

Volunteerism Research Project Summary Report

**Prepared for:
Volunteerism Research Project Advisory Committee
City of Edmonton - Community Services Department**

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October 1999

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The City of Edmonton has an international reputation as a city of volunteers. The City is looking at volunteerism in the community in order to be able to estimate needs and the infrastructure required to support volunteerism in the future. A Volunteerism Research Project was commissioned through the City of Edmonton, Community Services Department with the participation of an advisory committee drawn from organizations supporting the volunteer infrastructure through funding and/or services (see Appendix A for Terms of Reference and membership).

The purpose of the study is to help determine the needs of organizations in Edmonton, outline the infrastructure necessary to meet the needs, and make recommendations on how to maintain or improve volunteerism in Edmonton in line with best practices derived from experience in Edmonton and elsewhere. The consultants conducted the study between May and July, 1999. The study included interviews with key stakeholders (both from Edmonton and elsewhere), literature reviews and Internet searches. The ideological and motivational underpinnings of volunteerism were included in the review. Another topic of the review was screening of volunteers to meet legal requirements, risk assessment and liability concerns, and to assist in properly matching volunteers to services. The benefits and drawbacks of immediate referral versus screening of volunteers prior to referral forms a sub-topic of screening. The study also included review of structures and practices in Edmonton and elsewhere in the for-profit sector (including larger corporations and smaller businesses) to support volunteerism through corporate participation in coordination groups, financial and in-kind contributions and matching grants, and employee incentives and recognition programs. Generally, however, the project focussed on volunteering of time, skills, and in kind contributions – including the use of time and skill to gain financial and in kind support – rather than on voluntary financial contributions themselves. The project deals with formal voluntary action, rather than informal.

This document summarizes the key issues affecting volunteerism in Edmonton, as well as the conclusions and recommendations that arise from these issues. Full details of the study and the findings can be found in the report [Volunteerism Research Project in the City of Edmonton](#).

2.0 ISSUES AFFECTING VOLUNTEERISM IN EDMONTON

2.1 *Renewal of Resources*

A consistent message was provided by participants in the study - one of the biggest issues facing the Edmonton volunteer community is the renewal of volunteers at the board level and planning/organizational level. There are three major reasons given for this:

1. Major events

Participants in the study were asked whether or not one-time major events, such as the 8th IAAF World Championships In Athletics, would affect the ongoing volunteerism in the city. Almost unanimously, the view is that these big 'sexy' events do not have an impact on day-to-day volunteering. This includes volunteers who provide front-line and indirect service. There is a concern however, that these major events can affect volunteering at

the planning, policy and organizational service level. It is felt that there is a relatively small group of 'leaders' who are asked (or volunteer) consistently for this type of role. After a major event there is significant burn-out amongst the board and organization level of volunteers. This then can cause them to withdraw from volunteering on a temporary or sometimes permanent basis. It was felt that the human services organizations were more significantly affected by this than other types of organizations.

2. The missing generation

There appears to be a lack of individuals willing to step into the roles that have been carried out by a number of leaders in the volunteer community for the last several decades. This is attributed to i) lack of leadership development, and ii) generational attitudes.

As indicated in the full report, there is a great potential amongst the 'boomer' generation for future volunteering. However, at this stage, they are not fulfilling the potential in terms of time and types of volunteerism. Whether it is that this generation is too busy working long hours and still raising families that prevents them from stepping into the leadership roles, or whether it is a generational attitude, can be debated. However, it remains an issue that these individuals are not stepping forward to lead Edmonton's volunteer community.

2. Board liability

Concerns over being held personally responsible for the actions of one's current or previous boards is becoming a major issue. People are becoming increasingly hesitant to become a board member for this reason.

In order to address these difficulties there are a number of steps that need to be considered:

- leadership development - interested individuals need to be trained and mentored to take over the leadership roles in the volunteer sector. Major events, such as the 8th IAAF World Championships In Athletics, can be used to provide training to individuals. In addition, board and leadership development can be provided through other means, such as the Volunteer Centre of Edmonton (VCE).
- consideration be given to the suggestions made by various authors, such as Dow, on how to capitalize on the three generations. However, the suggestions need to be analyzed in the context of the local environment. [This topic is developed in the full report].
- encourage governments to change the regulations governing boards to reduce the personal liability issues. For instance, limits could be put in place regarding an individual director's personal liability for board actions. The Panel on Accountability and Governance in the Voluntary Sector ("Broadbent Report") is making specific recommendations at a national level related to this [in addition to these recommendations, Broadbent makes specific recommendations for inter-sectoral cooperation and specification of agency outcomes and accountability – see Executive Summary in Appendix B]. In addition, a committee in British Columbia has recently released a paper ([Draft Strategy - Promoting the Volunteer and Community Services Sector in British Columbia](#)) that makes specific recommendations on this issue.

2.2 Collaboration Within the Underlying Support Structure to Voluntary Organizations

There are a number of organizations that provide the underlying support to volunteerism in Edmonton. These include:

1. The Volunteer Centre of Edmonton - provides volunteer referral, promotion, consultation and training to volunteer agencies in Edmonton.
2. Grant MacEwan Community College (GMCC) - provides training through the Voluntary Sector Management Program for volunteer managers, board members and others who work or volunteer in support of the non-profit sector.
3. Resource Centre for Voluntary Organizations - housed at Grant MacEwan it provides a wealth of resources for volunteer managers, not-for-profit agencies, and others interested in volunteerism.
4. Wildrose Foundation - provides grants and consultative assistance to volunteer groups. Sponsors the Vitalize Conference on an annual basis.
5. Alberta Community Development (Field Services) - provide basic community development consultation including, strategic planning, community collaboration & partnerships, fundraising, board development, leadership development, team building, facilitation and facilitation training.
6. Alberta Community Development (Board Development Program) - provides board development training to not-for-profit organizations.
7. Canadian Centre for Social Entrepreneurship, University of Alberta - a new centre focussing on education, research and community involvement. It will bring together the business, government and voluntary sectors to encourage innovative thinking with respect to social problems.
8. Volunteer! - University of Alberta, Student Union's new initiative for the referral of volunteers.
9. Volunteer Management Group - a professional association for volunteer managers from agencies.
10. Provincial Branch, Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) - offers board development workshops for the 190+ FCSS boards, including specific topics such as the impact of FOIP legislation; provides a central location for resource materials for programs; with the FCSS association, developed materials on how FCSS boards can work effectively with other human service boards.
11. City of Edmonton (Community Services Department) - liaise and consult with agencies receiving FCSS grants; provide community investment and other grants and provide board development and organizational development training.
12. Volunteer Alberta - an association of volunteer centres, other agencies and individuals.

Many of the organizations above have mandates that go far beyond the boundaries of Edmonton, however, they do provide vital resources for volunteerism in the city. In addition, there are volunteer centres in proximity to Edmonton, including St. Albert, Sherwood Park and Ft. Saskatchewan. There are also umbrella organizations which provide a number of advisory services to organizations within a specific volunteer sector, e.g. community leagues or sport. There are some larger organizations within the health and social services sectors which provide assistance to smaller organizations within those particular sectors.

There appears to be a lack of connectedness between these various organizations providing support to the volunteer sector in Edmonton and Alberta. Although these support organizations may be aware of the services provided by each other, the volunteer community as a whole is not necessarily aware of the full spectrum of support. Confusion can lead to uncertainty in the volunteer community as to who is responsible for various aspects of volunteer management. Volunteer support organizations have indicated that they communicate regularly on a one-on-one basis about issues affecting them. Although this is an extremely important means of communication, there is no collective forum to discuss emerging issues affecting the sector.

One thing that has been noted by staff working in the volunteer community, is that the structure is set up to support organizations, not individual volunteers. There is no perception that these organizations perform an advocacy or mediation role for individuals who have volunteered and are having difficulty with their voluntary organization. This is an area that might usefully be looked at by the underlying support organizations.

2.3 Corporate versus Small Business Volunteer Focus

Due to the nature of business in Edmonton, more focus should be placed on organizing small businesses to become involved in volunteerism than has been in the past. Edmonton does not have the headquarters for major corporations; our environment is somewhat different and we should place greater emphasis on small business volunteers rather than focus on corporate volunteers.

2.4 Volunteer Management

There is a trend towards more professional volunteer management, both at the level of the volunteer coordinators, and at the level of managing the volunteers.

Over the past decade there has been an increase in the level of professionalism amongst those individuals responsible for managing or coordinating volunteers. Certainly in Edmonton, GMCC has increased the level of professionalism through their Voluntary Sector Management Program. In addition to this, the Volunteer Centre of Edmonton offers workshops and training for volunteer coordinators and also helps support the Volunteer Management Group. However, volunteer coordinator positions tend to be viewed as entry-level, poorly paid positions.

There is an increasing need to ensure that organizations manage their volunteers appropriately. Enhanced volunteer management helps to encourage individuals to volunteer their time and to maintain a prolonged volunteer experience with an organization. It is just as important to properly orient, train and supervise volunteers, as it is to do these tasks with paid employees. Professional organizations often recruit their staff from the cadre of experienced volunteers. Literature supports the concept of the possibility of volunteers provoking more creative change

within organizations than staff, and notes as well the need to conceive of volunteerism as a career path.

Once volunteers are recruited, it is essential to maintain their commitment to the organization for an extended period of time. Many organizations request a one-year initial commitment from potential volunteers. Although there will always be circumstances beyond the control of the organization, it is largely the responsibility of the organization to ensure an appropriate environment for maintaining volunteer commitment, such as adjusting activities to shorter, more task oriented jobs.

Within the health field in Edmonton & Calgary, the regional health authorities seem to differ from the other volunteer sectors in terms of support for volunteers and volunteer coordinators. Not only do the volunteers in this sector appear to be more oriented towards longer terms of service, the administrative support for volunteer programs is strong and career opportunities for volunteer coordinators are well supported.

2.5 Screening

There are two different concepts of screening in the field. The first is the basic screening for skills, interest and fit within an organization. The second is the more complex and technical to ensure protection for the organization and its clients. With increasing demands on organizations to provide more services, there is the counter demand to protect clients, particularly youth, elderly or disabled, from harm. In order to do so, there is greater need for screening of volunteers and for that screening to be part of an ongoing management practice within the organization.

There is some disagreement amongst organizations as to who should play the key role in the first type of screening. Some organizations believe that the VCE should play a stronger role in the initial screening for fit and interest; most others disagree.

The second type of screening is of particular interest to groups with 'at risk' clients, and is not of particular interest to other sectors. It is generally agreed that the actual screening is the responsibility of the organization receiving the volunteer and is not a task that can be delegated to another group, such as the VCE. However, the VCE needs to continue to play a strong role in training organizations and assisting them in setting up appropriate screening procedures.

2.6 Funding of the Underlying Support Structure

The Volunteerism Research Project Advisory Committee has identified that the primary source of funding for the underlying support structure for volunteerism in Edmonton is limited to Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) and the United Way. However, organizations providing the underlying support provide services to many organizations outside the social services arena. As budgets and priorities in the social services become tighter, it becomes more difficult to justify funding services that may be provided to non-social service agencies. Some acknowledgement and commitment from other sectors, such as the health, sports, recreation and arts sectors, is required to maintain the underlying support structure for volunteerism in Edmonton.

3.0 CONCLUSION

Volunteer capacity in Edmonton can be enhanced by ensuring practices that bring government, business and the volunteer sector closer together. Government and business must understand the benefits that volunteers and the volunteer sector bring to the economy and to the community through serving societal interests. All levels of the volunteer sector must work together to build an appropriate and cooperative infrastructure support.

4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the findings and conclusions of this study, the Volunteer Research Project Advisory Committee makes the following broad-based recommendations to the Community Services Advisory Board (CSAB) for transmittal to and consideration by the City of Edmonton. CSAB may wish to lay aside time at future meetings or establish a subcommittee to review the recommendations before making a submission to the City. The recommendations are for long term rather than immediate action, and are seen to fit within CSAB's mandate, under City Bylaw 11926, "to have a key role in developing a long-term plan for community services in Edmonton." Some recommendations below speak to support of voluntary organizations (non-government bodies) providing or needing underlying support to volunteerism. Other recommendations are addressed more generally to all organizations involved in volunteerism support – public and private funders, government services, and voluntary organizations involved in the underlying support structure.

1. Funding should be made available to support on-going volunteer infrastructure in Edmonton.
 - 1.1 The City should continue to provide long-term funding for infrastructure and operational support to voluntary organizations providing underlying support to volunteerism in Edmonton, and consider additional funding for this purpose, including from sources beyond the FCSS funding envelope, since organizations outside the social services sector are also beneficiaries of the support provided.
 - 1.2 The City should work with other funders, including other levels of government, to encourage the provision of long-term operational funding for voluntary organizations providing underlying support to volunteerism in Edmonton.
2. Develop strategies to build and strengthen relationships between organizations providing the underlying support to volunteer agencies in Edmonton.
 - 2.1 The City should encourage a periodic process by which organizations involved in the underlying support of volunteerism could focus on the topics of coverage, continuity, collaboration and communication amongst these organizations, including enhancing public and voluntary sector awareness of the services provided.

3. Develop a forum for businesses, government and volunteer agencies to meet, discuss and resolve issues relating to volunteerism in Edmonton.
 - 3.1 The City should take the lead in initiating a forum for interaction of the three groups. Emphasis should be placed on encouraging businesses to participate in the process.
 - 3.2 The City, other funders and organizations providing underlying support to volunteerism, and voluntary agencies should advocate support to the recommendations in the Broadbent report (highlighted in Section 7.1 - Renewal of Resources, above) to strengthen activity between businesses, government and voluntary agencies.
4. Develop stronger and more formal means of advocating the benefits of volunteerism.
 - 4.1 The City, through CSAB and other means, should work with key organizations and funders to develop and implement strong marketing tools to advocate for and encourage volunteerism in Edmonton.
5. Emphasis should be placed on encouraging the renewal of volunteer resources at board, planning and organizational levels.
 - 5.1 The City should play a lead role in encouraging processes to provide proper training, support and experience to enable volunteers to progress through a variety of volunteer experiences.
 - 5.2 The City, other organizations supporting volunteerism, and voluntary agencies should provide support to the recommendations in the Broadbent report (see Section 7.1 - Renewal of Resources, above) to limit and reduce the personal liability of board members.
6. Support should be provided to agencies to continue to enhance the level of professionalism in volunteer management.
 - 6.1 The City and other funders should provide funds to assist agencies which lack capacity to manage volunteers appropriately and adequately. Aid could be through assistance to individual agencies, or through support to central agencies or consortia to provide management and developmental services.
7. Support should be provided to agencies requiring training and assistance in establishing appropriate volunteer screening procedures.
 - 7.1 The City should work with agencies requiring assistance with screening of volunteers, to enable the agencies to profit from the current training opportunities and to help develop the necessary procedures and infrastructure to conduct the screening.

The recommendations above require the willingness of a number of organizations to develop a common vision and cooperate in the development and implementation of long-range activities. Subsequent to the acceptance of these broad-based recommendations, a number of recommendations relating to specific organizations should also be developed. This level of recommendation should be developed as part of the formal process proposed in recommendation 2 and 2.1.

APPENDIX A – TERMS OF REFERENCE AND MEMBERSHIP FOR THE VOLUNTEERISM RESEARCH PROJECT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Community Services Department Project Charter for Volunteerism Research Project Advisory Committee

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

This project has developed as a result of funders having more and greater expectations of volunteers and voluntary organizations. There has been a change in the funding environment, and government support is decreasing at the same time as the expectations of agencies are increasing.

After discussions between major funders in Edmonton, a recommendation was made by the Community and Family Services Advisory Committee (CAFSAC), that a study be undertaken, of volunteerism in Edmonton. Since volunteerism is a major criterion of FCSS funding, as noted in the Conditional Agreement Regulation, Section 2(a), this study is being funded through Family and Community Support Services (FCSS).

1.2 Purpose and Scope of the Volunteerism Project

The purpose of the Volunteerism Project is to determine the volunteerism needs of the Edmonton Community, and the infrastructure required to achieve this. The recommendations of this report will guide future investment in this area. The Volunteerism Project will incorporate the following:

- Research best practices in volunteerism in Canada and possibly the United States to determine:
 - a healthy volunteerism environment
 - benefits/drawbacks of immediate referral vs. screening of volunteers prior to referral.
- Complete an environmental scan to determine Edmonton volunteerism needs in general. This scan would include input from the following:
 - Umbrella organizations representing sectors such as Social Services, Recreation, Sport, Health and Hospitals, Education, Libraries, Arts, Culture, Community Groups, the Faith Community etc.
 - The corporate sector.
 - All agencies which use volunteers
 - The “waves” of need such as the occasional volunteer requirements of major events (e.g. The World Track and Field Games)
- Look at which resources are available and which resources are missing in Edmonton.

1.3. Project Objectives

- To get a good understanding of current best practices in volunteerism.
- To obtain an inventory of resources for recruiting and training of volunteers.
- To determine what constitutes an environment for healthy volunteerism.
- To make the information available to the public.
- To weigh the information gathered and to make recommendations regarding infrastructure support for volunteerism in Edmonton.

2. Project Deliverables

- The indicators of a healthy volunteer environment.
- An encapsulation of best practices in volunteerism.
- A compilation of volunteerism needs in Edmonton.
- Recommendations to determine the volunteerism needs of the Edmonton Community, and the infrastructure required to achieve this.

3. Project Workplan and Timeline

Phase I. Planning

By April 30, 1999

- Prepare project charter and get approval from Steering Committee
- Develop a call for proposals
- Hire contractor
- Work with contractor to finalize information-gathering content and sources e.g. literature review, decision on parameters of comparative cities, gather volunteerism activity information, record volunteerism successes, determine volunteerism best practices.

Phase II. Research

May-June, 1999

- To be clarified when contractor is hired as noted above.

Phase III. Development of Recommendations.

- Identify key findings to be incorporated into recommendations End June 1999
- Convene a recommendations meeting with a representation of funders and community. Early July 1999

Phase IV. Approval and Implementation.

- Recommendations reviewed September 1999
- Decisions made by CSAB September Meeting

4. Membership

Name	Affiliation
Cathy Krysa	Past Chair of Community and Family Services Advisory Committee
Ronald Gaunce	Community Services Advisory Board
Judy Padua	Clifford E. Lee Foundation
Don Taylor	United Way
Carol Gilfillan	United Way
Bob Wyatt	Muttart Foundation
Dianne Allen	Epcor
Jon Hall	Volunteer Centre of Edmonton
Hazel Sutherland	Grant McEwan Community College
Wendy MacDonald	Grant McEwan Community College (Alternate)
Ann Jordan-Mills	Committee Support, Community Services Department, City of Edmonton

The Project Team would like to thank the members of the advisory committee for their support of the project, identification of major issues and suggestions for organizations and individuals to contact during the course of the study. In particular we would like to thank Ann Jordan-Mills for her support and coordination.

Sandra Woodhead Lyons and Ray LaFleur – Project Team members.

APPENDIX B - BUILDING ON STRENGTH: IMPROVING GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN CANADA'S VOLUNTARY SECTOR EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND PRINCIPLE RECOMMENDATIONS

An excerpt from: *Building on Strength: Improving Governance and Accountability in Canada's Voluntary Sector* by the Panel on Accountability and Governance in the Voluntary Sector. Reprinted with permission. (pdf version only – go to the website listed below).

The complete report is available from:

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Or from their web site: www.web.net/vsr-trsb/pagvs/index.htm