

Pre-Budget Submission to the House of Commons
Standing Committee on Finance

By: VOLUNTEER CANADA

August 2023

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Recommendation 1:** That the federal government **invest \$15 million in the development and implementation of a national action strategy on volunteerism** to support volunteer activity across the country and the organizations that rely on the work of volunteers to support Canadians.
- **Recommendation 2:** That the federal government provide funding in the amount of **\$3 million for the creation and implementation of a National Volunteer Screening Centre** to facilitate volunteer recruitment and increase the diversity of volunteers in Canada, and protect volunteers and those served by volunteers.
- **Recommendation 3:** That the federal government **establish sustainable funding to provide charities and non-profits with operational support** to help them meet their objectives and human resource needs.
- **Recommendation 4:** That the federal government undertake a **national data strategy** to collect consistent, standardized data about the size and scope of charitable and non-profit organizations.

BACKGROUND

Volunteers play a vital role in [forging stronger communities](#), promoting a sense of [meaning and belonging](#), and delivering a broad range of social, recreational, and community services. Volunteering serves as a safeguard for the support systems we rely upon. COVID-19 disrupted all of this.

In 2018, 79% of Canadians engaged in some form of volunteerism. Volunteers played a role in every sector of Canadian life as mentors, coaches, organizers, supporters, community builders, fundraisers, board members, caregivers, and good neighbours.

According to Statistics Canada, 65% of Canadian organizations report a shortage of new volunteers, 50% report challenges with retention and 42% report that volunteers are not able to commit to long-term volunteer roles. All of this, while 74% of organizations reported an increase in demand for services in 2022.

Post-pandemic Canada is adapting and recalibrating to new social, economic, environmental, and cultural realities. Volunteer Canada believes in the importance of re-engaging volunteers to support essential nation and community building. Ensuring adequate support for volunteering is a foundational component of building a strong future for all Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

BREAKDOWN OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: That the federal government invest \$15 million in the development and implementation of a national action strategy on volunteerism to support volunteer activity across the country and the organizations that rely on the work of volunteers to support Canadians. The strategy would include:

- i) The undertaking of baseline research, with ESDC and Statistics Canada, on the state of volunteering in post-pandemic Canada to mitigate the structural, technological, and community-level changes affecting volunteering;
- ii) The engagement of a broad spectrum of stakeholders, organizations, and community members to identify and prioritize options in the development of the national strategy;
- iii) The development of actionable and context-specific, local initiatives to implement the national strategy.

Context

Volunteers are a foundational pillar of Canada's society and economy, touching the lives of Canadians in ways too numerous to list. We also know that pandemic-related restrictions severely disrupted our system of volunteer engagement. And we know that demand for many volunteer services, like programs that help to address food insecurity, has risen sharply.

The 2019 Senate Report on the Charitable Sector identified Volunteer Canada as the organization that should lead the creation of a national action strategy on volunteerism. The pandemic accelerated the need for this strategy, which will prioritize how to recruit, retain, support, and engage diverse volunteers in every sector now and in the future.

Central to creating this strategy is the need for consultations on the state of volunteering, the needs of communities, and the participation levels across the country. That understanding would only be complete with a specific focus on seniors, youth, grassroots organizations, ethnocultural, and Indigenous communities.

Key Stakeholders

Older adults are historically our most active volunteers, but for their safety, they were also the first to leave their in-person volunteer positions.

One of the pandemic challenges was the increased isolation of older adults. Many have stopped volunteering and identified that health and safety standards must be in place before they return. A Volunteer Victoria survey of volunteers aged 55 and older reported that over 70% of older adults remain concerned about returning to face-to-face volunteering.

Older adults are a cornerstone of the volunteer community because of the many hours they give compared to other volunteers. Individuals who volunteer are [more connected](#) to their communities and have increased rates of belonging and inclusion – feeling included and having a sense of purpose have a positive impact on their physical and mental health. We believe that by creating high-quality volunteering infrastructure with specific supports for older adults, we will reduce their social isolation, develop a more profound sense of belonging and address the [“loneliness epidemic”](#) that disproportionately impacts older adults.

Young Canadians have also been affected by the shifting volunteer landscape. As a result of the pandemic, volunteering changed to focus on meeting essential needs, such as driving people to appointments or providing or delivering food (activities where one needs to be older or have a driver's license). This shift has made it more difficult for school-age youth to find volunteer placements.

The national strategy would target youth and create placements to improve their social and work skills. While many Canadian youth pivoted to virtual volunteering during the pandemic, their enthusiasm and energy are ideal for face-to-face involvement. These opportunities will expand their horizons, provide them with a sense of achievement, and offer them new challenges and the chance to work in areas that could become their careers.

Newcomers and refugees volunteer to contribute to Canada and improve their language and employment skills. The pandemic restricted their ability to volunteer, and many do not have the resources to engage in virtual volunteering (which represents more than half of all available volunteer positions in Toronto, for example). The pandemic slowed down their integration into Canadian society. Volunteering is one of the best ways to improve their social, language and

work skills and to find their place in their community. They become active participants in Canadian society, improving their sense of belonging.

Many **volunteer-based organizations** faced financial hardship during the pandemic and were forced to retrench to a core staff, losing volunteer managers and recruitment managers. With the disappearance of these people, it's now more difficult for all people, particularly those new to Canada, to get involved in their communities. Despite the resiliency of charities and non-profits, many cannot continue to serve their communities without the tools and support to rebuild and welcome back volunteers. It is imperative that our volunteers find their way back to participation and that those organizations relying on volunteers find ways to attract, recruit and retain them. New research and evidence are needed to identify a way forward.

The development of the national strategy will be carried out at a national level, but the way forward will include measures to support specific projects to bring seniors, youth, newcomers, indigenous people, and others back to safe and secure volunteer opportunities. Volunteer-serving organizations and **Volunteer Centres** will be key to the success of this initiative. A national strategy will involve support for volunteer-serving organizations that enable their capacity to do important local work.

Recommendation 2: That the federal government provide funding in the amount of \$3 million for the creation and implementation of a National Volunteer Screening Centre to increase recruitment and diversity of volunteers in Canada and protect volunteers and those being served by volunteers.

Context

Strengthening our ability and agility to re-engage volunteers is essential, as is addressing the systemic barriers that limit participation, such as screening models that create undue barriers to engagement.

One barrier for many volunteers is the cost and complicated process of accessing a criminal reference check to participate in most volunteer activities. Creating a streamlined, accessible process for volunteers to receive a criminal reference check will remove a significant barrier and increase the accessibility and diversity of volunteering.

Equally important is the need to ensure a robust check system is in place for those engaging in volunteering online. We are all acutely aware of the prevalence of online fraud, grooming and “scamming.” Ensuring our older adults, youth, newcomers, and all volunteers are protected in whatever format they choose to volunteer is critical.

Recommendation 3: That the federal government establish sustainable funding to provide charities and non-profits with operational support to help them meet their objectives and human resource needs.

Context

Over the years, governments and other funders have decreased their share of operational costs when supporting projects. Organizations receive project support but not the funding necessary to support organizational health. Government supports the sector because of the expertise it brings to accomplish its goals, but it does not fund the physical and financial infrastructure of the sector or its networks. Just as importantly, it does not support the policy development, research, evaluation, and expertise of non-profits.

For many volunteer-led organizations, the pandemic was the straw that broke their funding model. The pandemic restrictions increased their operational costs, strangled their fundraising, and, in many cases, reduced their staff and volunteers. In desperation, many groups drew on their long-term assets in order to meet the immediate increased need for services.

Even with the wage subsidy, many organizations let go of staff. In Toronto, half of volunteer managers were laid off, redeployed, or eliminated. This cascaded down to fewer volunteers being recruited. Now organizations are scrambling to fill these manager positions with limited success.

Smaller organizations relied more heavily on special events or membership fundraising to raise revenue. Pandemic safeguards closed this down. Larger organizations faced similar fundraising challenges, along with an increased demand for their services. Foodbanks, for example, have seen unprecedented demand for their services and a widening swath of Canadians needing these services.

As the country reimagines itself in the rebuilding process, volunteer-supported organizations that provide essential programs and services in communities across Canada require greater infrastructure, technology, and administrative support to innovate and adapt to address complex challenges and problems. We support Imagine Canada's recommendations for more sustainable funding for the charitable and non-profit sector.

Recommendation 4: That the federal government undertake a National Data Strategy to collect consistent, standardized data about the size and scope of charitable and non-profit organizations.

Volunteer Canada also supports Imagine Canada's request that the federal government undertake a National Data Strategy to collect consistent, standardized data about the size and scope of charitable and non-profit organizations and the populations they serve. This would allow sector analysis to be more accessible and usable to inform public policy and the work of the charitable sector.

ABOUT VOLUNTEER CANADA

Volunteer Canada provides national leadership and expertise on volunteerism to enhance the participation, quality, and diversity of volunteer experiences. We are a registered charity engaging over 1100 non-profits and charitable organizations as members across Canada. We

engage over 150 Volunteer Centres from coast to coast and partner with over 35 national and international corporations in corporate community engagement. Volunteer Canada conducts and disseminates research on volunteering, promotes volunteer engagement, assists in capacity building, and convenes and collaborates across sectors to strengthen volunteerism.