

Media Release

New Study Identifies Need for a Framework for a Quality Volunteer Experience in Singapore's Social Service Sector

First-of-its-kind study by NCSS and SMU aims to enable Social Service Agencies to develop data-backed volunteer management strategies for more effective outcomes, attracting and retaining more volunteers in the long run

Singapore, 29 May 2023 – Volunteers at different life stages have different resources, responsibilities and motivations. This finding, which was established in a new study titled "Transforming the Volunteer Experience in the Social Service Sector", highlights that this understanding is critical when managing volunteers so that the volunteering experience can be enhanced.

The [National Council of Social Service \(NCSS\)](#) partnered with [Singapore Management University](#) researchers at the [SMU Lien Centre for Social Innovation \(LCSI\)](#) for the study. By gleaning insights to understand and enhance volunteerism in Singapore's non-profit sector, it aimed to improve the design and development of its volunteer management strategies.

NCSS supports the development of Social Service Agencies (SSA) by leveraging the assets of partners and strengthening social service agencies' volunteer management capabilities to ensure a sustained pool of volunteers.

"Volunteers augment the manpower capacity in the non-profit sector. This volunteer experience study, a collaboration between NCSS and SMU, provides us with valuable data and insights on what motivates different groups of volunteers. NCSS can then better direct our work with non-profit organisations to strengthen volunteer management practices, enabling volunteers to better support those in need," said **Ms Tan Li San, Chief Executive Officer, National Council of Social Service**.

"[SMU Lien Centre for Social Innovation](#) is delighted to continue to build capacity and thought leadership in the social impact sector. Identifying the five key features of enhancing the volunteer experience will allow Social Service Agencies to maximise a sustainable and mutually beneficial strategy in uplifting both clients and volunteers," said **Mr Steve Loh, Executive Director, Lien Centre for Social Innovation**.

The findings helped to establish that SSAs can implement Know-Your-Volunteer (KYV) strategies and adopt Volunteer-Centred Organisational Strategies. Some KYV strategies that SSAs can adopt include administering a simple survey to do a volunteer-oriented needs assessment and profiling to understand volunteers better. In terms of adopting Volunteer-Centred Organisational Strategies, SSAs could examine the way volunteers are viewed and adopt a more inclusive approach of including volunteers into the organisation's management which could be done for example, by empowering volunteers to progress into leadership roles.

Framework for a quality volunteering experience to attract and retain volunteers

The study found that a quality volunteering experience comprised *Enjoyment, Exposure, Impact, Connectedness and Flexibility*. This framework could be considered by organisations when looking at the challenges and opportunities of volunteering. Please refer to Annex for details.



About [Singapore Management University](#)

Established in 2000, Singapore Management University (SMU) is recognised for its disciplinary and multi-disciplinary research that addresses issues of global relevance, impacting business, government, and society. Its distinctive education, incorporating innovative experiential learning, aims to nurture global citizens, entrepreneurs and change agents. With more than 12,000 students, SMU offers a wide range of bachelors, masters and PhD degree programmes in the disciplinary areas associated with six of its eight schools - Accountancy, Business, Computing, Economics, Law and Social Sciences. Its seventh school, the SMU College of Integrative Studies, offers degree programmes in deep, integrative interdisciplinary education. The College of Graduate Research Studies, SMU's eighth school, enhances integration and interdisciplinarity across the various SMU postgraduate research programmes that will enable students to gain a holistic learning experience and well-grounded approach to their research. SMU also offers a growing number of executive development and continuing education programmes. Through its city campus, SMU focuses on making meaningful impact on Singapore and beyond through its partnerships with industry, policy makers and academic institutions.

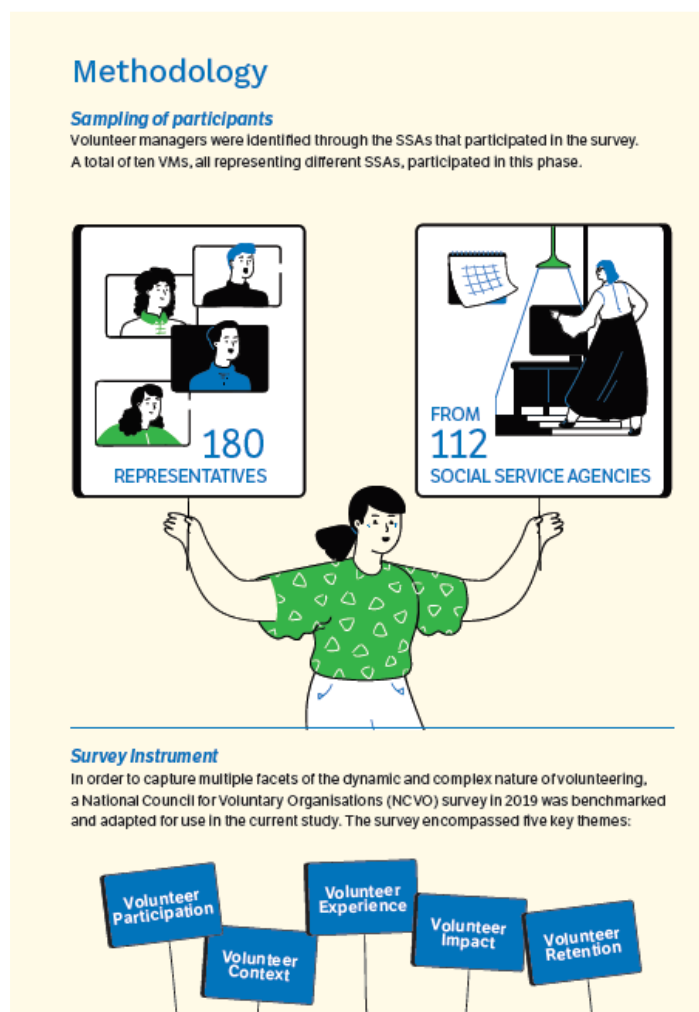
About [National Council of Social Service](#)

NCSS is the umbrella body for over 500-member social service agencies in Singapore. Its mission is to provide leadership and direction in enhancing the capabilities and capacity of our members, advocating for social service needs and strengthening strategic partnerships, for an effective social service ecosystem. Community Chest is the fundraising and engagement arm of NCSS and Social Service Institute (SSI) is the human capital development arm of NCSS.

Methodology of Survey Findings

LCSI designed and carried out the study in two phases. First, the study incorporated a quantitative survey to understand the perspectives of volunteers in the sector and second, researchers sought to understand the perspectives of volunteer managers through a series of qualitative interviews.

Through insights mined from data with 180 volunteers across 112 SSAs in Singapore, LCSI developed a framework for what constitutes a quality volunteering experience and recommended practical and actionable steps that Social Service Agencies (SSAs) can consider adopting. This included Know-Your-Volunteer (KYV) strategies, which enable organisations to enhance their volunteers' experience in a strategic and targeted manner. The findings and recommendations provide valuable insights for SSAs, volunteer managers and policymakers to enhance their volunteer management strategies and empower volunteers to make a difference in their communities.



Methodology

Sampling of participants
 Volunteer managers were identified through the SSAs that participated in the survey. A total of ten VMs, all representing different SSAs, participated in this phase.

FROM 112 SOCIAL SERVICE AGENCIES

180 REPRESENTATIVES

Survey Instrument
 In order to capture multiple facets of the dynamic and complex nature of volunteering, a National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) survey in 2019 was benchmarked and adapted for use in the current study. The survey encompassed five key themes:

- Volunteer Participation
- Volunteer Experience
- Volunteer Impact
- Volunteer Retention
- Volunteer Context

Discussion

Features of a Quality Volunteering Experience

Five key features of volunteering make up a quality volunteering experience for volunteers and may be considered by organisations when looking at the challenges and opportunities of volunteering.



Findings

The findings were analysed by utilising volunteer profiling. Volunteers were profiled based on their 'Life stage', 'Volunteering role', 'Motivations for continuing to volunteer', and 'Perception of the benefits of volunteering'*



The objective of volunteer profiling is to explore how specific known characteristics of volunteers can influence their volunteer experience, retention and preferences.

This empowers SSAs to use the targeted findings (by the various ways of profiling) according to the needs and context of their organisations.

Life stage

Young adults were more likely to:



Feel that volunteering improved their employment prospects



Feel that it negatively impacted their work or studies



Stop volunteering if the perceived volunteering was causing too much stress

Recommendations

1. *Know-Your-Volunteer Strategies*

- Paying attention to intuitive volunteer profiling that does not require additional data collection (for example, life stage or volunteer role)
- Administer a simple survey to do a volunteer-oriented needs assessment and profiling to understand volunteers better



2. *Volunteer-Centred Organisational Strategies*

- Examining the way volunteers are viewed and adopting a more inclusive approach
- Incorporating corporate people- development strategies into volunteer management