

Recruitment of Aboriginal Volunteers at Sporting Events

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Background

Canada's growing Aboriginal population offers many potential volunteers for sporting events (Riemer, Dorsch, Hoeber, & Bell, 2003). In fact, more Aboriginal people are getting involved in such events, inspired by values such as community ties, mutual support, and helping. Given the wealth of knowledge that Aboriginal volunteers have to offer (Volunteer Alberta, 2004), their increased involvement can significantly enhance these events.

The purpose of this project was to identify key lessons for successful recruitment of Aboriginal volunteers based on their experiences at two major sporting events: the 2006 Saskatchewan First Nation Winter Games and the 2005 Canada Summer Games. Both of these events involved a significant number of Aboriginal volunteers (500 and 350, respectively).

Data Collection

We conducted roundtable sessions with Aboriginal volunteers from both the Winter (45) and Summer (32) Games. In these sessions, we explored their motivations for volunteering and how they were recruited. We also conducted interviews with two managers of volunteers associated with the events.

Motivations of Aboriginal Volunteers

We found that the primary motivation for Aboriginal volunteers was to support the athletic pursuits of children. One mother spoke about her support, both for her children and for others in the community: *"The First Nations... we love supporting our kids, and if*

they can't be involved any other way... I'm going to volunteer so I can... support any of the kids that come out." Her comment illustrates how, through their involvement, these volunteers were ensuring that Aboriginal children have access to opportunities that may otherwise not be available.

Some Aboriginal volunteers were motivated by a desire to be role models for youth: *"If they see the parents doing it, then they're going to do it and see it as a good thing."* Others were motivated by pride in being a member of the event's host community: *"As hosts of the games, we are role models. The way we do it, if we do something good, they're going to see it and say, 'Hey! That's the way we want to do it, and do a good job.'"*

Another motivating factor for volunteers was contributing to the legacy of the 2005 Summer Games. This was the first time that Aboriginal people were invited to participate in a formal capacity, and to showcase their unique culture to Canada. One manager of volunteers described the impact as follows:

"A lot of them were sold on the fact that this was the first time ever that we've had this much involvement on this scale, having a physical presence in the opening ceremonies, having the cultural teepee village. I can't really speak for all volunteers, but that would be my guess ... just knowing that they're part of something and willing to be part of history."

Recruitment Strategies

We found that the most effective recruitment strategy for the Winter Games was first to target individuals in the host community based on their previous commitments to sporting events, networks, and skills. These individuals then appealed directly to their social networks, including family, friends, and community members. It is worth noting that most Winter Games volunteers were directly recruited by family members.

The manager responsible for recruiting Aboriginal volunteers for the Summer Games focused on groups and organizations already known to him (e.g., educational programs, Aboriginal organizations, government agencies with Aboriginal employees), and on the Aboriginal communities and organizations geographically closest to Regina. He made personal invitations at these sites for individuals to volunteer. For both events, word of mouth and personal invitations proved more effective than impersonal recruitment methods such as posters or email.

Contribution to a legacy may have limited use as a recruitment strategy. However, as more volunteer opportunities become available, strategies could focus on creating a legacy of Aboriginal involvement in mainstream sporting events.

Suggestions for Recruiting Aboriginal Volunteers

Based on our research, we offer the following suggestions for recruiting Aboriginal volunteers.

1. **Tie recruitment messages to the motivations of Aboriginal volunteers.** Examples of potential messages include:

- The impact volunteers can make in the lives of Aboriginal children. For example: “Your involvement can make it possible for an Aboriginal child to participate in sport.”
- The potential to be a role model and enhance one’s community. For example: “Volunteering can lead to a renewed sense of community pride and accomplishment.”
- The legacy of volunteering. For example: “You will be part of something historic and groundbreaking.”

2. **Use targeted recruitment.** Targeted recruitment techniques work well in engaging a large number of Aboriginal volunteers. For Aboriginal-hosted events, begin by recruiting individuals who have previously volunteered. They can then recruit other volunteers from their social networks. For mainstream events, use targeted recruitment to identify organizations, communities, and programs with many potential Aboriginal volunteers. Make personal invitations to Aboriginal individuals to volunteer.

References

Rierner, H., Dorsch, K., Hoeber, L., & Bell, A. (2003). *Building volunteer capacity in the Aboriginal community*. Regina, SK: Sask Sport Inc.

Volunteer Alberta. (2004). *Participation of urban Aboriginal peoples in volunteerism in Alberta: Report*. Calgary, AB: Alberta Network – Canada Volunteerism Initiative.