
Look at Leisure #35: Voluntarism in the Recreation Sector

Voluntarism is a vital aspect of community life in Alberta. Volunteers play a role in the delivery of a wide range of services, in administration, community planning and decision-making. This bulletin discusses several aspects of voluntarism. Much of the information is based on the 1988 and 1992 Recreation Surveys, which specifically examined voluntarism in the recreation, sports, and parks sectors.

Introduction

Voluntarism 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 satisfied and productive volunteers is a challenge for 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 Recreation Surveys, conducted by Alberta government researchers, this bulletin presents research findings from other sources. One of these 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 of the 1992 Survey discussed in this bulletin are:

- ⊙ About 32% of the survey respondents had worked as a volunteer in the recreation, sports, or parks sector in the previous year. This is down from 36% in 1988.
- ⊙ 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 38% of volunteers (unchanged from 1988) had received some form of training, but this was mainly informal/on-the-job.
- ⊙ On the average, volunteers spent just over 7 hours per week doing volunteer work.

How Many Volunteer?

Several studies have looked at voluntarism 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 voluntarism 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. Our 1992 survey shows that this figure has now fallen to 32%.

Groups Helped?

The greatest proportion of recreation sector volunteers worked with local sports teams or clubs and community leagues or associations. 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.

The volunteers identified in this study were quite active. Over one-half (55% as opposed to 58% in 1988) worked with more than one type of organization. Almost 13% (up from 10% in '88) worked with four or more volunteer groups.

Services Performed?

Volunteers perform a wide variety of services. According to the Recreation Surveys, the majority of volunteers in the recreation, sports, and parks sector (70%) work as general volunteers. Close to one-third work as committee members (31% and 30%), while just less (28% and 27%) 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).

Time Spent Volunteering

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

Over one-half of volunteers worked between one and five hours a week. More than one-quarter reported that they contributed more than 10 hours a week as a volunteer.

Table 1 shows the number of hours worked by volunteers working with each of the different groups identified. Those involved with service clubs and recreation or parks boards tend to contribute the highest number of hours. Members of an executive and committee tend to work more volunteer hours than do coaches/managers/instructors and general volunteer workers.

Table 1 - Number Of Volunteer Hours Worked

Group	Hours			
	1-5	6-10	11-15	15+
Conservation, Parks, Ecology	46.5	26.3	6.1	21.1
Community League/ Association	49.3	18.6	11.7	20.2
Youth Group	45.9	20.9	10.4	22.5
School	53.4	17.1	8.1	21.2
Church	53.6	18.1	7.9	20.4
Cultural Group	54.2	14.1	12.7	18.3
Service Club	53.6	14.9	11.5	19.5
Local Sport Team or Club	56.5	16.7	9.2	17.4
Recreation/Parks Board	40.0	20.8	12.8	26.4
Special Sport/ Recreation Event	51.8	16.2	9.7	22.0

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 Volunteers?

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 income 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;
- ⊙ are in single parent family households;
- ⊙ have less than a high school education and household incomes under \$30,000/year;
- ⊙ live in urban locations.

*This point is well illustrated by Table 2 which shows for example, that although Calgary respondents make up 30.5% of the sample they account for only 23.9% of the volunteers. The 'Other' centres, on the other hand, account for far more than their share of volunteers.

Table 2 - Percentage Of Respondents From Various Centres

Centre	Total Sample	Volunteer Sample
Calgary	30.5	23.9
Edmonton	24.0	20.6
Lethbridge	2.8	2.5
Medicine Hat	2.2	2.0
Red Deer	2.3	2.4
Sherwood Park	1.4	1.7
St. Albert	1.6	1.5
Other	35.3	45.4

Although we have provided a summary profile of people most likely to be volunteers, further analysis of the Recreation Survey data clearly shows the diversity of the volunteer work force. As shown in Table 3, 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.

Table 3 - Profiles For Volunteer Groups

Type of Group

- ⊙ Most Likely Characteristics

Community Leagues or Associations

- ⊙ Between 35 and 44 years of age
- ⊙ From households consisting of couples with children; school-age children present

Youth Groups

- ⊙ From single parent family households or those of a couple with children;
- ⊙ Rural residents

School Groups

- ⊙ 35 to 44 year age range; under 25 years
- ⊙ Females, couples with children;
- ⊙ Single parent families.

Church Groups

- ⊙ Adults 65 years or older
- ⊙ Females
- ⊙ Income levels under \$30,001/year

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

Local Sports Teams and Clubs

- ⊙ Under 45 years of age
- ⊙ Males
- ⊙ From households of a couple with children
- ⊙ High school or technical/vocational
- ⊙ Household incomes of \$30,001 or greater

Recreation or Parks Boards

- ⊙ No distinguishing characteristics.

Special Sports or Recreation Events

- ⊙ Under 45 years of age
- ⊙ Males
- ⊙ Post secondary levels of education
- ⊙ Income over \$30,001/year

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).

Why Volunteer?

Not only are people attracted to different types of volunteer organizations, but also 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.

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 and 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 neighbourhood 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. This was mainly informal or on-the-job training. Only 17% had received any formal training or courses.

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.

This 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 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.

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.

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