
Look at Leisure #38: 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, 1992 and 1996 Recreation Surveys, which specifically examined voluntarism in the recreation, sports, and parks sectors.

Introduction

Voluntarism continues to be a very important topic in the recreation, sports, and parks field. Many organizations rely on volunteers for day-to-day operation. They are essential for special sports and recreation events such as tournaments and games. Volunteers are becoming more sophisticated. There are also more demands on 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, 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 study provides important information about the services people perform and why they volunteer.

Highlights

Some of the highlights of the 1996 Survey discussed in this bulletin are:

- About 37% of the survey respondents had worked as a volunteer in the previous year. This is up from 36% in 1988 and 32% in 1992.
- 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 36% of volunteers (almost unchanged from 1988 and 1992) had received some form of training, but this was mainly informal/on-the-job.
- On the average, volunteers spent about 6.5 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 showed that this figure had fallen to 32%, but it has now rebounded to just over 37%.

What Groups are Helped?

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.

The volunteers identified in this study were quite active. Over one-half (59% as opposed to 55% in 1992 and 58% in 1988) worked with more than one type of organization. In 1992 almost 13% (up from 10% in 1988) worked with four or more volunteer groups. In 1996 this figure was 14%.

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 (76%) work as general volunteers. Close to one-third work as committee members (34%), while just less (25%) had volunteered as a coach/manager/trainer, 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.

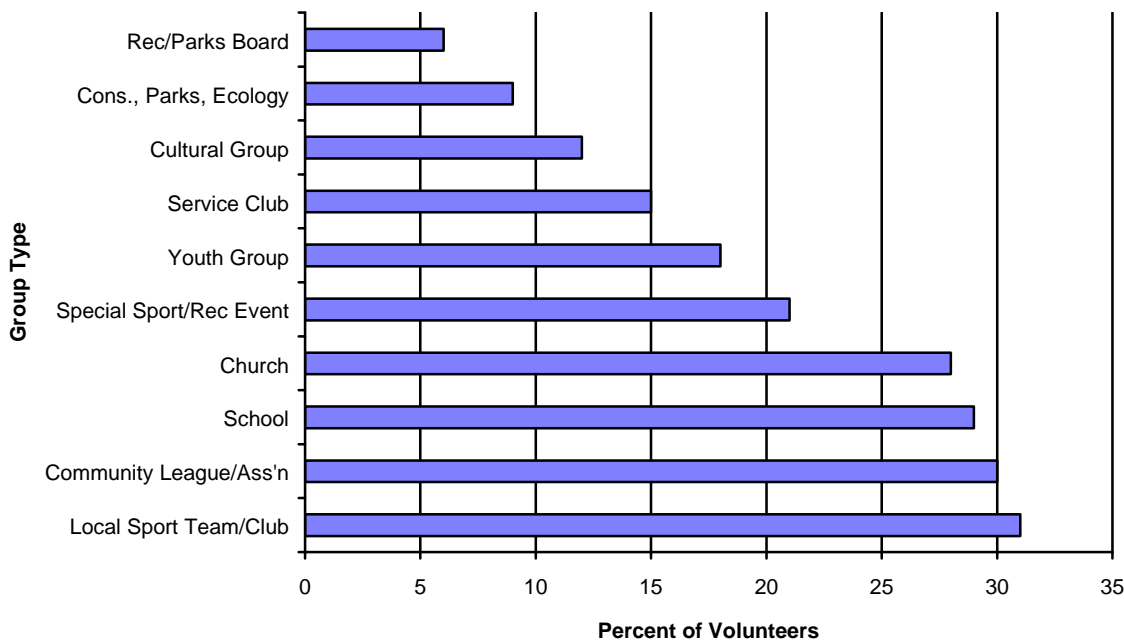
The most frequently mentioned services were:

- 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 *Alberta 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).

Figure 1 - Volunteers by Group Type



Time Spent Volunteering

The *Alberta 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. As Figure 2 shows, 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 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 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 1996 *Alberta 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 children (50%);
- have a university level of education (37%);
- earn household incomes over \$30,000 (75%);
- and,
- live outside of the large urban centres.

Figure 2 - Volunteer Hours Worked

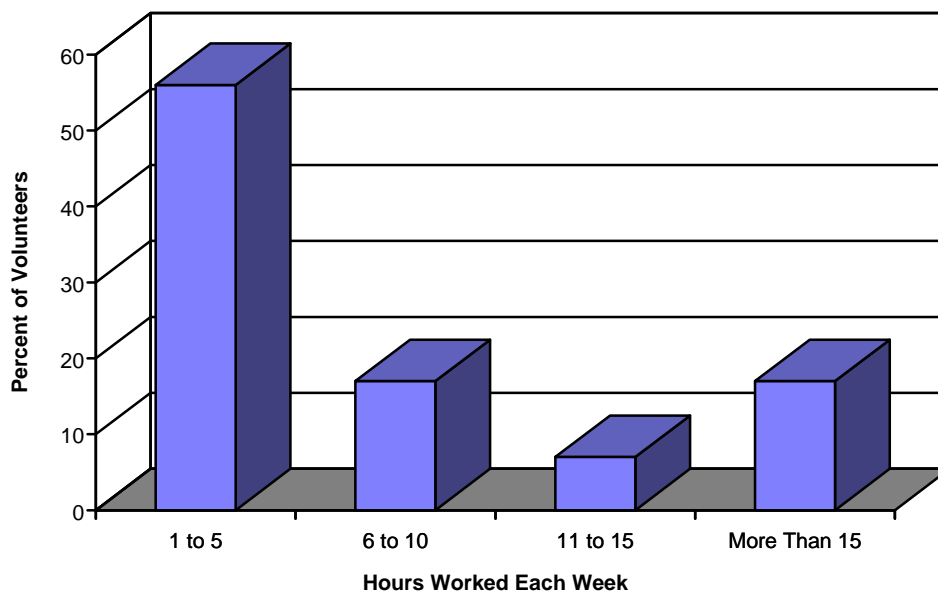


Table 1: Number of Volunteer Hours Worked

	Hours			
	1-5	6-10	11-15	15+
Conservation, Parks				
Ecology	52	19	6	8
Comm. League/ Association	52	19	7	17
Youth Group	50	18	8	20
School	54	18	8	17
Church	55	16	8	16
Cultural Group	51	14	5	22
Service Club	49	16	10	19
Local Sport Team/ Club	56	17	8	15
Recreation/Parks Board	37	24	9	21
Special Sport/ Recreation Events	48	20	8	19

Demographers (most recently Foot) have noted that the structure of Canadian families is changing rapidly. Although at present much is being made of the "baby boomers" progress through society, and the effects of their aging, it is clear that several other identifiable groups are also changing markedly.

During the course of the Recreation Surveys the concept of Household Type emerged as a useful analytical tool in both a practical and theoretical sense. Households can be grouped according to the age characteristics of their members, yielding groups which (as will be shown) have quite characteristic recreation preferences and practices. Accordingly, the households of the Recreation studies have been classified as follows:

Household Type 1 is composed of those households having no members in the 18 to 29 age group. (In the 1996 survey, the age limits were 20 to 29).

Household Type 2 is composed of households in which the youngest members are under 6 years of age.

Household Type 3 is composed of those households in which the youngest members are between 6 and 17 years of age.

Household Type 4 is composed of those households in which the youngest members are between 18 and 24 years of age.

Household Type 5 is composed of those households in which the youngest members are between 30 and 49 years of age.

Household Type 6 is composed of those households in which the youngest members are between 50 and 64 years of age.

Household Type 7 is composed of those households in which all members are over 65 years of age.

When voluntarism is examined according to household type the effect of children on volunteering immediately becomes evident. As seen in Table 2, those households with children contribute many more volunteers than one would expect on the basis of their numbers alone.

Table 2: Percentage Of Respondents Who Volunteer

Household Type	Total Sample	Volunteer Sample
1	6.3	5.3
2	13.1	13.6
3	27.6	37.7
4	9.0	7.7
5	16.1	12.9
6	12.8	10.9
7	12.2	10.2

This volunteer profile is very similar to the volunteer profile obtained in the 1981, 1984 and 1992 Surveys on Recreation.

In contrast, there are some segments of the population that are not as likely to be volunteers. According to the Recreation Survey, these

- 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
- household incomes under \$30,000 per year; and,
- live in urban locations

This point is well illustrated by Table 3 which shows for example, that although Calgary respondents make up 40.6% of the sample they account for only 36.7% of the volunteers. The 'Other' centres, on the other hand, account for more than their share of volunteers. When the data are analyzed by community size it is found that Calgary and Edmonton account for 64% of the sample but only 59% of the volunteers. Centres of less than 6,000 people provide 19% of the volunteers with only 16% of the population. When the data are examined regionally few differences are evident.

Table 3: Percentage Of Respondents From Various Centres.

Centre	Total Sample	Volunteer Sample
Calgary	40.6	36.7
Edmonton	22.9	22.1
Lethbridge	3.8	4.5
Medicine Hat	3.5	3.2
Red Deer	2.6	2.6
Sherwood Park	1.2	1.4
St. Albert	1.5	1.6
Other	33.9	37.9

Although we have provided a summary profile of people most likely to be volunteers, further analysis of the data shows the diversity of the volunteer work force. As shown in Table 4, 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. Older volunteers are more likely to favour church groups, cultural groups, and service clubs. Community leagues, school groups, and local sports teams or clubs attract volunteers under 45 years of age and those with children in the household.

The volunteer activities of men and women are 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. 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 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.

Table 4: Profiles For Volunteer Groups

Conservation, Parks, Ecology

- ⊙ males
- ⊙ 55-65 age group
- ⊙ university education

Community Leagues or Associations

- ⊙ 35-44 years of age
- ⊙ household type 3
- ⊙ rural residents

Youth Groups

- ⊙ 35-45 years of age
- ⊙ university education
- ⊙ household type 3
- ⊙ rural residents

School Groups

- ⊙ 35-44 years of age
- ⊙ university training
- ⊙ females
- ⊙ couples with children
- ⊙ single parent families.

Church Groups

- ⊙ adults 65 years or older
- ⊙ females
- ⊙ income levels under \$30,001/year
- ⊙ communities under 6,000

Cultural Groups

- ⊙ 45 years of age or older
- ⊙ females
- ⊙ households without children

Service Clubs

- ⊙ 45 years of age or older
- ⊙ males
- ⊙ households without children
- ⊙ communities under 65,000

Local Sports Teams and Clubs

- ⊙ males under 45 years of age
- ⊙ high school or technical/vocational
- ⊙ incomes of \$30,001 or greater
- ⊙ communities under 65,000

Recreation or Parks Boards

- ⊙ males with university education
- ⊙ communities under 65,000

Special Sports or Recreation Events

- ⊙ under 45 years of age
- ⊙ males
- ⊙ university education
- ⊙ income over \$30,001 per year

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 1996 *Alberta Recreation Survey* found that about 36% 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 16% 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. There are numerous training opportunities available in Alberta.

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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