

Monitoring Monday - Let's celebrate Pi Day by looking at “Diversifying Environmental Volunteers by Engaging with Online Communities”

Join us each Monday as the Clean Water Team shares resources on water quality monitoring. This Monday take a slice at Pi Day by looking at “Diversifying Environmental Volunteers by Engaging with Online Communities”.

Diversifying Environmental Volunteers by Engaging with Online Communities

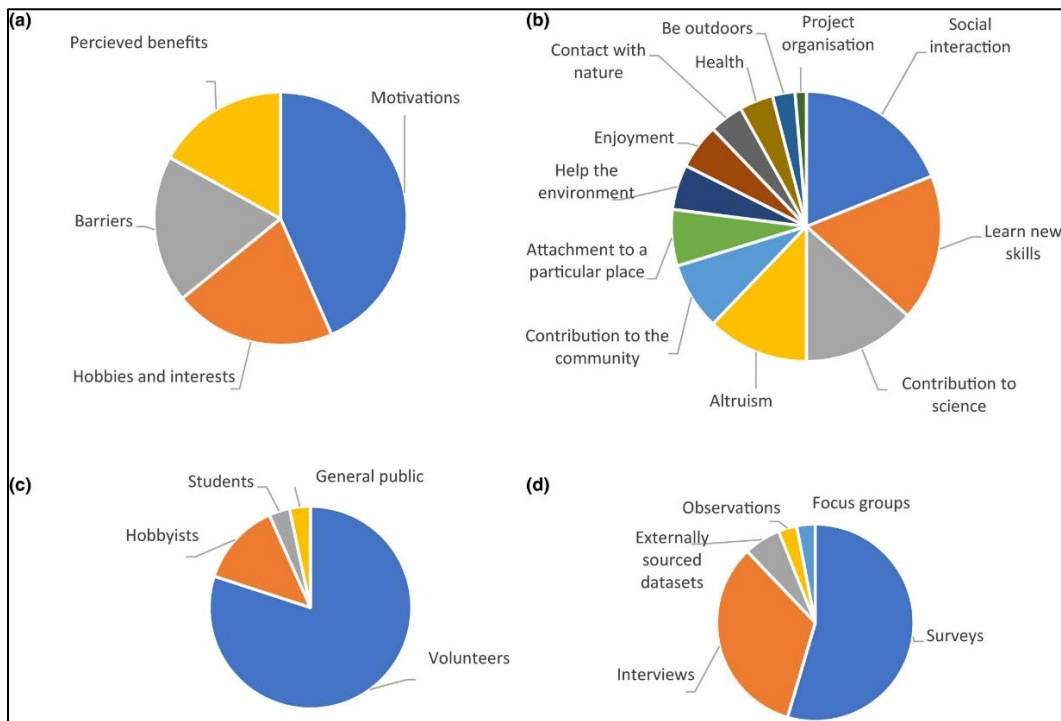


Figure 1 - Literature review findings. (a) Factors which improve recruitment and retention in environmental projects. (b) Motivations to volunteer. (c) Potential sampling bias identified. (d) Potential data collection method bias identified

Abstract

Environmental volunteering can benefit participants and nature through improving physical and mental well-being while encouraging environmental stewardship. To enhance achievement of these outcomes, conservation organizations need to reach different groups of people to

increase participation in environmental volunteering. This paper explores what engages communities searching online for environmental volunteering.

We conducted a literature review of 1,032 papers to determine key factors fostering participation by existing volunteers in environmental projects. We found that the most important factor was to tailor projects to the motivations of participants. Also important were promoting projects to people with relevant interests, meeting the perceived benefits of volunteers and removing barriers to participation.

We then assessed the composition and factors fostering participation of the [NatureVolunteers](#)'s online community (n = 2,216) of potential environmental volunteers and compared findings with those from the literature review. We asked whether projects advertised by conservation organizations meet the motivations and interests of this online community.

Using Facebook insights and Google Analytics we found that the online community were on average younger than extant communities observed in studies of environmental volunteering. Their motivations were also different as they were more interested in physical activity and using skills and less in social factors. They also exhibited preferences for projects which are outdoor based, and which offer close contact with wildlife. Finally, we found that the online community showed a stronger preference for habitat improvement projects over those involving species survey-based citizen science.

Our results demonstrate mismatches between what our online community are looking for and what is advertised by conservation organizations. The online community are looking for projects which are more solitary, more physically active and more accessible by the organized transport. We discuss how our results may be used by conservation organizations to better engage with more people searching for environmental volunteering opportunities online.

We conclude that there is a pool of young people attracted to environmental volunteering projects whose interests are different to those of current volunteers. If conservation organizations can develop projects that meet these interests, they can engage larger and more diverse communities in nature volunteering.

- [Research Article](#) (Online),
- [Research Article](#) (PDF)
- [Plain language summary](#) (PDF)

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