

Volunteer Centres: An Untapped Resource

We're writing this letter, signed by aligned Volunteer Centres in a robust network across the country, to speak up on how meaningful volunteerism is enabled.

Canadians volunteer more than anywhere else in the world. Every year, nearly 13 million individuals contribute time to an organization in their community, and during the COVID-19 pandemic hundreds of thousands more have stepped up to deliver services to those most vulnerable. While it's clear that volunteerism is a powerful characteristic of Canadian identity, the role of Volunteer Centres—the vibrant network of 200+ agencies whose role it is to facilitate this extraordinary exchange—is far from understood, or worse yet, has been ignored. In recent weeks, we have been reminded that, in many instances, governments, funders, and even some non-profit leaders, fail to recognize the skill, resources, and infrastructure required to keep volunteers engaged and our social services afloat.

Notwithstanding a crisis, every single Canadian benefits from volunteer contributions because of their presence in our social fabric. Even more importantly, volunteers ensure our country's most vulnerable community members are not left behind. This has been true for decades. The time and skill volunteers dedicate increase our country's capacity in hospitals, shelters, food banks, schools, festivals, community sport, among others, that if paid, would exceed more than 50 billion dollars every year.

But volunteerism is more than human capacity, and what makes volunteerism truly meaningful is that the exchange is not one-way. When a volunteer gives their time, they in turn gain empathy, understanding, and access to skills or human assets. It is this two-way relationship, enabled by skilled volunteer engagers, that makes volunteerism a meaningful, and ethical exchange of labour. Without an understanding of this important social contract, we stand to drift from volunteerism as a truly democratic function of our society.

Local, community-based Volunteer Centres across the country have built connections between non-profits and volunteer seekers from every demographic. We continue to hold an essential recruitment role that enables volunteers to find the opportunities they are looking for and organizations find the volunteers they need.

We also do so much more.

More than ever, Canada's 170,000 non-profit and charitable organizations have turned to Volunteer Centres for answers during the COVID-19 crisis. As organizations with decades of experience, we know that it takes expertise to respond quickly and effectively to recruit, train, and manage volunteers to serve clients safely. And what's more, we know how to leverage the skills and interest of volunteers to build meaningful roles that grow personal experience, and therefore, economic and social opportunity.

While some governments spent time, energy and money in building new structures and mechanisms to recruit and deploy volunteers at national and provincial levels, local community based Volunteer Centres have been on the front-lines in realigning their existing resources; providing training and supports for volunteer engagement; coordinating recovery efforts; and pulling together diverse partners to meet identified needs – most often without additional financial or human resources.

We have ensured that volunteering has continued to serve a vital role in our community, despite the fact that two out of three charities and non-profit organizations have lost more than 30% of the revenue that allow them to deliver regular, necessary services.

As we move to a post-pandemic world, the role of locally-based Volunteer Centres is more important than ever. In an anticipated time of high government debt, limited resources, and greater community needs, the expertise of Volunteer Centres must be harnessed to ensure that we uphold the integrity of volunteerism that underpins our vibrant, and diverse society.

We're up to the challenge.

Signatories (Central)

1. Alliance des CAB de la ville de Québec (CABQ, CABC et Cab Aide23)
- *Québec, QC*
2. Cab de Sherbrooke - *Sherbrooke, QC*
3. Centre d'action bénévole de Farnham - *Farnham, QC*
4. Centre d'action bénévole de Contrecoeur - *Contrecoeur, QC*
5. Centre d'Action Bénévole Domaine-du-Roy - *Saint-Félicien, QC*
6. Centre d'action bénévole du Granit - *Lac-Mégantic, ON*
7. Centre d'action bénévole La Grande Corvée - *Grande-Vallée, QC*

8. Centre d'action bénévole Les Hauts-Bois inc. - *Murdochville, QC*
9. Centre d'action bénévole soif de vivre - *Saint-Rédempteur, QC*
10. Centre d'action bénévole Valcourt et Région - *Valcourt, QC*
11. Community Development Halton/Volunteer Halton - *Burlington, ON*
12. Convergence action bénévole - *Lévis, QC*
13. Fédération des centres d'action bénévole du Québec - *Montréal, QC*
14. Ontario Volunteer Centre Network - *Ontario*
15. Pillar Nonprofit Network - *London, ON*
16. PIN- The People Information Network - *Guelph, ON*
17. Volunteer & Information Quinte - *Belleville, ON*
18. Volunteer Action Centre Waterloo Region - *Waterloo, ON*
19. Volunteer Bureau of Montréal - *Montréal, QC*
20. Volunteer Canada/Bénévoles Canada - *Ottawa, ON*
21. Volunteer Dufferin - *Mono, ON*
22. Volunteer Markham - *Markham, ON*
23. Volunteer MBC - *Mississauga, ON*
24. Volunteer Ottawa - *Ottawa, ON*
25. Volunteer Toronto - *Toronto, ON*
26. Volunteer West Island - *Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue, QC*

Signatories (West)

27. City of Leduc - *Leduc, AB*
28. Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations - *Edmonton, AB*
29. Hanna Volunteer Association/Hanna Learning Centre - *Hanna, AB*
30. Propellus - The Volunteer Centre of Calgary - *Calgary, AB*
31. Rimbey FCSS - *Rimbey, AB*
32. South Okanagan Similkameen Volunteer Centre Society - *Penticton, BC*
33. Stony Plain Volunteer Centre - *Stony Plain, AB*
34. Volunteer Airdrie Society - *Airdrie, AB*
35. Volunteer Alberta - *Alberta*
36. Volunteer Campbell River - *Campbell River, BC*

37. Volunteer Lethbridge Association - *Lethbridge, AB*
38. Volunteer Nanaimo - *Nanaimo, BC*

Signatories (East)

39. Volunteer Strathcona Centre - *Sherwood Park, AB*
40. Volunteer Victoria - *Victoria, BC*
41. Kings Volunteer Resource Centre - *Kentville, NS*
42. Volunteer Centre of Southeastern N.B. Inc. - *Moncton, NB*
43. Volunteer Greater Fredericton - *Fredericton, NB*

Signatories (North)

44. Volunteer Bénévoles Yukon - *Whitehorse, YK*