



Volunteer Management, Leadership, and Governance

Do you have all the volunteers you need?

Are all your volunteers satisfied with their roles and planning to continue volunteering for your organization for many years to come?

Do your board volunteers understand their obligations and responsibilities?

If you answered “no” to any of these questions, you should check out the information resources published by the Knowledge Development Centre at Imagine Canada. This bulletin highlights several resources designed to help nonprofit organizations more effectively recruit, train, retain, and protect both service and governance volunteers.

Recruitment

Many resources published by the Knowledge Development Centre deal with volunteer recruitment. Two particularly valuable resources that focus on this topic are *Expanding volunteerism in rural schools in Nova Scotia* by Jane Baskill and *Promising practices for volunteer administration in hospitals* by Femida Handy, Robert Mound, Lisa-Marie Vaccaro, and Karin Prochazka. Although these resources focus on volunteering in particular settings, their results are applicable to many different types of nonprofit organizations.

Jane Baskill surveyed 179 parents who volunteered in rural schools in Nova Scotia. Nearly two thirds (65%) of those surveyed said that they would like to volunteer more and suggested steps that schools could take to encourage more volunteering. Schools could:

- better communicate the importance of volunteers (65%),
- provide more information on what volunteers can do to help schools (62%),

- provide orientation for volunteers (51%),
- be flexible in scheduling the times and locations of volunteer activities and consider offering opportunities for virtual volunteering (43%),
- provide childcare for volunteers (29%),
- develop a volunteer handbook (23%),
- provide skills-building workshops (23%), and
- hold regular meetings with volunteers (23%).

Femida Handy and her colleagues studied 28 hospitals in the Greater Toronto Area. Their resulting manual contains numerous suggestions for recruiting volunteers. For example:

- Before you try to recruit new volunteers, review your success at retaining the volunteers you already have. If there are any problems in this area, rectify them before trying to recruit new volunteers.



“Put a face on your volunteer program. Take photos of volunteers in action or get volunteers to take photos of themselves for a special newsletter, display, or booklet on volunteering.”

- Set realistic goals. In most cases, a few high-quality volunteers are more valuable than thousands of people with few skills and little commitment to your organization.
- Target specific audiences. For each volunteer position, try to think of where you would be most likely to find people with the needed skills.
- Recruit lots of recruiters. People are most likely to volunteer if they are asked by someone they know, so involve everyone in your organization in your recruitment efforts.
- Be prepared to redirect some volunteers whose skills or goals are not a good fit for your organization.

“When volunteers burn out, they stop volunteering. This not only puts increased pressure on remaining volunteers but also contributes to the loss of collective skills and results in important work not getting done.”

Training

Whether your organization is large or small, you should provide some training to ensure that your volunteers feel confident in undertaking their tasks. Training is also important to ensure the health and safety of volunteers and of any clients or staff with whom volunteers may be working.

Training is particularly important for board volunteers. The Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne (FCFA) du Canada surveyed 170 francophone nonprofit organizations on this topic. The results of the survey are presented in a report entitled *A study of the training needs of volunteers on the boards of nonprofit organizations serving Francophone and Acadian minority communities in Canada*.

Survey respondents identified the need for training in the following areas:

- Powers, roles, and responsibilities of the board.
- Legal obligations and responsibilities of the organization.
- Developing and implementing a strategic plan.
- Knowledge about the organization, its background, mission, objectives.
- Valuing volunteers.
- Understanding financial results.

Retention

One of the main challenges to volunteer retention is burnout. Recognizing that this was a problem among volunteers who are responsible for wharves and harbours in Nova Scotia, the Coastal Communities Network undertook research to understand the factors that contribute to burnout and what can be done to alleviate or prevent it. The results of the project are reported in *“One plank at a time”: Volunteer harbour management in Nova Scotia* by Dan MacInnes, Erica de Sousa, and Ishbel Munroe.

The researchers found that the major factors contributing to burnout among harbour volunteers included:

- Lack of clear, accessible information about roles and responsibilities.
- Not having a break from volunteer responsibilities.
- Uncertainty about funding and/or constant pressure to raise funds.
- Lack of organizational structure.
- Having to attend to many tasks unrelated to why they chose to volunteer in the first place.



Knowledge Development
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Core volunteers

Many nonprofit organizations rely on a small group of extremely dedicated volunteers. Lesley Gotlib Conn and Cathy Barr of Imagine Canada call these volunteers “core” volunteers and define them as those who volunteer 188 hours or more per year. According to the 2000 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering, and Participating, only 25% of volunteers fit into this category, but these volunteers contributed 73% of volunteer hours.

To understand the unique characteristics, motivations, and challenges of core volunteers, Conn and Barr conducted in-depth interviews with 26 core volunteers and 24 mainstream volunteers. Their results

are presented in a report entitled *Core volunteers: Exploring the values, attitudes and behaviours underlying sustained volunteerism in Canada*.

The major differences that Conn and Barr found between core and mainstream volunteers were that core volunteers were more likely to have a personal or professional connection to the organization they supported and much more likely to express a strong passion for the organization’s cause. Core volunteers were also more likely than mainstream volunteers to describe volunteering as a mutually beneficial exchange between the volunteer and the organization.

Tips for recruiting and retaining core volunteers:

- Target people who are already personally or professionally involved in your organization or cause.
- Ensure that your recruitment messages mention both how volunteers can help your organization and how they will benefit from volunteering for your organization.
- Make sure that your core volunteers can see the impact they are having. This is more important to them than formal recognition.
- Be alert for signs that core volunteers are burning out or ready to “retire.” Consider offering such volunteers the opportunity to step back for awhile, reduce their level of involvement gradually, or move into an advisory role.

Board volunteers

Another crucial group of volunteers is board volunteers. Elizabeth Ridley and Cathy Barr of Imagine Canada conducted in-depth interviews with 33 board members representing 11 different service areas of the nonprofit sector. Their findings are presented in a report entitled *Board volunteers in Canada: Their motivations and challenges*.

The board members who were interviewed for this study identified the following as the major challenges they faced as board members:

- Time constraints.
- Unequal distribution of work among board members.
- Poorly run meetings;

- Dealing with conflict among board members.
- Difficulty reaching consensus.
- Difficulty recruiting and developing enough volunteer leaders to sit on the board and on committees.

Ridley and Barr offer the following tips for recruiting and retaining board volunteers:

- Clearly communicate your organization’s vision and mission.
- Explain how your board and its individual members contribute to the success of your organization.
- Be honest with prospective board members about the time commitment required.
- Provide orientation and training to familiarize new board members with your organization and their responsibilities.

Risk Management

In recent years, risk management has become a major concern for nonprofit organizations and their volunteers across Canada. Risk management is any practice that an organization uses to limit its exposure to liability. It includes actions and procedures to protect the organization's finances, its physical assets, its charitable or nonprofit status, and its reputation. The Knowledge Development Centre has published six information resources on the topic of risk management.

Risk management: A guide for nonprofit and charitable organizations by Nicole Bertrand and Lyn Brown of the Prince Albert and District Chamber of Commerce presents the results of a survey of 81 nonprofit and charitable organizations across Canada and discusses the major components of risk management. There is also a fact sheet, *Good practices in risk management* by the same authors.

In *Risky business: An exploration of risk and liability issues facing volunteer programs in the North Okanagan*, Karen Six and Eric Kowalski of the Social Planning Council for the North Okanagan present the results of a survey of nonprofit organizations, interviews with lawyers and insurance agents, and focus groups with volunteers. A handbook entitled *Developing a risk management strategy: Five steps to risk management in nonprofit and charitable organizations* is also available from this project.

Island or Iceberg: Liability and Voluntary Organizations by Agnes Meinhard presents the results of a study of the insurance environment for nonprofit organizations. This research was done in collaboration with Easter Seals, which developed a toolkit, *How to Manage Insurance Costs in the Voluntary Sector: Tips and Checklist*, by Vanessa Pfaff.

Interested in calculating the economic value of volunteer contributions?

Increasingly, funders and prospective funders are asking nonprofit organizations to assess the economic value of the contributions made by their volunteers. This information can also be used in volunteer recruitment campaigns, in your annual report, in financial statements, and for project and program evaluations.

To assist nonprofit organizations with these calculations, Imagine Canada created the Volunteer Value Calculator. This free online tool is available at http://www.nonprofitscan.ca/page.asp?vvc_toolkit.

Volunteer **VALUE** Calculator

Where can I get these resources?

All resources published by the Knowledge Development Centre at Imagine Canada are available at <http://nonprofitscan.andornot.com/vvr.aspx>.

Knowledge Development Centre

Between 2002 and 2007, the Knowledge Development Centre at Imagine Canada funded 61 community-based and national research projects on volunteers and volunteering and published over 100 information resources. The program ends on March 30, 2007.

Imagine Canada

The Knowledge Development Centre is hosted by Imagine Canada, a national organization that looks **into** and **out for** Canada's charities and nonprofits.