



RAND

EUROPE

# Insights on the role of volunteers in public safety at major sporting events

Case study

Lucy Strang



This case study has been produced as part of an independent research project conducted for Qatar University by RAND Europe on 'Connections between misuse of alcohol, antisocial, violent and destructive behaviour at major sporting events, and promising strategies to minimise the incidence of and harm from these behaviours'.

### **Acknowledgements**

We would like to thank interviewees for sharing their views and professional insights with members of the research team. We would also like to express our gratitude to Professor Mariam Al Maadeed and Dr Suzanne Hammad of Qatar University, for their support during the research process. The views presented in this report are the authors' and any remaining errors are also our own.

For more information on this publication, visit [www.rand.org/t/RR2804](http://www.rand.org/t/RR2804)

Published by the RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, Calif., and Cambridge, UK

© Copyright 2018 RAND Corporation

**RAND®** is a registered trademark.

RAND Europe is a not-for-profit research organisation that helps to improve policy and decision making through research and analysis. RAND's publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its research clients and sponsors.

### **Limited Print and Electronic Distribution Rights**

This document and trademark(s) contained herein are protected by law. This representation of RAND intellectual property is provided for noncommercial use only. Unauthorized posting of this publication online is prohibited. Permission is given to duplicate this document for personal use only, as long as it is unaltered and complete. Permission is required from RAND to reproduce, or reuse in another form, any of its research documents for commercial use. For information on reprint and linking permissions, please visit [www.rand.org/pubs/permissions](http://www.rand.org/pubs/permissions).

### **Support RAND**

Make a tax-deductible charitable contribution at [www.rand.org/giving/contribute](http://www.rand.org/giving/contribute)

[www.rand.org](http://www.rand.org)

[www.randeurope.org](http://www.randeurope.org)

## Key findings

- Volunteers have an important role to play in maintaining public safety and facilitating positive spectator behaviours during major sporting events. This is at least in part due to how volunteers are perceived by, and engage with, spectators at such events.
- Given the importance of recruiting and retaining volunteers, event organisers must understand and respond to their motivations. Key motivators identified in this case study include a sense of pride in one's community and country; the opportunity to gain experience and develop skills; meeting new people and strengthening personal relationships; a passion for sport; and a desire for a new experience.
- Maintaining the engagement of volunteers requires event organisers to care for their wellbeing; match them with roles that suit their interests and abilities; manage their expectations; communicate effectively; and recognise their contribution to the event.
- Building a legacy of volunteering after a major sporting event is challenging, and requires significant forward planning and financial investment.

## 1. Introduction

This case study is part of a research project that RAND Europe has been commissioned to undertake by Qatar University, examining violent and antisocial behaviours at football events, the factors associated with such behaviours, and strategies to prevent and reduce their occurrence.

Here we seek to examine the role of volunteers in the successful delivery of major sporting events, with a particular focus on their contribution towards maintaining public safety and facilitating positive fan behaviours. Given the importance of volunteers to these efforts, we also explore some of the key motivators for volunteers, which organisers should take note of and respond to in order to ensure that volunteers stay engaged over the course of an event. The case study also briefly considers the challenges of and opportunities for building a legacy of volunteering after an event has

finished, and concludes with some key lessons for the 2022 World Cup in Qatar.

Insights have been gathered from five interviewees, four of whom have managed volunteer programmes at major sporting events including FIFA World Cups, the Olympics and the UEFA European Championships; the fifth interviewee has been a volunteer at several international sporting events including the 2016 Rio de Janeiro and 2012 London Olympics. These interviews were the key data sources for this case study and insights from the interviews are its focus. These insights were supplemented by a targeted document review, and data collected through the document review were used to provide context to the insights of the interviewees. Further details on the methods used, including the limitations of this case study, can be found at the end of this report.

## 2. The role of volunteers in maintaining public safety at major sporting events

Volunteering has been defined as ‘any activity in which time is given freely to benefit another person, group, or organisation’ (Wilson 2000, 215). As major sporting events have grown in scale over the past few decades, volunteers have become increasingly important to their successful delivery. In Allen & Shaw’s (2009, 80) study on volunteer motivation, the authors stated:

In order for such events to run successfully and sustainably, there must be a pool of motivated and enthusiastic volunteers who are able to perform their roles satisfactorily.

### How many volunteers are needed?

During the 2018 World Cup in Russia, 17,000 volunteers (FIFA 2018) were selected from a pool of 170,000 applicants (Etchells 2018); during the 2014 World Cup in Brazil, 15,000 volunteers were deployed. In relation to the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, Nasser al Khater, the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy’s Assistant Secretary-General for Tournament Affairs, estimated that between 14,000 and 16,000 volunteers will be required and, as of September 2018, almost 90,000 people have applied for a role (Gulf Times 2018). Qatar has already engaged with hundreds of volunteers for the international friendly football matches held in the country (SC 2018). Interviewee VM1 estimated that for Brazil 2014, 35–45 per cent of volunteer roles related to the management of event spectators.

### What do volunteers do in relation to crowd safety?

The number of roles available to volunteers can be vast; interviewee VM4 noted that for the London Olympics, there were ‘literally hundreds of different roles’. According to VM1 and VM2, these public-facing roles can involve volunteers directing fans to correct locations,

supervising queues, welcoming fans to stadiums and answering questions about the event, checking tickets, and undertaking many other responsibilities. VM4 emphasised the importance of volunteers in easing confusion and anxiety amongst visitors during the London Olympics, commenting on:

That real sense of spirit and community engagement and opening up London to people.... It can be quite a frightening and difficult city to get around, and [...volunteers] really make it easier and help people to feel at home.

VM4 expressed the view, also shared by VM2 and VM3, that the volunteers’ identity as non-paid members of staff has an important effect on how receptive spectators are to their instructions and warnings, in comparison to security guards and stewards who are often tasked with the same roles. In discussing this point, VM3 recalled an event they had organised in which volunteers wore high-visibility jackets typically worn by security staff, with no indication that they were in fact volunteers. The interviewee commented:

There was a certain amount of negative feedback... from the general public because we were seen to be [having] more security. [If] for whatever reason, in terms of crowd safety and dynamics, you’re moving crowds of people around large areas... it was very important that people knew they were volunteers in terms of the branding that was put out on them and then the messaging. Then we were finding it was a much more positive experience.... [Volunteers were seen to be] supporting the security at the event, supporting the police at the event, in terms of how that messaging was getting across to people.

Both VM2 and VM4 highlighted that, in their experience, the friendly and open demeanour of volunteers enhanced spectators’ enjoyment

of the event, and facilitated positive spectator behaviours. VM4 commented:

There's a difference there in terms of that officialdom in the sense that you're being told what to do or you're being dragooned or you're being organised. And volunteers are very different [from police and security staff] because they don't have to be there. It's clear that they're part of the community.... I think that was really important in terms of breaking down some of those barriers, and it was certainly the case that volunteers had a really good time with the crowd. There was a sense of togetherness and people were having their photographs taken and they were having a laugh with the volunteers. In that sense, I think they then were quite happy to be, not told so much, but to be advised on the best way to go and what they could and couldn't do. That did set up a different dynamic to the paid members of staff and security guards that were doing that.

VM2 added that while volunteers and paid security staff may have similar responsibilities in terms of dealing with spectators, their different approaches can complement each other:

[B]oth groups are very important, because of course, [paid] stewards, they have a very important role – they have to be strict, and they have to maintain professionalism, to really give an impression that nothing will be tolerated, which is not in line with the regulations. On the other hand, volunteers, they can be... more friendly, more cheerful; they are more open; they approach spectators.

In addition, VM3 noted that volunteers have an important part to play in monitoring spectators and noting any common challenges and concerns that they may express to the volunteers, and feeding back that information to the event management if required. This interviewee described volunteers as 'the eyes and the ears' for event organisers.

### **What skills, experience and training do volunteers need?**

Interviewee VM2 noted that volunteer roles that require high levels of engagement with spectators can be draining:

...I have to also admit that these jobs are very, very difficult – you have to really understand that these are the most difficult and demanding jobs, because [volunteers] are standing all the time; [they] meet many people – it's exhausting.

VM2 also emphasised that volunteers who perform public-facing roles need to demonstrate enthusiasm, patience, resilience and a level-headed attitude:

Open and friendly approach – this is really important, and resistant to stress, because I think they do not understand sometimes that this is exciting; they will be in a fantastic place and fantastic times, but still, it's hard work because you're standing; there are thousands of people coming through the stadiums, thousands and thousands of people, and you really have to be really patient in replying, in pointing, and also, there are sometimes situations that are just very stressful, or they are maybe not dangerous, but you know, you never know how the crowds would behave, so they also need to be trained in understanding the dynamics of the crowd.

VM3 shared VM2's view that volunteers in such roles require proper training in crowd dynamics, particularly in relation to assessing crowd volume and when potential threats to public safety emerge. VM3 added that volunteers should also be given training on how to communicate effectively; for example on how to deliver a message about their observations on crowd concerns to ensure that it reaches the appropriate authorities.

### 3. What motivates volunteers?

Given the importance of volunteers to hosting a safe and successful sporting event, interviewees commented that it is crucial to understand and respond to their motivations. A variety of motivators were identified by the interviewees, many of which overlapped. VM1 noted that volunteers come from different backgrounds and cultures, which may also influence their volunteering goals and expectations, and this must be taken into account by volunteer managers.

V1, VM1, VM2, and VM4 all stated that volunteers can be motivated by a sense of **pride in their community and their country**, and a desire to make a positive contribution and 'give back' (VM1). In relation to the London Olympics, VM4 commented:

[M]any people just wanted to be part of the global event and saw it as a way of celebrating what was good about London and the UK, and wanting to be really proud of this country and to make the Games a success.

Speaking from a volunteer's perspective, V1 added that volunteering gave her a sense of **personal satisfaction**:

I think it's really about doing something positive, but also feeling good in yourself, because it is a good feeling afterwards.

More pragmatically, V1, VM2 and VM4 also commented that many volunteers apply to **gain experience** that they can add to their CVs, particularly as they tend to be at the start of their professional careers. VM2 and VM4 noted that for the London Olympics and UEFA 2012, the organisers offered certification for volunteers in customer care and other related fields, so that they had an official record of the training they had received and the skills they had developed. In addition, VM2 highlighted that volunteering offered **skills development** opportunities and training that could be an asset to job applications:

[W]e also created a very thoughtful programme of training. We wanted to give them competencies and skills that they had to use for their role during the tournament, but also... in their professional lives.... So, we decided... to give them really fantastic training programmes. We were certifying the programmes, so they received diplomas and certificates they could give to their future employers. So, this was also [a] benefit.

VM2 commented on the **social enrichment** many volunteers sought through their engagement with the other volunteers taking part in the event, and the personal friendships which developed. This interviewee added that volunteer managers sought to anticipate and facilitate this aspect of the experience by providing shared spaces and facilities for volunteers:

[I]t was also important for them to have good relationships with other people [volunteers], to meet other people.... We buil[t] a volunteer centre in each of the locations, and it was a fantastic centre for their interactions. We equipped the centres not only with sofas, or with places to eat and be trained, but also, there was a huge social activity part. They could rest; they could talk with others; they could play some games before the shift or after the shift, and they were coming all the time.

VM1 described a similar provision for volunteers during the 2014 World Cup in Brazil, and noted that organisers at the 2018 World Cup in Russia took the same approach. Relatedly, VM1 commented that volunteering offered an opportunity to bond with family members, recalling seeing grandparents and grandchildren sharing the experience together.

Other motivating factors identified by the interviewees included a **passion for sport** (VM1, VM2 and VM3) and the desire to see a large-scale sporting event 'from the inside' (VM2). VM1 also noted that volunteers were often seeking an **experience that was different from their everyday life**.

## 4. Keeping volunteers motivated

All interviewees commented on the need to retain volunteers over the course of a sporting event, given their centrality to its safe and well-organised delivery. VM2 acknowledged that a certain proportion of volunteers would inevitably drop out, and stated that this needs to be anticipated and planned for by organisers. In relation to UEFA 2012, VM2 noted that volunteer organisers made a careful assessment of how many people would be expected to drop out at each stage. This interviewee suggested recruiting 30–40 per cent more volunteers than required, to militate against the risk of drop outs, although retention rates may depend on the host country and its volunteering culture.

### Promising practices

In addition to offering skills development and certification, and opportunities to socialise, as highlighted above, interviewees suggested a few more key strategies for keeping volunteers motivated over the course of a sporting event and increasing retention. VM1 noted that the retention of volunteers is tied to how they feel they have been treated by the event organisers. Both V1 and VM1 emphasised that ensuring the **wellbeing of volunteers** was vital in terms of regular breaks and access to food and medical care.

VM3 and VM4 suggested that, as far as possible, **volunteers should be matched with roles** that suit their interests and abilities. VM3 commented that volunteers who are well-placed in their roles are a 'win-win' for both the volunteer and the event organisers.

VM3 and VM4 raised the topic of properly **managing the expectations** of volunteers during the recruitment process, to ensure that prospective volunteers have a clear understanding of what would be entailed in their participation. VM3 stated:

If someone's expectation is much higher than what we can offer through the volunteer programme, we're saying to them, 'Honestly, listen, this is not what we're about,' because they'll either become very frustrated, they'll be saying bad things about the programme to other volunteers.... So it's important that we're very clear in terms of what they're going to get when they come on board, what they'll get out of it, what the experience will be like.

Relatedly, V1, VM2, VM3 and VM4, particularly stressed the importance of **communicating** effectively with volunteers about their role, their obligations and any other salient information relating to the event. V1 commented that advising prospective volunteers as early as possible about the role that has been assigned to them and the degree of commitment involved helped potential volunteers make a timely decision about whether they wanted to participate, and if not, to drop out before rather than during an event. VM3 commented on the importance of regular communication with volunteers about the crucial role they would be playing, to keep them motivated in the run-up to the event:

[I]t's a trickle-feeding of information to them coming up to the event as well... to keep their engagement in it and for them to realise that it can't happen without them.

VM4, who has also been a volunteer themselves, recalled that in relation to communicating with volunteers during the London Olympics:

New technology was really important. We were texted every day to remind us of where we were meant to be and at what time we were meant to be there... there were emergency numbers that you could text in or call if you were going to be late or if you were not going to be able to make it for some reason, and then they could get replacements in.

Interviewees also highlighted the importance of **public and individual recognition** of the volunteers' contribution to an event. VM4 stated that 'the volunteers are putting a lot into it and a lot of their time and a lot of their commitment, but they do expect something back.' VM2, VM3 and VM4 commented that event organisers often gave volunteers small gifts such as badges or t-shirts as keepsakes. In relation to the London Olympics, VM4 noted:

[T]here was a badge system... where [volunteers] get a badge for the amount of hours you put in, and volunteers were collecting badges from these Games....

[T]hose that had volunteered overseas in previous games were sharing their badges from Olympics past and were very proud of this as a mark of what they've done.... [Volunteers] all got an Olympic baton at the end with a certificate that was signed by Seb Coe, who was the Chair of the Organising Committee, and the symbolism of that was that we would then be passing the baton on to volunteers in the future. It was really nice and it made you feel your contribution had been really important and had been marked.

VM4 also noted that speeches at the event's opening and closing ceremonies paid tribute to the contribution of volunteers.

## 5. How can host countries build a legacy of volunteering?

The 2022 World Cup organising committee, the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy, has stated its ambition to build a legacy of volunteering in the country (SC 2018). VM2, VM3 and VM4 all expressed the view that this task is a significant challenge. VM4 stated:

[I]t's not easy, and even in the UK, numbers went up immediately after the Games but now they've dipped back to a historic norm. So it's hard to keep the momentum going.

Both VM3 and VM4 commented that, after volunteering at a major sporting event, other available volunteering opportunities may seem less appealing by comparison. VM3 stated:

If you come from a huge, big FIFA World Cup and you're going to a small little community organisation... there's a certain bit of a comedown from that, but how can the organisation keep that part of the volunteer culture going? ...[I]t's the volunteer manager and the positive experience, that they can make sure there's a positive volunteer culture. That's the thing that would keep them going.

Thus **ensuring positive experience throughout the volunteering process** is one factor that may contribute to a volunteering legacy. VM4 echoed the view that the first step in creating a legacy of volunteering is to ensure, as far as possible, that people who have engaged with the volunteering process, even just by applying, have a positive experience. In relation to the London Olympics, the interviewee commented:

[E]xpectation management... at the outset... needed to be handled quite sensitively, particularly if the country's interested in trying to create something that's really positive about volunteering and to leave a legacy. The last thing you want is 250,000 people saying that they were treated badly at interview stage and didn't get a proper response and were just told they weren't any

good, or no use, and not told about other things they might be able to do.

VM4, together with VM2 and VM3, suggested forming a **working group or forum** to take the lead on facilitating and managing volunteering after a sporting event. VM2 expressed the view that such a body should engage closely with both the government and civil society. VM4 warned that efforts to create a volunteering legacy needed **long-term planning and considerable financial investment**. This interviewee also recommended identifying a number of specific, realistic goals, providing a number of suggestions:

[Y]ou might want to think about developing some local volunteer centres in some of the regions or localities that provide a focal point for people who would be interested in volunteering, as a brokerage between opportunities and people who are putting themselves forward to volunteer. A series of locally funded or government-funded local volunteer centres in half a dozen key strategic areas might be a good starting point. Think about investment in a schools-based programme to try and bring to young people the benefit of volunteering both for themselves in terms of their school's development and the experience can help them get jobs, but also in terms of building that nation of civic society. Think about an award programme.

VM3 also recommended that, if possible, event organisers should create and share with the volunteering body a **database of the individuals who have volunteered**, so that they can be contacted directly with future volunteering opportunities. V1 also suggested **media campaigns** to promote volunteering and highlight the impact it can have on local communities.

## 6. Key reflections and lessons for Qatar

Volunteers can make an important contribution to public safety and facilitating positive spectator behaviours at major sporting events by providing advice and warnings to spectators in a manner that is likely to be well-received, easing confusion and anxiety among visitors and monitoring and providing feedback about crowd concerns.

The experiences discussed in this case study do not relate to events held in the Gulf and Arab region, and therefore may not be generalisable. However, we can identify several potentially useful lessons for the organisers of the 2022 World Cup.

**Selection of volunteers:** Organisers can maximise the benefits of using volunteers by ensuring that volunteers in public-facing roles are enthusiastic, level-headed and resilient.

**Training:** Investment in training, for example in monitoring crowd dynamics and communicating effectively, is essential.

**Understanding and actively maintaining motivation:** Organisers should identify and

respond to the motivations of volunteers, which may vary by background, so that they enjoy their experience and stay engaged.

**Anticipating and preventing attrition:**

Organisers should anticipate that a proportion of volunteers will drop out during an event, but also seek to prevent drop outs as far as possible by **caring for the wellbeing of volunteers**; attempting to **match volunteers to roles** that suit their interests and abilities; **managing the expectations** of volunteers; **communicating clearly** and consistently; and **recognising the efforts** and contributions of volunteers to an event.

Building a legacy of volunteering after a major sporting event is a significant challenge and requires advance planning and considerable financial investment. Setting up an organisation to take the lead on volunteering after an event may focus these efforts, and identifying a number of specific, realistic goals, such as developing local volunteer centres, may be a good first step.

## Bibliography

Allen, J. B., & Shaw, S. 2009. "Everyone rolls up their sleeves and mucks in": Exploring volunteers' motivation and experiences of the motivational climate of a sporting event. *Sport Management Review* 12: 79–90.

Etchells, D. 2016. 'Russia registers record number of volunteer applications for 2018 FIFA World Cup.' *Inside the Games*, 31 December 2018. As of 29 October 2018: <https://www.insidethegames.biz/articles/1045310/russia-registers-record-number-of-volunteer-applications-for-2018-fifa-world-cup>

Fifa. 2018. 'Volunteers.' As of 29 October 2018: <https://www.fifa.com/worldcup/organisation/volunteers/>

Gulf Times 2018. 'Over 88,300 volunteers register for 2022 FIFA World Cup.' 4 September 2018. As of 29 October 2018: <https://www.gulf-times.com/story/604859/Over-88-300-volunteers-register-for-2022-FIFA-World>

SC (Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy) 2018. *Legacy Book. Edition One*. As of 29 October 2018: <https://www.sc.qa/sites/default/files/SC-Legacy-Book-EN.pdf>

Wilson, J. 2000. Volunteering. *Annual Review of Sociology* 26: 215–240.

## About this case study and the research project for Qatar University

Qatar has hosted a number of international sporting events and will host the World Athletics Championship in 2019 and the 2022 FIFA World Cup. In preparing for these events, there is an opportunity to learn from research into the prevalence, nature and causes of violence and disorder at other sporting events that have drawn together spectators from a range of countries with diverse cultural and religious characteristics, and to draw on promising practices to prevent and respond to these harms.

Qatar University commissioned RAND Europe to research the current available evidence on these topics to identify insights that may be relevant for Qatar's preparations.

### Project aims

The goals of this project were to understand:

1. What has been the nature (types of behaviour, types of perpetrators, victims, location, etc.) and prevalence of antisocial, violent and destructive behaviours among populations watching and attending major sporting events, in particular international football matches?
2. What factors are associated with these behaviours (e.g. alcohol misuse, ethnicity and nationalism, group dynamics) and what is the nature of the association?
3. What approaches have been taken to prevent and respond to these behaviours?
4. To what extent have these approaches proved effective?
5. What specific recommendations follow from the findings that could be used in Qatar in planning for the World Cup in 2022, and where are the opportunities for further research?

### Project methods and approach

The project drew mainly on the identification and critical assessment of international literature and media reports, as well as interviews with a wide range of stakeholders in Qatar and internationally.

Full details of the methodology for the research can be found in the final evaluation report available at

<https://www.rand.org/randeurope/research/projects/violent-and-antisocial-behaviour-at-football-events.html>

### About this case study

A total of six case studies were undertaken to investigate a range of issues relating to safety and security at international sporting events.

This case study drew on two data collection methods. Firstly, telephone interviews were conducted with five key informants, four of whom have managed volunteer programmes at major sporting events including FIFA World Cups, the Olympics and the UEFA European Championships (abbreviated in the case study as VM1, VM2, VM3 and VM4); the fifth informant (V1) has been a volunteer at several international sporting events including the 2016 Rio de Janeiro and 2012 London Olympics.

The interviews were semi-structured and took between 45 minutes and one hour. We developed broad interview protocols tailored to each group of informants, and these served as the basis for each interview. In addition to questions included in the protocol, this approach allowed the team to discuss unanticipated topics that interviewees considered relevant. With the permission of interviewees, all calls were recorded and then transcribed.

These insights were supplemented by a targeted review of academic and grey literature

to identify sources relating to themes that had emerged from the key informant interviews. During this process, the research team ran a number of Google Scholar, Advanced Google and general Google searches utilizing a set of selected search terms: (volunteer AND "World Cup"), (volunteer AND Olympics), (volunteer AND motivation), (volunteer AND crowd), (volunteer AND legacy), (sport AND volunteer and mega-event). Data collected through the document review were used to provide context to the insights of interviewees.

This case study is subject to several limitations. Firstly, the interviewees constitute a small, purposive non-random sample of

individuals tasked with managing volunteers for major sporting events; the pool of people in this field is limited overall, and the interviewees' insights are primarily anecdotal rather than empirical. Furthermore, while there is a small body of mainly qualitative research on volunteering at major sporting events, which was used by the research team, the scope of the case study precluded a systematic and in-depth analysis of this literature. Finally, the research team was unable to interview volunteer managers from major sporting events in the Gulf and Arab region. The experiences discussed by interviewees do not relate to events in the region, and therefore may not be generalisable.

## **Project results and reports**

Details of the other case studies and wider project results are available at <https://www.rand.org/randeurope/research/projects/violent-and-antisocial-behaviour-at-football-events.html>. These are of interest not only to those responsible for preparing for upcoming events in Qatar, but to anyone involved in the safety and management of international sports tournaments.

## **Contact information**

RAND Europe is a not-for-profit organisation that helps to improve policy and decision-making through research and analysis. For further information about this document please contact:

Christian van Stolk  
Director, Home Affairs and Social Policy  
Programme, RAND Europe  
[stolk@rand.org](mailto:stolk@rand.org)  
[www.randeurope.org](http://www.randeurope.org)