

BUILDING THE BRIDGE FOR VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT

The Canadian voluntary sector's perspective on the trends and
issues identified in Bridging the Gap



JANUARY 2013

FORWARD

Volunteer Canada and Manulife Financial have been working in partnership, since 2010, to bridge the gap between what Canadians are looking for in their volunteer experience and how organizations are engaging volunteers. The initiative began with a pan-Canadian study that gathered the views from current, past, and those who have never volunteered, as well as the perceptions from those working in volunteer-involving organizations, summarized in **Bridging the Gap: Enriching the Volunteer Experience for a Better Future for our Communities**

This second phase of research delves deeper into the capacity of organizations to respond to the gaps, trends and issues in volunteering and citizen engagement. The research also serves to examine innovative practices, models and tools for engaging today's volunteers.

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METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To assess the capacity of organizations to address the gaps identified:

- a. Many people are looking for group activities *BUT* few organizations have the capacity to offer them;
- b. Many people come with professional skills *BUT* many professionals are looking for volunteer tasks that involve something different from their work life;
- c. Organizations are expected to clearly define the roles and boundaries of volunteers *BUT* many volunteers want the flexibility to initiate what they have to offer (i.e., create their own volunteer opportunity);
- d. Many organizations still want long-term commitment *BUT* many more volunteers are looking for shorter-term opportunities; and
- e. Many organizations focus on what they need *BUT* besides helping others, many volunteers come with their own goals to be met.

2. To gather innovative practices and models that incorporate the key characteristics of volunteering:

- a. Volunteering changes through our life cycle.
- b. Volunteers today are different.
- c. Volunteering is a two-way relationship.
- d. Volunteering is personal
- e. Volunteering is a way to transfer and develop skills.

3. To identify strengths and challenges for organizations in responding to the key issues identified by volunteers in their engagement with organizations:

- a. Organizational politics.
- b. Underutilization of skills.
- c. Volunteer activity poorly organized.
- d. Lack of support and appreciation.
- e. Inadequate communication and feedback.

METHODOLOGY

Online Survey - The online survey explored the capacity of organizations to respond to key characteristics of volunteering and to communicate about their experience engaging volunteers vis-à-vis the key gaps identified in Bridging the Gap. (Please see a list of gaps in objective #1 on the previous page). A bilingual online survey of 18 questions was distributed to non-profit and voluntary organizations through the networks of Volunteer Canada, provincial/territorial associations, and local volunteer centres between November 2011 and January 2012.

Survey responses were collected from a total sample size of 583 respondents, 554 in English and 29 in French. These results are analyzed through various filters, including size of organization, sub-sector, regional differences, as well as other variables that may produce correlations.

Interviews - A total of 27 interviews were carried out to gather perceptions about the capacity of volunteer-involving organizations to respond to the gaps and key characteristics that emerged from Bridging the Gap, as well as their ability to incorporate advice from volunteers about improving the volunteer experience. Using deductive analysis, key themes are summarized in this report and successful practices and models were collected.

Case Study – A case study was conducted to highlight an organization that has gone through an intentional transformation in terms of its volunteer engagement strategies. The case study describes the organization's history, mandate, precipitating factors for changes, strategies, challenges, and milestones.

National Round Table - Leaders from the public, private, and voluntary sector, involved in national organizations, were invited to participate in a national round table discussion. The purpose of the round table was to provide a level of validation or counterinterviews, insights behind the findings, and to provide guidance as to the content, format, and applied dissemination strategies for the research.

SURVEY

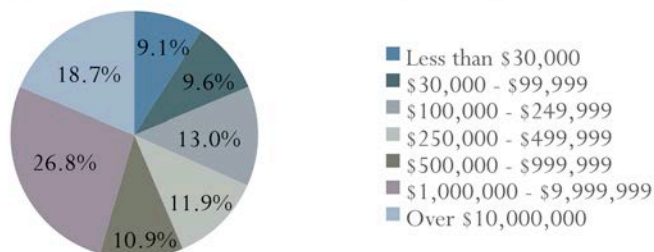


A survey was conducted to explore the capacity of organizations to respond to key characteristics of volunteering and to communicate about their experience engaging volunteers vis-à-vis the key gaps identified in Bridging the Gap. Survey responses were collected from a total sample size of 583 respondents, 554 in English and 29 in French.

THE RESPONDENTS

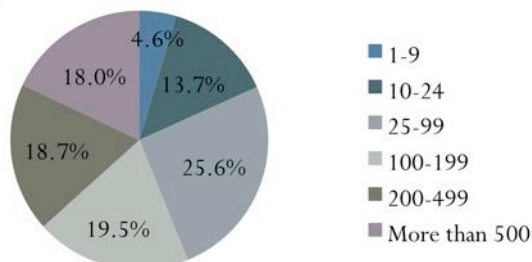
The majority of survey respondents were from the Social Services sector (30%), with Health (Community-based) being the second most represented sector (22%). The organizations surveyed, displayed vast geographical diversity in terms of where they were carrying out their activities. There was representation in all provinces and territories, as well as nationally and internationally. There was somewhat higher than proportional representation from Ontario— with 52% indicating their activities were carried out in the province (whereas only 42% of non-profit organizations reside in Ontario (Imagine Canada, 2003, National Survey on Non-profit and Voluntary Organizations). 46% of respondents had an annual operating budget of between \$1,000,000 and \$10,000,000

What size is your organization in terms of annual operating budget?



70% of respondents indicated that their organization was a registered charity, with 29% being incorporated in their province/territory. Fewer respondents indicated being a local branch of a provincial/territorial/national organization (11%) or federally incorporated (8%).

How many volunteers have been engaged in your organization over the past year?

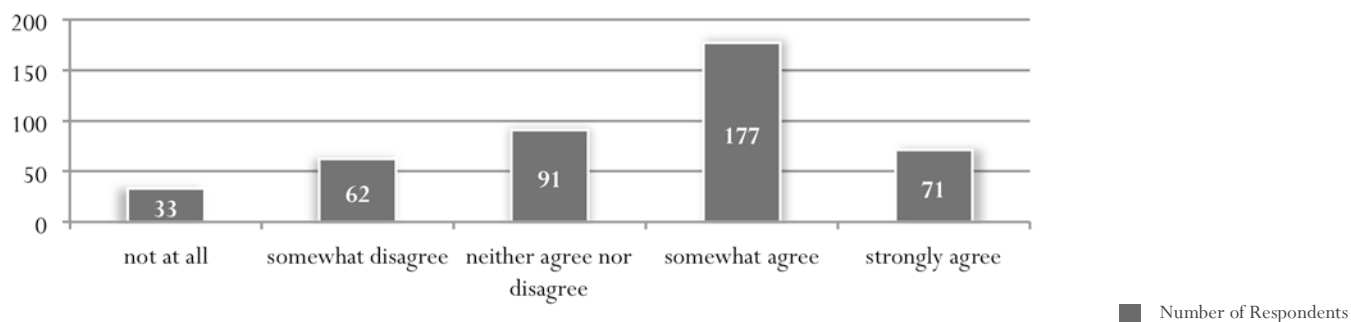


Organizations surveyed had diversity in terms of the numbers of volunteers they engaged with in their volunteer programs. 56% of organizations engaged with over 100 volunteers in the past year. As it relates to supporting volunteer engagement, 38% of organizations have a decentralized volunteer program, in which volunteer engagement is distributed to each program area. Another 34% indicated having a volunteer department. Support is also distributed to particular departments (Community development 12%, Human resources 12% and Fund development 4%).

SURVEY

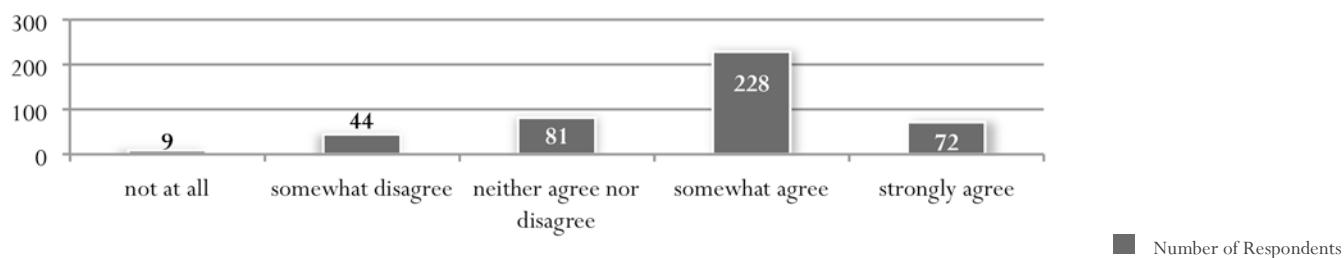
BRIDGING THE GAP RESEARCH FINDINGS- ORGANIZATIONS' EXPERIENCES

Many people are looking for group activities BUT few organizations have the capacity to offer them



248 respondents indicated that they either somewhat agreed or strongly agreed with the research finding that highlighted the capacity challenges that organizations have in providing group opportunities. In certain cases, it is possible organizations hadn't been approached by many people seeking group volunteer opportunities, and in other circumstances organizations felt that they did in fact have the capacity to effectively respond.

Many people come with professional skills BUT many professionals are looking for volunteer tasks that involve something different from their work life

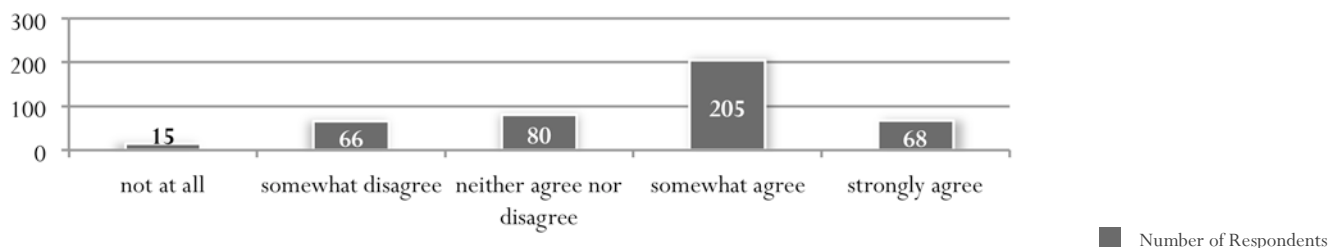


A large number of respondents (300) indicated that they either somewhat agreed or strongly agreed that many professionals are looking for volunteer tasks that involve something different from their work life. This research finding resonated strongly amongst organizations, and highlights the importance of not pigeon holing volunteers into positions related to their career path, but instead taking the time to discover volunteers' interests, passions and motivations.

SURVEY

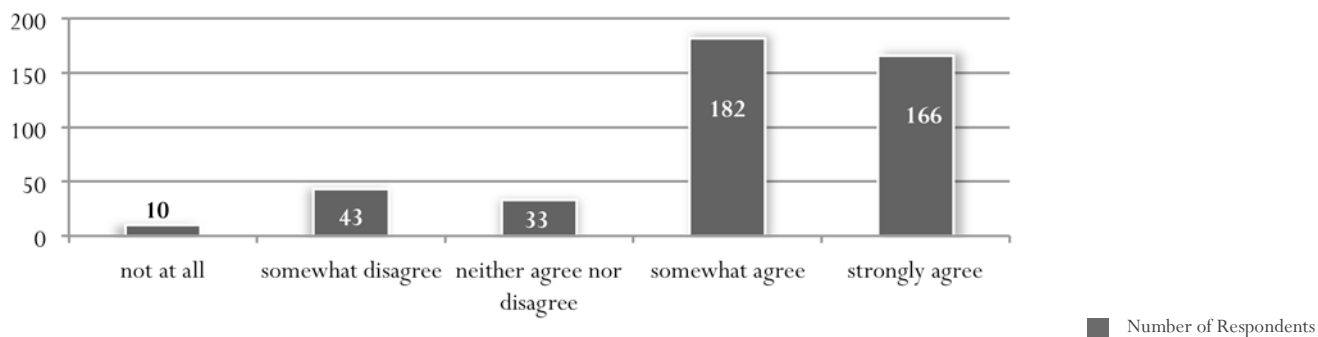
BRIDGING THE GAP RESEARCH FINDINGS- ORGANIZATIONS' EXPERIENCES

Organizations are expected to clearly define the roles and boundaries of volunteers BUT many volunteers want the flexibility to initiate what they have to offer (i.e., create their own volunteer opportunity)



273 respondents either somewhat agreed or strongly agreed with the request by volunteers to initiate their own volunteer opportunities and for greater flexibility in their roles. Another 81 indicated that this was not at all the case, or that they somewhat disagreed with that experience. While some organizations may design formal roles that require clearly delineated tasks and responsibilities, others may have the option to establish roles that are more organic in nature in which volunteers have the flexibility to engage in a variety of different and evolving tasks.

Many organizations still want long-term commitment BUT many more volunteers are looking for shorter-term opportunities

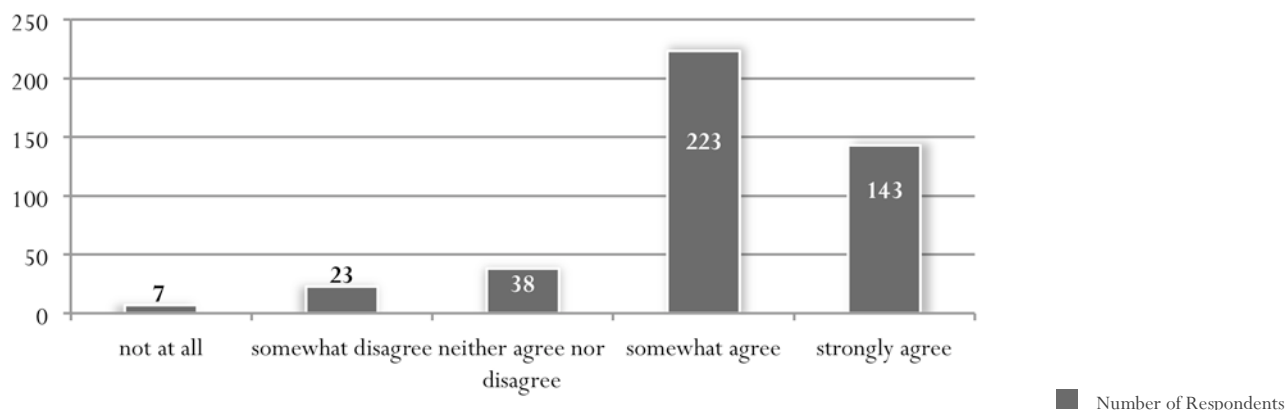


348 respondents agreed that more volunteers are looking for shorter-term opportunities. In the two years that have passed since the Bridging the Gap landscape research, this trend has featured prominently from coast to coast to coast. For some organizations, this requires rethinking volunteer programs and task division. However, for organizations that depend on long-term commitment and established relationships between volunteers and vulnerable groups, short-term opportunities are difficult to establish.

SURVEY

BRIDGING THE GAP RESEARCH FINDINGS- ORGANIZATIONS' EXPERIENCES

Many organizations focus on what they need BUT many volunteers also come with their own goals to be met



Increasingly organizations are encountering volunteers that have their own direction, objectives and even specific tasks in mind. Of all of the research findings, this one was the most prominently agreed to by survey respondents. 366 respondents either somewhat agreed or strongly agreed with the above statement. Less interested in filling a volunteer posting as is, today's volunteers seek to fulfill particular goals and objectives to bring more satisfaction to their commitments. The greater demands being made by volunteers can be positive in that volunteers are actively creating more fulfilling positions, which can lead to stronger retention. On the other hand, organizations can find it challenging to ensure that their needs are still met for tasks that may be interpreted as less appealing to some volunteers.

ORGANIZATIONS' CONSIDERATIONS WHEN ENGAGING VOLUNTEERS

	Not at all	Somewhat	Significantly
Volunteering changes through our life cycle	29	219	183
The demographics of our volunteer base is changing	60	206	167
Volunteering is a two-way relationship	7	63	363
Volunteering is personal	11	109	313
Volunteering is a way to transfer and develop skills	7	116	311

Organizations felt that "Volunteering is a two-way relationship," "Volunteering is personal" and "Volunteering is a way to transfer and develop skills" were all very significant influences in how they engage volunteers. There was not a significant response to changing demographics as consideration when engaging volunteers. Reciprocity in volunteering is certainly acknowledged by organizations, and corresponds with the observation that more of today's volunteers seeking to support their own objectives and goals.



ENGAGING VOLUNTEERS FROM DIFFERENT GROUPS

YOUTH

72% of organizations indicate that it is either somewhat or very easy to engage youth volunteers. Meanwhile, over a quarter of organizations still state that it is not easy at all to engage youth.

FAMILIES

Organizations cite the greatest challenge as it relates to engaging family volunteers with 60% stating that it is not easy at all. 62% indicate that they do not have or infrequently have the adequate tools, training and strategies to engage families.

EMPLOYER-SUPPORTED VOLUNTEERS

Organizations also cite challenges relating to engaging employer supported or workplace volunteers. 36% of organizations indicated that it is not easy at all to engage this group.

BABY BOOMERS

Organizations find it comparably easier to engage baby boomers with 91% finding it either easy or very easy to engage this cohort. 38% indicated that baby boomers are most of the time their “leadership volunteers.”

SENIORS

Organizations have indicated relative ease as it relates to engaging seniors. 82% of organizations indicate that it is either somewhat or very easy to engage seniors.

NEWCOMERS

30% of organizations state that it is not easy at all to engage newcomer volunteers. 32% of organizations indicated that most or all of the time they are encountering more immigrants and new Canadians seeking volunteer opportunities.

CHALLENGES IN VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT

- Organizations indicate that their most serious concerns reside in the economy (24%) and risk and liability (22%).
- Organizations indicate that they experience no concern with incorporating Mandatory Community Service Programs (51%) and 42% indicate that policies and practices related to screening pose no concern.
- 50% of organizations indicate that they are concerned with changes to legislation and how this will affect volunteer engagement. 51% of organizations cite concern with keeping up with technology and 59% of organizations indicate the professional development needs are a concern.

INTERVIEWS



Between October 2011 and January 2012, 27 Shift conducted phone and Skype interviews with 27 individuals. The intent of these interviews was two fold: 1) to determine if the gaps and trends identified in the first phase of Bridging the Gap resonated with the voluntary sector; and 2) to potentially identify effective and innovative practice in the areas discussed in the first phase of Bridging the Gap research.

ABOUT THE RESPONDENTS

The interviewees comprised a blend of staff from small, medium and large charities and nonprofit organizations; staff at volunteer centres; consultants; and retired volunteer engagement professionals.

One consideration around the representation of this research relates to the demographics of the interview participants – all interviews were conducted in English, and no interviews were conducted with individuals in PEI, Newfoundland and Labrador, Yukon, Northwest Territories, or Nunavut.

The volunteer programs explored in these interviews demonstrated diversity in roles and numbers – from engaging fewer than 10 volunteers all the way up to tens of thousands. When asked to describe the types of volunteers engaged by their organizations, most respondents spoke about four areas:

- direct support (e.g. peer support, care, tutoring)
- education/awareness (e.g. giving presentations, being present at community events)
- fundraising (e.g. specific campaigns, special events, gift/thrift shops)
- general administration (e.g. archives, mailing, photocopying, phone support)

Those responsible for volunteer engagement in their organizations differed – a full-time paid role, part of a full-time role, a board member role, or a volunteer role. While in most cases the responsibility falls to one individual or department, a few organizations spoke of volunteer engagement responsibilities being spread throughout the organization.

NO CONSENSUS ON THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE

Even with the small sample that was interviewed, opinions about a changing landscape of volunteerism spanned resistance (e.g. “people should volunteer for charity’s sake”), to acceptance (e.g. “there seems to be a more selfishness in the volunteers – but this isn’t necessarily negative”), to a belief that this is nothing new (e.g. “we’ve been talking about episodic volunteering for 20 years”).

HOW THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR IS RESPONDING TO TRENDS

Respondents generally agreed that the expectations of volunteers are changing. Some respondents expressed frustration, others described ways they were adapting.

GROUPS OF VOLUNTEERS

BRIDGING THE GAP FOUND:	Many people are looking for group activities BUT few organizations have the capacity to offer them.	THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR RESPONDS:	Organizations don't have capacity or a natural fit for engaging groups.
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Many organizations receive requests to engage groups (e.g. service clubs, corporate volunteers) though often the request is seen as a burden, not an opportunity – especially as requests were made for a one-day activity, often on a set date. As sometimes these requests come from large donors or potential sponsors, organizations often feel the need to scramble to find something – anything. Organizations with a focus on manual activity (e.g. food banks, housing organizations) could be better suited to this type of volunteering. If a fit isn't found, organizations refer enquiries to local volunteer centres or other.

“We are not a free team-building organization.”

Corporations often see a day of volunteering as free team-building, without understanding the cost to the organization they believe they are serving. Especially when an activity requires medical or policy screening, the work required does not pay off in impact for a one-day event.

Successful group volunteering usually arises from: 1) workplace fundraising campaigns; 2) a long-term relationship (vs. a one-day activity); or 3) a partnership between two voluntary organizations where a group of members from one organization support the clients or mission of the other organization.

VOLUNTEERS WITH PROFESSIONAL SKILLS

BRIDGING THE GAP FOUND:	Many people come with professional skills BUT many professionals are looking for volunteer tasks that involve something different from their work life.	THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR RESPONDS:	Volunteers with professional skills are engaged on boards of directors or in roles related to their work life.
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Volunteers with professional skills are often invited or recruited because of their particular expertise (e.g. academics/students for research, teachers for tutoring, accountants for financial advice). While some of these roles provide direct service to organizations and their clients, these roles are usually board, board committee, or advisory body roles. Rarely are volunteers engaged as advisors to individual staff members.

Sometimes this type of volunteer engagement is met with resistance: unionized environments protect certain duties, staff don't want to give up interesting work, or staff feel threatened by a volunteer with more experience than they have.

HOW THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR IS RESPONDING TO TRENDS

VOLUNTEERS WITH INDIVIDUAL INTERESTS

BRIDGING THE GAP FOUND:	Organizations are expected to clearly define the roles and boundaries of volunteers BUT many volunteers want the flexibility to initiate what they have to offer (i.e., create their own volunteer opportunity). Many organizations focus on what they need BUT many volunteers also come with their own goals to be met.	THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR RESPONDS:	The ability to respond to volunteers' individual goals and their desire for flexibility varies depending on the capacity of individual staff members.
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Reacting to volunteers' individual interests is very dependent on the capacity of staff (to ask the right questions, to be aware of the strategic plan related opportunities) and as the culture of volunteer engagement promoted by the leadership of the organization. For large organizations, government-related initiatives, or organizations with an extremely high level of volunteer applications, the ability (or necessity) to be flexible and responsive to individual volunteer interests is low.

Reacting to requests or ideas from prospective volunteers can be sometimes awkward, especially if the volunteer is a CEO or entrepreneur who was used to having her/his ideas implemented and having complete control over a situation.

LENGTH OF VOLUNTEER COMMITMENTS

BRIDGING THE GAP FOUND:	Many organizations still want long-term commitment BUT many more volunteers are looking for shorter-term opportunities.	THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR RESPONDS:	Organizations still want long-term commitment and are able to get it in some circumstances, but also spend more time recruiting due to turnover rates.
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The length of time volunteers are committed to a role often depends on their connection to the cause and the type of role. While in general people are looking for more diverse and shorter roles, those who had been personally impacted by a health-related issue and those who were invited to a role perceived to be prestigious were most likely to make long-term commitments.

Because of the interest in shorter commitments, some organizations have accepted higher turnovers and spend more time recruiting. Less often, organizations change and "cut up" long-term roles into multiple short-term opportunities. However, because of the health, safety and security requirements of some roles, being able to react quickly to short-term interests is not possible.



WHAT DO WE NOTICE ABOUT DIFFERENT SUBSETS OF VOLUNTEERS?

WHAT DRIVES SUCCESS?

Not surprisingly, organizations that implement strategies to outreach and engage specific demographics have more success in recruiting and retaining that demographic.

YOUTH

"They never come back... well, what are we offering them?"

Youth are looking for more challenging and interesting roles than those usually offered to young people. Young people want to see the results of their work. They are busy, but their schedules are more predictable than other age groups. For student volunteers, a letter of reference is often used as a carrot to carry out the expected time commitment.

EMPLOYER-SUPPORTED VOLUNTEERS

This is an under-engaged group, as are groups in general. Employer-supported volunteerism most often looks like workplace fundraising campaign involvement rather than volunteering in-house.

BABY BOOMERS

Baby boomers are the most solid base of volunteers, and are recognized for their experience and knowledge. As baby boomers retire, they have more control over their time. They are busy, but often have more flexible schedules than other age groups. Organizations have to be able to adapt with boomers who take vacations or who are involved with caring for both children and parents.

"Volunteerism definitely changes over time, but it's less about generations, and more about the realities of life stage."

FAMILIES

This is by far the least engaged group addressed in Bridging the Gap, often because family volunteer engagement is not even on our radar as a possibility. While families can look diverse in age range, a common reaction to considering family volunteerism is raising the potential challenges of involving young children.

Current involvement of families is often done through health-related fundraising teams. Parents with children are more likely to volunteer in activities related to their children (and may not even consider it to be volunteering).

WHY ARE SOME CANADIANS NOT VOLUNTEERING?

For those of us working in the voluntary sector, the idea that individuals don't know what to offer as potential volunteers or where they can go to look for opportunities can be a source of disbelief. However, respondents generally felt the voluntary sector holds responsibility for non-volunteers: we aren't targeting our marketing and recruitment efforts, we put up administrative or bureaucratic barriers, and we aren't effectively responding to the changing interests of volunteers.

WHAT IMPACTS EFFECTIVE VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT?



USING THE LANGUAGE OF “NEW VOLUNTEERISM”

Respondents were able to describe a shift to “new volunteerism” (e.g. episodic roles, skills-based, virtual, flexible) in general terms. However, when describing their own organizations’ volunteer engagement, respondents defaulted to describing more traditional roles (e.g. long-term, service-oriented, structured) even if they did offer newer types of roles.

These newer types of roles (e.g. short-term, skills-based, strategic committees) came up during deeper lines of questioning, but were rarely mentioned up front when respondents were asked about their organizations’ volunteers.

“One of the greatest hurdles is a traditional mindset of what a volunteer is.”

Organizations share the responsibility in creating an updated culture of volunteerism.

MISCONCEPTIONS

Inaccurate perceptions about rates of volunteerism exist (e.g. “youth aren’t volunteering” or “volunteer rates are decreasing”). Trends at our own organizations are not always indicative of Canadian society as a whole.

VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT AS A STRATEGIC FOCUS

For many organizations, volunteer engagement is viewed as a necessity in tight fiscal times, and often is planned for by more junior staff. More innovation and success is found when volunteer engagement is embedded at all levels of the organization and/or is a key strategic focus of the organization’s leadership.

STAFF CAPACITY

Successful volunteer engagement is dependent on the capacity (knowledge, leadership ability, time) of individual staff members throughout the organization. One respondent spoke of her own experience looking for a good volunteer opportunity:

“I want to get involved with organizations, but they don’t have the capacity to make the best use of me.”

ADAPTATION = SUCCESS

With any subset of volunteer (especially youth) organizations that make a special effort to adapt to unique characteristics of that subset have more success in recruiting and retaining. Those that have embraced a changing landscape of volunteerism are having more success than those who have not changed role design or recruitment methods.

CLASSES OF NONPROFITS?

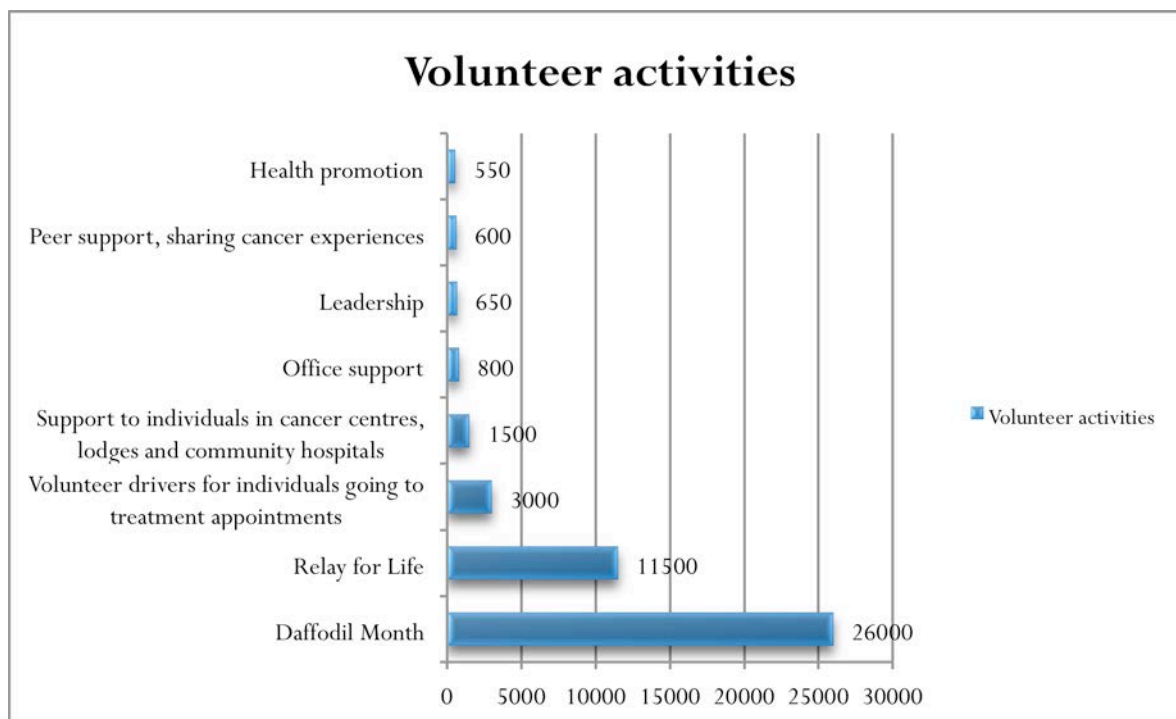
Some roles (often due to the organization’s brand equity or a government-appointment role) were seen as “high prestige” and a long-term commitment was easier for volunteers to make. The same was true for employer-supported volunteerism and company support; organizations with high name recognition or with “low-risk” missions may find support more easily.

CASE STUDY

CULTURE SHIFT: FROM VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT TO VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT

For the Canadian Cancer Society, Ontario Division, the shift from a culture of volunteer management to one of volunteer engagement has been a long process. Aware of trends in volunteer engagement as well as changing demographics, volunteer and staff leaders wanted to make sure their organization was progressive and moving forward and from the beginning there was interest from the top down that they needed to make a change.

The Canadian Cancer Society, Ontario Division, engages approximately 60,000 volunteers annually in a wide range of volunteer activities – direct support to those living with cancer, fundraising events, advocacy, health promotion, local office support, and leadership via boards, councils, committees or advisory groups, among others. Some volunteer regularly on a weekly or monthly basis; others volunteer in different ways throughout the year.



Already having considered volunteer engagement in their 2006-2011 strategic plan, in early 2010 the Society brought on external talent to coach and mentor volunteers and staff through the culture shift, and an advisory team of staff and volunteers looked at innovation around volunteer engagement. As part of the process, their current practices were reviewed, volunteers and staff were surveyed and they asked themselves many questions, such as: “What is volunteer engagement? What does it look like when you engage a volunteer vs. manage a volunteer?”

CHANGING TRENDS

The drive for the shift from volunteer management to volunteer engagement came from the changing interests of volunteers. The Society had to take into consideration trends such as changing demographics of volunteers, shorter periods of commitment and a desire for more direct impact, before laying the groundwork for the way ahead.

“What we’re seeing in Ontario, and our other divisions are seeing across the country, is that individuals are looking to volunteer but may not have a lot of time, or may want to do something in a group, or as a family. Individuals are looking for short-term roles that have an impact, that allow them to see what the results are,” says Cathy Hall, Director of Volunteer Engagement with the Canadian Cancer Society, Ontario Division. “They aren’t always interested in what’s already been done, or in roles that require large commitments. Some people want to use their professional skills. Some people want to do something completely different. We looked at trends we were experiencing as well as general volunteer trends across Canada and recognized that we needed to adjust and adapt.”

The Society is also looking to create opportunities where the timing is more flexible for groups of volunteers such as families and employer-supported volunteers. Current opportunities usually involve assisting at fundraising events on specific day or days.

MAKING THE CULTURE SHIFT

The Canadian Cancer Society, Ontario Division, felt that if they really wanted to embrace the trends, and to improve and develop their recruitment and retention, they needed to change from a culture of volunteer management to a culture of volunteer engagement.

“It really is about making an intentional shift,” Hall says. “More people-focused than position-focused.” In the past, when a potential volunteer approached the Society, they would have been told about the currently available roles. “Now, we’ll ask a number of questions to get more information on what the individual is wanting to do, the type of experience being sought, the skills and experience they are looking to share with the Society. Where there is not an obvious ‘match’ or ‘matches’, we’ll take additional time to come up with some options before going back to the potential volunteer. This approach is much more collaborative and people-focused.”

SHIFTING VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

As part of the ongoing change process, the Canadian Cancer Society, Ontario Division, employs a range of actions. For example:

- **Using pilot initiatives** to test out practices (e.g. for youth engagement, engaging current volunteers and reestablishing connections in local communities). The organization has a strong focus on youth – 24% of new volunteers last year were 17-year-olds and under, as a result of their youth volunteer program.
- Focusing on the volunteer, not the roles. Volunteers have **diverse interests**, but organizations often have unvaried roles. Take the time to match based on skills and interest; adapt and change roles to suit individuals and the organization.
- **Targeting individuals for leadership roles.** Hall described the organization’s challenges with recruiting for high-level positions. “We have more success when we go out and make an intentional ask.”
- Being **more intentional** about asking people already in their volunteer base, e.g. “In the past you’ve done XYZ, have you thought about this?” Based on a survey done by the Society in Ontario, current volunteers said they would volunteer more if they were asked to.
- **Adjusting recognition programs**, including a new nation-wide recognition program as well as a new provincial awards program, both of which focus on impact and the collaborative efforts of volunteers and staff.

- Attempting to **report back on the results** of volunteers' involvement and how they have made an impact, done most often through local offices via email, cards, newsletters, or through National Volunteer Week activities. Reporting on impact could be targeted to a specific volunteer, team or more broadly to the volunteers.

SHIFTING ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

The organization also developed new practices that focus on how volunteer engagement is approached by the organization as a whole. For example:

- **Sharing the learning** from the above-mentioned pilot initiatives among volunteers and staff; others can make changes based on that learning.
- Having **publicly supportive leadership**. The CEO was a member of the original project advisory team and speaks about volunteer engagement at meetings. Volunteer engagement is woven throughout the new strategic plan.
- Developing and delivering “**Volunteer Engagement 101**”. At first, the training was shared with staff that worked with volunteers as part of their daily work, but now this training is being spread throughout the organization to volunteers and staff.
- **Changing human resource practices** so that volunteer engagement is infused into job descriptions, interview questions, and performance management. Make people aware that volunteer engagement will be a part of their role, even if it hasn't been in the past.
- **Changing vocabulary** such as using the phrase ‘volunteer engagement’ instead of ‘volunteer management.’
- Launching a **volunteer portal** for leadership volunteers to access general information about the organization and other tools volunteers need in their roles. The portal will also provide collaborative work space as a resource for volunteers to engage with each other and with staff.
- Engaging volunteers in **all areas** of the organization.

FACTORS IN SUCCESS

“One of the key factors is support from the top,” says Hall. “It has been great to have a CEO, senior leadership team and division board of directors that are very supportive of volunteer engagement.”

In addition, involving volunteers from the beginning instead of coming to them with an already developed plan made a difference.

“We recruited a mix of volunteers and staff to work together in creating everything to do with our pilot projects from scratch,” says Hall. “By partnering fully with volunteers, we benefitted from their creativity and talents much more than if we had simply asked for general feedback on something already put together”. Volunteers were involved in every step of the pilot project process, including requiring pilot teams to identify volunteer and staff leads for each project so that it wasn't staff only driving the bus. Hall also feels that sharing what has been learned from the pilot teams has really helped to foster the innovation that has taken place.

CHALLENGES AHEAD

“One of the challenges we always face is time,” says Hall. “This culture change is an intentional shift; it takes place over time. It's not flipping a switch.” Hall feels that they've made some great strides, but there will always be items to develop and work on.

Another challenge is the potential to resort back to old strategies in stressful or busy times. “Making a concerted effort to engage with volunteers will increase our capacity, but we can't just engage volunteers and not support them,” says Hall. “It means during our crunch time, for example, we still focus on engaging volunteers. We don't want to default to old practices.”

THE FIRST STEP

Hall believes the first step is knowing where you are, and where you want to go. “We looked at our current practices and conducted a survey of our volunteer base,” she describes. “If you want to shift, examine what changes you need to make internally. Where do you want to be five years from now, and what do you need to do to get there? How will you know you were successful?”

LESSONS LEARNED

When asked what key suggestions she would give to organizations interested in a similar shift, Hall shared these tips:

- Have the support of key leadership staff and volunteers.
- Involve volunteers from the very beginning of the design process.
- Try new initiatives, and be sure the learning is shared and communicated across the organization.
- Leverage technology.
- Adjust HR practices to highlight everyone’s role in volunteer engagement.
- For those responsible for volunteer engagement: walk the talk. Have a volunteer partner. Do what you expect of others.

And finally, Hall suggests organizations “be prepared to adjust your course along the way. You can sometimes learn more from the things that don’t prove successful.”

BUT WE’RE JUST A SMALL ORGANIZATION!

If your level of resources doesn’t match that of the Canadian Cancer Society, Ontario Division, Hall still recommends the same principles. “If you are on a smaller scale, the principles still work,” says Hall. “You need buy-in from the executive director, board chair, etc. Start with one idea, one team, and try it out. Don’t just tell people what they need to do or have. It’s not just about the efforts of one person telling people what they need to do. Involve volunteers from the beginning. Pilot, share the results, and learn from it.”

NOTE: The Canadian Cancer Society, Ontario Division, worked with JFFixler Group (<http://www.jffixler.com/>) to guide the culture change. To read more about their process and learning, visit the Canadian Journal of Volunteer Resources Management, Issue 19.3 p.7. <http://www.cjvrm.org/past/CJVRMIssue19.3.pdf>

NATIONAL ROUND TABLE



A SUMMARY OF THE ROUND TABLE DISCUSSIONS

The World of Volunteering in 2017 and Beyond & Imagine Canada Summit

Broadening the definition of volunteering – People express hope that a renewed meaning of volunteering will emerge that is broader than perceptions of charity and benevolence to an understanding of citizen engagement, leadership and participation.

Volunteering can be regarded as part of our everyday lives, and as the way we participate and shape the communities we want for ourselves and for future generations. We need to open up discourse to identify volunteering as civic participation, community engagement and knowledge philanthropy.

Supporting Volunteer Engagement – There is great benefit in developing customized strategies for different groups, types of organizations and communities. This includes responding to the unique characteristics of rural communities and small organizations. There is also a particular interest in understanding the unique attributes of millennials, baby-boomers, and new Canadians. Supporting generational, cultural and individual differences are seen as key success factors in volunteer engagement. Creating a more welcoming, diverse and inclusive voluntary sector was seen as essential.

Embracing Technology – Technology is seen to be a vehicle of volunteer engagement with the emergence of virtual and micro-volunteering. People expressed their aspirations that volunteer-involving organizations are continuously re-tooled to maximize the benefits of technology and social media.

Governor General Roundtable Discussions on Professionalization of the Voluntary Sector

Demonstrating outcomes – Organizations encounter challenges relating to finding appropriate social metrics, which effectively measure and demonstrate the impact of volunteer engagement and the programs, services, and initiatives.

Professionalization – How far? Engaging volunteers in most organizations involves a range of screening practices to best match people to work in the organizations, including position descriptions, applications forms, interviews, reference checks, orientation and training, supervision, evaluation and recognition. Yes some would say we have gone too far, and these human resource practices – accepted without question for paid employment – are deterring potential volunteers. How do we support a volunteer's enthusiasm while adhering to the ever-increasing demands for accountability, professional practice and standards and risk management systems?

National Dialogue on Volunteer Screening

Understanding screening – Screening must be about more than just police information checks; it is an ongoing, integrated approach for the safe and effective inclusion of volunteers within an organization. Screening is more than a safety precaution; it is an overarching practice of safely and effectively integrating volunteers into an organization and managing volunteers once they assume a volunteer position. Participants widely support the revival of a national education campaign to provide resources and training for organizations, volunteers, and the public.

CONCLUSION

There is much diversity in the non-profit sector and in organizational experiences engaging volunteers, however as this primary research has highlighted there are also a number of consistent themes that can be identified. Organizations have been very generous in sharing a number of ideas and tips around ways to embrace any challenges they have encountered relating to the changing landscape of volunteering. Some of these are already in use; others represent future opportunities. Here are some highlights:

- **Check your organization's mindset on volunteerism:** Are volunteers seen as free labour? An annoying necessity? Or, are they seen as a resource for multiplying the time and talents of staff? Consider moving from a culture of volunteer management to volunteer engagement, and be sure to have organizational leadership on board.
- **Assess your structure:** Do your organization's silos or hierarchy present barriers to volunteers being engaged effectively?
- **Value impact:** Shift volunteer recognition from years of service to level of impact.
- **Survey volunteers:** Ask for advice and feedback on anything from strategic direction to volunteer engagement practices.
- **Volunteering as an honour:** Imagine creating a role that volunteers fight over to be a part of; a role that has meaning, status, and honour. What would that look like at your organization?
- **Plan for volunteers with professional skills appropriately:** Be prepared, clearly outline your expectations, plan ahead, and don't waste their time. Know their individual desires in case they have interests beyond their day jobs. These principles should be carried over to your engagement with all volunteers.
- **Current vs. new skills:** Consider ways for skilled volunteerism to provide opportunities for individuals to learn new skills or mentor others (including staff), rather than just use their current skills.
- **Adapt to new proposals:** With the goals of the organization in mind, stay open to considering new roles proposed by potential volunteers. Sometimes it won't work, but sometimes it may be worth it to craft something unique or new.
- **Engage skilled volunteers as personal advisors:** While some have time for board or committee members, others would prefer contributing their expertise through quick phone calls or coffee dates.
- **Rearrange (don't reinvent) the wheel:** Break up long-term or complex roles into multiple smaller roles for people with different skill sets. Doing so also presents an opportunity to engage employer-supported volunteers in non-manual roles.
- **Recruit pre-retirement:** Start recruiting retirees during their retirement planning, not after they have already retired. Recruiting is easier when large groups of potential supporters are found in one place (i.e. workplaces).
- **Offer team-building service:** If organizations have the opportunity to engage groups of volunteers and have expertise in team-building, offer a fee-for-service program to companies looking for one-day group volunteer opportunities as fun team-building days.



VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT PROFESSIONALS MUST THINK STRATEGICALLY

This involves hiring people with strategic thinking skills, providing them time to think strategically, and allowing that strategy to spread throughout the organization.

- **Partner with other community organizations:** Partnering with youth organizations and schools is an especially effective way to engage the youngest of the youth age range.
- **Engage new Canadians and Aboriginal people:** Respondents felt these groups could be involved more and in better ways, organizations that implement strategies to outreach to and engage specific demographics have more success in recruiting and retaining that demographic.
- **Consider virtual volunteerism:** Volunteer roles that involve computer work can be done outside of the office, and provide flexibility for busy volunteers.
- **Alternate uses of social media:** Rather than using social media to promote the organization, use it to have conversations with volunteers and learn about stakeholders' interests and priorities.


People stay where they're treated well.

EMBRACING THE CHANGING CULTURE OF VOLUNTEERISM

Organizations see the importance of reciprocity in volunteering, and view the importance of establishing a two-way relationship with volunteers. They have also identified how volunteers' goals differ throughout their life cycle, and that establishing a meaningful opportunity depends on targeted volunteer opportunities. Many leaders and leadership organizations have been enormously resourceful and have begun to implement innovative strategies to engage volunteers today and into the future. However the capacity and willingness to embrace the changing landscape varies considerably across the non-profit sector and will require continued effort to ensure the gap is bridged between what volunteers are seeking in their volunteer opportunities and how organizations are engaging volunteers.

The following key strategies are recommended:

1. **Promote a broader understanding of the concept of volunteering** – While every organization can contribute to changing the public perception of volunteering through its own communications, there can be greater impact if leadership organizations collaborate on promoting common messages that reflect a broader spectrum of engagement.

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2. **Provide a central repository of volunteer engagement tools, strategies, and models** – Resources identified through the survey, interviews, and round table discussions can be gathered and made accessible, providing a virtual space for organizations to share and exchange their innovative practices.
 3. **Applied dissemination of key resources** – Develop learning modules and tap into existing knowledge and training networks bring key resources into local communities through in-person, on-line, and hybrid learning formats.
 4. **Look to Canada’s 150th Anniversary as a Focal Point for Marking the New Changing Culture** – Leading up to 2017, a five-year plan can be put in place that is incorporated into celebrations for the Canada’s celebrations.
 5. **Engage public policy makers in addressing some of the key issues identified in this report** – Collaboration amongst various stakeholders – including those engaged in public policy is needed to provide multi-faceted support of volunteerism in Canada.