

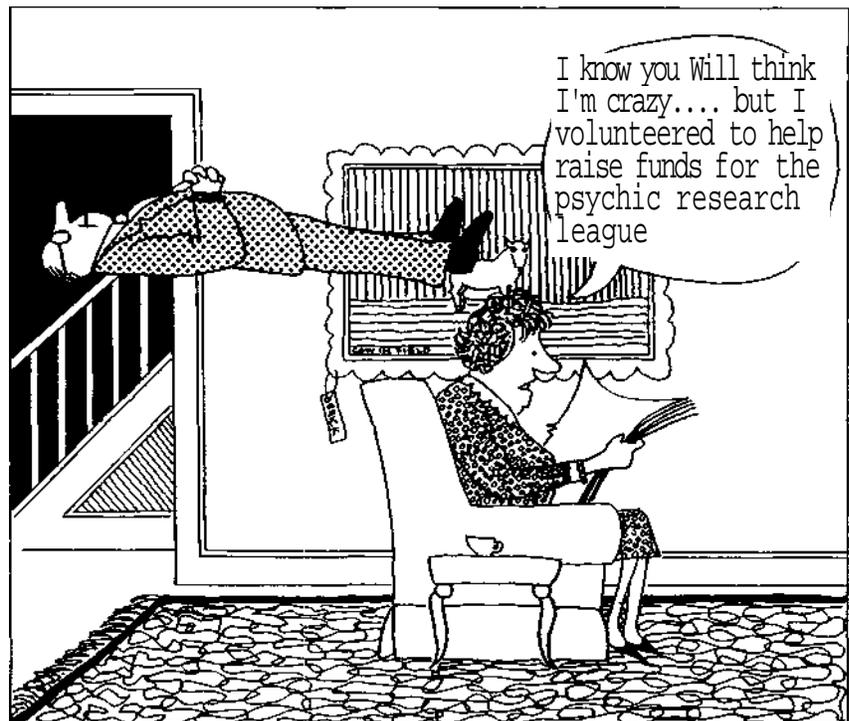
A Look at Leisure

Results of the 1981 Public Opinion Survey on Recreation conducted by Alberta Recreation and Parks

No. 7

VOLUNTARISM

This is the seventh bulletin in a series published by Alberta Recreation and Parks which presents results from the 1981 Public Opinion Survey on Recreation. This bulletin provides information on the characteristics of volunteers and non-volunteers as well as attitudes toward voluntarism. This information will be of use to agencies that involve volunteers in their programs or wish to encourage volunteer participation.



Volunteering is an uplifting experience.

Alberta
RECREATION AND PARKS

The responses to the following questions are examined in this bulletin:

7. Volunteers work in many areas of organized recreation. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements ? (Check all items.)

| | Disagree | Agree | No opinion |
|---|----------|-------|------------|
| Volunteers are given meaningful tasks..... | | | |
| Volunteers have an important role in the community | — | | |
| The personal sacrifices of volunteering make it difficult for me to participate as a volunteer | | | |
| Volunteers have a chance to learn new things | | — | |
| The number of people who are willing to volunteer is decreasing. . . | | | — |

5. Did you work as a volunteer in the past 12 months?

Yes No

The first section will look at voluntarism, and will describe the characteristics of people most likely to be volunteers and those who are non-volunteers. Some factors considered in identifying these people include demographic (e.g. age, marital status), economic (e.g. education, income), and residence (e.g. rural/urban, length of time in present dwelling) characteristics.

The second section will look at various attitudes about volunteering expressed by survey respondents. The attitudes of volunteers and non-volunteers are compared. Differences in attitudes about voluntarism are also examined to see if they vary with demographic, economic, and residence characteristics.

The final section will discuss some implications of the findings for agencies that involve volunteers in their projects.

Some of the major findings, based upon the responses of Albertans included in the survey, are:

- o Two-fifths of the sample had volunteered in the past year.



- o Those who were most likely to volunteer were 35 to 44 years of age; married with school-age children; in higher education and income categories; rural residents and long-term residents of their community.
- o A large majority agreed with the idea that volunteers have an important role in the community, and that volunteers have a chance to learn new things.
- o Volunteers were more likely than non-volunteers to have a positive image of voluntarism.
- o Non-volunteers were more likely to report that personal sacrifices make it difficult to participate as a volunteer. Other groups who felt this were young adults, those who were separated, widowed or divorced, and residents of Calgary and Edmonton.

When interpreting these results, there are two things to consider. First, the study has defined volunteers and non-volunteers on the basis of their reported involvement as a volunteer in the previous twelve months. The frequency of this involvement was not measured and, therefore, both casual and regular volunteers were included in the volunteer group. Secondly, although the survey questions were not directed specifically to voluntarism in recreation settings, the results can still be considered useful for recreation agencies who deal with volunteers in their programs.

VOLUNTEER PARTICIPATION

The results of the study indicate that about two-fifths (40.6%) of those people responding to the survey were volunteers, while three-fifths (59.4%) had not volunteered in the previous year. This picture indicates a relatively large volunteer workforce in the province and a significant contribution to Alberta communities and services. This rate of participation is similar to the figures reported in previous studies (Curtis, 1971; Smith and Baldwin, 1974).

In general, however, it is difficult to compare studies since results often vary greatly depending on the way in which "volunteering" is defined. It is interesting to note that people in North America have a greater tendency to volunteer than people in many other countries, such as Great Britain, Germany and Mexico (Curtis, 1971).



Volunteers may be involved with many different types of organizations. We could not determine which types of organizations attracted the volunteers in this study. However, a Statistics Canada (1981) study found that volunteer participation in leisure and recreation activities attracts almost one-quarter of those Canadians doing volunteer work. This is slightly less than the percentage of people involved in social welfare and religious volunteer activity.

IDENTIFYING VOLUNTEERS AND NON-VOLUNTEERS

Do those people who volunteer differ from those who do not volunteer? If so, these differences may be important to recognize when agencies attempt to recruit potential volunteers. The study results indicate that there are a number of significant factors which distinguish volunteers from non-volunteers.

The first set of factors which were considered may be called life-cycle variables. It was found that individuals in the thirty-five to forty-four year age range showed the greatest tendency to volunteer. Volunteers were also more likely to be married, with children between the ages of six and seventeen years. Similar patterns have been reported previously (Babchuk and Booth, 1973; Tomeh, 1973). These characteristics describe the younger middle-aged stages of the family life-cycle, when people are becoming more involved with their career, family and community, and volunteering often fits in with these responsibilities. In addition, much of the volunteer activity of parents may be directly related to the activities of their children. This might include, for example, coaching children's hockey teams, or raising funds for the swimming group in which the children are members.

The sex of the respondent was not a significant factor in this study, but other studies have reported that males are more frequent volunteers than females in the recreation sector (e.g. Statistics Canada, 1981). Volunteers were also more likely to be of higher education and middle-income levels and to be involved in white collar and technical professions. In general, previous research has also reported that higher socio-economic status is positively related to voluntarism (Babchuk and booth, 1973; Curtis, 1971). One exception to this trend, noted in our study, was that farmers ranked highest in volunteer participation compared to all other occupations.



Residence factors also accounted for differences between volunteers and non-volunteers. Individuals from rural areas had a greater tendency to volunteer (56.7%) than those from urban centres (39.2%). This trend was also supported when regional location was examined. For example, over one-half of the respondents from the Grande Prairie, St. Paul and Fort McMurray areas reported that they were volunteers, while only one-third of Calgary and Edmonton respondents participated as volunteers.

The incidence of volunteering was greater for residents of single-family dwellings (44.6%) compared to individuals in apartments (28.2%) and attached dwellings (35.4%). This picture relates closely to the life-cycle variations reported above. Previous research has provided some evidence that those who are fairly well established in a community may be more likely to volunteer than new-comers (Tomeh, 1973). This trend appears to hold true in Alberta, since participation in voluntarism increased with the length of time individuals had lived in the province, and in their present dwelling.

The study also supplied a fairly clear picture of the characteristics of non-volunteers. Briefly, these included respondents in the youngest (under 25 years) and oldest (over 64 years) age categories, and those who were single, single parents, or couples without children. Those with lower education and income levels, and blue-collar workers, were also more likely to be non-volunteers than other groups. Additional factors associated with non-volunteers were urban residence, as well as recent arrival in the community and the province.

It may be seen that people most likely to be volunteers and non-volunteers differ on a number of characteristics. Many of the differences found in this study are similar to those reported by previous researchers. An understanding of the characteristics of typical volunteers and non-volunteers is important so that efforts to encourage volunteer involvement may be most effectively directed toward specific segments of the population.

The study did not specifically ask why people participate or do not participate in voluntarism. However, the information on attitudes presented in the next section provides some ideas which might be relevant to this issue.



ATTITUDES TOWARDS
VOLUNTARISM

Respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with five attitude statements about voluntarism. Responses provide some indication of the public's general views about voluntarism. Furthermore, awareness of these attitudes may alert agencies to changes or improvements which they might adopt in their programs to attract and retain volunteers. A summary of the results of the attitude question is presented below in Table 1.

TABLE 1: RESPONDENTS' ATTITUDES ABOUT VOLUNTARISM

| | Agree (%)) | Disagree (%)) | No Opinion (%) |
|--|-------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| Volunteers have an important role in the community | 91.4 | 2.2 | 6.4 |
| Volunteers have a chance to learn new things | 89.7 | 2.3 | 8.0 |
| Volunteers are given meaningful tasks | 66.5 | 8.1 | 25.4 |
| The number of people who are willing to volunteer is decreasing | 60.9 | 12.3 | 26.8 |
| Personal sacrifices make it difficult to participate as a volunteer. | 42.2 | 36.3 | 21.5 |

The majority of people agreed with two positive statements about voluntarism: "volunteers have an important role in the community" (91.4%), and "volunteers have a chance to learn new things" (89.7%).

The literature points out that participation in voluntary associations provides benefits to both the individual and the community (Babchuk and Booth, 1973; Tomeh, 1973). The strong agreement with both of these statements indicates that the Alberta public also recognizes these positive benefits of volunteering.

Voluntary associations serve many functions for society and the community. Tomeh (1973) noted that voluntary associations help to educate people about important values and standards of society, and help people to control important aspects of their environment. These organizations also play a role in cultural preservation, as well as contributing to social change. In addition, volunteers make a valuable economic contribution to society by supplementing existing services. This is a particularly important function in the recreation and leisure sphere where many community needs must be met in the presence of limited budgets.

ATTITUDES OF
VOLUNTEERS AND
NON-VOLUNTEERS

The observation that "volunteers have a chance to learn new things" represents just one of the personal benefits associated with voluntarism. Other personal benefits which volunteers might experience include a feeling of identity with the community, increased friendships and self-confidence, as well as opportunities for recognition and status.

A majority (66.5%) agreed that volunteers are given meaningful tasks. This is an important consideration since many of the personal benefits of voluntarism depend on volunteers feeling that they have worthwhile and responsible roles in the organization.

On a somewhat more negative note, over one-half of the respondents (60.9%) felt that the number of people who are willing to volunteer is decreasing.

Finally, in contrast to the relatively high agreement with the previous four statements, fewer people (42.2%) indicated that personal sacrifices made it difficult for them to participate as a volunteer.

Comparisons were made between volunteers and non-volunteers in terms of their agreement with these five attitude statements. It was felt that differences in views between the two groups might provide insight into why some people participate as volunteers and some do not.

In general, volunteers were found to have a more positive image of voluntarism (see Table 2). They were more likely than non-volunteers to agree with statements about the importance of volunteers to society (96.8%), the personal benefit of learning new things (95.4%) and that volunteers are given meaningful tasks (75.4%). Although some volunteers (32.2%) agreed that personal sacrifices make volunteering difficult, over one-half (55.6%) of the volunteers did not agree with this statement.

TABLE 2: AGREEMENT OF VOLUNTEERS AND NON-VOLUNTEERS WITH ATTITUDES ABOUT VOLUNTARISM

| | <u>Volunteers</u> | <u>Non-Volunteers</u> |
|--|-------------------|-----------------------|
| | (%) | (%) |
| Volunteers have an important role in the community | 96.8 | 87.9 |
| Volunteers have a chance to learn new things | 95.4 | 85.7 |
| Volunteers are given meaningful tasks | 75.4 | 60.2 |
| The number of people who are willing to volunteer is decreasing | 65.1 | 58.4 |
| Personal sacrifices make it difficult to participate as a volunteer | 32.2 | 49.0 |



In general, non-volunteers also recognized the positive benefits of voluntarism to the community and the individual. However, they were less inclined to agree that volunteers are given meaningful tasks (60.2%) and were more likely to report that personal sacrifices make volunteering difficult (49.0%). The role of personal sacrifice has been identified as an important factor accounting for non-participation in voluntarism. For example, Carter (1975) reported that people have refused to become involved as a volunteer, or stopped volunteering, because of personal sacrifices associated with job, school, and family responsibilities, lack of time and being too busy.

These findings suggest that non-participants have certain views about voluntarism which may influence their decision not to participate. It is important for agencies to recognize this and to consider these issues when developing their volunteer programs.

FACTORS ASSOCIATED
WITH DIFFERENT
ATTITUDES

In order to provide a better understanding of factors associated with different attitudes, each attitude statement was examined to see if responses varied with demographic, economic and residence characteristics. There was little variation in views among respondents for the statements that "volunteers are important to the community", "volunteers have a chance to learn new things", and "volunteers are given meaningful tasks". This suggests that there was fairly consistent recognition of these positive benefits among people with widely different characteristics.

It is also important to identify which people felt that personal sacrifices made it difficult for them to volunteer. Age and marital status were important here. Those in the younger age groups (under 35 years) and those who were separated, divorced, or widowed expressed this view. When regional differences were considered, it was found that residents of Edmonton and Calgary were most likely to agree with the personal sacrifice statement.

Finally, there were some particular groups who felt that the number of people willing to volunteer was decreasing. These groups included single parents and those who were separated, widowed, and divorced, as well as residents of mobile homes. It is possible that these people rely on volunteer services for assistance, and have noticed more difficulty in obtaining help in recent years.



IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study should be particularly relevant to those agencies which involve volunteers in their projects, or wish to encourage volunteer participation. The results indicate that the public has a generally positive image of voluntarism and recognizes the benefits of volunteering both to the community and the individual.

Two important objectives of a volunteer program are to retain present participants and to encourage new volunteers. To accomplish this, it is useful to have an understanding of the types of people who volunteer and those who don't. The survey results indicated that both volunteers and non-volunteers may be defined by different socio-demographic and residence characteristics. Do these characteristics hold true for your community? The most effective program attempts to recruit volunteers from those groups who are under-represented, while still making full use of those groups presently involved (Slack and Campbell, 1982). Have you tried to determine why people are not volunteering in your community? Can you think of creative opportunities to attract typical non-volunteers such as the young and elderly, and newcomers to your area?

The most important factor in attracting and retained volunteers is volunteer satisfaction. If volunteers feel that they are performing worthwhile tasks and are being recognized for their efforts, they will likely continue to volunteer. Moreover, they may become an important source of recruitment for new volunteers.

What can you do to make your programs more attractive and satisfying to volunteers? One of the most important considerations is matching a person's skills and interest to the right job. Do you have a clear idea about the types of tasks available for volunteers in your organization? It is important to consider such things as the skills and the amount of time required. In order to match people to these jobs the volunteer recruiter should assess the skills, interests, and needs of the potential volunteer. In the past, altruism (or helping others) was thought to be the main motivation for volunteering. Now it appears that personal gain factors (e.g. learning new skills, personal fulfillment, conquering challenges, affiliation, and recognition) are just as important. What motivates people to volunteer for your organization? Do you offer a variety of opportunities for those who may



have different reasons for volunteering? Information on motivation is useful for placing people in the right job, and could also influence the way you design your tasks and programs. Potential volunteers should also be given an accurate picture of the organization and the role of volunteers so that they know what to expect and are not disappointed.

The survey results indicate that the opportunity to learn new skills is an important aspect of voluntarism. Social opportunities such as developing new friendships are also attractive to volunteers. Take a look at the volunteer programs operated by your agency. Do they provide such opportunities? What can you do to encourage a warm, friendly, and challenging environment for volunteers?

Most volunteers expect to be recognized for their efforts. In fact, lack of recognition has been reported as a major source of dissatisfaction among volunteers (Carter, 1975). What types of rewards do you offer? What creative ideas can you develop to recognize the work of your volunteers? Do you provide volunteers with responsible tasks, and include them in decision-making? Are your volunteers encouraged to take advantage of training opportunities such as those offered through leadership development programs? Are you careful not to overwork volunteers? Studies have reported that some volunteers may suffer from "burn-out" from too much responsibility and time pressure. Do you encourage feedback from volunteers about their tasks and seek their suggestions about possible improvements?

Although many respondents did not agree that personal sacrifices make it difficult to volunteer, this appeared to be important for about one-half of the non-volunteers. Personal sacrifices associated with family, job and school responsibilities have been cited as reasons for discontinuing participation or for non-participation. What can you do to help remove this barrier? Have you considered making your tasks more flexible so that volunteers have some choice in scheduling? Perhaps you could try to provide opportunities for whole families to become involved on certain projects?

What are the most effective ways of reaching potential volunteers? Personal contact through satisfied volunteers appears to be the best technique. Other approaches include the mass media,



printed material, and special events such as mall exhibits, or open houses. Do you try to select the techniques most appropriate for the specific groups you are trying to reach? How do people perceive your volunteer program? Do they have an accurate image of your organization and the role that volunteers serve in it? Can you identify any negative views about volunteering in your community? What can you do to change these?

In periods of fiscal restraint, volunteers play an increasingly important role in recreation and leisure services. It is important to develop a program which recognizes the needs of both the volunteer and the agency. Some of the suggestions offered in this bulletin may assist you in meeting these objectives through the skilled use of volunteers in your organization.

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FUTURE ISSUES

Lifestyles - Lifestyle factors and attitudes toward recreation.

Social Setting - How important is the social setting in recreation?

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In the near future we will be publishing the full report Barriers to Recreation Participation. This report will be provided to major libraries and universities in Alberta. We will also be publishing the Executive Summary of the report, which will be available upon request to those who wish to obtain more detailed information than was provided in the fifth A Look at Leisure bulletin. Those who desire further depth are advised to refer to the full report

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