
Profiling Volunteerism

An Alberta Nonprofit/Voluntary Sector
Initiative Discussion Paper of the Value and
Contribution of Alberta Volunteers



On the cover Alberta Northern Lights Volunteer Recognition Program Recipients (clockwise from top left): Tim Adams, Dawn and Amber Shaw, Lanre Ajayi, and Gayle Wiscombe.

Profiling Volunteerism: An Alberta Nonprofit/Voluntary Sector Initiative Discussion Paper of the Value and Contribution of Alberta Volunteers | Alberta Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women

For more information: <https://www.alberta.ca/albertas-non-profit-voluntary-sector.aspx>

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Executive Summary

The Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector impacts the life of every Albertan. From sports and recreation, to arts and culture, health, education, environment, social services, community development, faith groups, and professional associations, the sector and its volunteers provide a vast array of programs and services and is the backbone of vibrant, welcoming, and engaged communities.

Profiling Volunteerism is an exploration of what volunteerism means, and how Alberta's volunteers serve their communities. The paper also explores the tangible and intangible benefits of volunteering, discusses trends, and maps roles for civil society actors in maintaining the health of the volunteer ecosystem.

Key facts about volunteerism in Alberta include:

- Alberta's volunteers reflect the rich diversity of the province; volunteers are drawn from every demographic group. Every year, more than 1.6 million Albertans provide more than 262 million volunteer hours to support their neighbours, nonprofit organizations, and communities.
- 50% of adult Albertans volunteer, higher than the national average of 44%. On average, Albertans also report higher charitable contributions.
- Informally, 70% of Albertans report helping someone outside of their immediate family.
- Albertans who have completed some form of post-secondary education are more likely to report formal volunteer involvement. This is likely related to access to professional networks, available time, and access to resources.

Key considerations related to volunteer trends include:

- Volunteering can take many forms. Volunteers are looking for flexibility in how they give their time; as a result, many organizations are offering virtual, group, and employer-supported volunteering opportunities.
- New Canadians are eager to participate in civil society through volunteerism, and are looking to develop skills and networks through volunteer opportunities.
- Youth volunteers are more likely to start and continue volunteering if they feel that they have the right skills and knowledge to do a task.
- Senior volunteers place a high value on being personally asked to provide help to a cause or organization.
- Offering flexibility in how volunteers can participate is crucial for volunteer recruitment and retention.

Key information related to the value of volunteerism for nonprofit organizations, communities and volunteers themselves include:

- The nonprofit sector is an economic driver; it employs 280,000 Albertans, and it accounts for \$5.5 billion in gross domestic product, annually. The value of volunteer time is estimated to be worth \$5.6 billion per year.
- Volunteer labour is crucial to the well-being and sustainability of nonprofit organizations. Alberta's 26,400 nonprofit organizations deliver programs and services that improve life for all Albertans, and are often complementary to programs and services delivered by other civil society actors in the public and private sectors.
- Without volunteers, Alberta's nonprofit organizations would not exist. Over 50% of Alberta organizations have no paid staff, and volunteer boards of directors are legislatively mandated for incorporation of an organization under the *Societies Act*.
- Volunteers are on the frontlines of disaster response. During periods of upheaval, volunteers on the ground mobilize quickly to ensure that people in their community have essential needs covered.
- Volunteerism brings together diverse communities of people to support programs and causes, creating opportunities to find commonalities in an increasingly polarized world, and to build understanding and trust.
- Volunteering is good for mental and physical well-being. Time and again, research has shown that volunteering is positively correlated with positive mental and physical health outcomes, likely tied to a volunteer's feeling of social inclusion and belonging.

Key observations/learnings about the role of civil society actors in maintaining a healthy volunteer ecosystem include:

- Governments are increasingly recognizing the need to formally acknowledge the essential role of volunteers in supporting the delivery of public services. A number of jurisdictions, including Newfoundland and Labrador, Australia, and Scotland, have formalized commitments to supporting volunteers through strategies and frameworks.
- Volunteer recruitment, retention and recognition is a shared responsibility among multiple civil society actors.
- Nonprofit organizations, particularly those with a provincial reach (such as Volunteer Alberta), play a vital role in building capacity for organizations to conduct important tasks such as volunteer screening.
- Volunteer centres are vital for ensuring that volunteers have access to opportunities, and serve as important community connection points.
- Municipalities often provide backbone support to volunteer centres or Family and Community Social Services programs, and partner with nonprofit organizations to run important community use infrastructure.
- The Government of Alberta plays an essential role in funding nonprofit organizations and in the realm of volunteer recognition, through programs like Stars of Alberta and Alberta's Northern Lights Volunteer Recognition Program.
- The Government of Canada is an increasingly prominent partner in the volunteer ecosystem, through the Special Senate Committee on the Charitable Sector, and through its use of volunteers in crisis management and recovery.

Statistics Canada has provided key factual information on Volunteers in Alberta, based on the results of the General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating. Data reflected as part of the infographic on the next page is from the 2013 Survey results. 2018 preliminary results are available, but the new infographic is not yet available.

THE FACES OF VOLUNTEERS IN ALBERTA

VOLUNTEERING RATE AND HOURS IN ALBERTA

(Aged 15 and over)



262 million hours volunteered in Alberta in 2013.



161 hours average annual volunteer hours



134 thousand full-time equivalent jobs represented by volunteering

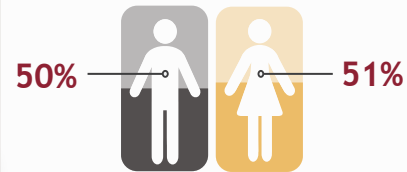


50% Volunteering rate



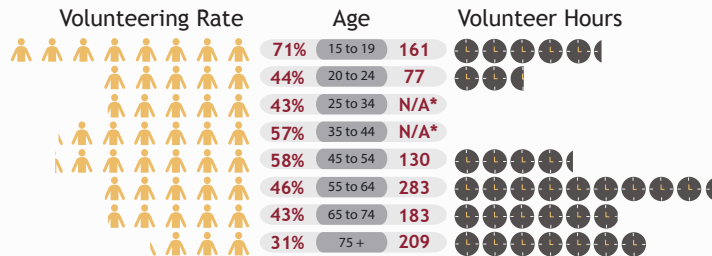
1.6 million Number of volunteers

GENDER DIFFERENCE



Women slightly more likely to volunteer than men (51% compared to 50%).

AGE DIFFERENCES IN VOLUNTEERING

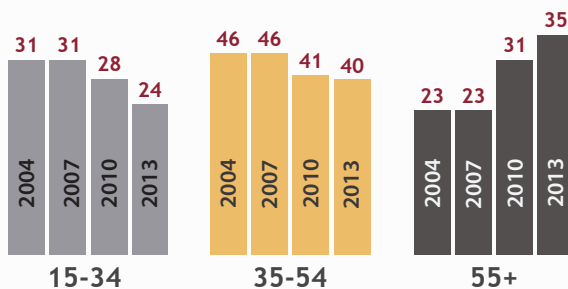


* too unreliable to publish

VOLUNTEERS ARE INCREASINGLY MORE EDUCATED

VOLUNTEERS ARE INCREASINGLY OLDER

From 2004 to 2013, the volunteer hours contributed by those **aged 55 and over** increased from 23% to 35%.



From 2004 to 2013, the proportion of volunteers, aged from 25 to 64, with **university degrees** rose by two percentage points to 35%.

	2004	2007	2010	2013
LESS THAN HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA	6	5	5	5
GRADUATED FROM HIGH SCHOOL	24	21	21	25
POST-SECONDARY DIPLOMA OR CERTIFICATE	37	40	39	36
UNIVERSITY DEGREE	33	34	35	35



Introduction

As a province, Alberta has a rich history of volunteering and the legacy of the province's earliest volunteers is seen in the social, cultural and recreational institutions that continue to thrive today.

- Before the advent of universal healthcare, local volunteers came together to raise funds to build the earliest hospitals.
- The children of homesteaders took classes in one-room schoolhouses and gathered for celebrations and events in community halls built by their parents.
- Long after local farmers and ranchers came together to host the Calgary District and Agricultural Society's first exhibition in 1886, visitors from around the globe continue to enjoy the spectacle of the Calgary Stampede.
- As Alberta and the nation struggled through a decade of economic crisis during the Great Depression, volunteers stepped up to establish community organizations to provide relief programs and, as local resources were depleted, to demand direct action by government.

Alberta's culture of volunteerism can be seen in every facet of our daily lives, whether it is the community soccer coach, a festival organizer, counsellors for families and individuals in crisis, homeless supports, those that contribute to a local bottle drive or bake sale, or a nonprofit organization's board of directors.

Volunteering is an enduring and ingrained part of who we are as a province, and volunteers play a vital role in the well-being of the province and its citizens. Volunteers are at the heart of Alberta's social, cultural and recreational life, critical to the sustainability of nonprofit organizations that deliver community-based programs and services that Albertans rely on.

Profiling Volunteerism in Alberta is a companion paper to 2018's ***Profiling the Sector***, and is intended to create a picture of the current state of volunteerism in Alberta. This paper provides a definition of what volunteerism means, and an exploration of who volunteers in Alberta, how they volunteer, and the global context for supporting volunteers. It also considers trends in volunteerism and volunteer management, and defines the current roles of civil society actors in volunteer management.

The paper examines the benefits of volunteerism for a broad spectrum of organizations, the sector, the community, the province, and the individual volunteer. Similar to *Profiling the Sector*, it is important to bring attention and focus to the value that volunteers and volunteerism provide to civil society in Alberta. Central features include:

Throughout the paper, specific challenges to our current understanding of volunteer trends are identified. These can serve as starting points for conversations on how civil society actors in Alberta ensure that the province continues to have some of the best volunteer metrics in Canada.

Defining Volunteerism

At a surface level, the definition of volunteerism is simple; it's time given by an individual to help someone else without pay. Volunteering Australia defines volunteerism as: **"time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain."**¹ Scotland's national volunteering framework defines volunteering as: **"A choice to give time or energy, a choice undertaken of one's own free will and a choice not motivated for financial gain or for a wage or salary."**²

There are, of course, nuances to this definition; how volunteerism is defined can depend on attachment to a nonprofit organization (**formal volunteerism**), assistance provided through networks without attachment to a formal organization (**informal volunteerism**). The definition of volunteerism can also hinge on the amount of time committed to a task: **episodic volunteers** give their time for defined events, and their attachment to an organization or a cause may be sporadic (such as blood donors, or casino volunteers). **Virtual volunteers** can be episodic (participating in a one-time event, such as an online gaming fundraiser), or formal (providing support to an organization that does its work online, such as a support line). Of course, volunteers affiliated with specific organizations may also serve as episodic volunteers for a particular organization, and formal volunteers likely serve others in their social networks in an informal capacity, as well.

A more comprehensive definition, taken from academic literature, explores the space between formal and informal volunteerism:

"Unpaid work that is carried out for a charitable, social, or political purpose, while distinguishing the two by whether one engages in unpaid labour in a formal organizational setting (such as a food bank, animal shelter, school or church), or as part of informal networks of extended families, friends and neighbours. Helping those who are in need is an important aspect of both types of volunteering, and activities carried out toward this end (such as cooking and serving food, cleaning, repairs, mentoring youth, collecting money for someone in need, legal assistance, etc.), can be very similar between the two settings."³

The common features in all of these definitions include:

- **Time** – volunteering is the gift of time, and is distinct from charitable giving (although the concepts may be intertwined, particularly in the context of corporate giving, where an employer may match volunteer hours with a donation).
- **Willingness** – voluntary actions are undertaken freely. While volunteer activity may be compelled in some cases (to gain academic credits, for example), volunteers, largely, choose the organization, people, or cause they support through the donation of time.
- **Community benefit** – the actions of volunteers impact the people around them, whether they offer their time formally or informally. Voluntary actions are committed for the good of others, and are expressions of generosity, and support for others.
- **Unpaid** – volunteers do not receive financial remuneration for their acts of service (though they may receive services or goods as in-kind donations to facilitate their participation, or as a thank-you).

¹ Volunteering Australia. "Volunteering Australia's Definition of Volunteering: Frequently Asked Questions." July 2015. <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/FAQs-Launch-of-Definition-280715-final.pdf>

² Government of Scotland. *Volunteering for All: Our National Framework*. 2019.

³ Hiromi Taniguchi. "The Determinants of Formal and Informal Volunteering: Evidence from the American Time Use Survey," *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, issue 23 (920-939), 2012

The space between informal and formal volunteerism is sometimes hard to define, and where voluntary actions land between informal or formal may depend on context.⁴ To illustrate the connection between informal and formal volunteers, and to acknowledge that the core desire innate in most voluntary actions is to help others, the Scottish government's volunteering framework proposes that volunteer actions can be viewed on a spectrum:



Figure 1: Volunteering for All - Spectrum of Volunteer Involvement (page 19)

While most research and data speaks to formal volunteerism and volunteers engaged with nonprofit organizations, it is important to acknowledge that volunteerism spans a wide range of activities, and degrees of connection to organizations, networks and communities. Informal and formal volunteerism should be viewed as complementary, and not substitutes for each other, as many informal volunteers are formal volunteers, and vice versa.⁵

⁴ Hiromi Taniguchi. "The Determinants of Formal and Informal Volunteering: Evidence from the American Time Use Survey," *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, issue 23 (920-939), 2012

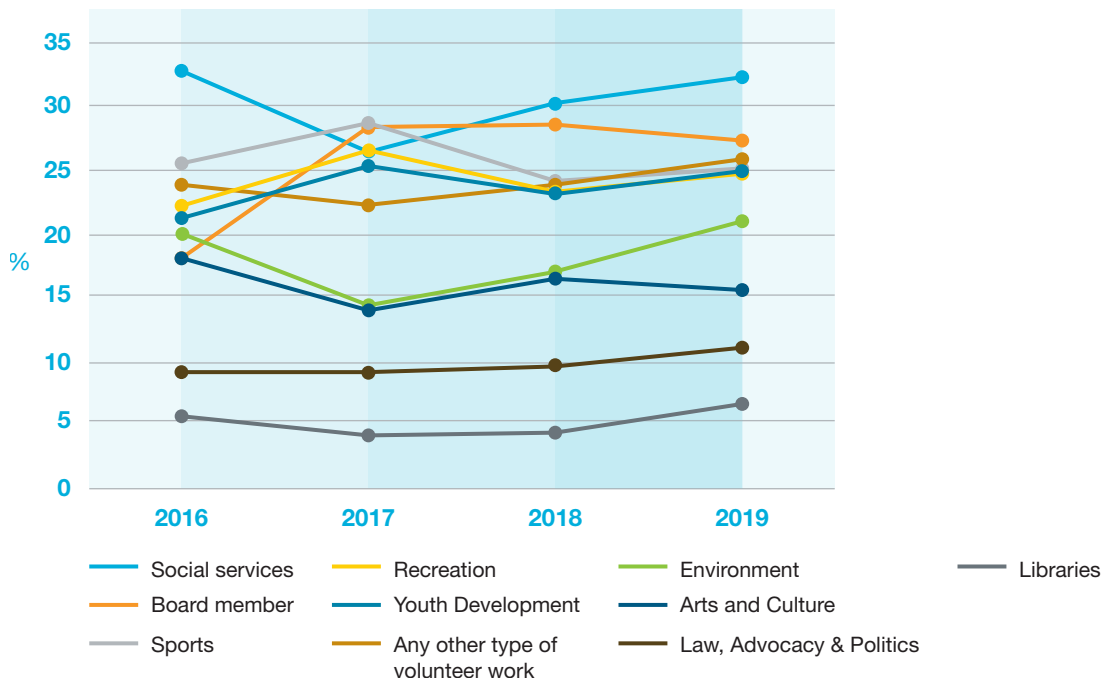
⁵ Young-joo Lee and Jeffrey L. Brudney. "Participation in Formal and Informal Volunteering: Implications for Volunteer Recruitment," *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, vol. 23, no. 2, winter 2012

Volunteerism in Alberta

Alberta volunteers represent the rich diversity of the province

Volunteers are drawn from every demographic category and are as diverse as the organizations and communities in which they volunteer. Regardless of age, gender, ethnic background and income, individuals contribute to the success of nonprofit organizations, and often take on many different volunteer roles.

Albertans volunteer for a wide range of organizations and causes. 2013 data indicates human services consistently attracts the highest portion of volunteers (30.3%). This is followed by serving as a board member (28.5%) and sports (24.4%).



Alberta's formal volunteer pool is comprised of slightly more women than men, at 50.6 percent. Women who reported volunteering contributed an average 141 hours each year.⁶ 49.6 percent of Alberta's volunteers are men. Men who reported volunteering contributed an average of 181 hours per year.⁷ The most comprehensive data set of volunteerism in the province comes from 2003 Statistics Canada data. In 2003, the majority of volunteers were between the age of 35 and 45 years, with those 35 and older reported to have the highest average annual volunteer hours (254 hours).⁸

⁶ Alberta's Volunteers, 2013 General Social Survey: Giving, volunteering and participating

⁷ Alberta's Volunteers, 2013 General Social Survey: Giving, volunteering and participating

⁸ Julie Sperling, David Lasby, & Michael Hall, Imagine Canada, Giving, Volunteering, and Participating in Alberta, 2004

In 2011, 11.1% of Alberta's population was reported as older than 65 years; an increase from 10.7% in 2006. Seniors comprise a significant segment of the volunteering community as they are contributing 16.6% of the volunteer hours in the province.⁹

While older Albertans continue to contribute the most volunteer hours, this age group no longer represents the highest volunteer rate. Statistics Canada, in its 2013 General Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating, reported that nationally, 66 percent of youth aged 15 to 19 years are volunteering.¹⁰ (In part, the high percentage of youth volunteers can be attributed to Ontario's requirement that secondary students complete 40 hours of community service before the end of grade 12 to receive their Ontario Secondary School Diploma. As Ontario is Canada's most populous province, this likely skews the proportion of youth volunteers across the country.)¹¹

While more young people are volunteering, the 2013 report notes that the bulk of the formal volunteer hours continues to come from individuals 55 years and older. In the coming years, it will be important to engage a growing senior population to sustain their volunteer involvement and to tap into potential of youth volunteerism as opportunities for the sector.

Education and income are significant factors impacting volunteer behavior. A 2017 study by the Pew Research Centre found that adults who had higher incomes and higher level of educational attainment were more likely to be involved in volunteering. The study found that 70% of college graduates were involved with at least one community organization, while only 48% of high school graduates actively volunteered.¹² In 2013, Statistics Canada reported a volunteer rate of 62.4 percent for university degree holders in Alberta, compared to a rate of 47.6 percent for those with a high school diploma.¹³ In general, volunteers with post-secondary education also contribute more annual volunteer hours.

Data on income and volunteerism rates suggests that there may be a correlation between household incomes and volunteer behaviour. In Alberta, 58% of individuals with household incomes between \$60,000 - \$70,000 reported that they volunteer. In households where income was between \$20,000 - \$36,000, 36% of individuals reported volunteering.

New Canadians are an important segment of Alberta's volunteers. The Conference Board of Canada's paper, *The Value of Volunteering in Canada*, highlights that new immigrants are looking for volunteering opportunities as a way to help others while helping them integrate into Canadian society.¹⁴ This can include learning English or French, or finding job opportunities that fit their skill set. The Conference Board of Canada found that volunteering could help build additional skills crucial for finding employment (interpersonal skills, references, work-specific skills, etc.).

"When I came to Canada I was a reclusive immigrant. A dedicated and persistent volunteer helped me out of my shell and happily, I have never looked back. We can't always express our appreciation directly to those who help us, but we can pay back or pay forward by helping others... It gives us a real feeling of reward and pleasure to know we've helped others. We gain in vitality and better health overall."

Sunny, volunteer

Volunteer stories taken from ecvo.com/volunteers, for a Canada 150 profile

⁹ Suzanne L. Cook & Paula Speevak Sladowski, Volunteer Canada, *Volunteering and Older Adults*, 2013

¹⁰ Statistics Canada, *General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating*, 2013

¹¹ Ontario Ministry of Education. "What do I need to graduate?" <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/students/curriculum.html>

¹² Americans with higher education and income are more likely to be involved in community groups, Fact Tank, Pew Research Centre, Feb. 22, 2019

¹³ Statistics Canada, *General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating*, 2013

¹⁴ *The Value of Volunteering in Canada*, Conference Board of Canada, 2018

While Alberta scores above the national average in terms of volunteer rates, the overall volunteer rate has fallen since 2010. This may indicate a decline in volunteering, but it is also important to recognize that this may actually be due to the shift in the way that individuals are choosing to volunteer. Instead of long term and regular commitments, people are trending towards more short term and spontaneous opportunities.

Albertans volunteer for many different reasons

Imagine Canada, through their study, *Giving, Volunteering, and Participating in Alberta*,¹⁵ reported that Canadians, including 93% of Albertans, are motivated to volunteer because it fulfills a desire to contribute to their community and to society. Albertans are stepping up as volunteers for other altruistic motives such as using their skills to help others, supporting organizations that have impacted them personally or as a means of exploring their strengths. A family connection to an organization or initiative is also a motivating factor. The study states that individuals were least likely to be motivated to volunteer due to religious obligations (25%) or improving job prospects (21%).¹⁶

Alberta vs Canada How do they compare?

Alberta	Volunteer rate	Canada
50	% per year	44
	Average annual hours	
161	hours per year	154
	Donation rate	
85	% per year	82
	Average annual donation	
863	\$ per year	531

¹⁵ Julie Sperling, David Lasby, & Michael Hall, Imagine Canada, Giving, Volunteering, and Participating in Alberta, 2004

¹⁶ Julie Sperling, David Lasby, & Michael Hall, Imagine Canada, Giving, Volunteering, and Participating in Alberta, 2004

Volunteering takes many forms



The ways in which Albertans volunteer is as diverse as their motivations for giving their time to an organization, cause, or community. Based on Imagine Canada data, some of the most common ways for volunteers to contribute time through formal volunteerism is through fundraising, or sitting on a board or committee. Common informal ways include providing counselling, guidance or advice, assisting with maintenance projects, or providing care.¹⁷

Volunteerism has changed to reflect the times and to accommodate the needs of individual volunteers. As the world changes, ways of volunteering have followed suit. Dealing with time constraints and other barriers, a growing number of people are looking for short-term volunteer opportunities that they can start as soon as possible. Propellus notes that 68% of volunteers are expecting to have a position within one month of beginning their search.¹⁸ This creates a mismatch in the volunteer ecosystem as, on average, most organizations publish volunteer opportunities postings about 6 months before the start date.¹⁹

¹⁷ Julie Sperling, David Lasby, & Michael Hall, Imagine Canada, Giving, Volunteering, and Participating in Alberta

¹⁸ Representing Volunteers in Alberta, Propellus, 2019

¹⁹ Ibid

Volunteers are also looking for flexibility with 71% of survey respondents indicating they are looking for opportunities that match on their own schedule.

Challenge: Flexible Volunteer Opportunities

A third of the respondents to the Propellus survey indicated they would only volunteer for flexible opportunities. This presents a challenge to organizations that work on fixed schedules, and may not be able to provide the sort of flexibility some segments of potential volunteers want. What are the limitations of providing flexible opportunities? What are the barriers for nonprofit organizations in creating flexible volunteer roles?



Survey of Albertans,
Gov. of Alberta, 2019

Informal volunteering is a critical component of the volunteerism ecosystem, but its impact can be difficult to measure. In its annual **Survey of Albertans**, the Government of Alberta has included questions about acts of informal volunteerism to get baseline data on trends. The 2019 Survey of Albertans provides the most current data, which indicates that 70% of Albertans participate in some form of informal volunteering.

Microvolunteering is emerging as a growing trend in volunteerism, offering a short time commitment and projects that can be completed quickly. Microvolunteering can include activities ranging from signing a petition or writing letters in support of a favoured cause, to taking part in an event, like a flash mob to bring awareness to a particular cause.

Microvolunteering also allows volunteers to work on their own, often from their own home, completing small assignments in support of a larger project. Microvolunteering is also well suited to support another growing trend – **virtual/online volunteering**. According to the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy, “virtual volunteering can offer flexible scheduling for some volunteers. Computers, email, and the Internet allow people to undertake assignments from home or work at times that best suit them.”²⁰

Microvolunteering can be exemplified through Blankets for Canada. They are based out of Lethbridge, Alberta, but have chapters across Canada and the United States. It is an organization that creates blankets for those that need them. Volunteers can sew, knit or crochet blankets themselves or with others when they have time and bring them to the organization to be distributed. The time commitment expected of those that volunteer is minimal and just as much as they are able to contribute and when they have the time to do so.

²⁰ Understanding Canadian Volunteers, Canadian Centre for Philanthropy and Volunteer Canada, 2004

Volunteers can share their technical skills as writers, graphic designers and researchers, or contribute to online crisis and other support-oriented groups.

Group volunteering is also growing in popularity. Volunteer Canada reports that 68% of Canadians would volunteer if more group opportunities were available²¹. Group volunteering often takes the form of activities such as community housing projects, food/clothing drives or environmental projects such as garbage clean-ups. In Alberta, 45% of volunteers provide time in a group with neighbours, friends and colleagues, with 28% volunteering as a family.²² The nonprofit sector is working to accommodate this trend by developing group-volunteering programs.

Interest in **employer-supported volunteering** is also growing, providing the nonprofit sector with new opportunities to create group-volunteering activities. The 2013 General Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating, reports that 37% of Canada's volunteers were in some way supported by their employer.

While volunteerism has historically been viewed as something that happens outside of work, and in the same realm as leisure activities, employers are increasingly seeing the value of supporting volunteerism and charitable giving through the workplace.

Volunteering attracts talent, develops the workforce, engages employees, and builds relationships with stakeholders and the broader community. Employer-supported volunteering (ESV) is volunteering that occurs through the encouragement and support of employers. In 2004, 61% of Alberta volunteers who were employed noted they had received some form of volunteering support from their employer.²³ Volunteer Canada cites that for every employee that volunteers through ESV, more than \$2,400 of value is realized by the employer in decreased turnover and improved employee performance.²⁴

According to a 2019 study by Volunteer Canada, 68% of Canadians would choose an employer that has a stronger volunteering culture over one that does not.²⁵ That same study found that there is 10% less voluntary employee turnover in organizations that have favourable employee impressions of their corporation's community contributions. ESV also supports innovations within a company, as people who feel their company is contributing to the community are twice as likely to feel encouraged to try something new and be innovative, regardless of the outcome.

²¹ Volunteer Canada, Recognizing Volunteers in 2017

²² Julie Sperling, David Lasby, & Michael Hall, Imagine Canada, Giving, Volunteering, and Participating in Alberta, 2004

²³ Julie Sperling, David Lasby, & Michael Hall, Imagine Canada, Giving, Volunteering, and Participating in Alberta, 2004

²⁴ Volunteer Canada, Canadian Code for Employer-Supported Volunteering, 2015

²⁵ Volunteer Canada, The Business Code for Volunteering, 2019

Individuals who are encouraged to volunteer by their employers are able to connect with their colleagues, their workspaces and identify commonalities in corporate and personal goals, leading to increases in employee morale. Volunteer Canada's study found that employees that feel positively about the way their company contributes to their community are 1.64 times more likely to feel a sense of camaraderie with their colleagues than those that do not.²¹ An Imagine Canada 2019 report found that employees with corporate volunteerism policies in place were 1.5 times as likely to report intending to stay with their employer for the next two years, 19 times as likely to be extremely or very satisfied with their job, and 2.6 times as likely to recommend their employer to a friend or family member.²⁶

Supporting ESV creates mutual benefits for employers and the nonprofit sector. Employees are able to build relationships both within and outside of the company that improve the company's image and reputation, as well as employee morale. This often results in a higher return on a company's investment in ESV.

Employer supported volunteering has proven to be a successful initiative within the energy sector. Suncor has developed a program called SunCares. Through this program, the company supports their employees contributing to the communities that they live and work in. SunCares offers grant money to support volunteer efforts, by giving up to \$2,000 to employees to support community organizations. Employees can earn money for nonprofit organizations through voluntary actions, such as participating in a fundraising walk or run, donating blood, coaching a team, or joining a board.

Challenge: Engaging Multigenerational Teams

Generation Y and Z job seekers appreciate and look for companies that accommodate employee supported volunteering. As employees from these two generations transition into leadership roles in workplaces, it is important that corporations understand this and leverage it for employee recruitment and retention. Alignment with personal values matters to these two generations, as does work-life balance. Providing opportunities to learn transferable skills through workplace facilitated volunteering, as well as opportunities to form connections with their colleagues and other professionals, will likely be seen as valuable benefits. Opportunities exist for both corporations and volunteers to benefit from sharing skills and talent to strengthen the resilience and capacity of communities through these partnerships.

²⁶ Imagine Canada, Profit, Purpose and Talent: Trends and Motivations in Corporate Giving & Volunteering, 2019

Corporate Giving

Another common way for private sector bodies to support the nonprofit sector is through corporate giving. An Imagine Canada report on corporate giving and volunteerism found that nearly 30% of employees surveyed would take a pay decrease to work at a company where their employer contributes more to the community and encourages volunteerism. In addition, 67% of employees with workplace giving campaigns and matching gifts were more likely to donate regularly than those that did not.

The report also showed that companies did not have to sacrifice profits to give back to their communities as the benefits to business are clear when employees are committed, engaged and more loyal. These employees were more likely to recommend other professionals to the company and the companies received a higher number of applicants for open jobs.

EPCOR has found success with the implementation of their **Helping Hands Grants**, a company-wide volunteering program offering employees opportunities to volunteer with a charity of their choice in exchange for a \$300 donation to that same charity. EPCOR employees have reported volunteering over 10,000 hours, helping 150 minor sports, social services organizations, schools or community associations.

Challenge: Managing the changing landscape of charitable giving

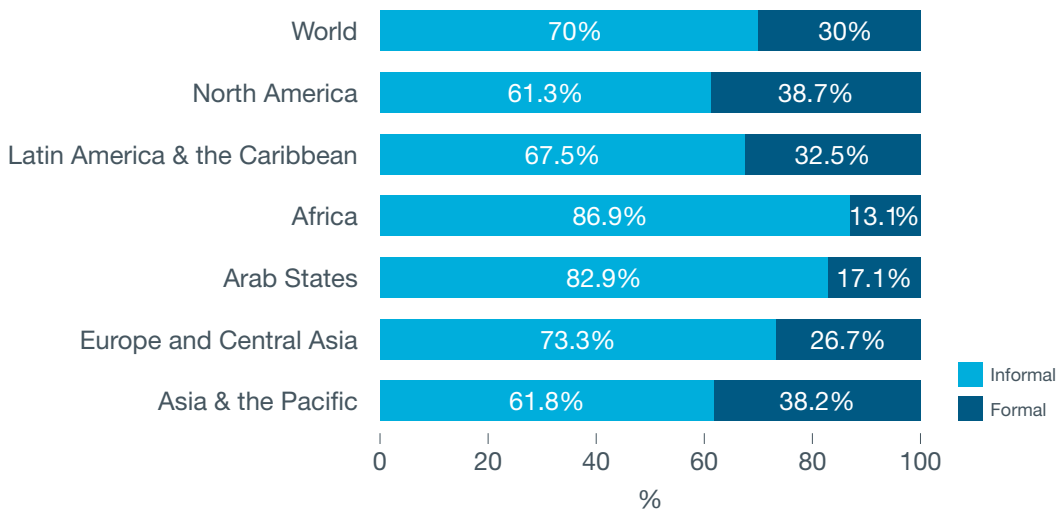
Since the 2008 financial crisis, many organizations have reported increases in demand that have not been met by increases in funds from personal donations. Corporate giving and corporate matching of donations by employers can serve as an avenue to assist the nonprofit sector while exposing employees to different avenues to volunteer and be involved in their community. COVID-19 has created unprecedented challenges for every component of civil society, including private sector entities. As the economy recovers and civil society creates a new normal, individuals, the nonprofit sector, private sector entities and government will be challenged to find innovative ways to ensure that nonprofit organizations can continue delivering essential services to communities.

Alberta within a Global Context

Given that many countries have different definitions of what volunteering is, and some countries do not differentiate between formal and informal volunteering, it is difficult to make comparisons on a global scale. However, the United Nations *State of the World's Volunteerism* report offers a series of indicators that Alberta can use as comparison points.

The *State of the World's Volunteerism* report is released every three years. The most recent edition came out in 2018. Using various in-country sources, the United Nations gathers total head counts of formal and informal volunteers in participating countries. The report also estimates rates of informal and formal volunteering by region. The results show that all regions have much higher informal volunteer rates compared to their formal rates.²⁷ According to their report, North America's informal volunteer rate (61.3%) is almost double that of the formal volunteer rate (38.7%). In most regions, including North America, women contribute much more to the informal volunteer rate.

World Informal and Formal Volunteer Rates



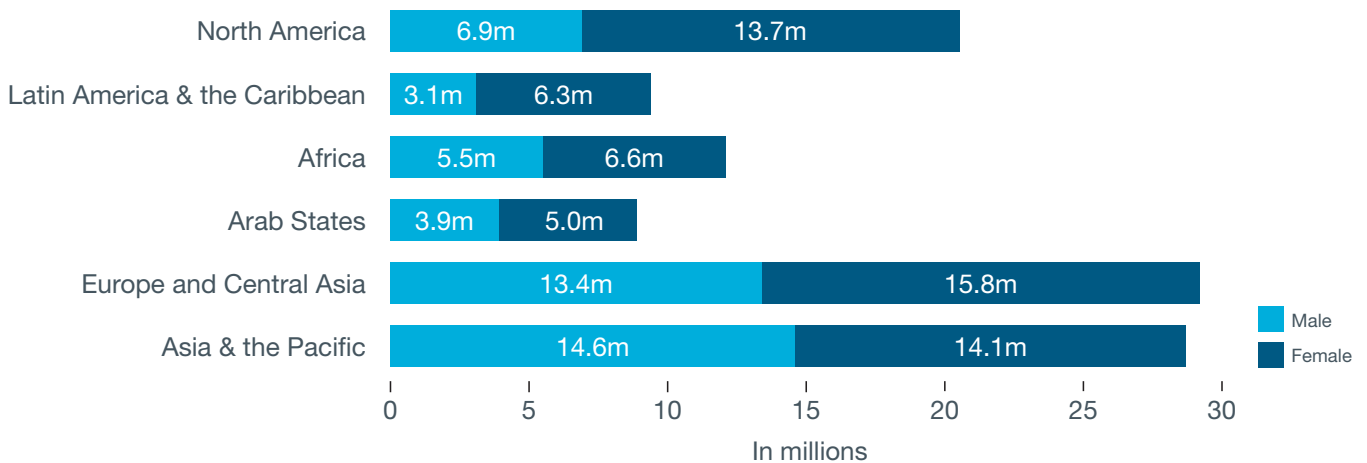
²⁷ UN Volunteers, 2018 State of the World's Volunteerism Report

Despite the difficulty in making global comparisons, it is important to acknowledge that the values associated with volunteering are shared and resonate across all cultures. While the definition of volunteerism may depend on cultural context,²⁸ the innate nature of giving and caring is reflected through voluntary behaviour all over the world.

World Informal Rate by Gender



Informal Volunteer Rate by Gender



²⁸ Government of Scotland. "Volunteering for All: Our National Framework." April 2019.

Volunteerism Frameworks

Increasingly, governments are choosing to recognize and affirm the critical work performed by volunteers, in ways both formal and informal, through frameworks that define the value of volunteer contributions, and highlight the role of volunteers in civil society. Canadian examples include:

- As part of the broader campaign to prepare for the Pan American and ParaPan American games, the Government of Ontario developed the Ontario Volunteer Action Plan in 2015. The plan was intended to create awareness and promote volunteer opportunities across the province. Key initiatives under the plan included the creation of the province-wide online volunteer recruitment platform and the Achieve Ontario volunteer recognition program.
- The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador released the Way Forward with Community work plan in April 2019. While the work plan is largely focused on the contributions of community organizations in the province, it includes initiatives related to volunteerism. A pilot project establishing a network of Regional Community Sector Skills Facilitators in various regions of the province will be established, providing access to facilitators able to assist in building partnerships, providing strategic supports to paid employees and volunteers, and increasing the community sector's capacity for social and economic growth. The province also plans to incorporate information on the importance of volunteerism and the viability of careers in the community sector into a planned review of the intermediate and senior highschool career education curriculum.

International examples include:

- In 2011, the United Nations International Year of Volunteers, the Australian government released its comprehensive National Volunteer Strategy. The Australian plan identifies six key areas of focus from responding to trends in volunteering to developing best practices to guide government in engaging the sector on policy development.
- The Government of New South Wales (NSW) has reiterated their commitment to grow volunteerism, outlined in its 2012 Volunteerism Strategy. The strategy outlines five Strategic Directions, each linked to specific initiatives such as: expanding the volunteer base through a statewide effort, raising the profile of volunteerism and promoting new models of volunteering, and removing regulatory barriers to volunteerism. The strategy outlines the role of government in supporting volunteers in civil society.
- In its 2018 Civil Societies Strategy, the government of the United Kingdom recognized the value of individual volunteer contributions and laid out its strategy for “enabling a lifetime contribution.” The strategy commits to funding for initiatives aimed at increasing participation by youth, including investment in the #iwill Fund that helps connect young people to opportunities for social action. The strategy also identifies how government will support volunteerism among seniors and adults including expanded volunteer programs in key government agencies, such as National Health Services.
- In 2019, the Government of Scotland released the “Volunteering for All” national framework. It seeks to define the key outcomes desired for volunteering in Scotland over the next ten years, identify the key data and evidence that will inform and drive performance at a local and national level, and enable informed debate and decision about the best combination of programs, investments and interventions to support volunteers and civil society.

The Value of Volunteerism

As volunteering is, by its nature, unpaid work, measuring the tangible impact of the gifts of time and talent provided by volunteers is difficult. Economic measures such as GDP or hours contributed per person speak to the broad, tangible benefits of volunteerism, but volunteers also provide intangible benefits that build communities. While research into civil society actions and volunteerism have often distinguished between the two concepts, new frameworks suggest that voluntary acts – such as picking up groceries for someone who is unable to, or volunteering on a board – are similar in intent and impact to formal actions meant to create change at the political level, such as voting, participating in a demonstration, or campaigning for a candidate. All of these actions are voluntary, and contribute to creating a vibrant civil society wherein people of different backgrounds interact with each other, share stories and exchange points of view, and work to create positive change in their communities.²⁹ At an individual level, the benefits of volunteerism are well-documented, and improve the social, mental and physical well-being of people who engage in voluntary actions.

Volunteerism is a significant contributor to a strong Alberta economy

Alberta's nonprofit voluntary sector is comprised of more than 26,400 nonprofit organizations (ranked fourth in Canada)³⁰ and is a significant contributor to the Alberta economy. The sector accounts for \$5.5 billion in GDP annually, surpassing the technology, retail, and education sectors³¹ and driven primarily by the sector's volunteer workforce. The sector also employs 280,000 Albertans³² as full and part-time staff. More than 50% of community-based organizations have no paid staff, and are run exclusively by volunteers. With more than 1.6 million Albertans providing more than 262 million hours of support to nonprofit organizations, Statistics Canada estimates the dollar value of time and skills contributed by Alberta volunteers at \$5.6 billion annually.

To a lesser, but not insignificant degree, the contributions of volunteers to the projects and causes they support help fuel economic activity in other sectors. For example, the development of public use infrastructure and delivery of programs and services by volunteer-driven nonprofits create spin-off opportunities for local contractors and service providers.

Volunteers play a vital role in the sustainability of the nonprofit sector and the delivery of community programs and services

Volunteers do more than provide unpaid labour to keep nonprofit organizations operational. In Alberta, volunteers are at the core of nonprofit and voluntary organizations. For a nonprofit to be incorporated, the organization is legally required to have a board of directors. These boards are composed entirely of volunteers, without which these organizations and nonprofits would cease to exist.

²⁹ Adalbert Evers and Johan von Essen. "Volunteering and Civic Action: Boundaries Blurring, Boundaries Redrawn," *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, no. 30 (2019)

³⁰ Government of Alberta, *Profiling the Non-profit/Voluntary Sector in Alberta*, 2018

³¹ Statistics Canada, *Satellite Account of Non-profit Institutions and Volunteering*, 2019

³² <https://www.alberta.ca/albertas-non-profit-voluntary-sector.aspx>

Voluntary and nonprofit organizations represent a wide array of values and interests, and provide complementary programs and services to those offered by government or the private sector. The voluntary sector, and volunteers, exist to fill gaps in services that cannot be filled by government or the private sector, or to augment the services that exist. In this respect, the nonprofit sector and its volunteers are responsible for improving quality of life for Albertans in every community in the province. Volunteers offer an array of skills and experiences and fill a variety of formal and informal roles, including governance, program delivery, fundraising, and support to individuals.

Many smaller organizations actively recruit volunteers with specific skill sets such as a background in business. Volunteers often provide pro bono professional services including legal, accounting, and technology expertise to community groups with limited resources.

Nonprofits often rely on the skills of volunteers to complete community building projects, and provincial grant programs recognize the value of volunteer trades people as a financial contribution in assessing grant applications.

With a greater number of post-secondary and university graduates stepping forward as volunteers, nonprofit organizations are taking advantage of a much larger skill base. Supporting the development of a volunteer's skills, experience and knowledge of business operations can also aid organizations in succession planning – by bringing in volunteers with connections to government, the private sector and other nonprofit organizations, boards can identify quality internal candidates should a paid staff position become available.

Volunteers deliver essential services

Volunteering can build the kind of social cohesion that is vital when emergencies occur, and volunteers have played an integral role in disaster relief. Often these volunteers are trained specifically for emergency response and provide support through Voluntary Service Organizations (VSOs) such as the Canadian Red Cross. However, in an age of instant communications, news of an emergency spreads quickly and there is often immediate reaction with citizens stepping forward to offer their time and expertise.

With more than 80,000 residents displaced in the aftermath of the 2016 **Fort McMurray wildfire**, Albertans stepped forward, offering financial support and opening donation centres and places of refuge. Volunteers from the devastated community also came together to support each other through the crisis.

Habitat for Humanity Wood Buffalo and FuseSocial, the primary volunteer centre in the community, in collaboration with organizations outside of the community, created the “NGOs Supporting Uninsured and Underinsured Residents” (NSUUR). Utilizing volunteer labour and focusing on repair and rebuilds for residents who are uninsured or underinsured, NSUUR efforts work to help individuals move forward and give them an opportunity to come home.

Recognizing the growing trend and the potential value of spontaneous volunteerism as a resource, many municipalities consider local organizations in emergency management planning. In 2016, the Calgary Emergency Management Agency and Defence Research and Development Canada collaborated on a framework to integrate spontaneous volunteerism into a community's emergency response.³³

Recently, the COVID-19 pandemic has started a new wave of emergency volunteerism. Albertans have risen to the occasion and volunteered informally, often organizing through social media, to support their neighbours through acts such as picking up groceries, or providing meals to families in need. Albertans have also expressed interest in formal volunteering opportunities to help navigate civil society through the pandemic, and one tool offered to help potential volunteers find opportunities to help is the Alberta Cares Connector.³⁴

Volunteerism helps build vibrant, welcoming, inclusive communities

Volunteerism promotes the values of resiliency, leadership, cohesion, and social inclusion – the foundation of neighbourhoods and the broader community. Volunteerism also brings together diverse communities of people to support a particular program or cause, creating opportunities to find commonalities in an increasingly polarized world, and build understanding and trust.

Studies have found that people rarely see their involvement in their community as volunteering but merely as a part of their citizenship. Social cohesion results when individuals can come together to voice their concern and collectively create a strong vision for the future of their community.

Volunteering is an effective strategy to increase social inclusion when working with populations that are marginalized, as it connects diverse individuals and groups and making it possible for them to work together. Ensuring that volunteering is accessible reinforces the value of social inclusion and an awareness that volunteering is not just for a select few.³⁵ Volunteerism is a means for citizens to build the trust and reciprocity necessary for thriving and resilient neighbourhoods and communities.

Volunteering brings considerable value to society by providing opportunities for citizen engagement to help inform public policy. Volunteer Canada states that volunteering is able to promote citizen and civic participation that are fundamental to democracy. When individuals volunteer, they are able to play an active role and contribute in ways that are meaningful for themselves, their communities and Canadian society as a whole.

"I've been volunteering with Habitat for Humanity for 25 years now. I've always liked knowing where my efforts or dollars are going. It serves a great purpose in the community; about 10 percent of the population just wouldn't be able to afford their own home without Habitat. My role as crew leader has me working here in the city, but it's also taken me all over the world – working with Habitat organizations throughout Central America and the Caribbean. These projects, domestically and internationally, can prove life-altering for people."

Orest, volunteer

Volunteer stories taken from ecvo.com/volunteers, for a Canada 150 profile

³³ Building a Framework for Calgary's Emergency Volunteers, Suzanne Waldman; Simona Verga; Matt Godso; DRDC – Centre, July 2016

³⁴ Demi Knight, Global News. "Coronavirus: Province launches online tool, connecting Albertans with volunteer opportunities." April 24, 2020. <https://globalnews.ca/news/6863438/alberta-cares-connector-coronavirus/>

³⁵ Understanding The Role of Volunteerism In Creating Social Inclusion, Anne Miller; Brenda Simpson; Josh Lieben Brenda J. Simpson & Associates, 2011

Volunteerism contributes to the volunteer’s own quality of life

In addition to the myriad benefits that volunteerism provides communities, it also enhances the lives of individual volunteers.

For the individual volunteer, the value of volunteering is rooted in a sense of well-being and belonging. According to Volunteer Canada, there are six primary motives for volunteering: the opportunities to express important values, to fit into one’s social group, to garner a better understanding of the world and the people, positive self-enhancement, and for protective effects against guilt, doubt and other negative feelings. In this way, volunteering enables feelings of connectedness and belonging.

Studies have shown that volunteering improves physical health, as well as mental health. This includes increased quality of life, better health outcomes, and improvements in overall life satisfaction. Volunteering England found evidence that showed volunteering improved self-rated health, mental health, coping abilities, social support and interaction, and healthy behaviours.³⁶

The health benefits associated with volunteering are particularly pronounced for senior volunteers. The Baycrest Research about Volunteering among Older Adults (BRAVO) study, conducted by Toronto-based Baycrest Health Sciences, presented the results of extensive research into the benefits of volunteering for older individuals.³⁷ The systematic review found that volunteering increases physical, cognitive and social activities for older adults. Notably, the study found that volunteering is associated with a decreased risk for cognitive decline and dementia. Furthermore, it found that seniors who volunteered had higher life satisfaction, better overall health, increased social support and fewer physical limitations.

Connecting individuals with volunteer opportunities allows them to make important social connections. This is particularly meaningful for immigrants settling into a new country and community. Volunteering presents an opportunity for new Canadians to apply their existing skills, develop new skills and knowledge, and make connections in their new communities.

Along with making valuable connections within the community and with fellow newcomers, Imagine Canada’s 2004 study on volunteerism also noted that:

“Volunteering is one way to practice new language skills, build social networks, gain Canadian experience, and develop a sense of attachment and integration to a new community.”

“I’ve volunteered for a lot of different reasons, but usually it comes down to a cause or idea that is really important to me – something I’m really passionate about. I have made incredible connections as a volunteer and made friendships with other people who care about the same things I do. Starting to volunteer at some of the places I have, I didn’t necessarily know if I was going to love it or not but trying different things has been really cool.”

Paige, volunteer*

*Volunteer stories taken from ecvo.com/volunteers, as part of a Canada 150 Profile.

³⁶ Volunteering and Health: What Impact Does It Really Have? Volunteering England, Rachel Casiday, 2015

³⁷ The Benefits Associated with Volunteering Among Seniors: A Critical Review and Recommendations for Future Research, Anderson et al., 2014

Volunteering also provides opportunities for individuals to develop skills and gain experience that can enhance employability, or further careers. As reported by TD Economics in *An Economist's Case for Volunteering*,³⁸ volunteering creates opportunities for individuals to transition into the labour force or explore jobs in fields that may be of interest before committing to a particular career path. This is tied to an increasing professionalization of volunteer services; over the past 30 years, the structural differences between civil society actors (government, the private sector and the nonprofit sector) have become increasingly blurred.³⁹ As the nonprofit and voluntary sector assumes greater responsibility for supporting civil society, and is expected to meet higher thresholds of accountability, transparency and efficiency, volunteers are increasingly called upon to deliver professional services.⁴⁰

Challenge: Promoting Inclusivity in the Nonprofit Sector

Volunteers are drawn to opportunities that allow them to express their core values, or provide them with experience in a particular field. The increasing professionalization of the nonprofit sector, however, creates tension between the fundamental expression of core values and expectations of volunteer performance and conduct; in environments that prize professional experience and ability to navigate bureaucratic processes, organizations run the risk of excluding groups of people that they serve from opportunities to participate in a volunteer capacity. This tension is most evident in the composition of boards of directors. Boards are responsible for setting the strategic direction of an organization, but a focus on professional skills may preclude community members with valuable lived experience from shaping the direction of an organization. Care should be given to how to balance a range of perspectives in determining how organizations can best serve the needs of the communities that they serve.

³⁸ An Economist's Case for Volunteering, TD Economics, April 23, 2019

³⁹ Shiv Ganesh and Kirstie McAllum. "Volunteering and Professionalization: Tensions and Trends." Submission to the Pre-conference on Non-profit Organizations, Organizational Communication Division, National Communication Association Annual Convention, November 2010.

⁴⁰ Ibid



Trends in Volunteerism

The patterns and demographics of Alberta's volunteers indicate that Albertans in every demographic category are generous with their time and talents. The needs of different groups of volunteers, however, deserve further examination, as the motivations and needs of individuals vary, based on their different identities. Key trends informed by research that could have implications for Alberta's volunteer landscape include:

Rural and Urban Albertans Volunteer Differently

In 2019, Propellus (the Volunteer Centre of Calgary) released *Representing Volunteers in Alberta*. The Propellus report was prepared using data collected through an online survey of volunteers on the Propellus' *Volunteer Connector* website and through direct email campaign conducted jointly with volunteer centres across Alberta, ensuring a diversity of perspectives was captured. The report indicates that rural volunteers are significantly more likely to be involved with neighbourhood associations or boards. Urban volunteers, however, are more likely to volunteer through school-based opportunities.

The study also found that rural volunteers are asked by fellow community members to get involved and focus on contributing to the community, whereas urban individuals are more likely to find their volunteer opportunities online and the focus is on contributing to a cause.⁴¹

According to the Propellus⁴² report, in urban settings, individuals cited more often themes of personal motivation to volunteer (volunteering in my child's school teaches me new things or volunteering helps me meet people) and volunteering as a way to build and use their skills.

In rural areas, the majority of respondents emphasize being part of the community or neighbourhood association as the reason for volunteering. Rural volunteers tended to volunteer more frequently than their urban counterparts and were involved with many different organizations with which they had a personal connection. It was also found that individuals are more likely to volunteer if they are approached directly by someone associated with an organization or volunteer-driven project.

The demographics of rural communities present unique challenges to volunteer driven nonprofit organizations. Rural populations in most parts of North America are simultaneously declining and aging as young adults leave rural communities. These challenges are more acute in rural areas where natural resource development is a primary economic driver, as the boom/bust nature of resource extraction means that populations fluctuate.⁴³ Volunteers in rural communities, therefore, are often responsible for keeping a number of nonprofit organizations running, leading to risk of burnout. Innovative approaches in managing nonprofit groups and recruiting volunteers are required, and often require a high degree of cooperation that may not be as prevalent or necessary in an urban community.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Representing Volunteers in Alberta, Propellus, 2019

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Laura Ryser and Greg Halseth. "On the Edge in Rural Canada: The Changing Capacity and Role of the Voluntary Sector," *Canadian Journal of Nonprofit and Social Economy Research*, vol. 5, no. 1, spring 2014

⁴⁴ Ibid

Different Age Groups Have Different Motivations and Barriers to Volunteering

While the volunteerism rate for Alberta youth (under 19) is unknown, Canadian statistics show that 66% of youth report engaging in some form of volunteerism. Over the past two decades, there have been significant efforts made to encourage youth volunteerism and to promote the value of volunteering to youth as a way of increasing social capital, and developing job-related skills.⁴⁵ Research suggests that youth are motivated to volunteer, and continue volunteering, when their friends and parents are engaged in volunteer activities. Youth are more likely to volunteer and continue to provide time to an organization or cause when they believe that they have the skills and ability to complete tasks or participate in a project.⁴⁶ They are likely cite a lack of time, a lack of confidence or skills, and not knowing about opportunities as the primary barriers to volunteering.⁴⁷ This suggests that volunteer opportunities targeted to youth should use a strengths-based approach, emphasizing the transferability of skills that they likely already have.

Including volunteerism as part of the educational curriculum is also helping to introduce and engage young people in a culture of volunteering. Although not mandated, some school boards have chosen to implement community service programs as part of school life in their district.⁴⁸ The Alberta Catholic School Boards has established a significant community service-programming component, asking for 10-25 hours of community service from their students. The intent of offering opportunities is to create interest in volunteering and for students to become lifelong volunteers.

As Alberta's volunteer statistics show, adults between the ages of 35-45 provide the highest number of volunteer hours on an annual basis. Senior volunteers also provide a significant amount of time to their communities. As Alberta will have more than one million seniors by 2035, it is important to understand the unique barriers they face to volunteer engagement. Research suggests that older adults continue to volunteer substantial amounts of their time until some point in their 70s.⁴⁹ Commonly cited barriers to volunteerism for older adults include not knowing about opportunities (there is evidence to suggest that personal invitations to participate are particularly important for this group of volunteers), physical health, challenges with transportation, stigmatization (the idea that they are viewed as less capable because of age), and caregiving responsibilities.⁵⁰

Adults in the 45-65 age category may be part of the "sandwich generation," where they are responsible for childcare and elder care, and may also be responsible for spousal care, providing assistance to adult children and their children, and friends and neighbours.⁵¹ While Albertans in this age category are likely performing a high volume of informal volunteering tasks, they may be less likely to be attached to formal opportunities. To increase engagement in formal volunteering for middle-aged adults, organizations may wish to leverage the informal connections they have to these volunteers, or offer episodic or online opportunities.

⁴⁵ Emma Taylor-Collins, Tom Harrison, Stephen J. Thoma, Francisco Moller. "A Habit of Social Action: Understanding the Factors Associated with Adolescents who have Made a Habit of Helping Others." *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, no. 30, 2019

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ Ibid

⁴⁸ Community Service and Service Learning in Canada, A profile of programming across the country, Imagine Canada, 2007

⁴⁹ Nancy Morrow-Howell. "Volunteering in Later Life: Research Frontiers," *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B*, vol. 65B, no. 4, July 2010

⁵⁰ Kris Southby, Jane South, Anne-Marie Bagnall. "A Rapid Review of Barriers to Volunteering for Potentially Disadvantaged Groups and Implications for Health Inequalities," *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of the Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector*, no. 30, 2019

⁵¹ Alana M. Boyczuk and Paula C Fletcher, "The Ebbs and Flows: Stresses of Sandwich Generation Caregivers,

Trends in Volunteer Management

Getting volunteers to agree to give their time is only the first step of maintaining volunteer engagement. In an ideal world, volunteer management follows a cycle:

The rapid pace of disruptive change created by external factors (including technology, sociopolitical upheaval, and economic shifts) means that the ideal process rarely plays out in a perfectly cyclical way. There are several trends in volunteer management that may create challenges and opportunities for the sector.

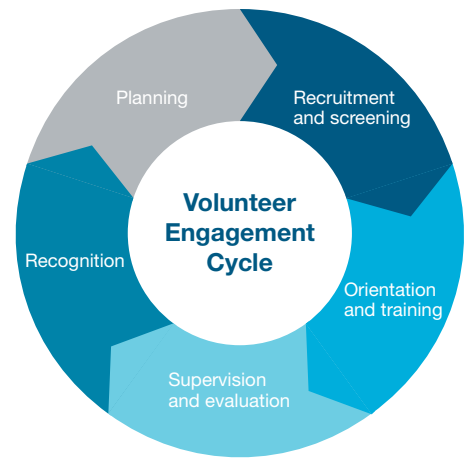
Volunteer Retention Requires Flexibility

Retention (ensuring that volunteers remain engaged and continue giving time) and recognition (thanking volunteers and making note of their contributions and impact on an organization and their community) are of equal importance.

Per the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy, volunteer retention depends on three factors: the ability of an organization to place a volunteer in a role that meets their needs, the ability to modify that role as a volunteer's needs change, and to provide a spectrum of roles that volunteers can rotate through.⁵²

Training has also been cited as a major factor in volunteer retention.^{53, 54} As the nonprofit sector continues the process of professionalization, training becomes an increasingly important tool for engaging and retaining volunteers. Training can be role specific, or can be for skills related to a volunteer role that can be applied outside of a volunteer context.

Retention is also based on the perceived importance of a volunteer's work, and the level of support a volunteer feels that they receive from an organization.⁵⁵ Qualitative research suggests that retention factors may be different, depending on which generation a volunteer belongs to. Baby boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) place a high value on results, and personal asks to participate in volunteer activities.⁵⁶ The needs of volunteers from subsequent generations (Generation X, Y and Z) are different, and their attachment to formal volunteerism largely hinges on the alignment of an organization's values and contributions with the volunteer's personal values.⁵⁷ Retention of volunteers born in the 1970s and later, therefore, might rely on an organization's ability to effectively tell the story of its values and impact, and how it improves its community.



The Leadership Empowerment and Achieving a Difference (LEAD) program at Volunteer Airdrie is an example of youth engagement and volunteering. This program offers youths in grades 7 to 12 the opportunity to partake in 10 in-class sessions accompanied by 20 hours of volunteering. They learn skills that will help them succeed in volunteer positions such as teamwork, management skills and conflict management. This program allows youths to be equipped with the skills necessary to be successful in volunteer positions.

⁵² An assessment of the need to improve the body of knowledge on volunteers and volunteering in Canada. Husbands, McKechnie & Gagnon, Canadian Centre for Philanthropy, 1999

⁵³ Government of Canada, 2016, Guide to Exemplary Practices in Volunteer Recruitment and Retention

⁵⁴ The Alberta Non-profit/Voluntary Sector in a Changing Economy

⁵⁵ Garner & Garner, 2010, Volunteering an Opinion: Organizational Voice and Volunteer Retention in Non-profit Organizations

⁵⁶ Howard, Tonya Renee. Developing Generation Based Volunteer Management Practices. Doctoral thesis, Walden University, 2016.

⁵⁷ Ibid

Offering a range of opportunities for volunteers may also require flexibility in how volunteers provide time to a cause or organization. Nonprofit organizations with more formal processes and structures compete for time and attention from volunteers who can give their time, talent and treasure in many informal, quick ways. An emerging trend in volunteerism is “gamification,” which is the “use of game design elements outside of games themselves.”⁵⁸ An example of gamification in informal volunteerism is the #trashchallenge, which encouraged community members to clean up garbage in their neighbourhoods. Gamification can be used as a way to build volunteer agency and capabilities, and can give tech-savvy volunteers an avenue to give their time, and lend their creative talents to an organization’s work.

Volunteer Recognition is an Ongoing Process

According to Volunteer Canada, volunteer recognition should take place during the entire volunteer engagement cycle, even at recruitment. When organizations take the time to understand their volunteers, and the tasks that they enjoy, the roles they prefer, and why they wish to support an organization, recognition is occurring.

Meaningful recognition varies from person to person. Not only is it important to acknowledge the work that volunteers are doing in the province, it is also an integral part of a successful retention strategy. From Volunteer Canada’s 2013 Volunteer Recognition Survey, 80% of volunteers just want to know that their efforts have made a difference. The same survey reported that close to 70% wanted to be recognized by being thanked on an informal ongoing basis. The 2013 survey also stated that nonprofit’s most commonly perceived barrier for recognition is the lack of funding to do so. However, most volunteers want to be recognized by simply hearing the impact that they made to the organization, cause or community.

There is evidence to suggest that organizations that can relay a compelling narrative about the need for volunteers, coupled with the promise of recognition, are able to recruit more volunteers who provide a higher number of volunteer hours.⁵⁹ Recognition efforts are correlated to volunteer retention; organizations that consistently engage in volunteer recognition activities are less likely to report issues with volunteer recruitment and retention. Volunteers who felt satisfied with the frequency and form of recognition they received were more likely to continue volunteering.⁶⁰

Organizations should take the time to figure out what type of recognition their volunteers are looking for, and determine what is meaningful to them. Volunteer Canada cites that it is important for organizations to get to know their volunteers and understand their motivations and preferences.⁶¹ There are tools that have been developed to determine how volunteers want to be recognized, for example, volunteer Canada has the Volunteer Recognition Tool, in which a short survey is filled out to determine the ways in which they like to be recognized. Additionally, research suggests that nearly all volunteer recognition activities are correlated to higher levels of volunteer satisfaction; the only three types of recognition that did not significantly predict satisfaction were awards, opportunities to participate in conferences, and media publicity.⁶²

⁵⁸ Dana Litwin, CVA. “The Gamification of Volunteering,” Top 20 Ideas in Volunteer Engagement in 2020. Edited by Erin Spink.

⁵⁹ Christopher Einolf. “Evidence-based volunteer management: a review of the literature.” Voluntary Sector Review, published online, July 12, 2018.

⁶⁰ Ibid

⁶¹ 2013 Volunteer Recognition Survey, Volunteer Canada

⁶² Einolf, 2018

Volunteer Management is Changing

The most recent external factor to upend regular volunteer management practices is the COVID-19 pandemic. Social distancing required many nonprofit organizations to temporarily cease operations, or change the way that they deliver their programs and services. The pandemic has also created challenges for volunteer screening.

Ideally, volunteer screening is a ten-step process (highlighted in the sidebar). However, several factors limited the ability of organizations to conduct thorough screenings in the early days of the pandemic: fewer people were available to complete checks, more episodic volunteers wanted to provide help, and the nature of volunteer tasks, in many cases, had shifted dramatically.

An additional compounding factor in volunteer management during the pandemic is the rise of unaffiliated volunteers joining informal networks to provide community support, instead of volunteering through formal organizations that have processes in place to vet individuals who wish to help. While the COVID-19 crisis makes this trend more apparent, the shift to individual, grassroots support for community members in need is a longer term trend, and tied to volunteer desires to take on tasks that are informal, and have less associated time commitment. Formal nonprofit organizations may wish to join forces with grassroots, online community support groups to draw from a pool of willing informal volunteers for episodic opportunities, as well as to offer guidance and support to organizers who are trying to coordinate informal volunteers. Establishing mutually beneficial relationships with a pool of informal volunteers helps to build a positive association with an organization, and may translate into future volunteer commitments.⁶³

The Alberta Northern Lights Volunteer Recognition Program was launched by the Government of Alberta on April 22, 2020 amid the COVID-19 pandemic to recognize outstanding individuals or groups, including organizations and businesses that exemplify Alberta's spirit of volunteerism. Using nominations received from the public, an analysis was conducted from which certain trends in volunteering during the COVID-19 pandemic can be seen. These trends are captured on the next page.

Ten Steps to Volunteer Screening

1. Determine policies and risks
2. Write clear volunteer position/role descriptions
3. Establish formal recruitment process
4. Use an application form
5. Conduct interviews and get to know the volunteer
6. Follow-up with references
7. If required, request a Police Information Check
8. Conduct orientation and training sessions
9. Supervise and evaluate the volunteer
10. Follow-up and feedback from volunteer

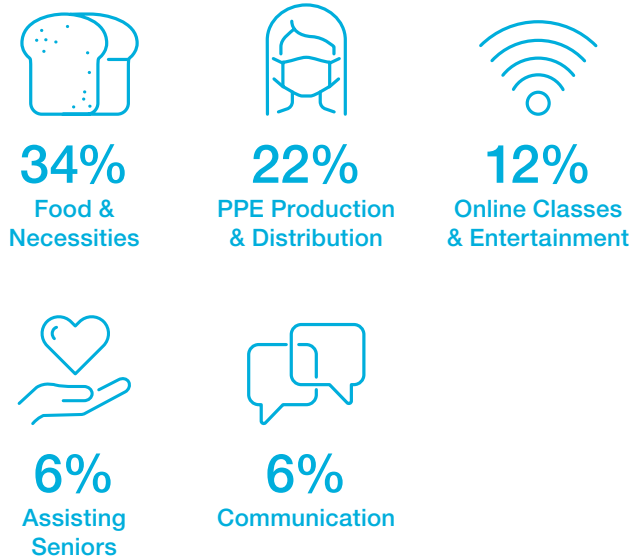
⁶³ Amy Stow. "Building Support by Reducing Commitment." Top 20 Ideas for Volunteer Engagement for 2020. Edited by Erin Spink.

Volunteering During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Alberta

Top 5 areas of volunteering during the COVID-19 pandemic

Many **New Volunteer Activities and Projects** emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic:

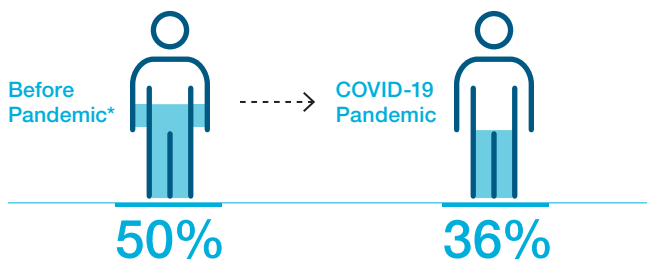
- To help vulnerable individuals and those required to self-isolate, many volunteers took to delivering groceries and essentials within their community.
- As the need for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) grew, volunteers began mass-producing homemade masks, scrub bags and ear saver straps.
- Volunteers also arranged birthday parades to help lessen the disappointment of having to cancel parties and celebrate both children and adults in their communities.



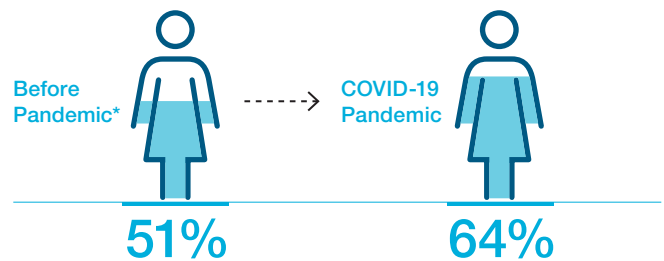
Overall percentage of nominations received for volunteering within these areas

Gender Split

Male

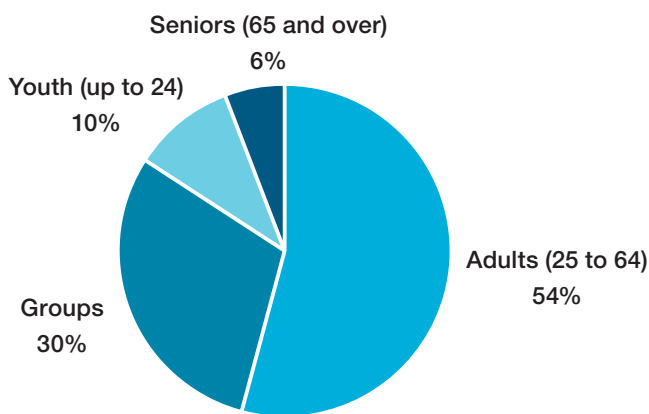


Female



*Statistics Canada, General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2013

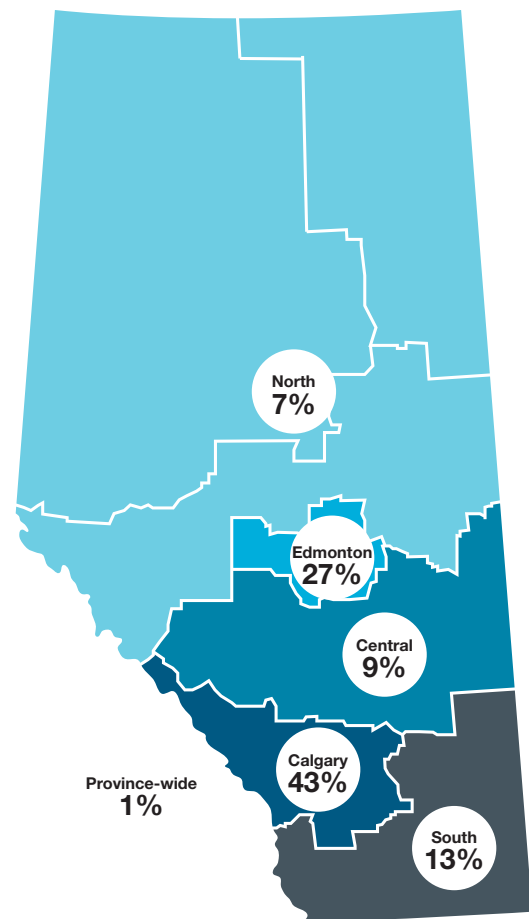
Age and Group Differences in Volunteering



15% of volunteer nominations received were affiliated with a cultural group working in areas such as food insecurity and translating public health information into other languages.

Regional Distribution

Location of volunteer work based on nominations received



Many volunteers engaged in **Virtual Volunteering**, due to public health measures during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Volunteers set up pages on social media sites like Facebook to share information and resources, support one another during this challenging time, and organize projects like grocery delivery services or birthday parade celebrations.
- Volunteers also went online to share their skills with their community, offering online fitness classes, tutoring, and entertainment.

Roles in Maintaining Alberta's Volunteer Ecosystem

Managing Alberta's volunteer ecosystem is a complex undertaking, and requires oversight and leadership from multiple civil society actors. Responsibility for maintaining and growing capacity for volunteerism and civic engagement across Alberta is a shared by several key actors, including:

Alberta Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Organizations

The Alberta Nonprofit/Voluntary Sector is comprised of two interconnected, but distinct segments. Alberta nonprofits form a diverse and large group of over 26,400 organizations. The nonprofit sector is comprised of organizations in all subsectors, from sports and recreation to business, and human services. These organizations provide vital services to Albertans, and are run by Albertans, often in a volunteer capacity.

The voluntary sector is comprised of individual volunteers and organizations (i.e. Volunteer Alberta, regional and community volunteer centres) whose mandates include programs and services to sustain and grow volunteerism.

Nonprofit and voluntary sector organizations are primarily responsible for managing the volunteer engagement cycle, and are the primary contact points for volunteer recruitment. To support some capacity building organizations, the Government of Alberta provides funds through the **Enhanced Capacity Advancement Program (ECAP)**. ECAP supports organizations that provide broad capacity building for the sector. Among other actions that bolster sector capacity, organizations that receive ECAP funding facilitate the development of enhanced capacity for volunteer recruitment, retention and recognition.

Several organizations serve specific provincial roles in developing and maintaining volunteer capacity. **Propellus** (Volunteer Centre of Calgary) provides access to the Volunteer Connector, providing backbone support to organizations across the province in recruiting volunteers. In April 2020, Propellus partnered with the Government of Alberta in launching the Alberta Cares Connector, providing access to volunteer opportunities to support community during the COVID-19 crisis.

Volunteer centres began as a provincial initiative to support volunteerism. The province operates over 30 volunteer centres and many other Family and Community Support Services (FCSS). Approximately 30 years ago, the provincial government invested in municipal government to create volunteer centres. These centres range from being stand-alone entities, or a department in a municipality, while some are a blend of both. The function of volunteer centres is to ensure that new and existing volunteers have a place to go for information and support regarding volunteering. They provide information on available opportunities.

Volunteer Alberta plays a significant role in supporting the province's volunteers, volunteer centres, and nonprofit organizations. Founded in 1990, Volunteer Alberta supports and convenes the province's volunteer centres. Volunteer Alberta's mission is to "strengthen nonprofit sector organizations through knowledge exchange and strategic connections." Volunteer Alberta has over 350 members, and provides guidance and support to facilitate and enhance community engagement.

Municipalities

Municipalities are an essential public sector partner in delivering volunteer services, and providing capacity and funding to volunteer serving agencies. In addition to providing physical space for some FCSS programs, or maintaining responsibility for delivery of the FCSS program, many municipalities are instrumental in volunteer recognition, retention and recruitment. Municipal governments may have grants available to nonprofit organizations, or may provide free space for meetings. Municipalities often work in partnership with nonprofit organizations to run and maintain essential public infrastructure, including arenas, theatres, and libraries. In Alberta, many villages, towns, counties and cities play a major role in recognizing volunteers through initiatives such as National Volunteer Week.

Government of Alberta

The Government of Alberta and the NPVS have interconnected mandates to provide services to all Albertans. The sector and the government work very closely to ensure there is accountability from both sides. Almost every ministry is affected by the work done by nonprofits and volunteers and as such, this relationship is very important.

Government is a partner with nonprofit organizations on several key initiatives, including:

National Volunteer Week, which is delivered in partnership with Volunteer Alberta. National Volunteer Week supports community-based celebrations and recognition of the contributions of volunteers, and promotes the awareness of volunteerism.

The Volunteer Screening Program, delivered in partnership with Volunteer Alberta, supports nonprofit organizations to develop effective volunteer screening and management practices through education, resources and reimbursement for the cost of Vulnerable Sector Checks, in order to remove cost barriers that may exist for volunteers and volunteer organizations.

The program includes three components: education and training, micro grants to help organizations develop and implement effective screening policies, and a fee waiver subsidy to cover the cost of Vulnerable Sector Checks for eligible organizations.

The Government of Alberta also leads initiatives in volunteer recognition. These initiatives include **Stars of Alberta**, an annual volunteer celebration that recognizes six exceptional volunteers (two recipients in each category of youth, adult and senior).

Alberta's Northern Lights Volunteer Recognition Program recognizes Alberta's everyday heroes, celebrating volunteers who perform acts of service in their community in both informal and formal capacities. While these initiatives are led by the Government of Alberta, nonprofit sector partners play a significant role in raising awareness of the programs, and through participating in selecting the recipients for Stars.

The Government of Alberta is also responsible for convening **Alberta's Nonprofit/Voluntary Sector Initiative (ANVSI)**. Created in 2007, ANVSI is an ongoing collaborative forum for government and sector representatives to build awareness on the important role of the sector, provide input on key government policies, and identify and address key issues affecting the sector. Ultimately, the initiative works to strengthen the connection between the government and the sector. This initiative is the first of its kind in the country. The ANVSI Leaders Council, comprised of representatives of nonprofit and volunteer organizations and four government ministries, has helped to guide policy and strategy across various ministries to better support the sector as a whole.

Government of Canada

The federal government is increasingly recognizing the importance of volunteers in supporting the delivery of public services. In June 2018, a special Senate Committee on the Charitable Sector was appointed to examine the impact of federal and provincial laws and policies governing charities, nonprofit organizations, foundations and other similar groups. The Special Senate Committee released its final report *Catalyst for Change: A Roadmap to a Stronger Charitable Sector* on June 20, 2019, containing 42 key findings and recommendations. One of the key recommendations is to develop a National Volunteer Strategy. The recommendations have not been officially accepted, but the federal government has established an advisory committee that will oversee the next steps for implementing the report and its recommendations.

Like other orders of government, the federal government relies on volunteers to support delivery of essential services and government programs. Volunteers are central to the federal government's COVID-19 management strategy. In April 2020, the Public Service Commission of Canada created an inventory of volunteer positions to assist in contact tracing, translation and statistical modelling.

Conclusion

Volunteerism takes the form of acts that are informal or formal, through individual actions, or acts carried out by families or groups. Alberta's volunteers are drawn from all backgrounds, and serve to maintain strong civic engagement, vibrant communities, and public gathering places. They also serve as foundational supports for the province's 26,400 nonprofit organizations, filling front line and governance roles. Volunteers coach team sports, organize festivals, serve on condominium boards, donate blood, cook meals, provide mentorship and childcare, and plant community gardens. Volunteers help to fill in the gaps and create better communities.

Volunteers also support the economy through their donations of time. The value of volunteer time is estimated to be worth \$5.6 billion annually. These are costs that other civil society actors, including government and private sector employers, do not absorb. The nonprofit sector provides services using volunteer labour, serving all Albertans with minimal investment from all orders of government.

Alberta is a leader in its volunteer commitment. To maintain and grow the province's healthy volunteer ecosystem, it is important that civil society actors continue to work together to identify gaps and needs, ensuring that all Albertans are able to realize the benefits of volunteerism.

Greater emphasis is needed to strengthen volunteer engagement and to ensure that programs to effectively support and manage volunteers, such as volunteer screening, are functioning at a high standard. Nonprofit organizations can benefit from identifying trends and adapting to the ongoing evolution of community volunteers they rely upon.

The work of strengthening and growing volunteerism in Alberta is not the work of a single entity, but requires the collective expertise, creativity, initiative and leadership of those who rely on and engage volunteers in making Alberta a great place to live. Across Canada and internationally, governments are working with stakeholders to develop strategies to harness the power of civil society, recognizing the invaluable contribution of volunteers is central to these strategies.

During uncertain times, volunteers take care of their neighbours. Alberta's civil society actors should continue to work diligently to ensure that supports for volunteers remain strong.

"(Being) Canadian is like being a part of a big family. By having an enormous volunteer culture we are bettering Canada one step at a time and making it one of the best places to call home!"

Harry, volunteer

Volunteer stories from ecvo.com/volunteers, for a Canada 150 profile



Appendix

Description of Surveys Discussed

Statistics Canada

The data referenced in this paper has been released in the General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating. The latest data was collected in 2013, and it is comparable with the surveys that were conducted in 2004, 2007, and 2010. The target population for this survey are individuals age 15 years or older living in the 10 provinces. The survey is done via a cross-sectional design that uses stratified probability sampling where information is collected from randomly selected individuals.

Survey of Albertans

The Survey of Albertans is conducted yearly by Alberta Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women (formerly Culture and Tourism). It is done to understand the perceptions of Albertans on various topics related to volunteerism, arts, heritage, recreation, sport, tourism and the cultural industries. The report is composed of data from 1,000 random telephone interviews. The target population is Albertans who are 18 years or older. The sample was distributed based on region, gender and age.

Representing Volunteers in Alberta

Conducted by Propellus in 2019, the survey was conducted to profile volunteerism from the perspective of volunteers. The data was collected through two methods: the Volunteer Connector website and volunteer centres in Lethbridge, Red Deer and Wood Buffalo region. There were 408 respondents, where 333 were urban and 75 were rural. **Rural** is defined as municipalities with less than one hundred thousand population (Hanna, Lethbridge, Okotoks, Wood Buffalo Region, etc.). **Urban** is defined as municipalities with a population greater than one hundred thousand (Edmonton area, Calgary area and Red Deer).

