

# **Developing the Volunteer Motivation Inventory**

**to**

## **Assess the Underlying Motivational Drives of Volunteers in Western Australia**

**A Research Project funded by Lotterywest**

**Social Research Grant**

**and**

**Undertaken by CLAN WA Inc.**

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**MTD-MAKING THE DIFFERENCE**



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The motivation of people to volunteer has long fascinated those researching and working alongside volunteers. Understanding the underlying motivational drives of those who volunteer has been a recurring theme preoccupying much of the literature on volunteering.

What actually motivates a person to volunteer is a complex and vexing question, yet understanding these motivations can be of great assistance to organisations in attracting, placing and retaining volunteers.

First, organisations can use information on motivations to attract potential volunteers by tailoring recruitment messages to closely match their motivational needs. Second, in assessing the motivational needs of new volunteers, organisations can ensure effective placement of volunteers into activities that meet their needs. Third, by understanding their volunteers' motivations, organisations can seek to maintain volunteer satisfaction by ensuring these motivations are fulfilled.

This research project aimed to develop a self-report inventory of volunteer motivations, which is intended to be administered to individual volunteers, to determine the key factors that motivated the volunteer to engage in their volunteering activity.

An initial Volunteer Motivation Inventory (VMI) was developed in a previous study by McEwin and Jacobsen-D'Arcy (2002). Then, in this current research, the VMI was administered to various samples of volunteers in many organisations in Western Australia. This research consisted of *three* studies and *five* stages. At each stage, the VMI was revised with the ultimate goal of maximising its capacity to robustly assess volunteer motivations. The VMI, in its various forms, was administered to a total of 2444 volunteers from 15 different organisations, making the present study the one of the largest studies of volunteer motivations to be conducted worldwide. A summary of the research stages is presented below:

*Stage One* - In Stage One of the research, the original VMI designed by McEwin and Jacobsen-D'Arcy (2002) that consisted of 40 items was used. This original VMI was distributed to volunteers in three organisations and completed by a total of 101 volunteers.

*Stage Two* - In Stage Two, a revised VMI based on analysis of the responses from Stage One was used. This VMI still consisted of 40 items (but with some of the statements re-worked) and was distributed to volunteers in one organization and completed by a total of 152 volunteers.

*Stage Three* – During the distribution of the VMI and in discussions with the managers of volunteers, three further motivations not previously included in the VMI and suggested by the managers of volunteers were added to the VMI used in Stage Two. This VMI now consisted of 43 items and was distributed to volunteers in two organisations and completed by a total of 192 volunteers.

*Stage Four* – A revised VMI based on analysis of the responses from Stages Two and Three was developed. This VMI now consisted of 41 items and was distributed to volunteers in 12 organisations and completed by

a total of 1221 volunteers.

*Stage Five* – The revised VMI from Stage Four was then combined with an adapted version of another measurement tool by Clary, Snyder and Ridge (1992) entitled the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI). The VMI now consisted of a total of 70 items and was distributed to volunteers in three organisations and completed by a total of 778 volunteers.

The final VMI that was produced from this research consisted of 44 short statements, to which volunteers respond using a 5-point ‘Strongly Disagree’ to ‘Strongly Agree’ Likert scale. This final inventory identifies ten key motivational categories. Six of these categories were identified previously by Clary, Snyder, and Ridge (1992), and the remaining four categories were not previously investigated. These factors and explanations are listed below:

1. *Values* whereby the individual volunteers in order to express or act on firmly held beliefs of the importance for one to help others (Clary, Snyder & Ridge, 1992).
2. *Reciprocity* whereby the individual volunteers in the belief that ‘what goes around comes around’. In the process of helping others and ‘doing good’ their volunteering work will also bring about good things for the volunteer themselves.
3. *Recognition* whereby the individual is motivated to volunteer by being recognised for their skills and contribution.
4. *Understanding* whereby the individual volunteers to learn more about the world through their volunteering experience or exercise skills that are often unused (Clary, Snyder & Ridge, 1992).
5. *Self-Esteem* whereby the individual volunteers to increase their own feelings of self-worth and self-esteem.
6. *Reactivity* whereby the individual volunteers out of a need to ‘heal’ and address their own past or current issues.
7. *Social* whereby the individual volunteers and seeks to conform to normative influences of significant others (e.g. friends or family) (Clary, Snyder & Ridge, 1992).
8. *Protective* whereby the individual volunteers as a means to reduce negative feelings about themselves, e.g. guilt or to address personal problems (Clary, Snyder & Ridge, 1992).
9. *Social Interaction* whereby the individual volunteers to build social networks and enjoys the social aspects of interacting with others.
10. *Career Development* whereby the individual volunteers with the prospect of making connections with people and gaining experience and skills in the field that may eventually be beneficial in assisting them to find employment.

When each of these 10 scales are scored, they provide a rank order for the most salient motivations for the individual who completed the VMI and an overall profile of the motivations an individual has for volunteering.

This research, through the continued development of the VMI, provided valuable information about the actual motivations and their importance to volunteers. *Values*, based on deeply held beliefs of the importance of helping others, was found to be the most important motivation. This was followed by *Reciprocity* - the belief that ‘what goes around comes around’. By helping others and ‘doing good’ you too will be helped. The

third most important motivation to volunteer identified in this research was that of *Recognition*. Receiving recognition and being recognised for their skills and contribution was important to volunteers. Career Development, Social and Protective factors were generally regarded as being less important.

Also within this research, a small-scale study considered the reasons why people do *not* volunteer. This smaller study involved 213 non-volunteers. The results identified that in order to convert non-volunteers into potential volunteers there was a need to demonstrate the meaningfulness of the volunteering tasks they would be undertaking and address their feelings of being time-poor or being too busy.

The final product of this research project was an improved inventory of volunteer motivations. Although this inventory could potentially assist in attracting, placing and retaining volunteers within an organisation, it is important to acknowledge that future investigations regarding the predictive validity and universal application of the VMI need to be conducted before it is able to be widely used or ever offered as a commercially viable product. Its limitations notwithstanding, the VMI has provided a valuable contribution to an increased understanding of the complex motivational drives of volunteers.

# VOLUNTEER MOTIVATION INVENTORY

## Instructions

This section of the survey contains a list of statements that ask about your experiences as a volunteer. Please circle the appropriate number you actually believe is closest to your response to each statement using the scale below, with 1 being 'strongly disagree' through to 5 being 'strongly agree'. There are no right or wrong answers, but please fill in only one response for each statement and please respond to all of the statements. If you need to change an answer, make an "X" through the error and then circle your true response.

**1**  
Strongly Disagree
**2**  
Disagree
**3**  
Undecided
**4**  
Agree
**5**  
Strongly Agree

		SD	D	U	A	SA
1	I volunteer because I am concerned about those less fortunate than myself.	1	2	3	4	5
2	Being appreciated by my volunteer agency is important to me.	1	2	3	4	5
3	I volunteer because I look forward to the social events that volunteering affords me.	1	2	3	4	5
4	I volunteer because I believe that you receive what you put out in the world.	1	2	3	4	5
5	I like to help people, because I have been in difficult positions myself.	1	2	3	4	5
6	I volunteer because I feel that volunteering is a feel-good experience.	1	2	3	4	5
7	I volunteer because my friends volunteer.	1	2	3	4	5
8	I volunteer because I feel that I make important work connections through volunteering.	1	2	3	4	5
9	I volunteer because I can learn more about the cause for which I am working.	1	2	3	4	5
10	I volunteer because doing volunteer work relieves me of some of the guilt for being more fortunate than others.	1	2	3	4	5
11	I volunteer because I am genuinely concerned about the particular group I am serving.	1	2	3	4	5
12	Being respected by staff and volunteers at the agency is not important to me.	1	2	3	4	5
13	The social opportunities provided by the agency are important to me.	1	2	3	4	5
14	Volunteering gives me a chance to try to ensure people do not have to go through what I went through.	1	2	3	4	5
15	I volunteer because volunteering makes me feel like a good person.	1	2	3	4	5
16	I volunteer because people I'm close to volunteer.	1	2	3	4	5
17	I have no plans to find employment through volunteering.	1	2	3	4	5
18	I volunteer because volunteering allows me to gain a new perspective on things.	1	2	3	4	5
19	I volunteer because volunteering helps me work through my own personal problems.	1	2	3	4	5
20	I volunteer because I feel compassion toward people in need.	1	2	3	4	5
21	I do not need feedback on my volunteer work.	1	2	3	4	5

**1**  
Strongly Disagree
**2**  
Disagree
**3**  
Undecided
**4**  
Agree
**5**  
Strongly Agree

		SD	D	U	A	SA
22	I volunteer because I feel that volunteering is a way to build one's social networks.	1	2	3	4	5
23	I often relate my volunteering experience to my own personal life.	1	2	3	4	5
24	I volunteer because volunteering makes me feel important.	1	2	3	4	5
25	I volunteer because people I know share an interest in community service.	1	2	3	4	5
26	I volunteer because I feel that volunteering will help me to find out about employment opportunities.	1	2	3	4	5
27	I volunteer because volunteering lets me learn through direct hands-on experience.	1	2	3	4	5
28	I volunteer because volunteering is a good escape from my own troubles.	1	2	3	4	5
29	I volunteer because I feel it is important to help others.	1	2	3	4	5
30	I like to work with a volunteer agency, which treats their volunteers and staff alike.	1	2	3	4	5

31	I volunteer because volunteering provides a way for me to make new friends.	1	2	3	4	5
32	Volunteering helps me deal with some of my own problems.	1	2	3	4	5
33	I volunteer because volunteering makes me feel useful.	1	2	3	4	5
34	I volunteer because others with whom I am close place a high value on community service.	1	2	3	4	5
35	I volunteer because volunteering gives me an opportunity to build my work skills.	1	2	3	4	5
36	I volunteer because I can learn how to deal with a variety of people.	1	2	3	4	5
37	I volunteer because no matter how bad I am feeling, volunteering helps me forget about it.	1	2	3	4	5
38	I volunteer because I can do something for a cause that is important to me.	1	2	3	4	5
39	I feel that it is important to receive recognition for my volunteering work.	1	2	3	4	5
40	I volunteer because I believe that what goes around comes around.	1	2	3	4	5
41	I volunteer because volunteering keeps me busy.	1	2	3	4	5
42	I volunteer because volunteering is an important activity to the people I know best.	1	2	3	4	5
43	I volunteer because I can explore my own strengths.	1	2	3	4	5
44	I volunteer because by volunteering I feel less lonely.	1	2	3	4	5

## Scoring Guide

	TOTAL					No. of Questions Answered	Average score
Va	1	11	20	29	38	/ 5	
Rn	2	12*	21*	30	39	/ 5	
SI	3	13	22	31		/ 4	
Rp	4				40	/ 2	
Rc	5	14	23	32		/ 4	
SE	6	15	24	33	41	/ 5	
So	7	16	25	34	42	/ 5	
CD	8	17*	26	35		/ 4	
Un	9	18	27	36	43	/ 5	
Pr	10	19	28	37	44	/ 5	

## Scoring Instructions

This Volunteer Motivation Inventory (VMI) consists of forty four reasons that one might have for volunteering and participants are asked to indicate, on the five point scale, the extent to which they agree or disagree with each reason as it applies to them.

For each individual, ten scores are calculated that correspond to the ten different motivations to volunteer that are assessed by this inventory. The highest scale score reflects the motivation of greatest importance to the participant while the lowest score reflects the motivation of least concern.

When these scale scores are obtained, a manager of volunteers will be able to identify and rank order what are the most important motivation(s) for that particular volunteer.

Step 1. Enter the responses as numbers in order down the columns (the question numbers are written in small text as a guide). Allow some space for corrections in each box. Where an answer is not provided for a question, leave the square blank.

Step 2. Questions **12**, **17**, and **21**, marked with an asterisk (\*) must be *recoded*. To *recode* these questions simply change all 1 responses into 5, 2 responses into 4, 4 responses into 2, and 5 responses into 1. Be sure to cross out the original response, leaving only the recoded response.

Step 3. Add the numbers up in their respective rows and write the total score in the TOTAL column. In the No. Q's Answered column, write the number of questions that have an answer for each row. In most cases this will be equal to the maximum number of answers, which is specified in the columns.

Step 4. Divide the figure in the TOTAL column by the figure in the Q's Answered column, and write this number in the Average Score column. Repeat this procedure for each row.



## **Description of Results**

*Values (Va)* – Describes the situation where a volunteer is motivated by the prospect of being able to act on firmly held beliefs that it is important for one to help others. High scores on this scale suggest that a volunteer is motivated to help others just for the sake of helping. Low scores indicate that a volunteer is less interested in volunteering as a means of helping others (Clary, Snyder and Ridge, 1992).

*Recognition (Rn)* – Describes a situation where a volunteer enjoys the recognition that volunteering gives them. They enjoy their skills and contributions being recognised, and this is what motivates them to volunteer. High scores indicate a strong desire for formal recognition for their work, whereas low scores indicate a lesser level of interest in formal recognition for their volunteering work.

*Social Interaction (SI)* – Describes a situation where a volunteer particularly enjoys the social atmosphere of volunteering. They enjoy the opportunity to build social networks and interact with other people. High scores indicate a strong desire to meet new people and make friends through volunteering. Low scores indicate that the prospect of meeting people was not an important reason for them to volunteer.

*Reciprocity (Rp)* – Describes a situation where a volunteer enjoys volunteering and views it as a very equal exchange. The volunteer has a strong understanding of the ‘higher good’. High scores on this scale indicate that the volunteer is motivated by the prospect that their volunteering work will bring about good things later on. Low scores indicate that the prospect of their volunteering work bringing about good things later on is not as important to them.

*Reactivity (Rc)* – Describes a situation where a volunteer is volunteering out of a need to heal or address their own past issues. High scores on this scale may indicate that a need to ‘right a wrong’ in their lives is motivating them to do the volunteer work. Low scores indicate that there is little need for the volunteer to address his or her own past issues through volunteering.

*Self-Esteem (SE)* – Describes a situation where a volunteer seeks to improve their own self esteem or feelings of self-worth through their volunteering. High scores on this scale indicate that a volunteer is motivated by the prospect of feeling better about themselves through volunteering. Low scores indicate that a volunteer does not regard volunteering as a means of improving their self-esteem.

*Social (So)* – Describes a situation where a volunteer seeks to conform to normative influences of significant others (e.g. friends or family). High scores on this scale indicate that the volunteer may be volunteering because they have many friends or family members who also volunteer, and they wish to ‘follow suit’. Low scores may indicate that a volunteer has few friends or family members who already volunteer (Clary, Snyder and Ridge, 1992).

*Career Development (CD)* – Describes a situation where a volunteer is motivated to volunteer by the prospect of gaining experience and skills in the field that may eventually be beneficial in assisting them to find employment. High scores on this scale are indicative of a strong desire to gain experience valuable for future employment prospects and/or to make work connections. Low scores on this scale are indicative of a lesser interest in gaining experience for future employment or in making work connections.

*Understanding (Un)* – Describes a situation where a volunteer is particularly interested in improving their understanding of themselves, or the people they are assisting and/or the organisation for which they are a volunteer. High scores on this scale indicate a strong desire to learn from their volunteering experiences. Low scores on this scale indicate a lesser desire of a volunteer to improve his or her understanding from their volunteer experience (Clary, Snyder and Ridge, 1992).

*Protective (Pr)* – Describes a situation where a volunteer is volunteering as a means of escaping negative feelings about themselves. High scores indicate that a volunteer may be volunteering to help escape from or forget about negative feelings about him/herself. Low scores indicate that the volunteer is not using volunteering as a means to avoid feeling negatively towards him/herself (Clary, Snyder and Ridge, 1992).