

Supporting the Future Success of the Volunteer Management Professionals of Canada

By

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## Executive Summary

The focus of this organizational leadership project was the Volunteer Management Professionals of Canada (VMPC) and the organization's future as a support to volunteer management stakeholders at the national level.

VMPC sponsored the project with the aim of developing possible solutions to increase member involvement. In this research I sought to explore the following question: How can the board of the Volunteer Management Professionals of Canada increase involvement with volunteer management professionals across the country? Five subquestions were also used to guide the research:

1. What are the current benefits of being involved as a member of VMPC?
2. What do stakeholders see as the opportunities for VMPC to support volunteer management professionals?
3. What are the success stories told by stakeholders about current and past involvement with VMPC?
4. What are the barriers for volunteer management professionals to be involved with VMPC?
5. With an increase in membership, what are suggested best practices in leadership to support the board in their continued success?

## Organizational Context

VMPC has provided advocacy and education to people managing volunteer programs since 1980 and is a national leader in the field of volunteer management. The board works virtually, as the executive and committee chairs are geographically dispersed through the country. All the board members work full time for their employers. Members come from organizations such as parks and recreation, health care, law enforcement, animal welfare organizations, and food banks. The VMPC board meets once a year in person at their annual conference.

## Scholarly Literature

This inquiry project was informed by scholarly literature. The review of the literature examined the topics of leadership and membership development and how these themes in the literature could support the changes needed to increase member involvement in VMPC. With a focus on leadership, I reviewed literature examining the ideal leadership traits for membership or service provision organizations (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Jackson & Parry, 2011; Schneider & George, 2011). I also conducted a review of strategic planning as a leadership tool to build successful organization (Ketokivi & Castañer, 2004; Reid, Brown, McNerney, & Perri, 2014). The second theme of membership development explored the literature for theories and research to determine ideal leadership strategies to build member organizations (Bauman, 2008; Vincent & Webster, 2013; Whitney & Gale, 2015; Wollebaek, 2009). The literature in membership development exhibited many of attributes of customer experience management as an additional topic for consideration (Chapleo, 2015; Grønholdt, Martensen, Jørgensen, & Jensen, 2015).

## Inquiry Project Approach

In this inquiry project I applied an organizational action research methodology. This methodology is based on the organizational action research model (Rowe, Agger-Gupta, Harris, & Graf, 2011). I used an overall appreciative inquiry stance. “Appreciative Inquiry is the cooperative, co-evolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. 8). Action research is a systematic methodology particularly used by social scientists in “organizational development, education, health and social care” (French, 2009, p. 188).

Action research facilitation is a collaborative process that takes an organization through four stages of a research cycle: focus and framing, stakeholder engaged inquiry methods, reflection on action and evaluation of action, and a process to engage stakeholders in moving forward (Rowe et al., 2011, p. 1). This research was conducted through collecting data with participants, which resulted in a suggested direction for the organization to plan action in order to address their challenge.

## Methodology

I chose to conduct a survey and focus groups. The survey was the ideal data collection for this project, as this inquiry included people who were located across the country. For the purposes of triangulation I conducted focus groups to generate discussion around the lead project question and subquestions (French, 2009; Glesne, 2011).

## Participants

The participants in this research were comprised of a purposeful selection of people who manage volunteer programs across Canada. The participants in the survey included VMPC members and nonmembers. The focus groups were comprised of VMPC members.

## Ethical Issues

Out of respect to VMPC and all the participants in the research, I took all ethical issues into consideration when conducting this inquiry. As the researcher, I adhered to the *Tri-Council Policy Statement's* (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, & Social Sciences and Humanity Research Council of Canada, 2014) ethical guidelines with regards to respect to persons, concern for welfare and justice. I was also guided by the ethical considerations as outlined in the Royal Roads University (2011) *Research Ethics Policy*.

## Analysis

I initially analyzed the data for this project through the process of pawing to highlight recurring terms and word repetitions, “looking for patterns in qualitative data” (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 8). I then grouped the gathered words from the pawed data as well as the phrases pulled from the stories participants shared in their survey responses (Chenail, 2012). I identified themes from the pawed material to create the findings and conclusions. I mitigated the issue of researcher bias by meeting with the inquiry team to review the analyzed data to ensure the themes resonated with them.

## Findings

A total of 152 participants took part in the survey. Of these, 41 participants were volunteer management professionals who were not VMPC members. The survey rate of return was 27%. The focus groups had 12 participants. The survey included participants from eight provinces, with focus group members spanning four provinces. In total, the inquiry included representation of nine provinces.

Four general themes arose from the survey and focus group data:

1. Networking and education are important for increasing knowledge and competency of the membership.
2. Participants noted the need for VMPC to increase communication with and to members.
3. Time and resources for volunteer management professionals have decreased, which has become a barrier for members to be involved in the activities of VMPC.
4. Advocacy for the profession and collaboration with national partners is important.

## Recommendations

The four recommendations to VMPC were are as follows:

1. Develop a standard practice to engage in strategic planning every 2–3 years.
2. Provide leadership training for leaders of VMPC.
3. Create an expanded position or incorporate a position responsible for increased opportunities for professional development beyond the conference.
4. Increase communication to and with the membership through a variety of mediums.

## Implications

In designing the inquiry and its recommendations I needed to be realistic and creative in my goals and consider the capacity of the volunteer board to implement any initiatives. Successful organizations build on what is working and design “new structure[s] in response to changes in goals, technology, and environment” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 92). According to the survey VMPC has many members who have been loyal for over 10 years. If VMPC does not implement the recommendation of this report, they may not be successful in building the membership in order to replace those retiring or leaving the profession: “Newer members, who have been members for one year, show signs of continuance commitment towards the membership relationship and maintain their membership, provided it meets their needs and is better than membership with a competitor” (Vincent & Webster, 2013, p. 1634).

## Next Steps

The next steps will be decided and planned by the incoming board of VMPC. In May 2016 the board will have a new president, board, and committee members. The members of the inquiry team have committed to taking the recommendations forward to the new board and start the “action” (Rowe et al., 2011, p. 1) phase of the action research cycle. The leaders of VMPC were in agreement that the results of this research would support increased involvement in the organization and the board will look at implementing the recommendations over the next 2 years.

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**Dedication**

This project is dedicated to my mentor and inspirational leader, Annette Garm. I greatly appreciated Annette's insistence that I pursue a master's degree, and I am thankful for her confidence in me.

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## **Chapter One: Focus and Framing**

The focus of this organizational leadership project was the Volunteer Management Professionals of Canada (VMPC) and the organization's future as a support to provincial volunteer management stakeholders at the national level. VMPC has been in existence since 1980. The organization changed its name from the Canadian Administrators of Volunteer Resources in 2014. The organization has gone through many reinventions over the years that demonstrate VMPC's progressive and dynamic nature. The original organization focused on those managing volunteer programs in hospitals. Today, the organization represents any Canadian managing volunteer programs.

In a discussion I had with the President and Vice-President, in February 2015, they conveyed that VMPC is experiencing a decline in membership. The situation was paradoxical. The board wants to provide value for its members but without members it cannot afford to create value.

In this research I sought to explore the following question: How can the board of the Volunteer Management Professionals of Canada increase involvement with volunteer management professionals across the country? Five subquestions were also used to guide the research:

1. What are the current benefits of being involved as a member of VMPC?
2. What do stakeholders see as the opportunities for VMPC to support volunteer management professionals?
3. What are the success stories told by stakeholders about current and past involvement with VMPC?

4. What are the barriers for volunteer management professionals to be involved with VMPC?
5. With an increase in membership, what are suggested best practices in leadership to support the board in their continued success?

This project was of interest to me because I had been inspired in my work as a result of being a member and therefore stakeholder of VMPC. The stakeholders of the project were paying members of VMPC and those who manage volunteer programs. The opportunities for networking and sharing allowed me to develop many successful volunteer programs. As a member of the organization I needed to ensure the direction of the project was not influenced by my own desires and aspirations for the organization, but the collective hopes of all stakeholders. In order for change to be successful, the stakeholders needed to be engaged in the process, thereby ensuring the actions within the project would be carried forward by champions in the organization (Rowe, Graf, Agger-Gupta, Piggot-Irvine, & Harris, 2013).

### **Significance of the Inquiry**

As the researcher and a member of VMPC, this inquiry was significant because membership fees are the operating revenue of this organization. Membership funds offered VMPC the means to be an advocate for managers of volunteers across Canada when political decisions are brought forward that impact volunteer programs. Without the advocacy of VMPC system changes could be implemented with far-reaching negative consequences for volunteer management professionals. VMPC has been a leader in the field by making significant contributions to the *Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement* in 2012 (Volunteer Canada, 2012). VMPC was also a leader in the creation of the *National Occupational Standards for Managers of Volunteers* with the Human Resource Council of Canada (HR Council for the

Nonprofit Sector, 2012). VMPC needed to be “active participants in shaping their reality, from reacting to the present to creating the future” (Senge, 2006, p. 69). In order for change to be successful, the stakeholders needed to be engaged in the process (Rowe et al., 2013). Following from this, actions emerging from this project needed to be carried forward by the internal champions in the organization to ensure continued stakeholder engagement. VMPC needs to continue to be a leader in supporting innovation and best practice in the field of management of volunteers because the organization’s role increases the profile of the profession.

In designing this inquiry I needed to be realistic and creative in my goals and consider the capacity of the board to implement any initiatives. Bolman and Deal (2013) suggested successful organizations create productive change by “studying the existing structure and process so that they understood how things worked” (p. 92). Successful organizations build on what is working and design “new structure[s] in response to changes in goals, technology, and environment” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 92).

The key stakeholders of VMPC are members of provincial organizations supporting volunteer management professionals, individuals who manage volunteers but do not have provincial organizations to join, and federal and provincial programs that support or have an impact on the management of volunteer programs. These stakeholders work for not-for-profit organizations (NPOs), including all levels of government. A continued strong voice speaking out for volunteer management professionals benefits all volunteer programs across Canada and the aforementioned stakeholders. Acting as an advocate for professionals benefits those managing those volunteer programs as well as those who volunteer in their communities. Volunteer management professionals with support and advocacy from professional support organizations,

such as VMPC, provide safe and meaningful programs for the volunteers and the community (Volunteer Canada, 2012, p. 4).

### **Organizational Context**

VMPC is “dedicated to advocacy, capacity building and networking, it connects and empowers a network of professionals and passionately elevates the quality of volunteerism in Canada” (Volunteer Management Professionals of Canada [VMPC], 2014b, para. 1). VMPC has developed relationships with organizations provincially, nationally, and internationally who support the volunteer management profession. These organizations include, for example, the Administrators of Volunteer Resources of British Columbia, Volunteer Canada, and the Human Resources Council for the Non-Profit Sector. The purpose of VMPC is as follows:

- To provide national leadership for those working in the field of Volunteer Management.
- To maintain a professional Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice in the management of volunteer resources.
- To promote professional development in the management of volunteer resources.
- To collaborate with provincial, national and international organizations. (VMPC, 2014b, Our Purpose section, para. 2–5)

The board works virtually, as the executive and committee chairs are geographically dispersed through the country. All the board members work full time for their employers. Their employers are government or other NPOs. Members come from organizations such as parks and recreation, health care, law enforcement, and food banks. The VMPC board meets once a year in person at their annual conference. The annual conference alternates between host organizations in Western and Eastern Canada. The conference is either organized by VMPC or held in

conjunction with a provincial conference. The organization has several committees to support the profession and its membership. There is an advocacy and professional standards committee, professional development, membership, executive, communication, and information technology committees.

VMPC is the only national organization keeping Canadians, who manage volunteer programs, connected across the country. They provide opportunities for networking to inspire innovation in the sector. VMPC is an advocate when legislation or proposed programs initiated by the federal government are introduced. VMPC's advocacy role was instrumental in being the voice of Canadians across the country when the Royal Canadian Mounted Police wished to enact legislation that all volunteers be fingerprinted. If this legislation had passed it would have had unintended negative consequences on volunteer programs and on those who wished to volunteer. VMPC (2014f) commented that fingerprinting could have put a great burden on the system as millions of people volunteer each year and many good, law abiding people would simply not want to volunteer because they found the procedure to be too intrusive.

### **Systems Analysis of the Inquiry**

The geographic and political boundary of VMPC's system is Canada. The stakeholders in VMPC, for the most part, are NPOs and individuals who manage volunteer programs. All the stakeholders work, in some capacity, in the voluntary sector. VMPC is impacted by systems that affect NPOs. An unidentified barrier in the system had caused the decline in membership of VMPC. The two foci of this action research project were the systematic barriers preventing people from being involved in VMPC and the innovations needed to overcome those barriers.

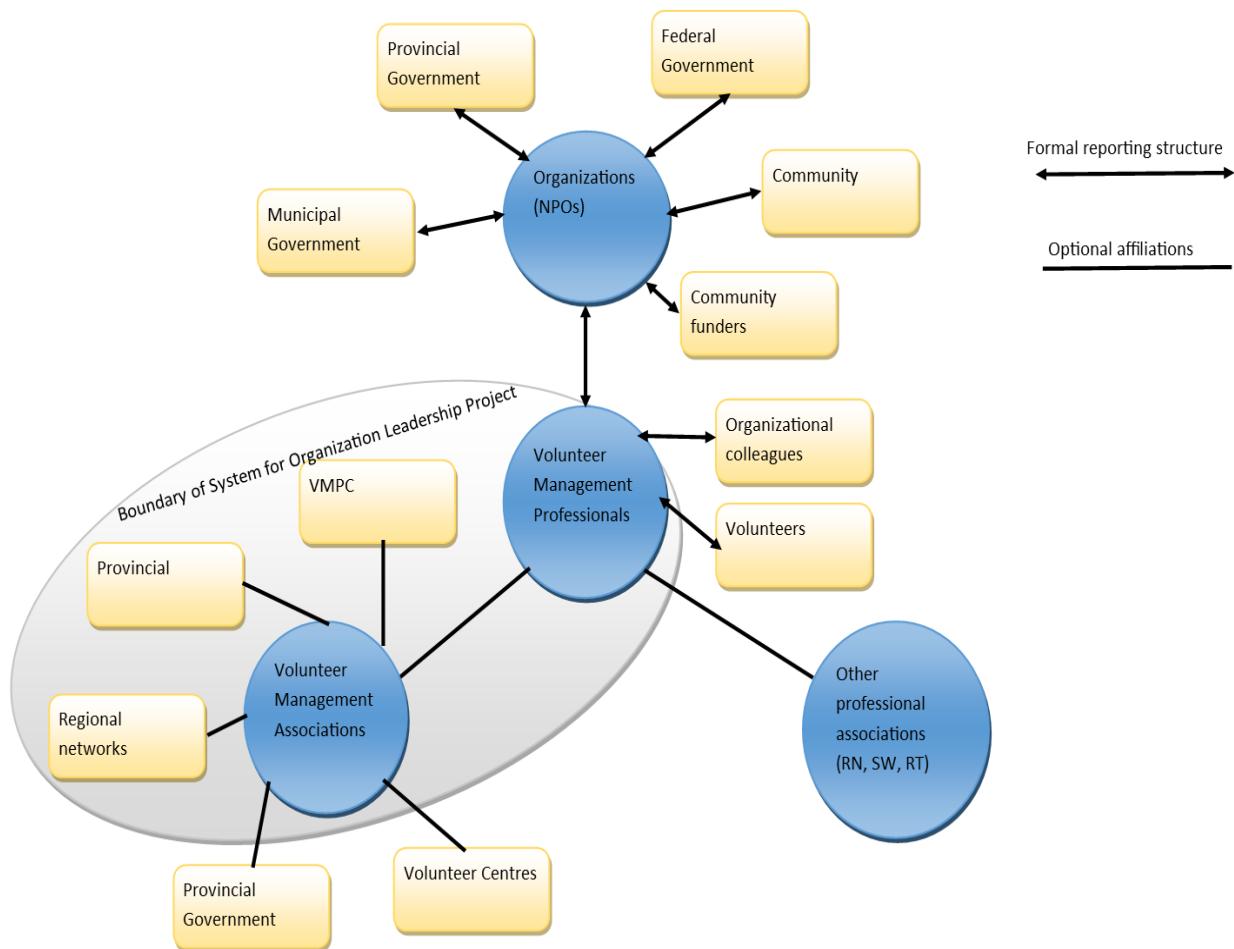
I needed to hear from people in the voluntary sector to discover the barriers to their participation. One view of the system was Cady's (2011) interpersonal and social dynamic lens,

looking at how each piece of the system interacts with the other. Through this interpersonal and social dynamic lens perhaps there was insight into how professionals in the field of volunteer management viewed VMPC and how they described their metaphors for their relationships with VMPC. Bolman and Deal's (2013) four-frame model offered an additional way of looking at the system through structural, human resource, political, and symbolic frames (p. 19). It was my hope that the answers to the questions posed by this research would inform VMPC on how the practices of the employers of volunteer management professionals affects the ability of volunteer management professionals to participate in VMPC. Those organizations are affected by a myriad of funders and other stakeholders that influence their system and in turn VMPC.

In addition to the aforementioned system influences, VMPC is affected by the vastness of Canada. In order for members to participate, they have to travel great distances at great cost to meet in person. For instance, for a VMPC member in Nelson, British Columbia, to travel to a conference in Vancouver, the individual would have to travel at a distance of over 650 km. If the members of VMPC wish to join virtually, they need to have the information technology to connect with colleagues. Many NPOs lack the technology and support to participate in virtual meetings. This occurs despite studies that indicated information technology infrastructure is important to the success of NPOs remaining relevant (Whitney & Gale, 2015, p. 57). Some organizations are very strict regarding the use of technology. Computer firewalls in the workplace can restrict the ability of some employees to connect virtually through a platform such as Skype™ (Microsoft, 2016). An example of organizations restricting technology access due to security concerns would be the Provincial Health Services Authority (2013) *Information Security* policy.

The key human resources who provide understanding of the complexity of the NPO system includes those who manage volunteer programs. I anticipated that the stories of people managing volunteer programs would provide the symbolic lens and inform the metaphors told by members of VMPC. Participants' stories would shed light on the opportunities to increase membership involvement. VMPC's implementation of changes, derived from the information from key stakeholders, could drive the organization to remain vital and relevant.

The systems map provided in Figure 1 depicts the entire system effecting VMPC. The individuals who manage volunteer programs represent a small portion of a much greater picture. Volunteer management professionals are influenced by the organization with whom they are employed. The employer of those managing volunteers is usually influenced by a myriad of funder and regulating bodies such as provincial or federal governments. VMPC is competing for membership from individuals managing volunteers. VMPC's competitors are other organizations such as volunteer centres, provincial membership organizations, and other professional membership organizations (e.g., registered nurse or recreation therapy associations). The systems map in Figure 1 illustrates the competition for membership from those managing volunteer programs.



*Figure 1.* Systems map for Volunteer Management Professionals of Canada members in relation to their organization, volunteer program, professional associations, and the boundary of this organizational leadership project.

*Note.* NPOs = Not-For-Profit Organizations; RN = Registered Nurse; RT = Registered Therapist; SW = Social Worker; VMPC = Volunteer Management Professionals of Canada.

## Chapter Summary

This chapter laid the foundation for this project. The chapter started with the inquiry questions, explained the significance of the project, and described the organizational context. This chapter also examined the complex system of organizations vying for the limited financial resources of volunteer management professionals. Chapter 2 reviews the relevant scholarly literature pertaining to this project.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

The literature examined was relevant to the inquiry question: How can the board of the Volunteer Management Professionals of Canada increase involvement with volunteer management professionals across the country? I also explored the following subquestions:

1. What are the current benefits of being involved as a member of VMPC?
2. What do stakeholders see as the opportunities for VMPC to support volunteer management professionals?
3. What are the success stories told by stakeholders about current and past involvement with VMPC?
4. What are the barriers for volunteer management professionals to be involved with VMPC?
5. With an increase in membership, what are suggested best practices in leadership to support the board in their continued success?

This chapter reviews two themes relating to increasing involvement of members. The first theme is leadership. This theme explores the subtopics of ideal leadership traits for organizational leaders and the importance of strategic planning. The second theme is with regards to membership, with the subtopics of membership development and customer experience management (CEM).

Although I found no articles specifically for membership organizations with volunteer boards without staff, the articles used for this review explored similar organizations and the search for sustainable membership. I did find a limited number of scholarly articles newer than 2006 regarding organizations with decreased membership that were looking to increase involvement. These more recent publications, such as Bauman's (2008) research article, often

cited works of authors from the 1990s, thereby not providing many leads to newer documents to review for this research project.

## **Leadership**

Dynamic and relevant organizations have inspiring leaders and practices that are strategic, forward thinking, and support the ongoing development and leadership of their members, employees, and boards. The examination of the literature provided some insight into leadership theory and practice that would best support an association of professional membership. In this section I discuss leadership and the suggested traits of good leaders as well as leadership in strategic planning as a best practice in thriving organizations.

**Leadership traits for success membership.** Fostering ongoing education in leadership for the board, and those new to leadership studies, could be a valuable benefit for incoming board and committee member and contribute to ongoing innovation. I chose to explore scholarly research of effective leadership that best supports the organizational needs. I believed the study of leadership would propel VMPC into the future as a leader in the field of volunteer management across Canada and provide a legacy to its board and volunteers. VMPC is led by a board and by committees comprised of leaders in their volunteer programs across Canada. In examining the scholarship on successful sustainable organizations, those with exceptional leadership and leaders were considered to be the most vibrant and had a greater resilience into the future (Whitney & Gale, 2015).

VMPC (2014b) has an objective “to promote professional development in the management of volunteer resources” (para. 3). As a successful organization, VMPC should also have a mandate to provide leadership education to its board, chairs, and committees (Senge, 2006). Moving in new directions requires change and leaders with the skills to champion

initiatives (Bolman & Deal, 2013). These leaders will help the organization thrive. I found much written about leadership; however, the research suggests two models of leadership for successful membership organizations to be transformational leadership and servant leadership (Schneider & George, 2011), I chose to focus on these two styles within this literature review.

Schneider and George (2011) undertook research to examine if transformational or servant leadership would best serve the needs of a thriving organization. Transformational leaders inspire followers to a high level achievement in part by encouraging creativity (Gumusluoglu & Ilsev, 2009). Servant leadership is a means of “empowering and developing people with empathy and humility” (Mittal & Dorfman, 2012, p. 555). Leadership is more complex than breaking down leadership to only two styles that would serve an organization; nevertheless, I found the premise is intriguing (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). Schneider and George conducted surveys with eight service organizations to determine the ideal leadership trait. The result was that servant leadership, in this small sample, tended to provide a “better predictor of club members’ attitudes” (p. 74).

Servant leadership may be an important consideration in the leadership style of a vibrant and relevant organization. However, one limitation Schneider and George (2011) noted in their study in transformational versus servant leadership was the small sampling. Another constraint to their research was that Schneider and George were looking specifically at the two types of leadership. There seemed to be no consideration of other leadership styles that may be integrated along with their chosen leadership styles to create the ideal leader. For instance, other researchers paired transformational leadership with transactional leadership as a complementary effective leadership style (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Jackson & Parry, 2011).

Kouzes and Posner (2012) identified five best practices of exemplary leaders, which I believe would have benefited Schneider and George's (2011) leaders, had they been able to incorporate these practices into their leadership. Kouzes and Posner's best practices are as follows:

- Model the Way
- Inspire a Shared Vision
- Challenge the Process
- Enable Others to Act
- Encourage the Heart. (p. 15)

VMPC may want to consider the benefits of servant leadership in conjunction with the five best practices.

**Strategic planning.** In my discussions with VMPC, in 2015, the President and Vice-President expressed a concern about declining membership (President and Vice-President, personal communication, February 11, 2015). In consultation with VMPC, I identified strategic planning as a tool to determine future direction. This tool is a strategy to increase involvement of volunteer management professionals across Canada.

Strategic planning increases the success of organizations. Reid, Brown, McNerney, and Perri (2014) stated, “Fully 93 percent of the most successful organizations, regardless of size or budget, credited their strategic planning and strategic management efforts as having ‘some’ to ‘critical’ impact on their organizational success” (p. 33). Strategic planning, however, is not successful without research and planning to ensure the process drives the organization forward into a viable future full of innovation and is directed by strategic thinking (Agarwal & Helfat, 2009; Reid et al., 2014).

Strategic thinking involves research into innovations led by other similar organizations, along with those who are in competition. Strategic thinking also includes dreaming about potential benefits for members (Agarwal & Helfat, 2009). Reid et al. (2014) stated successful not-for-profits take the time to conduct some environmental analysis. This could include “industry trends or benchmarks, conduct stakeholder interviews, surveys or focus groups” (p. 35). Program assessments could also be included in this process. The immediate needs of the organization are a consideration, but a larger component should be reserved for planning for the future (McHatton, Bradshaw, Gallagher, & Reeves, 2011; Reid et al., 2014). One approach to the strategic planning and environmental scan is to determine the organization’s strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results (SOAR). The SOAR method provides an appreciative stance for the board to consider when planning for the future. This is as opposed to the frequently used “SWOT [strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats]” (Stavros & Hinrichs, 2009, p. 12), which tends to focus on the weaknesses and threats. “SOAR conversations center on what an organization is doing right, what skills could be enhanced, and what is compelling to those who have a ‘stake’ in the organization’s success” (Stavros & Hinrichs, 2009, p. 6).

An environmental analysis may be daunting or not carried out in strategic plans of small NPOs such as VMPC in which funding is precious and resources are few. However, the investment in environmental analysis will result in a strategic plan that will be vibrant and lead the organization to greater success. Envisioning the future will also help to address the needs of the organization to grow rather than react to immediate challenges. Senge (2006) commented, “All too often, proactiveness is reactivity in disguise” (p. 21).

Ideally the process of strategic planning involves all those required to implement the plan. The planning should not only be held at the executive level but also include all stakeholders

(Ketokivi & Castañer, 2004). The board may want to consider key stakeholders such as subcommittee members, provincial association presidents along with other organizations who have a vested interest in the success of VMPC.

## **Membership**

In my search of the scholarly literature I found few resources with regards to membership organizations entirely run by volunteers. VMPC operates solely with voluntary leadership. My research into member organizations pertained to memberships for nursing, social work, and wine groups. The sourced literature, however, examined the elements that build membership capacity; therefore, the findings of this literature review could be applied to the research questions regarding increasing involvement of members in VMPC. This section pertaining to membership discusses the subtopics of membership best practices and CEM.

**Membership best practice.** The findings of the articles focused on key aspects to building and maintaining successful organizations:

- conveying a clear sense of the organization's values;
- collaboration with other organizations;
- engaging, inspiring, and skilled leaders;
- opportunities for networking with the board and fellow members; and
- diverse communication plan (Bauman, 2008; Biga, Spott, & Spott, 2015; Vincent & Webster, 2013; Whitney & Gale, 2015; Wollebaek, 2009).

Conveying a clear message of the organization's values is important to engage members. Organizational values not only convey the culture but also create the emotional draw for people to join, as "organizations that mean the most to consumers are generally those that consumers have a great deal in common such as shared history, values interests and beliefs" (Vincent &

Webster, 2013 p. 1629). VMPC's values will create a connection with members, resulting in a sense of loyalty and emotional attachment. Slater and Armstrong (2010) stated, "Members who identify with the organization . . . feel more involved" (p. 728). Petit (2009) commented, "The more information the customer knows and the more informed he or she has can certainly lead to total trust and transparency between both constituencies (p. 31). Bauman (2008) remarked that members look to organizations with leaders who "clearly communicat[e] how, why and by who decisions are made within the organization" (p. 174). One venue for keeping members informed and connected is social media; sites such as Facebook™ (2016) can provide an opportunity for members to not only hear about the work of an organization but also have an opportunity to engage in conversation (Briones, Kuch, Fisher, Liu, & Jin, 2011).

Collaborations with other organizations is an element of organizational longevity; "a small homogeneous group with weak ties to the community and high expectations of participation are unlikely to persist" (Wollebaek, 2009, p. 280). Whitney and Gale (2015) also commented on the importance of networking on sustaining organizations. Networking promotes connections and is not only encouraged between members but also between similar associations; "organizations can learn from each other, share resources, and help build coalitions when strategic initiatives and priorities are aligned" (Whitney & Gale, 2015, p. 2).

VMPC has been very fortunate to have very skilled and inspired leaders through its history, which is a key element in sustainable membership organizations (Whitney & Gale, 2015). The literature pertaining to membership and leadership was not specific as to leadership traits, but one article did comment on formal versus informal leadership structure: "organizations can increase their survival substantially by optimizing their structure, board composition and activities" (Wollebaek, 2009, p. 279). However, scholars did indicate that long-time members

will stay, even if they are unsatisfied with the leadership, whereas new members will move on (Bauman, 2008; Vincent & Webster, 2013).

The research indicated that some members join only through a sense of obligation—“I feel I probably should” join (Bauman, 2008, p. 170). This longevity may be attributed to long-time members having “more opportunities to experience membership benefits such as networking, career opportunity and professional recognition” (Markova, Ford, Dickson, & Bohn, 2013, p. 499). This could influence organizational leaders into thinking they are sustainable because loyal long-time members join each year, even though the organization is unable to sustain longevity in newer members: “Newer members, who have been members for one year, show signs of continuance commitment towards the membership relationship and maintain their membership, provided it meets their needs and is better than membership with a competitor” (Vincent & Webster, 2013, p. 1634). Successful leaders of membership-driven organizations need think outside the box on an ongoing basis to provide a continuum of value to engage members from Year 1 to Year 20. Thinking outside the box will create a successful organization, “even during period[s] of socioeconomic change” (Darling & Heller, 2009, p. 20).

The literature that spoke to membership organizations indicated success is achieved when members have the opportunity to network with each other and with leaders in the organization. In her study, Bauman (2008) interviewed members in a school counsellor association and reported that networking was a valued benefit. Skarlicki, Lucas, Prociuk, and Latham (2000), in their study of the Canadian Psychological Association, found that “access to a relevant network of colleagues” (p. 73) was a factor in why people join a professional association. Markova et al. (2013) stated, “Those who actively participate in professional activities through the association are likely to develop a stronger affiliation with it” (p. 498).

**Customer experience management.** Leaders need to build relationships and experiences with members to increase involvement. CEM touches on many of the practices involved in effective member organizations, such as trust and commitment. CEM differs from customer relations management in that the latter is more focused on the use of technology to understand and predict innovations in working with customers (Day, 2003).

Palmer (2010) suggested that customer relations management was too “narrowly defined” (p. 203). CEM is more effective at creating value for customers. The reason for CEM being more effective is related to how the practice builds an emotional connection to an organization when opportunities are created for interaction (Grønholdt, Martensen, Jørgensen, & Jensen, 2015). The literature cautioned that CEM is not merely about creating “high levels of service quality and customer satisfaction” (Palmer, 2010, p. 199); CEM has the qualities of systems thinking, it is about the whole experience that a customer comes into contact with the organization and how each interaction creates a positive customer experience. Palmer (2010) stated, “The challenge for the development of a customer experience construct is to integrate a typically diverse array of stimuli in order to assess the trade offs that are entailed in creating value for consumers” (p. 198).

Strong branding is an important element of successful organizations (Chapleo, 2015). A prominent brand ties in with CEM. It is the premise that the brand evokes emotional ties with members, which leads to sustained membership (Chapleo, 2015; Grønholdt et al., 2015; Palmer, 2010). A brand is personal to the consumer: “It is a meaning that is internalized by the consumer based on how closely the brand or company fits with his or her values and with the things that are important to him or her” (Barnes, 2003, p. 181). Verhoef et al. (2009) suggested, “Customer experience has a significant influence on the customer’s overall perception of the brand” (p. 37).

The creation of an experience for members that they cannot achieve with any other organization will give the organization and its members a “competitive advantage” (Grønholdt et al., 2015, p. 91). Verhoef et al. (2009) suggested that creating opportunities for friendships will “increase satisfaction and lead to higher switching costs” (p. 35). The term “higher switching costs” (Verhoef et al., 2009) refers to the emotional attachment that is formed with the organization because a member has ties to the association through friendships that may not continue should the member change organizations. Relationship building between members is an aspect of CEM that could lead to enduring commitment: “Effective management of relationships between associations and members results in greater numbers of members and longer duration of memberships” (Vincent & Webster, 2013, p. 1623). Barnes (2003) also commented, “Where such value is created, the payback to the firm is considerable, in terms of repeat business, higher share of wallet, and much more longevity in the relationship and willingness to refer others” (p. 179).

To create successful CEM, organizational leaders need to understand their customers. The organization needs to communicate with members to understand what is important to them, what are their issues, and what will create the ideal customer experience (Barnes, 2003; Grønholdt et al., 2015; Palmer, 2010). Open communication with members creates a dialogue between the organization and opportunities for discussion. This dialogue can eliminate distrust with the leadership, as the members are not guessing about the conduct of their elected officials. Members do not feel the need to create stories and mental models about what they think is happening (Senge, 2006; Short, 1998).

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter discussed topics relevant to the inquiry question regarding VMPC increasing involvement of members in the organization. This chapter reviewed the themes of leadership and membership development. Further exploration of the literature regarding leadership looked at the subtopics of ideal leadership traits and the importance of strategic planning. The chapter went on to discuss the membership theme and the subtopics of membership development and CEM. Chapter 3 will discuss the inquiry project approach including methodology, project participants, inquiry methods, and ethical issues.

### **Chapter Three: Inquiry Project Approach**

This chapter provides the questions guiding this master's project, as well as the methodology and rationale for the research approach. In this chapter I discuss the project participants, describe the inquiry methods used for data collection, and conclude with considerations made for ethical issues with regards to the role of participants and the collected data.

In this research I sought to explore the following question: How can the board of the Volunteer Management Professionals of Canada increase involvement with volunteer management professionals across the country? Five subquestions were also used to guide the research:

1. What are the current benefits of being involved as a member of VMPC?
2. What do stakeholders see as the opportunities for VMPC to support volunteer management professionals?
3. What are the success stories told by stakeholders about current and past involvement with VMPC?
4. What are the barriers for volunteer management professionals to be involved with VMPC?
5. With an increase in membership, what are suggested best practices in leadership to support the board in their continued success?

### **Inquiry Project Methodology**

In this inquiry project I applied Rowe Agger-Gupta, Harris, and Graf's (2011) organizational action research (OAR) methodology (see Appendix A). I used an overall appreciative inquiry stance. "Appreciative Inquiry is the cooperative, co-evolutionary search for

the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. 8). Action research is a systematic methodology particularly used by social scientists in “organizational development, education, health and social care” (French, 2009, p. 188), and an effective methodology for finding solutions to problems of everyday life (Stringer, 2014). Although, in the view of some researchers, action research is not “genuine research,” this qualitative approach to finding solutions to problems is a “legitimate, authentic and rigorous approach to inquiry” (Stringer, 2014, p. 41).

Action research facilitation is a collaborative process that takes an organization through four stages of a research cycle: focus and framing, stakeholder engaged inquiry methods, reflection on action and evaluation of action, and a process to engage stakeholders in moving forward (Rowe et al., 2013, p. 20). Researchers use various terms to describe the first phases of action research. Stringer (2014) referred to the phases of research as “look, think [and] act” (p. 9). Coghlan and Brannick (2014) identified the phases aligning with ARE as context and purpose, construction, and planning action. Each researcher has a variation of terms for the phases, but the steps are essentially the same. The research is conducted through collecting data with participants, which results in a suggested direction for the organization to plan action to address their challenge. The OAR process culminates in the organization taking action (Rowe et al., 2011; see Appendix A).

An appreciative stance aligned with the values of the sponsor organization. The VMPC website stated they are dedicated to “advocacy, capacity building and networking, it connects and empowers a network of professionals and passionately elevates the quality of volunteerism in Canada” (VMPC, 2014b, Our Purpose section, para. 1). Lewis, Passmore, and Cantore (2011) noted appreciative inquiry “create[s] desirable images of the future, desirable images of how

things could be” (p. 26). The five Ds of appreciative inquiry, define, discovery, dream, design, and destiny (Bushe, 2012, p. 12), invoke many metaphors associated with NPOs. For example, the Make-a-Wish Foundation® Canada’s (2016) mission statement is “to grant the wishes of children with life-threatening medical conditions to enrich the human experience with hope, strength and joy” (About Us section, para. 1). Another example is the Immigrant Services Society of BC’s (2015) mission: “Helping immigrants build a future in Canada” (para. 1).

### **Project Participants**

The participants in this research were comprised of a purposeful selection of people who manage volunteer programs across Canada from the 10 groups affiliated with VMPC (2014c) as well as individual members of the organization. In the 2014–215 fiscal year, VMPC had 435 members in good standing (Membership Chair, personal communication, April 15, 2016).

I conducted a survey of VMPC members as well as members of affiliated organizations to provide feedback to VMPC. I also approached affiliate provincial organizations of VMPC to request they send the survey to their members in order to capture data from volunteer management professionals who are not VMPC members. The members of these groups were considered project participants for the data collection cycle and were required to provide informed consent prior to taking part in the research (see Appendix B).

I employed purposeful sampling to “consciously select people on the basis of a particular set of attributes” (Stringer, 2014, p. 77). This sampling approach enabled me to capture survey data from 152 people in the volunteer management profession from eight provinces. The following provinces and territories were not represented in the survey results: Nunavut, Northwest Territories, Yukon, Québec, and Newfoundland. These provinces are not represented because, despite being invited to participate, residents in those provinces did not reply to the

survey. The survey provided feedback from a cross section of generations and perspectives of those in varying communities (rural, urban). The data from the surveys and focus groups informed the data analysis and subsequent recommendations for actions.

When selecting participants for the focus groups I once again used purposive sampling. A total of 12 volunteer management professionals representing four provinces (British Columbia, Ontario, Québec, and New Brunswick) participated in the focus groups. All focus group participants were members of VMPC. My intention was to hold an in-person focus group in Vancouver as well as two online sessions. During the pilot test for the focus groups, I found those in government positions and in the health care industry had firewalls impeding the use of the desk-sharing programs outside of their networks. Due to the availability of participants and unreliable access to web-based conference programs, I conducted all the focus groups by conference call.

I was an outside researcher with no power or authority over the board of directors or VMPC participants. The majority of participants completed a confidential and anonymous survey, so I did not have knowledge of who participated. The board did not participate in the focus groups so their authority or bias did not influence the data or prevent anyone in the focus groups from providing candid comments.

The inquiry team was made up of five members of the VMPC board. The members included the president, vice-president, treasurer, and certification and advocacy chairs. The board agreed that my Royal Roads Master of Arts in Leadership classmate, Rhonda Eden, could support me in this inquiry to ensure that my bias, as a member of the organization, did not influence the findings. The sponsor was Charles Allain who, at the time of this research, was the President of VMPC. The inquiry team was helpful in revising and testing the questions for the

survey. The team piloted the survey before I sent the invitations for participation (see Appendix C). After I had analyzed the survey data, I met with my inquiry team to review and refine the focus group questions. The inquiry team also reviewed the summarized data and the recommendations to strategize the opportunities for future action.

### **Inquiry Project Methods**

I chose to conduct a survey in order to include a large cross section of the population. The survey was ideal for data collection, as this inquiry included people who were located across the country. For the purposes of triangulation I conducted focus groups to generate discussion around the lead project question and subquestions (French, 2009; Glesne, 2011; Roulston, 2011). I had initially intended to include 18 people in the focus group sessions. However, I reduced the number because smaller groups of four to six participants are recommended as ideal for teleconference focus groups (Allen, 2014; Krueger, n.d.).

**Data collection methods.** I collected the data for this research using multiple qualitative inquiry methods: surveys and focus groups. These multiple methods enabled me to capture varying perspectives in the data, which facilitated triangulation of the data (French, 2009; Glesne, 2011; Roulston, 2011). Rowe et al. (2013) stated that triangulation helps to “derive intersecting or common themes across different settings” (p. 25).

**Surveys.** I used JitsuTech (2016), an online or browser-based survey company, to collect the primary data. The company is based in Canada and uses Canadian servers (JitsuTech, 2016). As previously noted, I sent the survey out to volunteer management professionals from across Canada. The advantage of the on-line survey method was the engagement of a variety of participants who lived far from my location. The survey participants came from eight provinces. Palys and Atchison (2014) noted one advantage of surveys is that they enable the researcher to

“create, edit and finalize the research instrument without the burden of scheduling and attending physical meetings” (p. 147). Stringer (2014) suggested surveys are of “limited utility in the first phases of an action research process” (p. 118). In the case of this research project, the survey questions included a mix of open and closed questions, specifically asking for feedback on the inquiry questions. I asked survey participants four fixed-choice questions regarding identification of generation, gender, the province of participants, current membership, and whether or not participants were aware of VMPC. The remaining survey questions provided an opportunity for participants to reflect on their participation in VMPC and provide advice for action. The survey preamble and questions are located in Appendix C.

***Focus groups.*** The second data-gathering method was focus groups. The focus groups further expanded on the results of the survey. These sessions provided the opportunity for deeper reflection from stakeholders regarding the project questions. These include the leadership implications for the board with regards to increased involvement of members and suggestions for successful leadership. Palys and Atchison (2014) stated focus groups allow for “participants to embellish on positions, discuss related dynamics and articulate the rationale(s) underlying their perspective” (p. 154). Focus groups are facilitated sessions, typically involving six to 10 participants for approximately 90 minutes to two hours (Glesne, 2011). Glesne (2011) suggested three to five groups as an appropriate sample. This project conducted three focus groups. I had offered the VMPC members a fourth focus group option to be held in French in hopes of increased participation of members in Québec and New Brunswick. As members did not request to participate in the French session I cancelled the session. I held the focus group sessions by conference call. My intention was to hold one of the focus groups in person, but those who replied to participate lived great distances from each other, which made it impractical to hold an

in person session. The focus group participants represented only a small portion of Canadian volunteer management professionals, including eight people from British Columbia, two from Ontario, one from Québec, and one person from New Brunswick. This small sample was not intentional, and the low participation left me wondering if another data-gathering method would have provided a better representation of the participants from across the country. However, those who did participate did confirm the findings of the survey. The selection of participants for the focus group was purposeful as those invited to the focus group were current members of VMPC. The questions for the focus group are located in Appendix D.

**Study conduct.** Once I received ethics approval from Royal Roads University I worked with my inquiry team to develop a timeline for the project. The inquiry team reviewed and piloted the questions for the survey. After the completion of data collection from the survey I sent the analyzed data along with a PowToon™ (n.d.) video that provided an overview of the survey results to the inquiry team. The inquiry team met after they reviewed the data analysis and reviewed the questions and agenda for the focus groups. The inquiry team discussed the focus groups, in particular the change from conducting one of the groups in person. We collectively made the decision to do all the focus groups by conference call. The board was not invited to participate in the focus group sessions due to the possibility of concerns relating to power-over issues, anonymity, and confidentiality of focus group participants. One member of Focus Group 3 did express feeling comfortable giving candid feedback because the board was not present on the call. I did, however, invite the board of VMPC to complete the survey. I set four focus group dates and sent invitations out to all VMPC members. The first group slated for January 26, 2016, was scheduled as a French-only session. I planned for this session to be facilitated by a French-speaking classmate of the Royal Roads University (RRU) Master of Arts

in Leadership program. My intention was to provide an opportunity for potential participants, particularly people in Québec to participate in a focus group. It was an oversight that the survey was not provided in the French language.

With the support of the sponsor organization, I invited VMPC members to take part in the survey and the focus group using email addresses provided by VMPC. I also emailed letters to affiliate organization to ask if they would be interested in forwarding the survey to their members. Affiliate organization members are not necessarily members of VMPC. This provided the potential for me to gather feedback from volunteer management professionals who were not currently involved in VMPC. A copy of the letter of invitation to the affiliate organizations is located in Appendix E.

I sent letters of invitation for the survey and focus groups by email. Appendix F contains the invitation letter to the survey. Appendix G consists of the invitation to the focus group. Appendix H holds the information letter. I, as the researcher, received and collected the responses from the survey. I then shared the anonymous results of the collected data with the inquiry team. The consent letter for participants of the focus group is located in Appendix B.

The validity and authenticity of my gathered data from the focus groups can be ascertained from the audio records and captured feedback from the focus group sessions. The data collected from the survey can be verified directly from the online survey software. I retrieved and analyzed the data from the survey with the knowledge that any question of authenticity could be verified with the survey company. All data are securely stored and will be maintained for verification up to 1 year after the submission of this project, after which all data will be deleted or destroyed.

After I had collated all information gathered from survey and focus group participants, the inquiry team assisted me in reviewing the analyzing data. The inquiry team also reviewed the recommendations and offered suggestions of actions to forward to the Executive. I presented the final recommendations to the board in a format to celebrate the future increased involvement of volunteer management professions. The board will consider the recommendations for their strategic plan or future plans.

As the inquiry team was comprised of board members, I provided them with progress updates and findings throughout the process. I called inquiry team meetings by conference call in August 2015 and in January, February and April 2016. We had hoped to meet in November 2015 to discuss and conduct a pilot test of the survey, but the team was unable to meet at that time. Instead, I sent a detailed email with the link to the survey and all members of the inquiry team emailed their thoughts and suggestions back to me. The inquiry team was actively involved in discussion around key findings and suggested actions to be presented to the executive. In line with the ARE model (Rowe et al., 2013), the inquiry team and the board have ownership over the recommendations.

**Data analysis.** Trustworthiness and validity are achieved when research is credible, transferable to the organization, dependable, and all the information gathered can be confirmed (Stringer, 2014). Glesne (2011) referred to triangulation as clarification on research bias and advised researchers obtain “rich thick descriptions” (p. 49) as means to ensure the authenticity and validity of the research content. This also contributes to the reliability, validity, authenticity, and trustworthiness of the research (Glesne, 2011; Stringer, 2014). When gathering the data I considered all these issues to ensure the data would be credible. At all times I ensured the data, which were anonymous, were made available to the board. As previously noted, I informed the

board as the research progressed, thereby ensuring transparency of the research process and the data collected.

I initially analyzed the data for this project through the process of pawing, which is the term used for reviewing the data and highlighting recurring terms, word repetitions or “looking for patterns in qualitative data” (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 8). I then grouped the gathered words from the pawed data as well as the phrases pulled from the stories participants shared in their survey responses (Chenail, 2012). I identified themes that could then be used by the inquiry team to set priorities. I used the themes derived from the data results of the survey to frame the questions for the focus group.

I mitigated the issue of researcher bias by meeting with the inquiry team to review the analyzed data and themes to ensure the themes resonated with them. I noted my personal thoughts regarding the needs of VMPC in my research journal to check my “own subjectivity” (Glesne, 2011, p. 49). I also reviewed my research findings with my RRU Master of Arts in Leadership cohort member to confirm that my opinions did not influence results. The identified themes and feedback provided a clear set of actions for the board’s consideration.

### **Ethical Issues**

Out of respect to VMPC and all the participants in the research, I took all ethical issues into consideration when conducting this inquiry. As the researcher, I adhered to the *Tri-Council Policy Statement’s* (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, & Social Sciences and Humanity Research Council of Canada [CIHR], 2014) ethical guidelines with regards to respect to persons, concern for welfare and justice. I was also guided by the ethical considerations as outlined in the RRU (2011) *Research*

*Ethics Policy*, and the RRU Research Ethics Board approved my inquiry proposal on November 19, 2015.

**Respect for persons.** Respect for persons “recognizes the intrinsic value of human beings and the respect and consideration that they are due” (CIHR, 2014, p. 6). All those who took part in the research voluntarily chose or declined to participate of their own free will. All participants were provided with information about the research including risk, confidentiality, and anonymity information (see Appendix H). As a member-driven organization, there were no power-over issues with me conducting this inquiry, as invitations were sent to a large audience and those who participated in the survey and focus groups were free to choose to take part without coercion. The members of VMPC work in various organizations throughout the country and are not employees of VMPC. I chose to exclude the VMPC board and committee members from participating in the focus group sessions to ensure the anonymity of participants was protected and to allow participants to freely express their opinions. There was a risk that focus group participants might share conversations or identifications of participants. I limited this risk by requiring that all focus group participants sign the consent form in Appendix B prior to taking part in the sessions; I also reinforced this requirement within the opening discussion before the execution of the focus groups.

**Concern for welfare.** As the researcher I needed to protect the welfare of participants and consider all the foreseeable risks associated with the research. I provided participants with enough information to adequately assess risks and potential benefits associated with their participation in the research (see Appendices E, F, G, and H). I did not anticipate any negative consequences to the organization as a result of the research. There was the possibility that the reputation of the organization could be negatively portrayed within the data. I ensured any

negative comments from the survey and the focus groups were used to create constructive feedback that offered insight for opportunities that would provide a positive future for the organization. The *Tri-Council Policy Statement* (CIHR, 2014) defined concern for welfare as caring for “the quality of that person’s experience of life in all its aspects” (p. 7)

Within this research, I obtained the collection of opinions directly from individuals through a survey and focus group sessions. I did not collect any personal information that could identify participants in either the surveys or focus groups. I have safely and securely stored all signed consent forms as well as the key to participant codes (used in data analysis), and only I have access to this data. The information regarding consent and privacy was contained in the information letter to participants and on the consent form for the focus groups (see Appendices B, C, and H).

I conducted the survey using the online software JitsuTech™ (n.d.), which stores the data in Canada. The information about data storage was included in the consent statement (see Appendix C). I have secured all electronic data on an encrypted device. All focus group participants returned consent forms to me electronically, and I have also stored these on an encrypted device. All data will be destroyed 1 year after the completion of the project. This final report contains no identifying information about inquiry participants.

**Justice.** All members of VMPC were invited to participate in the research. The *Tri-Council Statement* (CIHR, 2014) defined justice as the “obligation to treat people fairly and equitably. Fairness entails treating all people with equal respect and concern” (p. 8). I excluded VMPC board members from participating in the focus groups to protect the anonymity of the participants. The board, as members of the organization, were invited to participate in the survey.

**Conflict of interest.** The *Tri-Council Policy Statement* (CIHR, 2014) defined a conflict of interest as activities or situations that “place an individual or institution in a real, potential, or perceived conflict between the duties or responsibilities related to research, and personal, institutional or other interests” (p. 93). There was no conflict of interest in this project between VMPC members and me, nor were there any issues between the VMPC board members and me.

I, as the researcher, did not personally benefit from the research financially, nor did I receive any other benefit from VMPC. The organization is an NPO with no paid staff. No one received financial compensation for participating in the research. No one gained notoriety through taking part in the inquiry, as all participants in the research were anonymous and therefore not identifiable.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter I discussed how the research was conducted and how the data were analyzed. This chapter also provided information about how I addressed ethical issues and protected the identity of all participants in the survey and focus groups. The final section of the chapter addressed how I adhered to the ethical guidelines presented in the *Tri-Council Policy Statement* (CIHR, 2014). Chapter 4 will provide the project findings and conclusions.

## **Chapter Four: Action Research Inquiry Project Findings and Conclusions**

In this chapter I discuss the project findings and conclusions collected from the survey and focus groups conducted with members and nonmembers of VMPC. In this research I sought to explore the following question: How can the board of the Volunteer Management Professionals of Canada increase involvement with volunteer management professionals across the country? Five subquestions were also used to guide the research:

1. What are the current benefits of being involved as a member of VMPC?
2. What do stakeholders see as the opportunities for VMPC to support volunteer management professionals?
3. What are the success stories told by stakeholders about current and past involvement with VMPC?
4. What are the barriers for volunteer management professionals to be involved with VMPC?
5. With an increase in membership, what are suggested best practices in leadership to support the board in their continued success?

### **Study Findings**

This study found that members and nonmembers wanted VMPC to provide increased opportunities for learning, networking, and continued advocacy for the profession. Members also wanted to hear more from VMPC about the work of the board. I derived these findings based upon the data gathered from the survey and the focus groups. There were 152 participants in the survey. I was fortunate to have 41 volunteer management professionals who were not VMPC members participate in the survey and provide their feedback as to why they were not involved. For the 2014–2015 membership year VMPC had 435 members (VMPC Membership Chair,

personal communication, April 1, 2016). The survey, according to those statistics, provided a rate of return of 27%. The focus groups were smaller in size, with 12 participants taking part over 3 days.

This study included participants from eight provinces in the survey and four provinces for the focus groups. In total, the inquiry included representation of nine provinces: British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Québec, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and New Brunswick. Of those who identified their gender, 6% percent were male. This was to be expected, as the NPO field is dominated by women (HR Council, 2008). In total, two men signed up for the focus groups; however, one male participant was ill the day of the group and could not participate. Near equal amounts of Baby Boomers and Generation X participants took part in the survey, representing 132 respondents (87%) in the survey. Seventeen participants identified themselves Generation Y. No participant comments in the survey pertained specifically to increasing involvement of this generation, but an increase of this group may occur if VMPC implements recommendations from the members.

Four general themes arose from the survey and focus group data:

1. Networking and education are important for increasing knowledge and competency of the membership.
2. Participants noted the need for VMPC to increase communication with and to members.
3. Time and resources for volunteer management professionals have decreased, which has become a barrier for members to be involved in the activities of VMPC.
4. Advocacy for the profession and collaboration with national partners is important.

Each of these themes were corroborated from the data collected from the survey and focus groups. To protect the anonymity of the participants, any direct comments are identified by the manner in which volunteer management professionals participated. Online survey comments are indicated with the participant code OS and focus groups are indicated by the codes FS1, FS2, and FS3.

**Theme 1: Networking and education are important for increasing knowledge and competency of the membership.** The majority of participants in the survey and focus groups identified the importance of networking for increased knowledge and competency. Of the 152 survey participants, 75 made reference in their comments with regards to increased networking opportunities with other VMPC members. Their comments specifically mention networking as opportunities for education and to share professional best practice. The conference was highlighted as a key networking element to member involvement with VMPC.

The 12 focus group members made 23 references to the importance of networking and of the conference. Members commented that the opportunities for networking added or would add the most value to their membership. As shown in Figure 2, the surveyed members rated networking as an important aspect of their membership, ranking collaboration with colleagues and education higher than attending the conference. The conference was mentioned as a value to becoming a member of VMPC. This was evident in comments on the survey such as “I only join VMPC in years that the conference in is my province” (OS), and “Other than the conference, I do not know what I get for my membership” (OS). As well, a participant in the focus group stated, “Sending staff to the conference is important to keep people connected nationally” (FS3).



*Figure 2.* VMPC survey results for the question, “What benefits of being a member of VMPC have you experienced and their importance to you as a member?”

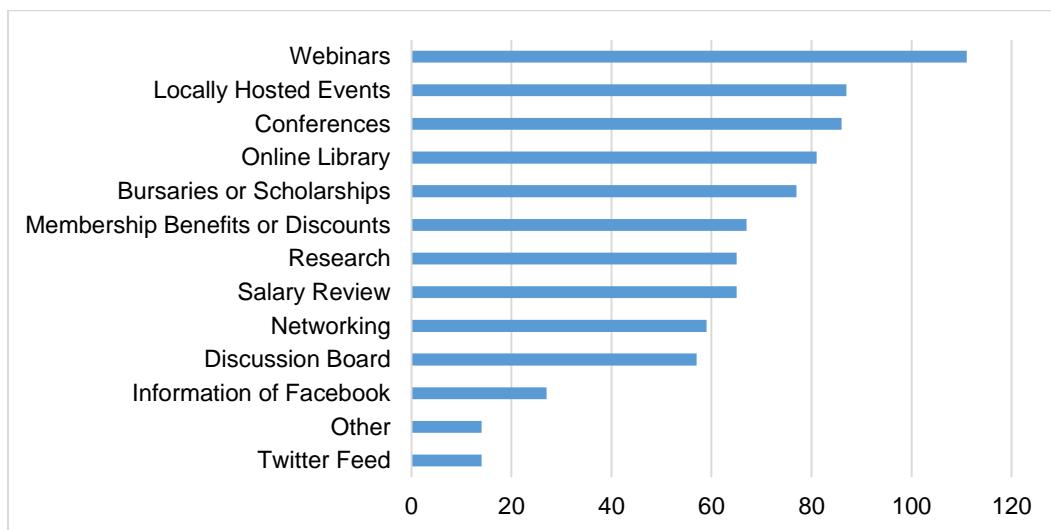
Members and nonmembers in the survey made several statements about the conference being unattainable for members due to distance and cost: “I only attend the conference when it is in my home province” (OS). Another survey participant stated, “[I attended] conference years where the conference was financially feasible” (OS). There is also the perception that more events take place in Eastern Canada: “I believe it is quite costly to become actively involved in VMPC as most of the events take place in the Eastern portion of Canada and I live in the West” (OS).

Comments about the important benefit of networking and connecting with colleagues were prevalent in the survey and focus groups, as indicated by this participant: “I would like to connect with other volunteer management professionals to build relationships and share knowledge” (FS1). Connecting with colleagues across the country was of particular importance

to survey and focus group participants: “The opportunity to connect with those around the country is why I became involved” (FS3). One member of the focus groups stated, “Networking with members from different provinces [has been] very beneficial” (OS).

Participants in the focus groups and the survey expressed an interest in local events hosted by VMPC. In the survey, 87 respondents (57%) appreciated local meetings as being an opportunity for VMPC to gain more members. Participants in Focus Groups 1 and 2 mentioned a desire for meetings of local groups. These participants suggested “creating local area networks and regional meetings” (FS1) and “hosting of local gatherings will make the membership more real” (FS2).

Inquiry participants indicated that opportunities to attend webinars may increase their involvement in the organization. As shown in Figure 3, survey respondents rated webinars as having a slighter greater importance than the annual conference. When asked in the survey, “What do you see as an opportunity for VMPC to support you in your profession,” 111 respondents (73%) ranked webinars as important.



*Figure 3. VMPC survey results for the question, “What do you see as an opportunity for VMPC to support you in your profession?”*

Members commented on the importance of ensuing friendships keeping them connected and involved in the organization. In discussing benefits experienced as member of VMPC, one participant stressed the importance of developing “friendships and networking with others” (OS). Many participant comments referring to the importance to networking also included the aspect of creating connections between members. They expressed a need to be a part of a community of people who manage volunteer programs. The word “connections” was used 13 times in the survey and focus groups. Participants’ comments included, “The connections I’ve made with other members is what I have enjoyed most” (OS), and “I would like to connect with other volunteer management professionals to build relationships and share knowledge” (FS1).

The data showed an interest from members in networking and connecting with others as important to their participation in VMPC. This is partially being achieved through the annual conference. Unfortunately, for many members, distance and funding are barriers to participation, leaving many members without opportunities to establish relationships with their colleagues across the country.

**Theme 2: Participants noted the need for increased communication with and to members.** From the survey and focus groups, members indicated they wanted more frequent communication from VMPC. Participants wanted to see and hear more about the work of the organization. Members also indicated they wanted to receive educational articles and best-practice information.

Participants indicated that they are unaware of the value of their membership. This lack of awareness was attributed to VMPC not providing enough information about the work of the organization. Participants shared that they receive the bulk of communication prior to the

conference: “Outside the conference we do not hear much from VMPC” (FG3). Participants in Focus Group 3 commented that VMPC needed to be more visible.

Those who participated in the focus groups had many thoughts on how VMPC could overcome the perceived scarcity of communication with members. Members suggested “Google Groups™” (FS3), focus groups (FS1; OS), and “regular e-blasts of current relevant information” (OS).

Members of VMPC said that they wanted more opportunities to communicate with the board. They suggested that board members mingle at conferences and get to know VMPC members (FS3). One participant in the focus group commented that it would be beneficial for the board to include something a bit more personal about the board members in newsletters, so members could get to know their leaders (FS3). Members of Focus Group 1 suggested that increased communication would “keep VMPC in members’ minds” (FS1).

VMPC inquiry team agreed with participants in the survey and focus groups, who had stated, with the exception of the conference, communication with members is not frequent. Improving the frequency of communications with members will increase ties with the membership. Members said they not only wanted to know more about the work of the organization, but also about the people who were doing all the work on behalf of the membership. Participants also expressed a need for members to be heard by the board of directors, ensuring that communication is not only from the board but also from the membership.

**Theme 3: Time and resources for volunteer management professionals have decreased, which has become a barrier for members to be involved in the activities of VMPC.** Members indicated they are busy and resources are minimal. These constraints were listed as barriers to being involved in VMPC. I received feedback from all data collection

methods about the changing economic conditions of members' positions (OS; FS1; FS2; FS3).

Changes in budgets have hindered the ability of members to be involved. Many participant comments supported this economic restraint; for example, one participant stated, "Funding for travel related to VMPC is not shared by my employer. This means it comes out of my pocket if VMPC cannot pay the cost" (OS). A participant in Focus Group 3 commented, "It used to be widely accepted that organizations pay for memberships. This is no longer a supported practice" (FS3).

VMPC hosts a national conference each year. The conference alternates from Eastern to Western Canada each year, but not all members can afford to attend. Participants in the focus groups and survey commented that the cost of the conference is a barrier to their involvement. One participant commented, "I have no idea who affords to go to national events. I work in [a large organization] in Canada and all the volunteer resources staff can't afford to go to a local conference every year" (OS), and another participant stated, "The conference is too expensive to attend, as I have to pay my own way" (FG1). Survey and focus group participants also identified increasing demands in their workplace as a barrier to attending the conference: "My job is all encompassing and there just isn't time to breathe let alone participate in one more thing" (OS) and "my position has expanded but my resources have not" (OS).

Time constraints were also a factor regarding the distance members must travel to events: "Driving takes up a huge chunk of time away from the office" (OS). Another participant stated, "Geographic location of events can be a barrier" (FS1). Many participants offered proposed solutions to the cost and distance by suggesting the creation of local events for member to attend (OS; FS1; FS2; FS3). Despite participants' many references to the lack of funds and time, members also remarked on the importance of making time for VMPC: "Those who say

they do not have time are being short sighted; they need to look further down the road at the importance of being involved to keep up accreditation and competency” (FS2). VMPC is integral to the profession at the national table. From Focus Group 3 a member stated, “VMPC is important to our profession. . . . The return on investment is greater competency in the organization’s staff” (FS3). Members also suggested that perhaps they do not make the time because they do not know how much time is needed to be involved: “There are misconceptions about how to be involved. What is required, how much time” (FS3)?

As shown in Figure 4, the lack of time and resources is an issue for many members and a barrier to involvement. The findings showed, despite these constraints, members see a need for VMPC. Members are interested in contributing to the continued success of the organization. As one participant in the survey commented, “If [being in involved with VMPC] is important enough there are no real barriers” (OS).

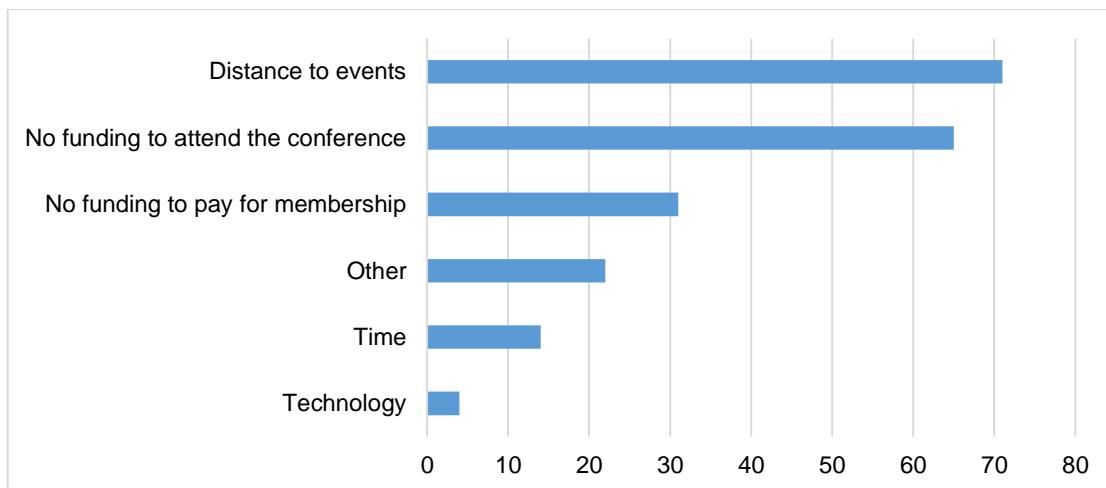


Figure 4. VMPC survey results for the question, “What are the barriers to becoming a member of VMPC?”

**Theme 4: Advocacy for the profession and collaboration with national partners is important.** The quantitative survey data from member and nonmembers indicated the importance of advocacy and collaboration. Members want VMPC to continue working closely

with other national and provincial organizations. Participants made specific comments about collaborations with Volunteer Canada and Imagine Canada (OS). In reviewing what participants had ranked as “very important” to “important,” respondents selected the following fixed choices on the survey: joint membership (63%), national occupational standards (63%), Volunteer Canada’s (2012) *Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement* (65%), and VMPC (2014d) professional code of ethics (66%). With the exception of the code of ethics (VMPC, 2014d), the other items listed are collaborative initiatives. The *Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement* (Volunteer Canada, 2012) was a joint project of Volunteer Canada and VMPC. The *National Occupational Standards for Volunteer Management Professionals* (HR Council for the Nonprofit Sector, 2012) was a project conducted with the HR Council for the Nonprofit Sector. Additionally, joint memberships are working relationships with provincial organizations of volunteer management professionals.

Advocacy and what that meant to members was varied. Many participants commented on the importance of tools such as the Volunteer Canada (2012) *Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement* the HR Council for Nonprofit Sector (2012) *National Occupational Standards for Volunteer Management Professionals* (OS; FS3). Others mentioned advocacy as it pertains to national issues, which create operational challenges for volunteer programs. Participants provided examples such as changes to criminal record searches requiring fingerprinting of all volunteers and mandatory hours for high school volunteers (FS2).

As a national body, VMPC is in the best position to represent the issues of those managing volunteer programs across the country. The national voice eliminates the boundary of provinces (FS3). The collective voice through one organization provides the best opportunity for dialogue and resolution. As one participant noted, “VMPC is our national vehicle for advocating

and for providing much needed education” (OS). Respondents mentioned they looked to VMPC to increase the profile of the profession at educational institutions that operate educational programs for NPOs. These include programs such as event management or fund development courses (FS1; FS2).

Focus group members and survey respondents indicated that the international collaboration with the Council for Certification in Volunteer Administration (CCVA) is a value to their membership (OS; FS1; FS2). In the survey, participants ranked the discount for certification through CCVA as 35% “very important” to “important,” and 23% rated certification as “moderately important.” One respondent in the survey expressed appreciation for the certification and recertification processes: “This is important to me professionally and also important to the superiors and my board” (OS). I found, however, one comment from a survey respondent asking VMPC to take back the certification process into Canada (OS). This comment referred to a previous practice of VMPC administering their own certification process (VMPC, 2014a).

Certification is one of the draws for volunteer management professionals to be involved in the organization. One focus group participant said he or she did not know about VMPC but saw there was a discount on certification for those who joined (FS1). A survey respondent mentioned this value as well, but also commented that he or she was no longer a member of VMPC: “I joined to get certified but could see no reason to continue” (OS).

Affiliation agreements were mentioned as a reason people became involved with VMPC. VMPC has collaborated with provincial associations of volunteer management professionals to provide a discount of up to 50% for provincial members to join the national organization (VMPC, 2014e, Member Benefits section, para. 7–8). A member in the survey stated, “I get

[VMPC membership] through my provincial affiliate, but is it the biggest benefit of belonging to my provincial organization" (OS).

Members saw advocacy and collaboration as important work in the continuing success of VMPC. Participants in the survey and focus groups valued the work of the board partnerships in valuable documents such as the Volunteer Canada (2012) *Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement* and the collaboration with CCVA. They commented that collaborations provided VMPC with the opportunity to be visible in the nation as a leader in volunteer management.

### **Study Conclusions**

To increase involvement VMPC needs to improve connections and communication with the membership. Members and nonmembers wanted to hear more from VMPC in a variety of mediums. One focus group participant commented that from his or her perspective board members spend more time with each other at conferences than they do mingling with current and perspective members. Members want more opportunities to network with each other. They want networking to occur through the conference, webinars, or local events. Those who participated in the survey and the focus groups were supporters of a national organization to provide advocacy, education, and opportunities for certification and networking.

Participants in the focus groups recognized they may have too many expectations for the volunteer board, but if board members want to increase involvement, they need to find solutions to balance their time and the needs of their members. This may be a challenge for the volunteer board, but "to get extraordinary things done in organizations, you have to go beyond reason, engaging the hearts as well as the mind of your constituents" (Kouzes & Posner, 2012, p. 129). Envisioning new ways to engage members may build capacity, especially when members identify time as a barrier. Successful leaders think outside the box, "regarding what the

organization can become even during period[s] of socioeconomic change" (Darling & Heller, 2009, p. 20).

This research project reflects the system lens of the members who provided feedback as to how they would like to be involved in the organization. Members talked about the friendships they made with colleagues and how those connections supported their volunteer programs. Their feedback presents a picture in time of what current and potential members saw as the values of joining the organization: "An individual is more likely to join a professional organization when he or she believes that joining will result in a valued outcome" (Bauman, 2008, p. 86). Leaders need to regularly collaborate with members to ensure they continually meet the needs of their customers.

The conclusions from the research findings are discussed under the following subheadings:

1. Participants requested regular opportunities for the board to hear from members and to create strategies for increased operation and innovation.
2. VMPC needs to engage in CEM as a strategy for ongoing engagement of the membership.
3. Communication is important for successful leadership.
4. Networking is a priority for VMPC membership.
5. VMPC, as a learning organization, needs to support its leaders to excel in their roles.

**Conclusion 1: Participants requested regular opportunities for the board to hear from the members and to create strategies for increased operation and innovation.** As mentioned in Chapter 2, strategic planning is a tool of successful organizations: "Fully 93 percent of the most successful organizations, regardless of size or budget, credited their strategic

planning and strategic management efforts as having ‘some’ to ‘critical’ impact on their organization’s overall success” (Reid et al., 2014, p. 33). The overall success of an effective strategic plan includes feedback from all stakeholders in the organization prior to planning. Involving all stakeholders ensures that strategic future plans reflect the interest and values of all members: “Participative planning and communicating the resulting goals and priorities to all employees, may reduce position bias and thus enhance goal convergence” (Ketokivi & Castañer, 2004, p. 339). Ketokivi and Castañer (2004) referred to employees, but organizations need to ensure that their plans appeal to the majority of their constituents and stakeholders in order to be successful and, therefore, increase member involvement.

An environmental scan is a step toward a successful strategic plan. This scan not only seeks the input from stakeholders but also examines the competition to determine what they offer that competes with VMPC. In the survey and the focus groups, members stated that many of their networking needs are met by their provincial organization. The strategic plan should also anticipate the needs of members in order to create an exceptional experience. VMPC needs to exceed other organization’s services or provide a unique value to compete for the limited funding resources of volunteer management professionals (Bauman, 2008; Vincent & Webster, 2013). A regularly scheduled plan to gather feedback and plan for the future would ensure the needs of the membership were always at the forefront of the board’s list of priorities: “Successful organizations make planning a consistent periodic process. Conversely, the strategic planning process in less successful organizations tends to be reactive, spurred by crisis or unanticipated risks and challenges” (Reid et al., 2014, p. 33).

An environment scan discovers the needs of members. This research project was an example of a tool to gauge the needs or wants of members. One approach to the strategic

planning and environmental scan is to determine the organization's SOAR. The SOAR method is used in strategic planning with an appreciative stance, rather than the frequently used "SWOT [strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats]" (Stavros & Hinrichs, 2009, p. 12), which tends to focus on the weaknesses and threats. "SOAR conversations center on what an organization is doing right, what skills could be enhanced, and what is compelling to those who have a 'stake' in the organization's success" (Stavros & Hinrichs, 2009, p. 6).

Once the strategic planning process is complete it is important to communicate the results to members. Members in the focus groups and survey noted the importance of improved communication for increased involvement of members. "True accountability lies in an organization's commitment to not only tracking plan progress, but to reporting on that progress to staff, board and community" (Reid et al., 2014, p. 37).

**Conclusion 2: VMPC needs to engage in CEM as a strategy for ongoing engagement of the membership.** CEM is the day-to-day commitment of the organization to engage members to ensure they feel connected to VMPC: "Interaction through personal contacts and relationships can lead to benefits such as better understanding of customers and their needs, opportunities to encourage trust, loyalty and increases in performance benefits for the organisation" (Vincent & Webster, 2013, p. 1622). Customer relationship management (CRM) is also a practice in working with customers; however, CRM generally refers to creating relationships based on the "recorded history of the customer" (Verhoef et al., 2009, p. 31). In addition, CRM tends to be focused on using technology to create efficiencies in business practice (Day, 2003). As such, CEM is more relevant to VMPC than CRM.

The feedback from the survey and focus groups told a story of members wanting more experiences interacting with fellow members, which would increase their involvement. CEM is a

holistic approach to interacting with customers (Verhoef et al., 2009). CEM looks at how customers experience the organization and how the brand makes people feel emotionally (Chapleo, 2015; Grønholdt et al., 2015; Palmer, 2010). CEM will enable leadership to not only look at how VMPC interacts with its members, but also how members interact with VMPC and between colleagues. Member-to-member interactions “can lead to a more enriched customer experience and help build customer loyalty” (Verhoef et al., 2009, p. 35). The importance of networking with fellow volunteer management professionals was a significant finding of the research. Stories told by participants in the survey relayed the positive experiences members received from their provincial organizations. VMPC needs to differentiate itself from its provincial counterparts and create an experience that emotionally ties members to VMPC and gives the national organization a “competitive advantage” (Grønholdt et al., 2015; Petit, 2009). VMPC needs to create the opportunities for members to make long-lasting connections with the organization: “The model suggests that the longer a relationship has been maintained the more likely it is for members to continue maintaining the relationship” (Vincent & Webster, 2013, p. 1632).

The creation and maintenance of relationships between members and the organization will turn current members into ambassadors of the organization who will “actively and passionately promote the association to friends and acquaintances who are non-members” (Vincent & Webster, 2013, p. 1633). The development of programs to continually engage new members will encourage their emotional connection to VMPC, “provided it meets their needs and is better than membership with a competitor” (Vincent & Webster, 2013, p. 1633).

**Conclusion 3: Communication is important for successful leadership.** Participants in the survey and focus groups instinctively knew the board was working hard to provide services

to professionals across the country, but felt they did not hear enough from VMPC. Participants noted other provincial organizations have Facebook™ (2016) pages or use social media platforms to keep members informed. As mentioned in CEM, trust is often built through increased communication. If members are not well informed, they will begin guessing or creating stories and mental models about what they think is happening (Senge, 2006; Short, 1998).

Successful customer relationships are built on trust (Darling & Heller, 2009; Petit, 2009). To gain the trust of customers, leaders need to be good communicators (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). Leaders not only have to be good communicators with their staff, or in this case the board, but also with members. Ongoing dialogue is important between the board and committees of VMPC and members (Grønholdt et al., 2015).

**Conclusion 4: Networking is a priority for VMPC membership.** A common story told by members in the focus groups and the survey was the desire for more opportunities for socializing with other volunteer management professionals across the country. As VMPC wants to ensure the future success of the organization, the development of relationships between members will increase involvement and long-term relations. In a study about the survival of a volunteer association, Wollebaek (2009) suggested that organizations with extroverted activities contributed to their longevity. This could include an annual conference, local meetings, webinars, or social dinner outing.

As stated in the discussion in Conclusion 2 regarding CEM, creating opportunities for networking and fostering friendships will increase member involvement. In the survey, several participants' comments related to the appreciation that friendships created from interactions at VMPC events "provid[e] support and knowledge" (OS). Networking includes opportunities for

face-to-face meetings, such as the conference. However, as the cost to attend the conference can be a barrier for some members, VMPC needs to create other methods to encourage member interactions. The survey and focus groups expressed an interest for discussion forums and local meetings.

Social networking could be expanded and used as a tool to increase involvement. A study on the use of Facebook™ (2016) and NPOs found Facebook™ was underutilized as a tool to build relationships and experiences with members (Waters, Burnett, Lamm, & Lucas, 2009). “Social networking sites can be an effective way to reach stakeholder groups if organizations understand how their stakeholders use the sites” (Waters et al., 2009, p. 106). Organizations using social media often do not know what these tools can offer, thereby limiting the opportunities for interactions between the organization and its members (Briones et al., 2011). A lack of resources to support social media efforts can be achieved by the use of volunteers:

Nonprofits can use the videos and photographs taken by their volunteers if the organizations lack the equipment and resources, but they must start making the relationship development efforts by getting them [volunteers] involved in organizational activities and asking for social networking assistance. (Waters et al., 2009, p. 105)

**Conclusion 5: VMPC, as a learning organization, needs to support its leaders to excel in their roles.** As stated in Chapter 2, successful organizations have a team of leaders who are supported in their learning. Their learning inspires the membership and future leaders of the organization. Focus group participants attested to the work of the current board: “The VMPC leaders are inspiring and go the extra mile” (FS3). Darling and Heller (2009) asserted there are “four primary elements for excellence in successful organizational development: committed people, care of customers, constant innovation and management leadership” (p. 9). Ongoing

leadership development will support the success of VMPC, establishing the skills in the membership to be the voice for volunteer management professionals for years to come.

Senge (2006) stated that learning organizations are ones “continually expanding in capacity to create its future” (p. 14). VMPC is an organization that provides education not only to its members but also to Canadians about the importance of the volunteer management profession. Supporting the board to build its leadership skills benefits the board members and the future of member involvement. The leadership skills learned while on the board and on committees will add value to their membership in VMPC and their workplaces.

### **Scope and Limitations of the Inquiry**

I encountered some limitations when working on the conclusions, because all the survey questions were optional to complete, so some people did not indicate if they were members or not members. This was an oversight, and I suggest for future VMPC surveys that identifying the province and whether or not the participant is a member be mandatory fields. This requirement would provide a clearer picture of who completed the survey. In total 152 surveys were submitted, but only 144 survey participants responded to the question, “Are you a current member of the Volunteer Management Professionals of Canada,” with totals of 103 members and 41 nonmembers, indicating that eight people did not identify their affiliation. As well, it would have been of benefit to create an identical survey for nonmembers to compare the comments of members and nonmembers.

The other limitation of the survey was the availability in only English and not French. This was unfortunate, as it may have been a barrier to participation in the survey for some members. French-speaking members did receive French notice about the English survey. I made an effort made to correct for the lack of a French option for the survey by providing the

opportunity for members to participate in a focus group in French. However, no one signed up for the French session. There may be a future opportunity for VMPC to engage its French-speaking stakeholders to explore their thoughts on increased involvement.

### **Chapter Summary**

VMPC is not alone in facing a decline in membership. In a study with school counsellors, Bauman (2008) found similar results in her survey. There were parallels to schools not paying for professional memberships for its staff. Respondents of Bauman's survey also stressed it was "important to be active within one's professional organization to have a voice on any and all issues that arise statewide and nationally" (p. 170), and focus group participants in this inquiry echoed this. Bauman's survey participants also commented on time constraints as a barrier to membership, stating they did not have the "time, energy or resources to join, maintain, or benefit from membership" (p. 171). The solution to increased involvement will require creative and innovative thinking. If VMPC takes up the challenge, they could be a model for other professional organizations struggling with decreased involvement of membership.

The solution to increasing involvement may lie in the innovative solutions to address the time and financial constraints and to demonstrate the importance of the organization. As mentioned by one of the inquiry team members, "If something is important to someone, they will find the time" (Inquiry Team Member, personal communication, January 11, 2016).

This inquiry's findings demonstrated an interest in member involvement. Members want to hear more from VMPC. They want more opportunities to connect with fellow professionals and for VMPC to continue their work in advocacy and collaborations such as certification.

The conclusions addressed the need for VMPC to create more opportunities to hear from their stakeholders and develop plans to address their needs. VMPC needs to ensure that the values of the board align with those looking to join and be involved in a national organization.

This chapter discussed the study findings, conclusions, and scope and limitations of the inquiry. The following chapter will detail the inquiry recommendations and implications.

## **Chapter Five: Inquiry Project Recommendations and Implications**

This chapter provides recommendations to VMPC to support organizational change in order to increase involvement of members. The chapter also discusses organizational implications, implications for future inquiry, and closes with a report summary. Through this research I sought to explore the following question: How can the board of the Volunteer Management Professionals of Canada increase involvement with volunteer management professionals across the country? Five subquestions were also used to guide the research:

1. What are the current benefits of being involved as a member of VMPC?
2. What do stakeholders see as the opportunities for VMPC to support volunteer management professionals?
3. What are the success stories told by stakeholders about current and past involvement with VMPC?
4. What are the barriers for volunteer management professionals to be involved with VMPC?
5. With an increase in membership, what are suggested best practices in leadership to support the board in their continued success?

### **Study Recommendations**

The following four recommendations are based on the inquiry findings and conclusions as well as the best practices found in relevant literature. Implementing the recommendations will assist the VMPC board to increase involvement with volunteer management professionals across the country. The four recommendations are as follows:

1. Develop a standard practice to engage in strategic planning every 2–3 years.
2. Provide leadership training for leaders of VMPC.

3. Create an expanded position or incorporate a position responsible for increased opportunities for professional development beyond the conference.
4. Increase communication to and with the membership through a variety of mediums.

**Recommendation 1: Develop a standard practice to engage in strategic planning**

**every 2–3 years.** I suggest, in this era of rapid change, that VMPC hold a strategic planning session with the board and committee chairs every 2 to 3 years (Whitney & Gale, 2015). Reid et al. (2014) offered, “Successful organizations make planning a consistent periodic process” (p. 34). As stakeholder engagement is an important element in planning and implementing organizational change, I recommend seeking feedback from members throughout the year and prior to strategic planning. This gathering of input will provide the board with a reasonable idea as to the needs and what is valued by the membership. This would include stakeholder engagement in the form of survey, focus groups, or interviews prior to the strategic plan.

I further suggest a set of standard survey questions be used to create benchmarks that VMPC can use to gauge success and identify trends. I recommend VMPC utilize a combination of questions from the survey that VMPC provided in May 2015 along with the questions asked in this research project as comparable data for VMPC’s next strategic session. I suggest attempting to gauge the thoughts of nonmembers as well. The information from nonmembers will provide insight as to why people may not be joining the organization. The survey conducted in this research provided for the opinions of 41 nonmembers. If organizational change is required, I suggest VMPC take the time to engage stakeholders to facilitate a smooth transition and improve members’ understanding. Members will be ready for the changes because they had input; “the real power of a vision is unleashed only when most of those involved in an enterprise or activity have a common understanding of its goals and directions” (Kotter, 2012, p. 87). Bruckman

(2008) stated, “Authentic participation in the change process, with many opportunities to raise issues of concern, will help keep a group open to the possibility of significant change” (p. 215).

**Recommendation 2: Provide leadership training for leaders in VMPC.** I recommend that the board of VMPC provide an opportunity for leadership education for board members and committee chairs. VMPC leaders need skills they may not use in their every day work. The board is running a business, and VMPC volunteer board and committee members need business leadership knowledge to support a thriving organization. “The organizations that will truly excel in the future will be the organizations that discover how to tap into people’s commitment and capacity to learn at all levels of the organization” (Senge, 2006, p. 4).

If funding permits, I recommend including committee members in leadership training as well, as this may provide increased skills to committee members to advance in roles within VMPC. Many board members may have leadership learning opportunities within their own organizations, but smaller NPOs may not give the same benefits to their volunteer management professionals. The leadership education could be offered to board and committee members as a group online or in person with a trainer, or the organization could provide funds to members to take leadership courses. I suggest topics regarding leadership theory such as transformational, transactional, collaborative, appreciative, and servant leadership, as Schneider and George (2011) noted transformation and servant leadership styles best served the needs of NPOs. Other topics to support leader development could include change management, team building, emotional intelligence, and CEM. In addition, systems thinking is a topic of benefit to all organizations. Systems thinking is a practice of looking at the whole ‘system’ and how each part reacts to another (Senge, 2006). Systems thinking prescribes that leaders approach a challenge by looking all the different aspects and perspectives to ensure that all consideration are made in

decisions. Systems thinking will provide the best outcome and avoid unexpected consequences (Senge, 2006; Waldman, 2007).

**Recommendation 3: Create an expanded position or incorporate a position responsible for increased opportunities for professional development beyond the conference.** I recommend that the board of VMPC create a position or incorporate a position responsible for expanded opportunities for professional development. This recommendation addresses the feedback of members regarding increased opportunities for networking and education. This expanded program could include two to three webinars per year, as well as live broadcasts at the conference.

I also suggest an additional committee volunteer position be added with the responsibility of creating opportunities for members to network in forums such as teleconference dialogue topics. This would benefit those members who do not have the technology required for webinars due to firewalls or dated equipment. The teleconferences could be held, for instance, at 8 a.m. Pacific Standard Time with the topic of “family volunteering” or “recognition.” In this research project’s focus groups some participants requested evening events. VMPC could offer a variety of times offered to determine the ideal time for greatest participation. This recommendation of teleconference networking may address the desire from members for local events. If this does not address the need for local contact, I suggest a position under membership as a provincial representative to hold virtual or in-person networking opportunities within the province. Similar organizations researched also experienced the challenges of distance in their membership and noted that one “way to meet the needs of rural members who feel isolated is to increase the use of technology to bring resources to these members” (Bauman, 2008, p. 175).

**Recommendation 4: Increase communication to and with the membership through a variety of mediums.** I recommend that VMPC increase communication to the membership a minimum of once a month in a variety of mediums. This could be achieved through the use of social media, newsletters, online, or teleconference sessions. Wiggill (2011) asserted, “Without planned communication and relationship management, many NPOs find it difficult to achieve their mission and goals” (p. 227). The organization could achieve this increase in communication by creating a position or incorporating a position for a volunteer with expertise or interest in social media. The volunteer would monitor VMPC social media sites and the website to ensure posted communications remain relevant. The creation of volunteer positions is a method used by the American Red Cross to monitor and update social media as well as website content (Briones et al., 2011). Wiggill (2011) suggested that the creation of a position with the skills to create strategic communication was a key component to successful increasing involvement. Wiggill (2011) also commented that if someone does not have the skills, it is advantageous of the organization to train a volunteer. This training may be seen as an incentive to volunteer.

Members want to know what is going on in the profession and the great work of the board. The use of social media will provide an opportunity for dialogue and discussion with members. The focus group participants also requested a venue for members to share their appreciation for all the work of the board. A social media site could fill the need of members to thank their board.

### **Organizational Implications**

**Leadership implications.** The implication for VMPC from these findings, conclusions, and recommendations is that the board may not have the capacity to carry out all the recommendations. The board members are volunteers with busy lives and full-time jobs outside

their VMPC responsibilities. The board may have to prioritize the services provided to the membership in order to give the best value that the board can realistically achieve under the current leadership. In a research paper about volunteer sport group capacity, the authors commented on the organization's ambitions versus the capacity of the resources to carry out their ambitions (Balduck, Lucidarme, Marluer, & Willem, 2015). The board may need to be creative in finding solutions to build capacity in order to increase or maintain membership involvement.

**Sponsor engagement.** Throughout this research process I kept the inquiry team informed either by email or teleconference meetings regarding the progress, findings, conclusions, and recommendations. My approach aligned with Rowe et al.'s (2011) OAR model of stakeholder engagement, ensuring that stakeholders were informed and provided with the opportunity to have dialogue and discussion about each aspect of the research process. The process started when the sponsor agreed to support my project. I made arrangements to provide a presentation about the research process at their board meeting in Edmonton in June 2015. The board meets virtually, with the exception of one meeting per year at the national conference. The face-to-face meeting was an opportunity for me to introduce myself to the board and present an overview of the project. As Glesne (2011) commented, the initial meeting is an opportunity for the organization to "check you out—to find out informally who you are, what you are like, and whether they would mind having you around" (p. 58). The meeting provided an opportunity to start inquiry team development and outline the requirements of being involved on the team. As a member of VMPC, this initial meeting offered the venue to introduce my change in role. Coghlan (2003) commented that as an insider needs to "create the space and character for their research role to emerge" (p. 456).

At the meeting in Edmonton, the board selected members to participate on the project inquiry team. The team met by conference call four times to first review the project and discuss the findings and recommendations. The team was unable to meet to discuss the survey questions, but participated by email with valuable feedback on the questions as well as suggestions for additional questions. The team held a final meeting on April 21, 2016, to discuss the findings, provide their thoughts, and plan for the future. The board's plans are provided under in the Report Summary section of this chapter.

**Supporting the membership through change.** As with all change, there are those who are ready, those who want more information before they are ready, and those who are resistant. Rogers (2003), in his theory regarding how people adopt to changes or innovation, suggested five categories based on a person's ability to embrace new ideas: early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards. When planning for change, leaders need to understand that not all members will embrace the board's changes in the same manner. The board will need to use their leadership skills to approach changes by recognizing the needs of the members to transition to new models of service. The comment in the survey about certification is an indication that change is sometimes more difficult for some members. One member was still unhappy with the change from a Canadian certification process to the international collaboration with CCVA. The certification process changed in 2012.

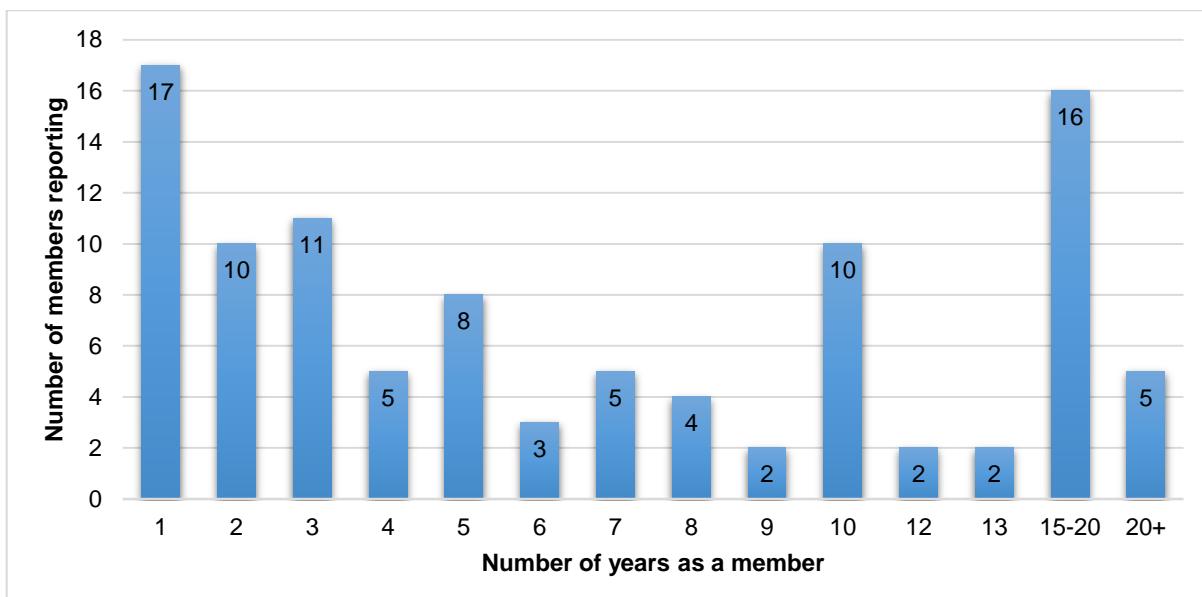
For the most part the changes proposed in the recommendations do not suggest any loss of service to members. The recommendations are all enhancements to current practice of VMPC. However, any changes to VMPC's operations will create an impact on resources of the organization (financial or human) and, therefore, require research prior to implementation: "A leader must walk in their [members'] shoes and appeal to their self-interest if it [the change]

supports the overall organizational plan and does not create new problems” (Bruckman, 2008, p. 215). For instance, in regards to Recommendation 1, “Develop a standard practice to engage in strategic planning every 2–3 years,” it is important to consider the possible effects of this change and how the board could prepare for the change. Bridges (2009) suggested organizational leadership starts by thinking about what ends when there is a change. In the case of certification, the Canadian process ended, creating a sense of loss for some members. Deciding what is ending may take some brainstorming, as those who are innovators may not be able to see the loss, as they are eager to adapt. Perhaps in the case of instituting a policy for strategic planning members may experience a sense of loss over the spontaneity of a creating a strategic plan when deemed necessary. People with a preference for less bureaucracy may be resistant to a formal plan and prefer to address the needs of the organization as they arise. Searching for the possible sources of loss could provide opportunities for dialogue and discussion in preparation for change. Bridges (2009) stated, “Failure to provide help for endings and losses leads to more problems for organizations in transition than anything else” (p. 8). Bruckman (2008) suggested, “A clear understanding of ‘what drives the group’ must be achieved before a leader can introduce new elements into the mix” (p. 215).

The change needs to align with the mission and values of the organization in order to be successfully adopted. A vision of how the change will build the success of the organization will help VMPC “direct, align and inspire action” (Kotter, 2012, p. 8). Burke (2009) commented that in the prelaunch phase the organization must “craft a vision statement and, in so doing, provide clear direction for the organization change effort” (p. 746). I suggest the implementation of the recommendations include the following five steps:

1. Review the impending change and examine the losses that may be felt by members (Bridges, 2009).
2. Do not introduce too many changes at once (Bruckman, 2008). Create a reasonable timeline to introduce multiple changes.
3. Provide “open and honest communication prior to the introduction of change” (Bruckman, 2008, p. 215) and throughout the process.
4. Create opportunities to stakeholders to have a role in the change process (Bruckman, 2008).
5. Celebrate the successes (Bridges, 2009).

The risk of not implementing the recommended changes is a gradual decrease in membership until the organization can no longer financially support its endeavours. As mentioned in the literature review, it is important for VMPC to create the infrastructure and value to support organizational commitment in new members. The commitment to provide value for all members will lead to longevity.



*Figure 5.* Survey respondents' length of members: VMPC survey results for the question, “What is the total number of years you have been a member?”

The literature suggested that the current continuous commitment may be attributed to long-time members having “more opportunities to experience membership benefits such as networking, career opportunity and professional recognition” (Markova et al., 2013, p. 499). As shown in Figure 5, Survey participants were mainly new members (38% of participants having been members for 3 years or less) and long-term members (35% of participants with 10 years or more as a member); the remaining participants who had been members for 4-9 years represented 27% of the participant pool. The long-term members may be near the end of their careers and may no longer renew their memberships, creating a large deficit in the funding for the organization, thereby resulting in an urgency to build value for new members. Vincent and Webster (2013) remarked, “Newer members, who have been members for one year, show signs of continuance commitment towards the membership relationship and maintain their membership, provided it meets their needs and is better than membership with a competitor” (p. 1634). VMPC must create value for all members to foster longevity and loyalty.

### **Implications for Future Inquiry**

Some of the data gathered did not provide insight into increasing membership involvement but instead created a curiosity for further research, such as inquiries into multiple generations within VMPC. Only one participant commented on generational differences and, therefore, not enough data were gathered on that subject within this research project. However, the data from the survey indicated that VMPC may have a large portion of its membership within retirement age. Those who indicated they were Baby Boomers represented 45% of survey participants (OS), with only 17 people (11%) who completed the survey indicating they were in Generation Y.

Further research is needed to determine if those of Generation Y do not complete surveys or if in fact VMPC is not attracting younger members. In her article on generations in the workforce, Gibaldi (2014) indicated that perhaps members of Generation Y are unable to secure professional positions because there are so many Baby Boomers who are not retiring and, therefore, no positions available; “boomers may now be in the position of blocking the career paths of newer job entrants by continuing to occupy higher level positions” (p. 55). Similarly, Bennett, Pitt, and Price (2012) reported the delay in retirement is “prolonging workplace regeneration cycles” (p. 279).

It is also a possibility the younger generations are looking for services from VMPC that differ from the needs of their Baby Boomer and Generation X counterparts. Lester, Standifer, Schultz, and Windsor (2012) found that Generation Y valued technology, teamwork, being involved, “continuous learning, fun at work and recognition” (p. 348). Ozcelik (2015) also made reference to Generation Y and Millennials “searching for opportunities to learn and grow” (p. 102). If these traits for members of Generation Y and Millennials are correct, then to add value VMPC must provide additional opportunities for education to increase the involvement of these generations. Further research into the needs of these upcoming and future generations may help VMPC survive in perpetuity.

Another possibility for future research pertained to the survey and focus groups findings that a barrier to participation is time and money. Research could explore how to best keep people committed when time and money is a barrier. As well, it would be useful to determine what people value that would make them find the time to participate.

Also missing from the research was the voice of VMPC stakeholders from several provinces. VMPC could benefit from exploring why some provinces are not involved. In

particular, this research did not have participation from the French-speaking community in Québec.

### **Report Summary**

I met with the inquiry team on April 21, 2016, to discuss the recommendations. This teleconference call included the President, Treasurer, and Certification Chair. All members of the inquiry team were leaders in the organization and have the authority to collaboratively create action from the recommendations with VMPC stakeholders. This meeting began the fourth stage of Rowe et al.'s (2011) OAR cycle—"Act" (p. 1) or as shown in Appendix A. The fourth stage "engage[s] sponsor/key stakeholders in understanding findings and finalizing recommendations" (Rowe et al., 2011, p. 1).

Prior to this inquiry, VMPC's board embarked on a strategic planning process in October 2015. This research project has provided additional considerations for the board to include in their plans for the next 2 years. Some of the recommendations affirmed the work already included in their upcoming strategic plan.

VMPC, at the time of this report, was welcoming a new board in May 2016. The current president completed his 2 years and will sit as past president. All the inquiry members will have new roles on the VMPC board and, therefore, they will be considering the recommendations more thoroughly with the incoming board. In discussion with the inquiry team they have committed to carrying the recommendations forward to the new board. The inquiry team stated that Recommendation 1 (develop a standard practice to engage in strategic planning every 2–3 years) will be a priority for the board to formalize in the coming year. The board will look at creating benchmark questions for future surveys, using a combination of the survey they distributed in May 2015 and the survey developed from this research and sent in December 2015.

This combined survey will give the board comparable data to demonstrate areas of improvement and development as well as provide an indication of their success.

The inquiry team was in agreement that providing leadership training to the board was a value to both the board and as a benefit to the individuals serving on the board. The team discussed how this could be carried out and suggested that they would look at providing some time at the May 2017 conference for board development. The other recommendation for expansion of the professional development position is in progress, and the inquiry team anticipated that the position will continue to evolve over time to accommodate the needs of the membership.

The inquiry team discussed future plans to involve me in the organization. Although no firm plans have been made, I have agreed to be available to talk about the research to the membership. I also expressed interest in leading a teleconference on topics related to the research as a contribution to the membership for their ongoing learning. The idea for the teleconference came from discussions with the focus groups. Participants in the research focus groups commented they enjoyed the teleconference process and would be interested in similar sessions to network with members across the country. I also suggested that I would be available to do educational sessions related to leadership. My role will be discussed further with the new incoming board.

In conducting this research, I sought to explore how the VMPC board could increase involvement with volunteer management professionals across the country. It is my hope that the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of this inquiry will bolster VMPC membership, enabling the organization to thrive.

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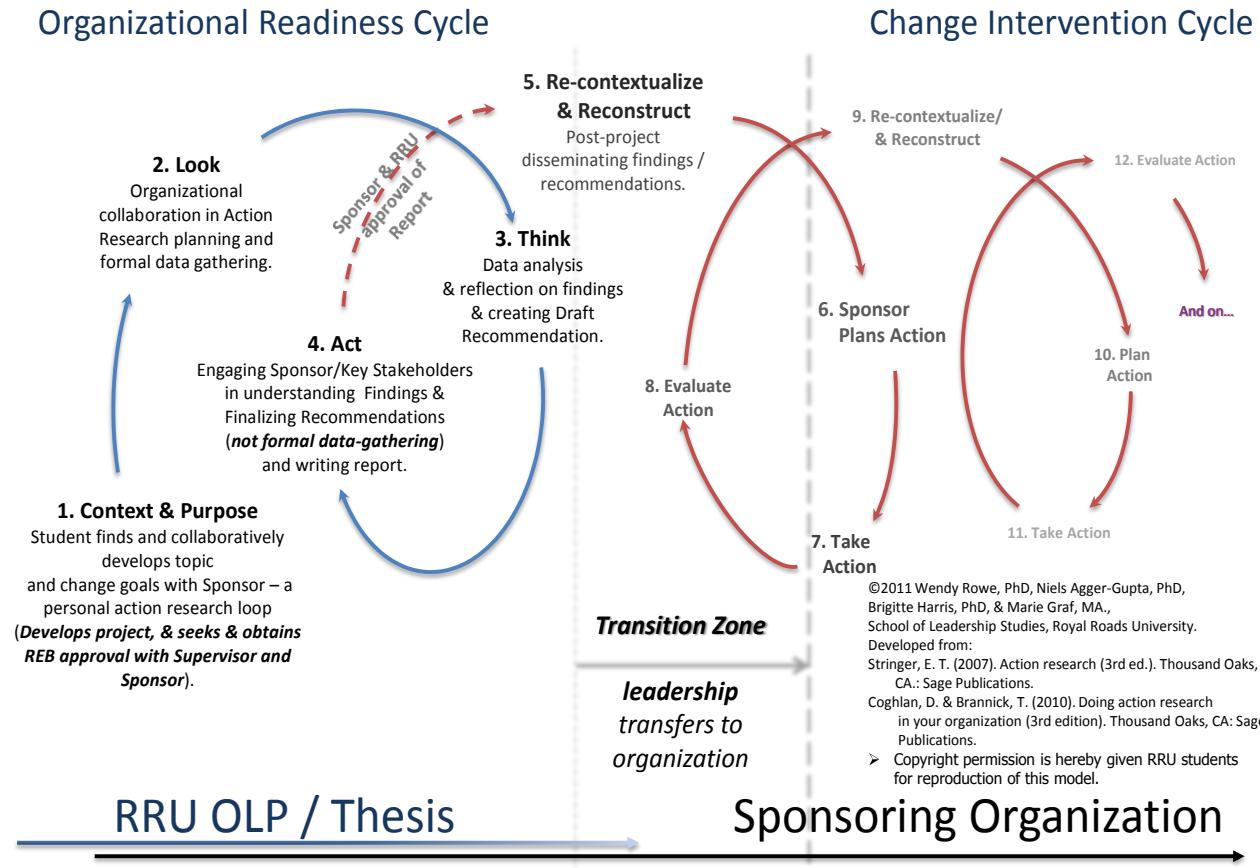
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## Appendix A: Organizational Action Research Cycle



*Note. Organizational Action Research: The Readiness-for-Action Cycle (p. 1), by W. E. Rowe, N. Agger-Gupta, B. Harris, & M. Graf, 2011, Victoria, BC, Canada: School of Leadership Studies, Royal Roads University. Copyright 2011 by Rowe et al. Reprinted with permission.*

## Appendix B: Informed Consent Document

This project is part of the degree requirement of the MA-Leadership Program, School of Leadership Studies at Royal Roads University.

The student conducting the research is Charlene Dishaw.

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These student's credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by calling Dr. Brigitte Harris, Director, School of Leadership Studies at [telephone number].

This document constitutes an agreement to take part in a focus group, the objective of which is to provide information to the Volunteer Management Professionals of Canada to inform the main research question of: how can the Volunteer Management Professionals of Canada (VMPC) increase involvement of volunteer management professionals across the country. The research topic, questions and methods have been approved by the research supervisor and VMPC. No person under the age of 18 is permitted to be involved in this research project, without independent research ethics board approval.

The research will consist of a number of open questions based on **the aforementioned research question**. The time required would be approximately two hours.

Information will be recorded in hand-written format, and will be summarized in anonymous format in the body of the final report. If audio recordings are used in the focus groups, the recordings will not be transcribed but used to verify and clarify written notes from the focus groups. At no time will any specific comments be attributed to any individual.

All raw documentation will be kept *strictly* confidential by the researcher. As a focus group participant, you commit to maintaining the confidentiality of who participates and what they say. I will only use the information for purposes of the research only. The results will involve summarizing information and presenting the anonymous gathered data to VMPC.

By signing this form, the individual gives their free and informed consent to participate in this project.

Name: (Please Print): \_\_\_\_\_

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C: Survey Preamble and Questions

My name is Charlene Dishaw, and this research project explores the opportunities for increased involvement of membership in the Volunteer Management Professionals of Canada (VMPC) and is part of the requirement for the Masters degree in Leadership at Royal Roads University. The research includes this survey. The survey is estimated to take 20 to 25 minutes to complete. The information you provide will be summarized, in an anonymous format, in the body of the final report. At no time will any specific comments be attributed to any individual. All data received will be kept confidential. All survey data is being held on a Canadian server.

Your completion of this survey will constitute your informed consent. You can withdraw at any time by simply not completing the survey.

- I confirm that I have read the Information Letter that provides detail of the research (please tick) (if possible there will be a hyperlink to the research information letter. The letter will be sent separately with the survey invitation and link)
1. Are you a current member of the Volunteer Management Professionals of Canada? (yes or no boxes)
  2. What is the total number of years you have been a member? (essay box)
  3. If you are not a current member are you a member of an affiliate organization? If yes, which province? (drop down list of provinces)
  4. If you are not a current member, have you been a member of the Volunteer Management Professionals of Canada (formerly known as CAVR) in the past? (yes or no boxes)
  5. Which province do you reside? (drop down list of provinces)
  6. Are you male or female?
  7. This survey is interested in which generations (Boomers, Generation X, etc.) are represented in the survey participants, please indicate the time span in which you were born:
    - a) 1924-1945
    - b) 1946-1964
    - c) 1965-1981
    - d) 1982-1996
    - e) 1996-1999
  8. Do you plan on retiring or leaving the volunteer management profession in the next 1-3 years? (yes or no boxes)
  9. How have you been involved in VMPC? (choose all that apply)
    - a) As a committee member
    - b) Attended a conference
    - c) Board member
    - d) Responded to previous surveys
    - e) Contributed to the newsletter

- f) Attended focus groups
  - g) Other
10. If you are a current or past member, what benefits of being a member of the Volunteer Management Professionals of Canada have you experienced and their importance to you as a member? (Drop down with ranked list (important to unimportant) of benefits as well as an options for *other as an essay box*)
- a) I joined VMPC because it was a requirement of my employer
  - b) Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement
  - c) National and international networking opportunities.
  - d) Subscription to the Canadian Journal of Volunteer Resources Management (CJVRM)
  - e) Webinars
  - f) Joint membership with Provincial organization
  - g) Professional Code of Ethics
  - h) National Occupational Standards
  - i) Discounts for National conferences and educational opportunities
  - j) E-Communiqués and e-newsletters
  - k) Access to Members-only section of the website which includes Resource tools, Member Directory, Job Postings and Member's Forum
  - l) Forums and round table discussions
  - m) National conference
  - n) Discount for the Certified in Volunteer Administration (CVA) credential
11. Are there other important benefits that you have experienced as a member of VMPC? (essay box)
12. What, if any, are the barriers to becoming a member of the VMPC?
- a) No funding to attend conferences
  - b) No funding to pay for membership to VMPC (\$35 per year for affiliate members or \$70 for non affiliate members)
  - c) Distance to events
  - d) Technology (examples no computer, restrictive Information Technology department, internet speed) (please explain)
  - e) Time (please explain)
  - f) Other
13. What, if any, are the barriers to active involvement in VMPC?
- a) No funding to pay for membership to VMPC
  - b) Distance to events
  - c) No one asked me to be involved
  - d) Technology (examples no computer, restrictive Information Technology department, internet speed) (please explain)
  - e) Time (please explain)
  - f) Other

14. What have you enjoyed most about being a member of the Volunteer Management Professionals of Canada? Do you have specific moments or stories to share? (essay box)
15. What do you see as an opportunity for the Volunteer Management Professionals of Canada to support you in your profession? Please choose all that are *important* to you.
  - a) Networking (please explain how VMPC could provide this opportunity)
  - b) On-line library
  - c) Information on Facebook
  - d) Bursaries or scholarships
  - e) Local events hosted by VMPC
  - f) Membership benefit discounts for products such as insurance, recognition products
  - g) Twitter feed
  - h) Webinars
  - i) Salary review
  - j) Discussion board
  - k) Research
  - l) Conferences
  - m) Other

**Appendix D: Focus Group Questions**

1. How long you have been involved with VMPC and how have you been involved in the organization?
2. What do stakeholders see as the opportunities for VMPC to support volunteer management professionals?
3. What are the barriers for volunteer management professionals to be involved with VMPC? How do you think these barriers could be overcome?
4. With an increase in membership, what are suggested best practices in leadership to support the board in their continued success?
5. Is there anything else you would like to share about increasing involvement of members with the VMPC?

**Appendix E: Letter of Invite to Affiliate Organizations of the Volunteer Management Professionals of Canada**

Dear Affiliate President

I would like to invite you to be part of a research project that I am conducting with the Volunteer Management Professionals of Canada. This project is part of the requirement for my Master's Degree in Leadership, at Royal Roads University.

The objective of my research project is to **increase involvement of volunteer management professionals in the national organization.**

This phase of my research project will consist of a survey and is estimated to take approximately 20 to 25 minutes to complete. I hope that your organization would be interested in sending out a link to the survey to your members. The survey will be conducted anonymously and I will not know who participates.

The attached document contains further information about the study conduct and will enable you to make a fully informed decision on whether or not you wish to participate. Please review this information before responding.

If you do not wish to participate, simply do not reply to this request. Your decision to not participate will remain anonymous.

Please feel free to contact me at any time should you have additional questions regarding the project and its outcomes.

If you would like to participate in my research project, please contact me at:

Name: Charlene Dishaw

Email: [email address]

Sincerely,

Charlene Dishaw

**Appendix F: Invitation Email Letter for VMPC Members to Participate in the Survey**

Dear VMPC or Affiliate member

I would like to invite you to be part of a research project that I am conducting with the Volunteer Management Professionals of Canada. This project is part of the requirement for my Master's Degree in Leadership, at Royal Roads University.

The objective of my research project is to **increase involvement of volunteer management professionals in the national organization.**

This phase of my research project will consist of a survey and is estimated to take approximately 20 to 25 minutes to complete. I hope that you would be interested in participating. The survey will not collect any of your identifying information and I will not know who participated, this process protects the anonymity of all participants.

The attached document contains further information about the study conduct and will enable you to make a fully informed decision on whether or not you wish to participate. Please review this information before completing the survey.

If you do not wish to participate, simply do not complete the survey.

Please feel free to contact me at any time should you have additional questions regarding the project and its outcomes.

Name: Charlene Dishaw

Email: [email address]

Sincerely,  
Charlene Dishaw

Attachment: Invitation to the Survey

**Appendix G: Invitation Letter to Focus Group**

Dear [Prospective Participant],

I would like to invite you to be part of a research project that I am conducting. This project is part of the requirement for my Master's Degree in Leadership, at Royal Roads University.

The objective of my research project is to support the Volunteer Management Professionals of Canada (VMPC) to increase membership involvement.

You received this email from VMPC as a prospective participant because you are member of VMPC and manage a volunteer program in Canada.

This phase of my research project will consist of a focus group and is estimated to last two hours. [Date, time, and location details].

The attached document contains further information about the study conduct and will enable you to make a fully informed decision on whether or not you wish to participate. Please review this information before responding.

You are not required to participate in this research project. If you do choose to participate, you are free to withdraw up until February 29, 2016, without prejudice. If you do not wish to participate, simply do not reply to this request. Your decision to not participate will also be maintained in confidence.

Please feel free to contact me at any time should you have additional questions regarding the project and its outcomes.

If you would like to participate in my research project, please contact me at:

Name: Charlene Dishaw

Email: [email address]

Sincerely,  
Charlene Dishaw

## **Appendix H: Research Information Letter**

### **Organizational Learning Project to Support the Continued Success of the Volunteer Management Professionals Of Canada**

My name is Charlene Dishaw, and this research project is part of the requirement for a Masters of Arts in Leadership at Royal Roads University. My credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by contacting Dr. Brigitte Harris, Director, School of Leadership Studies: [email address] or [telephone number].

#### **Purpose of the study and sponsoring organization**

In this research I seek to understand how the board of the Volunteer Management Professionals of Canada (VMPC) can increase engagement with volunteer management professionals across the country? Research questions I will be exploring are:

1. What are the current benefits of being involved as a member of VMPC?
2. What do stakeholders see as the opportunities for VMPC to support volunteer management professionals?
3. What are the success stories told by stakeholders about current and past involvement with VMPC?
4. What are the barriers for volunteer management professionals to be involved with VMPC?
5. With an increase in membership, what are suggested best practices in leadership to support the board in their continued success?

This research is sponsored by the Volunteer Management Professionals of Canada. VMPC is a national organization that provides advocacy, capacity building and networking for volunteer management professionals across Canada.

#### **Your participation and how information will be collected**

The research will consist of a survey and three focus groups. You are being invited to take part in either or both. The survey is anticipated to require about 20 to 25 minutes to complete. The focus groups will be two hours in length. The anticipated questions will be those included in the sub-questions of the research project. The survey will include some demographic questions including indication of generation and location in Canada.

#### **Benefits and risks to participation**

The benefit will be the opportunity to help the Volunteer Management Professionals of Canada to provide greater opportunities for engagement with volunteer management professionals across the country. All information provided in the survey will be anonymous and confidential. All data gathered in the focus groups will be anonymous. The identity of participants in the focus group will be held confidentially by myself as the researcher. All participants will be asked to maintain the anonymity and confidentiality of those in the focus group.

## **Inquiry team**

The methodology for this Masters project is Action Research. This is a collaborative process with the sponsoring organization. VMPC has created an inquiry team to work with myself as the researcher to keep the organization informed of the research and to help support the development of questions and pilot testing the inquiry methods. The inquiry team is composed of the President, Vice-President, Treasurer, Advocacy and Membership chairs of VMPC. A member of the Royal Roads University Masters of Arts in Leadership from the summer 2014 cohort will also be on the inquiry team to ensure that researcher bias does not influence the data and research. The inquiry team will not have any access to raw data, but will provide reflection and feedback as my analysis progresses.

## **Real or Perceived Conflict of Interest**

I do not anticipate any conflict of interest because I will be excluding the board from the focus group to eliminate any participant feeling uncomfortable sharing their constructive suggestions for the board. I disclose this information here so that you can make a fully informed decision on whether or not to participate in this study. I am a paying member of VMPC but hold no position on the board. I will receive no compensation and have measures in place to ensure that the reflected data is purely reflective of the participants in the survey or focus group.

## **Confidentiality, security of data, and retention period**

I will work to protect your privacy throughout this study. All information I collect will be maintained in confidence with hard copies (e.g., consent forms) stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. Electronic data (such as transcripts) will be stored on a password-protected computer on my home computer or password protected external hard drive. Information will be recorded in hand-written format and summarized, in anonymous format, in the body of the final report. At no time will any specific comments be attributed to any individual.

All documentation will be kept strictly confidential. Data collected from the research will be stored for one year after completion of the project in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. All transcripts will be destroyed after the year. All electronic data collected in this research is password protected and will also be deleted after one year. Any data/information pertaining to an identifiable individual who has withdrawn at any time will not be retained. Due to the nature of the focus group, it is not possible to keep identities of the participants anonymous from the researcher, or other participants. Participants are asked to respect the confidential nature of the research by not sharing names or identifying comments outside of the group.

The on-line survey is being conducted with a company that retains the information on a server in Canada. The surveys will contain no identifying information.

## **Sharing results**

In addition to submitting my final report to Royal Roads University in partial fulfillment for a Masters of Arts in Leadership I will also be sharing my research findings with VMPC. The research and data may be used for journal articles, books, or conference presentations. The research report will be available for dissemination within the VMPC.

## **Procedure for withdrawing from the study**

As all information gathered in the survey and focus group will not be attributed to any one person. Due to the inability to discern who made particular comments there will be no opportunity to withdrawal from the data once it has been collected.

Prospective research participants are not compelled to take part in the focus group. If an individual does elect to take part, he or she is free to withdraw at any time with no prejudice.

You are not required to participate in this research project. By completing the survey, as indicated on the survey, completing the survey implies your consent. The focus group participants will sign either an electronic or in-person consent form indicating that you have read and understand the information above and give your free and informed consent to participate in this project.

Please keep a copy of this information letter for your records.