

# The Ripple Effect of Volunteerism: Examining Its Reach and Impact on Conservation Organizations

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## Introduction

Day by day, we are seeing evidence of climate change through habitat loss and the disruption of ecosystems.

In response, there has been a rise of conservation nonprofits whose mission is to restore and protect the environment. As a result, there is a growing need to utilize and understand volunteer programs, which are an essential component of how these organizations achieve their goals.

## Research Question

Through an exploration of the benefits, challenges, and strategies for optimizing volunteers, this study investigates the profound impact of volunteerism on conservation organizations, shedding light on its role in fostering environmental stewardship.

## Methodology

This study focuses on a group of conservation organizations in Northern Ohio who use volunteer programs in their day-to-day operations.

### • Interviews

- Through the perspective of the organization's volunteer coordinator/manager, I learned about the benefits, challenges, and optimization of volunteer programs.

### • Participant Observation

- As a volunteer, I compared and contrasted their experiences with mine.

**"It's huge. It's definitely necessary...they're the backbone of the park." (Coordinator 4)**

## Results

### Benefits:

- Saving on resources
  - Time
  - Labor
- Time
- Project Efficiency
  - "Teamwork Makes the Dream Work"
- Achieving the Organization's Mission

### Challenges:

- Volunteer Management
  - Volunteer Recruitment
  - Volunteer Retention
- The Demands of the Job
- Logistical

### Optimization:

- Valuing Volunteers
- Managing Volunteers
- Organizations' Investment in Volunteer Programs

## Conclusion

It's evident that the landscape of volunteer engagement within conservation organizations is dynamic and multifaceted. I hope conservation organizations can embrace the recommended strategies that I have laid out and, in doing so, address challenges that they face within their organization. By fostering a culture of innovation and adaptability, we can harness the collective power of volunteers to address pressing environmental challenges and forge a path toward a more sustainable future for our planet.

## Recommendations for Organizations

1. Be flexible and accommodating with volunteers.
2. Invest in a volunteer coordinator.
3. Be consistent within volunteer programs.
4. Establish a volunteer management plan or framework to provide clear guidelines and procedures for recruiting, training, coordinating, and recognizing volunteers.
5. Have diverse volunteering locations. These locations could include urban, rural, and remote areas and different ecosystems and habitats.
6. Get to know your volunteers, figure out what interests them and what they love to do, and learn what motivates them.
7. Create incentives for the volunteers.  
Organizations should implement incentives to recognize and reward the contributions of volunteers.