeded in getting new volunteers
- Overall volunteer satisfaction stable
  - % of volunteers rating "satisfied and above": 80% to 96%
  - Exception: one grantee with satisfaction rating of 61%; VC hired more than a year after grant and left after 9 months

15,300
new volunteers
signed up in 2 years*

*Sign-ups may not have been deployed. Among the grantees, active volunteers at Year 2: 5,385+109 cases. 1 case refers to 1 distinct entity. An entity may be an individual or a group of individuals from a department in an organisation or the entire organisation.

Qualitative results

- All grantees reported qualitative improvements: Great improvements in 2/4 stages in NVPC's 4-stage volunteer management framework
  - Improvements, when "institutionalised" through policies and processes and applied consistently, would benefit volunteers during and after the grant

Improvements in volunteer management among grantees

1. Concept stage — Moderate	3. Implementation stage — Great
a) Clearly defined vision, mission and goals for the volunteers b) Assessed volunteer needs c) Designed budget for volunteer involvement	a) Has screening procedure to identify suitable volunteers b) Conducted orientation and training c) Supervised volunteers d) Has recognition activities for volunteers
2. Planning stage — Great	4. Review stage — Least
a) Has written job description, policies b) Has a recruitment plan and procedure c) Designed database, record keeping for volunteers' information, hours etc. d) Identified potential risks faced by volunteers, manage risks	a) Reviewed performance/ reasons for exit of volunteers b) Assessed impact of volunteer programme

Qualitative results

- Less "adhocracy", more coordination, improved deployment of volunteers across departments, even among well-established organisations

Grantee 1	Grantee 2	Grantee 3	Grantee 4
Documentation required from pilot helped **map out priorities, objectives. Easy reference** for all staff, simplified internal communications. **Volunteers more "autopilot"** eg help lead projects with minimal staff supervision. **Longer-staying volunteers and better animal advocates.**	Before pilot, there was no volunteer coordinator; existing programme staff performed role ad hoc. Various departments recruit and monitor their own volunteers, no cohesiveness in coordinating volunteers. After the VC pilot, **better framework to grow volunteer numbers, programmes.**	Before pilot, various divisions managed their volunteers. No centralised record of volunteers' information. With NVPC support, able to engage full time staff; **central point to handle deployment of volunteers, track contributions, cross reference on volunteers' expertise**, etc.	**Volunteer satisfaction survey** was something grantee had never thought of doing. Survey **results presented to Council. Survey surfaced volunteer motivations and profiles.** New ways to appreciate volunteers. Survey builds capacity to have better volunteers relations.

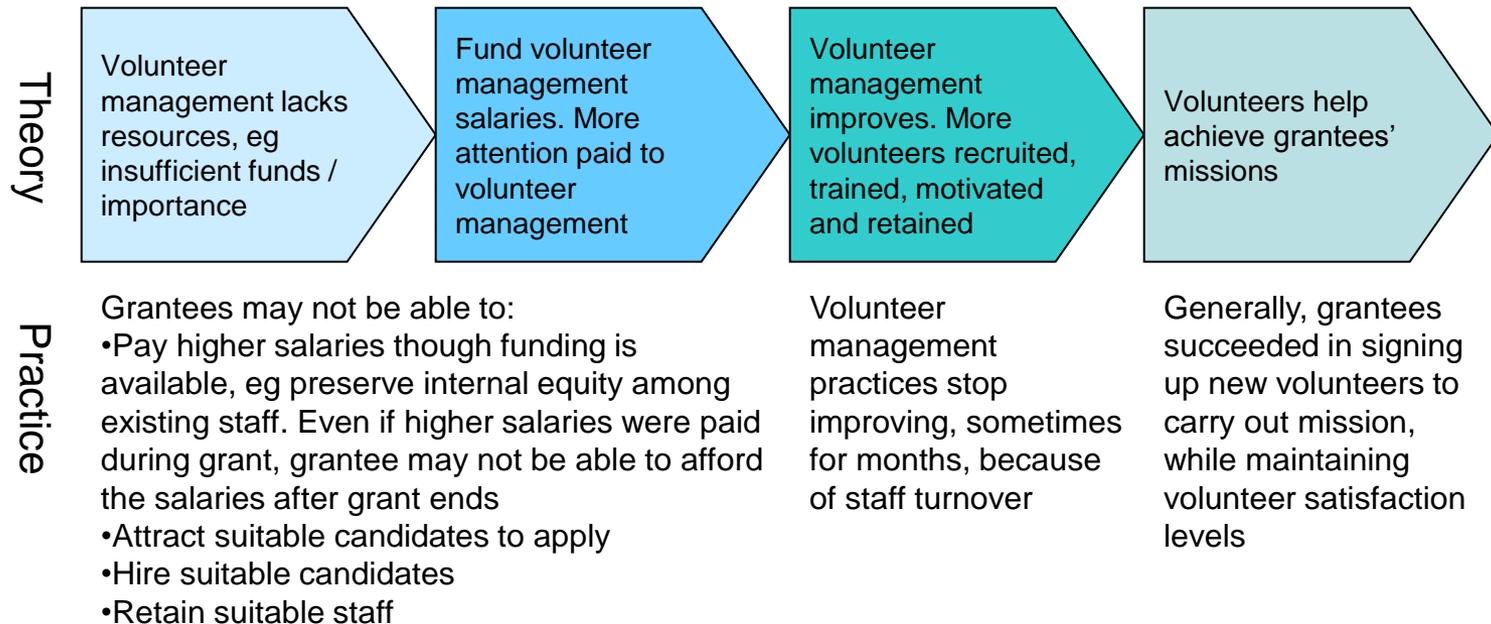| Grantee 5	Grantee 6	Grantee 7
Project woke us up and says, 'it's time you work out a system". Grantee is involved in indoor and outdoor activities. **Robust risk management framework developed to run activities in safer environment.** Evaluation forms filled by volunteers and discussed by supervisors, to enable self **accountability and suggest improvement in volunteers' work.**	Grantee managed to recruit and retain active volunteers. Among them, a few have shown leadership and organisational skills. With the VC, there is **someone dedicated to develop/implement the volunteer management processes eg sustaining, evaluating and appreciating volunteers.**	In the past, done separately by each centre. Now, "Instead of separate pools of volunteers and scattered resources, we have **one consolidated volunteer database which we can easily tap on".** Could result in higher chances of recruiting volunteers. **Feedback** consolidated anonymously by VC and disseminated **to improve programmes and enhance future volunteering experiences.**

Qualitative results

- **Better management of volunteers, matching of volunteers to needs**

Grantee 8	Grantee 9	Grantee 10
The VC pilot programme "made us **understand what a VMS is**. It also **made us more conscious of the whole process** eg from recruiting of volunteers to interviewing and placing them; finding ways to motivate, recognise volunteers and look after volunteers' welfare and development". **Building relationships with volunteers takes time. With a VC, "volunteers are guided"** and "know what other areas they can contribute in". With the VC, "we are **better able to match the needs of people who wish to volunteer to** … **the needs of the various centres**".	Before the pilot started, there were 150 active volunteers. With the grant, **number of active volunteers increased** to 410. In the past, scope of volunteer work was limited eg "provide some entertainment to patients". Now, with staff handling volunteer management, **grantee widened scope of volunteer work** by tapping volunteers' skills, eg recruit and mentor other volunteers. **Some volunteers were also donors, eg sponsor programmes they came up with.** The grant "has brought a big wave of changes …we now **better managed our volunteers**" which in turn "**increase our base of volunteers as a happy volunteer refers another**".	The **VC pilot programme made volunteer coordinating work easier**. With a VC, there is someone to attend to volunteers straightaway and allocate them to the respective volunteer programme. **Response time is shorter.** **VC recruited more groups of volunteers, which created more opportunities for beneficiaries** to participate in a variety of activities.

Conclusions and recommendations

Grant addressed ability to pay salaries …

- Funding made possible the hiring of staff to manage volunteers. We saw them as managers; they manage volunteers, not just do clerical work
- Grantees may hire staff at non-managerial grade, and pay lower salaries*
- Theory of change differed from practice in some cases

Theory

| Volunteer management lacks resources, eg insufficient funds / importance | Fund volunteer management salaries. More attention paid to volunteer management | Volunteer management improves. More volunteers recruited, trained, motivated and retained | Volunteers help achieve grantees' missions |

Practice

Grantees may not be able to:
- Pay higher salaries though funding is available, eg preserve internal equity among existing staff. Even if higher salaries were paid during grant, grantee may not be able to afford the salaries after grant ends
- Attract suitable candidates to apply
- Hire suitable candidates
- Retain suitable staff

Volunteer management practices stop improving, sometimes for months, because of staff turnover

Generally, grantees succeeded in signing up new volunteers to carry out mission, while maintaining volunteer satisfaction levels

*VC salaries ranged from $1,200 per month to $5,500 per month, depending on qualifications, organisation and other factors. For example, qualifications ranged from GCE 'O' levels to masters degree; job level ranged from executive to director.

… but some grantees unable to hire and hold on to VCs

- **Difficulty hiring, holding on to VCs**
  - Hard to find VCs good in both fieldwork and admin
  - Grantees experienced VC turnover. Volunteer management practices stop improving, sometimes for months
- **Grant period, deliverables affected**
  - Took time to hire and/or find replacement VCs
  - Less than two years to improve volunteer management, meet deliverables
  - Grant usage affected; when vacancies unfilled, no salaries payable

- **Reasons for leaving**
  - Some reasons common to other jobs eg low salary, poor job fit
  - Some reasons specific to VC job: work is complex but career pathway lacking
    - VC is a boundary-spanner, working with external parties (volunteers from different walks of life) and internal (programme staff)
    - There is managerial work (eg manpower planning) and clerical work (eg scheduling)
    - Work VC does "can be very lonely, draining". Support from management, staff and mentorship may help retain VCs

Despite VC turnover, grantees reported qualitative improvements in volunteer management. It would take time and consistent application for qualitative improvements to lead to quantitative improvements eg increase in new or active volunteers

Human resource development

- In other manpower-challenged areas, the approach has included early talent spotting, scholarships, high pay, good career prospects
  - Public sector examples: armed forces, civil service
  - Private sector examples: MNCs, GLCs. SME: SME-Spring Executive Development Scholarship
- Steps have been taken in social service sector eg scholarships, pay increases, Professional and Leadership Development Scheme, and Sabbatical Leave Scheme for social workers

- In the health sector, much is also being done
  - Foreign talent imported for both doctors and nurses
  - Strategic Manpower Conversion Programme to help people make career switch to healthcare sector
  - MOH pilot: central employment scheme (Career Resourcing and Development of Allied Health Talents*) to help recruitment and retention of intermediate and long-term care staff, with development pathways across the sector, training and career exposure opportunities
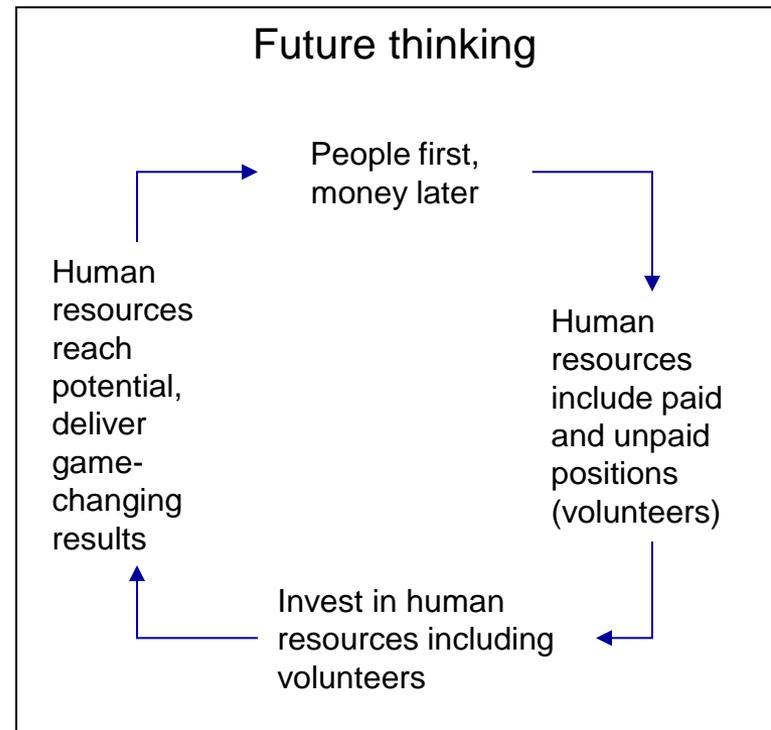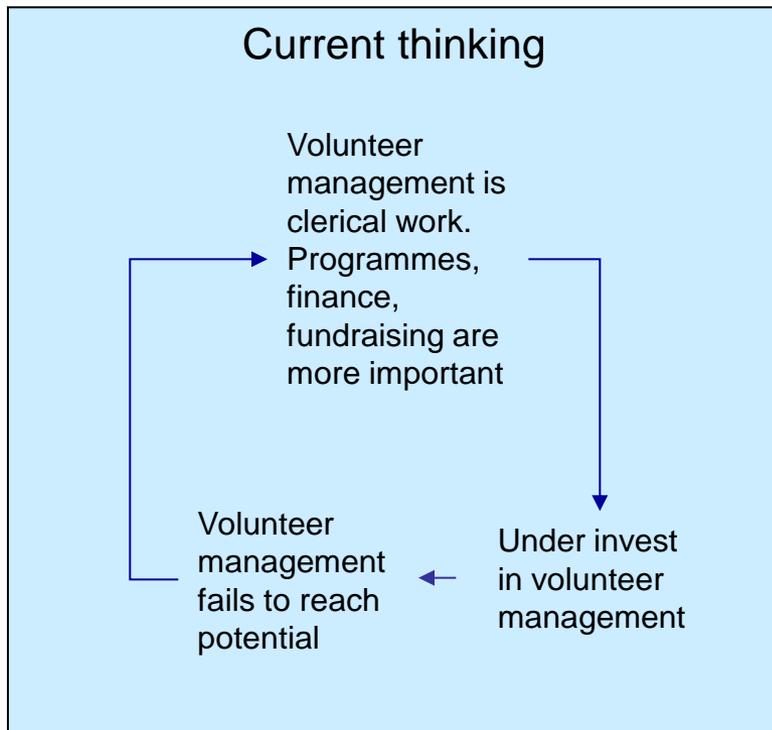
Human resource development

- Among non-profit support functions, finance tends to be more developed. Leaders tend to pay more attention to finance as there are statutory and regular requirements
  - Financial Reporting Standards and Charities Accounting Standards set detailed standards on doing the right things and doing things right
  - Code of Governance also sets the tone on Financial Management and Controls

- HR is also a requirement, but usually in the context of paid staff
  - All tiers in Code of Governance have HR guidelines particularly for Basic II and above: there must be policies for recruitment, training and development, and performance review
  - For volunteer management, requirement is simply "that there is a volunteer management system in place" (for enhanced and advanced tiers, not in Basic I nor II)

- Career options for VCs are generally limited compared to programme staff

Volunteer management development

- ## To change the game, change the thinking
  - ### Start with changing leadership thinking

Current thinking

Volunteer management is clerical work. Programmes, finance, fundraising are more important

Under invest in volunteer management

Volunteer management fails to reach potential

Future thinking

People first, money later

Human resources include paid and unpaid positions (volunteers)

Invest in human resources including volunteers

Human resources reach potential, deliver game-changing results

Volunteer management development: value chain

- Funding is only part of the value chain. A holistic approach is needed
- The more links in the value chain are addressed, the better the results, leading to a virtuous cycle

i. NPO leaders
•Value volunteers and volunteer management
•Prepared to invest in volunteer management (attention, headcount, budget)

ii. Funding set aside
•For VC headcount
•For VC training and devt
•Other volunteer expenses

iii. Volunteer management is a "destination", not intrusion or accident
•Career prospects, reward, recognition
•On the radar of job seekers like HR is

vi. Other NPO staff
•Value volunteers
•Prepared to work with VCs (beneficiaries don't seem to have a problem working with volunteers)

v(a) Standards, skills in volunteer management
•Best practices
•Transferable

iv. Pipeline of VCs (paid or unpaid): recruit and select

v(b) Training providers
•Overview, short courses for key modules
•Masterclass
•Formal qualifications (and some say certification)
•Informal, peer learning

When links in value chain are in place, there is a virtuous cycle

- Volunteers play a more integral role in achieving organisational mission
- Volunteer coordinator's job satisfaction grows
- Volunteer base grows

Grantee 9
Management said: **Now, with staff handling volunteer management**, grantee could "**widen the scope of volunteer work by tapping on the volunteers' skills**", **eg recruit and mentor other volunteers. Some volunteers are also donors, eg sponsor programmes they come up with**. VC said **when starting out as a VC**, "I was not sure if I fit the VC role. **A lot of things were done based on my memory**… **Now … there is something for me to refer to, it made my work easier** … **I am doing work of a bigger scale**". "**I handle bigger projects rather than small projects**, which I used to handle in the past. The **small roles are taken over by the volunteer leaders**. …I am also happy when the volunteer programmes ran well". "... because of all these guidance, it made us think about the areas/things that we should do to improve. **NVPC is like a mentor to us**. As we spoke to NVPC staff, they were able to **tell us the areas that we should look into** … NVPC was able to **help us expand to do even better**". The grant "has brought a big wave of changes …we now **better managed our volunteers**" which in turn "**increase our base of volunteers as a happy volunteer refers another**".

Technical notes

Research limitations

- Volunteer satisfaction was measured through surveys
  - A survey was done at the start of the grant, then compared with another survey at the end of the grant
    - Surveys were administered by grantees using a questionnaire provided by NVPC
    - Survey was mostly done online. Responses may not be representative of all volunteers eg exclude those who did not wish to be surveyed online
    - Where hard copy surveys were used, responses may have been affected by social desirability bias, since respondents were potentially identifiable

- This is a cross-sectional study. Survey respondents at start and end of grant may not be the same
- Some grantees' surveys had small sample sizes (about 30 respondents)

Research limitations

- Changes in variables (eg satisfaction level) may not reflect improvements made by grantees in volunteer management
    - Changes in volunteer management, when made, may take time to "trickle down" and survey respondents may not have benefitted from those changes. Some improvements may even raise expectations
    - For the survey done at the end of the grant, a screening question was inserted. Only those who had volunteered at least once with grantee in the past 12 months were to do the survey. Hence, results (eg satisfaction level) at the end of the grant may not be comparable to survey results at start of grant as some people took part in survey which they should not have

- Site visits and interviews
    - There may be imperfect recall of information on current volunteer management practices
    - Interviews may be conducted differently depending on each grantee. To improve consistency across grantees, an interview guide was used