



**PRIME
MINISTER'S
VOLUNTEER
AWARDS** **PRIX DU
PREMIER
MINISTRE POUR
LE BÉNÉVOLAT**

GUIDE TO EXEMPLARY PRACTICES IN VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION



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PRIME MINISTER'S VOLUNTEER AWARDS: CELEBRATING REMARKABLE CANADIANS WHO HAVE INSPIRED OTHERS

CONTEXTUAL HISTORY OF THE AWARDS

The Government of Canada places a priority on recognizing the enormous contributions volunteers make to Canada. This commitment was confirmed in the 2010 Speech from the Throne, which established a prime ministerial award for volunteerism.

The inaugural Prime Minister's Volunteer Awards Ceremony took place in December 2012 in Ottawa. At this special event, the Prime Minister presented a group of 17 inspiring volunteers, not-for-profit organizations and businesses with awards for their exceptional efforts.

On February 27, 2014, the Prime Minister honoured Canada's most innovative and inspiring volunteers in the second Prime Minister's Volunteer Awards. Through volunteering and giving, these individuals, groups and organizations have been profoundly influential, helping their communities' members lead better lives and build stronger communities.

Their outstanding dedication and activities are a source of inspiration, and their celebration provides a solid platform to share best practices in the areas of volunteerism and socially responsible business practices. To this end, and as in previous years, award recipients came together during the 2014 ceremony to share insights about effective methods for reaching communities and making a lasting impact. During this Exemplary Practices Session, presenters shared impressive stories of success as well as their experiences leading others in their own communities and across the country to discover the value and rewards of volunteerism. For more information about the sessions and the award recipients, please visit:

www.pm.gc.ca/awards.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE 2014 EXEMPLARY PRACTICES SESSION

Presentations were made by the dedicated volunteers honoured with a Prime Minister's Volunteer Award on February 27, 2014. That day, 14 of the recipients of the 2014 Prime Minister's Volunteer Awards came together to share their volunteer experiences during the Exemplary Practices Session. They were asked to consider the context in which their own efforts had inspired the participation of others in selflessly volunteering. In particular, they were asked to consider their volunteer programs and activities and answer questions about impact, reach and engagement with volunteer recruitment and retention in mind.

WHAT WE ASKED

To guide the conversation, participants were asked to focus on the following topics:

Recruitment: Free time is a precious commodity. Yet you've succeeded in enlisting busy Canadians to assist in your charitable efforts. Which methods did you find most effective for engaging volunteers to contribute their time and talent to your project? How do you recruit people to your organization?

Engagement: It can be difficult for charitable organizations to maintain momentum between major campaigns or events. What strategies do you use to retain and inspire your volunteers? How do you keep your volunteers involved?

Reach: Word of mouth can assist charitable organizations to broaden their reach and increase their impact by growing their volunteer bases. Corporate entities face a special set of challenges in enlisting people from outside the company. Which techniques and approaches have you found useful for mobilizing your volunteers to recruit new participants? How do you inspire your volunteers to inspire others?



LESSONS IN VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

The observations and insights of session participants spanned a range of topics, from balancing volunteer and personal life, to fostering partnerships with other agencies and businesses. The summary below captures the recurring themes that emerged in the form of observations, insights and suggestions as they relate to the recruitment and retention of volunteers in Canada.

OPPORTUNITY FOR VOLUNTEERISM CHANGES AS SOCIETY CHANGES

The social, economic and demographic landscapes in Canada are changing. Population aging, changing household and family structures, evolving immigration patterns, the globalization of business and the shift from in-store to online retail shopping are frequently raised as concerns. Volunteers noted that in every shift, there is new opportunity to tap into the energy and the skills of Canada's increasingly diverse population. The new cultural landscape resulting from expanded patterns of immigration is relevant: where once, community volunteer services rallied to assist newcomers to Canada, it is now new Canadians themselves who are ready to turn with

open arms and help others. Volunteer initiatives and community organizations can find ready support from new Canadians in the fields of health and family issues, provision of food and clothing supplies, and resettlement activities. Most importantly, new Canadians often have a more in-depth understanding of the needs, priorities and cultural expectations of their communities, which could help ensure the relevance, impact and sustained support of any volunteer initiative.

REALIZE THE POWER OF YOUTH IN VOLUNTEERING

The current cohort of Canadians aged 18 to 25 years old is proving to be enthusiastic, capable and active in the volunteer sector. The difficulties of finding employment have inspired young people (as well as new Canadians) to see volunteer activity as a way to fill out their résumés with practical experience. Young adults and millennials have grown up with a readiness to reach laterally across their own age groups to find friends, mentors and business partners. As such, they are equally able to see the needs among their own group and use their networks,

social media and crowdsourcing skills to rally their peers in extraordinary numbers in support of worthy causes. Many young people tend to volunteer “episodically” and thus, once active, will need to see the impact of their work in practical, measurable ways if their interest is to be sustained. Session participants expressed that volunteer recruiters must find creative ways of finding skilled generations of volunteers as senior volunteers exit. These may include promoting employer support for volunteering to engage baby boomers and volunteering among currently underengaged populations.

NEW OPPORTUNITIES HAVE ARISEN FROM THOSE DOWNSIZING

Experience has shown that more seniors are moving from larger to smaller accommodations, and in doing so, are downsizing their possessions. In light of this downsizing, our volunteers noted that the thrift store has re-emerged as a much-needed service with an untapped wealth of ready inventory. Community organizers have successfully canvassed local populations for a wider variety of material contributions than ever before, and have been able to support their communities with goods in much-needed new categories, including formal-wear rentals for high-school prom goers (for as little as \$5.00 per day), small appliances, tool rentals and whole suites of furniture. The common refrain among the participants was that thrift stores have found yet another avenue for providing goods to a community while allowing recipients to retain their dignity. The increasing access to this practical and meaningful hub of community support and its rewarding outcome has facilitated the recruitment and retaining of volunteers.

EVERYONE KNOWS SOMEONE IN NEED

High-performing volunteers are well aware that many know someone in need of support. Our award winners were each astounded by the broad relevance of their work.

While many had begun by helping out within a small, identified community, they soon discovered that the need for their services was greater. While this at times can seem daunting, volunteers have been able to leverage their networks, resulting in a huge number of candidates for volunteer work who are already familiar with, sensitized to and willing to support any particular cause. The message here is one of hope; the pool for recruitment is deep and closer at hand than many initially expect.

REQUESTING VOLUNTEER ASSISTANCE CAN PROVE TO BE FRUITFUL

Volunteers who have initiated new services should feel confident that as they extend their support to the broader community, others will be there to join them in their work. One must confidently ask for help directly. For some volunteers, particularly those who may be shy or introverted, the need to “broadcast” may be awkward, but the results of doing so are well worth the effort. Often, people who wish to help do not advertise their desire simply for fear of rejection, yet a simple request is often met with an enthusiastic commitment. In addition, new technologies have made asking for assistance easier: many people now access their community news online, through social-media portals, and agency-specific apps. These are useful tools that leaders in the voluntary sector are accessing more and more frequently.

MAXIMIZE EACH VOLUNTEER’S TALENTS; QUALITY VOLUNTEERS MAKE A HUGE DIFFERENCE

While volunteer recruitment is often seen as an issue of numbers alone, session participants expressed their conviction that because each new member of the volunteer community has a unique range of experiences, talents, resources and networks, active recruitment is better viewed as the task of finding quality

contributors with unique talents and abilities. Just as true entrepreneurs succeed in business from an early age and truly creative people become adept at their art forms early on, great volunteers hit the ground running once they find a cause worthy of their attention. The trick is to focus on quality over quantity, and make sure that each volunteer is given a range of opportunities to explore their capabilities rather than be slotted into a predetermined post.

EVEN SMALL CHANGES IN THE ECONOMY CAN DRASTICALLY AFFECT DEMAND FOR VOLUNTEER SERVICES

Seasoned recruiters of volunteers know that the rise and fall of need in any community is a result of a variety of issues. For example, when times are tough during an economic downturn, there can be great need for volunteers to support social services, but beyond this, volunteers are also required when extreme weather, epidemics or man-made disasters occur. Thrift shop owners and food banks must keep an eye on the economic climate, with enough lead-time to solicit donations in order to meet an imminently rising need. The pipeline of recruitment and the provision of training must also anticipate rapid but often predictable upswings in demand.

PEOPLE BLOSSOM WITH TRAINING AND PREPARATION

Few volunteer positions today can rely merely on a willingness to help. In order to be effective, a growing number of volunteer positions with skillsets in areas such as computing, project management, logistics, social media and finance are required. No agency can assume that volunteers have specialized training in advance. In one evocative example, a participant described how her agency of church groups worked hand-in-hand with emergency relief authorities in Alberta to provide support

during spring floods and other natural catastrophes. It became obvious at the outset that the need was for trained experts who could support government agencies without getting in their way or compromising their impact. As a result, a concentrated yet detailed training program was devised to ensure that even the least-experienced volunteers could enter a situation as competent supporters of a coherent community effort. Participants noted that, typically, volunteers who receive training are more likely to remain with an organization. This seems to be related to the confidence that people have when they are truly prepared for a task. This confidence relieves stresses otherwise associated with their activities, and makes it much easier to continue over the long term. While the mission of goodwill can inspire volunteers to lend a hand, preparation will encourage them to continue.

MAKE USE OF THE TALENT AROUND YOU

Tapping into the life experience of professionals in the community can often open up whole new categories of support for those in need. Participants in the session shared stories of business managers, engineers and physicians whose deep knowledge of critical topics spawned whole new programs that attracted further volunteers and resulted in considerable reach and impact. For example, medical professionals have taken bold steps to correct myths about common debilitating diseases. Basing new educational programs on both current medical insight and long-term experience, doctors have been able to rally non-medical volunteers to take awareness programs further. Practical, timely and popular, these programs have achieved admirable results when the health of program participants is compared with the health of a non-participating cohort. In short, volunteer programs based on validated knowledge of accredited experts are popular among volunteers and beneficiaries alike.

THE POWER OF FAITH IS STRONG WHEN IT COMES TO VOLUNTEERISM

A large majority of Canadians declare that their spiritual beliefs compel them to assist those around them. The easiest place to find the greatest concentration of these potential volunteers is still in existing religious communities. Despite the gradual but ongoing decline in attendance at religious services, churches, temples, synagogues and mosques are still critical hubs of community activity and communication. Recent decades have also seen a new wave of religious tolerance and coexistence, and many charitable causes have been able to rally members of once-divided religious affiliations to work together for the betterment of others. However, a ready supply of volunteers and donors does not guarantee any depth of knowledge related to the delivery of community programs. The most successful operations often gather their recruits from denominational hubs, offer them detailed and practical training, and manage their efforts and schedules as though they were running a professional business.

BUSINESSES SHOULD BACK THEIR EMPLOYEES' EFFORTS

As late as the 1990s, it was still popular among businesses to select one or more charities to contribute to. Employees were then asked to step up and make the effort successful by using their own time and energy.

The corporate model of giving has evolved since then. Businesses have learned that buy-in and engagement in corporate volunteering programs is much higher when the employees chose their preferred cause and in turn, the company offers matching of contributions and even executive participation and leadership. As a result, both the impact of the contribution to the community and the resulting goodwill towards the corporation is far greater. Forward looking businesses will now match any contribution by an employee to a registered community agency with as much as one and a half times the amount given. Moreover, these businesses report that their overall cost of contribution has in fact decreased while the impact of their actions has multiplied many times over.

THE VALUE OF A CHARITABLE RECEIPT IS REAL

Most operations at some point will have to turn to professional contractors to carry out basic services such as construction, electrical work, insulation and carpentry. Organizations that are able to issue tax-reportable receipts for even a portion of this kind of work will find it much easier to recruit competent professionals. In doing so, the common mistake of relying on good-natured but less experienced helpers to act in these roles can be avoided.



CONCLUSION

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The thoughts that emerged from the session represent a compendium of insights, advice and suggestions that together comprise a unique guide to recruitment and retention of volunteers in Canada. In all, this session represents hope for the future – the future of Canadians, of society, and of the nation. Canada's changing demographic landscape is driving a new portrait of volunteering with Canadians getting older and our mosaic becoming more diverse. The winners that have come together for this session have demonstrated their ability to go beyond adapting to these changes, to being able to harness them for the benefit of recruiting and retaining volunteers to tackle some of Canada's most complex social problems. This guide of exemplary practices will be a rich source for Canadian volunteers and will enable the success of volunteerism, socially innovative nonprofits and socially responsible businesses.

We would like to thank the dedicated volunteers who participated in this session. To learn more about them please visit **www.pm.gc.ca/awards**.

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