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Administrative Sciences

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Suggested Citation: Araque, Lenis Yelin (2025) : Volunteer management in non-profit organizations: Experience of Huellas Foundation in Medellín, Colombia, Administrative Sciences, ISSN 2076-3387, MDPI, Basel, Vol. 15, Iss. 3, pp. 1-25,
<https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci15030077>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/321221>

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Article

Volunteer Management in Non-Profit Organizations: Experience of Huellas Foundation in Medellín, Colombia

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Abstract: This study explored how volunteer management is adapted to the specific context of a nonprofit organization (NPO). Through a participatory autoethnographic approach in Huellas Foundation, a Colombian NPO that supports its mission operation in volunteer action, it examined how management practices evolve and adjust according to the particular needs of the context. The analysis revealed two fundamental principles that emerge and guide volunteer management: self-realization and institutional recognition. It also identified four key components that shape the management process: the conversation between roles, profiles, times, and interests; the understanding of volunteering as a cultural reference; the balance between legal shielding and emotional construction; and the contribution of volunteer action to the social organization. The findings suggest that effective volunteer management requires continuous adaptation of practices according to the specific context, considering both the needs of the organization and the motivations of volunteers. This study contributes to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence on how the contingent approach to volunteer management manifests itself in a Latin American context and offers valuable insights for the adaptation of practices in different organizational contexts.

Keywords: volunteer management; contingent approach; non-profit organizations; practices; participatory autoethnography



Received: 14 August 2024
Revised: 4 December 2024
Accepted: 20 February 2025
Published: 24 February 2025

Citation: Araque, L. Y. (2025). Volunteer Management in Non-Profit Organizations: Experience of Huellas Foundation in Medellín, Colombia. *Administrative Sciences*, 15(3), 77. <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci15030077>

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1. Introduction

Volunteer management is a set of organizational practices and processes designed to effectively recruit, retain, motivate, and coordinate volunteers, who play a critical role in delivering services and fulfilling organizational missions (Prince & Piatak, 2022; Sillah, 2022; Zesati, 2019). Recent research suggests that these practices cannot be universally standardized, but must be tailored to the specific context of each organization (Brudney & Meijs, 2014). Beyond simply being a form of unpaid work, volunteering represents a set of social and organizational practices that reflect and shape the values, culture, and structure of the organizations that host it. These practices are social and collective phenomena, influenced by material and historical factors, which shape the functioning of organizations and the experience of individuals within them (Geiger, 2009; Nicolini & Monteiro, 2016).

In order to understand how volunteer management practices are adapted in an NPO, the empirical context for this research was the Huellas Foundation, located in Medellín, Colombia. With more than two decades of history, this organization has developed an adaptive volunteer management model that not only sustains its operations and mission development, but has also come to define its organizational identity and its impact on

the community. It is an experience that allows us to observe how volunteer management evolves and adapts in response to specific challenges and particular cultural contexts.

This study contributes to the body of knowledge on volunteer management by demonstrating how organizational practices are adapted to the specific context of a Latin American nonprofit organization. Through a participatory autoethnographic approach, two principles—self-realization and institutional recognition—and four key components that structure volunteer management were identified, revealing how these elements emerge and adjust according to the particular needs of the organization.

These findings not only illuminate the internal operations of a successful NPO, but also offer valuable insights into how volunteer management practices and processes can be tailored to the specific context to maximize impact and sustainability. At the same time, the study underscores the importance of considering cultural and historical context and how volunteerism can become cultural touchstones that transcend organizational boundaries and take root in the broader community.

To address and deepen the understanding of volunteer management in NPOs, this article presents a literature review of the universalist and contingent approaches, followed by a detailed description of the participatory autoethnographic methodology. It then presents the findings organized around the two fundamental principles and the four key components of volunteer management identified in the Huellas Foundation, concluding with a discussion of the implications of these findings for both the practice and theory of volunteering and a reflection on the limitations of the study, as well as suggestions for future research in this field.

2. Volunteer Management

Volunteer management encompasses a set of organizational practices and processes for effectively recruiting, retaining, motivating, and coordinating volunteers, who play a key role in delivering services and fulfilling organizational missions (Prince & Piatak, 2022; Sillah, 2022; Zesati, 2019).

This set of attributes of application and promotion that NPOs facilitate for the development of volunteer experiences is varied in global reading and particular to each organization (Hernández, 2016). In this regard, there is a fundamental tension in the literature between two different approaches to conceptualize and apply these practices: universalist and contingent (Brudney & Meijs, 2014).

The universalist approach assumes that volunteer management is essentially similar across organizations, leading to the formulation of generally applicable “best practices”. This perspective is based on the workplace metaphor, where volunteers are viewed as unpaid part-time staff, and has led to a number of standardized management models (Brudney & Sink, 2017). However, empirical research suggests that this approach may be limited, especially in contexts where volunteers perform roles that differ significantly from paid staff or in organizations with less hierarchical structures.

In contrast, the contingent approach argues that volunteer management practices should be tailored to the specific context of each organization, recognizing that “one size does not fit all” (Ashworth & Robins, 1985). This perspective considers factors such as volunteer program characteristics, volunteer role, and organizational culture as crucial elements in determining the most appropriate management practices (Brudney & Meijs, 2014).

To better understand this diversity of approaches, Brudney et al. (2019) developed the Volunteer Stewardship Framework, which categorizes volunteer management models along two dimensions: The first dimension concerns access to volunteer power, which can be private when the organization has access to a limited and defined group of potential volunteers, or common when the organization recruits from the general pool of volunteers

in the community. The second dimension concerns the orientation of volunteers, which can be unitary when a single organization provides guidance and management, or shared when this is distributed between a sending organization and one or more host organizations.

Four distinctive models of volunteer management emerge from the intersection of the two dimensions: (1) the membership model, characterized by private access and unitary management, for example, where members volunteer for their own organization, with the home and host organization being the same; (2) the service model, combining common access with unitary management, is typical of non-profit social service organizations or government agencies that recruit volunteers from the community and manage them internally; (3) the secondary model, featuring private access but shared management, where the home organization sends volunteers to external host organizations; finally, (4) the intermediary model, with common access and shared management, is exemplified by volunteer centers that connect community volunteers with various host organizations.

Research by [Brudney et al. \(2019\)](#) revealed that organizations using shared management models (secondary and intermediary) need additional management practices beyond traditional HR approaches, particularly as they relate to external relationships and community engagement.

The relative importance of different management practices varies significantly by model. For example, models with a shared orientation require greater attention to external relationships and interorganizational coordination, whereas unit-oriented models may focus more on internal volunteer management ([Brudney et al., 2019](#)). This variation supports the need for a contingent approach to tailor management practices to the specific context of each organization, this being the context in which the present study is embedded.

In this sense, effective volunteer management requires a balance between the adoption of certain fundamental practices and their adaptation to the specific organizational context. Aspects such as social support, which can be emotional, informational, and/or material, are generated by both the organization and the volunteer's environment ([Astray & De Roda, 2008](#)). Its importance lies in that it consolidates the motivation, sense of belonging, and recognition of volunteers ([Reyes, 2012](#); [Cuevas et al., 2015](#); [Faletehan et al., 2020](#)).

The training and development of volunteers remain essential components, regardless of the model adopted. As [Ferreira \(2023\)](#) notes, well-structured training and supervision programs are generally well received by volunteers. This suggests that, although the specific approach may vary, certain fundamental practices maintain their relevance across different organizational contexts.

In essence, volunteer management under the contingent approach, rather than following a universal "best practice" model, recognizes that it must be adapted to the diversity of factors, including the characteristics of the volunteers, the nature of the organization, the type of work performed, and the social and cultural context. As such, it involves creating a structured and supportive environment that enables volunteers to contribute meaningfully to the organization while gaining personal satisfaction and professional development. [Prince and Piatak \(2022\)](#) suggest that the most satisfied volunteers can be valuable resources to volunteer programs, bringing unique perspectives and acting as advocates for the organization.

Volunteer characteristics consider volunteers' motivations, time availability, skills, and interests ([Brudney et al., 2019](#)). Volunteers are driven by a dynamic interplay between intrinsic factors, such as personal values, altruism, and desire for self-actualization, and extrinsic factors such as social connections and professional development ([Carvalho et al., 2024](#); [Kruglova et al., 2023](#)). Effective management strategies must address both the desire to contribute to society and the personal aspirations of volunteers, given that motivations are neither universal nor static, but adapt according to specific cultural, social, and or-

ganizational contexts. This contingent nature of motivations suggests that organizations must develop flexible management practices that recognize and respond to the diversity of drivers that lead people to volunteer.

With respect to the characteristics of the organization, the size, structure, culture, mission, and type of work the organization does are considered to influence how volunteering should be managed. A large, bureaucratic organization may require a more formalized approach to volunteer management than a small community organization, just as organizations working with vulnerable populations may need to implement stricter safety and training protocols for their volunteers (Brudney et al., 2019).

This is why volunteer management is strongly influenced by the organizational climate and leadership styles within the organization. Studies have shown that leadership styles, particularly transformational leadership, promote greater intention to stay, satisfaction, organizational commitment, and identity among volunteers (Ferreira et al., 2015; Nencini et al., 2016; Valencia et al., 2018; Almas et al., 2020; Faletahan et al., 2020).

To this, they add effective communication and continuous feedback as other pillars of volunteer management. Pawlak (2023) emphasizes the importance of setting clear expectations and maintaining open communication channels with volunteers. These practices not only help to align volunteer activities with organizational goals, but also contribute to their satisfaction and long-term retention.

Both volunteer and organizational characteristics respond to the context bounded by social and cultural norms, the availability of other resources, and the specific needs of the community, for the design of volunteer programs (Brudney et al., 2019). In this sense, volunteer management often involves navigating unique social challenges, limited resources that must be optimized, and the need to balance volunteer demands with organizational needs (Berenguer et al., 2023).

It is because of the social and cultural context that volunteer management must be sensitive to changing trends in the volunteer landscape. El-Amin (2023) highlights the need for NPOs to develop their capacity to maintain sustainability, which involves adapting volunteer management strategies to evolving economic and social realities.

In summary, volunteer management in nonprofit organizations is a dynamic, complex, and multidimensional phenomenon that requires a contingent approach, adaptable to the specific context of each organization. Management practices must consider both internal aspects—such as volunteer motivation, training, and development—and external aspects—related to the social, economic, and cultural environment. This understanding of volunteer management as a set of socially situated and materially mediated practices leads us to take a closer look at how these practices manifest and evolve in nonprofit organizations, a topic addressed below.

The Study of Practices in Not-for-Profit Organizations

The universalist approach, initially dominant, assumed that management skills were generic and transferable across different contexts. However, empirical research has shown that the effectiveness of practices varies significantly depending on factors such as the size of the organization, the presence of paid staff, and the nature of volunteer roles (Brudney & Sink, 2017). As Meijs and Ten Hoorn (2008) note, “there is no one best way to organize volunteers, whether in volunteer-run organizations, government organizations, nonprofits with mostly paid staff, or businesses” (p. 29).

From a sociological perspective, Geiger (2009) conceives practices as social and collective phenomena that reflect historical and social differences. Practices are understood and evaluated through intersubjective reasoning processes, highlighting their negotiated and socially constructed character. In the specific context of NPOs, practices would encompass

the actions, behaviors, and routines that contribute to the organization's operations and impact. This view supports the contingent approach by recognizing that practices cannot be universally standardized.

The contingent perspective is strengthened by the work of [Nicolini and Monteiro \(2016\)](#), who consider practices as actions and expressions structured and influenced by material factors, which shape the functioning of organizations. They stress that aspects such as social order, knowledge, institutions, identity, and power emerge and are reproduced through routine activities that give rise to everyday practices. In the context of NPOs, this implies that the effectiveness of practices depends on their alignment with specific organizational characteristics, such as size, structure, culture, and operating environment.

[Rathi et al. \(2016\)](#) refer to practices in terms of the knowledge needs of nonprofit organizations. Their study identifies five main categories of essential practical knowledge for these entities: knowledge about the community, about resources, about finances and funding sources, about access to funding agencies, and about sources of support. This classification underscores the contextualized nature of practices in the sector, which draws on the technical skills of its practitioners.

Taking a more action-oriented approach, [Gazley and Guo \(2015\)](#) examine collaborative practices in nonprofit organizations. Their systematic review reveals the importance of studying not only the antecedents and outcomes of collaboration, but also the specific processes and practices that facilitate inter-organizational cooperation. This emphasis gives rise to the dynamic and emergent nature of practices according to the specific context.

This resonance of adjusting practices to specific circumstances, needs, and contexts consolidates the contingent approach in the Volunteer Stewardship Framework ([Brudney et al., 2019](#)) raised in the previous section, by proposing that volunteer management practices should be adapted according to two key dimensions: access to volunteer energy and management orientation. This framework suggests that the relationships between practices and outcomes vary by organizational model, revealing that practices considered universal may have different effects in different contexts.

[Fernandez et al. \(2006\)](#) reinforce this perspective by analyzing volunteer management in emergency situations, where the effectiveness of practices depends significantly on the specific context and situational needs. Similarly, [Ashworth and Robins \(1985\)](#) argued that participation and management style should be adapted according to factors such as the value attributed by the participants, the level of skill, and the nature of the tasks.

Twelve volunteer management practices were identified in the literature and are presented in Table 1, not as universal prescriptions but as an adaptable repertoire according to the specific context of each organization, given that recent research suggests that their effectiveness varies according to the organizational context ([Hager & Brudney, 2015](#)). For example, while recruitment and selection are essential, their implementation must be tailored depending on whether the organization operates under a membership, service, secondary, or intermediary model.

Table 1. Volunteering practices identified in the literature. Source: Author's own elaboration.

Practice	Detail	Authors
Recruitment and selection	Organizations employ a variety of strategies to attract and screen volunteers, including the use of social media, community events, and referrals from current volunteers. The screening process often involves interviews and background checks to ensure the suitability of candidates.	(Hager & Brudney, 2015 ; Studer, 2016)

Table 1. Cont.

Practice	Detail	Authors
Guidance and training	A thorough introduction to the organization, its objectives, and volunteer responsibilities is provided. Ongoing training is essential to develop volunteers' skills and keep them engaged.	(Nesbit et al., 2018; Studer & von Schnurbein, 2013)
Assignment of tasks and roles	Organizations seek to align the skills and interests of volunteers with the needs of the organization, which increases satisfaction and retention.	(Studer, 2016; Walk et al., 2019)
Supervision and support	Supervisory systems are in place to guide and support volunteers in their roles, including regular meetings and access to resources.	(Nesbit et al., 2018; Studer & von Schnurbein, 2013)
Recognition and reward	Organizations develop recognition programs to value the contributions of volunteers, which may include awards, appreciation events, and personal development opportunities.	(Hager & Brudney, 2015; Nesbit et al., 2018)
Performance evaluation	Systems to evaluate volunteer performance and provide constructive feedback are implemented	(Studer & von Schnurbein, 2013; Walk et al., 2019)
Risk management	Organizations develop policies and procedures to protect both volunteers and the organization, including insurance and security protocols.	(Hager & Brudney, 2015)
Effective communication	Clear and open channels of communication are established between the organization and volunteers to maintain engagement and address any issues in a timely fashion.	(Nesbit et al., 2018; Studer, 2016)
Leadership development	Some organizations offer opportunities for volunteers to take on leadership roles, which can increase retention and long-term engagement.	(Walk et al., 2019)
Use of technology	Implementation of technology-based volunteer management systems to improve efficiency in coordination and communication.	(Studer & von Schnurbein, 2013)
Clear policies and procedures	Establishment of clear guidelines on expectations, rights, and responsibilities of volunteers.	(Hager & Brudney, 2015; Studer, 2016)
Integration with paid staff	Strategies for fostering effective collaboration between volunteers and paid personnel.	(Nesbit et al., 2018)

In line with the contingent approach, the implementation of these practices must consider multiple contextual factors. For example, orientation and training take on different dimensions depending on the management model: in unit-oriented organizations, they may focus on internal processes, while in shared management models, they must address coordination with multiple host organizations (Prince & Piatak, 2022).

Supervision and recognition practices also illustrate the need for the contingent approach. While some organizations require more formal structures, others benefit from more flexible approaches, depending on factors such as the type of work, volunteer characteristics, and organizational culture (Olden, 2016). As Kruglova et al. (2023) point out, volunteer motivation combines altruistic and selfish motives, requiring management practices adapted to these complexities.

Likewise, effective communication, recognition, and integration with paid staff must also be tailored to the specific context. For example, organizations operating under an

intermediary model need to develop more complex communication systems that facilitate coordination among multiple stakeholders (Brudney et al., 2019).

In the current framework, characterized by increasingly dynamic and complex environments, volunteer management must be especially sensitive to changing trends. El-Amin (2023) emphasizes the need for NPOs to develop adaptive capacities to maintain sustainability, which implies continuously adjusting management practices according to evolving economic and social realities.

This contingent perspective provides a better framework for understanding how NPOs can effectively manage their volunteer programs in different contexts. It recognizes that excellence in volunteer management does not come from the uniform application of predetermined practices, but from the ability to adapt these practices according to the specific needs of the organization and its environment (Berenguer et al., 2023).

3. Methodology

This research adopted participatory autoethnography as its primary method, recognizing that organizational practices are socially constructed phenomena that must be understood from multiple perspectives and cultural contexts. This qualitative research method combines personal introspection with cultural analysis, allowing the researcher to examine his or her own experiences in relation to a broader social context (Ellis et al., 2011; Adams et al., 2015).

The participatory autoethnographic approach is particularly appropriate for studying volunteer management from a contingent perspective, as it allows us to understand how organizational practices adapt and evolve in response to specific contextual factors. As Boyle and Parry (2007) point out, this method is valuable for understanding complex social phenomena, especially in organizational contexts where practices are deeply rooted in local cultural and historical realities.

Participatory autoethnography is distinguished by its emphasis on collaboration and recognition of multiple voices and forms of knowledge (Lapadat, 2017; Chang et al., 2012). This approach recognizes that organizational knowledge is socially constructed and that individual experiences are intrinsically linked to broader social and cultural structures (Ngunjiri et al., 2010). In the context of this study, this allowed us to examine how volunteer management practices emerge and adapt through the interaction between different actors and organizational contexts.

The empirical context of the study was the Huellas Foundation in Medellin, Colombia, a non-profit organization formally established in 2007, after nine years of community work without a formal structure. Its mission of social inclusion and promotion of the rights of children, youth, and women in contexts of vulnerability is based on voluntary action. This context offers a unique opportunity to examine how volunteer practices are managed and adapted in a third sector organization in a developing country. As Coraggio et al. (2018) point out, research in Latin American contexts can provide valuable and distinctive perspectives on NPO management, contributing to a more global and diverse understanding of the sector that transcends predominantly Western views.

In line with the above, participatory autoethnography answers the call to expand NPO management research beyond the contexts of the Global North (Mirabella et al., 2019). To achieve this, in the context of this study, the researcher not only reflected on her own experiences as a volunteer and director of the Huellas Foundation for 12 years, but also actively involved other volunteers from the organization in the process of data generation and analysis. This collaborative approach allowed for a richer understanding of volunteer management in the organization by incorporating multiple perspectives and experiences (Hernandez et al., 2017). It is a particularly appropriate method for this study,

as it allows for an in-depth exploration of organizational dynamics from the perspective of a participant-observer immersed in the context (Anderson, 2006; Herrmann, 2022).

In this sense, the research approach adopted is qualitative and interpretive, based on the premise that social reality is constructed and that knowledge is produced through the interaction between the researcher and the participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). It is, in itself, a particularly valuable reflexive wager for understanding the complexities of organizational life (Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013). Aligned with the contingent approach to volunteer management (Brudney & Meijs, 2014), this methodological approach recognizes that organizational practices must be understood in their specific context and not as universal prescriptions.

4. Construction and Analysis of Data

Data collection was conducted through multiple methods, recognizing that understanding contingent practices requires diverse sources of information that capture the complexity of the organizational context (Flick, 2018). This methodological triangulation allowed us not only to validate the findings, but also to understand how different management practices emerge and adapt according to specific circumstances.

First, participant observation was used, a central technique in participatory autoethnography that allows the researcher immersed in the context to study and generate rich and detailed data on everyday practices (Bautista, 2011; DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). The researcher, in her dual role as director and volunteer, was able to observe and participate on a daily and direct basis in the management of volunteerism over an extended period of time, documenting organizational practices and their evolution in response to different contextual challenges and needs.

Second, three focus groups were conducted with seven (7) active volunteers of the Huellas Foundation. Participants were selected based on specific criteria, including having a signed volunteer agreement and letter of desire for 2018 and having at least two years of volunteer experience with the organization. This technique allowed us to generate data on the collective perceptions and experiences of the volunteers, providing a complementary perspective to the researcher's observations (Aigner, 2002; Barbour, 2018). The sociodemographic characterization of the participating volunteers is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Sociodemographic characteristics of focus group participants.

Participant	Age	Gender	Education	Duration of Participation in Fundación Huellas' Volunteering Experience	
				Admission Date	Exit Date
1	23	Female	University	2013	2019
2	20	Female	University	2010	2019
3	19	Female	Secondary	2017	2019
4	24	Female	Technical	2011	Present
5	25	Female	University	2016	2021
6	21	Masculin	Secondary	2016	Present
7	20	Masculin	Technical	2016	Present
8	19	Masculin	Technical	2017	2020

Finally, an exhaustive documentary review was implemented in three sources of the organization's archives: the first was related to the 7 volunteers participating in the autoethnography, of whom 39 voluntary action agreements and 39 letters of desire were

reviewed in physical documents. The agreements, although they share a basic structure, show the contingent approach to volunteer management: each volunteer declares annually the specific process or project he/she will accompany, the weekly hours he/she will dedicate, and the responsibilities he/she will assume. This customization responds to multiple contingent factors such as the changing needs of organizational projects, the volunteer's accumulated skills and experience, and his or her time availability according to other responsibilities (study, work, family). The systematic variation in these arrangements demonstrates how the organization adapts its management practices according to the specific circumstances of each volunteer and period, moving away from a standardized approach.

The second source was the review of audiovisual material, in which 5 videos of volunteers posted on the organization's social networks were analyzed to promote the call for new volunteers and recognize the importance of permanence and the contribution made by its protagonists.

The third source was the review of institutional documentation, in which 20 digital documents produced between 2009 and 2022 were examined, including project reports, systematizations of experiences, and research, which made it possible to trace the evolution of organizational practices over time.

Documentary evidence is central to this study because of its ability to reveal how volunteer management practices have evolved and adapted according to the specific organizational context. Institutional documents, especially voluntary action agreements and letters of desire, along with audiovisual material and project reports, provide tangible evidence of how the organization has adjusted its practices to particular needs and circumstances over time. This documentary review allowed for a more complete understanding of the contingent approach to volunteer management (Bowen, 2009; Coffey, 2014). The inventory of documentary review sources and audiovisual production is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Inventory of physical and digital documentary review sources, and audiovisual production.

Source Type	Digital, Physical, or Audiovisual Document	Quantity	Source	Year of Data Production
Source 1: Physical Documents	Voluntary action agreements P1	5	Historical archive of volunteering Huellas Foundation	2013–2018
	Voluntary action agreements P2	9	Historical archive of volunteering Huellas Foundation	2010–2018
	Voluntary action agreements P3	2	Historical archive of volunteering Huellas Foundation	2017–2018
	Voluntary action agreements P4	8	Historical archive of volunteering Huellas Foundation	2011–2018
	Voluntary action agreements P5	3	Historical archive of volunteering Huellas Foundation	2016–2018
	Voluntary action agreements P6	6	Historical archive of volunteering Huellas Foundation	2015–2018
	Voluntary action agreements P7	3	Historical archive of volunteering Huellas Foundation	2016–2018
	Voluntary action agreements P8	3	Historical archive of volunteering Huellas Foundation	2016–2018
	Letter of desire for voluntary action P1	5	Historical archive of volunteering Huellas Foundation	2013–2018

Table 3. Cont.

Source Type	Digital, Physical, or Audiovisual Document	Quantity	Source	Year of Data Production
	Letter of desire for voluntary action P2	9	Historical archive of volunteering Huellas Foundation	2010–2018
	Letter of desire for voluntary action P3	2	Historical archive of volunteering Huellas Foundation	2017–2018
	Letter of desire for voluntary action P4	8	Historical archive of volunteering Huellas Foundation	2011–2018
	Letter of desire for voluntary action P5	3	Historical archive of volunteering Huellas Foundation	2016–2018
	Letter of desire for voluntary action P6	6	Historical archive of volunteering Huellas Foundation	2015–2018
	Letter of desire for voluntary action P7	3	Historical archive of volunteering Huellas Foundation	2016–2018
	Letter of desire for voluntary action P8	3	Historical archive of volunteering Huellas Foundation	2016–2018
Source 2: Audiovisual material (Volunteer videos)	Viideo 1: Yeicy Tatiana, Voluntary work with love	1	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8bFDfgnuv4A (accessed on 26 November 2021)	2016
	Video 2: Bibiana Úsuga: voluntary work = happiness.	1	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0NQSiKA99_g (accessed on 26 November 2021)	2016
	Video 3: Lina Daily volunteer	1	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RaIMSV_ClrU (accessed on 26 November 2021)	2018
	Video 4: Voluntary work Yeniffer Fundación Huellas	1	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iVki_d1B4v4 (accessed on 30 November 2021)	2016
	Video 5: Fundación Huellas Medellín Young volunteers	1	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JhsCyR9STDM (accessed on 30 November 2021)	2016
Source 3: Institutional documents (Reports and digital reports)	DR1. Yo También Cuento. Proyecto de formación integral y capacitación informal con niños, niñas y pre-adolescentes desescolarizados	1	Huellas Foundation digital	2009
	DR2. Ciclos de Oportunidad: Una Propuesta teórica a partir de la experiencia en comunidades pobres y sus dinámicas propias de desarrollo	1	Huellas Foundation digital	2013
	DR3. Informe final proyecto Alternativas de Desarrollo Humano Integral Sostenible para La Vereda Granizal, Municipio de Bello, Departamento de Antioquia. Convenio con PNUD	1	Huellas Foundation digital	2014

Table 3. Cont.

Source Type	Digital, Physical, or Audiovisual Document	Quantity	Source	Year of Data Production
	DR4. Informe de avance Proyecto Discapacidad. Vereda Granizal, Bello. Convenio con PNUD	1	Huellas Foundation digital	2014
	DR5. Informe de acompañamiento Ecomanatiales. Convenio PNUD	1	Huellas Foundation digital	2015
	DR6. Análisis información Encuesta de participación Caseta Comunitaria Altos de Oriente II (Ejercicio de visitas domiciliarias)	1	Huellas Foundation digital	2015
	DR7. Proceso de Producción Agroecológica. Sistematización de la experiencia	1	Huellas Foundation digital	2016
	DR8. Sistematización BPM	1	Huellas Foundation digital	2017
	DR9. Sistematización de la experiencia de producción agroecológica en la vereda Granizal del municipio de Bello-Antioquia	1	Huellas Foundation digital	2019
	DR10. Política de Protección a la Infancia Fundación Huellas	1	Huellas Foundation digital	2019
	DR11. Informe Final Luna Menstruante 2019	1	Huellas Foundation digital	2019
	DR12. Sistematización PASI 2019 [Prevención del Abuso Sexual Infantil]	1	Huellas Foundation digital	2019
	DR13. Informe Técnico final Servicios básicos [proyecto Promoción de los servicios básicos y el desarrollo económico, comunitario y cultural de la vereda Granizal, municipio de Bello/Antioquia/Colombia]	1	Huellas Foundation digital	2019
	DR14. Informe PPI Cuarentena	1	Huellas Foundation digital	2020
	DR15. Informe Técnico PPI [proyecto de Dinamización de la Política de Protección a la Infancia de la Fundación Huellas]	1	Huellas Foundation digital	2020
	DR16. Informe caracterización de las familias participantes en el proyecto “acompañamiento académico para niñas, niños y jóvenes de Medellín en tiempo de COVID-19”	1	Huellas Foundation digital	2021

Table 3. *Cont.*

Source Type	Digital, Physical, or Audiovisual Document	Quantity	Source	Year of Data Production
	DR17. Informe técnico AA [proyecto Acompañamiento académico para niños, niñas y jóvenes de Medellín en tiempos de COVID-19]	1	Huellas Foundation digital	2022
	DR18. Informe de sistematización de la experiencia: Proyecto Acompañamiento académico para niño, niñas y jóvenes de Medellín en tiempos de COVID-19	1	Huellas Foundation digital	2021
	DR19. Estatutos de la Fundación Huellas	1	Huellas Foundation digital	2022
	DR20. Acompañamiento académico para niños, niñas y jóvenes de Medellín en tiempos de COVID-19	1	Huellas Foundation digital	2022

Data analysis was conducted in an iterative and reflexive manner. This process involved open coding of data, identification of emergent themes, and construction of analytic categories (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The researcher used writing as a method of inquiry (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005; Ellingson, 2017), producing narratives that intertwined multiple voices and experiences to understand the contingent nature of volunteer management at Huellas Foundation with attention to the purpose of participatory autoethnography.

The ethical considerations of the research followed the recommendations of Tolich (2010) and Lapadat (2017) for autoethnography. Measures were taken to protect the privacy and well-being of participants, including the use of pseudonyms and obtaining informed consent. In addition, the researcher engaged in ongoing reflexivity, critically examining her dual position as a researcher and participant, and considering the ethical implications of representing the experiences of others (Ellis, 2007; Tullis, 2013).

5. Volunteering at Huellas Foundation

The evolution of volunteer management at Huellas Foundation reflects how organizational practices adapt to the specific context and needs. From its beginnings in 1998 as an informal community project to its formal constitution in 2007, the organization has developed a distinctive approach that responds to its particular reality. During the initial stage, volunteer management emerged organically from the community dynamics, adapting to the immediate needs of care for the unschooled population displaced by the armed conflict (DR2, Ciclos de Oportunidad, p. 40).

With formalization, although more structured processes were established, volunteer coordination was never deliberated by the organization and was assumed to be a direct responsibility of executive management, rather than creating a specific role for volunteer management. This unintended organizational decision, which might seem unusual from a universalist approach to management, reflects a contingent adaptation that has allowed sustaining volunteerism as a fundamental basis for organizational functioning (DR12, Sistematización PASI, 2019, p. 25).

The history of volunteering in the Huellas Foundation is marked by an organic evolution and a deep connection with the community. As evidenced by a historical document, “the collaboration of young volunteers, residents of the sector, high school graduates and university students, who exercise empirically teaching and accompaniment” (DR1, Yo También Cuento, p. 11) not only supported the initial operations, but established the basis for an adaptive management model that responds to the unique characteristics of the territory and its population.

Three main types of volunteering are formalized in the organization’s volunteer management: daily, professional, and international (DR10, Política de protección a la infancia, p. 26). Professional and international volunteering have broadened the scope and capabilities of the Foundation. Professional volunteers bring specialized knowledge, while international volunteers offer new perspectives and skills, such as language training. For example, “An international volunteer, from the United States, led the English language seedbed” (DR17, Informe técnico AA, p. 13), demonstrating how these modalities complement and enrich the Foundation’s service offerings.

Volunteer management at Huellas has evolved to include formal processes of recruitment, training, and accompaniment tailored to the specific needs of the context and structure of the organization. Huellas Foundation has developed specific profiles for each type of volunteer (DR10, Política de protección a la infancia, pp. 26–30), recognizing that management practices must respond to the different characteristics, motivations, and circumstances of volunteers. While framework policies such as the Child Protection Policy have been implemented, which “are aimed at all volunteers and collaborators of the Huellas Foundation” (DR10, Política de protección a la infancia, p. 8), their application reflects a balance between the need to establish general guidelines and the flexibility required to adapt practices to the particular realities of each territory and group of volunteers.

The integration of volunteerism into the organizational structure is evident in the way volunteers participate in various aspects of the Foundation’s operation, reflecting the organization’s ability to adapt its practices according to emerging circumstances and needs. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, volunteers were instrumental in the implementation of academic and emotional support programs to respond to the crisis context: “Expert volunteer advice was available in communication and entertainment for girls and boys” (DR17, Informe técnico AA, pp. 18–19), demonstrating how volunteers’ specific skills are mobilized flexibly according to contextual demands.

A notable aspect of volunteer management at Huellas is its focus on the personal and professional development of volunteers. This is reflected in the Foundation’s statutes, which include the objective to “structure and develop the management for the training and support of the volunteers of the Huellas Foundation, aimed at their personal and professional qualification” (DR19, Estatutos de la Fundación Huellas, p. 2). This statutory mandate, rather than a universal prescription, is a statement to materialize in differentiated practices in response to the diverse profiles, interests, and contexts of the volunteers.

Against this backdrop, volunteering at the Huellas Foundation exemplifies how effective management requires a dynamic balance between structure and flexibility. It demonstrates that management practices must continually adapt to the changing needs of the community and the challenges of the context. This integration of formal and informal aspects, far from being a weakness, is a strength that has enabled the organization to maintain its presence in the community. This contingent understanding of volunteer management, revealed through the participatory autoethnographic approach, lays the foundation for the results presented in the following section.

6. Findings

The participatory autoethnographic analysis of volunteer management practices in the Huellas Foundation revealed that they adapt and evolve according to the specific needs of the organizational context. This adaptation reflects the nature of practices as social and collective phenomena that respond to historical and contextual differences (Geiger, 2009), and likewise, as structured actions that dynamically shape organizational functioning (Nicolini & Monteiro, 2016). This contingent perspective made it possible to understand how volunteering practices not only fit the particular characteristics of the territory, but have also been fundamental in the configuration and evolution of the organization over time.

Through deep and daily immersion in the organization by the principal investigator and collaborative reflection with other volunteers, the study found that the volunteer management of the Huellas Foundation is characterized by two principles that underlie and guide volunteer management practices, and four components that shape the volunteer management process. They are presented in Figure 1 and described below.

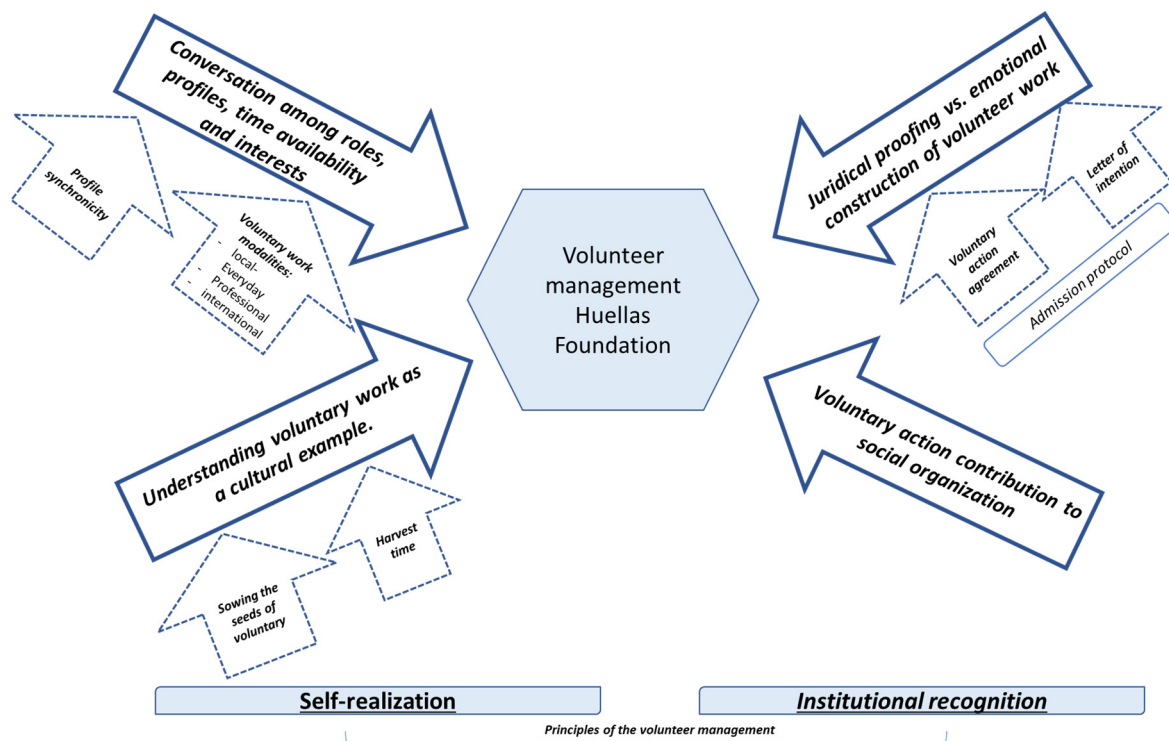


Figure 1. Principles and components of volunteer management Huellas Foundation. Source. Author's own elaboration.

6.1. Principles of Volunteer Management

"My mother and my sister told me that it was possible that at home I needed so many things and I was giving away my time and work. . . what they did not know was that I had an inner peace and a desire to overcome so many things that I would not change for anything; now they value and thank God for my experience in Huellas, because it has allowed me to grow, be me, study, understand my family, accompany them with love and provide opportunities for others"

(Fragment Focus Group—Participant 2)

The experience of volunteering at Huellas Foundation demonstrates how effective management must be adapted to the specific realities of each organizational and territorial context. The testimony presented illustrates how management practices must respond not

only to the operational needs of the organization, but also to the particular circumstances of volunteers and their family and social environments.

In response to this specific context, the Foundation has developed over the years an adaptive management model for its team of volunteers, which constitutes the main basis of its operational and administrative activity for the fulfillment of its mission. This model emerges from a deep understanding of local dynamics and the particular needs of its volunteers.

The constant satisfaction expressed by volunteers in their letters of desire, descriptions, and reflections in the focus groups and videos reviewed allow us to identify the existence of two principles that support the volunteer management process in the organization: self-realization and institutional recognition.

6.2. Self-Realization Principle

The principle of self-fulfillment seeks to facilitate the activation of personal capabilities and the feeling that what one does is important. This principle refers to the satisfaction or pleasure that people derive from satisfying their socioemotional needs through specific experiences or interactions. In the context of volunteering, it suggests that volunteers gain a sense of personal fulfillment and social utility through their participation in volunteer activities. The way in which this principle is realized varies according to the individual characteristics and particular circumstances of each volunteer and his or her motivations.

According to [Olson \(1992\)](#), there is no type of collective action that is not crossed by a particular interest; and this does not refer to the economic conception of interest, but in this case, it applies to the transcendent dimension of life of feeling fulfilled as a person and useful in society. This observation is aligned with the findings of the research, where volunteers express a deep personal satisfaction derived from their work in the Huellas Foundation.

This concept is supported by research showing how people seek emotionally rewarding experiences in various contexts. For example, [Bartsch et al. \(2018\)](#) found that people seek different levels of emotional gratification in their interaction with media, from simple hedonistic pleasures to more complex satisfactions related to social and cognitive needs. Similarly, in the context of the Huellas Foundation, volunteers experience a range of gratifications, from the immediate satisfaction of helping to long-term personal fulfillment.

6.3. Institutional Recognition Principle

Regarding the principle of institutional recognition, it is understood that the time, talent, and work carried out by a volunteer contributes to the growth of the organization and it must be able to make it explicit in a frequent and contextualized way to promote the self-realization of people. A concrete message, recognition, the provision of different opportunities, and other options are part of the possibilities to confirm to those who participate in the volunteer experience that what they are doing is really important.

This principle refers to the formal validation and acceptance that an organization gives to the contributions and status of its members or participants. In the context of volunteering, it implies that the organization explicitly and frequently recognizes the time, talent, and work contributed by volunteers, which in turn reinforces their self-gratification and commitment.

This is a relationship between belonging and recognition ([Ferreira et al., 2015](#)). This idea is reinforced by the findings of [Prince and Piatak \(2022\)](#), who note that the most satisfied volunteers can become valuable advocates for the organization, which underscores the importance of implementing effective recognition practices. At the Huellas Foundation,

this principle is manifested through various recognition mechanisms and development opportunities offered to volunteers.

Both self-realization and institutional recognition recognize that human relationships are inherently complex and require adaptive responses. For this reason, the Foundation has developed various guarantees of permanence that are tailored to the specific needs of each volunteer (DR2, Opportunity Cycles), including celebratory life, continuing education, participation and influence in decision making, autonomy for the development of the experience, activation of the Academic Life Support Fund (FAVA), and, in specific cases, transportation assistance (DR2).

The above considers the existence of barriers to the development of the volunteer experience. For example, the initial comment of families and socially validated “they are wasting their time” and “it is better to work and earn money instead of giving away their work”, takes place in the dynamics of survival that young people in the territories involved in the modality of local-daily volunteering. To overcome it, Huellas Foundation activates dialogue with primary nuclei, betting on the reconfiguration of social thinking, from the construction of new references of being young people in the territory. It also implements practices such as home visits to their families “to chocolatiar” (take chocolate with bread), to know the particular situation and give them the opportunity to know the organization, clarify their doubts, and establish trust.

Likewise, the management includes recognition practices (certification of the experience and the first filter of hiring in case it is required in the framework of projects with other forms of financing). As a great learning from the last three years of volunteer management of the main autoethnographer in her capacity as director of the organization, the reflection on the closing of the volunteer experience (i.e., the exit stage of the volunteers) was included in the process, since this is an uncertain moment, particular to each case, it reflects the organic understanding of the contingent approach in the community times and has nuances that inscribe different emotions, implying the transition in time, space, and professional and labor projection. For the organization, it implies a management of constructed knowledge with the challenge of recruiting and training new volunteers.

6.4. Component 1 of Volunteer Management: Conversation Between Roles, Profiles, Times and Interests for the Success of the Volunteer Experience

“...I started as a volunteer teacher... I studied a technique in recreation and sports... I grew little by little and now I do administrative support... I feel good and it allows me to be a reference for my son”

(Fragmento de vídeo 4)

This component illustrates how volunteer management practices at the Huellas Foundation have been adapted to reflect the complexity of interactions between the organization and volunteers.

As reflected in the testimony presented above, an excerpt from one of the videos analyzed, the volunteer experience at Huellas goes beyond the simple assignment of tasks, involving a process of personal and professional growth that is aligned with the principles of self-gratification and institutional recognition.

This is because Huellas Foundation has developed an understanding that the volunteer experience is a two-way relationship, where all actors contribute and benefit, according to their abilities, interests, and experiences. This is supported by the fact that solidarity (in which the volunteer experience is inscribed), is disinterested perhaps in the “material accumulation”, but it is not in the transcendent capacity of human existence, an example of this is the feeling of self-gratification or social recognition that generates the service, and that motivates and enhances new and greater solidarity actions.

Thinking about “doing without expecting anything in return” is related to the economic or transactional compensation that an action of service could have; however, it inscribes the need to activate the feeling of gratitude and the transformation of realities, which constitutes a higher compensation and is of an emotional nature.

This demystifies the idea that the volunteer does a favor to the organization by offering his or her time, generating eternal moral debts. Instead, it constitutes the idea of joint construction, horizontal conversation, and the assignment and follow-up of instructions, which make strengthening contributions to the life of the organization and to the inventory of opportunities for all the people who participate in it (human talent including volunteers, project and service participants, professionals, and others).

To achieve a successful volunteer experience, goodwill and willingness of time are not enough, but the practice of synchrony of profiles is required. This practice, which has emerged at Huellas Foundation, reflects what [Rathi et al. \(2016\)](#) describe as the need for knowledge about the community and resources in nonprofit organizations. It involves a careful process of alignment between volunteer profiles and the needs of the organization, which contributes to both volunteer self-gratification and institutional recognition of their contributions.

However, the profile category in the framework of this study does not refer to a checklist of academic curriculum to strengthen organizational life, but to the reading of both the academic inventory and the previous experience, and to give the possibility to people who know the profile of the organization.

For example, this is not because a person says “I want to volunteer” is already a volunteer. Often interview meetings occur in the Huellas Foundation with this intention, which fails to materialize. This is because the desire is no guarantee of profile, and in turn the profile of the volunteer is no guarantee of harmony with the organizational dynamics.

In this sense, the profile of volunteers refers not only to the willingness and availability of time, but also to the determined capacity to assume this time and desire, together with knowledge, in solidarity and social processes that meet personal interests.

Indeed, there will always be a personal and particular interest in each person who approaches the volunteer experience, which may be associated with the gain of expertise in a particular subject, empathy with a population group, enabling new opportunities, a sense of professional social responsibility, and many more reasons.

The option of letting interests emerge with the flow of the relationship will always be valid because the initial agreements of the volunteering experience are not static but vary with time and the building of trust. However, the interests that are made explicit by both parties from the beginning of the relationship will guide the construction and flow of the relationship.

This is why on the other side of the relationship is the profile of the organization, which is configured based on its mission, history, principles, decision-making mechanisms, leadership styles, management styles, composition of the human talent that drives the processes, the population group it accompanies, geographical location, needs and requirements, and all the other possible factors that characterize organizational life.

Just as it is necessary for the organization to have a clear profile of the person interested in the volunteer experience, for the latter, it is essential to know the possible dynamics of the organizational profile that will allow him/her to decide if his/her time, work, and talent can be effectively channeled into the processes and services offered by the organization.

It is this exercise that guides the practical synchronization of profiles, which, once achieved, allows for establishing the time requirements and availability, assigned and assumed responsibilities, inclination to teamwork and demand for individual work, as well as the expectation and capacity for commitment.

Failure to do so correctly places emotional and time burdens on both the organization and the individual, which will not come to fruition due to the absence of trust building (Olson, 1992).

The synchrony of profiles has led to the recognition in the organization and the various possibilities to promote the volunteer experience. In the case of Huellas Foundation, three modalities are identified: local-daily volunteering (young inhabitants of the territories where the organization is present and dedicate between 15 and 20 h to volunteer action, thereby configuring the support of missionary compliance); professional volunteering (residents of the metropolitan area who dedicate between 4 and 10 h a week to volunteer action in advisory tasks to the daily volunteering in projects or areas of work); international volunteering (managed by different channels of inter-institutional relationship or management of social networks, are people who are present in the organization between 4 weeks and a year)

The diversity of volunteering modalities offered by the Huellas Foundation (local-daily, professional, and international) demonstrates the adaptability of organizational practices to different contexts and needs, as suggested by Nicolini and Monteiro (2016). These modalities allow for greater flexibility in volunteer participation and better alignment with their interests and availability, which in turn fosters self-gratification and facilitates institutional recognition.

6.5. Component 2 of Volunteer Management: Understanding Volunteerism as a Cultural Referent

“...I remember when I studied at the “la escuelita de tabas” (little boarding school) and I used to play that I was my teacher, now I walk around the neighborhood and all the children greet me and call me teacher”

(Fragment Focus Group—Participant 6)

This component reflects how volunteering practices at the Huellas Foundation have become a social and collective phenomenon rooted in the history and local context, as described by Geiger (2009) in his conception of organizational practices, as illustrated by the testimony presented previously.

Through the participatory autoethnographic analysis, it has been revealed how the volunteering experience in the Huellas Foundation has evolved over 23 years (14 years of formal volunteer action experiences, plus 9 years of previous work as a community project), configuring itself as a cultural reference in the territory. This evolution reflects what Nicolini and Monteiro (2016) describe as the way in which practices shape the functioning of organizations over time.

This has allowed what the organization has called the **Harvest Time**, referring to the fact that 50% of the daily volunteers have in their childhood history the active participation in some of the processes or services offered by the organization (they studied in the “little school of boards”, participated in a children’s seedbed, the thematic Christmas, the toy library, sports festivals, among others), accompanied by those who at the time were the volunteers. Once they had the opportunity to go through the school and the college, they have returned to the organization with the intention of “giving back what they received”, that is, to accompany other children as they were accompanied by the volunteers.

The “harvest time” phenomenon is aligned with the principle of self-gratification, since these volunteers find satisfaction in “giving back”, and with the principle of institutional recognition, since the organization validates and celebrates this form of participation.

Therefore, it is understood that the mission fulfillment of the Huellas Foundation and its daily relationship with the community make possible the practice of growing volunteering. This does not refer exclusively to time, but to the provision of various channels to facilitate access to information from the volunteer experience. In this case, it

was not the construction of a plan to make it happen, but this autoethnographic exercise facilitated the understanding of what in the purpose of the organization and the form of daily relationship was being enabled as sowing.

The practice of “growing volunteering” reflects what [Herrero and Kraemer \(2020\)](#) describe as the acquisition of strategic skills through hands-on experience. This practice involves not only disseminating information about volunteer opportunities, but also creating an environment that encourages and values volunteer involvement from an early age.

Consequently, with Component 1 “synchronizing the profiles”, it does not mean that all the seed grows, but that the seed germinates in some people who identify the reference of the volunteer experience as a possible personal opportunity and from there they carry out their own process, as emerged in the reflection of the focus groups with the volunteers participating in this autoethnographic study (participants 2, 3, 4, and 6 of the focus groups).

In order for “growing volunteering” to take place, other channels of access to information about the experience are added, such as referrals from the volunteers themselves to other people based on their valuable experience, school, or university social service, the creation of web channels, professional practice agreements with universities that then translate into periods of professional volunteering, and the targeting and accompaniment of pre-adolescents who express interest in volunteering.

The latter refers to the “volunteering seedbed” initiative for adolescents aged from 13 to 15, which began in 2018 with eight participants who grew up in the Foundation and declared their desire to participate as volunteers, but their ages and school stage still required constant accompaniment, so while supporting the logistics of the activities, they were supported by the psychosocial and pedagogical team of the organization. This is an initiative that reflects what [Gazley and Guo \(2015\)](#) describe as the importance of studying the specific processes and practices that facilitate participation and cooperation.

6.6. Component 3 of Volunteer Management: Legal Shielding vs. Emotional Construction of Volunteering

“I want to be a volunteer this year because with the foundation I have learned to be a better daughter, a better sister and a better person”

(Fragment letter of desire 2016, Participant 1)

This third component illustrates the tension between the formal and informal aspects of volunteer management practices at the Huellas Foundation, reflecting the complexity of organizational practices described by [Nicolini and Monteiro \(2016\)](#).

Through the analysis of the documentary review data in this autoethnographic study, it was revealed how the Huellas Foundation has developed a dual approach to volunteer management that combines legal compliance with building a deep emotional commitment to volunteerism.

On the one hand, the organization has implemented as a practice the signing of the “voluntary action agreement” in response to Law 720 of 24 December 2001, and National Decree 4290 of 2005 (both correspond to Colombian legislation). The agreement serves as a legal shielding mechanism, providing a clear distinction between volunteering and labor relations.

This is because one of the great fears and risks in the management of the volunteer experience is the establishment of an employment relationship with the existence of a schedule, remuneration, and instruction. To overcome this and generate shielding to the organization and differentiation of roles, responsibilities, and relationships, since 2008, each volunteer signs the agreement of voluntary actions with Huellas Foundation (which has gone through different formats in terms of density, design, and content). This document

is valid until the last working day of each year and is renewed in the first week of the beginning of voluntary actions of the current year.

However, although the agreement is important in the legal order that establishes the institutional shield and therefore is signed annually, on the other hand, for the Huellas Foundation, it is more relevant to the configuration of the desire to live the experience. Therefore, in a coexistent manner, the practice of writing the letter of desire was implemented for volunteers, in which the person expresses their intention to be a volunteer or volunteer considering the contributions that their attributes and knowledge can make to the organization and in turn, their understanding of what the Huellas Foundation can offer for their personal, professional, and social growth. They also declare their commitments for the year, the availability of time, and the process in which they want to focus their participation in voluntary actions.

It is a practice that is aligned with the principle of self-gratification by allowing volunteers to express their personal motivations and expectations. Proof of this is the fragment of testimony presented at the beginning of this component. This practice reflects what [Herrero and Kraemer \(2020\)](#) describe as the acquisition of strategic skills through practical experience, as it enables volunteers to reflect on their personal and professional growth.

The coexistence of these two practices—the formal agreement and the letter of desire—illustrates how the Huellas Foundation has adapted its practices to balance legal needs with emotional ones, returning to the importance of studying the specific processes that facilitate cooperation, as [Gazley and Guo \(2015\)](#) put it.

Both practices are delimited in the “**admission protocol**”, a tacit agreement that starts from recognizing the need for dialogue between the profiles and gives rise to at least four moments to establish the process: the interview meeting, participation in a full meeting with the Huellas team in a weekly meeting space, a month of induction, the expression of desire through the letter, the signing of the agreement of voluntary actions, and participation in the commitments, services, schedules and territories assumed, resulting in an organic flow. The protocol has variations according to each volunteering modality proposed in Component 1.

The flexibility in the application of this protocol, particularly for international volunteering, illustrates how organizational practices adapt to different contexts, as suggested by [Nicolini and Monteiro \(2016\)](#).

The protocol also includes a cumulative archive of volunteer agreements and letters of desire for each volunteer and represents a knowledge management practice that allows the organization to track the development and contribution of volunteers over time. This aligns with [Rathi et al.’s \(2016\)](#) observation about the importance of community knowledge in nonprofits. The inventory of covenants and charters reviewed as part of this research was reported in [Table 2](#).

6.7. Component 4 of Volunteer Management: Contribution of Volunteer Action to the Social Organization

“I wanted to continue being part of this great work that was being developed in the community, and that could not be finished because of what was happening. . . I stayed supporting the sports area and I think we have done a very good job”

(Fragment of Focus Group—Participant 7)

Component 4 on volunteerism management sets out how volunteering practices at the Huellas Foundation not only shape the functioning of the organization, but also contribute significantly to its sustainability and resilience. This reflects the situated and socially constructed nature of organizational practices (as suggested by [Geiger, 2009](#); [Nicolini &](#)

Monteiro, 2016), and is reflected in the excerpt presented above, which highlights the desire of a volunteer to continue contributing to the organization.

Through participatory autoethnographic analysis, an exercise was conducted with one of the volunteers to quantify the economic impact of volunteering in the Huellas Foundation. The quantification of the contribution of volunteer action (AAV) to the organization's budget was weighted based on the equation¹ $AAV = ((HS \times \$VH) \times \#HM) \times MA \times \#V$. The results showed that volunteering is equivalent to 50% of the organization's operation. This valuation exercise reflects what Rath et al. (2016) describe as the need for knowledge about finance and funding sources in NPOs.

In addition to the economic contribution to support the sustainability of the organization, the specific participation of an international volunteer (Italian–German), between September and December 2017, to give continuity to his experience once he finished volunteering and recognizing the valuable work of the organization, he honorarily assumed the cost of renting a local house to install the administrative and operational headquarters of the organization since March 2018 and to date maintains his donation for that purpose.

However, the most relevant aspect of this finding is that in the documentary and audiovisual review, as well as in the focus group conversations, it was identified that the greatest contribution of the volunteer experience to the organization is its strength to give continuity to the organization's processes even in times of contingency and scarcity. In this sense, it is a high inventory of social capital, characterized by a historical solidarity and resilient capacity to make agreements and move forward together, building a common purpose to serve the community (Kliksberg, 2006; Ostrom, 2000; Olson, 1992).

The resilience demonstrated by volunteers, characterized by a historical solidarity and ability to make agreements and move forward together, reflects the principles of self-gratification and institutional recognition. Volunteers find personal satisfaction in their ability to keep the organization running (self-gratification), while the organization recognizes and values this crucial contribution (institutional recognition).

This component also aligns with the previous ones by demonstrating how volunteering as a cultural reference (Component 2) and the emotional construction of volunteering (Component 3) contribute to creating a strong sense of organizational commitment and resilience. The continuity of volunteer participation, even in difficult times, is a testament to the effectiveness of the practices of synchronizing roles, profiles, timing, and interests (Component 1).

The findings presented illustrate how volunteer management at the Huellas Foundation exemplifies the contingent nature of organizational practices. The two principles identified—self-realization and institutional recognition—along with the four key components, emerge as adaptive responses to the specific needs of the organization and its context. This empirical evidence not only contributes to the understanding of how volunteer management practices evolve in response to contextual factors, but also offers important implications for both the theory and practice of volunteer management in non-profit organizations, which are discussed below.

7. Conclusions

Through a participatory autoethnographic approach, this study has contributed to a deeper understanding of the contingent approach to volunteer management, illustrating how organizational practices adapt and evolve in response to specific contexts.

The understanding of organizational practices that give rise to volunteer management were understood throughout the study, as social and collective phenomena (Geiger, 2009), and as actions and expressions structured and influenced by material factors that shape the functioning of organizations (Nicolini & Monteiro, 2016). This approach made it possible

to examine the management of volunteering at the Huellas Foundation as a set of dynamic and contextual practices and processes, rooted in the history and specific culture of the organization and its community.

The participatory autoethnographic methodology employed in this study proved particularly well suited to exploring the complexities of volunteer management in the organization. It incorporated both the perspective of the researcher as a participant-observer and the experiences and perceptions of other volunteers in the organization. This approach reflects what [Anderson \(2006\)](#) and [Herrmann \(2022\)](#) describe as the ability of autoethnography to provide an in-depth exploration of organizational dynamics from the perspective of a participant immersed in the context.

The research findings support and expand the contingent perspective proposed by [Brudney and Meijs \(2014\)](#) by revealing how the two fundamental principles identified—self-actualization and institutional recognition—emerge and adapt according to the specific context of the organization. These principles, far from being universal prescriptions, represent adaptive responses that reflect the reciprocal nature of volunteering in this particular context.

The four components identified in the management of volunteering at the Huellas Foundation exemplify what [Brudney and Sink \(2017\)](#) describe as the need to adapt practices according to the specific characteristics of each organization. The conversation between roles, the understanding of volunteering as a cultural referent, the balance between legal shielding and emotional construction, and the contribution of volunteer action demonstrate how management practices must be adjusted to the particular realities of each context.

From a practical perspective, this study provides valuable insights into how NPOs can adapt their volunteer management practices according to their specific contexts. The importance of aligning volunteer interests with organizational needs, creating a sense of belonging, and balancing legal and emotional aspects are lessons that can inform the adaptation of practices in diverse contexts.

The theoretical implications of this study support and expand the contingent approach to volunteer management. The findings illustrate how management practices cannot be universally standardized, but must be adapted by considering multiple contextual factors, as proposed by [Rochester \(1999\)](#) and [Brudney et al. \(2019\)](#). However, they have broader implications for understanding volunteering in developing country contexts.

It is important to note the limitations of the study. By focusing on a specific organization in Colombia, the findings, while valuable for understanding the application of the contingent approach, are not intended to be generalizable. The autoethnographic nature of the study, while providing insightful understanding, also introduces potential biases that should be recognized.

Future research could expand the understanding of the contingent approach by examining how different organizations adapt their volunteer management practices in different contexts and territories. It would also be valuable to explore how practices evolve over time and adapt to different cultural and socioeconomic realities.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Ethical review and approval has been waived for this study given that the research was carried out within a context in which the participants were volunteers, who operated and in turn made decisions in the dynamics of the organization. In this sense, their participation was voluntary and was based on a relationship of trust and collaboration, where the aim was to promote joint reflection on shared practices and experiences.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: Data is contained within the article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Note

- ¹ Equation conventions: AAV (volunteer action contribution)—HS (hours per week)—\$VH (Hourly Value)—#HM (Number of hours per month)—MA (months per year)—#V (Number of volunteers). The exercise recognized that the hours per week (HS) of the volunteers ranged from 15 to 20. These data are equivalent to the daily volunteering modality, since the exercise did not include additional values that may mean the cost of professional and occasional volunteering, travel, lodging, and support costs of international volunteers.

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