



The Value of One



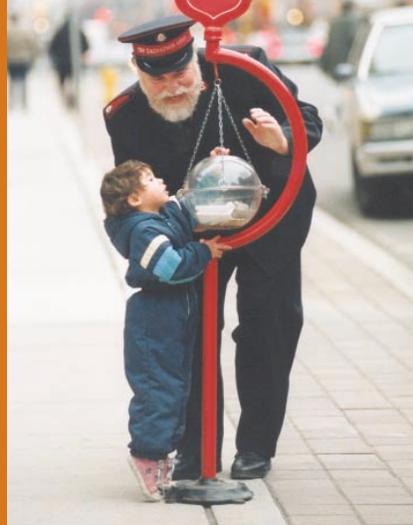
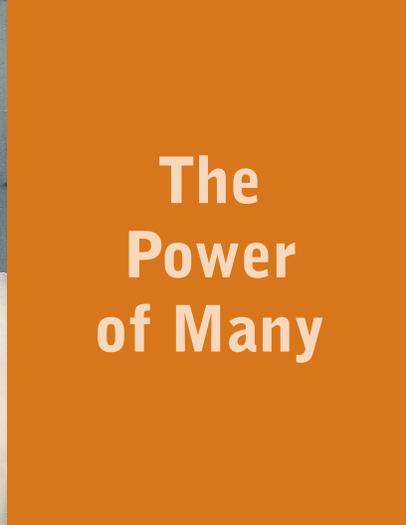
The Power of Many



The Value of One

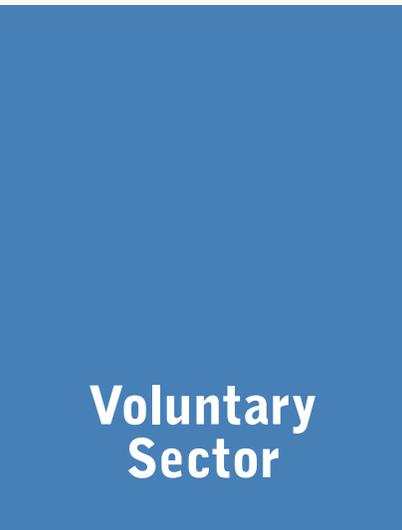


The Power of Many



# The Canada Volunteerism Initiative

The Report of the National Volunteerism Initiative Joint Table



Voluntary Sector



Canada

December 2001

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# A Message from the Joint Table Members

In mid-2000, the federal government and the voluntary sector committed to the development of a national volunteerism initiative. This report is the result of a year-long effort by the National Volunteerism Initiative Joint Table to develop proposals to sustain and enhance volunteerism in Canada and serve as a lasting legacy of the International Year of Volunteers.

As we conducted and analyzed research, gathered information, and talked to volunteers and those working in voluntary organizations, a remarkable picture emerged. Canada's volunteers perform hundreds of thousands of acts of kindness and service every day. From the hospital volunteer to the community hall treasurer, to the massive and instant volunteer response in times of crisis and natural disaster, Canadians give freely of themselves, donating their time, energy, creativity and skills.

There is no disputing that volunteerism is a central thread in the social fabric of Canadian life, although we have also come to realize that we cannot afford to be complacent. While Canadians are deeply committed to their communities and to each other, there is growing evidence that urgent action is needed to ensure volunteerism remains a vital force in Canadian society. There are now far fewer volunteers than there were three years ago, and those who remain are taking on an increasingly heavy workload.

In order to respond to these challenges, this report on the *Canada Volunteerism Initiative* recommends a renewed investment in volunteer activity that will provide volunteers and voluntary organizations with the tools and resources they need to ensure that volunteerism continues to play a strong and vital role in Canadian society.

We are honoured to have worked on this important initiative and thank all those who contributed to its development.



Colleen Kelly (Co-Chair)



Tom Ring (Co-Chair)



Mary Anne Chambers



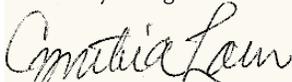
Jim Dooley



Anthony Knight



David Fransen



Cynthia Lam



Geoff Gruson



Gabrielle Moule



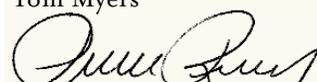
Marilyn Hay



Tom Myers



Rick Herringer



Pierre Riley



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# Executive Summary

## Introduction

Canada is celebrated for its quality of life and the fundamental values of freedom, respect and community which influence who we are and how we act. Our compassion, dedication to caring for those in need and our sense of togetherness allow us to enjoy times of relative peace and harmony and to navigate turbulent times, confident in our commitment to one another.

The importance of volunteers to our quality of life cannot be overstated. We see them: in our hospitals and at our museums; coaching our children in sports and the arts; protecting our communities, the environment and wildlife; providing services for the elderly; helping out in schools; caring for the under-privileged; fighting fires and conducting emergency search and rescue operations; helping out at major events like the Canada Games; giving blood; working in food banks and on the streets with the homeless; as well as sitting on boards of voluntary organizations. Much of our quality of life depends upon the commitment and service of volunteers.

The events of September 11, 2001 shocked people worldwide and eroded some of the trust that Canadians have for one another and their institutions. However, that unthinkable tragedy has also brought the importance of family and community more vividly into focus. The contributions of voluntary organizations and volunteers were clearly visible to people as events unfolded, and many Canadians were moved to participate as they always do in times of crisis. Floods, famine, tornadoes, fires, ice storms and drought have always brought out the force of Canadian generosity.

## Forging a New Relationship to Better Serve Canadians

Two years ago, the Government of Canada and the voluntary sector decided to begin a journey of renewal. They jointly established six groups (referred to as "Joint Tables") to examine the various aspects of their relationship. This Voluntary Sector Initiative (VSI) was announced in June 2000. Its goal is to examine new ways of working together and strengthening the relationship between the voluntary sector and the federal government for the benefit of all Canadians.

This report on the *Canada Volunteerism Initiative* (CVI) is the result of the work of one of the VSI Joint Tables. This particular Joint Table focused its efforts on determining how to encourage more Canadians to volunteer with, participate in, and contribute to voluntary organizations. It also focused on how to enhance the ability of voluntary organizations to benefit more from the contributions of volunteers. The report highlights what we know and don't know about the state of volunteering in Canada today, and makes recommendations that address some of the obstacles and challenges faced by both volunteers and voluntary organizations.

## Canada's Volunteer Force Is Eroding

While more than 6.5 million Canadians actively volunteer in over 175,000 voluntary organizations both in Canada and around the world, the 2000 *National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating* (NSGVP) tells us that volunteer resources are eroding. One million fewer Canadians volunteered in 2000 than in 1997. Further, only 7 percent of Canadians contributed 73 percent of volunteer effort in 2000. While this central core of 'super' volunteers is remarkable, dependence on such a small and shrinking number of people is neither wise nor sustainable. Efforts must be made to deepen and extend the pool of volunteers.

The consultations and research conducted by the Joint Table revealed a number of important challenges related to volunteer recruitment, retention, support and recognition. Much needs to be — and can be — done to enhance the capacity of voluntary organizations to administer volunteer resources and attract and retain new volunteers.

The findings and recommendations set out in this report represent an attempt to better understand, sustain and enhance volunteerism in Canada. It is hoped that these recommendations will both reflect and reinforce the values of community, caring and mutual responsibility that continue to define Canada.

## Critical Needs and Recommendations

The NSGVP findings, research and consultations with individuals and groups of Canadians all tell us that more needs to be done to help volunteer activity grow and contribute to stronger communities in Canada. There is a need for a coherent, sustained approach to any new investment so that voluntary organizations can plan for the future, maximize their effectiveness, and better support the involvement of volunteers.

Each of the recommendations that follow is a part of a continuum of initiatives that, taken together, will strengthen volunteerism, improve the capacity of voluntary organizations to engage and support volunteers, heighten awareness of the contribution of volunteers to Canada's quality of life, and encourage more Canadians to volunteer.

### Networking and Information Exchange

There is a considerable amount of existing knowledge and experience on practices and issues related to volunteerism across Canada. Often, this information is not readily available, nor easily shared among voluntary organizations. Participants at numerous consultation sessions pointed out the benefit of hearing from others in the session. This was particularly so in the session with representatives from rural

Canada. Management expertise developed in one type of voluntary organization — health organizations for example — may be easily adapted for use in other types of organizations. Likewise, tools, resources and ideas that address volunteer mobilization skills need to be widely distributed and supported by training, consultation and peer support.

Technology gives us the ability to improve information-sharing, but technology alone is not sufficient. Voluntary sector leaders, board members, and individual volunteers have confirmed that personal interaction, networking and exchange — followed up with technology support — are the best ways to achieve a transfer of knowledge from organization to organization, and from person to person.

During consultations, strong support emerged for local development activities — such as establishing local networks, improving access to training and consultation, and providing more opportunities for discussion and resource exchange — supported by regional and national expertise.

- ▶ **It is recommended that regionally based, nationally connected volunteer resource networks be established. These networks would be mandated to provide a range of capacity/knowledge-building services to grassroots organizations.**
- ▶ **Together, these networks would form a leadership resource to support and enable the establishment of similar, community-based networks around volunteer development. These networks should be developed by enhancing existing organizations.**

### Research and Innovative Projects

Seventy-three percent of all volunteer effort in Canada is provided by only seven percent of all Canadians. We need to further our understanding of why this is the case. We need to find out why Canadians do, or do not, volunteer. What factors or practices encourage and sustain volunteering? What are the best ways to recognize and celebrate volunteer contributions?

A thorough analysis of research needs related to volunteerism was carried out during 2001, the International Year of Volunteers, and many serious knowledge gaps were identified. As well, an environmental scan on volunteering and improving volunteering, carried out for the Joint Table in the spring of 2001, identified several areas in need of further investigation, including the social and economic value of volunteering to volunteers, the community, and the government; the nature of the demand for volunteers; and employer support for volunteering.

A sustained investment in research on volunteerism will increase our understanding of volunteering and allow for the development of tools, resources and methods that

enhance the ability of Canadians to participate as volunteers. As well, the results of the research must be made available to those who need it. This can be accomplished through the volunteer resource network outlined earlier.

There is an equally urgent need to develop and test new methods for encouraging, sustaining and supporting volunteerism for the future. Community organizations need support to try out locally relevant strategies that will strengthen volunteerism and community engagement.

Pilot projects could focus on important population segments such as youth and seniors, and enable groups such as Aboriginal peoples and new Canadians to develop culturally appropriate strategies for their communities. What is learned from successful projects could then be more broadly applied throughout Canadian society. These approaches will encourage a stronger link between research, learning, and knowledge application, leading to more concrete results.

- ▶ **It is recommended that resources be dedicated to analysis and research that will improve our knowledge about, and understanding of, the dynamics of volunteerism in Canada, and that the resulting knowledge be clearly presented and broadly disseminated.**
- ▶ **Further, it is recommended that resources be dedicated to enabling innovative pilot projects at the community level.**

### Promotion, Recognition and Outreach

Volunteerism in Canada cannot be taken for granted, nor will it flourish without broad awareness of its many contributions and the importance of the voluntary sector organizations that support it. The benefits of volunteerism and the contributions of millions of volunteers need to be recognized, supported and celebrated. Without sufficient recognition or understanding of the investment of time, energy, commitment, expertise and excellence of volunteers, we risk weakening this vital force that builds community in Canada.

The International Year of Volunteers provided the opportunity to begin raising awareness and appreciation for the individuals and organizations engaged in voluntary activities in our communities. However, the activities of this past year alone will not result in broad awareness and increased understanding of the efforts of volunteers or the voluntary sector, nor increase engagement in volunteering throughout Canada.

A sustained recognition, awareness, promotion and outreach campaign is required to ensure that volunteerism and civic participation are recognized as basic elements of Canada's way of life and that the efforts of volunteers are acknowledged and applauded.

At the same time, the campaign would encourage more Canadians to volunteer.

- ▶ **It is recommended that a multi-year campaign of promotion, recognition and outreach be developed and implemented to help Canadians better understand and appreciate volunteer activity and encourage them to volunteer.**

## Leadership and Engagement

The goals of the Joint Table were to examine what is needed to encourage volunteerism and improve the capacity of organizations to benefit from the contribution of volunteers. The Joint Table was asked to undertake this work in order to ensure a lasting legacy to the International Year of Volunteers. Canadians have told us that a lasting legacy requires ongoing leadership and broad engagement across our society.

Throughout the work of the Joint Table, and especially during the consultations, participants talked about the pressing need for a continuing, high-level dialogue about the role of volunteerism in building the kind of society Canadians want for the years ahead.

The voluntary sector, private sector and all orders of government currently work with groups and individuals towards the goal of stronger communities. Working together, Canadians must define what is required to sustain the health and vibrancy of volunteerism and voluntary organizations as core contributors to Canada's quality of life, the strength of its communities, and the bonds of its shared citizenship.

All sectors (voluntary and private sectors, government, academe) and individual Canadians must work together to engage in a dialogue to achieve this objective. The ultimate effectiveness of the recommendations set out in this report depends on this important national dialogue.

- ▶ **It is recommended that a forum be established to lead the involvement of all sectors in this work.**



## Introduction

The importance of volunteers to our quality of life cannot be overstated. We see them: in our hospitals and at our museums; coaching our children in sports and the arts; protecting our communities, the environment and wildlife; providing services for the elderly; helping out in schools; caring for the under-privileged; fighting fires and conducting emergency search and rescue operations; helping out at major events like the Canada Games; giving blood; working in food banks and on the streets with the homeless; as well as sitting on boards of voluntary organizations. Many of the services we take for granted would not be available without volunteers. We recognize and thank them once in a while, but do we fully realize, appreciate and acknowledge the contribution they make to our quality of life?

The Voluntary Sector Initiative (VSI) was jointly launched by the sector and the Government of Canada in June 2000 to enhance the voluntary sector's ability to meet the challenges of the future, as well as to strengthen the relationship between the sector and the Government of Canada in order to serve Canadians more effectively.

The National Volunteerism Initiative Joint Table (see Appendix A for the membership of the Joint Table), one of six such tables established under the VSI, was asked to examine what was needed to encourage more Canadians to participate in voluntary organizations, to improve the ability of organizations to benefit from the contribution of volunteers, and to enhance the experience of volunteering. This was a daunting task, given that there are more than 175,000 voluntary organizations in Canada meeting a diverse set of needs.

This report of the work of the Joint Table presents proposals for the *Canada Volunteerism Initiative* (CVI), which will serve as a lasting legacy of the International Year of Volunteers (IYV). The proposals outlined in this report were developed over the past year based on discussions with hundreds of organizations and experts across Canada and worldwide, meetings of the Joint Table, discussions with other VSI Joint Tables, an environmental scan of existing research, as well as the findings of the 2000 *National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating* (NSGVP). It should be noted, however, that this report represents a summary overview rather than a definitive assessment of volunteerism in Canada.

6.5 million Canadians  
volunteered in the  
year 2000  
– NSGVP

The *Canada  
Volunteerism Initiative*  
— Canada's lasting  
legacy to the  
International Year of  
Volunteers

# What Volunteering Means to Canada

In a free and democratic society, volunteering and civic participation are fundamental acts of citizenship essential to the well-being of a caring society. Canada has built a democracy in which people from different faiths, cultures, languages, and races work together to build the society in which they want to live. Respect, community, togetherness, and caring for each other are a way of life in Canada, fundamental to who we are and what we do.

The voluntary sector, one of the three pillars of Canadian society alongside the public and private sectors, enables civic participation and encourages citizens to become engaged in their society and communities in a meaningful way. Voluntary organizations are a force for social cohesion — a force for stability and growth.

Volunteers come from all age groups, all backgrounds, all sectors, and all parts of Canada. They give their time, energy, creativity and expertise to help make Canada one of the best places in the world to live. Volunteers perform hundreds of thousands of acts of kindness every day, either by volunteering through a formal organization or by reaching out to neighbours, friends, families and strangers who need a helping hand.

In times of crisis, the contribution of volunteers is most evident. While we recognize and applaud the way Canadians come together at such times, we must not overlook the largely unseen efforts of volunteers whose life-long, day-to-day commitment to serving others has helped to shape our sense of who we are. Where would we be as a country without volunteers? It is estimated that the contributions of Canada's 6.5 million volunteers represent approximately 549,000 full-time, year-round jobs. What would happen to the quality of life of the millions of Canadians who depend on them if they weren't there? These are important questions that the voluntary sector and the Government of Canada have been working together to answer.



Voluntary organizations are a force for social cohesion — a force for stability and growth

The contributions of 6.5 million volunteers represent approximately 549,000 full-time jobs



## Three Developments that Affected the Work of the Joint Table

During 2000 and 2001, the following three significant developments affected volunteering in Canada and hence the work of the Joint Table:

### 1) International Year of Volunteers

In December 2000, Canada joined with countries around the world to launch 2001 as the International Year of Volunteers (IYV). Canada was one of the first countries to make a significant investment in planning and actively celebrating IYV. Working in partnership, the Government of Canada and the voluntary sector have experienced many successes throughout this special year. During our dialogue with Canadians, we heard that the heightened awareness and promotion that resulted from IYV activities had a positive impact on local communities and voluntary organizations. We must maintain this momentum.

### 2) National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating

In August 2001, Statistics Canada released the results of the 2000 *National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating* (NSGVP). The survey revealed a number of alarming trends, including a drop in the volunteer rate and an increased reliance on a small subset of 'super' volunteers. A more extensive summary of the findings of the NSGVP that affected the Table's work is presented later and in Appendix B.

### 3) September 11, 2001

The events of September 11 have had a fundamental impact on the work of the Joint Table. This unthinkable tragedy brought the importance of family and community more vividly into focus. The desire for social stability became evident across the country — from the response to appeals for donations of blood and money, to the tone of letters to the editor, to animated discussions at dinner tables and in schoolrooms. The contributions of voluntary organizations and volunteers were clearly visible to people everywhere as events unfolded — and many Canadians were moved to participate.

"The National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, the International Year of Volunteers and the September 11<sup>th</sup> tragedy brought the importance of volunteerism into clearer focus."

– Table Member

# The State of Volunteering in Canada

While many Canadians clearly recognize and value the contribution of volunteers, especially in times of crisis, there is cause for concern about the day-to-day state of volunteering in Canada.

## Environmental Scan Findings

The Joint Table commissioned a scan of all the research that was available on the state of volunteering in Canada. The scan revealed that there is only a limited amount of recent public opinion research about volunteering and volunteerism. The scan also pointed out that there are many gaps in the knowledge base and that more research is needed. (For more details on the environmental scan, please see Appendix C.)

The scan did show that all sectors of Canadian society including the public-at-large think that volunteering is important and valuable to Canadian society. There is also a high level of trust for voluntary organizations and for volunteers. There is some concern that volunteers may be replacing paid workers in some areas. As well, there are a number of concerns that volunteers may not be valued sufficiently by voluntary organizations or by society as a whole.

The scan also revealed that there are a number of challenges confronting volunteerism in Canada. The research and key informant interviews suggested that there is a need to strengthen management capabilities in voluntary organizations so that volunteers benefit more from their volunteering experiences, and voluntary organizations involve volunteers in the most effective way. As well, the data suggest that the expectations of volunteers may be changing and, therefore, voluntary organizations may have to rethink their ways of recruiting and supporting volunteers.

Various jurisdictions have focused on initiatives intended to increase volunteering, such as mandatory community service by high school students. Numerous social

agencies are interested in extending their volunteer pool to include people with disabilities and new Canadians. Employers everywhere are beginning to experiment more widely with the idea of supporting employee volunteerism. All of these trends and opportunities need closer examination.



*“There is cause for concern about the day-to-day state of volunteering in Canada.”*

– **Table Member**

*“Research shows that Canadians think volunteering is important and valuable to Canadian society.”*

– **Environmental Scan**

*“Losing 1 million volunteers in three years is clearly a problem.”*

– **Table Member**

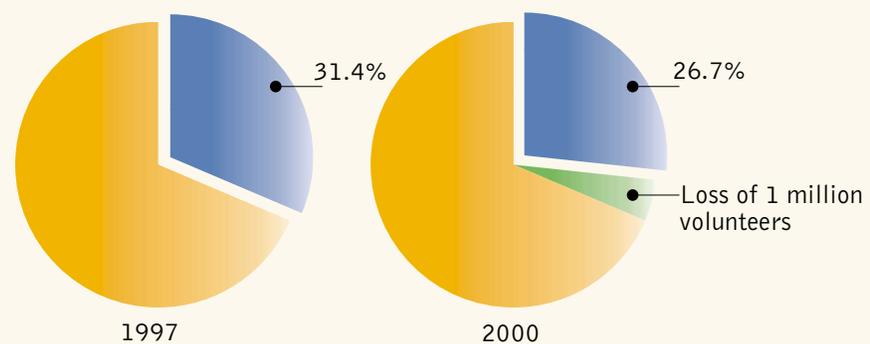
The number of Canadians volunteering declined by 13 percent between 1997 and 2000 — NSGVP



### National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating — 2000

The results of the NSGVP contain both good news and bad news. The good news is that 6.5 million Canadians are engaged in volunteering and these volunteers come from all age groups, all backgrounds, and all communities. The bad news is that, between 1997 and 2000, one million fewer Canadians contributed to a formal volunteer activity — a 13 percent decline. This is an alarming trend.

Figure 1: Proportion of adults who volunteer.

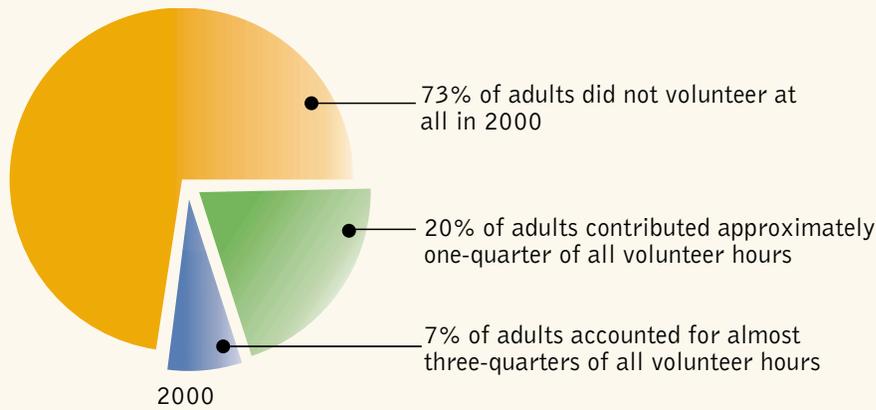


The volunteering rate declined independent of age, sex, marital status, education, labour force status and income. Despite the adoption of mandatory community service in some high school education systems, the volunteering rate among those aged 15–24 declined from 33 percent in 1997 to 29 percent in 2000.

Further, in spite of a 2.5 percent increase in the Canadian population and a 9 percent increase in the average number of hours per volunteer between 1997 and 2000, the decline in the overall volunteering rate resulted in an absolute decline in the total number of volunteer hours — from 1.11 billion hours in 1997 to 1.05 billion hours in 2000. To put this in perspective, this decline of 56 million volunteer hours is equivalent to the loss of 29,000 full-time jobs. While these numbers speak for themselves, they do not explain why this decline has occurred.

In 2000, 73 percent of Canadians did not volunteer at all, at least in the formal system. The survey findings also show that only seven percent of Canadians contribute almost three-quarters of all volunteer effort. This central core of 'super' volunteers is highly homogenous: they are older, university educated, higher income, parents, and actively religious. While these people represent a remarkable cohort of Canadians, dependence on such a small number is neither wise, nor sustainable, in the longer term. Effort is needed to deepen and extend the pool of volunteers.

Figure 2: Distribution of volunteer load



*“Seven percent of Canadians contribute almost three-quarters of volunteer hours — dependence on these ‘super’ volunteers is not sustainable.”*

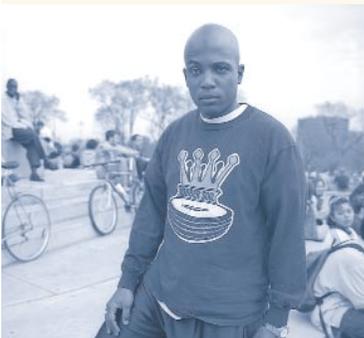
**– Consultation Participant**

The survey does provide some insights into motivation and obstacles to volunteering. For example, in the recent survey, 62 percent of volunteers cited potential employment prospects as their reason for volunteering. Only about half said that in 1997.

The single most important factor people give for volunteering is a belief in the cause supported by the organizations. This is followed by: putting skills to use; being personally affected by the cause; and exploring one’s own strengths. These factors remained stable over the three-year period, suggesting that other factors contributed to the marked decline in volunteering.

The reasons given for not volunteering have remained relatively constant: lack of time and unwillingness to make a year-round commitment. The survey also indicates that many non-volunteers in Canada have never been asked to volunteer. Many people indicate that they don’t know how to get involved in their community. A clear need exists to promote and celebrate volunteerism to help Canadians from all backgrounds become more aware of volunteering opportunities, and to help organizations reach out to potential volunteers.

Although the survey provides a useful snapshot of volunteer participation, it also leaves many questions unanswered. The survey points to the need for more analysis to answer such questions as: why volunteering is down and giving is up; why a small proportion of people are carrying an increasingly heavy volunteer load; and whether mandatory community service programs are proving effective.





## Joint Table Consultations

More than 350 individuals and organizations participated in consultations through the 26 forums across Canada or through the interactive questionnaire on the Internet.

The proposals discussed at the consultations were the result of extensive dialogue with selected organizations and experts, meetings of the Joint Table, discussions with other VSI Joint Tables, the results of the environmental scan, as well as the results of the NSGVP.

There was virtually unanimous agreement that the consultations allowed for a productive exchange of views. As well, participants agreed that the proposals would provide a useful foundation for developing and implementing the *Canada Volunteerism Initiative* (CVI). Participants from each session also shared many new ideas and insights to help further refine and define the proposals.

These discussions with individuals across Canada also led to the conclusion that the mechanisms in place to recruit and support volunteers within organizations are often inadequate. For example, there are indications that potential volunteers have less available time than they did in the past, yet organizations continue to ask them to make long-term or intensive volunteer commitments. Volunteers today are seeking opportunities to develop skills or contribute special talents, yet they may be asked to carry out repetitive and unchallenging work.

Much needs to be done to improve volunteer recruitment and strengthen the way voluntary organizations administer volunteer resources. It is clear that, if organizations are to continue to deliver on their mandates, they will need to reach out to more potential volunteers and to an increasingly diverse mix of volunteers.

A summary of the consultations is provided in Appendix D.

*"This has been a wonderful opportunity for sharing information...we need more of it."*

– **Consultation Participant**

*"The public, governments and the private sector don't really understand what volunteering is all about. We need to tell our story."*

– **Consultation Participant**

# The Goals and Guiding Principles of the Canada Volunteerism Initiative

The goals of the *Canada Volunteerism Initiative* (CVI) are to:

- Encourage Canadians to participate in voluntary organizations;
- Improve the capacity of organizations to benefit from the contribution of volunteers; and
- Enhance the experience of volunteering.

One of the first tasks of the Joint Table was to develop guiding principles for the CVI. The following guiding principles are the result of internal deliberations of the Joint Table and discussions with both voluntary sector leaders and individual volunteers:

► **The Canada Volunteerism Initiative must recognize the diversity and range of voluntary organizations.**

The single defining characteristic of the more than 175,000 voluntary organizations in Canada is that volunteers lead them. To be eligible for charitable or not-for-profit status, organizations must have a volunteer Board. The vast majority of these organizations depend on volunteers to provide some, or all, of their services.

It's also important to recognize the diversity of voluntary organizations. At one end of the spectrum, there are the organizations that have no paid staff at all. All of the leadership, fundraising, and service provision in those organizations is done by volunteers. At the other end of the spectrum, there are the large institutions such as hospitals, school boards and municipal recreation programs with high levels of staffing, funding, and sophistication, but still involving millions of volunteers.

The needs of these diverse organizations are clearly different, even unique in many cases. The CVI has to consider these variables.



► **The Canada Volunteerism Initiative must be readily accessible to all voluntary organizations and volunteers at national, regional and local levels, as well as in urban, rural and remote communities.**

Technology has had a tremendous impact on the ability to improve information-sharing, but technology alone is not sufficient.

*"Promoting public awareness of volunteerism is essential."*

– **Consultation Participant**

*"Making information, tools, advice and other forms of support of a consistent standard easily accessible across Canada is very important."*

– **Consultation Participant**



Again and again, voluntary sector leaders and individual volunteers have confirmed that technology can support, but not replace, personal, face-to-face interaction to achieve a transfer of knowledge from organization to organization, and person to person.

During consultations, strong support emerged for local development activities such as establishing local networks; improving access to training and consultation; and providing more opportunities for discussion and resource exchange. To be effective and meaningful, however, these activities would have to be supported by regional and national expertise.

Rural and remote communities have particular challenges not experienced by those in urban centres. Often the work of these rural and remote agencies is critical to the quality of life of the community and its citizens, but their access to support and information may be limited. Every effort must be made to ensure that approaches to improve volunteerism are inclusive and sensitive to the needs of rural and remote agencies.

- ▶ **The Canada Volunteerism Initiative must promote innovation and risk-taking, as well as support for research in order to remain relevant to changing community needs.**

In many communities across Canada, voluntary organizations are examining ways and means to increase their volunteer pool, to adjust to changing conditions, and to reach out to new potential volunteers. Many of the challenges they face require new and innovative solutions.

Efforts to deepen the volunteer pool will require financial support for some experimentation and risk-taking. Expanding volunteer recruitment and designing meaningful work for new and existing volunteers are critical to the future of volunteerism in Canada. We must promote these outreach efforts, support innovative techniques, and help voluntary organizations try new things.

- ▶ **The Canada Volunteerism Initiative must promote volunteerism and the contribution of volunteers to Canadian society.**

Although many who volunteer do not expect recognition or rewards for their efforts, it is always important to recognize and acknowledge those who are participating freely in community service.

Broadening understanding and awareness of the work and contribution of volunteers is critical to attracting new volunteers. If voluntary organizations are to reach out and deepen the pool of potential volunteers, they need visibility and support.

*"We need to find ways to make sure that volunteering continues from generation to generation."*

– **Consultation Participant**

*"We should not aim for a one-size-fits-all solution... the sector is too diverse."*

– **Table Member**

- ▶ **The Canada Volunteerism Initiative must build on existing organizations and processes, making effective use of community assets and promoting collaboration.**



During consultations, participants made it clear that they did not want to see new infrastructure created. They want efforts to improve volunteerism to build on existing organizations and processes that would make the best use of community assets, as well as promote collaboration among agencies and organizations. Clearly, there is a strong belief that existing structures can be used to build the support for volunteerism that is needed.

*“There are lots of good voluntary organizations out there that can share in doing the job.”*

**– Consultation Participant**





## Recommendations

The voluntary sector and the Government of Canada are committed to forging a new working relationship — one that will benefit all Canadians and build a more stable voluntary sector.

In times of crisis or major events, Canadians are there to help, but too few of us are making the kind of sustained, day-to-day commitment that is so necessary to the well-being of our communities. As our society becomes more and more complex, volunteers are called upon again and again to pick up the slack. There are cracks in the infrastructure that require a concentrated effort to fix.

Volunteerism and civic participation are fundamental elements of our democracy and contribute to the richness of Canadian society. People coming together — motivated by their commitment to one another and their communities and without expectation of reward — make a difference in the everyday lives of millions of Canadians.

We ignore the erosion of volunteerism in recent years at our peril. The organizations that support volunteers and enable civic participation, as well as the volunteers themselves, deserve acknowledgement and our deep appreciation. All Canadians benefit from their efforts. The time has come to demonstrate an understanding of their important contribution to the fabric of Canadian society and the well-being of people and communities, and to consciously create an environment that will enable them to flourish.

The NSGVP findings, research and consultations with individuals and groups of Canadians all tell us that investments are required to help volunteer activity grow, thrive and contribute to the development of stronger communities in Canada. There is a need for a coherent, sustained approach to investment so that voluntary organizations can plan for the future, maximize their effectiveness, fulfill their mandates, and better support the involvement of volunteers.

The four recommendations that follow address specific concerns about the state of volunteering, but these elements should not be considered as separate and unique in themselves. Each is a part of a continuum of initiatives that, taken together, will improve the capacity of voluntary organizations to engage and support volunteers, heighten awareness of the contribution of volunteers to the Canadian quality of life, and encourage more Canadians to volunteer.

There are cracks in the infrastructure that require a concentrated effort to fix

Investments are required to help volunteer activity grow and thrive

## Networking and Information Exchange

While there is a wealth of knowledge and experience on practices and issues related to volunteerism across Canada, much of it is not readily available, nor easily shared among organizations.



Technology gives us the ability to improve information-sharing, but technology alone is not sufficient. Voluntary sector leaders and individual volunteers have confirmed that personal interaction, networking and exchange — followed up with technology support — are the best ways to achieve a transfer of knowledge from organization to organization, and from person to person.

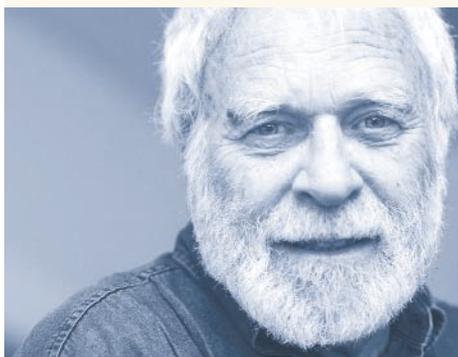
As well, it is essential that we find ways to be accessible and inclusive to serve the diverse interests of those operating nationally, those serving rural and remote communities, and everything in between.

- ▶ **It is recommended that regionally based, nationally connected volunteer resource networks be established. These networks would be mandated to provide a range of capacity/knowledge-building services to grassroots organizations.**
- ▶ **Together, these networks would form a leadership resource to support and enable the establishment of similar, community-based networks around volunteer development. These networks should be developed by enhancing existing organizations.**

## Research and Innovative Projects

A thorough analysis of research needs related to volunteerism was carried out during the International Year of Volunteers (IYV). Many serious knowledge gaps were identified.

Existing research shows that 73 percent of all volunteer effort in Canada is provided by 7 percent of Canadians. We need a better understanding of why this is the case.



There is a need for more research that will explain: why Canadians do or do not volunteer; what factors or practices encourage and sustain volunteering; and what are the most effective ways to recognize and celebrate volunteer contributions.

*"We need to have a way of learning what others are doing so that we can benefit from other people's successes."*

– **Consultation Participant**

*"Any model that is used must be sensitive to the needs of rural and remote communities."*

– **Consultation Participant**

*"We all need to understand what motivates volunteers."*

– Consultation Participant



As well, the environmental scan carried out for the Joint Table in the spring of 2001 identified several areas in need of further investigation, including: the social and economic value of volunteering to volunteers, the community, and the government; the nature of the demand for volunteers; and employer-supported volunteering and how it can most effectively support volunteering in Canada.

Research needs to be done to better understand the motivations of volunteers, the patterns of participation, and the challenges and benefits to volunteering from the perspective of the individual volunteer. Research is required on trends, program successes, and the outcomes and impacts of volunteerism on civil society, public policy and social development in Canada.

A sustained investment in analysis and research will increase all sectors' understanding of volunteering and allow for the development of tools, resources and methods for encouraging more Canadians to participate as volunteers. Research results must be broadly disseminated so that groups at the national, regional and local levels can broaden their knowledge of volunteering. The research results should be made widely available to increase societal awareness of the trends that are affecting volunteerism in Canada. This can all be accomplished through the volunteer resource network outlined earlier.

There is an equally urgent need to develop and test new methods for encouraging, sustaining and supporting volunteerism for the future. Community organizations need support to try out locally relevant strategies that will strengthen volunteerism and community engagement.

Pilot projects could focus on important population segments such as youth and seniors, and enable groups such as Aboriginal peoples and new Canadians to develop culturally appropriate strategies for their communities. What is learned from successful projects could then be more broadly applied throughout Canadian society. These approaches will encourage a stronger link between research, learning, and knowledge application, leading to more concrete results.

- ▶ **It is recommended that resources be dedicated to analysis and research that will improve our knowledge about, and understanding of, the dynamics of volunteerism in Canada and that the resulting knowledge be clearly presented and broadly disseminated.**
- ▶ **Further, it is recommended that resources be dedicated to enabling innovative pilot projects at the community level.**

*"We need to try out new things, but often the risk is too great within limited resources."*

– Consultation Participant

## Promotion, Recognition and Outreach

Volunteerism in Canada cannot be taken for granted, nor can it be expected to flourish without broad awareness of its many contributions and the importance of the organizations that support it.



*"We need a sustained promotion and awareness campaign to get the volunteerism story out."*

– Table Member

The benefits of volunteerism and the contributions of millions of volunteers need to be recognized and supported. Without sufficient recognition or understanding of the investment of time, energy, commitment, expertise and excellence of volunteers, there is a risk that Canada will lose this vital force that helps to build and sustain communities.

The International Year of Volunteers provided the opportunity to begin raising awareness and appreciation for the individuals and organizations engaged in voluntary activities in Canadian communities. However, the activities of this past year alone will not result in broad awareness and increased understanding of the efforts of volunteers, nor increase engagement in volunteering throughout Canada.

*"We need to acknowledge the contribution of volunteers to Canada's way of life."*

– Consultation Participant

A sustained recognition, awareness, promotion and outreach campaign is required to ensure that volunteerism and civic participation are recognized as basic elements of Canada's way of life and that the efforts of volunteers are acknowledged and applauded. At the same time, the campaign would encourage more Canadians to volunteer.

- ▶ **It is recommended that a multi-year campaign of promotion, recognition and outreach be developed and implemented to help Canadians better understand and appreciate volunteer activity and encourage them to volunteer.**

## Leadership and Engagement

The goals of the Joint Table were to examine what is needed to encourage volunteerism and improve the capacity of organizations to benefit from the contribution of volunteers. The Joint Table was asked to undertake this work in order to ensure a lasting legacy to the International Year of Volunteers. Canadians have told us that a lasting legacy requires ongoing leadership and broad engagement across our society.





Throughout the work of the Joint Table, and especially during the consultations, participants talked about the pressing need for a continuing, high-level dialogue about the role of volunteerism in building the kind of society Canadians want for the years ahead.

The voluntary sector, private sector and all orders of government currently work with groups and individuals towards the goal of stronger communities. Working together, Canadians must define what is required to sustain the health and vibrancy of volunteerism and voluntary organizations as core contributors to Canada's quality of life, the strength of its communities, and the bonds of its shared citizenship.

All sectors (voluntary and private sectors, government, academe) and individual Canadians must work together to engage in a dialogue to achieve this objective. The ultimate effectiveness of the recommendations set out in this report depends on this important national dialogue.

- ▶ **It is recommended that a forum be established to lead the involvement of all sectors in this work.**

*"An ongoing dialogue is an important part of social cohesion and the democratic process."*

– Table Member

## Anticipated Results

We believe that the *Canada Volunteerism Initiative* could achieve the following results:

- ✓ Improve the ability of voluntary organizations to engage and support volunteers, respond quickly to change, and readily adapt to emerging needs. Voluntary organizations will have better access to consistent information, tools and development opportunities that respond to specific organizational and community needs.
- ✓ Enable voluntary organizations to improve their administration of volunteer resources and provide more meaningful and rewarding opportunities for volunteers, while still fulfilling their mandates.
- ✓ Improve networking and information-sharing to advance learning at a much more rapid pace than in the past. Voluntary organizations will be able to adapt new models as they are tested and found to be useful. Increased collaboration will provide voluntary organizations with access to resources and ideas from across the voluntary sector.
- ✓ Increase awareness of the importance of volunteerism to Canada's quality of life and social fabric, and encourage more people to volunteer and participate. Canada's communities will gain strength as a result of this improved civic participation and service. Canada will have a society in which voluntary service is highly valued and volunteering is considered to be an integral part of citizenship.

The further development and implementation of any of the recommendations of this report should include the development of specific indicators to measure and assess progress towards the overall goals of the *Canada Volunteerism Initiative*.



The province with the highest rate of volunteerism is Saskatchewan at 42 percent  
– NSGVP

## Conclusion



Canada's quality of life depends to a significant degree on volunteers and voluntary organizations. Every day thousands of volunteers give freely of their time, skills and energy for the benefit of people and communities, helping to make Canada one of the best places in the world to live. We are in danger of taking them and their contributions for granted.

In the fast-paced life of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is important for us to realize and acknowledge what volunteerism does for Canada and for Canadians. The latest data that we have, the *2000 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating*, suggest that volunteerism is in decline and there is much anecdotal evidence to support this finding. We lost a million volunteers between 1997 and 2000. While we cannot fully explain why this decline occurred or what it means for our collective future, we have to ask ourselves whether we can afford to lose a million more.

The recommendations presented here cannot solve all of the challenges that volunteers and voluntary organizations face. However, these recommendations respond to a number of those challenges in a measured and practical way. The *Canada Volunteerism Initiative* can be a first — but crucial — step in a journey of renewal and partnership between the Government of Canada and the voluntary sector.

The *Canada Volunteerism Initiative* can be a first — but crucial — step in a journey of renewal and partnership between the Government of Canada and the voluntary sector

# National Volunteerism Initiative Joint Table Members

Voluntary Sector	Government of Canada
Colleen Kelly ( <i>Co-Chair</i> ) Executive Director Volunteer Vancouver	Tom Ring ( <i>Co-Chair</i> ) Director General Citizens' Participation & Promotion Branch Canadian Heritage
Mary Anne Chambers Chair United Way Canada — Centraide Canada	Jim Dooley Executive Advisor, Oceans Sector Office of the Assistant Deputy Minister Fisheries and Oceans Canada
Anthony Knight Executive Director Youth Council of New Brunswick	David Fransen Associate Assistant Deputy Minister Spectrum, Information Technologies and Telecommunications Sector Industry Canada
Cynthia Lam Former Chief Executive Officer (Retired) Chinese Family Services of Greater Montreal	Geoff Gruson Director General Strategic Planning and Policy Royal Canadian Mounted Police
Gabrielle Moule National Director, Volunteer Resources Canadian Red Cross	Marilyn Hay Director General Manitoba Region Human Resources Development Canada
Tom Myers Vice President Telephone Pioneers	Rick Herringer Director Refugee Resettlement Citizenship and Immigration Canada
Pierre Riley Directeur général Fédération des centres d'action bénévole du Québec	

# National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating Analysis: Implications for Volunteerism

## I. INTRODUCTION

### Purpose and Context

Set out below are selected highlights of factors and trends identified through a comparative analysis of findings from the 1997 and 2000 editions of the *National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating* (NSGVP). Conducted by Statistics Canada as a supplement to the Canada Labour Force Survey, the NSGVP is based on a representative sample of 14,724 Canadians aged 15 years and older and reflects a 63% response rate.

The selected highlights in this analytical report focus on principal areas of concern about the directions in which volunteering in Canada may be heading. The object is to help identify possible policy and strategic issues of interest to the *Canada Volunteerism Initiative* (CVI) which is seeking to establish measures to promote the effective engagement and support of volunteers in Canada, as part of a broader and long-term Voluntary Sector Initiative (VSI) being pursued jointly by the federal government and the voluntary sector in Canada.

Using virtually the same methodology, the questions on which the 1997 and 2000 surveys focused concerned the proportion of Canadians who volunteer (volunteer rate), the number of volunteers and the hours they contributed, the distribution of the volunteer 'workload,' and factors that motivate people to volunteer and are associated with volunteering (religious affiliation) or stand in their way. Within these questions, the survey shed light on the characteristics of volunteers (age, sex, marital status, education, labour force status, and household income) and provided a provincial breakdown of volunteering patterns.

The NSGVP provides a series of snapshots of volunteering, helping to identify issues of concern and areas warranting more in depth investigation and research.

### Highlights of Key Findings

The survey clearly shows that volunteering declined significantly between 1997 and 2000 in nearly every meaningful measure. The proportion and number of volunteers and the hours devoted to volunteering are all down from 1997. The decline is evident for men and women regardless of age, marital status, education, labour force status or household income. Volunteering declined in every province except PEI, where there was a slight increase. Although volunteer hours declined by 5%, the 7% of Canadians who account for 73% of the hours increased their average hours volunteered per year.

The survey revealed that, while volunteering was down, there was an 11% increase in financial contributions to charitable and similar organizations. At first glance this might suggest that there has been a convenient trade-off, with a rise in giving offsetting a decline in volunteering. However, it is not known whether this increase in giving may have reduced the need for volunteers in some sectors or organizations (i.e., by providing more resources to engage paid staff). Nor is it known if the increased giving translated into an increased capacity for those sectors and organizations to in fact recruit more volunteers than they otherwise would, meaning that — in the absence of the increased giving — the volunteering rates might have been even lower than the 2000 results reveal.

**Note on the Reliability of the NSGVP Results**

While many participants in the Joint Table consultations stated that the survey results were consistent with what was happening in their organization, some participants wondered whether methodology or other factors might have led the 2000 NSGVP to overstate the decline in voluntary participation. Others wondered whether the 1997 NSGVP, conducted when unemployment was higher than in 2000 (and when more people presumably had more time to volunteer), might have captured an unusually high point in recent volunteer participation. Still others wondered about other possible explanations for overstating the problem.

There are methodological limitations in any survey and perhaps some errors as well. These can lead to overstating or understating the real state of affairs. It is worth noting however, that even if the survey overstated the decline in numbers of Canadians volunteering from 1997 to 2000 by 20% — an unheard of error — there would still be about 800,000 fewer Canadians volunteering in 2000 than in 1997. If, on the other hand, the survey understated the decline by 20%, the drop in numbers of Canadians volunteering from 1997 to 2000 would be 1.2 million. Either way, the decline in volunteer participation in such a short period is massive, a conclusion reinforced by the fact that all groups of Canadians in virtually every province reduced their contributions as volunteers.

## II. ANALYSIS OF SELECTED FACTORS AND TRENDS

### Volunteering Rates

- ▶ The national volunteering rate — the proportion of the Canadian population 15 years and older who participated in at least one volunteer activity in the year before the survey — declined from 31.4% in 1997 to 26.7% in 2000. That represents a 15% drop in the volunteering rate over the three-year period.
- ▶ In the period 1997–2000 the volunteering rate declined regardless of age, sex, marital status, education, labour force status and income.
- ▶ Some of the largest declines in the volunteering rates — in absolute and proportional terms — were evident in several of the traditional strongholds of volunteerism. For example, for the five population segments that demonstrated the highest rates of volunteerism in 1997\* the proportional drop in volunteering rates ranged from 13% to 25% in the three-year period — the latter almost double the average national decline.

Rank in 1997	Population Category	1997 Volunteering Rate (%)	2000 Volunteering Rate (%)	Decline in Rate (percentage points)	Decline in Rate (% of 1997 rate)
1	University Degree	48	39	9	19
2	\$100,000 + Household Income	45	39	6	13
3	Employed Part-Time	44	33	11	25
4	\$80–99,999 Household Income	42	35	7	17
5	Age 35–44 Years	37	30	7	19
	<b>Total Population</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>15</b>

\* Note: Not all of these categories are totally mutually exclusive.

- ▶ Despite the adoption of 'mandatory volunteering' in high school education systems in several provinces, the volunteering rate among those aged 15–24 years declined from 33% in 1997 to 29% in 2000 — a 12% drop in the rate.

### Volunteers and Volunteering Hours

- ▶ Despite a 2.5% increase in the Canadian population 15 years and older, the total number of volunteers actually declined by 13% from 1997 to 2000. The loss of almost 1 million volunteers in that three year period — from 7.47 million in 1997 to 6.51 million in 2000 — contrasts with what could have been an increase of some 190,000 volunteers simply from population growth, had volunteering rates remained constant.
- ▶ Despite the 2.5% increase in the Canadian population and a 9% increase in the average number of hours volunteered per volunteer in the period 1997–2000, the decline in the overall volunteering rate resulted in an absolute decline in the total number of volunteer hours in Canada over the three year-period — from 1.11 billion hours in 1997 to 1.05 billion hours in 2000.
- ▶ The decline of 56 million volunteer hours from 1997 to 2000 translates into the equivalent of some 29,000 volunteers engaged full time year-round (i.e., 40 hours/week for 48 weeks).
- ▶ Had volunteering rates simply remained constant, population growth alone would have increased the volunteer hours by about 27 million hours — compared to the decline of 56 million hours.

### Distribution of Volunteering Load

- ▶ The distribution of volunteering load — measured in both volunteer hours per Canadian and volunteer hours per volunteer each year — is highly uneven. For example, in 2000:
  - 73% of Canadians 15 years and over did not volunteer at all
  - 20% contributed 27% of all volunteer hours
  - 7% contributed 73% of all volunteer hours
- ▶ Even among volunteers, the average number of volunteer hours each year varies widely from one population segment to another. For example, the average hours volunteered annually among the five highest population segments range from 25% higher to more than double that of the five lowest segments\*.

Highest Segments	Average Hours/Year	Lowest Segments	Average Hours/Year
1. Age 65 and over	269	1. \$80–99,999 Household Income	127
2. Widowed	253	2. Age 15–24	130
3. Less than \$20,000 Household Income	207	3. Age 25–34	131
4. Not in labour force	193	4. Single, never married	136
5. Separated/divorced; age 55–64 years (tied)	181	5. Employed full time	145

\* Note: Not all of these categories are totally mutually exclusive.

- ▶ The top one-quarter of volunteers that contribute the most volunteer time annually average 188 hours or more of volunteer time each year. That is the equivalent of not less than about five conventional working weeks annually devoted to volunteering for each of more than 1.6 million volunteers across the country. The lowest one-quarter of volunteers average about one-half week or less of volunteer time each year — one-tenth or less that of the top one-quarter.
- ▶ Volunteering rates vary widely among provinces. There are many possible reasons for the variations, including the nature of governmental policies and programs relating to volunteering and the level of support for recognized voluntary organizations. The rate in the province with the highest level of volunteerism (Saskatchewan: 42%) is more than double that of the lowest province. With the exception of Prince Edward Island, which showed a moderate gain, all provinces experienced a decline in their volunteer rate from 1997 to 2000.

### Motivating Factors and Barriers

- ▶ The perception of volunteering as a practical means of securing suitable longer-term paid employment seems to be hardening as a social value, with more than three-fifths (62%) in 2000 citing employment prospects as their reason for volunteering, compared to only slightly more than one-half in 1997, despite the fact that labour conditions were in fact more favourable in 2000 compared to 1997.
- ▶ The principal reasons for Canadians becoming involved in volunteering remain largely unchanged from 1997 to 2000, with the single most important factor (95%) being a belief in the cause supported by the organization, followed by putting skills to use (81%), being personally affected by the cause the organization supports (69%) and exploring one's own strengths (57%). This stability in motivating factors suggests that some other factors have been at play in the marked decline in overall volunteering rates across all sectors of society and all regions of the country.
- ▶ The top reasons for current volunteers not volunteering more and for non-volunteers not volunteering at all are identical, and have remained relatively constant between 1997 and 2000: lack of extra time (about 70%) and unwilling to make a year-round commitment (about 35% in the former group and 45–50% in the latter group). Addressing the issue of real and/or perceived lack of time availability will constitute the single most significant challenge in arresting and offsetting the current decline in volunteering rates.
- ▶ Among those who do not currently volunteer, two significant factors for non-participation can readily be addressed through basic awareness and outreach efforts: those who had not been personally asked to volunteer (about 35%), and those who did not know how to become involved (about 20%). Only about 25% of non-volunteers indicated that they actually have no interest in volunteering. (This group may overlap closely with the same proportion who indicated that they did not volunteer because of a health problem or disability that prevented them from volunteering.) One conclusion is that the vast majority of Canadians might be open to volunteering if their concerns were addressed or they were made more aware of, and welcome to, volunteering opportunities.
- ▶ Some of the most important ways for people becoming involved in volunteerism are linked to their direct contacts with voluntary organizations. As a result, any decline in the number and proportion of volunteers actively involved in volunteering raises serious questions about the viability of the future volunteering base. For example:
  - Some 30% of volunteers in 2000 began their volunteer activity as a result of being directly contacted by the organization. However, this is a 32% decline in the proportion so approached in 1997 (44%).
  - Similarly, about 15% of volunteers in 2000 began their volunteering because they already were members of the organization; however, this is about 48% lower than the proportion so engaged in 1997 (29%).

- ▶ While 'mandatory' community service requirements such as those required in certain provincial education and social assistance systems appear at face value to boost the national volunteerism rate by as much as two percentage points, the 1997 and 2000 survey data do not reveal what the patterns would have been without such mandatory provisions. For example, they do not allow a ready estimate of any impact of new education system requirements on previous youth/student volunteerism rates. Indeed, as noted above, volunteerism among those 15–24 years declined 12% from 1997 to 2000.
- ▶ The decline in Canada's overall volunteering rate and total hours volunteered between 1997 and 2000 cannot be readily or fully explained — as some may be inclined to do — by a switch from donations of time to donations of money. As noted above, had volunteering rates remained at 1997 levels, the total number of volunteer hours would have experienced — with 2.5% population growth — an increase of some 27 million hours, rather than the loss of 56 million hours. That is a gap of some 83 million hours, against which there has been an increase of only \$500 million in monetary donations (10% higher than 1997). While valuation of volunteer time in monetary terms is odious to many, it nonetheless remains true that the increase in monetary donations translates into only \$6.02/hour for the 83 million volunteer hours 'lost' between 1997 and 2000 (i.e., compared to what would have been expected).

### III. ISSUES AND PERSPECTIVES

#### Relationship between Volunteering and Giving

A common reaction to the 2000 NSGVP has been that, since the decline in volunteering was to some degree offset by an increase in giving, there is not much cause for concern. In the final analysis, the argument goes, voluntary organizations will have more money to hire paid staff, engage more volunteers, provide more services, etc. This is undoubtedly true to some extent.

As suggested above, however, increased donations are unlikely to translate into an 'equivalent' increase in volunteers. In addition, it is unlikely that the proceeds from increased donations would be distributed evenly in geographic or social terms. For example, smaller voluntary organizations, particularly in rural or remote communities, are unlikely to benefit from increased donations as much as the organizations located in the larger centres, which generate the bulk of the money. Moreover, there are many who would argue that — in terms of the quality and nature of citizen participation and the fostering of a sense of community and social cohesion among Canadians — donation of monies is no substitute for donation of personal time.

#### Volunteer Rate

In 1997, fewer than 3 out of 10 Canadians volunteered. If the 15% decline in volunteering reflected in the 2000 NSGVP were to be reflected in the planned 2003 NSGVP, only 2 out of 10 Canadians would be volunteering. If, as many knowledgeable people suggest, the volunteer rate is an indicator of social cohesion and the vigour of Canadian democracy, even the 1997 participation rate of 31.5% — fewer than 3 in 10 — is low.

Efforts aimed at increasing the volunteer rate may be one of the most effective ways to increase overall volunteer activity, and a particularly good target for policy and communication purposes. In addition to being a significant indicator of social cohesion and civic participation, the volunteer rate is readily understood, easily measured and less affected by demographic or other factors than measures such as numbers of volunteers and volunteer hours. As a practical matter, efforts to increase the volunteer rate significantly may need to aim systematically at all ages, regions and segments of society because, as indicated above, they all showed declines.

While it does not necessarily follow that increasing the volunteer rate would translate into a corresponding increase in overall volunteer hours or a significant reduction in the heavy load borne by the small minority of volunteers, it is more likely to improve the situation than not.

### Looking Ahead: Future Questions

The NSGVP is likely to be the most useful tool for illuminating the path being taken by the VSI. The NSGVP is particularly useful because it addresses the interrelated issues of giving, volunteering and participating and because it brings together the key players in the federal government and the voluntary sector. Research to explore questions such as those illustrated below should be undertaken in the context of a broad strategy designed to improve understanding of volunteering, as well as giving and participating.

For example:

- ▶ What key factors and conditions will be the most critical in retaining existing volunteers, re-engaging those who have dropped out, and attracting newcomers—especially new Canadians and others who may not be familiar with the existing volunteering landscape?
- ▶ To what extent is there a shift toward short-term, high profile volunteering such as special sporting and cultural events or major disasters and emergencies, and away from volunteering positions that require a more sustained commitment?
- ▶ What are the key relationships between giving, participating and volunteering, and what are the positive and negative repercussions of trends in one on trends in the others?
- ▶ To what extent do Canadians see — and value — volunteering as a means of exploring and expressing their national identity, reinforcing their sense of belonging to community and/or fulfilling public obligations as members of Canadian society and the broader global community? Conversely, to what extent do they view volunteering in a more practical and utilitarian sense of meeting needs within society through donation of unpaid work?
- ▶ What are attainable goals in terms of volunteering rates, and what will it take to achieve them?

# Executive Summary: An Environmental Scan on Volunteering and Improving Volunteering

Submitted by:  
Michael Hall  
Katie Davidman  
A-J McKechnie  
Fleur Leslie

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© Canadian Centre for Philanthropy, 2001  
425 University Avenue, Suite 700  
Toronto, Ontario  
Canada M5G 1T6  
Telephone: (416) 597-2293  
Fax: (416) 597-2294  
[www.ccp.ca](http://www.ccp.ca)  
[www.nsgvp.org](http://www.nsgvp.org)  
[www.nonprofitscan.org](http://www.nonprofitscan.org)

This environmental scan reviews existing research on public attitudes and opinions about volunteering and reports on the results of a small number of key informant interviews with volunteers and individuals from voluntary organizations, businesses and governments. It outlines current strengths in volunteering, suggests areas for improvement and identifies current gaps in our information about volunteering. The scan reveals that there is only a limited amount of recent public opinion research about volunteering and volunteerism in Canada. Most research has focused on the perceived importance of volunteering and the barriers and motivations to volunteering.

There is little research that examines the views of voluntary organizations, business or government about volunteering and volunteerism.

The main findings from the environmental scan are summarized below according to the following five themes: the Perceived Role and Value of Volunteers and Volunteering; Current Trends Affecting Volunteering and Volunteers; Understanding Motivations and Barriers to Volunteering; Satisfaction with Volunteering and Perceived Benefits; and Approaches to Improving Volunteering. For each theme we first present our findings from the scan of existing research. Next we summarize the results of the key informant interviews.

\* This scan was undertaken and published prior to the release of the 2000 NSGVP.

## 1. The Perceived Role and Value of Volunteers and Volunteering

### The Research

- ▶ The available research reveals that Canadians, including the general public, volunteers, voluntary organizations, corporations and governments think volunteering is important and valuable to Canadian society.
- ▶ Volunteering appears to be considered a valuable activity that provides benefits to volunteers and to the organizations that rely on volunteers.
- ▶ Canadians have a high level of trust in volunteers.
- ▶ Almost two-thirds of Canadians aged 18 to 35 expect to volunteer at some point in their lives. In 1997, almost one-third of Canadians volunteered.
- ▶ Volunteering is seen as a way to improve communities.
- ▶ There appears to be corporate support for volunteering.
- ▶ Perceptions about whether activities should be characterized as volunteering depend upon the perceived costs and benefits of the activity to the participant.
- ▶ There are concerns about volunteerism replacing paid workers; volunteer liability (expressed particularly with regard to sitting on boards of directors) and worries about the qualifications of volunteers.

### Key Informants

- ▶ Key informants indicate that volunteering is important and that the work of most volunteer groups and many public departments would not be possible without them.
- ▶ Some indicated that Canadians may be concerned about volunteers replacing paid workers.
- ▶ Volunteers may not be valued by the organizations in which they serve and by society at large.

## 2. Current Trends Affecting Volunteering and Volunteers

### The Research

- ▶ Although the numbers of volunteers increased between 1987 and 1997, the trends create some cause for concern about the health of volunteering in Canada. Only one-third of Canadians volunteer, and about 8% of volunteers contribute 72% of all volunteer hours.
- ▶ Research on the demand for volunteers is very limited. In 1993, there were three volunteers to every paid worker in the charitable sector. Some evidence suggests that social service agencies need more volunteers than they can find.
- ▶ Voluntary sector organizations may be facing challenges in effectively utilizing existing volunteers because of a lack of volunteer management capacity.
- ▶ There appears to be a need for recruitment practices to become more sophisticated to respond to a more diverse population of potential volunteers.

### Key Informants

- ▶ Trends most commonly cited by key informants were the time pressures faced by volunteers, the demand for specific skills in volunteers, and the use of volunteering as a source of skill development.
- ▶ Some key informants suggest that volunteers are looking for new ways of volunteering (e.g., family volunteering), have greater expectations of volunteer experiences and are becoming more selective in their choice of volunteer activities.
- ▶ Voluntary organizations have an increasing need to develop management skills to recruit, train and retain volunteers.
- ▶ Voluntary sector respondents report having to deal with more intensive screening and risk management around the use of volunteers.
- ▶ Volunteering in rural areas may be threatened by the demise of smaller voluntary organizations.
- ▶ Changing demographics such as the loss of active senior volunteers, the lack of young volunteers, and an increasing number of volunteers whose first language is not English, were identified as posing challenges for voluntary organizations.

- ▶ Mandatory volunteering is considered to be a negative experience by many volunteers because it often requires volunteers to do work that is unfulfilling and it has the potential to undermine future volunteering. However, some respondents identified this as a potentially valuable approach to encouraging volunteering.
- ▶ The majority of key informants identified a need for more volunteers.
- ▶ Some volunteers believe there is a need for better utilization of existing volunteers.

### 3. Understanding Motivations and Barriers to Volunteering

#### The Research

- ▶ Belief in a cause and the opportunity to use one's skills are the top motivators for volunteers.
- ▶ Time scarcity is cited as the biggest barrier to volunteering. The reasons behind this have been less well researched. There is some evidence that employer support to volunteering can help to alleviate this barrier.
- ▶ Many people initially get involved in volunteering because someone approached them from an organization, suggesting that the recruitment activities of voluntary organizations are an important determinant of rates of volunteering.

#### Key Informants

- ▶ Some key informants identified the expenses of volunteering as a barrier.
- ▶ Poorly designed and managed volunteer programs were identified as a factor that impedes the recruitment and retention of volunteers.
- ▶ The lack of knowledge about volunteer opportunities may be a barrier.
- ▶ The need for people to be asked to volunteer may be a factor impeding volunteering.
- ▶ Language and literacy skills may serve as a barrier for newer Canadians.
- ▶ The undervalued nature of volunteering also may be a barrier.

### 4. Satisfaction with Volunteering and Perceived Benefits

#### The Research

- ▶ There has been very little research about the quality of volunteer experiences or volunteer satisfaction. That which has been done suggests that volunteers enjoy helping others and about half are satisfied with their experiences (over another third are somewhat satisfied).
- ▶ Volunteers have been found to earn more wages at subsequent jobs than non-volunteers.

#### Key Informants

- ▶ Volunteers report gaining a variety of skills from their activities.
- ▶ Volunteers appear to be satisfied with their volunteer experiences.
- ▶ Key informants also identified some negative aspects of volunteering. These include a lack of respect for volunteers, ineffective volunteer management, too much bureaucracy, and a lack of role clarity between paid and unpaid staff.

### 5. Approaches to Improving Volunteering

#### The Research

In terms of future research and action, eight areas of further investigation emerge from the review of the research literature. These include research on:

1. The image that Canadians have of volunteering to inform outreach and recruitment strategies.
2. The nature of demand for volunteers.
3. The rewards and satisfactions associated with volunteering.
4. The impact of demographic and social change for volunteering and volunteer management.
5. Volunteer management and related capacity needs of voluntary organizations.
6. The social and economic value of volunteering to volunteers, the community, and government.

7. Employer-supported volunteering and how it can most effectively support volunteering in Canada.
8. The impact of mandatory community placements on volunteering, and measures to address concerns that voluntary sector organizations have around liability, confidentiality and accountability issues, in order to mitigate the effect these have on recruiting and effectively using volunteers.

**Key Informants**

Key informants predominantly felt that governments have a role to play in improving volunteering by providing better financial support to voluntary organizations to enable them to more effectively use volunteers. Other suggestions for government included:

- ▶ Providing expertise, working to improve awareness of the sector
- ▶ Providing more recognition for the contribution of volunteers
- ▶ Supporting government employee volunteers
- ▶ Providing tax incentives for volunteering

Business was also seen to have a role in improving volunteering by proactively supporting their employees' volunteer activities. Many key informants identified the value of improved volunteer training and management for improving volunteering. Some respondents identified the importance of recognizing the needs of rural and Aboriginal peoples.

The environmental scan reveals that Canadians generally appear to value volunteering. However, volunteerism in Canada appears to be facing a number of challenges. There are some areas where the research, despite being limited, reveals fairly consistent messages that are reinforced by the key informant interviews. For example, there appears to be a need for improved volunteer management capacity within voluntary organizations.

In many other areas, however, there is need for additional research to guide any anticipated action. For example, any effort to recruit additional volunteers would be assisted by research that showed, among other things: how volunteering is perceived by different segments of the population; the rewards people seek from their volunteer experiences; and the current need or demand for volunteers. The design of a strategy for improving volunteering and volunteerism in Canada may, therefore, benefit from additional targeted research.

# Summary of Consultations on Proposals for the National Volunteerism Initiative

## Overview of Consultations

### Purpose and Background

The purpose of the consultations was to obtain comments from members of voluntary organizations throughout Canada on proposals for the National Volunteerism Initiative (NVI). The key reason for seeking the comments was to tap into the experience, expertise and insights of voluntary organizations to help design the NVI.

The goals of the NVI, designed to be a lasting legacy to the International Year of Volunteers, are to:

- ▶ Encourage Canadians to participate in voluntary organizations; and
- ▶ Improve the capacity of organizations to benefit from the contribution of volunteers and to enhance the experience of volunteering.

The proposals for the NVI were developed over the last year based on discussions with selected organizations and experts, meetings of the NVI Joint Table, discussions with other Voluntary Sector Initiative (VSI) Joint Tables, and the results of the 2000 *National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating* (NSGVP).

The draft proposals were outlined in a document entitled *Sharing Your Views on Proposals for the National Volunteerism Initiative* that was used as the basis for presentations and discussions at the consultations. This document, as well as background on the VSI, the Joint Tables, and related matters can be found on or via the NVI website at [http://www.vsi-isbc.ca/eng/joint\\_tables/nvi/index.cfm](http://www.vsi-isbc.ca/eng/joint_tables/nvi/index.cfm)

### Process and Participation

The consultation document, *Sharing Your Views on Proposals for the National Volunteerism Initiative*, was distributed to participants before the consultations and also at the sessions themselves. The document outlined the major challenges, solutions, mechanisms and principles that had been identified as relevant to designing the NVI.

At the sessions, participants were asked whether the right types of challenges to meeting the goals of the NVI had been identified, and whether the proposals for solutions, mechanisms, and principles offered an adequate basis from which to develop and implement the NVI in response to the challenges. Participants were also asked whether the overall approach to the NVI seemed sensible and appropriate, and whether other questions and concerns needed to be addressed.

People from more than 350 diverse organizations participated, including administrators of volunteer resources, managers, executives, members of boards of directors, front-line volunteers, trainers and support specialists. The NVI Joint Table Co-Chairs or their representatives participated in all sessions. Comments from each session were recorded by a member of the NVI Secretariat and generally by a local voluntary sector representative as well.

In all, 26 consultation sessions averaging 15 participants each were held in 11 cities from St. John's, Newfoundland to Vancouver, British Columbia, between August 28 and October 16, 2001. The consultation schedule and the names of participants who gave written permission to be identified are listed at the end of this report.

In most cities, half a day was devoted to taking note of the comments of representatives of a cross-section of voluntary organizations from the city and surrounding region, and half a day to voluntary organizations representing specific interests or groups (e.g., sport and recreation, faith communities, Aboriginal peoples, visible minorities, health, seniors, youth) from the same areas.

In addition to the consultation sessions, stakeholders had the opportunity to provide input via the consultation workbook posted on the VSI website at [www.vsi-isbc.ca](http://www.vsi-isbc.ca).

### Overall Results and Perspectives

Evaluation forms from all sessions indicate virtually unanimous agreement that the consultation allowed for a productive exchange of views and that participants' ideas and comments were heard.

There was broad agreement, and hence a strong national consensus, that the proposals (relating to challenges, solutions, mechanisms, and principles) were appropriate and would provide a useful foundation for developing and implementing the NVI. Participants from each session also shared many new ideas and insights to help further refine and define the proposals.

Many participants expressed the view that by significantly improving the capacity of voluntary organizations to engage and support volunteers, these organizations will be better equipped to fulfill their missions. Participants agreed that one of the underlying, and oft unrecognized, roles of voluntary organizations is to provide a solid foundation for volunteerism. Volunteerism, in turn, makes a vital contribution to maintaining the civic participation, compassion, and respect for diversity that characterize Canada's democracy and that are particularly important in a post-September 11 world.

Participants also expressed interest in remaining involved and keeping apprised of follow-up activity in the development of the NVI.

## Summary of Comments by Participants

The summary below paraphrases the key comments made most often by participants under the main sections of the presentation, *Sharing Your Views on Proposals for the National Volunteerism Initiative*. Participants sometimes put forward opposing views, and these are reflected in this report. The comments listed below also include issues not covered in the presentation but put forward by participants.

Since the sections in the presentation on "challenges", "solutions" and "principles" raise some of the same issues (e.g., importance of supporting inclusiveness), in the interests of brevity, this summary report tries to avoid unnecessary repetition of comments on issues that arise under more than one section.

### Comments on Challenges

- ▶ The NSGVP results do not necessarily indicate a major problem with volunteering; there may be many reasons (e.g., lower unemployment in 2000 than 1997 and various methodological errors) to explain the decline in numbers of volunteers, etc.
- ▶ On the other hand, even if the NSGVP overstated the decline in volunteering by as much as 20% — an unheard of error in serious surveys — we would still have 800,000 fewer volunteers than in 1997, and the numbers would not point so consistently downward across virtually all categories (e.g., age, gender, education, income bracket, province).
- ▶ Since the time crunch facing most Canadians is unlikely to disappear any time soon, dealing with it will remain a challenge.
- ▶ Finding volunteers, matching their expectations with organizational needs, training and retaining them certainly are major challenges — more in some sectors such as health care and social services where demands are typically year-round and even 24/7, than say, sport and recreation.

*"We can't continue operating and meeting new challenges without some new resources from somewhere."*

*"There's a lot of stuff on the Net about volunteering, but I need to be able to talk to a real live person who understands my community and how to help my organization; and that's the way it should be across Canada."*

- ▶ Volunteer burnout is a growing problem even though volunteering is about giving your time and energy freely to activities that are meaningful to you.
- ▶ Voluntary organizations are facing new and increasing costs (e.g., liability and other types of insurance, higher salaries for administrators of volunteer resources, reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses)
- ▶ Recognizing volunteers appropriately is always a challenge, particularly when the value of volunteerism is not well appreciated in the broader society.
- ▶ Volunteering costs money (e.g., bus fare, lunches, childcare)
- ▶ Many organizations lack the capacity (including money) to be able to engage and support more volunteers.
- ▶ Public, governments and the private sector don't really understand what volunteering is all about and how important it is.
- ▶ Collaboration and dialogue are important but they consume a lot of energy and time and travel costs that few organizations can afford.

### New Challenges Identified

- ▶ Providing a consistent level of information, tools and other support services to voluntary organizations — particularly on a face-to-face basis at the community level and surrounding region — throughout Canada is a major challenge.
- ▶ Ensuring that the information, tools and support services meet the diverse needs of the many different organizations serving Canadians of all ages, cultural and social backgrounds, including immigrants, whether they live in large cities or rural and remote communities adds an important dimension to the challenge.

*"I started volunteering when I was 5 years old when my parents took me door to door selling apples for the Beavers."*

*"My parents go to church, and volunteer there, and I just got into the habit of volunteering as a kid."*

*"We invest a lot of time trying to understand what prospective volunteers want to do and what they have to offer, and then we develop a role that fits them and our mission."*

- ▶ Similar challenges exist serving Aboriginal peoples who wish to integrate into non-Aboriginal communities.
- ▶ Promoting understanding of what volunteerism is all about and why it is vital to our democracy and quality of life will be an ongoing challenge.
- ▶ Improving the efficiency and effectiveness of voluntary organizations without losing the initiative, passion and altruism that are among the hallmarks of volunteerism is a difficult balancing act.
- ▶ Engaging the 'next generation' of volunteers — particularly children and youth — is proving to be an increasing challenge.

### Comments on Solutions

- ▶ Design programs, volunteer positions and management systems with volunteers in mind; don't automatically use private or public sector management approaches.
- ▶ Collaborate at the community level to raise local awareness of what voluntary organizations do and why they're important.
- ▶ Consider adjusting roles and management styles so that voluntary organizations can attract volunteers — especially young people, retired people, and people with special skills.
- ▶ Since much of the information, tools, guides, etc., already exist, focus on making them accessible (e.g., outreach) in a consistent way throughout Canada and ensure they're adapted to the diversity of cultural, sectoral, geographic and other needs.
- ▶ Recognize that front-line volunteers, administrator of volunteer resources, and board directors all have distinct needs in terms of screening, orientation, training, recognition, etc.
- ▶ Operating transparently in an accountable way is a good way to ensure that voluntary organizations remain relevant to their community.
- ▶ Voluntary organizations are going to have to become a lot more professional if they're going to be taken more seriously.

- ▶ If you make volunteering professional you'll kill it; volunteering is something that anyone should be able to do just because they want to.
- ▶ Ensure that volunteering can remain an activity that people can do out of sense of altruism and commitment to their community.
- ▶ Extend "mandatory volunteering," especially in schools so that young people can get into the habit of volunteering.
- ▶ Work toward eliminating "mandatory volunteering" because, if volunteering is to continue being vital to our society it needs to be an activity that is freely given.
- ▶ Ensure that volunteers contribute to designing surveys and research on volunteerism.
- ▶ Provide support to groups that provide advice and services to voluntary organizations (e.g., police who help in the screening process).
- ▶ Encourage more research on volunteerism, including further analysis of the results of the NSGVP.

### Comments on Mechanisms

- ▶ Build on existing mechanisms by providing more resources to enrich the offerings of voluntary sector organizations and to extend their reach, particularly to isolated/rural/remote groups and communities.
- ▶ Establish mechanisms to support collaboration and dialogue — including face-to-face dialogue — among voluntary organizations and between voluntary organizations, governments and the private sector.
- ▶ Avoid new centralized federal mechanisms.
- ▶ Strengthen the federal role — in collaboration with the provinces — in promoting volunteerism, and supporting measures to enhance engagement and support of volunteers.
- ▶ Ensure support for recognizing and celebrating volunteers and volunteerism.
- ▶ Ensure that increased funding is made available one way or another to meet the needs of voluntary organizations.
- ▶ Avoid federal-provincial squabbles in the process of establishing any new mechanisms.
- ▶ Ensure that resources get to the local level and are not eaten up either by government or voluntary sector bureaucracies.

### Comments on Principles

- ▶ The NVI should recognize that the meaning and goals of volunteering and volunteerism vary substantially among organizations, sectors, and social and cultural groups throughout Canada.
- ▶ The NVI should recognize that for some geographic and cultural communities, volunteering is much more than "a nice thing to do"; it's essential for survival.
- ▶ The NVI should not aim at a "one-size-fits-all" solution; it should be sensitive to differences relating to culture, location (urban/rural/remote), evolving community needs, and the approach to volunteerism by other levels of government.
- ▶ The NVI should strongly support efforts to help ensure that volunteering remains a rewarding experience.

*"Promoting public awareness of volunteerism is essential."*

*"Making information, tools, advice and other forms of support of a consistent standard easily accessible across Canada is very important."*

*"Sure we need to invest more in national security, but we also need to invest in improving the capacity of voluntary organizations to engage Canadians and contribute to the kind of democracy that has made Canada number 1."*

*"Let's not have some new bureaucracy for the NVI; there are lots of good voluntary organizations out there that can share in doing the job."*

*"I really hope that whatever the government is going to be doing under the NVI, it's going to find a way of doing it with less paper and red tape."*

*"Ensuring adequate financial support for the NVI is essential."*

- ▶ The NVI should promote reaching out to all groups in the community and designing programs and volunteer positions that are truly inclusive.
- ▶ The NVI should recognize that voluntary organizations can be important agents of change, particularly by tapping into the experience and expertise at the community level.
- ▶ It is important to ensure that provinces have a genuine role in the NVI because many of them have legislation, policies and programs that affect volunteerism and voluntary organizations in fundamental ways.

### Acknowledgements

The NVI Joint Table would like to thank all those who gave their time and their feedback during the consultation process. Their comments will be instrumental in shaping the direction of the NVI.

*"I volunteer because I like to, not because I have to. But I didn't appreciate that for many cultural and other communities, volunteering is like an essential service; if people don't volunteer, the community doesn't survive. Period."*

*"Maybe September 11 is going to help us realize how important volunteering is not only for dealing with emergencies and providing services, but also for bringing us together."*

*"I don't feel 'at home' unless I'm volunteering."*

## Appendix D

Date	City	Morning: Cross-Section of Voluntary Sector	Afternoon: Sector-Specific	Host Organization(s)
August 28	Ottawa	Cross-Section of Voluntary Sector		NVI Secretariat
September 12	St. John's	Cross-Section of Voluntary Sector	Sport and Recreation	Community Services Council Newfoundland and Labrador
September 26	Vancouver	Cross-Section of Voluntary Sector	The Administrators of Volunteer Resources of B.C.	Volunteer Vancouver
September 28	Winnipeg	Cross-Section of Voluntary Sector	Aboriginal Groups	Volunteer Centre of Winnipeg
September 29	Winnipeg	VSI Reference Group on Aboriginals		VSI Reference Group on Aboriginals
October 2	Calgary	Cross-Section of Voluntary Sector	Faith Communities	Volunteer Calgary
October 4	Regina	Cross-Section of Voluntary Sector	Rural Organizations	Volunteer Regina
October 4	Quebec City	Cross-Section of Voluntary Sector	Health and Social Services Organizations	Fédération des centres d'action bénévole du Québec
October 10	Ottawa	National Voluntary Organizations	International Voluntary Organizations and Arts and Culture Organizations	National Children's Alliance NVI Secretariat
October 11	Kitchener	Cross-Section of Voluntary Sector	Seniors	Volunteer Action Centre of Kitchener-Waterloo and Area
October 11	Montreal	Cross-Section of Voluntary Sector	VSI Reference Group on Visible Minorities (Local level organizations)	Chinese Family Services of Greater Montreal VSI Reference Group on Visible Minorities
October 12	Fredericton	Cross-Section of Voluntary Sector	Youth	Youth Council of New Brunswick
October 12	Sudbury	Cross-Section of Voluntary Sector	Corrections, Justice, Environment	Sudbury Women's Centre
October 15	Ottawa	VSI Reference Group on Visible Minorities		NVI/VSI Secretariat
October 16	Ottawa	Board Volunteers and Executive Directors		NVI/VSI Secretariat

# Participants in the NVI Consultations\*

## Atlantic Region

Kimberly Greening  
Community Services Council  
St. John's, NF

Pamela Corrigan  
Community Services Council  
St. John's, NF

Lisa Dwyer  
Community Services Council  
St. John's, NF

Colleen Hiscock  
Gander Military Family Resource  
Centre  
Gander, NF

Janice Reid Boland  
Badminton Newfoundland and  
Labrador  
St. John's, NF

Bryan Harris  
YMCA-YWCA  
St. John's, NF

Tom Dawe  
Teachers on Wheels  
St. John's, NF

Susan Rowe  
Community Services Council  
St. John's, NF

Michelle Brown  
Random North Development  
Association  
Shoal Harbour, NF

Leon A. Mills  
Canadian Hard of Hearing Association  
St. John's, NF

Garry Gosse  
Clarenville Athletic Association  
Clarenville, NF

Lisa Flynn  
Seniors Resource Centre  
Prince Charles, NF

Pamela Hoddinott  
General Hospital  
St. John's, NF

Terry Mallay  
Marystown Recreation Commission  
Marystown, NF

Don McKinney  
NB Crimestoppers  
Mazerolle Settlement, NB

Marie Starr  
Fredericton Community Kitchen Inc.  
Fredericton, NB

Shera Stanely  
Military Family Resource Centre  
CFB Gagetown, NB

Guna Kulasegaram  
Jobs Unlimited  
Fredericton, NB

Jacqueline Wilt  
CNIB — NB Division  
Fredericton, NB

Claire MacLean  
Victoria Order of Nurses  
Sydney, NS

Lisa Pardy  
Multicultural Association of  
Fredericton Inc.  
Fredericton, NB

Lisa Bramford  
Multicultural Association of  
Fredericton Inc.  
Fredericton, NB

Marilyn Noble  
People Link  
Fredericton, NB

Wayne Casey  
Canadian Red Cross  
Fredericton, NB

Annette MacKay  
Moncton Volunteer Centre Inc.  
Moncton, NB

Peggy Miles  
Recreation and Public Relations  
Department  
Summerside, PE

Val Goodwin  
Port Elgin District Voluntary Action  
Group Inc.  
Port Elgin, NB

Andrew Blakney, Tim Scribner,  
Scott Durling, Katherine Hay,  
Matthew Lewis, Cindy Hemming,  
Graeme Blake, James McManus,  
Jeff Leblanc  
Students  
Fredericton High School  
Fredericton, NB

## Quebec

Serge Hénault  
Unité régionale de loisirs et de sport  
Lévis, QC

Robert Fradet  
Association des musiciens et des  
écrivains de la-Côte-du-Sud  
Saint-Raphaël-de-Bellechasse, QC

\* List of participants who gave written permission to be identified.

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Gisèle Tremblay Service d'entraide de Saint-Romuald Saint-Romuald, QC	Bertrand Boutin Association régionale de soccer de Québec Québec, QC	Barbara Tremblay Centre d'action bénévole-SERS Lévis, QC
Estelle Turcotte Albatros-Charny Charny, QC	Marie-Claude Bélanger Association des personnes handicapées de Bellechasse St-Damien, QC	Ginette Bernard Centraide Québec Beauport, QC
Patricia Cloutier Service d'entraide de Saint-Jean- Chrysostome Saint-Jean-Chrysostome, QC	Céline Dumas C.H.S.L.D Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes, QC	Karine Lamontagne Carrefour de liaison et d'aide Multiethnique Montreal, QC
Myriam Côté Fédération de l'âge d'or du Québec Sainte-Foy, QC	Chantale Robitaille Les petits frères des Pauvres Vanier, QC	Karen Emmanuel La Maison d'Haïti Montreal, QC
Daniel Houde Centre Casa Saint-Augustin-de-Desmaures, QC	Francine Rochette Comité du 3 <sup>e</sup> âge de Lotbinière Saint-Flavien, QC	Nicole Brennan YMCA/Montreal Montreal, QC
Jean Bilodeau-Fontaine Carrefour Jeunesse-Emploi de Lotbinière Saint-Flavien, QC	Christiane Lagueux Région pastorale Rive-Sud Lévis, QC	Dr Uma Shanker Srivastava Foundation Bharat Bhavan Montreal, QC
Michel Bélanger Groupe Déziel Inc. Lévis, QC	Jacynthe Trépanier Association des personnes handicapées de Lotbinière Saint-Flavien, QC	Naeem Bhatti Pakistani Association of Québec in Montreal Montreal, QC
Martin Pageau LEUCAN-Région de Québec Sainte-Foy, QC	France Cantin Maison de la famille de Bellechasse Saint-Lazarre, QC	<b>Ontario</b> Marie Pierce Canadian School Boards Association Ottawa, ON
Clarence S. Bayne National Blacks Coalition, Canada Montreal, QC	Émilie Gravel Association bénévole de Charlevoix La Malbaie, QC	Dianne Roger Perinatal, Child, Youth and Family Programmes Ottawa, ON
Salvador G. Cabugao National Council of Canadian Filipino Associations Montreal, QC	Marguerite Bureau Maison des aîné(e)s de Lévis Lévis, QC	Margaret Fietz Family Service Canada Ottawa, ON
Éric Boulay La Maison de L'Aube rivière Québec, QC	Sylvain Raymond Municipalité de Saint-Étienne- de-Lauzon Saint-Étienne de Lauzon, QC	Dan Vandervoort Aga Khan Foundation Canada Ottawa, ON

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Kathleen Shaw Friends of the National Library Ottawa, ON	Linda G. George Ottawa, ON	Richard Groulx Access-The AIDS Committee of Sudbury Sudbury, ON
Sandra Griffin Canadian Child Care Federation Ottawa, ON	Paul G. Toupin United Way of Canada-Centraide Canada Ottawa, ON	Victoria Cameron Social Planning Council of Sudbury Sudbury, ON
J. Elmer Hynes Canadian Executive Service Organization Ottawa, ON	Dr. Frederick Pryce Ottawa, ON	Clément Farmer Evergreen Foundation Sudbury, ON
P.M. Honeywell Council for the Arts in Ottawa Ottawa, ON	Timothy T. Simboli, Ph.D. Family Service Centre of Ottawa- Carleton Ottawa, ON	Natalie Wilson North Bay Volunteer Centre of the Blue Sky Region North Bay, ON
Sue Hall Centrepoint Theatre Ottawa, ON	Sue Inglis, Ph.D. McMaster University-Department of Kinesiology Hamilton, ON	Darcie Anne Hickey Sudbury Women's Centre des Femmes Sudbury, ON
Barbara Hogan VSO-Voluntary Service Overseas Ottawa, ON	Rene Rivard Reach Ottawa, ON	Stéphanie Breault Sudbury Sexual Assault Crisis Centre Sudbury, ON
Patti Gratton Opera Lyra Ottawa Ottawa, ON	Liz Baret Nepean, ON	Ron Westworth Elliot Lake St. Joseph's Hospital Elliot Lake, ON
Mary Anne Dancey Council for the Arts in Ottawa Ottawa, ON	Betty Usher Nepean Seniors Recreation Centre Nepean, ON	Cindy Carpenter YWCA Sudbury, ON
Barbara Levine WUSC Ottawa, ON	Beth Graham Nepean, ON	Nancy Cada Elizabeth Fry Society Sudbury, ON
Ndungu Kahihu Canadian Crossroads International Toronto, ON	W.D. Fennell Ottawa, ON	Ruth Mohammed Manitoulin Island Family Resources Little Current, ON
Emmanuel J. Dick National Council of Trinidad & Tobago Organizations In Canada Toronto, ON	Cynthia Baxter Community Foundation of Ottawa Ottawa, ON	Donna Hudson Ironside Timmins Community Policing Timmins, ON
Lee Giles Altruvest Charitable Services Mississauga, ON	Ariella Hostetter Glebe Centre Inc. Ottawa, ON	

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Mae Radford Victorian Order of Nurses Hamilton, ON	Bonnie MacDougall River Run Centre Guelph, ON	Violet Nelson Anishnaabe Oway-Inc. Winnipeg, MB
Carol Ariss Cambridge Volunteer Bureau Cambridge, ON	Caroline Neufeld Self Help Centre of Hamilton Wentworth Hamilton, ON	Maurene Cohen Jewish Child & Family Services Winnipeg, MB
Catherine Stewart Savage Out of the Cold Kitchener, ON	Janice Klassen Sunnyside Home Kitchener, ON	Beverley McLellan The Winnipeg School Division #1 Winnipeg, MB
Kathy Braun City of Kitchener Kitchener, ON	Faye Wilson Cambridge Memorial Hospital Auxiliary Cambridge, ON	Michelle Eldridge Fort Whyte Centre Winnipeg, MB
Pat Pollard Kitchener, ON	Suzanne Dychuck Volunteer Action Centre of Kitchener-Waterloo and Area Kitchener, ON	Carmen Court c/o Society for Manitobans with Disabilities Winnipeg, MB
Colleen Cavanaugh c/o Stoney Creek United Church Hamilton, ON	Douglas J. King Cambridge, ON	Heather A. Popoff Winnipeg Boys and Girls Club Inc. Winnipeg, MB
Paul Stumpf Waterloo, ON	Jean King Cambridge, ON	Anne Gray-Kaspick YWCA Thompson Thompson, MB
Sue Murray Tele-Touch Hamilton, ON	Liz Weaver Volunteer Hamilton Hamilton, ON	Marjorie Wood Creative Retirement Manitoba Winnipeg, MB
Joan Wiley City of Waterloo Waterloo, ON	Reva Cooper Kitchener, ON	Susan Carr Association for Community Living Steinbuch Steinbuch, MB
Sakina Kirefu Grand River Hospital Kitchener, ON	Carolyn Kovacs c/o Sackville Hill Seniors Centre Hamilton, ON	Ruth Gudgeon Stroke Recovery Association of Manitoba Winnipeg, MB
Christina Munck Raise Home Support Volunteer New Hamburg, ON	<b>Prairies</b> Murielle Gagné-Ouellette Commission nationale des parents francophones Saint-Boniface, MB	Margery Soloman International Centre of Winnipeg Winnipeg, MB
Cathy Taylor Volunteer Centre of Guelph Wellington Guelph, ON		

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Dave Stiegler Manitoba Developmental Centre Portage la Prairie, MB	Catherine Bickford- White Volunteer Regina Regina, SK	Jackie Edwards Parkridge Centre Saskatoon, SK
Gisèle Routhier Dauphin Friendship Centre Inc. Dauphin, MB	Hilda Maier Claybank Brick Plant Historical Society Claybank, SK	Geri Jaques MacKenzie Art Gallery Volunteers Regina, SK
Jo-Anne Johannesson Riverton & District Friendship Centre Riverton, MB	Ray Brady Wascana Rehabilitation Centre Regina, SK	Del Jones Sask-Tel Pioneers Regina, SK
Anita Flett Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg Inc. Winnipeg, MB	Lee Donnelly Ranch Ehrlo Society Pilot Butte, SK	Donna J. Boyce Dundurn Military Family Resource Centre Inc. Dundurn, SK
Norma Walker Immigrant & Visible Minority Women of Canada Winnipeg, MB	Sandra M. Pfeifer Rainbow Youth Centre Regina, SK	Jill Andres The Alberta Mentor Foundation for Youth Calgary, AB
Diane Bairstow Ikwe-Widdjitiwin Inc. Winnipeg, MB	Sheila Fahlman Regina Public Schools Regina, SK	Mimosa Arienzo Calgary Multicultural Centre Calgary, AB
Michelle Woods Aboriginal Ganootamaage Justice Services of Winnipeg Inc. Winnipeg, MB	Lorna Sandberg Canadian Cancer Society-Sask. Division Regina, SK	Debbie Emmelman Rainbow Society of Alberta Calgary, AB
Nelson Mayer Manitoba Association of Friendship Centres Winnipeg, MB	Peggy Roettger Girl Guides of Canada Regina, SK	Martha Parker Volunteer Calgary Calgary, AB
Irma Balaberda Yorkton Big Brothers and Sisters Inc. Yorkton, SK	Giovanna Pirro Regina Open Door Society Inc. Regina, SK	Katherine Morton AIDS Calgary Awareness Association Calgary, AB
Sheryl Korte St. Elizabeth Hospital Humboldt, SK	Maureen Bachman Globe Theatre Regina, SK	Janeth Alonso Calgary Immigrants Women's Association Calgary, AB
Sharon Haubrich Prairie West Hospital District Kindersley, SK	Sheila Carson Government House Historical Society Regina, SK	Shannon Norris Big Brothers & Big Sisters of Calgary and Area Calgary, AB
	Dale West Saskatchewan Sports Hall of Fame & Museum Regina, SK	

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Jim Murphy Huntington Hills Community Association Calgary, AB	Marva J. Ferguson Calgary Communities Against Sexual Abuse Calgary, AB	Joy Murray Canadian Cancer Society Vancouver, BC
Tim Bjornson Squash Alberta Calgary, AB	<b>British Columbia</b> Donna Godwin Peninsula Community Services Sidney, BC	Debbie Clyne City of Burnaby Burnaby, BC
Denni Wentzell Community Information & Referral Society Red Deer, AB	Diane Kirby Victoria, BC	Mary L. MacKillop c/o Holy Family Hospital Vancouver, BC
Jane Brenner Adult Learning Council Taber, AB	Christina Pereda Vancouver, BC	Peter Panozzo Volunteer Prince George Prince George, BC
Peggy Gray Fort MacMurray Volunteer Centre Fort MacMurray, AB	Mariel Williams Eagle Ridge Hospital and Extended Care Manor Port Moody, BC	David I. Hay Greater Victoria Child & Youth Advocacy Society Victoria, BC
Hal Murray Neighborhood Link of Calgary Calgary, AB	Leslie Beleski c/o Little Mountain Place Vancouver, BC	Gail Joyce Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services Victoria, BC
Mark Jantzen Dalhousie Community Church Calgary, AB	Karen Howe Administrators of Volunteer Resources, British Columbia Vancouver, BC	Carol Biely Volunteer BC Salt Spring Island, BC
Nancy Scott Jewish Family Services Calgary, AB	Rose Vidas St. Mary's Hospital New Westminster, BC	Debbi Leith 411 Seniors Centre Society Vancouver, BC
Mark Bezanson First Baptist Church Calgary, AB	Carole Fuhrer Surrey Parks and Recreation Surrey, BC	Shayda Kassam Volunteer Vancouver Vancouver, BC
Sandi Churchill Varsity Acres Presbyterian Calgary, AB	Barbara Boman Vancouver Hospice & Health Sciences Centre Richmond, BC	Sandra Stevenson Sport BC Vancouver, BC
Judi Reed Chinook Health Region Lethbridge, AB	Charlene Robson Mount Saint Joseph Hospital Vancouver, BC	Marla Fox Volunteer Kelowna Kelowna, BC

Susan Borthwick  
Canadian Red Cross  
Vancouver, BC

Al Etmanski  
Planned Lifetime Advocacy Network  
Vancouver, BC

Joanna Wyatt  
Telus  
Burnaby, BC

Ian Ross  
Crisis Centre of Greater Vancouver  
Vancouver, BC