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# Volunteer Engagement and Retention: Their Relationship to Community Service Self-Efficacy

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Volunteer Engagement and Retention:  
Their Relationship to Community Service Self-Efficacy

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## Abstract

The declining number of U.S. volunteers (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014) is troubling, necessitating improved understanding of drivers of volunteer retention such as volunteer engagement. We utilized the job-demands resources model to investigate the moderating role of community service self-efficacy (CSSE) on the relationships between 2 demands (organizational constraints and role ambiguity) and volunteer engagement. Volunteers ( $N = 235$ ) from 3 U.S. nonprofit organizations participated in a survey as part of a volunteer program assessment. Volunteers who encountered greater organizational constraints and role ambiguity were less engaged. In addition, CSSE attenuated the negative relationship between organizational constraints and engagement, but not the negative association between role ambiguity and engagement. When faced with organizational constraints, volunteers with higher CSSE reported greater engagement than those with lower CSSE. Organizations should therefore assess and support volunteers' CSSE to bolster their engagement when faced with demands. Further recommendations for increasing volunteer engagement are discussed.

**Volunteer Engagement and Retention:  
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Volunteers take action when they see a need. Without their assistance, many nonprofit organizations' efforts would be severely decreased or discontinued (Gershun, 2013). In fact, the 64.5 million American volunteers in 2012 contributed 175 billion dollars' worth of work (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2013).

In order to ensure the future success of volunteer programs, organizations must be able to attract, engage, and retain volunteers. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014) noted a concerning decline in the number of Americans who volunteer. The 2013 volunteer rate (25.4%) not only declined from the 2012 rate (26.5%), it is the lowest rate recorded since 2002 when the survey supplement was first distributed.

One avenue for improving nonprofit organizations' abilities to recruit and retain the necessary volunteer force is achieving a better understanding of volunteer engagement, defined as a positive state of mind in which volunteers are fully invested and committed to their roles (Bakker, 2011). Engaged volunteers are more likely to intend to continue volunteering (Huynh, Xanthopoulou, & Winefield, 2014); therefore, investigating what encourages versus harms volunteer engagement could contribute to volunteer retention efforts. Engaged volunteers are also more likely to be satisfied with their volunteer experiences (Huynh, Metzger, & Winefield, 2012), which may lead to them recommending the organization to additional potential volunteers and aid volunteer recruitment efforts. Although interest in volunteer engagement is increasing as evidenced by recent articles on the topic (e.g., Huynh et al., 2014), much investigative work into the antecedents of volunteer engagement remains to be done (Vecina, Chacón, Sueiro, & Barrón, 2012).

The purpose of this study is to investigate multiple predictors of volunteer engagement, including organizational constraints, role ambiguity, and community service self-efficacy (CSSE). We utilized the job demands-resources (JD-R) model as an organizing theoretical framework (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) to predict what harms volunteer engagement and what encourages it. Pulling largely from literature investigating these phenomena among employees, we propose that organizational constraints and role ambiguity operate as job demands on volunteers and decrease their engagement and volunteers' community service self-efficacy (CSSE) functions as a personal resource, maintaining their engagement despite job demands. Self-efficacy is a supported resource in multiple JD-R studies (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008), but the more appropriately specific construct to our study, CSSE, has not been investigated.

### **Volunteer Engagement and the JD-R Model**

Research on volunteer engagement emanates from the work of Kahn (1990) and others who investigated work engagement with employees (Curran, Teheri, MacIntosh, & O'Gorman, 2016). Kahn (1990) conceptualized engagement as a "harnessing" of workers to their roles, encompassing physical, intellectual, and emotional aspects. Subsequent researchers have further defined engagement as "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption" (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006, p. 702). Vigor includes energetically and persistently investing effort into work. Dedication refers to approaching work with a sense of pride and significance. Absorption involves being engrossed in work and perceiving that time is passing quickly. When engaged, workers are fully connected to and focused on their role and performance (Rich, LePine, & Crawford, 2010).

Engagement, though important in its own right, predicts a host of organizationally-relevant outcomes. Engaged employees perform their jobs more successfully (Bakker & Bal,

2010) and earn greater revenue for the company (Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2009). In nonprofit organizations, engaged volunteers report greater satisfaction with their volunteer experiences (Huynh et al., 2012) and lower intentions to leave the organization (Huynh et al., 2014).

The JD-R framework will be utilized in the current study to contribute to the understanding of volunteer engagement. A central assumption of the JD-R model is that predictors of engagement can be categorized as either resources or demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Job demands are appraised by individuals as stressful, frustrating barriers to their goal attainment and lead to less task investment and lower engagement (Crawford, LePine, & Rich, 2010). Demands originate at multiple levels, including those of the position and organization. We chose to examine one volunteer position demand, role ambiguity, and one organizational level demand, organizational constraints.

Resources, on the other hand, facilitate goal achievement, learning, and development, triggering a motivational process through which greater investment in work tasks results in increased engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). The JD-R model includes job resources, or aspects of the work setting, as well as personal resources, which are individual characteristics or traits (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008). The current study examines the personal resource of community service self-efficacy (CSSE). Although our focus is on volunteers, the majority of literature in this area has occurred in employed samples and our hope is that this generalizes, to some extent, to volunteer jobs.

### **Organizational Constraints and Role Ambiguity as Volunteer Job Demands**

Peters and O'Connor (1980) defined organizational constraints as “aspects of the immediate work situation...that interfere with the translation of abilities and motivation into

effective performance” (p. 391). Their taxonomy includes several types of constraints, including inaccessible or inadequate tools and equipment, materials and supplies, and work environment.

The effects of organizational constraints on employee outcomes have been well documented. Employees who face more organizational constraints report higher anxiety, frustration, and intentions to quit their jobs than do employees who have less organizational constraints (Spector & Jex, 1998). Further, constrained employees are more likely to engage in counterproductive work behaviors (Fox, Spector, & Miles, 2001) and demonstrate poorer job performance (Gilboa, Shirom, Fried, & Cooper, 2008) and lower work engagement (Sonnetag, Mojza, Demerouti, & Bakker, 2012).

The effects of organizational constraints on volunteer outcomes have not been investigated. Volunteers who lack proper preparation, supplies, and equipment may be impeded in their efforts to complete their tasks. In order to overcome these barriers, volunteers need to expend more effort than if constraints were not present and, even with the additional effort, might not be able to complete the tasks to their satisfaction. Organizational constraints, therefore, likely frustrate volunteers and prevent them from becoming energetic and absorbed in their work (Crawford et al., 2010; Sonnetag et al., 2012).

Volunteers may face organizational constraints to a greater degree than paid employees due to limited nonprofit funds and resources (Pearce, 1993). Though volunteers might recognize nonprofits’ constraints and reliance on volunteers, they are likely, nonetheless, to experience frustration and lower engagement when constraints impede volunteers’ ability to serve effectively. Therefore, we predict that organizational constraints operate as a job demand and lower volunteer engagement, leading to our first hypothesis that organizational constraints will be negatively related to volunteer engagement.

Another constraint potentially affecting volunteers is role ambiguity. Role ambiguity is typically perceived when expectations for a specific position are poorly defined and the outcomes of performing one's role are unclear (Van Sell, Brief, & Schuler, 1981). Role ambiguity is associated with poorer job performance (Tubre & Collins, 2000), fewer organizational citizenship behaviors (Eatough, Chang, Miloslavich, & Johnson, 2011), and lower work engagement (Inoue et al., 2014) among employees. Among volunteers, role ambiguity has been tied to higher burnout (Allen & Mueller, 2013) and lower intrinsic and organizational satisfaction (Cox, Pakenham, & Cole, 2010). Further, Ross, Greenfield, and Bennett's (1999) longitudinal study of HIV/AIDS volunteers found that role ambiguity increased volunteer turnover.

Role ambiguity may operate as a job demand and negatively affect volunteer engagement for several reasons. Allen and Mueller (2013) speculated that volunteers experiencing role ambiguity might feel that the nonprofit is ineffectively utilizing their donated time. Similarly, Cox, Pakenham, and Cole (2010) asserted that role ambiguity negatively affects volunteers' sense of accomplishment, a factor potentially more important to volunteers than paid employees due to volunteers' lack of formal rewards. We add that role ambiguity may be interpreted by volunteers as a sign of indifference to their contributions if the organization fails to provide the necessary clarity and support. We therefore predict that role ambiguity operates as a job demand and will lead to lower volunteer engagement due to factors such as increased frustration and lower sense of accomplishment. Thus, our second hypothesis is that role ambiguity will be negatively related to volunteer engagement.



### **Community Service Self-Efficacy as a Volunteer Personal Resource**

Bandura (1977) defined self-efficacy as “the conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce the outcomes” one desires (p. 193). Individuals with higher levels of self-efficacy both exert and sustain effort in the face of difficulties (Bandura, 1997). Reeb, Katsuyama, Sammon, and Yoder (1998) applied Bandura’s self-efficacy work to the volunteer role and defined CSSE as volunteers’ confidence in their ability to make a difference in their communities through service activities. Reeb and colleagues developed the CSSE construct and scale in response to previous mixed findings regarding self-efficacy of students in service-learning courses. They reasoned that global self-efficacy constructs and measures might not be specific enough to detect differences in the service context.

Research on CSSE has primarily been conducted with college students in service-learning contexts. For example, among students who participated in college service programs, students with higher CSSE (vs. lower) performed more weekly service hours (Reeb, Katsuyama, Sammon, & Yoder, 1998). Students with higher CSSE also have greater intentions to engage in future civic action (Gershenson-Gates, 2012).

The resource of CSSE could be argued to exert an even greater influence on volunteer engagement and retention of non-student volunteers, whose volunteer assignments often lack the structure, coordination, and support of service learning programs. When service-learning students low in CSSE face difficulties or problems, other resources like their motivation to perform well in class or their professors’ guidance might sufficiently motivate students to stay engaged and complete the service-learning assignment. In contrast, volunteers experiencing low CSSE and high demands might evidence greater disengagement and leave the organization.

**CSSE and organizational constraints.** According to the JD-R model, a variety of resources could potentially buffer the negative influence of the many different demands influencing engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Organizational constraints represent a type of demand which can frustrate volunteers, impede their task completion, and decrease volunteer engagement, whereas CSSE is a resource that can be utilized to cope with these demands and maintain engagement even under difficult circumstances. Volunteers with higher CSSE may therefore be more likely than those with lower CSSE to persist in the face of organizational constraints because of confidence in their ability to effect change regardless of obstacles (Bandura, 1977; Reeb, Folger, Langsner, Ryan, & Crouse, 2010). Thus, our third hypothesis states that CSSE will moderate the effect of organizational constraints on volunteer engagement, such that the negative relationship between organizational constraints and engagement will be weaker for those higher in CSSE than those lower in CSSE.

**CSSE and role ambiguity.** Similarly, higher CSSE volunteers may be more likely to persist when their role is ambiguous. Role ambiguity is predicted to impede volunteers and decrease their sense of accomplishment. However, volunteers higher in CSSE may be more successful at handling the ambiguity and finding a way to contribute and be engaged, leading to our fourth hypothesis: CSSE will moderate the effect of role ambiguity on volunteer engagement, such that the negative relationship between role ambiguity and engagement will be weaker for those higher in CSSE than those lower in CSSE.

## Method

### Sample

Participants were volunteers from three U.S. nonprofit organizations, including two animal welfare groups in Colorado ( $n = 87$ ) and California ( $n = 60$ ) and a shelter for the

homeless in Nebraska ( $n = 88$ ). Organizational estimates of total number of volunteers from the previous year were used to calculate the response rate. Of the approximately 2,488 volunteers contacted, 314 volunteers started the survey, yielding a 12.6% response rate. Those missing more than 50% of responses to one of the focal scales were excluded from further analysis, resulting in a final sample of 235 volunteers. Overall, 81% were female and 49% were between 41 and 60 years of age. In addition, 52% had graduated college, 54% were employed, and 80% considered themselves to be currently active in the organizations. Volunteers reported that their work at the animal welfare organizations included animal care and administrative tasks. Homeless shelter tasks included direct service activities (e.g., serving food) and indirect service activities (e.g., organizing donations).

### **Procedure**

Volunteer coordinators recruited volunteers via email to complete the online survey. The email communicated that the anonymous and voluntary survey would provide feedback regarding volunteers' experiences, and that responses would be analyzed by the university research team to improve their organization's volunteer program. Participants were given two weeks to complete the survey. After the data was collected for the primary purpose of consulting with the volunteer programs, IRB approval was obtained to utilize the archival data.

### **Measures**

The survey included a number of measures related to volunteer satisfaction and well-being as part of the larger volunteer program assessment. The role ambiguity, volunteer engagement, organizational constraints, CSSE, and demographic measures, which are described below, are the only measures relevant to the present study (see Table 1 for all items).

**Role ambiguity.** We adapted three items from Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman's (1970) measure of role ambiguity to reflect the volunteer context. Volunteers responded to items on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Rizzo and colleagues' (1970) measure has demonstrated good reliability ( $\alpha = .81$ ) and correlates negatively with satisfaction measures such as job security.

**Volunteer engagement.** We measured volunteer engagement with a 6-item version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES; Schaufeli et al., 2006), adapted for volunteers as opposed to employees. Volunteers rated items on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The UWES has demonstrated good reliability ( $\alpha = .85-.92$ ) and negatively correlates with a measure of burnout (Schaufeli et al., 2006).

**Organizational constraints.** We modified Spector and Jex's (1998) 11-item Organizational Constraints Scale (OCS) to fit the volunteer setting and added one item regarding fellow volunteers. Volunteers were instructed to rate how often they found it difficult or impossible to complete their volunteer assignment because of each constraint on a range from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*). Scores on the OCS correlate positively with other measures of job stressors (Spector & Jex, 1998).

**Community service self-efficacy.** The 10-item Community Service Self-Efficacy Scale (CSSES; Reeb et al., 1998) was used to assess volunteer self-efficacy. Reeb et al. (1998) developed the CSSES according to Bandura's (1995) guidelines for constructing self-efficacy scales. Participants responded utilizing a 10-point scale, ranging from uncertain to certain. The CSSES has demonstrated excellent reliability ( $\alpha > .90$ ) and scores correlate positively, but moderately, with general self-efficacy scale scores (Reeb et al., 2010).

**Demographic variables.** Age, gender, education, paid employment status and volunteer status with the organization were assessed using one-item measures.

[Table 1 here]

### Results

See Table 2 for the means, standard deviations, reliability estimates, and correlations of the study's focal variables. Each scale exhibited excellent internal consistency reliability. The direction and significance of the correlations between role ambiguity, organizational constraints, and volunteer engagement provided preliminary support for the first two hypotheses. The two demands of organizational constraints and role ambiguity were positively related, but moderately so ( $r = .46$ , Cohen, 1988). CSSE was negatively related to both role ambiguity and organizational constraints and positively related to engagement. Females tended to be more engaged than were males, and volunteers with more education were less likely to be engaged.

[Table 2 here]

Each of the hypotheses was tested using regression analyses. Due to their significant relationships with engagement, gender and education were entered as covariates when testing the hypotheses (Becker, 2005). We also created two dummy coded variables for organization and entered them as covariates in order to control for potential organizational differences. A summary of the study's findings is presented in Figure 1.

[Figure 1 here]

As predicted in hypothesis 1, organizational constraints were negatively related to volunteer engagement ( $F(1, 229) = 15.31, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.38, -0.13], \beta = -.25, r = -.23$ ). Volunteers were not as engaged when organizational constraints were high. In support of the second hypothesis, role ambiguity was negatively related to volunteer engagement ( $F(1, 229) =$

74.24,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [-0.47, -0.30],  $\beta = -.49$ ,  $r = -.51$ ). When roles were ambiguous, volunteers were less engaged.

The third and fourth hypotheses were tested using hierarchical regression analyses. Hypothesis 3 predicted that CSSE would moderate the relationship between organizational constraints and volunteer engagement, such that the negative relationship would be weaker when CSSE was higher. The interaction term accounted for a significant amount of variance in engagement,  $\Delta R^2 = .02$ ,  $p = .046$ , above and beyond that of the control variables and main predictor variables. We used the simple slopes procedure (Aiken & West, 1991) to probe the nature of the interaction at low (one standard deviation below the mean) and high (one standard deviation above the mean) levels of CSSE. At lower levels of CSSE, organizational constraints negatively predicted volunteer engagement ( $F(1, 227) = 14.73$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [-0.48, -0.15],  $\beta = -.32$ ). At higher levels of CSSE, however, the relationship between organizational constraints and volunteer engagement was no longer significant ( $F(1, 227) = 1.05$ ,  $p = .307$ , 95% CI [-0.26, 0.08],  $\beta = -.09$ ). The third hypothesis was therefore supported, such that volunteers with higher CSSE (versus lower CSSE) were more likely to stay engaged in the face of organizational constraints. See Figure 2 for a graph of the interaction.

[Figure 2 here]

Hypothesis 4 predicted that CSSE would moderate the relationship between role ambiguity and volunteer engagement, such that the negative relationship would be weaker when CSSE was higher. The interaction term was not significant ( $\Delta R^2 = .00$ ,  $\beta = -.06$ ,  $p = .282$ ), therefore failing to provide support for the fourth hypothesis.

### **Discussion**

We endeavored in the present study to better understand antecedents of volunteer engagement by utilizing the JD-R model framework. Specifically, we investigated organizational constraints and role ambiguity as job demands and CSSE as a resource. Our first two hypotheses were supported: both organizational constraints and role ambiguity were negatively related to volunteer engagement. Therefore, the results supported the proposed roles of organizational constraints and role ambiguity as demands.

We also found support for the role of CSSE as a personal resource. CSSE moderated the relationship between organizational constraints and volunteer engagement, such that in the face of greater organizational constraints, volunteers with higher CSSE were more likely to be engaged than were those with lower CSSE. However, CSSE did not significantly attenuate the negative relationship between role ambiguity and volunteer engagement. This finding suggests that CSSE may serve as a resource, or buffer, against certain volunteer job demands but not others. We further discuss these findings and their theoretical and practical implications, limitations, and avenues for future research below.

### **Implications for Theory and Research**

The current study provides an example of the successful application of the JD-R framework to the volunteer context in order to better understand antecedents of volunteer engagement, a much-needed research focus (Huynh et al., 2014). The JD-R model provides a simple and flexible framework with which to examine and discuss both negative and positive influences on volunteer engagement.

The lack of a significant interaction between role ambiguity and CSSE in predicting volunteer engagement, however, illuminates the importance of investigating different predictors

and their interactions, rather than assuming that all resources will mitigate the negative effects of all demands. This finding is consistent with Demerouti and Bakker (2011), who theorized that the job characteristics are important in determining how specific demands and resources interact. We encourage future work on volunteer engagement to further clarify not only which demands and resources are most prevalent and significant in the volunteer context, but also which resources assist most in attenuating the negative effects of those demands.

The current study also makes key theoretical contributions to the understanding of CSSE. Very few studies have conceptualized CSSE as a predictor or moderator; most work on CSSE has focused on the CSSES measure or examining whether service-learning interventions successfully increase students' CSSE (Reeb et al., 2010). As Reeb, Folger, Langsner, Ryan, and Crouse (2010) pointed out, however, CSSE also needs to be examined as a moderator or predictor of such outcome variables as service participation and effectiveness in order to validate its importance as a dependent variable. Our study answered this research call by proposing and supporting CSSE's role as a personal resource for volunteers that buffers the negative relationship between organizational constraints and volunteer engagement.

### **Implications for Practice**

In order for organizations to increase volunteer engagement, they must attempt to identify and address the demands volunteers face. In order to lessen organizational constraints, volunteers should be provided with the necessary equipment, information, and support to perform their roles (Liket & Maas, 2015). Organizations can also clarify volunteers' roles by providing them with job descriptions and handbooks that clearly communicate the tasks and expectations for volunteers, as well as complement these materials with effective orientations and trainings (Backer, Allen, & Bonilla, 2012). Checking in with volunteers during service, periodically



surveying them, and conducting focus groups would also assist the organization in understanding volunteer perceptions and needs.

Understandably, some demands are out of the organization's control, especially given budgets cuts prevalent today (Worland, 2011). Given this reality, another option for organizations is to select volunteers with the personal resources needed to cope with these demands. The current study identified CSSE as one of these resources. Alternatively, more effective placement strategies could be utilized to match volunteers higher in CSSE to roles with greater demands (Reeb et al., 1998). With appropriate selection and placement of volunteers to roles they can manage with their level of personal resources such as CSSE, organizations may more successfully engage and retain their volunteers.

In addition, according to the original work on self-efficacy by Bandura (1977) and the recent work on CSSE, it may be possible for organizations to increase their volunteers' CSSE (Reeb et al., 2010). Weiler et al. (2013) found that, although start-of-semester CSSE scores did not differ between students in a service-learning course and those who were not, end-of-the-semester CSSE was significantly higher for students in the service-learning course than for the comparison group. It is possible that organizations could utilize some of the same practices as service-learning courses, such as encouraging volunteers to reflect on their experiences and discuss them with their volunteer coordinator and fellow volunteers (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000), in order to increase volunteers' CSSE. Reeb et al. (2010) developed two alternate versions of the CSSES, the CSSES-Retrospective and CSSES-Sensitivity to Change, in order to better detect changes in self-efficacy. Future work should utilize the scale version most appropriate for their research.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

The lack of a significant interaction between role ambiguity and CSSE in predicting volunteer engagement was unexpected. It is possible that the motivating energy from CSSE does not compensate for the type of stress which role ambiguity causes, or that CSSE is necessary but not sufficient to cope with role ambiguity. Future research could examine other resources that may buffer the negative effect of role ambiguity, such as voice (Allen & Mueller, 2013) and social support from other volunteers (Inoue et al., 2014). We note that this future research is particularly important given the relatively strong negative relationship we found between role ambiguity and volunteer engagement.

Role ambiguity may also be a demand that is addressed most successfully by the organization directly rather than by resources. Although some degree of role ambiguity within many volunteer roles is to be expected, volunteer coordinators who ensure volunteers have sufficient onboarding and training experiences, including job descriptions or position guides, could greatly reduce role ambiguity (Brudney, 1999). Rather than accept role ambiguity as a given in volunteer contexts, as may be appropriate for other demands like organizational constraints, we recommend that organizations take more direct actions to attenuate this demand before looking for other resources to mitigate its negative effect on engagement.

The findings must be interpreted in light of several common limitations, such as the cross-sectional nature of the study, the use of self-report measures, and the low response rate. The cross-sectional nature of the study limits our ability to make causal inferences. The findings could be strengthened by studies that follow volunteers through the course of their time with an organization and collect data from them at multiple time points. Self-report measures introduce the possibility of biased responses due to impression management efforts. We provided clear

directions that the anonymous survey would be used to improve the current volunteer program in order to address this concern. Although providing information regarding the purpose of the survey might have decreased impression management efforts, it could have solicited a biased subset of respondents, such as volunteers with more negative attitudes toward the program if satisfied volunteers felt less compelled to improve the program. Our low response rate is another possible source of non-response bias. The response rate was, however, within the range of what other online surveys have experienced (Shih & Fan, 2008). Moreover, because organizational estimates of the total number of volunteers from the previous year were used to calculate the response rate, the estimate is likely lower than the actual response rate due to the probability of inactive volunteers being retained on email lists and survey emails landing in spam folders.

In order to address nonresponse bias concerns, we conducted two nonresponse bias impact assessments (Rogelberg & Stanton, 2007). We used a wave analysis to investigate whether results differed between early and late responders (those who responded after the mid-point reminder), which they did not. We used an interest level analysis to investigate whether results differed between active and inactive volunteers. It was assumed that active volunteers were more likely to be interested in the survey and be more likely than inactive volunteers to complete it. Results did not differ between active and inactive volunteers. Nonresponse bias does not appear to be much of an issue according to the analyses' results.

The participating nonprofit organizations represented only two types of the many kinds of service organizations, which limits the generalizability of our findings. Despite many similarities between predictors of volunteer engagement across organizations, the presence and intensity of some demands and resources may differ between volunteer roles. Volunteer firefighters, for example, most likely face very different demands and benefit from different resources than do

homeless shelter volunteers. Researchers should therefore clearly state the organizational and volunteer context(s) in which their studies take place using classification systems such as the National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities, which categorizes nonprofit organizations into one of 26 major groups (National Center for Charitable Statistics, 2005).

Organizational constraints is a complex construct, consisting of multiple constraints volunteers might experience. Each individual constraint, however, could also be treated as a separate job demand. Further, it is possible that the different constraints differ on how detrimental they are to volunteer engagement. Constraints perceived to be an organizational fault, such as organizational rules and procedures, may harm volunteer engagement to a greater degree than would constraints that are understood to be a common limitation in nonprofits, such as a lack of equipment or supplies. Spector and Jex's (1998) Organizational Constraints Scale (OCS) does not lend itself to examining these questions because each constraint is measured with only one item. Future research may create or use other organizational constraints measures to examine potential constraint differences across volunteer roles and types of nonprofit organizations so volunteer managers can focus their efforts on alleviating the most detrimental constraints.

## **Conclusion**

This study contributes to a better understanding of volunteer engagement and its predictors, an important yet understudied phenomenon (Vecina et al., 2012). The great dependence of nonprofit organizations on volunteers for accomplishing their service goals highlights both the importance and urgency of volunteer engagement research. In addition to better understanding volunteer demands and resources, we concur with Bakker, Schaufeli, Leiter,

and Taris' (2008) call for research on interventions to increase engagement, especially within the volunteer context.

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Table 1

Measures of Role Ambiguity, Organizational Constraints, CSSE, and Volunteer Engagement

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Role Ambiguity
I have clear planned goals and objectives for my volunteer assignment. (R)
I know exactly what is expected of me. (R)
I know what my responsibilities are. (R)

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Organizational Constraints
Poor equipment or supplies
Organizational rules and procedures
Other employees
Other volunteers
Your volunteer supervisor
Lack of equipment or supplies
Inadequate training
Interruptions by other people
Lack of necessary information about what to do or how to do it
Conflicting volunteer responsibility demands
Inadequate help from others
Incorrect instructions

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Community Service Self-Efficacy
If I choose to participate in community service in the future, I will be able to make a meaningful contribution.

In the future, I will be able to find community service opportunities which are relevant to my interests and abilities.

I am confident that, through community service, I can help in promoting social justice.

I am confident that, through community service, I can make a difference in my community.

I am confident that I can help individuals in need by participating in community service activities.

I am confident that, in future community service activities, I will be able to interact with relevant professionals in ways that are meaningful and effective.

I am confident that, through community service, I can help in promoting equal opportunity for citizens.

Through community service, I can apply my knowledge in ways that solve “real-life” problems.

By participating in community service, I can help people to help themselves.

I am confident that I will participate in community service activities in the future.

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#### Volunteer Engagement

When I volunteer, I feel strong and vigorous.

At my volunteer site, I feel that I am bursting with energy.

I am enthusiastic about my volunteer assignment.

I am proud of the volunteer work that I do.

My volunteer assignment inspires me.

When I get up in the morning, I feel like volunteering.

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(R) = reverse-coded

Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Focal Study Variables*

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Organizational Constraints <sup>a</sup>	1.68	0.62	-						
2. Role Ambiguity	1.83	0.80	.46*	(.92)					
3. CSSE	8.31	1.71	-.19*	-.19*	(.94)				
4. Volunteer Engagement	4.24	0.63	-.23*	-.51*	.26*	(.91)			
5. Age	3.98	1.72	.03	.06	-.08	-.01	-		
6. Gender	1.19	0.39	.00	.05	-.11	-.16*	.08	-	
7. Education	3.72	1.53	-.08	.06	.02	-.13*	.42*	.15*	-

*Note.*  $N = 235$ . CSSE = Community Service Self-Efficacy. Diagonal values are the internal consistency estimates for each scale.

<sup>a</sup>No internal consistency estimate is provided for the Organizational Constraints Scale because it is a causal indicator scale. See Spector & Jex (1998) and Streiner (2003).

Gender was coded as 1 = female, 2 = male.

\*  $p < 0.05$ .



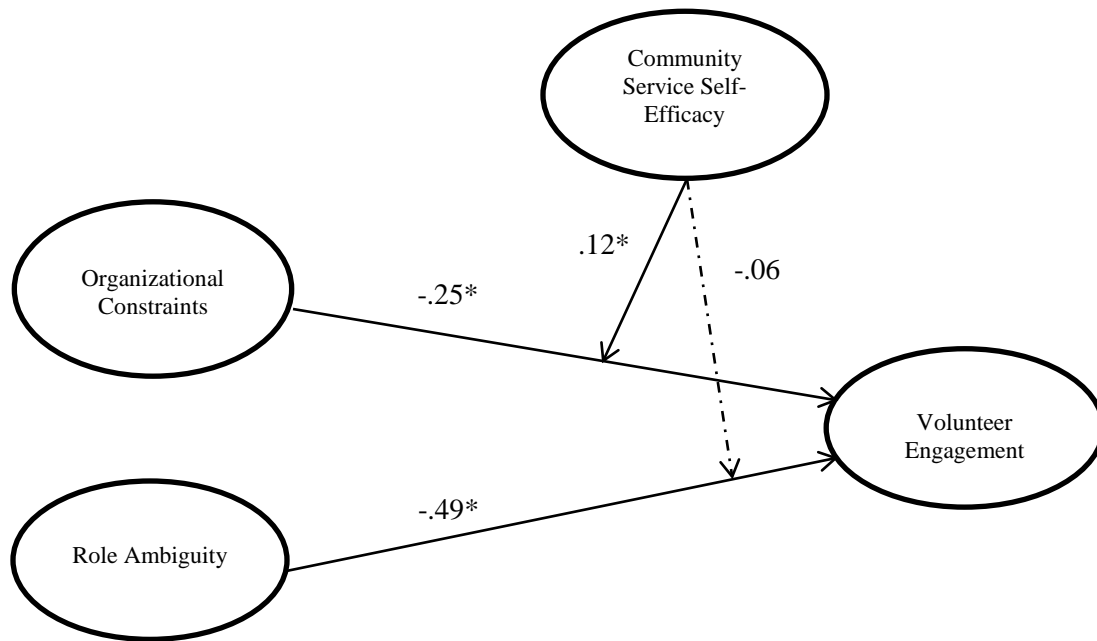
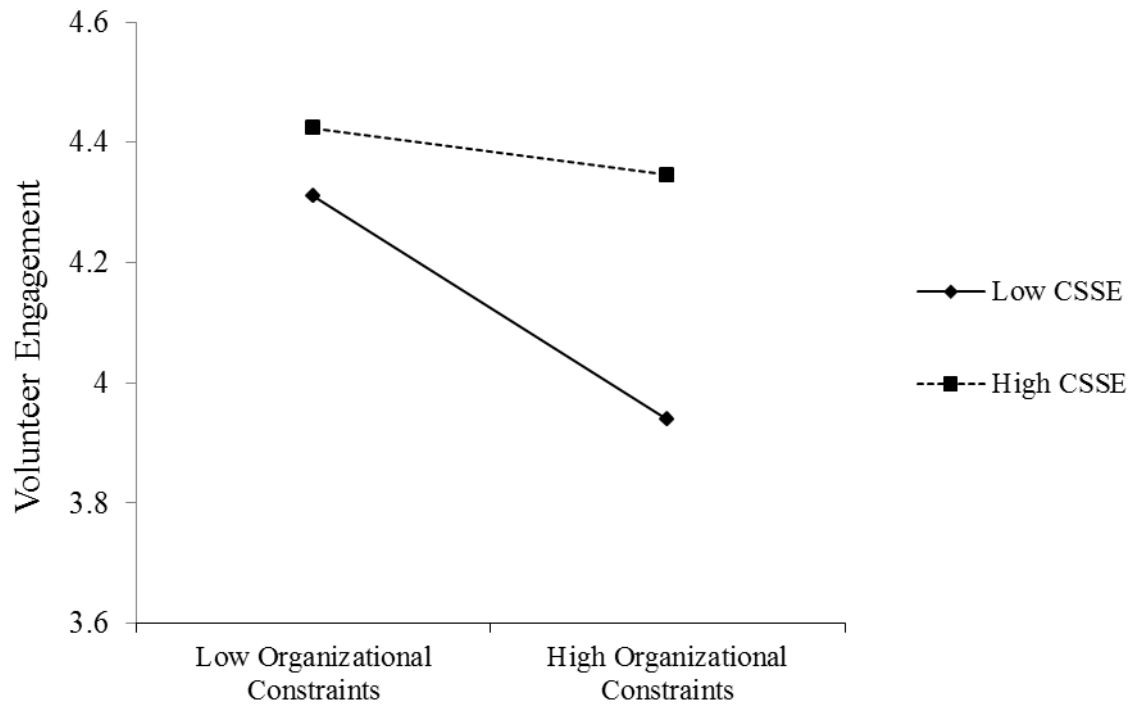


Figure 1. Conceptual model and results of hypothesis testing.

Note. Standardized regression beta weights are labeled. Nonsignificant paths are represented by dashed lines. Gender, education, and organization were included as covariates.

$N = 235$ . \*  $p < 0.05$ .



*Figure 2.* Volunteer engagement as a function of organizational constraints and CSSE.

*Note.* CSSE = Community Service Self-Efficacy.