



# Welcoming Communities

*Guidelines for Creating a Welcoming  
Volunteer Program*



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WelcomeBC

# Guidelines for Creating a Welcoming Volunteer Program & Tips to support New Canadian Volunteers

The evolving diversity of Canada has significant implications and provides important opportunities for the voluntary sector. Organizations should ensure their volunteer pool is reflective of the diversity of their communities. This reflection will provide great advantage in maximizing their appeal and effectiveness within their communities. Prioritizing efforts to attract candidates from a diversity of communities will deepen organizational knowledge and skills for outreach, policy and program development.

Volunteering is seen as an important opportunity to particularly assist New Canadian communities from around the world in developing and enhancing their cultural and professional integration into Canadian society and workplace. This is an opportunity for the voluntary sector that can then benefit from the usually strong professional and technical skills that New Canadian volunteers bring to organizations. It is important that the Sector ensures opportunities for volunteer involvement are accessible and barrier free.

On top of learning all the cultural nuances and mastering a new language, the development of social networks is important to successful settlement of new Canadians. New comers need and want to develop professional relationships in order to feel that they belong in the community and in their new country. A meaningful volunteer position can go a long way in providing these networks.

Following is a guide to creating a Welcoming Volunteer Program. The Guide presents seven steps and each step includes Tips to support New Canadian Volunteers.

*“There has been a subtle shift in the last several years in the ways we talk about nonprofit organizations. The nonprofit sector is discussed as an important cornerstone of civil society, a site for civic engagement, a place to build social capital, and a measure of a democratic society.”*  
 Frances Kunreuther, Nonprofits and Democracy: Engage, Educate, Activate, and Assess.

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## Step 1: Planning

Planning for your volunteer program gives you the opportunity to work out the program purpose, the role of volunteers in the organization, the program's contribution to the mission, and how the volunteer program fits into the organization's structure.

Planning is best done with input from those who will be affected by the volunteer program, particularly the leaders, the paid staff, and the clients of the organization. A thorough planning process will include the following elements:

**Mission & Vision:** Why does the volunteer program exist? What will the future be like because of the volunteer program?

**Goals:** What will be the impact of the volunteer program?

**Budget:** What is the budget for the volunteer program?

**Building Investment among Staff:** How will paid staff be prepared to work with/manage volunteers?

**Position Descriptions:** What will volunteers do?

## Step 2: Policies and Procedures

Policies and procedures are the nuts and bolts of the volunteer program. A policy is a principle, plan, or course of action. Policies tell people what to do. A procedure is a series of steps that direct people how to do what they must do.

Policies connect the volunteer program to the larger organization and the mission. They provide structure, formalize decisions already made. They ensure continuity over time and promote equity. Policies articulate the importance of volunteers.

### Type of written policies include:

- Statements of belief/position/value of organization.
- Mechanisms for managing risk (e.g., insurance coverage, background checks).
- Rules to specify expectations, regulations, and guides to action (e.g., confidentiality, time and training commitments, customer service).
- Aids to program effectiveness (e.g., personnel policies) modified for the volunteer program.

## Tips to support New Canadian Volunteers

Plan for an inclusive volunteer program by imagining a program where people of different ages, abilities, cultural backgrounds are working together to meet common goals; a program based on the principles of access, diversity, equality, and respect.

Develop a clear inclusive statement of commitment to the involvement of volunteers that reflect the cultural diversity of membership or communities served and include it in the mission and vision.

Include participation of volunteers from the diversity of communities served in planning.

Plan to ensure that everyone in the organization understands the role of volunteers, their recruitment and training process, and how New Canadian volunteers benefit the organization.

Develop baseline metrics. See program evaluation practices for further information.

Use the term "position" rather than "job" because this clearly defines for New Canadians the difference between paid and unpaid positions. If New Canadians hear the terms used interchangeably they may think volunteering will lead directly to employment.

Ensure that human resources and anti-harassment and discrimination policies exist and are compliant with legislation.

Policies on Background checks should be based on the volunteer position description. It is the tasks of the position that determine the level of risk and the appropriate administrative response.

Background checks and involvement of the Police can act as a barrier/deterrent to potential volunteers from police states/countries.

New Canadians may not have a local work related reference but the potential volunteer may have the skills and experience that will support the organization and where possible could shadow a current volunteer to provide a "living" reference.

## Step 3: Volunteer Recruitment

Volunteer recruitment means attracting and inviting people to consider involvement with your organization.

Multiple recruitment messages may be needed to attract different groups such as students, professionals, neighborhood residents, or client family members. Each message should identify:

- The specific need of the clients and/or the organization;
- How the volunteer can alleviate the need; and
- The benefits to the volunteer

The organization will be more effective if both your paid staff and your volunteer staff reflect the community. Knowing the demographics of your community will help to build diversity as an essential element in your recruitment plan. In addition to ethnicity, consider other components of diversity, such as age, gender, education, income levels, religious beliefs, physical abilities, and skills.

Recruiting volunteers from the population your organization serves demonstrates that people are assets, and that you value clients as partners, not just as clients. Deliberate and strategic outreach to youth, seniors, and people with disabilities demonstrates that everyone has something to offer.

*People most often volunteer when they feel they are being asked to get involved personally.*

In addition to asking people to volunteer other recruiting techniques include:

- Mass media; print and broadcast, and articles in local newspapers and newsletters of other organizations
- Public speaking and Outreach to membership or professional organizations using Slide shows and Videotapes
- Direct mail or email blasts
- Referrals from individuals associated with your organization
- Membership with Volunteer Centre
- Internet web-sites

Recruit for specific projects throughout the year rather than a once-a-year campaign. When recruiting, involve the entire organization, including the board members, clients and current volunteers.

## Tips to support New Canadian Volunteers

Actively engaging New Canadians as volunteers requires intentional outreach. Forming relationships with settlement agencies, second language training programs and cultural associations can help promote the opportunities in your organization.

Invite immigrant community leaders to speak at events.

Use photographs and visuals wherever possible to illustrate what your organization does. Indicate in your materials you are an equal opportunity employer and committed to the principles of employment equity.

Develop press releases of current volunteer needs and general interest articles that features New Canadian volunteers and submit to all local community and ethno cultural papers.

Clarify the level of English required and adjust positions to suit the person will ensure all are treated with fairness and respect; this also fulfills obligations to the BC Human Rights Act.

Ensure that promotional materials and website are welcoming and relate to a diversity of communities. Use graphics that reflect different cultures.

Reflect experiences of immigrant volunteers in recruitment materials. Include in position descriptions and posters the benefits of Volunteering unique to New Canadians include;

- Opportunity to practice and improve English
- Opportunities to expand social networks
- Obtain meaningful Canadian workplace experience, gain a reference or expand a resume
- Learn how a Canadian organization is run
- Learn about Canadian Culture
- Share their knowledge to help make programs better.

Advertise for volunteers with local ethnic radio stations, ethnic papers and ethnic websites.

Ask current New Canadian volunteers if they have friends or family who might like to volunteer.

### Tool for support:

- ✓ Sample Volunteer Recruitment Poster in simple English

## Step 4: Screening, Interviewing & Placement

Matching potential volunteers to volunteer positions will be an important part of your program's success. Making the match involves using a series of screening techniques that allow the organization and the volunteer to get to know each other and decide whether and how to best work together.

Screening tools include: applications, reference checks, interviews, background checks, training, and observation. Screening potential volunteers should be as sophisticated as necessary for the type of volunteer task under consideration. The goal of screening is to get the right volunteer into the right position.

The initial contact is the first step in the process of determining the fit between a potential volunteer and your program. Provide some basic information about your agency and the volunteer opportunities available. Find out what the volunteer is interested in doing and why. If it appears there may be a fit, gather contact information and ask the prospective volunteer to complete an application.

A face-to-face interview provides an opportunity for a more detailed discussion of your agency's mission, vision, and goals, as well as the volunteer's interests, motivations, and needs. The interview is your opportunity to learn about the potential volunteer's:

- Knowledge, skills, and experience
- Preferences or aversions to specific tasks
- Schedule and availability
- Willingness/ability to make the time commitment
- Willingness/ability to meet agency expectations.

Depending on the nature of your agency, the clients you serve, and the work to be done by volunteers, you might require additional screening before placing a volunteer. These may include references and criminal background checks.

You should make every effort to place the volunteer in a position that provides a good match between the skills and interests of the volunteer as it will help with the volunteer's level of satisfaction. Be flexible enough to try other positions that might provide a better fit.

### Tips to support New Canadian Volunteers

Organizations of all sizes and levels of resources should at minimum ensure that screening steps are consistently based on the elements of the position, not the applicant. This should be made clear to all applicants.

Utilize trained interpreters.

Have a graduated entry plan or buddy system for New Canadians with language barriers.

Explain fully the process of background checks.

High risk positions require a Police Records Check (PRC), which is only available to New Canadians who are citizens, landed immigrants or who have been in Canada for a required number of years.

PRC consent forms, and the request to have a police records check done at all, can be intimidating and may be particularly so for someone new to Canada from a country where security forces were experienced as repressive and abusive.

To reduce barriers to involving New Canadians in volunteering where most positions are high risk, consider if certain aspects of the position can be modified to reduce the risk. In addition, allow modification of the screening protocol. For example a modification might be instead of a local reference an existing immigrant volunteer could shadow a New Canadian volunteer.

Show photos of other volunteers at work to help explain what the New Canadian volunteer will do.

#### Tools for support:

- ✓ **Guide to Communicating with people learning to speak English**
- ✓ **Sample Volunteer Registration Form in simple English**
- ✓ **Sample Volunteer Offer Letter Template**
- ✓ **The Buddy System for New Canadian Volunteers**

## Step 5: Orientation, Training & Supervision

Initial orientation and training prepares volunteers to perform their duties efficiently and effectively. The policies and procedures developed earlier form the basis for the orientation; the position description forms the basis for the training. Volunteers who understand what is expected of them do a better job and are more satisfied.

Orientation helps volunteers see their service within the context of the organization. Orientation includes the verbal and written resources on following topics:

1. History of agency, mission, clients served and programs, Time lines and descriptions of major organizational events and activities
2. Culture and Language of the Organization- included in Handbook of policies and procedures
3. Volunteer Program Policies and Procedures
4. To include types of tasks or other ways in which volunteers contribute, Recordkeeping, Training, termination policies, and Evaluation procedures
5. Tour of the facility, explanation of who's who and who does what, location of restrooms, supplies, and equipment, arrangements for breaks, meals, and refreshments

Training gives volunteers the direction and skills necessary to carry out assigned tasks. Training should be:

- Specific to the requirements of the volunteer position
- Geared to the skill level of the volunteer
- On-going and address needs identified by both volunteer and supervisor
- Periodically evaluated to determine if it is on track

Training can also be used to reward volunteers. A special class or conference can be a reward for service, such as CPR training, public speaking, conflict resolution, or team building.

Volunteers need a designated supervisor whose most important responsibility is creating an environment that empowers the volunteers to perform their duties. Volunteers want and need to be held accountable for their performance by their supervisors. This is done by providing:

- Sufficient orientation to the organization,
- Clear and appropriate expectations,
- Proper training and equipment,
- Evaluation of performance, and
- Regular reinforcement and recognition.

### Tips to support New Canadian Volunteers

Review a diversity calendar whenever choosing a date and time for training, meeting or event.  
<http://www.interfaithcalendar.org>

Ensure all new volunteers have a written invitation identifying the location, time, date of the orientation and training sessions with your name and contact number.

Ask a local ESL teacher to invite their students to review your materials and give you feedback about words and concepts that are difficult to understand.

Ensure all new volunteers understand through orientation and training processes, the explicit details of their role/ position, including: requirements, boundaries, reporting relationships and processes.

Invite existing volunteers to mentor new volunteers. Use buddy system for trainees during orientation and training process.

Introduce, and include in sessions where possible, staff who will supervise volunteer work assignments of new volunteers.

Talk to New Canadians and ask them what questions they may have about volunteering. Ask volunteers what will help them achieve success in the work they do.

Provide word lists-staff titles, program names, common words or phrases used on the job. Refer to lists during the training period.

Understand the difference between feedback and evaluation. Feedback is usually done on an ongoing basis during the course of the day, it gives an individual a sense of how they are doing and an opportunity to make changes before it is too late.

Ask volunteers to evaluate the type of support you provide.

Create an organizational climate/culture that encourages sharing concerns before small problems become large issues. Be clear about what happens next if a problem arises.

## Step 6: Evaluating & Recognizing Performance

Volunteers add value to an organization; periodically evaluating their performance is one way to quantify their contributions toward achieving the mission of the organization. Evaluations give volunteers feedback on how they are performing assigned duties. Evaluations also give the administrator the opportunity to set new goals and identify training needs.

Clearly defined position descriptions are the basis for fair and equitable performance evaluations. Performance criteria should address both skills and accomplishments. Effective evaluation draws information from a variety of sources including; Staff feedback, Self-evaluations and Program records.

When volunteers are performing below expectations it may become necessary to take corrective action. You may consider: Re-training, transferring the volunteer to a new assignment, Disciplinary action or Retirement. Volunteers should understand from their initial induction into your program that they may be terminated with or without cause. Spell out in advance that infractions and regulations, violations of the law, and other unsafe or inappropriate conduct are all grounds for termination.

Recognition is how an organization tells volunteers that their efforts are important. Expressing thanks for donated time, energy, and expertise makes volunteers feel valued and appreciated. Praising individual volunteers, as well as the group, is a key volunteer retention strategy.

Recognition should be frequent and personal. Being sensitive to what volunteers expect helps the program administrator to design appropriate recognition activities. For example, volunteers seeking power may enjoy being thanked by the executive director and board of directors. A simple thank you from the paid staff may be appropriate for volunteers motivated by achievement. A party is right for the folks who volunteer to socialize.

Many organizations hold events to recognize and sometimes award volunteers. One week of April of each year is National Volunteer Week set aside to celebrate of volunteer efforts across the country.

### Tips to support New Canadian Volunteers

Informal and regular acknowledgment such as saying hello to the volunteer and thank you at the end of the volunteer shift go a long way in making the person feel appreciated and connected to the organization.

Make sure the New Canadian understands the evaluation and their part in the process.

Give the New Canadian volunteers several options in how they would like to be evaluated taking into account their English comprehension and comfort level.

Performance evaluations are based on professional development plans established when a new volunteer begins working.

Evaluations are directed at behavior and tasks, not at personal characteristics.

Provide both written and verbal evaluations to ensure understanding. Conduct follow-ups to evaluations and offer rewards to employees when goals are met or exceeded.

Invite New Canadians to be part of a recognition planning committee.

Consider the cultural appropriateness of the recognition. Ask volunteers about the suitability of rewards, don't make assumptions.

Effective recognition is based on individual taste not necessarily on cultural origin. When looking to recognize a volunteer, base your choices on what you know the individual would appreciate and not on possible perceptions on what you feel people from that community enjoy.

The recognition you give to New Canadians will be most effective when it is linked to their reason for volunteering. Show tangible appreciation. In many cultures gift giving is a cultural expectation displaying your honor of a person.

Letters of reference are helpful to New Canadians who are establishing themselves in the community.

#### Tools for support:

- ✓ Sample Volunteer Feedback Form
- ✓ Sample Volunteer Exit Feedback Form

## Step 7: Volunteer Retention & Evaluating the Program

Understanding volunteers' motivations and remaining sensitive to their needs are essential to retaining volunteers. Open communication will help determine the motivating element specific to each volunteer.

Strategies for keeping abreast of a volunteer's motivation and satisfaction include:

- Regularly sharing new developments in the program, the organization, and the field.
- Periodically soliciting the volunteer's suggestions about the program.
- Finding out what the volunteer likes most about their volunteer assignment.
- Think of a volunteer "career path" at your organization. A volunteer for an event, for example, might be recruited to become a volunteer for a sustained position and eventually be placed on the board of directors.

Volunteers do move on for many reasons. Plan for turnover among your volunteers.

### Volunteer Program Evaluation

To help make critical resource decisions, volunteer program managers need to document:

1. how financial, material, equipment, in-kind, and human resources that have been, are being, and will be used by the agency to support agency efforts; and
2. what benefits these resources have brought to the clients and programs.

To measure program outcomes it is necessary to collect baseline data in the early stages of planning. This data reveals how things were before the volunteer program went into effect. Changes in behaviors, skills, or attitudes of the people affected by the volunteer program and the added value the program brings can be measured and compared to the baseline

An Evaluation Report should indicate the overall volunteer program's contribution to organizational goals. Key questions you to ask;

- Is the program operating in conformity with its original design?
- Have adjustments been made as needed?
- Were the stated outcomes achieved?
- Is evaluation data being used for future planning?

### Tips to support New Canadian Volunteers

Help New Canadians to gain access to community activities. Post community events on the volunteer bulletin board.

Organizations of all sizes and levels of resources should at minimum ensure some process for feedback from volunteers about their experience of volunteering with the organization.

The success of the volunteer program depends on the understanding by volunteers of its objectives as well as their commitment and participation in attaining them. Share these with the volunteers so that they may see their part in the fulfillment of the mission of the organization.

Evaluate the diversity of your volunteer team to determine to what degree it is reflective of the community.

Ask these questions of your Volunteer Program?

- Are New Canadian volunteers involved in a full range of volunteer activities?
- Does the composition of the Board reflect the community?
- Have we developed an infrastructure that supports inclusion?
- Have we developed and advertised inclusive policies and procedures?

Baseline Data to collect includes:

1. number of current New Canadian volunteers,
2. the total time that New Canadian volunteers committed,
3. duties New Canadian volunteers perform,
4. achievements of the New Canadian volunteers

#### Tools for support:

- ✓ Assessing your Non-profit's Welcoming and Inclusive state
- ✓ Building a Diverse Board and Non-profit

## Sources of Information:

VolunteerBC Culturally Welcoming Volunteer Program, By Definition: Policies for Volunteer Programs, Volunteer Ontario, Spring 1993, Ontario Volunteer Centre Network: A Guide for Cultural Competency Application of the Canadian Code (for volunteer involvement), Volunteer Canada.

This document was produced in partnership with:

**Welcoming Communities**   
Attracting and Sustaining Newcomer Canadians

Visit [www.soics.ca](http://www.soics.ca) for more information on programs and resources for Newcomer Canadians.





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