
A Look at Leisure #43: 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, administration, community planning and decision-making. This bulletin discusses several aspects of voluntarism. Much of the information is based on the 1992, 1996 and 2000 Alberta Recreation Surveys, which specifically examined voluntarism in the recreation, sports, culture and parks sectors.

Introduction

Many Canadians contribute their time to volunteer events, activities and organizations. In particular, voluntarism is extremely important to recreation, sports, culture and parks organizations. The recreation, sports, culture and parks volunteers vary in both time and responsibility. Many organizations rely on volunteers for special events and tournaments, while others rely on them for day-to-day operations. Demands on volunteer time and skills are increasing, and has created a need to better understand training and recruitment methods. The information in this bulletin is intended to assist agencies in understanding who the volunteers are, as well as insight into their needs.

This bulletin will deal 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 Alberta Recreation Surveys, research findings from other sources are included. One source is a study of Canadian and Albertan volunteers, undertaken through the National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating by the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy, Statistics Canada, and Volunteer Canada. The study provides important information about the services people perform and why they volunteer those services.

Highlights

The following are highlights from the 2000 Survey:

- About 44% of survey respondents worked as a volunteer. This is up from 37% in 1996 and from 32% in 1992.

- Local sports teams/clubs and community leagues/associations attracted the highest proportion of volunteers.
- The majority of the volunteer sample worked as general volunteers, followed by those working as a committee member or as a coach/manager.
- Over half of surveyed volunteers contributed 1-5 hours a week, and another quarter contributed more than 10 hours per week.
- Volunteers represent a wide cross-section of the population.

How Many Volunteer?

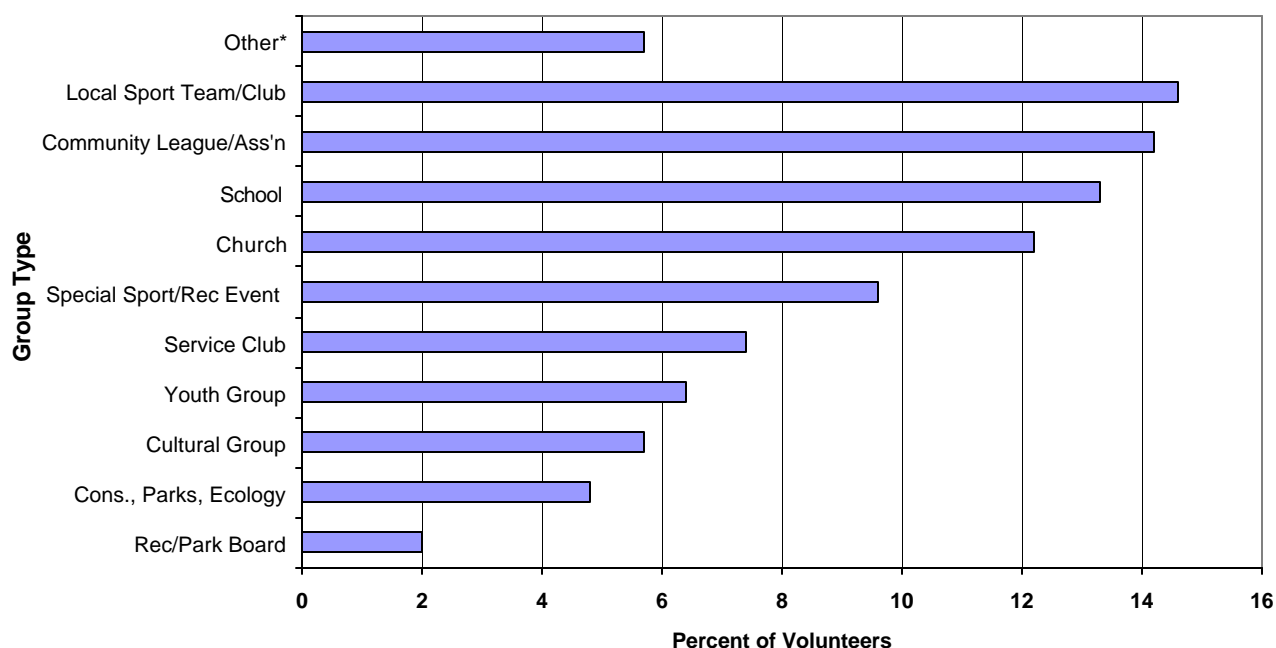
Several studies have looked at voluntarism in Canada. In a 1997 National Survey by Statistics Canada it was reported that approximately 7.5 million Canadians were involved in volunteerism between 1996 and 1997. The survey also noted this had increased by 2.2 million since 1987. *"This represents an increase of 40% in the absolute number of volunteers since 1987, which compared to a 20% increase in the population of the country over the same period of time."* (Statistics Canada, 1998) The 1997 National study found that 40% of Albertans had volunteered, providing the second highest volunteer rate for all Canadian provinces. (Greenberg, 1997)

The 2000 Alberta Recreation Survey looked specifically at voluntarism in the recreation, sports, culture and parks areas in Alberta. This study found that 44% of Albertans participated in some type of formal, organized, volunteer activity. This is an increase from the 1996 Alberta Recreation Survey in which 37% of the survey sample reported being a volunteer in these areas.

What Groups are Helped?

The greatest proportion of recreation volunteers worked with local sports teams or clubs, and community leagues or associations (see Figure 1). Almost one-third of the volunteers were associated with such groups. Another third worked with church groups, school groups, and special sport or recreation events. Fewer volunteers worked with

Figure 1 - Volunteers by Group Type



* Other includes nursing home/hospital, seniors' centre/club, charitable organizations, Canadian health organizations, and more.

cultural groups, service clubs, youth groups, conservation, parks, ecology groups or recreation/parks boards.

Volunteer activity continued to increase from 1996. Close to two-thirds of volunteers worked with more than one type of organization (63% in 2000, compared to 59% in 1996). The number of volunteers participating in more than four organizations remained consistent at 14% from 1996 to 2000.

Services Performed

Volunteers perform a wide variety of services. According to the Alberta Recreation Survey, the majority of volunteers in the recreation, sports, culture and parks sectors work as general volunteers (80%). One-third volunteered as committee members and around one-quarter worked as an executive or as a coach/manager.

The 1997 Statistics Canada study provides more detailed information about the variety of services provided by Canadian volunteers. Specific activities in which Canadian volunteers worked in were:

- organizing or supervising events
- canvassing, campaigning, fundraising
- sitting as a board member
- office work

- providing information
- teaching/coaching
- providing care or support
- participating in a self-help group
- maintenance/repair
- collecting/serving/delivering food

Men and women tend to differ in the types of volunteer activities they perform. According to the 1997 Statistics Canada survey women were more likely to canvass/campaign or fundraise, provide care or support, and collect/serve or deliver food. Men were more likely to teach/coach for an organization, maintain/repair or build facilities, and drive for an organization. In the Alberta Recreation Survey, more females than males worked as general volunteers, or volunteered as a committee member. Males were more likely than females to volunteer as a coach/manager, or as an executive.

Time Spent Volunteering

The Alberta Recreation Survey reported on the average weekly amount of time volunteers contributed to volunteer work. These findings are estimates; however, as some volunteer work involves regular commitment, while other work may be done over a short period of time. Over one-half of volunteers contributed between one and five

hours a week (see Figure 2). Just over 25% of volunteers said they contributed more than 10 hours a week as a volunteer.

Table 1 shows the number of hours worked by volunteers in each of the different volunteer groups. Volunteers to recreation/parks boards or cultural groups provided the highest number of hours. Those volunteering as an executive or as a committee member tended to contribute more hours, than those volunteering as coach/manager or as general volunteer workers.

In the 1997 national volunteer study, on average, a single Alberta volunteer contributed 146 hours per year, which is slightly less than the national average of 149 hours per year. In total, Albertans contributed 128 million hours in 1997 to volunteer activities. (Greenberg, 1997)

Who Volunteers?

Volunteers come from all areas of society, bringing with them a variety of interests and skills. However, certain parts of the population are more likely to volunteer in general depending on the volunteer sector and position.

The 2000 Alberta Recreation Survey found that people who are most likely to volunteer in the recreation, sports, culture and parks sector have the following characteristics:

- are between the ages of 45 and 64 years (41%)
- live in households of a couple with children (48%)

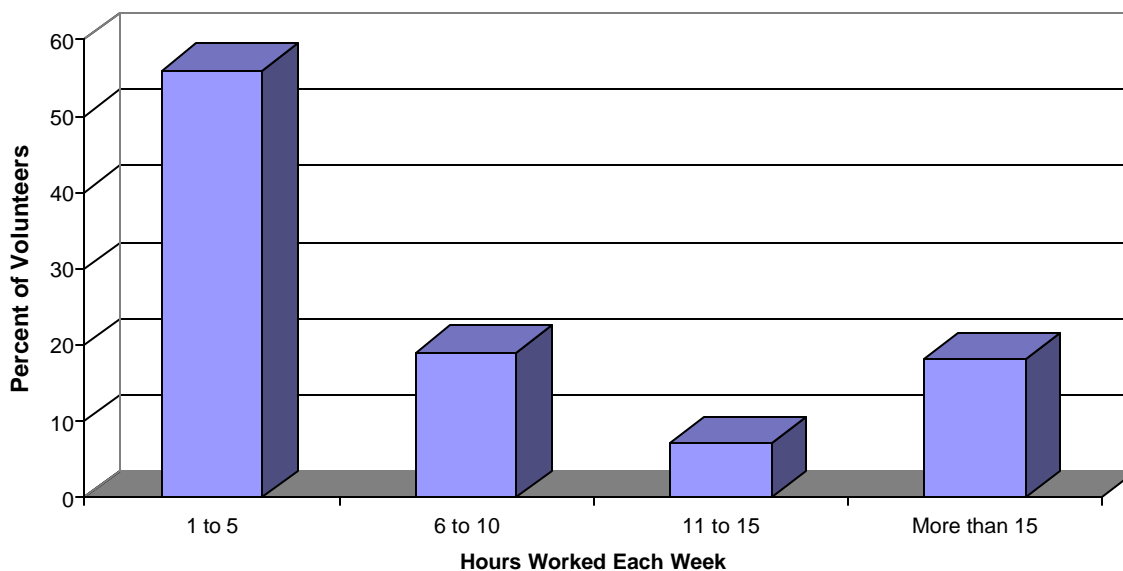
Table 1: Number of Volunteer Hours Worked

Volunteer Group	Hours			
	1-5	6-10	11-15	15+
Conservation, Parks Ecology	59	12	9	21
Comm. League/Ass'n	50	21	7	21
Youth Group	55	16	11	19
School	55	21	6	19
Church	53	21	7	19
Cultural Group	47	20	7	27
Service Club	46	22	8	24
Local Sport Team/Club	52	19	10	20
Recreation/Parks Board	44	17	9	30
Special Sport/Rec Events	49	20	9	23

- have a university level of education (38%)
- earn household incomes of more than \$30,000 (83%)
- live in smaller communities and rural areas

Household type is a useful analytical tool from the Alberta Recreation Survey data. Households are grouped according to the age characteristics of their members, producing groups with different recreation preferences and practices. Accordingly, the

Figure 2 - Volunteer Hours Worked



households of the recreation studies have been classified as follows:

Household Type 1 is composed of those households in which the youngest members are under 5 years of age.

Household Type 2 is composed of those households in which the youngest members are between 5 and 19 years of age.

Household Type 3 is composed of those households in which the youngest members are between 20 and 29 years of age.

Household Type 4 is composed of those households in which the youngest members are between 30 and 49 years of age.

Household Type 5 is composed of those households in which the youngest members are between 50 and 64 years of age.

Household Type 6 is composed of those households in which all members are over 65 years of age.

When voluntarism is examined according to household type the impact of children becomes an important determinant. As seen in Table 2, households with children provide more volunteers than those without children.

Table 2 – Percentage of Respondents Who Volunteer

Household Type	Total Sample	Volunteer Sample
1	11.7	11.9
2	29.4	38.1
3	14.0	11.4
4	14.8	11.3
5	17.7	17.1
6	12.5	10.2

There are also some segments of the population that are less likely to volunteer. According to the 2000 Alberta Recreation Survey, those least likely to volunteer:

- are less than 34 years of age
- live in households with 2 or more related adults or are single
- have a household income of less than \$30,000
- live in large urban centres

Table 3 shows the percentage of respondents from various centres that volunteer. The two largest centres, Calgary and Edmonton, make up 68% of the sample population, and combined make up 65% of the volunteer population. By contrast, smaller communities such as Red Deer and Sherwood Park make up 5% of the total sample, but 6% of the total volunteer sample. Additionally, those 'Other' centres, which are comprised of rural communities, make up 15% of the total sample, and 18% of the total volunteer sample.

Table 3 – Percentage of Respondents From Various Centres

Centre	Total Sample	Volunteer Sample
Calgary	35.5	35.5
Edmonton	32.7	31.1
Lethbridge	7.8	7.0
Medicine Hat	2.1	1.8
Red Deer	2.7	3.2
Sherwood Park	2.3	2.7
St. Albert	2.3	2.3
Other	14.6	18.4

The following is a summary profile of those people who are most likely to volunteer. As shown in Table 4, specific volunteer groups attract a specific type of volunteer.

Table 4 – Profiles For Volunteer Groups

Conservation, Parks, Ecology, etc.

- males
- 45-64 age group
- university level education

Community Leagues or Associations

- males
- couples with no children and single parent families
- those living in rural areas

Youth Groups

- 35-44 years of age
- couples with children
- youngest household members 5 to 19 years of age

School Groups

- females
- youngest households of under 5 years to 19 years of age
- couples with children and single parent families
- household income levels of less than \$10,000

Church Groups

- youngest household members 50 and older
- household income levels of less than \$10,000 to \$50,000
- college education
- 65 years and older

Cultural Groups

- females
- college level of education
- 45-64 years of age
- couples with no children

Service Clubs

- males
- youngest members aged 65 and older
- households of 2 or more related adults

Local Sports Teams and Clubs

- males
- small communities or rural areas

Recreation or Parks Boards

- males 35-64 years of age
- rural areas

Special Sport or Recreation Events

- college level of education
- households of 2 or more related adults
- households with youngest members from 19 to 29 years of age

Age, gender, and the presence of children in a household help to determine the type of group for which people volunteer. For example, school groups and youth groups attract volunteers from households with children. Older volunteers are more likely to volunteer with church groups and service clubs. Those volunteers aged 19-29 are attracted to special sport or recreation events.

Choices of volunteer activities differ for men and women. Females are involved in school and cultural groups. Males tend to be involved in recreation/parks boards, local sport teams and clubs, service clubs, and community leagues/associations.

Volunteer Canada discovered the volunteer rate among 15-24 year olds almost doubled between 1987 and 1997. Findings also indicate that one in four Canadian volunteers come from a cultural background other than English or French. (Volunteer Canada, 1997)

Why Volunteer?

There are a variety of motivations to volunteering. Volunteers can be motivated to volunteer for altruistic or egoistic reasons:

- altruistic motivations – the desire to help others
- egoistic motivations – relate to specific rewards

Volunteers can also be motivated by:

- **solidary** – includes to broaden horizons, to gain practical experience, to work with different people, and to feel a part of the community.
- **purposive** – includes to help make an event a success, to be involved in the organization, to put something back into the community, and to use skills where they are needed.
- **commitments and external traditions** – includes most people in the community volunteering, a desire to continue a family tradition, a friend or relative is involved, and more free time.

(Johnston, Twynam, and Farrell, 1999-2000)

The top motivations Canadians have for volunteering include:

- to help a cause in which they personally believe
 - to use their skills and experiences
 - because they have been personally affected or know someone who has been affected by the cause
 - to explore their own strengths
 - to fulfill religious obligations or beliefs
 - because their friends volunteer
 - to improve their job opportunities
- (Statistics Canada, 1998)

The reasons for volunteering differed for men and women. Women are more likely to volunteer to explore their own strengths, while men are more likely to volunteer to use their skills/experiences, and because their friends volunteer. (Centre for Philanthropy, 2000)

Volunteers can also derive benefits from volunteering. The 2000 Survey of Voluntary Activity and Giving showed that volunteers value their contribution as an important element in their lives, allowing them to learn new skills and to interact with other volunteers. In addition, Volunteer Canada says voluntary organizations are beneficial to volunteers in that they provide training in six general areas:

- interpersonal skills
- communication skills
- organizational and managerial skills
- fundraising skills
- technical skills
- enhanced knowledge of health, women's issues, political questions, criminal justice, and the environment.

(Centre for Philanthropy, 2000)

Volunteer Training

Increasing numbers of volunteers with increasing responsibilities make training an important aspect of volunteering.

For the volunteer, training is an important benefit to their contribution. Volunteering allows people to gain skills, expertise, and training that can help them in the paid work force. Volunteering is one means of helping Albertans gain employment by helping them to:

- get more work experience to put on their resume
- show off the skills they already have
- learn new skills
- meet people and make connections that may help to get work
- try out career ideas by working in fields that interest them
- demonstrate their maturity to future employers (Alberta Advanced Education and Career Development, 1998)

Volunteer Barriers

The Giving and Volunteering in Alberta study identified barriers given by respondents when asked why they do not volunteer. These barriers include:

- lack of extra time (73%)
- unwilling to make a year-round commitment (47%)
- because they had not been personally asked (33%)
- did not know how to become involved (11%) (Greenberg, 1997)

By taking these barriers into account, voluntarism in the recreation, sports, culture and parks sectors can be increased.

Implications

Volunteer Canada has laid out a series of questions potential volunteers should ask themselves before choosing to volunteer. It is important for you to provide information that makes it easier for potential volunteers to answer these questions, and to get people interested in volunteering for recreation, sports, culture and parks services. Questions for potential volunteers include:

- What kind of a time commitment am I willing to make?
- Would I like to volunteer with other people or by myself?
- Would I like to volunteer from my home or at an organization?

- If away from home, where is the best location for me?
- Do I have specific skills or talents to share?
- Would I like to develop a specific skill?

Potential volunteers can be attracted by keeping them informed on the variety of volunteer positions, the expected time requirements and the locations for volunteering, the skills needed, and the skills to be learned.

It is also important for the recreation and leisure agency to recognize the barriers that are faced by potential volunteers. Recognition of these barriers is important for improving volunteer recruitment strategies. For example, Albertans noted lack of time, and not being asked, as reasons for not volunteering. Agencies can address these concerns by offering flexible volunteer opportunities, and most importantly, by simply asking Albertans to volunteer their time to the recreation, sports, culture and park sectors. (Greenberg, 1997) Finally, stressing the benefits to volunteers may be helpful in getting past the barriers, and to recruiting volunteers.

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