

**Written Submission for the Pre-Budget
Consultations in Advance of the Upcoming
Federal Government Budget**

By: Volunteer Canada



Consultation on these recommendations provided by members of Volunteer Canada's Volunteer Centre Council—a leadership council of Canada's 150 Volunteer Centres across the country

Recommendation 1 – We recommend that the federal government fund Employment and Social Development Canada to create a Joint Ministerial Task Force on Volunteerism, in partnership with Volunteer Canada. We recommend that the government invest \$775,000 to develop and launch the task force. We propose that the mandate of the Task Force be threefold:

- i) With Statistics Canada, to develop better data, research and evidence on volunteerism and participation to better understand the structural, technological, and community-level changes impacting volunteering and participation
- ii) To engage a broad spectrum of stakeholders, grassroots organizations, and community members to identify and prioritize options for consideration in the development of a National Action Strategy on Volunteerism
- iii) To prioritize key recommendations and develop an implementation roadmap with costing for a National Action Strategy on Volunteerism

Recommendation 2 – We echo Imagine Canada's recommendation that the federal government establish a minimum core funding threshold that provides charities and non-profits with support to help them meet their operating costs.

Recommendation 1 – We recommend that the federal government fund Employment and Social Development Canada to create a Joint Ministerial Task Force on Volunteerism, in partnership with Volunteer Canada. We recommend that the government invest \$775,000 to develop and launch the task force. We propose that the mandate of the Task Force be threefold:

- i) With Statistics Canada, to develop better data, research and evidence on volunteerism and participation to better understand the structural, technological, and community-level changes impacting volunteering and participation
- ii) To engage a broad spectrum of stakeholders, grassroots organizations, and community members to identify and prioritize options for consideration in the development of a National Action Strategy on Volunteerism
- iii) To prioritize key recommendations and develop an implementation roadmap with costing for a National Action Strategy on Volunteerism

Context:

In the Federal Government Response to the 2019 Report of the Special Senate Committee on the Charitable Sector, Volunteer Canada was identified as the organization that should lead the creation of a National Action Strategy on Volunteerism. The pandemic has accelerated the need for a national strategy, one that will prioritize how to recruit, retain, support, and engage diverse volunteers now and in the future.

Central to the creation of this strategy are data, research, and consultations on the state of volunteering and participation across the country. That understanding would not be complete without a specific focus on seniors, youth, grassroots organizations, and diverse ethno-cultural communities and community members.

There are some things that we know. We know that volunteers are a foundational pillar of Canada's society and economy, touching the lives of every Canadian in ways too numerous to list. We also know that pandemic-related restrictions have severely disrupted the system of volunteer engagement. And we know that demand for many volunteer services (e.g., programs that help to address food insecurity) has risen sharply.

Historically, older Canadians are our country's most active volunteers, but they were also the first group to be asked to leave their in-person volunteer positions for health and safety reasons. A Volunteer Victoria survey of volunteers aged 55 and older told us that seniors are concerned about returning to face-to-face volunteering (Volunteer Victoria, [The Impact of COVID and Pandemic Precautions on Senior Volunteers](#), 2022). Comprehensive supports will be needed to bridge the gap between the pre-pandemic seniors volunteer- landscape and the post-COVID/recovery period.

School-age youth have also been affected by the shifting volunteer landscape. Volunteering has changed to focus on meeting essential needs, such as driving people to appointments or delivering food (things where one needs to be older or have a driver's license). This has made it more difficult for school-age youth to find volunteer placements. In addition, pre-pandemic trends indicated that youth had a greater interest in short, informal, or virtual volunteerism; a trend that was exacerbated by the pandemic and one that a destabilized voluntary sector is challenged to support. Enhanced research is required to strengthen understanding of how to best engage youth in volunteering moving forward.

Newcomers and refugees who volunteer to contribute to Canada and improve their language and employment skills face new barriers to volunteering. This is particularly true for virtual volunteering, which, in Toronto, represents more than half of all available volunteer positions. With the sharp decrease of volunteer managers, it is now more difficult for all Canadians to get involved in their communities. Virtual volunteering still requires coordination and resourcing and the decline in roles and supports, due to COVID, present challenges.

Despite the resiliency of charities and non-profits, many cannot continue long-term without a cadre of ready and willing volunteers who want to contribute to communities, services, and organizations. It is imperative that, in a post-pandemic Canada, our volunteers find their way back to service and participation and that those many organizations relying on volunteer service find ways to attract, recruit and retain volunteers in safe and inclusive ways. New research and strategies are needed to identify a way forward.

To what degree do volunteers return in person or virtually? Do levels of virtual volunteering remain high? Is the solution a hybrid of the two? What does this change hold for intergenerational volunteering? Will students across Canada be able to meet their volunteer requirements? Will newcomers continue to see volunteering as a viable pathway to employment and integration into Canadian communities? Consultation, data and engagement across volunteers and diverse stakeholders and community groups is needed to identify a way forward.

Volunteer Canada believes in the importance of re-engaging volunteers across Canada to support key essential acts of nation and community building. Strengthening our ability to re-engage volunteers is one way to do this, as is addressing the systemic barriers in place that limit participation, such as screening models that are not integrated and create undue barriers to engagement.

The Task Force's research and consultations need to be carried out at a national level, but the resulting way forward should also be targeted to specific demographics to bring seniors, youth, newcomers, and others back to safe and secure volunteer opportunities in communities across the country. All of this will contribute to creating the roadmap for a National Action Strategy on Volunteerism.

Recommendation 2 – We echo Imagine Canada’s recommendation that the federal government establish a minimum core funding threshold that provides charities and non-profits with support to help them meet their operating costs.

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 costs that support organizational health. Government supports the sector because of the expertise and resourcefulness it brings to accomplish its goals, but it does not fund the physical and financial infrastructure of the sector or its organizations or networks. Just as importantly, it does not support the policy development, research, evaluation, and expertise that makes an organization the best candidate to undertake the project.

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. Many carved into their long-term sustainability to meet the increased need for services.

Even with the wage subsidy, many volunteer-led organizations had to let go of staff. The pandemic restrictions shut down many volunteer programs, so the groups could not afford to keep their “volunteer managers”. In Toronto, half of volunteer managers were laid off, redeployed, or had their positions eliminated. This cascaded down to fewer volunteers being recruited. Now organizations are scrambling to fill these manager positions with limited success.

The Canada Revenue Agency database shows that COVID has affected several charities with the loss of income in 2020 and 2021 leading some to revocation of their status.

Smaller organizations often relied more heavily on special events or membership fundraising to meet their costs. Pandemic safeguards closed those sources of funding. Larger organizations faced the same 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 who need to use these services.

Throughout the pandemic, charities and non-profits have faced changes to their funding and revenue models. 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.

It is time to support the operating costs for charities and non-profits. Volunteer-led organizations, charities and nonprofits need to have stable, reliable funding that gives organizations the ability to partner with the federal government in serving Canadians.

Volunteer Canada is the national leadership body on volunteerism that represents over 1100 members from coast to coast to coast. Since 1977 we have collaborated with charities, nonprofits, grassroots community organizations, businesses, educational institutions, and individuals to provide leadership and resources on volunteerism. Volunteer Canada seeks to strengthen the quality, diversity and accessibility of volunteer experiences and is committed to building a radically inclusive movement of volunteerism and participation across the country.