

# A Look at Leisure

---

February 1990

No. 27

## **VOLUNTEERISM IN THE RECREATION SECTOR**

Volunteerism is a vital aspect of community life in Alberta. Volunteers play a role in the delivery of a wide range of services, in administration, and in community planning and decision-making. This bulletin discusses several aspects of volunteerism. Much of the information is based on the 1988 General Recreation Survey, which looked specifically at volunteerism in the recreation, sports, and parks sector.



Volunteering is an uplifting experience.

## INTRODUCTION

Volunteerism is an increasingly important topic in the recreation, sports, and parks field. Many organizations rely on volunteers for day-to-day operation. Volunteers are essential for special sports and recreation events such as tournaments, festivals, and games. Volunteers are becoming more sophisticated. There are also more demands competing for volunteers' time. Volunteer management skills are becoming increasingly important, for both volunteers and staff who work with volunteers.

Recruiting and keeping volunteers who are satisfied and productive is a challenge for all organizations that involve volunteers in their administration and programs. The information in this bulletin will assist agencies in understanding the make-up of the volunteer work force and some of the needs that volunteers bring to their work

The bulletin deals with the following topics:

- How many people volunteer?
- With what types of groups do volunteers work?
- What types of services do they perform?
- How much time do people spend volunteering?
- What types of people volunteer?
- Why do people volunteer?
- What types of training do they receive?

In addition to information from the 1988 General Recreation Survey, conducted by Alberta Recreation and Parks, this bulletin presents research findings from other sources. One of these sources is a study of general Calgary volunteers, undertaken by the University of Calgary Research Unit for Public Policy Studies. This latter study provides important information about the services people perform and why people volunteer.

Some of the highlights discussed in the bulletin are:

About 36% of the survey respondents had worked as a volunteer in the recreation, sports, or parks sector in the previous year.

Local sports teams or clubs and community leagues / associations attracted the highest proportion of volunteers.



- Volunteers working with various types of organizations had quite different socio-demographic characteristics.
- About 40% of volunteers had received some form of training, but this was mainly informal/on-the-job.

**HOW MANY PEOPLE VOLUNTEER?**

Several studies have looked at volunteerism in Alberta. The 1981 and 1984 Public Opinion Surveys on Recreation, conducted by Alberta Recreation and Parks, found that 40% of Albertans were active as volunteers. A national Survey of Volunteer Activity, conducted by the Secretary of State in 1986/1987, also confirmed that 40% of Albertans participated in some type of formal, organized volunteer activity. In fact, Albertans were the most active volunteers, compared to all other provinces.

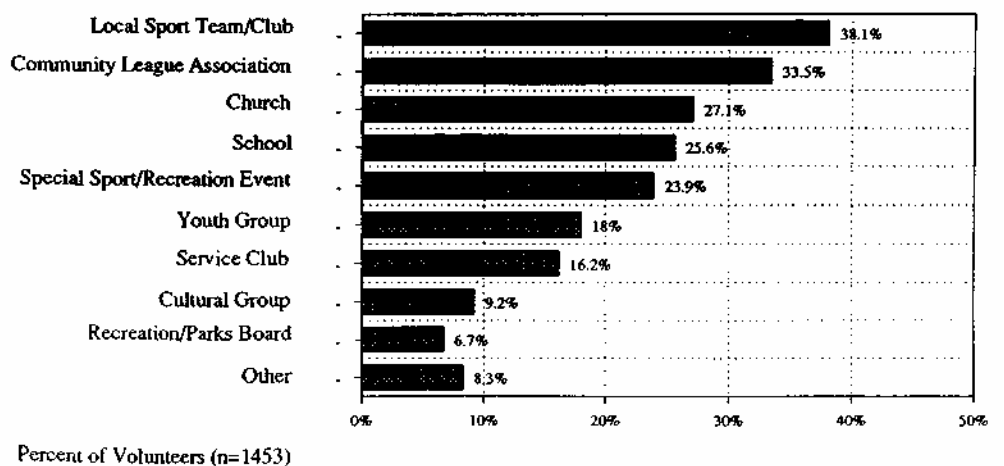
In 1988, the General Recreation Survey looked specifically at volunteerism in the recreation, sports, and parks sector. About 36% of the survey sample had worked as a volunteer in this field in the year prior to the survey.

**WHAT GROUPS DO THEY WORK WITH?**

The greatest proportion of recreation sector volunteers worked with local sports teams or clubs and community leagues or associations (see Figure 1). Over one-third of the volunteers were associated with these groups.

Close to one-quarter of the volunteers worked with church groups, school groups, and special sport or recreation events. Fewer volunteers were involved with cultural groups and recreation or parks boards.

**Figure 1** Proportion of Volunteers Working for Each Type of Group



The volunteers identified in this study were quite active. Over one-half (58%) worked with more than one type of organization. Over 10% worked with four or more volunteer groups.

## **WHAT SERVICES DO THEY PERFORM?**

Volunteers perform a wide variety of services. According to the 1988 General Recreation Survey, the majority of volunteers in the recreation, sports, and parks sector (70%) had worked as a general volunteer. Close to one-third had worked as a committee member (31%), while 28% had volunteered as a coach/manager/ instructor, or for an executive position.

The study of Calgary volunteers (Hillmo, 1986) provides more detailed information about the tremendous variety of services that volunteers perform. About 40% of the volunteers provided five or more services for their organization.

The most frequently mentioned services were:

- providing information;
- committee work;
- organizing/working/participating at events;
- promoting ideas/public relations;
- teaching/coaching; and,
- policy making/ developing recommendations.

Men and women differ to some extent in the types of volunteer activities they perform. In the General Recreation Survey, similar proportions of males and females worked as executive and committee members. Males were more likely than females to volunteer as coaches, managers, and instructors. Females were more likely to participate as general volunteer workers.

The Calgary study found that more women were involved in direct service to clients, public involvement, and office-technical work. A higher percentage of men were involved in decision-making and administrative roles (Hillmo, 1986).

## **HOW MUCH TIME DO VOLUNTEERS CONTRIBUTE?**

The General Recreation Survey asked volunteers to estimate the amount of time they contributed to volunteer work in an average week. This provides only a general estimate, since some volunteer work may involve regular weekly commit-

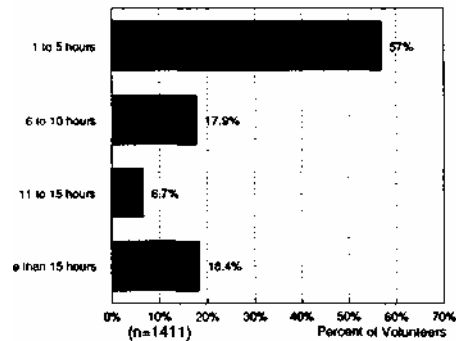


*Appropriate Use of Documents: Documents may be downloaded or printed (single copy only). You are free to edit the documents you download and use them for your own projects, but you should show your appreciation by providing credit to the originator of the document. You must not sell the document or make a profit from reproducing it. You must not copy, extract, summarize or distribute downloaded documents outside of your own organization in a manner which competes with or substitutes for the distribution of the database by the Leisure Information Network (LIN). <http://www.lin.ca>*

ment, while other work may be more intense over a shorter time period.

As Figure 2 shows, just over one-half of volunteers worked between one and five hours a week. One-quarter reported that they contributed more than 10 hours a week as a volunteer.

**Figure 2** Proportion of Volunteers Working Various Hours in a Week



Volunteers working with service clubs and recreation or parks boards tend to contribute the highest number of hours. Members of an executive and committee members tend to work more volunteer hours than do coaches/managers/instructors and general volunteer workers.

The amount of volunteer time contributed seems to increase with age. Although seniors are less likely than younger adults to volunteer, those who do are more active in terms of the amount of time they commit to volunteer work.

## WHO TENDS TO VOLUNTEER?

Volunteers come from all walks of life and all types of backgrounds. They bring a wide variety of skills and interests to their volunteer work. Research on volunteers has shown, however, that certain segments of the population have a greater tendency to volunteer than others. Although recruitment programs should be designed to attract these people, there is also a challenge to develop programs and recruitment strategies that will attract volunteers from other parts of the population.

The 1988 General Recreation Survey found that people who are most likely to volunteer in the recreation, sports, and parks sector have the following characteristics:

- are between the ages of 35 and 44 years;
- live in households with school-age children;



- have a university level of education;
- report household incomes levels over \$30,000/year; and,
- live outside of the large urban centres.

This volunteer profile is very similar to the volunteer profile obtained in the 1981 and 1984 Public Opinion Surveys on Recreation.

In contrast, there are some segments of the population that are not as likely to be volunteers. According to the General Recreation Survey, these people tend to have the following characteristics:

- are under the age of 25 or over 65 years of age;
- live in households with no school-age children or in single parent family households;
- have less than a high school education and household incomes under \$30,000/year; and,
- live in urban locations, particularly Calgary and Edmonton.

Although we have provided a summary profile of people most likely to be volunteers, further analysis of the General Recreation Survey data clearly shows the diversity of the volunteer work force. As shown in Table 1, the characteristics of volunteers attracted to various types of organizations are quite different.

Important factors which influence the type of group for which people volunteer include age, gender, and the presence of children in the household. For example, older volunteers are more likely than younger adults to favour church groups, cultural groups, and service clubs. Community leagues, school groups, and local sports teams or clubs tend to attract volunteers under 45 years of age and those with children in the household.

The volunteer activities of men and women appear to be quite different. Females are more involved with school groups, church groups, and cultural groups. Males have a greater tendency to volunteer for service clubs, local sports teams, or special sport or recreation events.

The presence of children in the household plays a particularly important role in shaping volunteer activity. The presence of pre-school age children, with their high demands on time, may make it difficult for parents to volunteer. On the other hand, having school-age children may open the doors to more volunteer opportunities and their activities may demand more volunteer commitment from their parents (Hillmo, 1986).

**Table 1**  
**Summary Profiles for Recreation Volunteer Groups**

| Type of Group                    | Most Likely Volunteer Characteristics  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Community Leagues or Association | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Between 35 and 44 years of age</li> <li>-From households consisting of a couple with children; school-age children present</li> <li>-Rural residents</li> <li>-Residents of the Calgary Region*, Stony Plain Region, and Edmonton</li> </ul> |
| Youth Groups                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-From single parent family households or households consisting of a couple with children;</li> <li>-Rural residents</li> </ul>  |
| School Groups                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-35 to 44 year age range; under 25 years</li> <li>-Females</li> <li>-Couples with children; single parent</li> </ul>  |
| Church Groups                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Adults 65 years or older</li> <li>-Females</li> <li>-Income levels under \$30,001 /year</li> <li>-Rural residents</li> <li>-Residents of Lethbridge, Calgary*, Stony Plain &amp; St. Paul regions.</li> </ul>                                |



### Cultural Groups

- 45 years of age or older
- Females
- Households with no children

### Service Clubs

- 45 years of age or older
- Males
- Households with no children
- Residents of Red Deer, St. Paul, and Calgary\* Regions

### Local Sports Teams and Clubs

- Under 45 years of age
- Males
- From households consisting of a couple with children
- High school or technical-vocational education
- Household incomes of \$30,001 or greater
- Residents of St. Paul, High Prairie, and Calgary\* Regions.

### Recreation or Parks Boards

- No distinguishing socio-demographic characteristics.

### Special Sports or Recreation Events

- Under 45 years of age
- Males
- Post secondary levels of education
- Income over \$30,000/year

\* This does not include the City of Calgary.

## WHY DO PEOPLE VOLUNTEER?

Not only are people attracted to different types of volunteer organizations, but they may have very diverse reasons for participating as volunteers. In fact, the Calgary study found that the majority of people identified between three and nine reasons why they volunteered.



*Appropriate Use of Documents: Documents may be downloaded or printed (single copy only). You are free to edit the documents you download and use them for your own projects, but you should show your appreciation by providing credit to the originator of the document. You must not sell the document or make a profit from reproducing it. You must not copy, extract, summarize or distribute downloaded documents outside of your own organization in a manner which competes with or substitutes for the distribution of the database by the Leisure Information Network (LIN). <http://www.lin.ca>*



It is important to understand what volunteers expect from their participation. To retain and attract volunteers, volunteer programs must consider the needs of the volunteers as well as those of the volunteer organization.

Many volunteers contribute their time and skills for altruistic reasons to help others and to help the community. However, there are many other reasons for volunteering, such as social reasons, personal gain, and to satisfy needs that are not met in other areas of life (Bharadia, 1986).

The Calgary study identified the most common reasons why volunteers contribute their time (Bharadia, 1986). Ranked in order of importance, these are:

- Personal satisfaction and enrichment
- Helping others
- Believing in the organization's goals, values
- Being able to use skills and experience
- Learning new skills/being in a stimulating new environment
- Doing interesting work
- Feeling useful and needed
- Having fun
- Improving the neighborhood or community.

An interesting finding of the study was that these reasons differed markedly for men and women, and for people of various ages. For example, personal development (such as learning skills and making job-related contacts) was particularly important for females. Gaining recognition and involvement in community decision-making were especially important for males. Many young adults were motivated by job-related reasons, such as learning new skills and making job-related contacts. Having fun was also important for young volunteers. Companionship, occupying spare time, and feeling useful and needed were reasons for volunteering identified by senior adults. Recognizing the different needs of volunteers will help agencies to define their volunteer tasks and match volunteers to appropriate jobs. This should increase volunteer satisfaction and commitment, and reduce volunteer dropout and turnover.

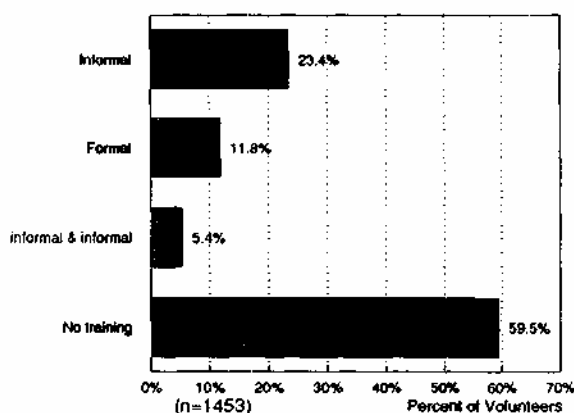


## VOLUNTEER TRAINING

Training is an important aspect of the volunteer experience. In fact, for Calgary volunteers, the provision of training was significantly related to satisfaction with volunteer work (Olstad, 1986).

The 1988 General Recreation Survey found that about 40% of volunteers in the recreation, sports, and parks sector had received some type of training (see Figure 3). This was mainly informal or on-the-job training. Only 17% had received any formal training or courses.

**Figure 3** Types of Volunteer Training



Volunteers working with cultural groups, special sport or recreation events, and school groups were most likely to receive some form of training. Training was reported less often by volunteers working with community leagues/associations, service clubs, and local sports teams or clubs.

## IMPLICATIONS

Volunteers are playing an increasingly important role in recreation and leisure services. The information in this bulletin should be of interest to organizations concerned with attracting and retaining satisfied and productive volunteers for their programs.

The bulletin has described the characteristics of people most likely to volunteer for various types of recreation, sports, and parks organizations. The volunteer make-up of these organizations may vary from community to community. Have you identified the characteristics of volunteers working for your



*Appropriate Use of Documents: Documents may be downloaded or printed (single copy only). You are free to edit the documents you download and use them for your own projects, but you should show your appreciation by providing credit to the originator of the document. You must not sell the document or make a profit from reproducing it. You must not copy, extract, summarize or distribute downloaded documents outside of your own organization in a manner which competes with or substitutes for the distribution of the database by the Leisure Information Network (LIN). <http://www.lin.ca>*

organization? Do you have a clear idea of the segments of your community that are not being reached through your present recruitment efforts?

Volunteers have a variety of needs and reasons for volunteering. Do you encourage volunteers by telling them about the types of benefits they might receive from their volunteer involvement, such as learning new skills, having fun, or meeting new people? Are you aware of the characteristics and skills of your volunteers? Do you have a good understanding of the volunteer skills that your organization requires? How do you try to match volunteers with appropriate tasks? Are volunteers recognized for their contributions?

Some of the most important sources of volunteers are parents of participating children, former participants in an activity, and excited volunteers who bring in friends and acquaintances. Do you have any ways of encouraging volunteers to bring friends into your organization? Training is becoming increasingly important for volunteers, for volunteer managers, and for staff dealing with volunteers. There are numerous training opportunities available in Alberta. The Skills Program, administered by Alberta Recreation and Parks, has been operating for four years, and on average, has conducted about 100 training seminars per year. Workshops offered in this series include: Short and Long Term Planning; Marketing; Leadership; Volunteers Working Together; Financial Management; and Time Management. Alberta Recreation and Parks' brochure, "Volunteer Board Training Opportunities in Alberta" outlines some of the leadership training programs available in Alberta. Blue Lake Center Leadership Courses and Alberta Recreation and Parks Association programs are available.

Do you help your volunteers find appropriate training programs? Are you able to provide any financial assistance for those interested in training? Do you assist volunteer groups in your community to share their resources, experiences, and training?

Volunteers are playing an increasingly important role in recreation, sports, and parks organizations. The information in this bulletin provides agencies with an understanding of the volunteer work force, and points out some important things to consider in developing an effective volunteer management program.

## REFERENCES

Alberta Recreation and Parks. 1988. "Volunteer Management Survey: Leadership Strategy". Prepared by Lou Skinner and Marg Mitsui.



*Appropriate Use of Documents: Documents may be downloaded or printed (single copy only). You are free to edit the documents you download and use them for your own projects, but you should show your appreciation by providing credit to the originator of the document. You must not sell the document or make a profit from reproducing it. You must not copy, extract, summarize or distribute downloaded documents outside of your own organization in a manner which competes with or substitutes for the distribution of the database by the Leisure Information Network (LIN). <http://www.lin.ca>*

Alberta Recreation and Parks. 1989. "Volunteerism: An Analysis of Data from the 1988 General Recreation Survey". Prepared by E. Dunn Research and Consulting Services, Edmonton.

Bharadia, Geeta. 1986. "Why do People Volunteer?". Volunteers and Volunteerism in Calgary Series. Research Unit for Public Policy Studies, University of Calgary.

Government of Canada. 1988. "Volunteerism Alive and Well in Canada". News Release, May 30, 1988, Ottawa.

Harvie, Janet. 1986. "The Participation of Women in The Voluntary Sector". Volunteers and Volunteerism in Calgary Series. Research Unit for Public Policy Studies, University of Calgary.

Hillmo, Janice. 1986. "The Nature of Volunteers and Volunteerism in the Calgary Setting". Volunteers and Volunteerism in Calgary Series. Research Unit for Public Policy Studies, University of Calgary.

Olstad, Marva. 1986. "Determinants of Satisfaction with Volunteer Work". Volunteers and Volunteerism in Calgary Series. Research Unit for Public Policy Studies, University of Calgary.

## **FUTURE ISSUES**

The next issue of *Look at Leisure* will focus on reasons for non-participation in recreation activities.

## **FURTHER INFORMATION**

From time to time, special analyses of the General Recreation Survey data are carried out. If you have any analysis requests, please let us know. We may be able to help. We can also provide copies of the questionnaire used in the survey.

For further information, or to have your mailing address changed, please contact:

J.H. (Chip) Ross Alberta  
Recreation and Parks 10405  
Jasper Avenue Edmonton,  
Alberta  
T5J 3N4  
Phone: (403) 427-2968



*Appropriate Use of Documents: Documents may be downloaded or printed (single copy only). You are free to edit the documents you download and use them for your own projects, but you should show your appreciation by providing credit to the originator of the document. You must not sell the document or make a profit from reproducing it. You must not copy, extract, summarize or distribute downloaded documents outside of your own organization in a manner which competes with or substitutes for the distribution of the database by the Leisure Information Network (LIN). <http://www.lin.ca>*