

*Public Opinion Research  
on the Voluntary Sector*

Final Report

*Submitted to:*

The Voluntary Task Force

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# Table of Contents

<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>METHODOLOGY</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>KEY FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS</b> .....	<b>3</b>
Familiarity with the Term “Voluntary Sector” .....	3
2001 – The International Year of Volunteers .....	3
Volunteerism and the Federal Government .....	3
Voluntary Sector Initiative – Awareness and Approval.....	4
<b>Detailed Findings</b> .....	<b>5</b>
Familiarity with the Term “Voluntary Sector” .....	5
2001 – The International Year of Volunteers .....	7
Volunteerism and the Federal Government.....	8
Voluntary Sector Initiative – Awareness and Approval .....	11
<b>APPENDIX I – TOPLINE QUESTIONNAIRE</b> .....	<b>13</b>

## INTRODUCTION

As part of its communications efforts, the Voluntary Task Force commissioned Ipsos-Reid to conduct a survey of Canadian public opinion on the voluntary sector and the efforts of the government to support volunteerism and civic participation in Canada. The specific goals of this project were to establish the following:

- the level of familiarity Canadians have with the term “voluntary sector”;
- awareness of the UN declaration that 2001 is the International Year of Volunteers;
- the level of importance Canadians place on the voluntary sector;
- the level of support for ongoing government involvement; and
- the level of awareness of and support for the Voluntary-Sector Initiative.

As well, the survey’s purpose was to set a benchmark on these measures that will demonstrate the success of the Voluntary Task Force communications efforts in the months to come.

## METHODOLOGY

This report summarises the findings from an omnibus telephone survey of 1,000 adult Canadians. The omnibus survey was conducted by Ipsos-Reid on behalf of the Voluntary Task Force between September 25 and 27, 2001. A sample of this size is said to have an associated margin of error of  $\pm 3.1\%$ , 19 times out of 20, of what they would have been had the entire adult Canadian population been polled. The margin of error will be larger within regions and for other sub-groupings of the survey population. The data have been statistically weighted to ensure that the age, gender and regional composition of the sample reflect that of the adult Canadian population according to 1996 Census data.

## KEY FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

### Familiarity with the Term “Voluntary Sector”

First, respondents were asked to indicate their level of familiarity with the term “voluntary sector”. Familiarity with this term is fairly low. Only thirteen percent say they are very familiar with it. In total, less than four in ten (37%) indicate they are either very (13%) or somewhat (24%) familiar with the term. The majority (63%) say they are not familiar with the term “voluntary sector”.

All respondents, regardless of their level of familiarity, were asked what organizations they thought of when they heard the term “voluntary sector”. One third were unable to think of any organizations that they would associate with this term. However, organizations that were listed by the balance are volunteer sector organizations. The Red Cross (32%) is most frequently mentioned, followed distantly by the Salvation Army (10%), the United Way (6%), and health care/hospital auxiliaries (6%).

### 2001 – The International Year of Volunteers

Four in ten (43%) Canadians say they’d heard that the United Nations had declared 2001 to be the International Year of the Volunteer. However, the majority (57%) are unaware of this declaration.

### Volunteerism and the Federal Government

Canadians are nearly unanimous (98%) in the belief that volunteers and voluntary-sector organizations contribute to a better quality of life for Canadians. Indeed, more than three quarters (77%) strongly agree, while 21% somewhat agree.

Most (83%) Canadians also believe the Government of Canada should be encouraging people to do volunteer work, with 50% strongly agreeing with this idea and 33% somewhat agreeing with it. Only 16% disagree with the federal government encouraging people to volunteer.

Eight in ten (80%) Canadians also believe that the Government of Canada should be doing more to help voluntary-sector organizations recruit and retain volunteers: nearly half (46%) strongly agree, and 34% somewhat agree. Those who disagree are split: 11% somewhat disagree, and 9% strongly disagree.

## Voluntary Sector Initiative – Awareness and Approval

Respondents were asked whether or not they were aware of the Voluntary-Sector Initiative. Most (95%) have not yet heard of this project. A few (5%) had heard of this federal government project.

However, most Canadians think it is a good idea to have a federal government project designed to strengthen its relationship with the voluntary sector and make the voluntary sector stronger. In fact, 84% say it is either a very good idea (35%) or a somewhat good idea (49%). Only 12% believe it is a bad idea.

## Detailed Findings

### Familiarity with the Term “Voluntary Sector”

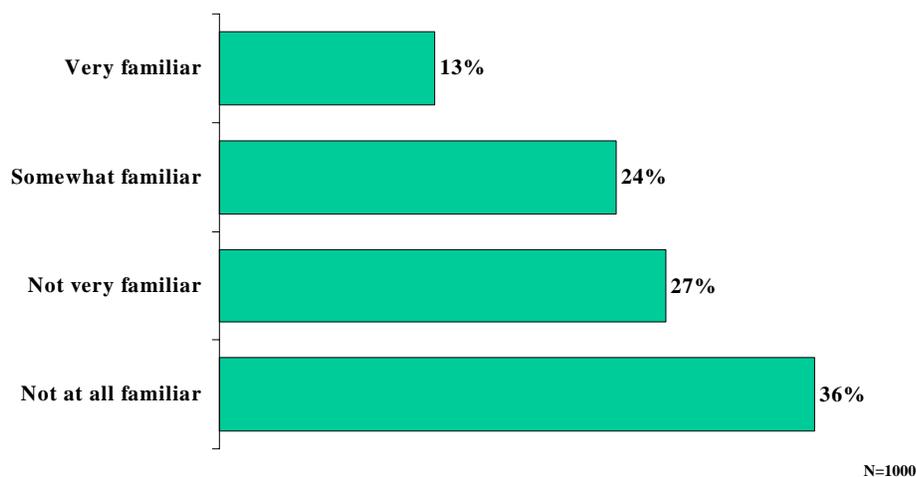
First, respondents were asked to indicate their level of familiarity with the term “voluntary sector”. Familiarity with this term is fairly low. Only thirteen percent say they are very familiar with it. In total, less than four in ten (37%) indicate they are either very (13%) or somewhat (24%) familiar with the term. The majority (63%) say they are not familiar with the term “voluntary sector”.

The highest levels of familiarity are found among Canadians aged 35 to 54 (47%) and those who are university educated (45%). Residents of Quebec (59%) are far more likely to say they are familiar with *'secteur bénévole'* or *'secteur bénévole et communautaire'*.

Canadians who are least familiar with the term “voluntary sector” are more likely to be between the ages of 18 and 34 (25%), have a high school education or less (31%) or live outside Quebec (29%).

### Familiarity With the Term “Voluntary Sector”

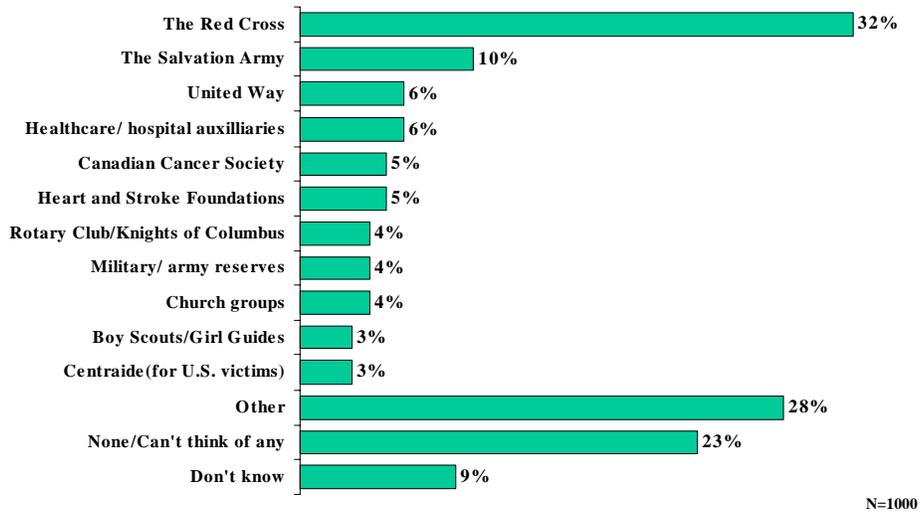
*How familiar are you with the term Voluntary sector?*



All respondents, regardless of their level of familiarity, were asked what organizations they thought of when they heard the term “voluntary sector”. One third were unable to think of any organizations that they would associate with this term. However, organizations that were listed by the balance are voluntary sector organizations. The Red Cross (32%) is most frequently mentioned, followed distantly by the Salvation Army (10%), the United Way (6%), and health care/hospital auxiliaries (6%). Many others were mentioned by at least 3% of respondents. See the chart below.

## Organizations Listed as “Voluntary Sector”

*What organizations do you think of when you hear the term voluntary sector?*



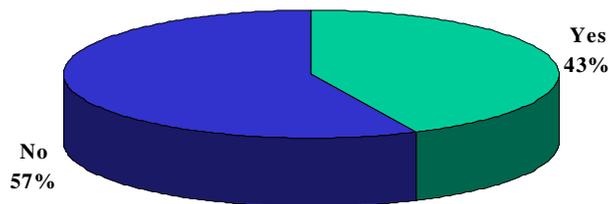
## 2001 – The International Year of Volunteers

Four in ten (43%) Canadians say they'd heard that the United Nations had declared 2001 to be the International Year of the Volunteer. However, the majority (57%) are unaware of this declaration.

The highest levels of awareness are found among women (47%), those 55 years of age and over (50%), those who are university educated (48%), and residents of Saskatchewan/Manitoba (56%) and Atlantic Canada (54%). Those who are least likely to be aware of the UN declaration are men (38%), those aged 18 to 34 (35%), those who have high school or who are less educated (36%), and residents of British Columbia (32%).

### Heard That 2001 is the International Year of Volunteers

*Have you heard that the United Nations has declared 2001 to be the International Year of Volunteers?*



N=1000

## Volunteerism and the Federal Government

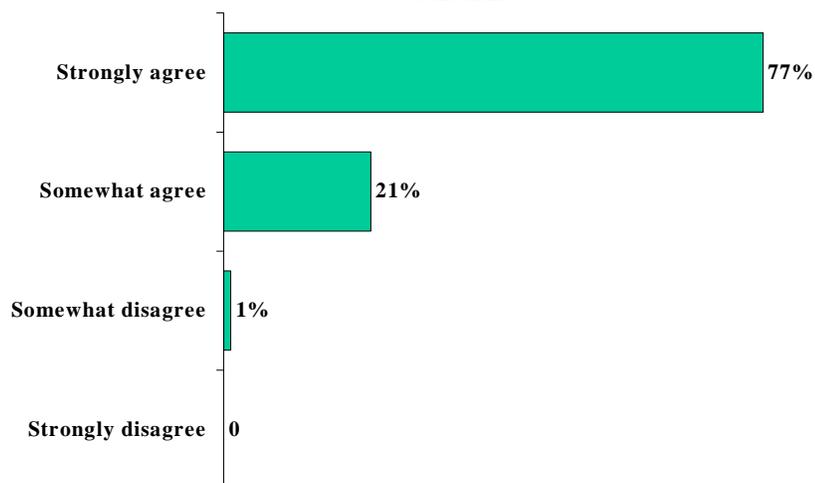
This section is based on the findings of three attitudinal statements. Respondents were asked to indicate whether they strongly agreed, somewhat agreed, somewhat disagreed or strongly disagreed with each. Based on the findings outlined below, Canadians strongly believe that volunteers and the voluntary sector contribute to a better quality of life and that the government should do more to help voluntary-sector organizations recruit and retain volunteers.

Canadians are nearly unanimous (98%) in the belief that volunteers and voluntary-sector organizations contribute to a better quality of life for Canadians. Indeed, more than three quarters (77%) strongly agree, while 21% somewhat agree.

### Contribution to a Better Quality of Life

*Now I would like to read you a list of statements. For each one, I would like you to tell me whether you agree or disagree.*

**- Volunteers and voluntary sector organizations contribute to a better quality of life for Canadians -**



N=1000

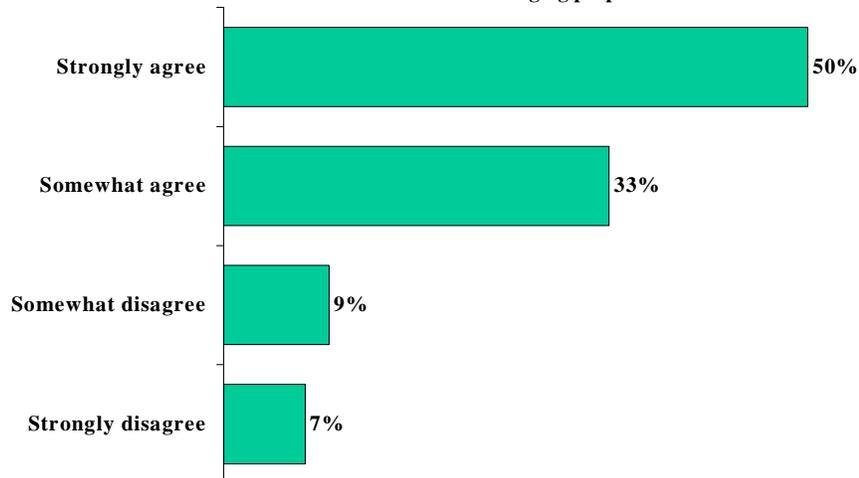
Most (83%) Canadians also believe the Government of Canada should be encouraging people to do volunteer work, with 50% strongly agreeing with this idea, and 33% somewhat agreeing with it. Only 16% disagree with the federal government encouraging people to volunteer.

The highest levels of strong agreement are found among residents of Atlantic Canada (58%) and Ontario (56%).

## Gov't Should Encourage People to Volunteer

*Now I would like to read you a list of statements. For each one, I would like you to tell me whether you agree or disagree.*

**- The Government of Canada should be encouraging people to do volunteer work -**



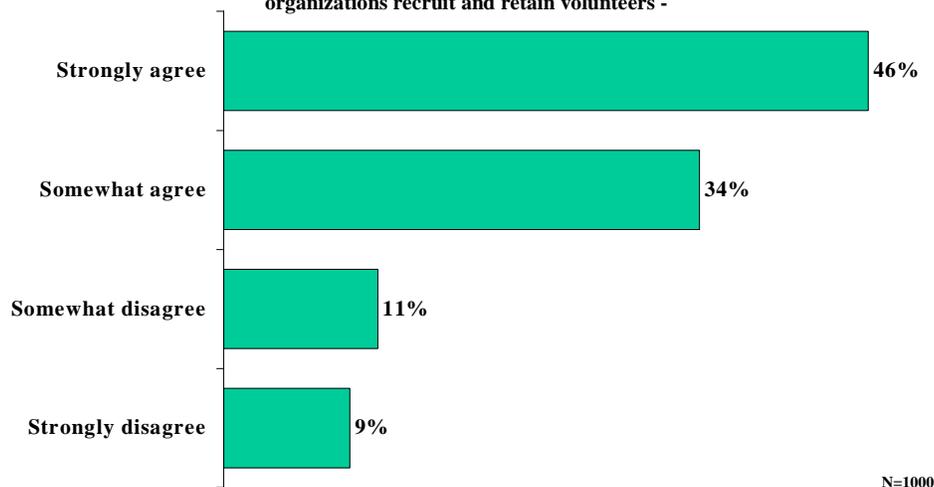
N=1000

Eight in ten (80%) Canadians also believe that the Government of Canada should be doing more to help voluntary sector organizations recruit and retain volunteers: nearly half (46%) strongly agree, and 34% somewhat agree. Those who disagree are evenly split: 11% somewhat disagree, and 9% strongly disagree.

## Gov't Should Help With Recruiting and Retaining Volunteers

*Now I would like to read you a list of statements. For each one, I would like you to tell me whether you agree or disagree.*

**- The Government of Canada should be doing more to help voluntary sector organizations recruit and retain volunteers -**



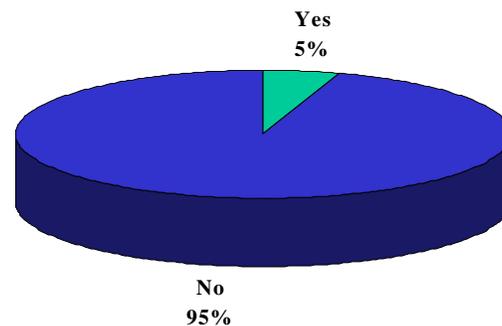
The highest levels of strong agreement are found among women (49%), those who have a high school education or less (50%), those earning a low annual income (53%), and residents of Quebec (56%) and Atlantic Canada (55%). Those least likely to strongly agree that the government should be doing more to help are men (41%) and residents of Alberta (30%), B.C. (38%), and Saskatchewan/Manitoba (38%).

## Voluntary Sector Initiative – Awareness and Approval

Respondents were asked whether or not they were aware of the Voluntary-Sector Initiative. Most (95%) have not yet heard of this project. A few (5%) had heard of this federal government project. At the time of this survey, awareness was very low across all of the demographics.

### Aware of the Voluntary Sector Initiative

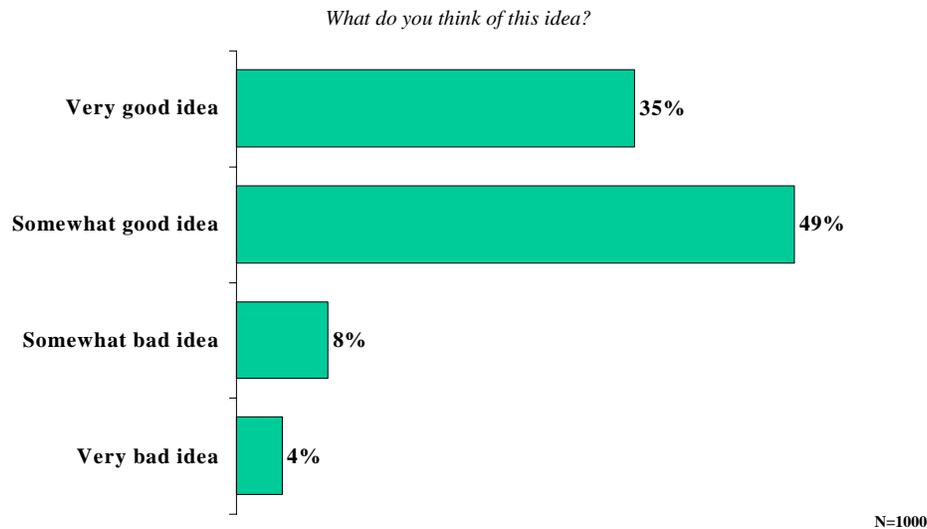
*The Government of Canada is working on a project called the Voluntary Sector Initiative. The project is designed to strengthen its relationship with the voluntary sector and make the voluntary sector stronger. Were you aware of this project?*



N=1000

However, most Canadians think it is a good idea to have a federal government project designed to strengthen its relationship with the voluntary sector and make the voluntary sector stronger. In fact, 84% say it is either a very good idea (35%) or a somewhat good idea (49%). Only 12% believe it is a bad idea.

# Approval of the Voluntary Sector Initiative



Although they comprise a small proportion (12%) of the Canadian population, those who think the Voluntary Sector Initiative is a bad idea are:

- slightly more likely to indicate a familiarity with the term “voluntary sector” (43% versus 37% national average);
- more likely to be aware that 2001 is the International Year of the Volunteer (52% versus 42% national average);
- less likely to say the government should be encouraging people to do volunteer work (57% versus 83% national average); and
- less likely to say the federal government should be doing more to help voluntary-sector organizations recruit and retain volunteers (38% versus 80% national average).

## APPENDIX I – TOPLINE QUESTIONNAIRE

### 1a. How familiar are you with the term voluntary sector?

	TOTAL
BASE (Weighted) : All Respondents	1000
BASE (Unweighted): All Respondents	1000
Very familiar	13%
Somewhat familiar	24%
Not very familiar	27%
Not at all familiar	36%
Don't know	0
TOPBOX & LOWBOX SUMMARY	
Familiar (Top2Box)	37%
Not familiar (Low2Box)	63%

### 1b. What organizations do you think of when you hear the term voluntary sector?

TOTAL MENTIONS	TOTAL
BASE (Weighted) : All Respondents	1000
BASE (Unweighted): All Respondents	1000
The Red Cross	32%
The Salvation Army	10%
United Way	6%
Healthcare/ hospital auxiliaries	6%
Canadian Cancer Society	5%
Heart and Stroke Foundations	5%
Rotary Club/Knights of Columbus	4%
Military/ army reserves	4%
Church groups	4%
Boy Scouts/Girl Guides	3%
Centraide(for U.S. victims)	3%
Local amateur sports leagues	2%
Police/ fire fighters	2%
Greenpeace	1%
The Humane Society	1%
Council of Canadians	0
The John Howard/Elizabeth Fry Society	0
Other	28%
None/Can't think of any	23%
Don't know	9%

**2. Have you heard that the United Nations has declared 2001 to be the International Year of Volunteers?**

	TOTAL
BASE (Weighted) : All Respondents	1000
BASE (Unweighted): All Respondents	1000
Yes	43%
No	57%
Don't know	0

**3. Now I would like to read you a list of statements. For each one, I would like you to tell me whether you agree or disagree.**

						TOPBOX & LOWBOX SUMMARY	
						Agree (Top2Box)	Disagree (Low2Box)
BASE (Weighted) : All Respondents 1000 BASE (Unweighted): All Respondents 1000	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Somewhat agree</b>	<b>Somewhat disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Don't know</b>		
Volunteers and voluntary-sector organizations contribute to a better quality of life for Canadians	77%	21%	1%	0	1%	97%	2%
The Government of Canada should be encouraging people to do volunteer work	50%	33%	9%	7%	1%	83%	16%
The Government of Canada should be doing more to help voluntary-sector organizations recruit and retain volunteers	46%	34%	11%	9%	1%	80%	20%

**4. The Government of Canada is working on a project called the Voluntary Sector Initiative. The project is designed to strengthen its relationship with the voluntary sector and make the voluntary sector stronger. Were you aware of this project?**

	TOTAL
BASE (Weighted) : All Respondents	1000
BASE (Unweighted): All Respondents	1000
Yes	5%
No	95%

**5. What do you think of this idea?**

	TOTAL
BASE (Weighted) : All Respondents	1000
BASE (Unweighted): All Respondents	1000
Very good idea	35%
Somewhat good idea	49%
Somewhat bad idea	8%
Very bad idea	4%
Don't know	3%
<b>TOPBOX &amp; LOWBOX SUMMARY</b>	
Good idea (Top2Box)	85%
Bad idea (Low2Box)	12%