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# NIRSA Championship Series Volunteerism: The Perceived Impact on Professional Development

**Jacob K. Tingle, Randall J. Griffiths, Dan Hazlett, and April Flint**

The National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association (NIRSA) Championship Series (Series) has developed into the primary organization for governing extramural/sport club collegiate recreational tournaments. As NIRSA professionals describe it, the Series has also evolved into a platform for professional development. To date, however, no study has attempted to link professional growth and advancement to volunteerism at Series events. As such, the purpose of this study was to examine skills and competencies that could be correlated with volunteering at Series events. Using Astin's Input-Environment-Outcome (I-E-O) model the research team explored the environmental impact of the volunteer experience by collecting data in two phases (prevolunteer experience and 3–4 months after the volunteer experience). Results indicated that campus recreation professionals do perceive themselves to be using effective leadership and communication behaviors and that there are no significant differences in professional development based on the NIRSA region of the tournament. Some gendered differences were uncovered, but it appears that a significant number of volunteers returned to work with higher levels of job-related competencies and important networking connections. Possible implications are discussed, including a Series training program based on NIRSA's core competencies, and areas for future research.

***Keywords:*** club sports, intramural sports, leadership, rec sports, training

Since its creation in 2006, the National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association (NIRSA) Championship Series (Series) has grown to more than 14,000 student participants, 1,000 volunteers, 900 student officials, and 750 teams participating annually (B. Turner, personal communication, January 12, 2017). Along the way, volunteering at Series events became more than simply an opportunity to network and socialize, specifically due to the formation of its

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hierarchy and multiple work teams. Today the "NIRSA Championship Series is also a platform for professional development, as up-and-coming professionals build skills and engage in all levels of learning through their programming, staff, official, and volunteer positions" (NIRSA Championship Series, 2016).

Unfortunately, the professional development outcomes of volunteering at this event have been predominantly anecdotal. One recent study focused on understanding how NIRSA directors perceive the value of volunteer experiences at Series events (Tingle, Hazlett, & Flint, 2016). While limited in nature, this study began the transition away from simple hearsay and stories to the process of extending the literature on volunteerism, specifically within the NIRSA profession and Series events context. A further review of previous literature on volunteerism provides the overall framework for this study.

Volunteers are imminently important to events such as the NIRSA Championship Series (Chelladurai, 2006). Recruitment and retention of sufficient volunteers is a key activity for any organization dependent on volunteer involvement. Volunteerism is most often viewed from a human resources perspective (c.f. Cuskelly, Taylor, Hoye, & Darcy, 2006) and, as such, is usually defined as an activity having no remuneration for labor, or at least extremely submarket value remuneration (Breuer, Wicker, & Von Hanau, 2012; Wilson & Musick, 1997). This perspective has led many researchers to primarily ask questions such as, "Why do people volunteer?" and "Are they receiving what they want so that they will return?" (Warner, Newland, & Green, 2011). While NIRSA event organizers would also be interested in these questions, this review is concerned with the benefits of these volunteer events as professional development opportunities for recreation department staff. The bulk of volunteer literature has not directly addressed this question, however, elements of this research do inform it.

Trends in the structure and management of volunteerism offer increased alignment for its use as a professional development opportunity. Professional development is structured as supplemental to work and episodic in nature (i.e., short duration, external to the normal work environment). Volunteerism has, over the last few decades, shifted from a continuous model typified by the "career" hospital volunteer of the 1950s to 1980s to a more episodic model (Hyde, Dunn, Scuffham, & Chambers, 2014; MacDuff, 2004). Episodic volunteer experiences are short in duration and are limited to a short series of repetitions, if any. Holmes (2014) found that episodic volunteering allowed for higher intensity of engagement than long-term volunteering. Many conduct this episodic volunteerism as a trial period in an effort to find a positive long-term service opportunity (Lien, 2010). High-intensity professional development classes can target skills that need to be integrated into the workplace; similarly, volunteers can engage with an organization and its cause during an event and develop skills that will benefit them over the long term.

The trend away from long-term service within a single organization does not necessarily mean that volunteers do not strive for continuous self-development. Similar to the primary work environment, the notion of improving performance at volunteer tasks remains. Many volunteers consider their service as a second career conducted during their leisure time (Stebbins, 1992). Stebbins (1992) defines this second career as:

> Serious leisure. . . the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer core activity that is highly substantial, interesting, and fulfilling and where, in the typical case, participants find a career in acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and experience (p. 3).

This continued commitment to quality service is found across volunteers regardless of age (Misener, Doherty, & Hamm-Kerwin, 2010), volunteer role (Ringuet-Riot, Cuskelly, Auld, & Zakus, 2014), or competitive level (Cuskelly, Harrington, & Stebbins, 2002; Wilks, 2016).

Volunteer opportunities at events like the Series tournaments are primarily structured to meet the needs of the event. The development potential is influenced by how the organization goes about creating volunteer opportunities and assigning its volunteers. The degree of fit between the individual volunteer and a job may be one influencing factor in these tasks (Kim, Chelladurai, & Trail, 2007). For example, a highly-experienced computer programmer volunteering at a local race may be placed behind the sign-in table working at a computer or she may be placed in the group building a platform for the medal award ceremony. Kim et al. (2007) examined this person-task fit as a factor in a volunteer's intention to return and found that person-task fit played as large of a role in intention to continue as management's treatment of the volunteer. Similarly, Neufeind, Güntert, and Wehner (2013) found that, for both long-term and episodic volunteers, their future intentions of event retention, recruiting, confirmation, comeback, and migration were either improved or reduced by the job characteristics of their service.

Volunteer training provides another venue for development of skills necessary for the volunteer service and those desired by recreational managers (Shaw, 2009; Tingle et al., 2016). During training, volunteers can be taught functional skills, important social traditions, and build a sense of community (Costa, Chalip, Green, & Simes, 2006). Training sessions also provide the opportunity for volunteers to form initial contact with other volunteers that facilitate organizational knowledge transfer and the social contacts desired by many volunteers (Kay & Bradbury, 2009; Welty Peachey, Bruening, Lyras, Cohen, & Cunningham, 2015). In addition, job satisfaction and satisfaction with training can become one in the same for many volunteers (Green & Chalip, 2004).

The structure of volunteer work and training is also shaped by the motives of the individual volunteer. It is insufficient for organizers to only think of the needs of the organization and ignore the value of the experience to the volunteer. As stated previously, a majority of volunteer literature is focused on the task of presenting an opportunity to fulfill some important motive (recruitment) and then, if satisfied, an opportunity to continue service (retention). Conducting volunteer management in a way that satisfies important motivations can maximize the impact of desirable outcomes for recreation managers and their staff alike (Green & Chalip, 2004). Simply put, when the volunteer experience satisfies the individual's initial motives for volunteering then his or her likelihood of returning is increased (Fairley, Kellet, & Green, 2007; Farrell, Johnston, & Twynam, 1998; Keunsu, Quarterman, Strigas, Jaehyun, & Seungbum, 2013; Schleinger & Gubler, 2016; Strigas & Jackson, 2003).

Several studies have been conducted to discover the most important motivations of volunteers. At the widest level researchers have examined the impact of

intrinsic and extrinsic motivations to volunteers and how organizations can foster higher levels (Stukas, Snyder, & Clary, 2016). Research has also examined the motivations of sport event volunteers. Schleinger and Gubler (2016) identified four categories of motivations, including community supporters, material incentive seekers, social networkers, and career and personal growth. Another four-factor model that included purposive, solidarity, external traditions, and commitments was used by Keunsu et al. (2013) to predict organizational commitment among marathon race volunteers. In another study of marathon volunteers, Strigas and Jackson (2003) described a five-factor motivational model. The five factors were material, purposive, leisure, egoistic, and external. They found egoist was the strongest motivator to predict commitment. Egoistic motives include the desire to socialize as well as to gain achievement in relation to others.

While these studies do not agree on one list of volunteer motivations, each contains other-focused alongside self-focused motivations. We can see that modern volunteerism is structured in a way that shares many attributes with formal professional development, making it an option for supervisors wishing for those outcomes for their employees. Additionally, it has the added attraction of being able to satisfy altruistic motivations to support the event or cause. While it has been found that recreational supervisors do believe that volunteering at NIRSA Series events can positively impact their employees (Tingle et al., 2016), it remains to be seen if the volunteers themselves report these outcomes. Heeding the call from prior research, the purpose of this study was to examine skills and competencies that could be correlated with volunteering at Series events. In an attempt to respond to this area of inquiry, the researchers addressed the following questions:

1. Do campus recreation professionals who volunteer at Series events show significant improvement in job-related competencies as a result of their experience?
2. Are there any significant differences in professional development based on the frequency of the individual's Series volunteer experience?
3. Are there any significant differences in professional development based on the gender identity of the volunteer?
4. Are there significant differences in professional development based on the NIRSA Region in which the Series event occurred?
5. Are there any significant differences in professional development based on the specific sport?

# Method

## Instrument

Based on the research questions, it was determined that a pretest–posttest design was the most appropriate method to uncover the level of professional development experienced at Series events. This method is grounded on Astin's (1993) Input-Environment-Outcome (I-E-O) model. Using Astin's I-E-O model as a theoretical foundation allowed the research team to explore the environmental impact of the volunteer experience, while controlling for any preexisting competencies.

Additionally, the use of this model ensured we avoided the "fatal flaws associated with an outcomes only model" (Astin, 2014, n.p.). Based on the findings of Tingle et al. (2016), the research team assembled an inventory to explore the volunteers' self-perceptions of their communication, leadership, teamwork, and training behaviors. The resulting inventory consisted of four subscales and work-related demographic information.

To assess perceptions of communication, the Communication Competence Self-Report (CCSR) was selected. A psychometrically-sound instrument (Rubin, 1985), the CCSR is a 19-item inventory that measures participants' self-perceptions of interpersonal (6 items), group (3 items), public speaking (4 items), and listening skills (6 items). Participants responded to each item using a 5-point continuum: 1 represented "I never engage in the described behavior" while 5 represented "I always engage in the described behavior."

The participants' self-perception of leadership behaviors were assessed using Northouse's (2011) Leadership Styles Questionnaire (LSQ). The LSQ is an 18-item questionnaire that measures perception of autocratic (6-items), democratic (6-items), and laissez-faire (6 items) leadership behaviors. Participants responded to their level of agreement with each item using a 5-point continuum: 1 represented "I strongly disagree" while 5 represented "I strongly agree."

In order to gather data on teamwork behaviors, the research team used a modified version of the Practice Environment Checklist (PEC), which had previously explored teamwork in the medical field (Lurie, Schultz, & Lamanna, 2011). Our modified version used a 13-item inventory in which participants responded to each item using a 5-point continuum: 1 represented "I never engage in the described behavior" while 5 represented "I always engage in the described behavior."

Using Rudasill (1994) as a foundation, the research team developed a 13-item survey to explore self-perceptions of training behaviors. Rudasill's work identified best practices for trainers/teachers and served as a strong foundation. Participants responded to the prompt, "*When teaching, instructing, or training staff/officials...*", using a 5-point continuum: 1 represented "I never engage in the described behavior" while 5 represented "I always engage in the described behavior. See Table 1 for a sample of response items from all the scales.

## Participants

***Pilot study.*** To assess the reliability and construct validity of the full instrument, the researchers administered the survey to 550 undergraduate campus recreation student employees via Survey Monkey (San Mateo, CA). That population was selected since they were familiar with the work setting, though the instrument itself is not limited in applicability to recreational sports employees, and because they would not be asked to participate in the final study. Of the 550 surveys distributed, 235 usable surveys were completed. A principal components analysis (PCA) with a direct oblimin rotation was used to analyze construct validity of subscales. Given that two of the scales were modified and two were being explored in completely new contexts, the research team decided that using PCA was more appropriate than confirmatory factor analysis. The goal of the analysis was to ensure the factor structure and the reliability of the survey. The following criteria were applied:

**Table 1 Survey Sample Response Items**

| Leadership Scale | Sample Response Items |
|---|---|
| CCSR | • I understand nonverbal messages.<br>• I am comfortable presenting speeches in front of an audience.<br>• I try to have the last word.** |
| LSQ | • Employees want to be part of the decision-making process.<br>• Employees need to be supervised closely, or they are not likely to do their work. |
| PEC | • I actively seek new ways to improve how we do things.<br>• I provide team members with the information that they need to do their jobs well. |
| Training scale | • I present all the objectives and explain them in detail at the beginning of a training session.<br>• I frequently vary interactive instructional methods (role playing, guided discussions, simulations, lectures, debrief discussions, technology, small group interaction). |
| Demographic information | • NIRSA membership status<br>• Region of employment<br>• Years as a professional NIRSA member |

Abbreviations: CCSR = Communication Competence Self-Report; LSQ = Leadership Styles Questionnaire; NIRSA = National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association; PEC = Practice Environment Checklist.
**Reverse scored.

(a) only factors with an eigenvalue of 1.0 or greater were kept (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 2004); (b) items with factors loadings of at least .400 and without cross-loadings of .500 on multiples were retained (Field, 2005); (c) each factor with an alpha coefficient equal to or greater than .50 was considered acceptable (Baumgartner & Jackson, 1999); and (d) items that reduced the reliability of a factor were eliminated (Kerlinger, 1973). All factors held as expected and the following Cronbach alpha reliability scores were found: CCSR = .873, LSQ = .703, PEC = .791, and Training = .869.

***Final study.*** Participants for the final study were campus recreation professional staff members who volunteered at Series events. It is important to note that graduate assistant volunteers were included in the sample. However, no student or graduate assistant who worked as a referee at a tournament completed the instrument.

## Data Collection

After obtaining approval from the institutional review board (IRB), data were collected at each Series event site over a 13-month period (including regional football and basketball events and at the national tennis and soccer tournaments). Data were attempted to be collected from each volunteer on two separate occasions. Prevolunteer experience data were collected via hardcopy surveys distributed at the sites of Series events with the assistance of a paid research

assistant. The preevent collection phase yielded data from 358 respondents, though some demographic information was left blank (i.e., two respondents did not identify their gender). Data were collected from all volunteers at 22 tournaments (13 basketball and 9 flag football), which represents every Series event in those two sports, with the exception of one basketball tournament and one flag football tournament. Within 3–4 months of their volunteer experience, study participants received an email asking them to complete an electronic follow-up survey, using Survey Monkey. The postevent survey was the same survey participants completed on-site. After two follow-up emails to all the volunteers, 158 postevent surveys were completed. In total, 152 respondents completed the entire follow-up survey; four stopped after completing only the LSQ and two were not usable at all. See Table 2 for demographic characteristics of the entire sample.

### Data Analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistics were calculated using SPSS 22.0 for Windows (IBM, Armonk, NY). Nine dependent variables were explored in the study: training, teamwork, autocratic leadership, democratic leadership, laissez-faire leadership, group communication, interpersonal communication, public speaking, and listening behaviors. To address the first research question, paired sample *t*-tests were employed for those who responded to the posttournament instrument. Since paired sample *t*-tests were used, there were 156 pairs for the three leadership variables and 152 pairs for the remaining six dependent variables. The other four research questions were explored using data from everyone who responded to the prevolunteer experience survey. Table 3 contains a complete list of the statistical procedures used to address the five research questions.

## Results

To ensure there were no corrupt data, descriptive statistics were calculated for each variable. Cronbach alpha was used to determine the reliability of the subscales. As with the pilot study, the Cronbach alpha results indicated the inventory accurately measured the respondents' self-perceptions: CCSR = .745, LSQ = .701, PEC = .859, and Training = .850. Additionally, nonsignificant Levene tests indicated that the data did not violate the homogeneity of variance assumption. See Table 4 for descriptive statistics of the entire prevolunteer experience sample.

Mean score observations revealed that, 3–4 months after the volunteer experience, respondents scored higher on eight of the nine variables. To address the first research question, paired-samples *t*-tests were utilized. The results indicated significant results for: democratic leadership, $t(155) = 2.497$, $p \leq .014$; authoritarian leadership, $t(155) = 2.676$, $p \leq .008$; laissez-faire leadership, $t(155) = 4.967$, $p \leq .001$; public speaking, $t(151) = 2.170$, $p = .032$; interpersonal communication, $t(151) = 3.791$, $p \leq .001$; and training ability, $t(151) = 4.560$, $p \leq .001$. The tests revealed no significant mean differences for the other three variables (see Table 5).

**Table 2 Demographics of Phase 1 Volunteers**

| | Frequency | % |
|---|---|---|
| Gender (*n* = *356*) | | |
| Female | 92 | 25.8 |
| Male | 264 | 74.2 |
| Employment status (*n* = *350*) | | |
| Full-time | 222 | 63.4 |
| Graduate assistant | 128 | 36.6 |
| NIRSA Series event (*n* = *358*) | | |
| Football | 169 | 47.2 |
| Basketball | 166 | 46.4 |
| Soccer | 19 | 5.3 |
| Tennis | 4 | 1.1 |
| Years as NIRSA member (*n* = *349*) | | |
| 1–2 | 65 | 18.6 |
| 3–5 | 154 | 44.1 |
| 6–9 | 81 | 23.2 |
| 10 or more | 49 | 14.1 |
| NIRSA work region (*n* = *352*) | | |
| I | 44 | 12.5 |
| II | 119 | 33.8 |
| III | 47 | 13.4 |
| IV | 69 | 19.6 |
| V | 24 | 6.8 |
| VI | 49 | 13.9 |
| Volunteer experience (*n* = *358*) | | |
| No previous experience | 56 | 15.6 |
| 1–2 previous tournaments | 62 | 17.3 |
| 3–5 previous tournaments | 77 | 21.5 |
| 6–9 previous tournaments | 54 | 15.1 |
| 10 or more previous tournaments | 109 | 30.4 |

Abbreviation: NIRSA = National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association.

An ANOVA was conducted to answer the second research question. Results revealed that there were no significant differences in professional development perceptions based on the frequency of volunteer experiences. An independent *t*-test was utilized to explore the third research question. The *t*-tests indicated female volunteers scored significantly lower on authoritarian leadership ($t[354] = 2.560$, $p = .011$) and significantly higher on listening ($t[354] = -2.282$, $p = .023$). No other significant mean differences were found. Results of the ANOVA conducted to

**Table 3 Variables and Statistical Procedures Used to Test Research Questions**

| Research Question | Independent Variable | Dependent Variables | Statistical Test(s) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Q1: Do campus recreation professionals who volunteer at Series events show significant improvement in job-related competencies as a result of their experience? | Volunteer status | CCSR, LSQ, PEC, training scores | Paired sample *t*-tests |
| Q2: Are there any significant differences in professional development based on frequency of the individual's Series volunteer experience? | Volunteer frequency | CCSR, LSQ, PEC, training scores | Analysis of variance (ANOVA) |
| Q3: Are there any significant differences in professional development based on the gender identity of the volunteer? | Gender | CCSR, LSQ, PEC, training scores | Independent *t*-tests |
| Q4: Are there any significant differences in professional development based on the NIRSA Region in which the Series event occurred? | NIRSA region of host site | CCSR, LSQ, PEC, training scores | ANOVA |
| Q5: Are there any significant differences in professional development based on the specific sport? | Series sport | CCSR, LSQ, PEC, training scores | Independent *t*-tests |

Abbreviations: CCSR = Communication Competence Self-Report; LSQ = Leadership Styles Questionnaire; NIRSA = National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association; PEC = Practice Environment Checklist.

**Table 4 Description Statistics for Prevolunteer Experience Respondents**

| | *N* | *M* | *SD* | *Levene* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Democratic leadership | 358 | 4.40 | .499 | .489 |
| Authoritarian leadership | 358 | 2.97 | .584 | .870 |
| Laissez-faire leadership | 358 | 3.30 | .626 | .169 |
| Group communication | 357 | 5.06 | .624 | .984 |
| Interpersonal communication | 357 | 4.91 | .498 | .402 |
| Public speaking | 356 | 4.67 | .676 | .400 |
| Listening | 357 | 3.99 | .529 | .825 |
| Teamwork | 357 | 5.01 | .482 | .849 |
| Training | 356 | 4.73 | .522 | .874 |

**Table 5 Paired-Samples *t*-Tests Comparing Pre- and Postvolunteer Perceptions**

| | Series Volunteers | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Pre | | Post | | | | |
| | *M* | *SD* | *M* | *SD* | *t* | *df* | *p* |
| Democratic leadership | 4.42 | .487 | 4.56 | .569 | 2.497 | 155 | .014* |
| Authoritarian leadership | 2.96 | .614 | 3.14 | .675 | 2.676 | 155 | .008* |
| Laissez-faire leadership | 3.29 | .639 | 3.57 | .563 | 4.967 | 155 | <.001* |
| Group communication | 5.08 | .617 | 5.17 | .511 | 1.668 | 151 | .097 |
| Interpersonal communication | 4.89 | .409 | 5.08 | .617 | 3.791 | 151 | <.001* |
| Public speaking | 4.74 | .578 | 4.86 | .578 | 2.170 | 151 | .032* |
| Listening | 4.03 | .531 | 4.01 | .492 | –0.364 | 151 | .716 |
| Teamwork | 5.08 | .471 | 5.14 | .367 | 1.518 | 151 | .131 |
| Training | 4.80 | .500 | 4.99 | .359 | 4.56 | 151 | <.001* |

*Significant difference.

examine the fourth research question indicated there were no significant differences in professional development perceptions based on the NIRSA region of the tournament host site. Though data were collected from four different sport tournaments, the unequal cell sizes for tennis and soccer made analysis of those two sports impossible. As such, independent sample *t*-tests were used to explore differences in football and basketball volunteers. The *t*-tests indicated that volunteers at flag football tournaments scored statistically significantly higher on laissez-faire leadership ($t[333] = 2.104$, $p = .036$). It is important to note that flag football volunteers reported higher scores on interpersonal communication, and the mean difference neared significance ($t[332] = 1.908$, $p = .056$).

## Discussion

This investigation aimed to assess the professional development which occurred through volunteering at NIRSA Series events. The results of this study indicated that recreational sports professionals that volunteer do perceive themselves to be using effective leadership and communication behaviors. We also found no significant differences in professional development perceptions based on the NIRSA region of the tournament host site, which seems to indicate an important level of consistency among the volunteer experiences. Additionally, volunteers perceive themselves to be good at working in group environments and as strong trainers/teachers. For example, NIRSA volunteers score very high for use of democratic leadership, and in the moderate range for use of authoritarian leadership and laissez-faire leadership (Northouse, 2011). There are strong connections between the findings of this study and previous literature and some results that diverge from expectations.

According to campus recreation directors, they are looking for staff who have technical skills (Schneider, Steir, Kampf, Haines, & Wilding, 2006), are good leaders (Ball, Simpson, Ardovino, & Skemp-Arlt, 2008), and are a good fit for the organization (i.e., they work well with that team; Tingle et al., 2016). The results from this study seem to indicate that Series volunteers believe they do possess these distinct characteristics. Moreover, based on the paired sample *t*-tests, our findings suggest that volunteer experience at Series events actually develops or enhances those desired skills and behaviors. Warner and colleagues (2011) indicated that people will continue to volunteer when the experience yields the desired outcomes. Given that many NIRSA professionals speak of enhancing their own professional development as a reason to volunteer at Series events, our findings confirm the results of Warner et al. (2011).

The results of this study also confirm several perspectives on the interactions between the volunteer experience and the volunteers. The short, episodic structure of the Series events (Holmes, 2014) allowed for high involvement and for NIRSA professionals to engage in a trial volunteer experience (Lien, 2010) before committing to more sustained involvement, such as serving on a NIRSA Championship Series work team. Committed Series volunteers exhibited that volunteerism is a serious leisure pursuit (Stebbins, 1992) and they are dedicated to treating the volunteer experiences with the same level of professionalism as their day jobs (Cuskelly et al., 2002; Meisner et al., 2010). Another important finding was the volunteers' perceptions that the experience enhanced their ability to work on teams. That finding seems to confirm previous work that explored satisfaction with the training experience (Green & Chalip, 2004) and that both functional skills and sense of community are enhanced with effective training for the volunteers (Costa et al., 2006).

Though we found no gendered differences on seven of the nine dependent variables, there were two important areas in which our male and female respondents differed. The female volunteers scored significantly lower on authoritarian leadership and significantly higher on listening skills. Authoritarian leadership principles are considered an agentic characteristic, while active listening is a communal characteristic. In previous research on gendered stereotypes, women tend to display more communal characteristics and males generally exhibit more

agentic behaviors (Welty Peachey & Burton, 2011). As such, it appears that the male and female volunteers in our study might be conforming to prescriptive gender roles identified in Social Role Theory, which was highlighted in previous analyses (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eagly, Wood, & Dickman, 2000).

Despite the positive findings, it is, however, important to note that the findings revealed some shortcomings in the volunteer experience. The negative change in active listening behaviors does raise some concern. One possible explanation for this result is *response shift bias* (Hall-Yannessa & Forrester, 2004). Hall-Yannessa and Forrester describe it as a situation where the volunteer experience helped participants realize they were not as competent as they believed themselves to be when completing the pre-Series survey. Autocratic leadership scores were also higher, and while there are situations in which an autocratic style is preferred (c.f. Beam, Serwatka, & Wilson, 2004), leadership scholars have more recently found that a more supportive, democratic, or transformational style achieves better outcomes (Welty Peachey & Burton, 2011). The fact that Series volunteers perceived themselves as using both more democratic and authoritarian styles is puzzling and warrants further exploration. A possible explanation might be that Series volunteer training does not specifically address leadership development. As such, one recommendation is for the NIRSA Series leadership team to develop an enhanced curriculum for the volunteers, such as one that focuses more intentionally on democratic leadership and how to enhance active listening behaviors. Specifically, it could benefit the entire association if a Series-specific leadership training program were grounded on applicable NIRSA core competencies. The most relevant core competencies may include Programming, Personal & Professional Qualities, Human Resources Management, Facility Management, Planning & Design, and/or Business Management.

This study represents a first attempt to explore the perceptions of NIRSA professionals who volunteer at Series events. The results indicate that the personal investment in time and the investment of resources by the volunteer's direct supervisor is merited. The volunteers generally return to work with higher levels of job-related competencies (Tingle et al., 2016) and important networking connections (Steir, Schneider, Kampf, Wilding, & Haines, 2006).

There are, however, some important limitations. Less than half of those who completed the prevolunteer survey also took the follow-up electronic survey. While having 158 matched pairs is an adequate sample, we do wish more volunteers had completed the postevent survey. Additionally, as with all self-reported data, one should use caution when interpreting the results. Another limitation was the exclusive focus on professional staff. An important element of Series events are student referees and volunteers. Given how essential students are to Series events, how they perceive the experience is important to explore. Another potential limitation was the failure to control for preexisting competencies (inputs) and to consider including any covariates or moderating factors. Future studies could use structural equation modeling to better explore causal relationships and how existing skills impacted the outcomes. A final limitation was the leadership instrument used in this study. Though psychometrically sound, it might be better to develop a NIRSA-specific volunteer leadership survey. All the limitations, however, create opportunities for future research.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine skills and competencies that could be correlated with volunteering at Series events. The study extends the literature on perceptions of skills gained through volunteerism as well as the connections between episodic volunteerism and professional development. While the study achieved its purpose, the researchers found that the Series could develop a more intentional experience or curriculum for volunteers focused on leadership development. Results also revealed several areas for further research. Although it is clear from the study that Series volunteers perceive themselves to be using effective leadership and communication behaviors, the divergence from previous study results warrant further exploration with volunteers to more fully understand the impact of Series events on specific professional development, possibly through focus groups or individual interviews. Studies examining factors, such as the relationship between length of time as a recreational sports professional or graduate assistant or the volunteer experience and the use of personality styles as an outcome variable would also provide further details about the perceived impact of volunteerism at Series events. Additionally, though important previous literature explores volunteer motivation (Farrell et al., 1998; Keunsu et al., 2013; Strigas & Jackson, 2003), no attempt was made to do so in this study. As such, that is another important direction for future research.

Moreover, an important area for further investigation should also include the experiences of student officials. Student officials are vital to the success of Series events, and the perceived impact Series events have on student development and student success is an important next step. Research into the evolution of the volunteer and student official experience could provide a more complete picture about how important Series events are to the recreation profession. Finally, it is evident that Series events provide NIRSA professionals who volunteer with an environment to develop or enhance professional skills. While further research is needed, Series leadership should develop more intentional experiences for volunteers while continuing to assess topics that might impact future volunteerism, such as accruing Continuing Education Units (CEUs) for volunteering or potential new Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) legislation.

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