



# VOLUNTEERISM & CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: **WHAT WE HEARD**

Summary of Community  
and Social Development  
Public Engagement Sessions

WINTER 2023

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# SUMMARY OF VOLUNTEERISM AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS: WINTER 2023

*what we heard...*

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## BACKGROUND

Community and Social Development hosted engagement sessions in the winter of 2023 to gather feedback from residents and organizations within the Tri-Region. The sessions were an opportunity to learn what is important to the public in building and strengthening community and volunteerism. Feedback was also gathered to develop a clearer picture of the state of volunteerism within the Tri-Region. The Community and Social Development Roundtable also provided insights into the challenges and opportunities related to volunteerism and civic engagement during an engagement session. The information, feedback and perspectives gathered through the engagement process will help inform the key components of the Volunteerism and Civic Engagement Strategy.

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## ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

A comprehensive, two-phased, public engagement plan was developed to ensure the public had an opportunity to provide feedback and input at multiple points throughout the Strategy development. The valuable insight and feedback provided will be considered and used in the development of the Strategy, helping to ensure the development of a truly community-focused Volunteerism and Civic Engagement Strategy.

### PHASE I: CONNECT

A comprehensive survey was open from January 23 – February 26. Some of the survey questions were developed alongside Volunteer Canada's 2023 survey so regional responses can be compared to National trends. The survey was developed with two streams of responses available. The first stream provided individuals an opportunity to answer questions, with the second stream being directed at organizations and leaders of volunteers. 230 responses were received, with input from 184 individuals and 45 leaders of volunteers within organizations. The feedback received within this phase of engagement was used to help set the stage for the current state of volunteerism and community involvement throughout the Tri-Region. The input received was also categorized to develop themes that created the focus areas for the second stage of engagement.



**PHASE I** OF ENGAGEMENT WAS AT THE “CONNECT” LEVEL OF THE STONY PLAIN PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SPECTRUM WHEREBY WE “CONNECT WITH THE PUBLIC AND STAKEHOLDERS TO PROVIDE INFORMATION, GATHER FEEDBACK, AND IDENTIFY POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS.”

# involve

## PHASE II: INVOLVE

In March and early April, six focused conversations and several one-to-one conversations were hosted with participation from nearly 50 community members and organization representatives. The conversations explored some of the common themes that arose in the survey, including:

- Youth Volunteering and Community Involvement
- Family Volunteering and Community Involvement
- Enhancing Awareness of Community Involvement Opportunities
- Creating Welcoming and Accessible Volunteer Spaces
- In addition to the above themes, several 1:1 conversations were conducted exploring topics that resonated with individuals.

The input received in Phase II will be used to help formulate key actions for the Volunteerism and Civic Engagement Strategy.



**PHASE II** OF ENGAGEMENT WAS AT THE “INVOLVE” LEVEL OF THE STONY PLAIN PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SPECTRUM WHEREBY WE “CREATE OPPORTUNITIES TO OPEN A WORKING DIALOGUE WITH THE PUBLIC AND STAKEHOLDERS TO EXPLORE EXPECTATIONS AND IDENTIFY POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS.”

## SUMMARY OF RESULTS

During the engagement process, several recommendations were suggested to enhance volunteerism and civic engagement throughout the region. The following chart summarizes the recommendations, and further details are presented in the proceeding sections of this report.

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Increase Youth Volunteering and Community Involvement**

- Consider developing group roles where friends or families can volunteer together
- Create opportunities that aid in the development of skills and leadership
- Host recruitment sessions with youth
- Advertise for roles in places youth frequent

### **Increase Family Volunteering and Community Involvement**

- Intentionally create family-friendly opportunities
- Develop family-friendly roles that appeal to children and youth and take into consideration timing and duties
- Develop messaging that is tailored to families to raise awareness of opportunities available

### **Enhance Awareness**

- Improve the central volunteer database and raise its profile
- Use a diverse range of communication mechanisms
- Tailor communications to volunteer groups

### **Create Welcoming and Accessible Spaces**

- Provide orientation
- Foster a friendly, welcoming and respectful culture
- Ensure access to role-appropriate tools
- Develop comprehensive training programs

### **Support Attraction and Retention**

- Set clear expectations: develop detailed role descriptions
- Streamline and tailor application processes
- Explore opportunities to create flexible positions
- Celebrate successes and show appreciation

### **Develop Organizational Resources and Supports**

- Promote volunteer opportunities
- Provide regional training and leadership sessions for volunteers
- Create volunteer handbooks and templates
- Develop access to resources that cover common volunteer issues and challenges





# What We Heard: Phase I

## INDIVIDUAL SURVEY RESPONSES

184 responses were received for this stream of the survey. Questions asked helped to paint a picture of community involvement and volunteerism through the Tri-Region.

### What does Volunteering and Civic Engagement look like?

Respondents were asked how they are involved in community; as is illustrated in the chart below, the ways and types of helping are plenty.

TYPES OF HELPING	
Help neighbours when they need	43%
Help friends or family that do not live with them	42%
Volunteer on behalf of an organization	36%
Help out in neighbourhood or local area	23%
Help as an individual and do not partner with either a formal or informal group	22%
Help with an informal group in local area or neighbourhood	13%
Volunteer with support from employer	7%
Not active volunteers	12%
Help out in other ways	4%

Respondents had the opportunity to select all their reasons for helping from a set list of options, as well as indicate how they are currently helping or volunteering. As is illustrated in the following charts, the motivations for getting involved in community or volunteering and the type of roles individuals are engaging in are vast.

MOTIVATIONS	
To help others	68%
To gain leadership skills	60%
To share or develop a new skill	42%
To help bring about change	41%
To get to know community	39%
For religious reasons	36%
To achieve career-related goals	34%
To make new friends/meet new people	30%
To learn something new	26%
To share my professional skills	18%
Because of a personal connection with an organization, mission, or cause	21%
For a sense of wellbeing and belonging	18%
Because someone asked me	9%
To fulfill educational requirements	7%
For fun!	4%
To be part of a team	1%

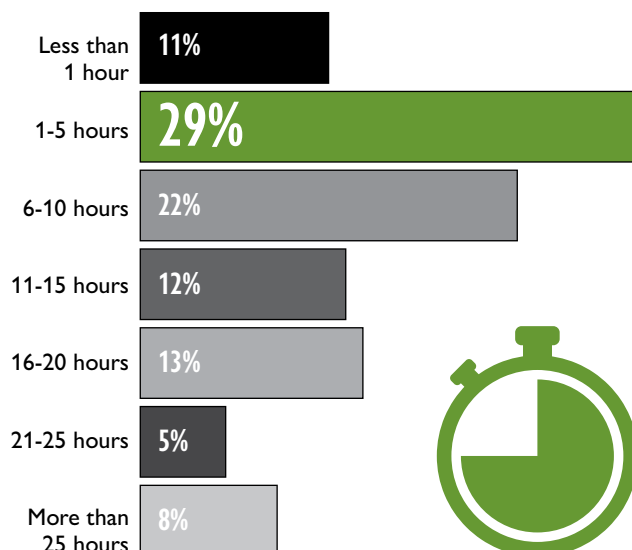


- (The list of available responses mirrors that of the Volunteer Canada Survey.)
- Special events
  - Assist in my neighbourhood
  - Program or service delivery
  - Fundraising
  - Governance Board & Committee work
  - Administrative or clerical support
  - Personal assistance with independent living
  - Technical computer, IT services and guidance, teaching or tutoring



Most respondents (62%) who are currently volunteering or helping in community contributed up to 10 hours per month. 25% contributed 11 to 20 hours per month, and 13% contributed more than 21 hours. A full breakdown of the hourly contribution per month is below.

## HOURS OF HELP PER MONTH



## BARRIERS, CHALLENGES AND POTENTIAL SUPPORTS

### Not Currently Involved in the Community or Volunteering

12% of individual survey respondents indicated they were not active volunteers. Those 12% were then asked about potential barriers or challenges that prevent them from volunteering or helping in the community and what supports could help address them.

The barriers and challenges cited included time and the need for flexibility in scheduling and roles, accommodating work schedules, finding roles that resonate with personal interests, and the difficulty connecting and integrating in a new community. Of these challenges, suggested supports to address them are highlighted below.

### What supports could help you address the barriers or challenges you face?

*“Networking or volunteer recruitment events. Being part of a volunteer pool that might be drawn on in times of need or that was used to share updates on volunteer opportunities. I tend to need some structure and guidance.”*

*“Volunteering with my children.”*

*“More push notifications on what is required in the community. I find myself searching.”*



## Currently Involved in the Community or Volunteering

Respondents who indicated they currently volunteer or help in the community were asked about the barriers and challenges they faced when volunteering or helping in community. Many of the responses had commonalities among them. Barriers identified were time, flexibility in scheduling of roles, and ability to accommodate individuals with work, family, and personal commitments.

A lack of awareness about what is out there and how to find the opportunities was detailed as a barrier many times. Respondents cited the need to know where help is needed and how help can be provided. A lack of mediums to access the information, whether real or perceived, was indicated as a challenge to awareness.

Respondents also expressed challenges with clarity of roles and expectations of the individuals in the roles as something often encountered. Legal and liability concerns were also indicated as challenges to volunteering and helping in the community. An insufficient amount of family and youth volunteering opportunities was often cited as a barrier.

Accessibility concerns were listed as a barrier numerous times. Respondents indicated a lack of accommodations for personal accessibility needs, as well as a lack of understanding about individuals and how to work within their specific needs. Community accessibility challenges such as transportation was also cited multiple times.

Another common challenge was the unwelcome atmosphere faced by many volunteers and those who help in community. Respondents cited unfriendly hosts/supervisors, unwillingness to onboard new individuals, and an overall unwelcoming environment with a lack of recognition as contributing to this challenge.

Respondents were then asked for suggestions about how organizations could help reduce the barriers or challenges they face. An opportunity to provide more flexibility in roles, whether that be through scheduling, allowing for infrequent shifts, creating varied options such as virtual roles was cited as an option to help address barriers of time and other commitments. Additionally, respondents stressed the importance of considering how more families and youth can be involved in volunteer and community involvement opportunities, and catering roles to appeal to, and accommodate, these groups.

A more comprehensive training program for volunteers was cited numerous times as an opportunity to reduce barriers encountered. Many respondents stressed the importance of clarity of roles and expectations for roles prior to starting. This included clear job descriptions, guidelines around schedules and shifts, as well as potential meet and greets, if appropriate for the role. Respondents indicated having a clear understanding of the role and organization would help in ensuring a suitable fit.

Ensuring information is easily accessible was cited as an opportunity to enhance awareness of opportunities available. A central space to access information about community involvement and volunteer roles available was cited numerous times as critical to reducing the awareness barrier. It was also suggested to explore as many mediums as possible to enhance awareness of opportunities available. This extends beyond social media, to mediums such as websites, personalized emails, newspaper, radio, community bulletin boards, and advertisements in common community spaces such as grocery stores, schools, and recreation centres.

Respondents expressed the importance of thanking those that volunteer and help in the community as well as addressing accessibility challenges to help create a more welcoming atmosphere. Ensuring a thorough and proper orientation, with introductions to other volunteers and, if applicable, staff, was also suggested as possible opportunities to address barriers and challenges.

Respondents also provided more specific suggestions to address barriers and challenges, as highlighted below.

### *What supports could help you address the barriers or challenges you face?*

*“There needs to be more training, recognition, and resources for all volunteers. The Town could offer the volunteer training programs and have the organizations pay a fee for each volunteer that attends or have a grant allotted for this. There needs to be training about volunteer roles/ responsibilities, privacy, diversity, confidentiality, etc.”*

*“Maybe it already exists but notify community members of all the service groups or organizations that are accepting volunteer services and contact info in one place and communicated to the residents.”*

*“Mentor the mentor - Have experienced people for the newer people to connect with.”*

*“Work with local grocery stores or other commonly used places of business to advertise needs. Encourage businesses to cross advertise or support other local businesses/programs that help the community.”*

*“Presenting opportunities to meet with other volunteers and directors.”*

*“I think that having an advocate or (person with accessibility challenges) on a board or organizing committee would be a great way to see that barriers and challenges are addressed. Just having them aware is a big step.”*







## PERSONAL ASSESSMENT OF VOLUNTEERING

Most respondents assessed their current level of volunteering as either just right (49%) or indicated they would like to increase the amount of time they spend volunteering (41%). A small percentage of respondents indicated they would like to decrease the amount of time they spend volunteering (6%).

Throughout the region, the time spent volunteering in the community over the last two years is quite varied. 27% of respondents have not changed the time they spend volunteering, 42% have increased the time over the last two years, and 24% have decreased the amount of time they spend volunteering.

In the last two years, 39% of respondents indicated the satisfaction from volunteering has not changed. Interestingly, 26% of respondents indicated their satisfaction has increased (26%), with an equal number indicating the satisfaction from volunteering has decreased (26%). However, most respondents indicated their commitment to volunteering has either not changed (41%) or increased (38%), with 10% of respondents indicating their commitment has decreased over the last two years.

### PERSONAL ASSESSMENT OF AMOUNT OF VOLUNTEERING OR HELPING

Just right	49%
Would like to increase the amount of time	41%
Would like to decrease the amount of time	3%
Not applicable	6%
Other	2%

### In the last two years, the satisfaction I get from volunteering or helping...

has not changed	39%
has increased	26%
has decreased	26%
not applicable	8%

### In the last two years, my time volunteering or helping in the community...

has not changed	27%
has increased	42%
has decreased	24%
not applicable	7%

### In the last two years, my commitment to volunteering or helping...

has not changed	41%
has increased	38%
has decreased	10%
not applicable	11%





## INDIVIDUAL SURVEY RESPONDENTS DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Much of the demographic information was collected for the purposes of cross comparison with Volunteer Canada's survey. A full breakdown of demographic information is available upon request. Some demographic information is highlighted below.



### WHERE DO RESPONDENTS VOLUNTEER?

**49% STONY PLAIN**

**14% PARKLAND COUNTY**

**22% SPRUCE GROVE**

**15% OTHER**

We received responses from 184 individuals. Of those 75% respondents identified as female, 20% identified as male, 1% identified as non-binary, and the remaining respondents did not list a gender identity. 64% of respondents reside in Stony Plain, 19% in Parkland County, 12% in Spruce Grove, and 5% reside in another location.

55% of respondents were not employed, 13% of respondents classified themselves as not in the work force, 28% of respondents were employed, and 4% preferred not to answer.

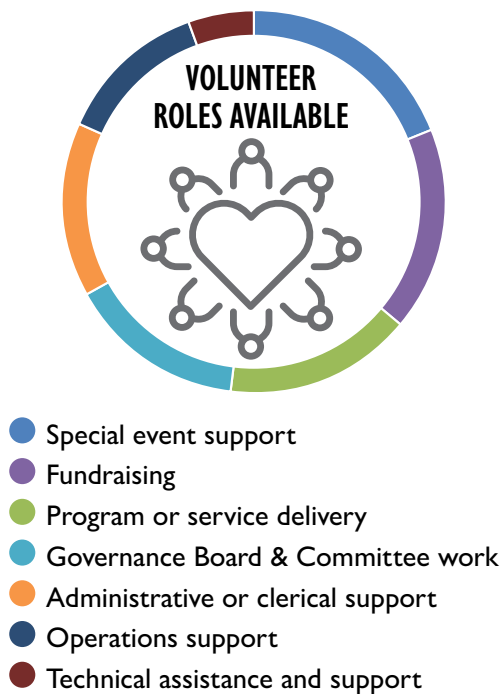
# ORGANIZATION SURVEY RESPONSES

45 responses were received from leaders of volunteers within organizations for this stream of the survey. Responses received help depict the current realities of community and volunteerism throughout the Tri-Region from an organization perspective. Many of the questions asked also mirror the questions from the Volunteer Canada survey, allowing for further opportunity to compare regional results to national results.

TOGETHER, THE **45 ORGANIZATIONS** THAT RESPONDED TO THE SURVEY, REPORT AN AVERAGE OF **4,058 VOLUNTEER HOURS** CONTRIBUTED ANNUALLY PER ORGANIZATION.

In the last two years, 55% of respondents indicated that demand for their organization’s programs or services has increased. 21% stated demand has decreased, with 11% reporting that demand has remained unchanged.

Respondents reported an array of volunteer roles available throughout the Tri-Region, as is illustrated in the chart below.



The majority of respondents stressed that volunteers were very critical (81%) or somewhat critical (14%) to the operation of their organization, with only 6% reporting that volunteers were not critical.

Respondents reported several volunteer related challenges facing their organization, with the top challenges being difficulty recruiting new volunteers (18%), dealing with the loss of volunteers (15%), and difficulty attracting board members (14%). A breakdown of the reported challenges is depicted in the chart below.

VOLUNTEER-RELATED CHALLENGES	
18%	Difficulty recruiting new volunteers
15%	We have lost volunteers
14%	Difficulty attracting board members
11%	Volunteers feel overburdened, “burned out”
10%	Not enough volunteers to deliver programs, services, or events
8%	Difficulty attracting youth volunteers
7%	Difficulty finding time to plan, recruit, and train volunteers while providing services
7%	Not enough staff to support volunteer engagement
6%	Do not know or not applicable
1%	Too many volunteers for roles available
1%	Volunteers not interested in virtual volunteering roles
3%	Other

Respondents were asked how volunteering has changed at their organization over the last years. The most commonly reported changes were the development of new volunteer roles (19%), expansion of volunteering due to increased demand (17%), and the re-engagement of volunteers (16%). The full scope of how volunteering has changed for volunteers is illustrated in the following chart.

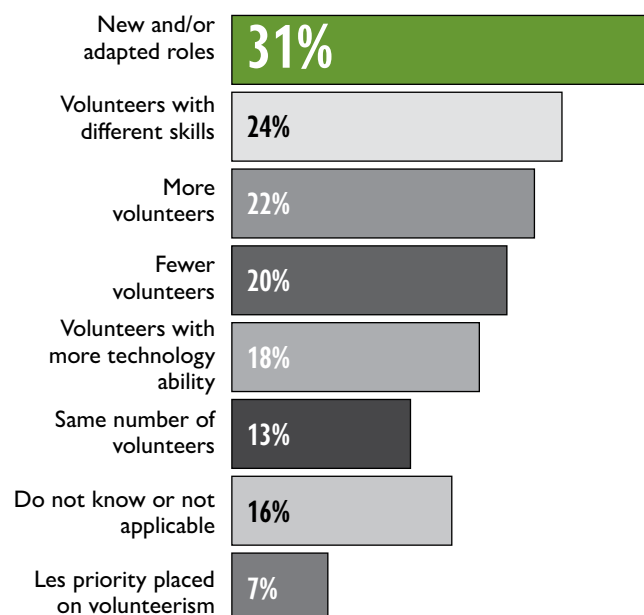
## *In the last two years, how has volunteering changed in your organization?*

<b>19%</b>	developed new volunteer roles
<b>17%</b>	expanded due to increased demand
<b>16%</b>	re-engaged volunteers
<b>9%</b>	reduced number of volunteer roles
<b>8%</b>	transitioned some roles to virtual/ remote delivery
<b>8%</b>	no changes
<b>6%</b>	redeployed existing volunteers to new roles
<b>6%</b>	virtual volunteering roles returned to in-person volunteering
<b>3%</b>	increased emphasis on existing virtual/ remote volunteer roles
<b>6%</b>	do not know or not applicable
<b>2%</b>	Other

32% of organizations reported that in the last two years, the number of people contacting their organization to volunteer has stayed the same. 26% of organizations reported that the number of people has decreased, while 12% of organizations reported that the number of people contacting their organization to volunteer has increased. The remaining 29% of respondents did not know or found the question not applicable.

Leaders of volunteers were asked to forecast what volunteering would like in their organization in the next two years. The responses varied across organizations, but it is anticipated volunteerism across the Tri-Region will see changes.

## **VOLUNTEER FORECAST (2 YEARS)**

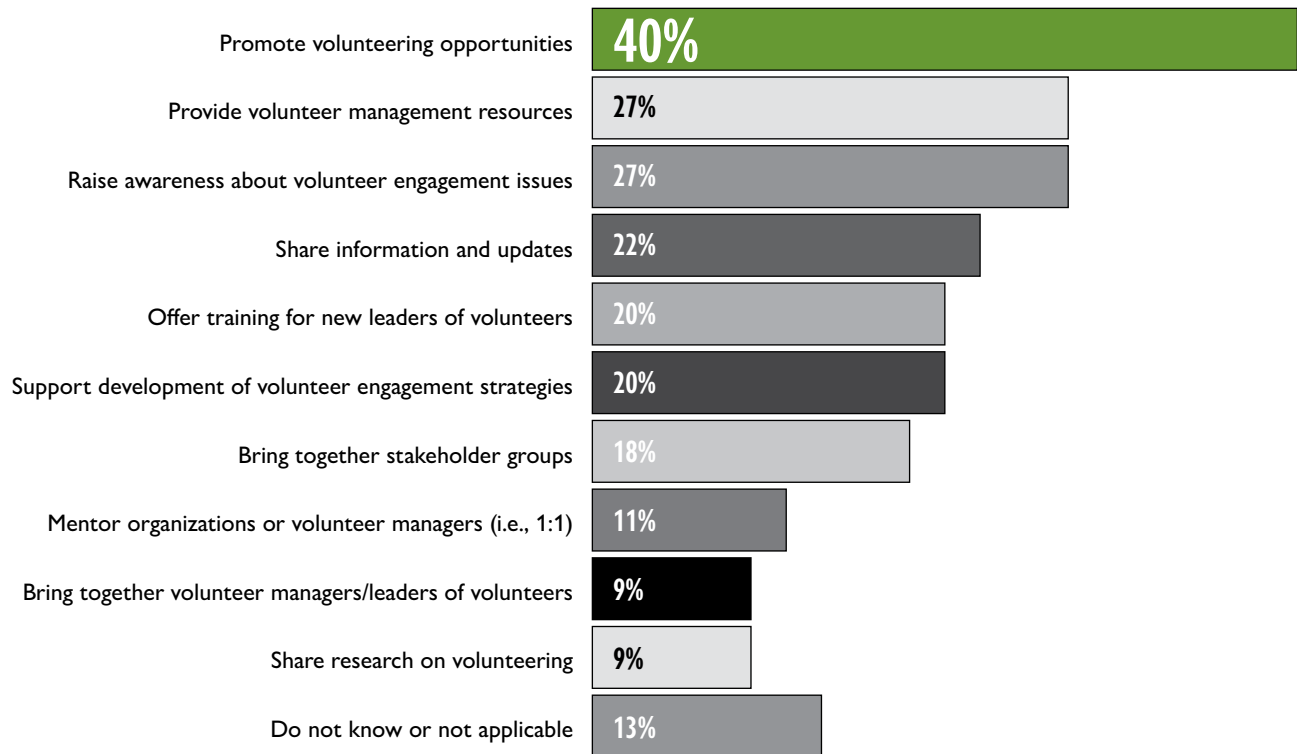


RESPONDENTS ANTICIPATE AN INCREASING  
**NEED FOR VOLUNTEERS WITH A VARIETY  
OF CAPACITIES IN THE NEXT TWO YEARS,**  
INCLUDING GOVERNANCE, FUNDRAISING,  
PROGRAM SUPPORT, ADMINISTRATIVE ROLES,  
SPECIAL EVENTS, CUSTOMER SERVICE, MENTORING  
YOUTH, CLEANING, AND MAINTENANCE,  
TECHNICAL AND OPERATIONS.

Respondents had the opportunity to indicate the supports that would be valuable to them to help advance volunteerism in their organizations. Promotion of volunteering opportunities, volunteer management resources, and raising awareness about volunteer engagement issues were the top three supports selected. Several other supports were also selected as valuable and are highlighted in the following chart.



## NEEDED VOLUNTEER SUPPORTS



# ORGANIZATION DEMOGRAPHICS

45 leaders of volunteers within organizations participated in this survey. Of those organizations, 53% are located in Stony Plain, 16% in Parkland County, 19% in Spruce Grove, and 12% are located in another location. While most responses were from non-profit organizations, registered charities or government organizations, there was a variety of fields represented in the data.



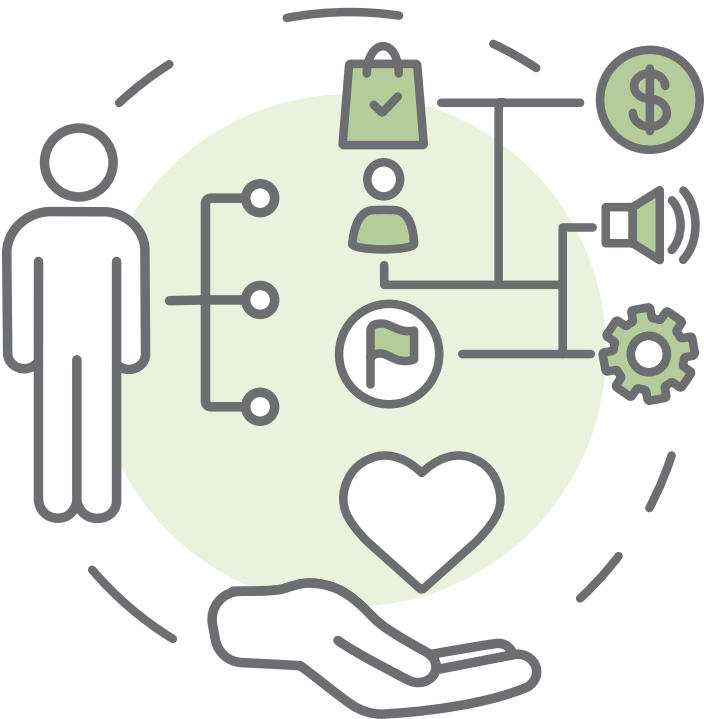
## What type of organizations responded?

56%	Non-profit
16%	Registered Charity
13%	Government Organization
3%	Grassroots or Informal Group
13%	Other

## What fields were represented?

31%	Community Support
16%	Arts, Culture and Heritage
13%	Healthcare and Social Assistance
9%	Youth Engagement
6%	Sport and Recreation
3%	Non-profit Support and Capacity-building
19%	Other

Most of the responses were from organizations without a staffing complement or a smaller staffing complement, and the number of volunteers per organization varied greatly. Most of the organizations that responded are well established in the community, with 72% having been in operation for more than twenty years. Of the remaining organizations 7% have been in operation for eleven to twenty years, 17% for three to ten years, and 3% have been in operation for two years or less. Responding organizations had varied budgets, as is illustrated below.



ANNUAL OPERATING BUDGET	
30%	Under \$25,000
3%	\$25,000 – \$49,000
7%	\$50,000 – \$99,999
3%	\$100,000 – \$249,999
3%	\$250,000 – \$499,999
3%	\$500,000 – \$999,999
23%	\$1,000,000 or more
27%	Unsure or not applicable



## Phase II:

### FOCUSED CONVERSATIONS

In early 2023, six focused conversations and several one-to-one conversations were hosted with participation from nearly 50 community members and organization representatives. The conversations explored many of the themes that arose through the survey results in Phase I. The input received in Phase II will be used to help formulate key actions for the Volunteerism and Civic Engagement Strategy.





## Youth Volunteering and Community Involvement

Two focused conversations were hosted with local youth. The youth indicated the desire to pursue volunteer opportunities where they can volunteer with their friends or family. They are also looking for the opportunity to develop new skills, meet new people, gain employable and leadership skills, and pursue their interests—including teaching others about what they know. Some of the youth who participated indicated the desire to see an impact through the work they do—seeing the benefit to their contribution where they can observe the difference they are making.

When selecting volunteer opportunities, the youth cited the desire to have a personal connection to the organization. Rather than applying for opportunities online they indicated a preference to have in-person discussions first to help determine suitability and fit. A conversation with organizational leaders is a chance to learn more about the organization, the role, and expectations, and make an informed decision prior to applying. Youth expressed the preference to have these conversations, whether it be through a volunteer fair, presentations by organizations or one-to-one conversation, to be in locations they frequent, such as the Youth Centre, schools, or after school club locations. Essentially, youth like the idea of organizations seeking volunteers to meet them where they are at.



### Expanding Youth Involvement

- Consider developing group roles where friends or families can volunteer together
- Create opportunities that aid in the development of skills and leadership
- Host recruitment sessions with youth
- Advertise for roles in places youth frequent

When asked how they learn about volunteer opportunities, the youth who participated indicated they reference posters and advertisements in the community, at school, on community bulletin boards, at the library and through clubs or after school organizations they frequent and through word of mouth.

## Family Volunteering and Community Involvement

A group of residents came together to offer feedback and suggestions about improving family volunteering and community involvement opportunities in the Tri-Region. They stressed the importance of involving families and children, as helping and volunteering is an opportunity for young kids to learn about the value in giving back and helping community. Community involvement initiatives allow kids to learn about compassion, interact with others, and develop valuable skill sets all the while spending time with family.

However, the group noted that there are currently not a lot of family volunteering options available throughout the Tri-Region; or, if there are family opportunities, they may not be advertised as such. The group encouraged organizations and event organizers to consider where families can get involved, and to be intentional about creating family-friendly opportunities.

## Family Volunteering

- *Intentionally create family-friendly volunteering and community involvement opportunities*
- *Develop family-friendly roles that consider timing and duties and appeal to children and youth*
- *Develop messaging that is tailored to families to raise awareness of opportunities available*

The group stressed that intentionality means developing or modifying roles so that they are conducive to a family and their potential needs. This means being aware of the timing of opportunities, considering school and scheduling, and offering shifts that are shorter in length. The group also suggested being intentional about the duties requested of families—consider roles that would be interesting to children and youth, with opportunities to learn, along with the space for a larger family unit to work. When recruiting for community involvement or volunteer roles, the group urged organizers to be creative and to think about how things could be structured to appeal to children and youth.

The group encouraged organizations to carefully consider messaging when asking for community involvement or recruiting for volunteers. They suggested the need to clearly state that families are welcome, and clearly indicate which roles are available for families to pursue. When recruiting for family roles, the group indicated a need to create a welcoming family space—ensure there are areas to access food and beverages (though this could ring true for all volunteers) and a dedicated child-minding space for families with younger children.



*“As a family we are always looking for opportunities to volunteer together. We need a family-oriented atmosphere, that considers timing, with shifts during the day at 1-2 hours max—to account for the attention span of younger children.”*

*(Quote from participant in a 1:1 conversation)*

## Enhancing Awareness of Community Involvement Opportunities

A group of residents came together to brainstorm ways to enhance awareness about the available volunteering and civic engagement opportunities available throughout the Tri-Region. The group acknowledged the good starting point of the existing central database of current opportunities but recognized the need to raise the profile of the tool in the community.

The group stressed the importance of using a variety of mechanisms to get the word out about opportunities. The community is diverse, with different preferences and modes of preferred communication, so the best way to reach as many people as possible is to diversify communications. The group recommended advertising in public spaces and community “bumping spots” such as restaurants, grocery stores, coffee shops, schools, places of worship and recreation facilities. They also encouraged organizers to use community bulletin boards, road signs, and electronic signs. Additionally, it was suggested to frequent community events with pop up booths to promote the roles available.

The group acknowledged the impact of social media campaigns as well as online advertising and website listings, but also stressed the need to continue with other means of promotion such as newspaper and radio advertisements to reach a different demographic. The group indicated that a lot of communication is now digital—sometimes a phone call is nice. Some volunteers do not have a computer and it is important to tailor communications to the needs of volunteers. The group suggested organizations consider offering multiple points of contact for people to learn more—including a phone number, website, and email address. Additionally, the group indicated opportunities for people to chat in person (if desired) would be beneficial.

### Enhancing Awareness

- *Improve the central volunteer database and raise its profile*
- *Use a diverse range of communication mechanisms*
- *Tailor communications to volunteer groups*

## Creating Welcoming and Accessible Volunteer Spaces

A group of Tri-Region residents came together to discuss how best to create welcoming and accessible volunteer spaces. The discussion was an opportunity for participants to reflect on their past and present roles and what has worked (or not) in creating a welcoming and accessible experience.

### Create Welcoming and Accessible Spaces

- *Provide orientation*
- *Foster a friendly, welcoming and respectful culture*
- *Ensure access to role appropriate tools*
- *Develop comprehensive training programs*

Participants indicated they felt very welcome when they were given the option of a meet and greet. It served as an opportunity to get to know the people they would be working with and feel comfortable with the individuals prior to commencing their roles. An explanation of the bigger picture of the organization’s mission, goals and plans also helped participants understand their place in the organization and the broader direction. Participants also stressed the importance of a clear outline for expectations for the volunteer role, combined with a step-by-step explanation of the role to ensure understanding.

Orientation was also cited as very important in creating welcoming and accessible spaces. This would include an orientation to the role, working area, and resources, but also to the overall space. It would serve as an opportunity to highlight safety measures, to tour common areas such as kitchen and washrooms, designated staff and volunteer parking areas, and to learn about other facility specific highlights. Orientation was cited as an opportunity to discuss and address specific volunteer accessibility concerns.



Overall, in terms of the first few and continued interactions, participants reiterated the necessity of friendly, respectful, and welcoming interactions among all levels of an organization. Participants indicated it is the responsibility of the whole organization to make the volunteer feel welcome and appreciated, and as a part of the larger team. Organizations need a culture of including volunteers within the organization to create this positive space.

Participants also reiterated that ensuring volunteers have the tools and resources needed to perform the job also contributes to the formation of a welcoming atmosphere. To ensure volunteers feel valued and welcome, it is critical that they have the tools they need—whether that be access to technological devices or role-specific tools.

Training of volunteers was cited as important in creating a welcoming space. The opportunities for volunteers to develop the skills and knowledge required to succeed in the role is very important and reflects the value organizations place on volunteers within the organization. Participants in the session suggested the need for added supports to organizations such as common templates, forms, and tip sheets to create a more welcoming and accessible space for all (for both organizations and volunteers). Participants also stressed the importance of centralized, regional training opportunities for volunteers to develop their capacity such as inclusion and diversity, unconscious bias, ageism, and pronoun training and help to create a welcoming and accessible space for all.



## Attracting and Retaining Volunteers

While not a specific topic of focused conversation, a common theme that arose throughout all the conversations was about how to best attract and retain volunteers. Many of the participants stressed the need for clear and detailed information throughout the entire volunteer process. This includes developing detailed postings and advertisements when recruiting volunteers. Participants encouraged groups to include as many details as possible about roles: the duties expected, the shifts required, the skill sets needed, the required time commitment, other benefits to the volunteer, and the training and orientation a volunteer could expect. Volunteers are more likely to sign up for an activity or a role when they are clear on the expectations and commitment required.

Participants also encouraged organizations to tailor the application process to the roles. Organizations should consider the opportunity to streamline application processes for less time-intensive, frequent roles such as special event volunteers. When determining screening requirements, participants suggested those are also tailored to the roles. Overall, it is also important to develop volunteer roles and opportunities for community involvement that are meaningful, and provide value for both the organization and volunteer.

Participants stressed the importance of considering the structure of roles that are developed. Organizations need to examine if it is essential that someone commit to a set term and certain shifts per week or perhaps there is an opportunity to provide flexibility to the role. Determine if individuals can complete the work when they are able, on a schedule that works for them, rather than a schedule that works for the organization. Participants encouraged organizations to explore opportunities to allow for drop-in positions and to consider the actual commitment required to encourage more people to get involved in the community.

Participants also indicated volunteer appreciation is a large component of creating welcoming volunteer spaces and retaining volunteers. It is important to show appreciation while the work is being completed and offer encouragement. Taking the time to celebrate successes with volunteers, as well as demonstrating impact is also very important. Doing so lets volunteers know they are valued within the organization.

### *Attraction and Retention*

- *Set clear expectations: develop detailed role descriptions*
- *Streamline and tailor application processes*
- *Explore opportunities to create flexible positions*
- *Celebrate successes and show appreciation*





# challenges





# VOLUNTEERING AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT WITHIN ORGANIZATIONS

Leaders of volunteers from several organizations across the Tri-Region came together to discuss the state of volunteering in their organization, challenges, opportunities, and needed supports to advance volunteerism.

## Challenges

When asked about the current volunteer challenges they are seeing within their organization, most participants cited difficulty recruiting new volunteers and attracting board members in addition to experiencing retention issues with their current volunteer base. Some organizations indicated their current volunteer base is experiencing burnout, while they have lost others due to health issues and shifting of priorities. Furthermore, in recent years, there has been a need for more specialized roles, with specific skill sets that have contributed to the difficulty of attracting and retaining volunteers.

Developing and delivering appropriate training to equip the volunteers with the required skillsets and knowledge was cited as a common challenge. Others cited the difficulty of retaining volunteers with a very limited capacity. Some organizations have seen a significant reduction in the resources dedicated to volunteerism—most notably, staff time and specific funding allocated to recruiting, training, and supporting volunteers.

## Needed Resources and Supports

Organizations reflected on the supports and resources needed to help in addressing the challenges they are encountering. Assistance with promotion of volunteer opportunities was considered a much-needed support. The group also suggested the opportunity to coordinate the sharing of opportunities among organizational networks—further enhancing the reach and cross promotion. Utilizing a variety of promotion mechanisms is a needed consideration to ensure multiple demographics are reached.

### *Needed Resources and Supports*

- *Promotion of volunteer opportunities*
- *Regional training and leadership sessions for volunteers*
- *Volunteer handbooks and templates*
- *Access to resources that cover common volunteer issues and challenges*
- *Training and networking opportunities for leaders of volunteers*
- *Continuation of Tri-Region volunteer appreciation events*
- *Board-specific resources and support*

Opportunities to combine common training needs among volunteer pools was cited as a much need support. Many organizations are seeing the need to further train and educate their current and future volunteer bases, but training can be very expensive and cumbersome to coordinate. Regional training sessions open to local volunteers in which participating organizations contribute a nominal fee was seen as possible solution. Subsidies offered to organizations in need was also seen as beneficial in eliminating the training gap. Organizations also cited potential benefits to creating structured training programs which would allow volunteers to hone and develop specialized skill sets and enhance their knowledge. Organizations indicated the need for a training program developed specifically for new leaders of volunteers to help equip them with required knowledge and skills.

A valuable resource for many of the organizations would be a volunteer handbook with editable templates. Such a resource could act as a step-by-step guide for leaders of volunteers throughout the volunteer life cycle. This includes resources and templates made available to assist in:

- **Recruitment:** including job posting, interview, reference check and role description templates
- **Onboarding:** including templates for screening, handbooks, common lists of consideration for orientation, health and safety policies and considerations, among others
- **Retention:** including tips on retaining and appreciating volunteers, check-in, and evaluation templates
- **Departure:** including templates for exit interviews

Organizations also stressed the need for access to resources that discuss risk management, conflict resolution, confidentiality, and other common volunteer needs. Organizations also cited the need for support in raising awareness about volunteer issues and the value of volunteers and volunteer management in a coordinated, regional manner.

The group encouraged the continuation of a regional volunteer appreciation event. The event is helpful and a great opportunity for volunteers across the region to come together, network, and celebrate their contributions and impact they have throughout the community. The group also indicated the need for a frequent newsletter whereby relevant, common information is shared. The newsletter could highlight new legislation, new training opportunities, volunteer management challenges and trends, as well as a spot for volunteer recognition and appreciation. Further, as leaders of volunteers, the participants encouraged the continuation of regional meetings. They are an opportunity to discuss common opportunities and challenges and to reduce isolation and enhance connection and collaboration.



### Board Resources and Support

As most of the organizations cited issues with attracting and retaining board members, specific supports that could assist with this challenge were explored. A number of valuable resources and supports were cited, including regional training sessions for current and potential board members. This could include a vast array of topics ranging from the different types of boards and the associated roles and responsibilities; meeting structures, Robert's Rules, meeting minutes and requirements; legality considerations and insurance needs; conflict resolution; and general overviews of what it means to be on a board and considerations before joining. Templated matrixes to help with succession planning and templates to assist with assessment of boards were also cited as needed resources.

## NEXT STEPS

The information, feedback and perspectives gathered through the engagement process will help inform the development of the Volunteerism and Civic Engagement Strategy. Specifically, *What We Heard* will be used to affirm, and where needed refine goals, and will be directly reflected in the key actions intended to advance the strategy.





# volunteering...

*...is such an important part of making our community better. Even small things are important and will provide a lot of foundation for volunteerism moving forward.*

*(Quote from participant in a focused conversation).*





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