

---

# Canadian Journal of Volunteer Resources Management

---

Le journal canadien de gestion  
des bénévoles

2009

Volume 17.2

---



THE ECONOMY AND VOLUNTEERISM

---

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>AN INVESTMENT IN VOLUNTEERISM MAKES GOOD ECONOMIC SENSE</b> Ruth MacKenzie, <i>Ontario</i> .....	3
<b>VOLUNTEER TAX CREDITS – A SURE WAY TO GO?</b> Carol Cheung, <i>Alberta</i> .....	4
<b>COUNTING ON VOLUNTEERS TO EASE THE ECONOMIC CRUNCH</b> Karen Franco, <i>Alberta</i> .....	6
<b>MANAGING PEOPLE THROUGH TURBULENT TIMES</b> Lynne Toupin, <i>Ontario</i> .....	8
<b>SHARED SERVICES THROUGH A FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY FORUM</b> Brenda Gallagher, <i>Ontario</i> .....	10
<b>COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER INCOME TAX PROGRAM</b> Meghann Darroch, <i>Ontario</i> .....	13
<b>GETTING YOUR MESSAGE OUT IN TOUGH ECONOMIC TIMES</b> Gina Grosenick, <i>Ontario</i> .....	15
<b>PEER EXPERT</b> Kim Evans, <i>Ontario</i> .....	18
<b>BOOK REVIEW</b> Lesley Abraham, <i>Ontario</i> .....	19

### Editorial Team

Lesley Abraham, Jennifer Campbell,  
Chris Jarvis, Kim Kilpatrick, Rachel Stoparczyk  
Lynne Whitehead & Joan Wyatt

### Regional Representatives

Rosemary Byrne, Faiza Kanji  
Tammy Stadt and Charlene Dishaw

ISSN 1192-1676

Subscriptions and correspondence can be sent to:  
2222 Fillmore Cr., Ottawa, K1J 6A3  
contact@cjvrm.org

No part of this publication may be reproduced, in whole or in part, without written permission from the Editorial Team. All articles are the express opinion of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the publisher or Editorial Team. The Publisher and the Editorial Team assume no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts. Letters commenting on articles are welcome, but may be edited for brevity and clarity.

## EDITORIAL

Imagine Canada and Volunteer Canada recently released the results of the 2007 Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating. “While the rates of donating, volunteering and helping are largely unchanged since the 2004 survey, there has been modest growth in the total value of donations, the average size of donations and total volunteer hours” (www.nsgvp.org). Nonprofits have reported additional challenges as a result of the downturn. We know from experience, however, that change presents both challenges and opportunities.

In this issue, Ruth MacKenzie emphasizes the role of government in addressing the challenges of the economy by supporting and stimulating the voluntary sector. Would a volunteer tax credit be a positive government initiative to aid the voluntary sector? Carol Cheung of Volunteer Alberta discusses the reasons why this measure could be problematic for the sector.

Karen Franco challenges the voluntary sector to view the current economic environment as an opportunity to strengthen our volunteer programs. Practical tips to help organizations “weather the storm” are offered by Lynne Toupin. Brenda Gallagher, from the Ottawa Chamber of Voluntary Organizations, outlines a Canadian initiative on shared services which has led to the development of a Financial Sustainability Forum.

Communication is an important element for sustaining donor and volunteer commitment. Gina Grosenick identifies ways for organizations to “maximize the limited resources available to them and still get the word out.”

The Community Volunteer Income Tax Program as outlined by Meghann Darroch involves volunteers trained by the Canadian Revenue Agency to assist eligible individuals with completing their tax returns. This benefits the client, the volunteer and the community.

What is the impact of the current economic situation on volunteer programs? Kim Evans provides her perspective.

Looking for a tool to estimate the impact of your volunteers? Check out Lesley Abraham’s book review.

We are witnessing the short-term impact of the economic downturn, personally and within our sector. Are we seeing both the challenges and the opportunities? What will be the long-term impact? Our predictions are as reliable as those of economists forecasting the end of the current recession - only time will tell!

Joan Wyatt  
Editorial Team

## **AN INVESTMENT IN VOLUNTEERISM MAKES GOOD ECONOMIC SENSE**

by Ruth MacKenzie

As the federal government continues to steer our country away from the global economic crisis, it will be looking for more opportunities to save costs, invest for a guaranteed return, utilize and mobilize the strengths of Canadians and enhance the nation's infrastructure to stimulate our economy. An investment in Canada's voluntary sector and its 12 million volunteers is one that encompasses all of the above. Our federal government can do more for this sector, not to show generosity or compassion, but to provide opportunities for driving Canada's national economy in the right direction as part of an effective economic stimulus.

Today, with the support of these volunteers, our country's 161,000 charities and nonprofits contribute \$112 billion in revenue towards the economy. Canada's voluntary sector is a significant component of the country's economic framework and is a bigger contributor to the GDP than Canada's entire manufacturing industry. The sector, with a paid workforce of 2 million Canadians and millions of volunteers, makes up a considerable, yet distinct, component of the labour force of this country.

Organizations, from small food banks to large hospitals, would not be able to provide their services and deliver on their missions without volunteers – active citizens who collectively give more than 2 billion hours of their time. This is particularly true of the over 80,000 organizations with no paid staff that rely solely on the contributions and passion of their volunteers. All of these organizations and their volunteers make our communities better places to live.

With a forecast for economic recession, our civil society and service organizations will be increasingly called upon to support the needs of people in communities across this country. Paradoxically, in tough economic times, the common reaction for governments and corporations is to reduce local community investment and to solely consider the role of the corporate sector as a source of economic stimulus. Real leadership should step outside of this box and consider an investment in the voluntary sector as an added instrument of this stimulus which could provide real returns.

Now, more than ever, the federal government needs to recognize volunteerism as part of the social and economic infrastructure of this country. To do so requires shedding the common perception that volunteerism just happens. In fact, promoting, recruiting, training, engaging and recognizing the efforts of volunteers requires support and expertise that is often unrecognized or

overlooked and definitely under-resourced. An investment in volunteerism will ensure that the efforts and skills of Canada's volunteers will be invested right back into our communities. This will also help our government with its goals, such as creating efficient healthcare and education systems, environmentally sustainable communities, safe neighbourhoods and providing skills training for Canadians.

In the United States, arguably the country that has the biggest hill to climb, Barack Obama quickly promised a volunteer fund as part of the "Serve America Act." This legislation, which was passed in early 2009, supports and utilizes the talents and skills of millions of volunteers from all age groups to tackle the nation's challenges. Under the Act, the government supports important work from tutoring students in poverty-stricken neighbourhoods, to cleaning up polluted rivers and lakes, and training the unemployed with job-related and job-hunting skills. This fund will help organizations of all sizes to increase their capacity to mobilize volunteers while responding to increasing demands on their services. It is exactly the kind of leadership that we need in Canada.

During these times of economic uncertainty and political volatility, the federal government must not forget the role of Canada's volunteers and volunteer-involving organizations – they are an essential part of our nation's social and economic infrastructure. An investment in the voluntary sector promises exponential returns by generating community services, offering skills training for Canadians and building and strengthening social capital. A vibrant and strong Canada will emerge.

*Ruth MacKenzie is the President of Volunteer Canada, a national non-profit organization that promotes volunteerism through research, advocacy, and awareness campaigns.*

## **VOLUNTEER TAX CREDITS – A SURE WAY TO GO?**

by Carol Cheung

Recently, newspapers have been profiling headlines on the economic crisis, layoffs and budgeting. Once in a while you will read an article or two shouting out that volunteers are needed and indicating that if governments implemented a volunteer tax credit, miraculously volunteers would appear! Could the introduction of a tax credit allowing individuals to claim a tax deductible (non-cash) expense for personal time volunteered to registered charities be the answer?

Volunteer Alberta's recent publication "The Potential Impact of Canadian Federal and/or Provincial Tax Credit Incentives for Volunteer Participation" (written by Clifford L. Spyker, CA, and Dr. John Pelozo of Mount Royal College, and funded by The

Muttart Foundation), reviews the existing literature around the subject. The findings from the research suggest that the wide-scale implementation of a tax credit policy for donations of volunteer time is potentially problematic for both nonprofit/voluntary sector organizations and government, and discusses five reasons why this is the case.

The first reason discussed revolves around the difficulty in putting an economic value on donated time. Currently there are many models for measuring donated time, including measuring volunteerism based on the value-added to an organization, measurement based around volunteer program efficiency measures or using an hourly rate. In the latter case, how do you determine the correct hourly rate for a wide range of volunteer positions?

The second reason looks at how regulatory bodies and nonprofit/voluntary sector organizations would comply if volunteer tax credits were introduced. Administration costs for Canada Revenue Agency would likely increase due to the over-valuation of time from donors.

The third topic considers how volunteer motivations will be impacted. If citizens volunteer in an altruistic manner, could the introduction of tax credits reduce the motivation to participate?

The correlation between the donation of time and the donation of money is also explored. A review of the existing research proved that no one conclusion exists on how the two—time and money—are correlated. Some say that the more you volunteer, the more you donate. Other theories suggest the two are net costs and the more you volunteer the less money you will donate.

The last topic looks at the potential transition of volunteerism towards a consumer model, transforming the altruistic action into a market transaction. How will this impact the long-term rates of participation?

The report is aimed at starting informative conversations around the table and summarizes past research around the subject. It suggests that a rash implementation of volunteer tax credits would not suffice as existing research conclusions contradict each other. It is evident that there is no research on best practices which align the implementation of a tax credit as a stimulus for volunteerism.

The report was sent to legislators, shared with nonprofit capacity organizations across Canada and discussed by an advisory group.

To access the full research report and/or summary, please visit [volunteeralberta.ab.ca](http://volunteeralberta.ab.ca).

*Carol Cheung graduated from the University of Alberta with a Commerce degree in December 2008. Although a recent graduate, her work experience with Edmonton Economic Development Corporation, AIESEC and Volunteer Alberta has given her a unique perspective on the nonprofit sector. Currently she works at Volunteer Alberta as the Communications/Marketing Manager and volunteers at various events such as the Edmonton Folk Music Festival.*

## **COUNTING ON VOLUNTEERS TO EASE THE ECONOMIC CRUNCH**

by Karen Franco

We all know that oil prices are slumping, the dollar is soft and layoffs have impacted Canadians from Victoria to Nova Scotia. As our government searches for political solutions to ease the economic burden of this crisis, we must all consider the impact on the non-profit sector. Now more than ever, the importance of the non-profit sector and the valuable role of volunteerism as part of the social and economic infrastructure of this country must be acknowledged.

It is inevitable that this deepening financial crisis has and will continue to place an increased demand and strain on the social services provided by the charitable and non-profit sector. Food banks, shelters and healthcare are all being called upon to meet the urgent needs of those Canadians most deeply affected by this economic crisis. At the same time that our community is demanding more, a large number of non-profit organizations are already facing the hard reality of decreased operational funding as charitable donations fall off and the value of endowment funds are being reduced.

With the release of the Alberta Government's Budget on April 7, 2009, the non-profit sector in this province has been dealt another significant blow with the elimination of the Wildrose Foundation. This citizen board was set up over 25 years ago to distribute lottery funding to the non-profit sector, a task that has now been shifted to the Culture and Community Spirit department of the government. There is much concern throughout the province's non-profit sector that this move will result in the loss of millions of funding dollars.

If the non-profit sector is to survive this new challenge, now is the time when the community needs to step forward and give the most precious gift of all—the gift of time and expertise. This is the resource that will be invaluable to local service

agencies as they respond to the growing needs of the community. Skills and expertise given voluntarily will enable organizations to bridge funding shortfalls and utilize funding for more targeted service delivery programs.

This is by no means a one-sided appeal. There is strong evidence that people who respond to an emergency by rolling up their sleeves and joining with others to do something positive are also improving their own situation by overcoming the feeling of helplessness or powerlessness that a crisis evokes. This same thinking also applies to the current economic situation.

Individual citizens have a desire to make their communities stronger and improve their own personal situations. Through volunteering, especially with others who have mutual concerns or needs, people feel less isolated and more in control; there is a feeling that by working together problems can be fixed. This is the time for agencies and organizations to look for ways to encourage and recruit new volunteers to help them fill the funding gaps. As the threat of more and more layoffs becomes a reality in our community, non-profit organizations can create and develop new volunteer opportunities that will better utilize this growing pool of talented and highly skilled individuals.

Now is the time for non-profit and charitable organizations to create volunteer opportunities that will allow volunteers to fill the employment gaps on their resumes while job hunting, enhance their community contacts and increase their own skills or develop new ones through volunteering. Agencies need to promote and support these volunteer opportunities, which not only enhance the community at large but also offer valuable unpaid work experience. Non-profit organizations should review their own volunteer programs and ensure they offer volunteer positions that allow volunteers to learn a new skill or apply expertise in new ways.

To succeed, organizations must be flexible and supportive enough to allow volunteers to search for work while volunteering. This may mean allowing volunteers to receive phone calls from prospective employers while on duty, adjusting schedules to accommodate a job interview, or preparing formal letters of reference for valued volunteers. This supportive environment, coupled with duties the new volunteer enjoys, may win you a long-term volunteer even after new employment is found.

Our neighbours to the south have already begun to identify plans for recovery under the leadership of President Barack Obama who has called his nation's attention to the importance of service through volunteerism. Spending the day before his inauguration engaged in a variety of volunteer tasks, Obama acknowledged to Americans, "If we're waiting for somebody else to do something, it never gets done. We're going to have to take responsibility, all of us." This is exactly the way Canadians need to think and the non-profit organizations that rely on volunteers must be prepared to re-evaluate their own strategies in order to survive in this new reality.

*Karen Franco is the Communications Director for Volunteer Calgary. She has spent 15 years engaged in communications, marketing and public relations, working in both the private and nonprofit sectors.*

## **MANAGING PEOPLE THROUGH TURBULENT TIMES**

by Lynne Toupin

When you pair an increase in demand for services with a decrease in available funding, it sounds like we are heading toward a perfect storm. However, it is a familiar refrain in the sector, this notion of having to do more with less. It is pretty much our modus operandi regardless of the state of the economy. So instead of lamenting this fact, I would like to offer a few practical ideas that may help your organization to better weather the storm.

### **Do not lose sight of your organization's most valuable asset – its people**

It is true that the stress of running an organization can be overwhelming at the best of times. However it is vital to not lose sight of the importance and value of your employees, especially in times when they are potentially feeling added pressure, stress or even worry over the security of their own jobs. While you should not make promises that you cannot keep, you should recognize that some of your employees might be feeling vulnerable to the possibility of job losses within your organization. Be honest with them about how your organization is doing, and attentive to any expressed concerns about the security of their jobs. While you do not want to scare them into looking for another job, you do not want to mislead your staff into thinking that everything is

going to be alright if your organization is indeed at real risk of having to lay off employees.

If you do find yourself in the difficult position of having to lay off staff, make every effort not to burden remaining staff with the extra work. There are limits to doing more with less and your remaining staff may be unprepared or unqualified to take on any additional responsibilities. If you think the work can be taken on by a volunteer, look carefully at the job tasks, assess the risk of having a volunteer take on that role and consider how the volunteer will be effectively supervised. You may find that managing a volunteer who is not right for the job will end up creating more work for yourself and the rest of your staff.

### **Remain committed to good human resource practices**

While it might easily end up on the back burner in times like these, it is important to stay committed to good HR practices. This could be as simple as taking the time to recognize employees for a job well done and reaffirm the impact that their work has on the organization and your clients. You would be surprised how far recognition can go to boost morale and keep your staff productive and engaged. Remember though that these affirmations need to be personalized. For some it may take the form of a public acknowledgement during a staff meeting, for others it might be a hand-written thank you card or the opportunity to leave early on a Friday afternoon.

Also remember to keep up with your staff's training and professional development. While your budget may not allow you to pay for staff to attend courses or conferences at this time, there are a number of effective (and often inexpensive) ways to develop your employees and build your organization's internal capacity. This could include setting up coaching or mentoring relationships between co-workers, encouraging job-shadowing or hosting informal lunch and learn sessions. Check out the HR Council for the Voluntary & Non-profit Sector's HR Toolkit at <http://hrcouncil.ca/hr-toolkit/home.cfm> for more information.

### **Explore new ways of doing things**

Job-sharing is a growing trend in many non-profits not only because more staff are juggling careers and family obligations, but also because they can see the benefits of offering flexible work arrangements to their employees. Job-sharing can increase productivity, reduce absenteeism and turnover and it can be an effective way to retain valued employees.

Another worthwhile option is to consider the possibility of sharing services or

resources with other organizations. The HR Council is partnering with a number of other organizations on a project exploring a range of shared service models that organizations could employ to reduce costs and increase efficiency. For our part, we are looking specifically at how organizations can effectively pool their resources to share the expertise of a highly qualified HR professional at a fraction of the cost that they would incur if each were hiring an HR specialist individually. Some of the other organizations involved in the project are considering other shared service models including how to effectively share office space, offer employees access to a pooled benefits plan or develop a platform to share training, learning and mentoring programs across organizations.

### **Final words**

No one can predict the length or severity of this recession but what we do know is that our sector, like many others, will be affected. Some of us were around during the last recession in 1990, when unemployment rates went as high as 11.5%. Our sector was called upon not only to provide a range of services to those in need, but also, in some instances, to create jobs for the jobless. In other cases, organizations lost their funding and employees lost their jobs. Over the months to come, the HR Council will be monitoring the effect of the recession on this sector's workforce as well as providing practical HR information to help managers navigate through these turbulent times.

*Lynne Toupin is the Executive Director of the HR Council for the Voluntary & Non-profit Sector. She has led a number of non-profit organizations over her career including the Canadian Co-operative Association and the National Anti-Poverty Organization. She co-chaired the Accord Table for the Voluntary Sector Initiative, which led to a written agreement between the Government of Canada and the voluntary and non-profit sector.*

## **SHARED SERVICES IN OTTAWA THROUGH A FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY FORUM**

by Brenda Gallagher

The Ottawa Chamber of Voluntary Organizations (OCVO) participated in Shared Services: Adding Value to Non-Profit Organizations from April 2008 to April 2009. This project was funded by the Social Development Partnership Program of the Ministry of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada and managed by United Community Services Co-op (UCS Co-op) in British Columbia.

This project was intended to grow the knowledge and understanding of concrete and practical methods for non-profit and community organizations to work

together, specifically through shared services and collective business activities. OCVO was one of five regional partners involved in this project (along with Newfoundland and Labrador, Alberta, Nova Scotia and Manitoba) that had expressed a keen interest in exploring the Co-op's shared services model.

Regional partners were tasked with the following responsibilities:

- conduct research on how a potential shared services/collective business activities model would operate;
- share and review information and best practices around shared services and collective business activities;
- incorporate contextual and best practices research into a concept paper for a collaborative business model for their region;
- conduct a stakeholder engagement process based on the concept paper; and
- develop a complete business plan for a shared services/collective business activities model.

OCVO staff, volunteers and consultants researched a number of shared services projects which were successful and discussed what concept would work best in our region, taking into account Ottawa's bilingual identity, culture and the impact of both municipal and federal governments. Once the initial research was complete, OCVO proposed to develop and test a model for enhancing the capacity of organizations in the voluntary sector along a number of key dimensions.

The initial concept would develop a program to address the critical importance of resource development in achieving financial viability in organizations across the sector. This would require a multi-pronged approach so members of the broader voluntary sector with differing needs at various stages would receive the support they need. Many supportive mechanisms would serve a range of needs and sophistication. For example, developing a strategy for organizations that need basic levels of information and skill development would involve an educational approach. The level, medium and intensity of learning would vary. Some organizations would be best served through formal workshops or peer learning, others by an e-based tool kit of reference material and some through ten hours of consulting time per month.

The concept assumed that organizations would want to access one or more of the following levels of service.

1. Assessment and analysis
2. Education
3. Mentoring
4. Connecting
5. Pooling, sharing, exchanging and buying

The concept was tested for initial feasibility via a survey. The goal of the survey was to determine the needs in the community, along the dimensions mentioned above, the willingness to participate and the preferred methods to finance and provide the services.

Over 90 organizations participated in the survey to some degree. Unfortunately, only 36 organizations provided sufficient information from which conclusions could be drawn. Many organizations indicated an interest in actively engaging in a process where they can enhance skills, as well as obtain practical information and support regarding different aspects of financial sustainability. There is a sense that many are seeking a forum that allows them to connect with other professionals in the diverse non-profit sector to share ideas, thoughts and challenges around sustainability and other issues.

In response to this survey, OCVO is developing an eight-part series on financial sustainability, offered over 12 months. Organizations will be asked to commit to participating in the entire series. The series would include the following components:

- a series of practical forums on a variety of topics linked to financial sustainability;
- modules that are led by expert speakers on specific sustainability concerns and an opportunity for participants to engage with each other; and
- an electronic chat room and web site that posts articles relating to the topic of sustainability, providing a way for participants to stay connected between sessions.

The eight proposed modules include the following:

1. Grant Writing
2. IT Capabilities, or How to Make Technology Work for You
3. Taking Advantage of Your Assets (including discussion on property and leasing arrangements)
4. Social Enterprise
5. Accounting Practices and Earned Revenue (including a focus on CRA and tax laws)
6. How to Search for Money
7. Working in Collaboration with Others
8. Applying Business Principles to Non-Profit Organizations

OCVO intends to complete the planning of the Financial Sustainability Forum over the summer and to begin offering sessions in the fall of 2009.

*Brenda Gallagher is the coordinator of the Ottawa Chamber of Voluntary Organizations. She has worked in the voluntary sector for over 15 years in communications and project management.*

## **COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER INCOME TAX PROGRAM: SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES THROUGH TOUGH ECONOMIC TIMES**

by Meghann Darroch

Since 1971, the Community Volunteer Income Tax Program (CVITP) has been a national, community based outreach program sponsored by the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA). Under this program, volunteers working with various organizations across Canada are trained by the CRA to complete returns dealing with simple tax situations. They donate their time and efforts to assist eligible individuals in their communities to prepare their income tax and benefit return.

The objective of the CVITP is to help eligible individuals who have a simple tax situation, cannot complete their own tax return and are unable to pay for assistance. Seniors, students, people with disabilities, new Canadians and low-income families are eligible for this free service. Volunteers do not complete income tax and benefit returns for deceased persons, bankrupt individuals, individuals with capital gains/losses or individuals with business/rental income and expenses.

The Coalition of Community Health and Resource Centres in Ottawa has been a long time partner of the CRA, coordinating volunteers and offering hundreds of free volunteer income tax clinics to those residents of Ottawa requiring support. Organizations interested in hosting the CVITP have the option of providing drop-in, drop-off/pick-up and by appointment only clinics. They can also choose to hold clinics on weekdays, evenings and on weekends, depending on their clientele's needs.

In 2009, the Nepean, Rideau & Osgoode Community Resource Centre (NROCRC) expanded their free income tax clinic times and locations to meet the needs of their catchment area's considerable population. Partnered with Nepean Housing, Osgoode Youth Association and the Youth Employment Resource Centre, NROCRC was able to offer 21 clinics around four different communities.

In January, we began recruiting volunteers for our free Community Volunteer Income Tax Program through the agency's website, local newspapers, flyers, Volunteer Ottawa and returning volunteers from the CRA. Two short-term employment opportunities arose for "Clinic Coordinators"; these positions were created to ensure clinics ran smoothly. The community's response to the request for support was overwhelming. In fact, there were so many individuals expressing an interest to volunteer that some were placed on a waiting list for next year's program and shared between host agencies.

Volunteers attended full-day training which was provided by CRA and received a training package complete with a CD manual, forms and practice cases. This training was followed by a volunteer meeting which was attended by a local CVITP representative, community partners and agency staff. The purpose of the meeting was to ensure volunteers had their schedules, were familiar with their Clinic Coordinators, felt prepared for the clinics and were able to learn about community resources so they could make appropriate referrals when required.

Accounting students from colleges and universities, high school teachers, new immigrants, retired and unemployed professionals all committed their time and effort to make these free income tax clinics a huge success! Many volunteers were eager to gain work experience, expressing that they had had a hard time finding employment with the recent downturn in the economy.

Zafar Alavi, one of our volunteers and Clinic Coordinators commented on his experience: "All my life, I was in the public service. I was a teacher and now I'm basically retired and I still want to continue to offer my services in the area of my expertise." Zafar mentioned that he felt compelled to assist those requiring support with their finances because he knows some people cannot afford to pay full price at mainstream tax service agencies. He wanted to support the CVITP because it is a free program and allows for more time to work with the clients to ensure their needs are met. As Canadians continue to feel the repercussions of the economic downturn, these programs are becoming more and more invaluable to a growing, lower income population.

Having a wide range of volunteers with various linguistic skills and work experience really benefited our program, allowing those with language barriers to access this service. All community members accessing this service were given feedback forms and were invited to comment on their experience. One member wrote: "It is very important to have this service. Many clients are on assistance and can't afford to pay to get it done."

Despite attempts to accommodate all requests for support, the clinics (most by appointment only) were quickly booked to capacity. It is clear that this is



a much needed service based on the total number of calls. NROCRC will look at expanding the number of clinics, times and locations based on participant postal codes, partnership opportunities and resource capacity. This year, the centre met the needs of approximately 200 community members.

Through the dedication of volunteers, over 500,000 Canadians will meet their tax obligations, and will receive the tax credits and benefits they are entitled to.

*Meghann Darroch is a Community Developer with the Nepean, Rideau & Osgoode Community Resource Centre in Ottawa.*

## **GETTING YOUR MESSAGE OUT IN TOUGH ECONOMIC TIMES**

by Georgina Grosenick

In tough economic times, voluntary sector leaders look for ways to economize and maximize available and shrinking resources. When making budgetary cuts, administrative and promotional expenses are often the first on the chopping block. Ironically, reducing the communicative capacity of an organization often further threatens the viability and sustainability of that organization and its programs. This article looks at the importance of communication and promotion for volunteer based organizations and identifies ways that managers of voluntary and nonprofit organizations can maximize the limited resources available to them and still get the word out.

UK scholar, David Deacon, convincingly argues that public communication is the “lifeline” or “oxygen” of charitable and voluntary activity. After all, the manner in which an organization communicates internally and externally has direct impact on

- its funding, both public and private;
- who becomes involved as volunteers, board members and staff;
- how the community and larger public views the organization, its efforts and its purpose; and
- what policymakers consider important issues to attend to and address.

In short, communication affects the ability of the organization to achieve its mission. With so much riding on how an organization communicates, prudent managers ensure that adequate resources are committed to this important function and facilitate strategic decision making around what, and to whom, the organization communicates.

Research shows that voluntary sector managers recognize the importance of developing and supporting strategic communication efforts. However, few have an integrated communications program within their organization due to limited resources and lack of capacity, both of which are exacerbated in a tough economic climate. What follows is a list of recommendations and suggestions for organizations with limited budgets to integrate communication planning into their operation and to maximize available resources to promote the organization, its programs and its issues.

1. Recognize the importance of communication. *The Jossey-Bass Guide to Strategic Communications for Nonprofits* states that to be effective, communication must be considered by an organization to be important, must be fully integrated, must be consistent and must be ongoing. Ensure that there is a commitment at all levels of the organization to support effective and strategic communication efforts.
2. Appoint a manager to oversee and implement communication planning. If the resources are not available in-house to fund this position, look to the volunteer or potential volunteer base. The current economic climate may be opportunistic with numerous underemployed communications graduates and specialists willing to undertake volunteer work to build their resumes.
3. Develop a communications plan that works within the budget and capacities of the organization. While we often think that expensive media campaigns are required to promote an organization's efforts, there are many other tactics that can be just as, or more, effective with target audiences or key supporters. Spitfire Strategies ([www.spitfirestrategies.org](http://www.spitfirestrategies.org)) provides a free online tool called the “SMART Chart” that offers a step-by-step guide for effective communication planning for voluntary sector managers.
4. Communicate with volunteers and donors regularly. In stressed economic times people are less willing to part with their hard earned money and time unless they feel a deep and personal connection to an organization. One way to economically maintain the organization's connection with current supporters is through regular email contact that promotes the latest successes and asks for continued support.
5. Proactively manage media coverage. If properly managed, media coverage can be a cost-effective way to promote an organization and its issues to the larger public and policymakers. On the other hand, negative coverage can severely affect an organization's reputation and legitimacy. Proactive media management includes media monitoring, maintaining a

media contact list, developing relationships and pitching stories to local journalists, appointing and training media spokespeople and creating a crisis communication plan. If these skills are not available in-house, invest in developing this capacity. Many universities and colleges offer public relations and media training courses through their continuing education programs at a reasonable fee. Alternatively, meet with the communications department at the local university and explore opportunities within practicum or community service learning course offerings.

6. Create a speakers bureau. Volunteers and clients of an organization can be excellent ambassadors and resources to promote the organization within the community. Identify potential speakers for public engagements and ensure that they are well informed about the organization, its mission and its key messages.
7. Update the organization's website. An organization's website is often the first point of contact that potential staff, volunteers, donors, funders and media have with that organization. A poorly maintained website with obsolete information reflects badly on the organization and neglects important opportunities to inform, educate and inspire people to support its efforts. Ensure that the organization's website is dynamic and that news and information on current activities is posted within hours of release. If necessary web skills or funding are not available in house, look to the volunteer base or to partnering with a local service provider.

Effective communication is central to any nonprofit organization's viability and legitimacy in the current economic climate. While many organizations may have to financially limit resources, there are many creative and economical ways to communicate to potential clients, volunteers, donors, funders and policy makers. Foremost is a commitment within the organization to make communications an important and fully integrated priority and then utilize the organization's resources and capacities in a manner that best promotes the organization and its mission.

Reference:  
The Jossey-Bass Guide to Strategic Communication for Nonprofits. K. Bonk, H. Griggs, E. Tynes. 1999.

*Georgina Grosenick is a PhD Candidate in Communication at Carleton University's School of Journalism and Communication. Her research focuses on the advocacy and strategic communication practices of nonprofit organizations. Her dissertation will look at the factors that enable or limit successful advocacy for nonprofits in the anti-poverty, housing and homelessness sector. Gina worked for over 20 years with various national nonprofit organizations as both a lobbyist and communicator.*

## PEER EXPERT

by Kim Evans

### What has been the impact of the economy on your volunteer programs?

#### Response:

During the summer of 2008, when gas prices were rapidly on the rise, my staff put together a discussion group with our Meals on Wheels volunteers to discuss the benefits and the challenges of our service.

Although we wanted to recognize the hard work of our volunteers, we were also hoping to get their feedback to ensure that we were meeting their needs. At the meeting, we provided lunch and the chance for volunteers to network. We also provided questions to keep the discussion on track and to help the volunteers feel comfortable in giving their opinions.

We wanted to address the rising cost of gas. We were concerned that the increase in gas prices would drastically affect our volunteer numbers, as our volunteers are not reimbursed for their mileage. We had also heard that some of the Meals on Wheels programs in western Canada were closing due to increasing costs.

We found that the majority of volunteers stayed on but were less likely to take on extra routes in an emergency. Some also refused to deliver on routes that required driving long distances to rural areas. Since these instances were rare, we did end up reimbursing some of their mileage. However, as we talked to the volunteers, it was strongly noted that they were volunteering to help people and were committed to staying on without compensation.

Recruiting for new Meals on Wheels drivers became more of a challenge with people stating that they could not afford to volunteer for that position. Gas prices have stopped rising and now we face an economy in deep recession. Hard hit by the economy, will people still volunteer their time when there is so much uncertainty? What we have found is that the recession has affected our service in both negative and positive ways.

One of the major challenges has been the effect on our corporate volunteering. Some of our smaller companies have had to stop volunteer programs due to downsizing and layoffs. Many employees are now too busy to allow time to help us deliver meals. Some companies have also closed down or moved away from the area. Some of our financially stronger companies have continued to stay on and we have had to focus on strengthening and maintaining the partnerships.

Trying to establish new partnerships has been very difficult when many

organizations are focused on keeping their companies afloat versus thinking about the volunteer time they can offer to the community.

In these times we have had to be creative, veering from our normal tight scheduling to being more flexible. Instead of companies delivering once a week, we now get them to deliver every second week or once a month. We have approached people who are now working from home and who do not mind taking an hour or two of their time, once or twice a month to give back to their community.

We also have taken on many short-term volunteers – the people who have been laid off and are looking for work or waiting to go back to school. Although this has caused more work on the staff's part, it does ensure that our meal routes get covered and our clients are fed. There has been an increase in college and university placement volunteers and we have expanded their role from working within the office to assisting with service delivery. In addition, we have noticed that there are new people signing up to volunteer who have jobs and who consider themselves to be in a fortunate position. Due to the recession, they now have new concern for their community and want to help others because they can.

Along with living in a tight economy, our elderly population is growing and our clients need us more than ever. In these times, we have realized that we must accept change, become more flexible with scheduling, adapt to the trends and try to always keep one step ahead.

*Kim Evans has been the Administrator for the Whitby office of Community Care Durham for the past five years and has over fifteen years experience in the volunteer and community development sector. Community Care Durham is a charitable organization that provides home support, respite and mental health services to more than 6,000 adults and their caregivers who have needs related to physical disability, aging and/or mental health.*

## BOOK REVIEW

by Lesley Abraham

*What Counts – Social Accounting for Nonprofits by Jack Quarter, Laurie Mook and Betty Jane Richmond, 2002*

Volunteers provide both tangible and intangible benefits for organizations, but how are volunteer contributions to be measured when it comes to financial accounting? One book that offers possible answers to this question is *What Counts – Social Accounting for Nonprofits* by Jack Quarter, Laurie Mook and

Betty Jane Richmond. The authors, researchers from York University and the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto, have put together a comprehensive and detailed account of different methods for measuring volunteer contributions. Rather than simply performing basic calculations, this research aims to transform traditional accounting mechanisms in ways that account for social, environmental and economic impacts. The book presents three adapted accounting statements which fit into the emerging field of social accounting:

1. Socioeconomic Impact Statement (adaptation of an income statement)
2. Socioeconomic Resource Statement (adaptation of a balance sheet)
3. Expanded Value Added Statement (adaptation of a value added statement).

These adapted methods are not just addendums to accounting statements, but are actually transformations of them. For example, the Expanded Value Added Statement aims to calculate the value created by an organization when it adds value to raw materials, products and services through labour and capital. In essence, the EVAS moves away from the standard accounting model which was developed for private organizations and towards one which includes non-monetary social impacts such as volunteers as well as economic ones – a “double bottom line.”

The methods offered in this book also take advantage of technology by offering access to the free Volunteers Count software (available online at [www.volunteerscount.net](http://www.volunteerscount.net)) which helps organizations track their volunteer contributions in ways that can be used for social accounting purposes. For anyone who is interested in looking for a better way to estimate the impact of their volunteers, this book is an easy-to-read and practical resource.

## ITEMS OF INTEREST

TechSoup Canada, TechSoup Global's new Canadian partner, opened its virtual doors at Toronto's Centre for Social Innovation making a wide range of donated software available to Canadian charities, non-profits and libraries. [www.techsoupcanada.ca](http://www.techsoupcanada.ca)

### **Better Together: Shared HR Services for Non-profits:**

[http://www.hrcouncil.ca/about/documents/Shared\\_HR\\_Services\\_Framework.pdf](http://www.hrcouncil.ca/about/documents/Shared_HR_Services_Framework.pdf)

# JOURNAL OF VOLUNTEER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

Editorial Process and Guidelines for Authors

## Objective

The Journal of Volunteer Resources Management is intended:

1. to serve as a credible source of information on the management of volunteers in Canada;
2. to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas and to encourage networking among managers of volunteers;
3. to provide a professional development tool for managers of volunteers;
4. to recognize and encourage Canadian talent in the field of management of volunteers;
5. to include in each issue at least two articles that will consider different views on a specific and predetermined theme.

## Target Audience

The Journal's intended audience includes managers of volunteers, educators, media and funders of not-for-profit organizations across the country.

## Submissions

All manuscripts will be accepted on diskette or via e-mail in either Microsoft Word or Word Perfect. Submissions should be written according to "Canadian Style - A Guide to Writing and Editing" - Secretary of State, Dundurn Press. External reviewers may be engaged to review content if deemed advisable by the committee.

The revised draft is edited for clarity and consistency by the Editorial Team.

The edited version is returned to the author for acceptance along with an approval form for signature.

The signed form is to be returned to the Editorial Team within a week along with any suggestions for final revisions.

## Format and Style

Authors are asked to respect the following word counts:

	Words	Pages
<b>Lead Article</b>	1000	5-6
<b>Secondary Article</b>	700-800	2-3
<b>Book Review</b>	150	1

The lead article will look at the topic in some depth and will normally require the author to conduct research into current trends and perspectives on the subject.

The secondary article will adopt a more practical approach, including personal experiences and opinions.

## Advertising

Limited advertising space will be allowed in the Journal, for materials of direct relevance to managers of volunteer service, and as long as it conforms to the guidelines set out by the Editorial Team.

## Guidelines:

1. Only ¼ page and ½ page ads will be accepted.
2. Ad must be camera-ready.
3. A maximum of one page of ads will be permitted per issue.
4. Job ads are not recommended.
5. Cost is to be determined by the Editorial Team.

## LOOKING AHEAD

*International Volunteer Managers Day*

**November 5**

<http://volunteermanagersday.org/>

*International Volunteer Day*

**December 5**

[www.worldvolunteerweb.org](http://www.worldvolunteerweb.org)

Fall 2009 PAVR-O workshops in Markham, Ontario:  
Advocating for your Position and the Profession (September 24)  
Building Bridges, Making Connections (October 29)  
Visit [www.pavro.on.ca](http://www.pavro.on.ca) for more details.

## DEADLINES FOR SUBMISSIONS & THEMES

Issue	Deadline	Theme
Volume 17.3	articles due end of September 2009	Boomer Volunteer Engagement
Volume 18.1	articles due end of December 2009	Going Green
Volume 18.2	articles due end of March 2010	Advocacy
Volume 18.3	articles due end of August 2010	Recruitment and Screening