Evidence Of A Volunteering Legacy From A Major Sporting Event: Rugby World Cup 2011

Smith, Karen

Sporting mega events are popularly claimed to have the potential to build volunteering capacity and drive interest and participation in other volunteering. Increased volunteering is thus touted as a legacy of hosting a major event. Olympic Games and the like can involve thousands of citizens who are typical praised as being instrumental in making these international events a success. A number of studies have found these event volunteers have high levels of positive intention to volunteer again after the event concluded (e.g., MacLean and Hamm, 2007, Bang et al., 2009, Doherty, 2009, Pauline, 2011, Dickson et al., 2013). However, the limitation of these studies is the absence of follow-up data to ascertain if these volunteering intentions translate into actions.

New Zealand hosted the 2011 Rugby World Cup (RWC 2011) and involved over 5,000 citizens in a nationwide volunteer programme to deliver the Tournament. The volunteering legacy was investigated as part of a longitudinal study of the RWC 2011 volunteering experience. An online survey collected data on RWC 2011 volunteers’ attitudes, intentions and behaviours at five time points over a 15-month period from two-and-a-half months before the event to ten-and-a-half months after the Tournament’s conclusion. This enabled the study to address the lack of longitudinal research on event volunteering (Doherty, 2009, Pauline, 2011).

This paper uses data from Rounds B to E of the study where volunteering intention questions were asked to approximately half of the RWC 2011 volunteers. The analyses used different sets of data based on matched responses from volunteers answering two or more rounds. In Rounds B and C (two weeks before Tournament and then immediately after the event) RWC 2011 volunteers were asked their intentions for volunteering in the following six months. Respondents were divided into intenders and non-intenders. Rounds D and E then measured whether the same respondents were volunteering six months (Round D) and 10.5 months (Round E) later.

The research provides evidence that RWC 2011 had positive outcomes for volunteering in a number of ways. While three-quarters of respondents were already actively engaged in other areas of volunteering, RWC 2011 introduced new people to volunteering (8% of respondents had never volunteered before), and brought others back into volunteering (19% were lapsed volunteers). The majority of respondents intended to volunteer again following the Tournament, and there was the potential to increase volunteering rates after RWC 2011, particularly in events and sport. Overall, volunteers’ positive intentions led to action and there was an increase in volunteering after the Tournament, however, not all the potential growth in volunteering was realised. Event and sport organisations were the main beneficiaries of the increase in post-Tournament volunteering of these RWC 2011 volunteers.

This research demonstrates that intention rates should not be used as the sole
measure of volunteering legacy success. Tracking volunteers across multiple
time points has revealed additional complexity to the relationship between post-
event volunteer intentions and actions that have been overlooked by previous
research. The research has implications for third sector researchers attempting
to measure volunteering legacies, and for event and volunteer managers wishing
to extend the impact of large-scale event volunteer programmes beyond the
event-time contribution. While post-event increases in volunteering will not
necessarily benefit the wider community sector, major events can have positive
outcomes for event and sport organisations that rely on volunteers. These
organisations need to be ready to engage volunteers as they complete their
major event volunteering experience.