



# Volunteer Connections:

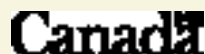
New strategies for involving older adults

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## Introduction

All the ingredients are in place for a renaissance in the world of volunteering and Canada's aging population will be a vital element of that rebirth. Canadians who volunteer their time tend to be older and as our population matures into a growing force, ripe with potential, a true Canadian natural resource will become available for the voluntary sector.

Baby Boomers—and lots of them—will be in a position where they can give their time, skills and energy. But are non-profit and voluntary organizations ready to harness the power of the Baby Boomers? What can be done to maximize this rich potential of volunteer energy? How can organizations successfully recruit Baby Boomers and encourage them to factor time for volunteering into their active lives? This manual is designed to explore those questions and help prepare non-profit and voluntary organizations to recruit, train and retain volunteers age 50+.

Canadian society is dominated by nearly 10 million Baby Boomers—those born between 1947 and 1966. The front-end Baby Boomers (i.e. adults aged 50+) are in the second half of their lives. Many are actively planning their retirement years. This generation is different from those preceding it. By 2006, our country will count approximately 15 million Canadians over the age of 50 getting ready to retire younger, healthier, better educated and wealthier than ever before and with a set of attitudes and values about the world that sets them apart from other age groups.

Baby Boomers continue to reap the benefits of growing up in an era of unprecedented prosperity. As they age, they can be expected to continue to seek activities that challenge them, give them flexibility and an opportunity to expand their intellectual and physical horizons.

This discussion must be set in the larger context of volunteering in Canada. That world is changing with an increasing number of hours being contributed by a shrinking number of volunteers. In 2000, more than 6.5 million Canadians volunteered their time to organizations and worthy causes. Yet this number signifies a decrease of one million volunteers since 1997 when nearly 7.5 million Canadians volunteered for groups and organizations. This is a worrisome trend; it will be even more so if it develops into one of continuing decline in volunteer involvement.

The 2000 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating (NSGVP) serves as a wake-up call for non-profit and voluntary organizations to get ready for both the changes that are imminent and the opportunities such changes enable. Non-profit and voluntary organizations cannot afford to be complacent. Set against a backdrop of possibly declining numbers of volunteers, it has never been more important to understand and harness the values, power and sheer numbers of Baby Boomers as the “older adult volunteers” of tomorrow.

Although volunteer numbers have declined substantially since 1997, the 2000 NSGVP indicates that the hours given to volunteer work have actually increased. These statistics confirm a well known phenomenon; faced with the need for more help, many Managers of Volunteers (and people with responsibility for volunteer programming—often volunteers themselves) turn to existing volunteers and ask for more time rather than looking to increase the number and diversity of their volunteer pool. And why not? The current volunteers are tried and true, they know the work and they are committed to the cause. Asking them to contribute a little more time is the easiest and likely most efficient way to get the work done. But what are the longer-term consequences of such a strategy? Already we see in the statistics a drop off of the number of people volunteering. How long can the existing cohort of volunteers carry the full weight of organizational volunteer needs? While no one knows for sure what full capacity looks like, we suspect that today's "super" volunteers—that remarkable 2 million Canadian volunteers who do the majority of all the volunteer work in Canada—are beginning to hit their limits. What can we as a voluntary sector do to enrich and diversify the supply of volunteers?

The volunteers upon whom organizations have come to depend over the years—the post WWII cohort—are aging. Now in their late 70s or 80s, they are leaving the volunteer ranks and, as a result, increasing the need to find their replacements. The post-war generation has played a fascinating role in the history of social development in Canada. They were born and raised during a depression, fought a world war, returned to create a booming economy and a young modern country, devised and supported a remarkable social welfare and health care safety net. Not surprising, in the light of all this, they are truly amazing volunteers. The post WWII generation set the bar high for volunteer involvement and their readiness to give time, money and energy to countless causes has played a large part in the evolution of Canada's vibrant voluntary sector.

To coin a phrase, Baby Boomers are a rather different "kettle of fish." Now on the brink of retirement, they are *potentially* positioned to replicate and augment the Canadian volunteer environment. But this cohort is different than their predecessors. They are more demanding—seeking opportunities for growth and uses of their time that are new and innovative and looking for interesting and meaningful experiences.

There is no doubt that Baby Boomers will want to channel some of their energies into volunteering. But how much? Will they step forward en masse? Will they seamlessly move into active volunteering in retirement or will their relative wealth, options and energies pull them in other directions? If they continue to volunteer in retirement at the rate they have done in their 40s and 50s then more than one in three will do so—more than half of those being people of higher education and income. Even if Baby Boomer volunteer rates drop to those of today's seniors (people currently over the age of 65), one in five will volunteer. Given the large number of Boomers within the total population,

no matter what their volunteer rate, they will introduce a large number of potential new recruits to the voluntary sector over the next five to ten years. The challenge for the voluntary sector will be to understand their needs and to create an environment ready to benefit from their unique kind of contribution.

The purpose of this manual is twofold. First, to introduce a discussion about the trends, opportunities and challenges inherent in thinking about engaging the senior of tomorrow, today's Baby Boomers, as volunteers. The manual will present a profile of Baby Boomers, explore both statistics and some new thinking about who they are, what motivates them and what they want. Second, the manual will put forward the volunteer management implications for community-based organizations of these "facts and figures."

#### **CANADA, BABY BOOMERS AND VOLUNTEERISM-- CHALLENGE AND RESPONSE**

Change—unprecedented change—is on the horizon. As we move into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the population ages, Canada will be home to more seniors than ever before. In 2002, five million Canadians were over the age of 50. By 2006, they will be almost 15 million strong.

This group of mature, yet energetic, people are more active and involved than any other generation of older adults we've ever seen. Overall they are better educated, possess stronger voices and have higher profiles and skill levels than members of previous generations. Most importantly, as author and economist David Foot points out, "sheer numbers separate the Baby Boomers from other groups of Canadians." Baby Boomers presently account for well over 30% of the Canadian population—and this percentage is growing.

For those recruiting this group to volunteer the potential is profound—a large pool of highly skilled, capable, active people many of whom have now retired from the work environment, many more who are preparing for retirement or gearing down their professional obligations. What could be better?

A look at the full picture, however, tells us that current strategies for recruiting volunteers from the ranks of Canada's 50+ age group will need to be re-thought if voluntary and non-profit organizations are going to capture the interests and accommodate the needs, desires and ambitions of this group. We need to keep our eyes firmly fixed on the future aspirations and abilities of the country's Baby Boomers so that as they begin to think about retirement and leave the workforce, volunteering and community service will be a real and viable option on their menu of possibilities.





## Thinking About Today's Older Adult Volunteer

It is helpful to pause and consider the volunteerism dynamics of the unique generation of WWII retirees preceding the Baby Boomers. That group set the bar for good works. Returning after the war, they had strong values about community and helping others. They demanded that government provide a social safety net to its citizens and they set in motion what was to become a comprehensive health care plan for all Canadians. Today, older Canadians—currently aged 65+—present an interesting picture when it comes to volunteering. While their volunteer rate has begun to diminish as we saw a drop from a participation rate of 23% in 1997 to a surprising—and worrisome—18% in 2000, those that do volunteer consistently contribute the largest number of hours. These volunteers form a subset of people on whom many non-profit and voluntary organizations place considerable expectations to give more time. And they respond. In the context of a 26% volunteer rate across all age groups in 2000, seven percent of Canadians—the majority of them older adults—contributed more than 73% of all the volunteer hours given that year.

Whether as parents or older siblings, today's seniors are the role models for the Baby Boom generation and the bellwether for patterns of involvement and for successes and barriers to volunteer involvement. The unknown equation is whether Baby Boomers will take on the well-established roles of today's "super-volunteers" (now in their 70s and 80s) as they move into a post-labour force, or whether they will continue to break the mould and create a new era of community engagement and social responsibility.

## **The Volunteer Management Implications:**

- Many organizations have become complacent because there has always been a steady supply of volunteers—mostly older adults—enticed through word of mouth, personal recruitment or requests from their churches. These methods are no longer adequate and will not work effectively with Baby Boomers.
- Although organizations have benefited remarkably from the contributions of seniors as volunteers, a rather homogeneous, changeless quality to volunteer programming has resulted. Managers of Volunteers need to rethink many aspects of their volunteer programs with the 'new' senior on the horizon—recruitment, position design, recognition will need to be reviewed.
- Many organizations simply do not have adequate numbers of volunteers to keep their programs running nor the capacity to find new ones. Managers must react to the sobering information released in the 2000 NSGVP that seven percent of Canadians give 73% of the volunteering hours in Canada “leaving a real vulnerability in the voluntary sector,” (Hall, 2001). Are they depending on the 'same old' volunteer? Have they diversified the volunteers in the organization? Are long-term volunteers starting to retire, or worse, burn out?
- Baby Boomers are going to want to change the policies and the procedures that were implemented by their parents 20, 30, or 40 years ago because they are different—not so willing to accept the status quo and too busy to fit into the accepted volunteering mores that exist today. If change isn't made, Managers of Volunteers will simply hear a chorus of “that's not for me!”
- Organizations need to develop two different, and yet complementary, volunteer management approaches. In the short term, older adult volunteers will continue to come forward in rather small numbers but with high interest and a readiness to give lots of time. This means organizations must continue to devote energies to the recruitment and recognition of the current senior volunteer. On the other hand, it appears that in the near future the amount of time and kind of volunteer experiences being sought by Baby Boomer older adults will change dramatically. This challenges organizations to examine job design and to create more short term and episodic volunteer opportunities with explicit outcomes and benefits described while not abandoning the traditional strategies employed to manage volunteer programming.
- The actual number of available older/retired volunteers may increase dramatically as Baby Boomers leave the job market. This signals needed changes to recruitment from the perspective of having more people to choose from—albeit fussier and harder to manage ones. The clever organization will absorb and prepare for both these scenarios by creating a level of fine detail in volunteer programming that reflects the changes on the horizon as Baby Boomers enter retirement.

## The Baby Boomers' Volunteering Environment

The Canadian population is aging. In fact, the world population is aging—rapidly. “Population aging is unprecedented, without parallel in the history of humanity,” says a United Nations report (UN Madrid 2002). By 2050, there will be more than two billion people over the age of 60 compared with 629 million in the world today. And this is going to affect volunteering. Whether their volunteer patterns change dramatically or not, Baby Boomers will certainly face a different context than their parents. As the population ages, many retired Baby Boomers will still find themselves with parents to care for—parents needing health and social care at unprecedented levels. As many Baby Boomers had their own children later than earlier generations did, they may also find themselves still parenting relatively young children while in their retirement years. Baby Boomers will find themselves taking care of others but there will be fewer people to take care of them.

The emergence of a significant number of “old old” people will subject the health care system to serious challenges. The labour force in Canada is also undergoing massive changes and a number of sectors expect to experience worker shortages with the exodus of the Baby Boomers. Immigration patterns continue to change and as more non-Canadians enter the labour market and society they bring with them family members needing integration, services, health care. The percentage of immigrants and current seniors who do not speak English already poses a real challenge to non-profit and voluntary organizations: to the services they are providing, and how they recruit, train, retain and recognize new volunteers from this group.

A growing “underclass” has emerged in Canada and the U.S. also—a distressingly high number of people who have been shut out of the progress and benefits of the technology revolution and general increase in wealth and well-being experienced in our countries.

The impact of environmental issues are close to the hearts of Baby Boomers as fears about global warming, clean water and air, genetically modified food and biological issues are prevalent.

Present for some time and compounded by the events of September 11, 2001, the spectre of terrorism, instability and war at home and around the world marks real change to the relative era of peace and security experienced by most Canadian Baby Boomers through their youth. All of these social trends contribute to a community perspective that is marked by constant change, serious and seemingly impossible to manage social problems, and health and education systems engaged in huge reforms.

The voluntary sector is on the frontline of identifying, responding to, and ameliorating these and other trends. Baby Boomers—as always it seems—are in a unique position. They have contributed to the evolution of many of the challenges we will face in the next ten years. They have benefited from, and some would say even taken for granted,

the health and education systems as well as infrastructure services such as water, electricity and media. As they themselves move into retirement and begin to turn to government to use rather than deliver a vast array of health and human support services, they will place systems of all types under incalculable pressure. They face a Canada never in more need of volunteers. They are, potentially, the volunteers that will be needed.

### **The Volunteer Management Implications:**

- Recruitment will be more competitive than ever before as the “super” volunteers retire from volunteering and organizations begin to compete with each other for new volunteers. Program managers will need to be innovative and cutting edge around the provision of great volunteer programming because there will be lots of competition from other organizations for volunteers.
- Organizations serving the “old old” will now be under even greater pressure as the aging population balloons and requires more support. This may create opportunities for more peer support.
- Organizations should consider developing and implementing family volunteering opportunities as we see an increase in multi-generations living together and providing support for each other.
- Managers of Volunteers in health related volunteering might well find there is a shortage of volunteers due to Baby Boomers’ preoccupation with caring for aging relatives in a time when the health care system itself is no longer providing a full range of services. Will Baby Boomers want to volunteer in the same arena in which they are informally volunteering? While the traditional volunteer in health care has been older, these organizations may need to turn more to youth participants.
- Baby Boomers are highly tuned to the broader environment. Recruitment strategies and volunteer program descriptions should explicitly tie the volunteer contribution to an impact on the overall issue at hand. Baby Boomers will be less interested in having their personal contribution recognized (à la “thank you for being such a great person”) and more interested to know how they’re making a difference (“because of you, our water is now six percent cleaner than it was last year”). Organizations should concentrate on producing promotional material that identifies the volunteer’s opportunity to make a meaningful contribution to the identified social issues.

## A Tribal Analysis

Despite their vast numbers, it won't likely be a simple task to recruit adults aged 50+. Members of this generation grew up in "an era of unprecedented economic expansion, in which the meeting of basic material needs could usually be taken for granted," explains Adams in his book *Sex in the Snow: Canadian Social Values at the End of the Millennium*. He continues by stating, "this affluence afforded large numbers of baby boomers who grew up during this period the freedom to focus on self-fulfilment and idealism – from sexual freedom, to feminism and civil rights. Television and rock 'n' roll helped to further disseminate a culture of affluence, on the one hand, and of social revolution, on the other." Baby Boomers from all aspects of life including new immigrants, the working class and others, are more likely to have relatively greater material gain and comfort than previous generations.

Unlike their parents who experienced the deprivation of war, depression, a more agrarian society, Baby Boomers have been spoiled by a world that has given them so much. While there is no evidence to suggest that Baby Boomers are any more selfish or less oriented to community than others—in fact statistically their volunteer rates are the highest and they are generous financial donors to charity—they do show a general tendency to be forthright about their needs. They will seek out volunteer work that interests them, that is designed to achieve clearly stated goals, that is well managed and fun to do. They will often want to kill two birds with one stone—spending time with family members, supporting a cause that has, or does, affect them, or improving their community economically as well as socially.

As with any large collection of individuals, this is far from a homogeneous group. The media loves to paint the Baby Boom generation with one brush—a spoiled generation that played at rebellion in the 1960s before settling into a rich and comfortable adulthood. However market researcher and author Michael Adams organizes Baby Boomers into four distinct groups that he calls "tribes," each with very different needs, motivations and values. Adams lists the tribes in his aforementioned book, *Sex in the Snow: Canadian Social Values at the End of Millennium*, and provides details about each one.

**1 Autonomous Rebels**—25% of Baby Boomers

With higher than average incomes and levels of education, Autonomous Rebels are motivated by personal autonomy and self-fulfilment. Possessing a strong belief in human rights, this group is also suspicious of authority and skeptical toward traditional institutions.

**2 Anxious Communitarians**—20% of Baby Boomers

Many members of this group live in small or mid-sized communities. A higher than average proportion are women. They are attracted to traditional communities, institutions and social status. They value family, community and duty.

**3 Connected Enthusiasts**—14% of Baby Boomers

Many Connected Enthusiasts live in large cities. They are motivated by experience seeking and are willing to explore the wider world. They relish interacting with and understanding others. They value family, community, and hedonism.

**4 Disengaged Darwinists**—41% of Baby Boomers

Many members of this group are men, often in blue-collar jobs, living in large urban centres. They are motivated by the goal of achieving financial independence, stability and security. Nostalgic for the past, they tend to be focussed on their own self-interest.

Of course this analysis is subject to the variations that mark any attempt to classify people. However the “tribal” characterizations are an interesting device to start thinking about this unique generation of people and encourage us to see Baby Boomers as made up of a variety of “types” calling for a different approach in terms of volunteer management, including recruitment and recognition.

### **The Volunteer Management Implications:**

- The Baby Boomer generation is set to re-shape and re-define many non-profit and voluntary organizations. They will demand higher standards of management and performance than any other cohort before them. Keep in mind, “their experience must be a positive one or they will simply vote with their feet and leave” (BOOMNET; 2001:13). As a result, a high level of professionalism in the management of volunteers becomes paramount, as does a well tested and organized system of policies and procedures that will help to inform this inquisitive group how they are contributing to the organization’s achievement of its mission.
- Program Managers are going to need to create more than one kind of volunteer experience for Baby Boomers. For example, Disengaged Darwinists and Anxious Communitarians will probably be drawn to fairly traditional volunteer opportunities whereas Connected Enthusiasts will want new kinds of experiences and would likely enjoy the analysis and advocacy that comes with starting a response to an issue. Autonomous Rebels will be drawn to the non-profit and voluntary sector but also have high expectations that things be done well and to have the best use made of their time.
- Foot and Ferronato (1999:4) ask “are you ready for the vigilante volunteer?” They define such volunteers as “that group of middle-aged professionals who are finished parenting, have money, and are seeking fulfilment through community contribution. Still busy with work, they are very specific about their needs and objectives and about the time and scheduling of their volunteer commitment. Their motto is often “what’s in it for me?” And their expectations are high. So how will you accommodate them?” Foot and Ferronato suggest that organizations put to themselves a series of questions in order to prepare for the “vigilante” volunteer. It should be noted that Volunteer Canada is not

necessarily promoting this particular label for volunteers—the concept of vigilante is perhaps a bit over-dramatic and infers a level of aggression or selfishness that may be misleading. On the other hand, these researchers have done some interesting thinking and their questions merit consideration:

What are the characteristics and aspirations of volunteers?

What is the time commitment for these tasks?

When is the work scheduled?

Is the work schedule flexible?

What is the job? Why is it important?

Why is it necessary to have policies around libel, screening and other similar issues?

What skills are required to perform these tasks?

Who has these skills?

Do we provide (exceptional) training that will enable the volunteer to do the tasks?

What is the setting for the position?

What is the social environment for the position? Is it solitary work or teamwork?

Who are the other team members?

What are the leadership possibilities and responsibilities for the volunteer?

- Adams' analysis fails to consider the impact of socio-economics, education and immigration on Baby Boomers; as organizations create volunteer opportunities with these factors in mind they must also be mindful of language, literacy and life experience differences between potential volunteers.
- Community groups will need to start thinking about how to create a “marketing message” with an appeal to Baby Boomers. Boomers are an educated and critical audience of mass media. The quintessential Baby Boomer advertisement is the beer commercial: short, snappy, creative, alluring. They have been raised to receive information in easily digestible bite-sized pieces. Whether advertising toothpaste or a volunteer position, remember that Baby Boomers know better than anyone that “the medium is the message.” The oxymoron is that while Baby Boomers are aware of aging, they fight and deny the physical signs that are attributed to getting older such as grey hair, baldness and wrinkles. “As consumers we identify with those images that most closely resemble our own self, whether they truly exist or not. If Baby Boomers deny societal stereotypes of ageism, how will they perceive marketing materials that promote complacency with growing older?” questions Dawn Lindblom in her book *Baby Boomers and the New Age of Volunteerism*. While information about volunteer opportunities and programming can't be distilled to the level of being meaningless it must be presented in an attractive and succinct way in order to capture the attention of this unique audience.
- Keep in mind that volunteering is a two-way exchange. As Michael Adams states in *Sex in the Snow*, Baby Boomers grew up in a culture of affluence. They're used to having their material needs met. Develop volunteering opportunities that offer incentives—both tangible and intangible—to your Baby Boomer volunteers. Their expectations are high.



- Baby Boomers come to volunteer work as a skilled and well-educated group with strong notions about their work, their world and their leisure. They will participate at all levels in non-profit and voluntary organizations—Boards of Directors, advisory, hands-on helping—but in all cases will want to be as much part of the design and management as the delivery. They will expect to be consulted on how the goals of the project/program/committee will be achieved.
- Coming from a labour force that has instituted workers rights, anti-discrimination, Total Quality Management and a myriad of other 'modern' human resource developments, Baby Boomers will be prepared to participate in critical evaluation of their volunteer experiences. The evaluation process should encourage your older volunteers to self-evaluate but, at the same time, feel free to express their concerns to you. You (and they) want to know:
  - If they want to increase or decrease the amount of time they're devoting to their volunteer position;
  - If they are bored and would like a change;
  - If they'd like to either increase or decrease the level of responsibility in their volunteer work;
  - If they want to identify an end point to their involvement;
  - If they have suggestions for improving their volunteer arrangements.
- Members of the 50+ generation, now moving out of the world of work, are often interested in developing and enriching social contacts with family, friends and their community. This means that if an organization wants to successfully recruit Baby Boomer volunteers, they will need to spend time on a personalized, word-of-mouth approach. Implicit in the personalized approach is the concept of social contact and involvement for the volunteer. Direct contact with potential Baby Boomer volunteers—the personal "ask"—may be more effective than less personal approaches such as advertising in the media.
- Another common way volunteers begin their involvement is by approaching an organization directly. For this reason, developing a high and positive profile can really pay off. If the activities of the organization are regularly profiled on radio, television programs and in articles in local newspapers, individuals thinking about volunteering will be disposed to approach these better-known groups.
- Many Baby Boomers are devoted Internet users. Organizations seeking volunteers and seeking ways to highlight their mission and their work will find the Internet a good way to reach both Baby Boomers and younger people. In keeping with the Boomers' interest in "the big picture," websites should include testimonials and analysis that ties real time experiences (description of a recent project, pictures from events, etc.) to the overall cause.



- The Volunteer Opportunities Exchange (VOE) is an effective tool on the Internet that can help connect agencies looking for volunteers with people seeking volunteer opportunities. The VOE is more powerful than a searchable website where a visitor uses key words to find available opportunities from an on-line database. The VOE allows both volunteers to create on-line profiles and agencies to submit similar profiles for their organization and their volunteer positions. Using this information, the VOE can instantly provide volunteers with a list of suitable volunteer opportunities to explore. Conversely, agencies are given a list of potential volunteers to further interview. And if a precise list of matching volunteers or matching opportunities isn't enough, volunteers and agencies can search the entire VOE database for each other using standard search criteria and key words. The VOE can be found on-line at [www.volunteer.ca](http://www.volunteer.ca).
- In most communities, people approaching retirement can access a variety of pre-retirement courses. Some are offered by employers, some by financial institutions, and others by educational establishments and community centres. It may be possible for volunteer recruiters to contact the providers of these programs to determine whether the organization can piggyback onto their programs by providing brochures or making a presentation at their courses. This will be particularly of interest to larger organizations. Alternatively, through local volunteer centres and/or associations of Managers of Volunteers it may be possible for a number of organizations to do a community-wide presentation on community volunteer opportunities, the benefits of volunteering, etc.
- Many employers are seeking ways to support their employees, especially those on the cusp of retirement, in community work. An opportunity may exist for non-profit and voluntary organizations to work in partnership with employers to develop projects or an ongoing relationship that brings employees or retirees into volunteer work. \* Please see page 29 for an example of a retiree program. For more thoughts on this aspect of engaging the older adult volunteer, refer to Volunteer Canada's publication *Volunteer Connections: The benefits and challenges of employer-supported volunteerism*.
- Boomers indicate that receiving training and skills development opportunities is a very important contributor to their decision to volunteer. While they don't necessarily want the nice thank you card as volunteer recognition, they do want the chance to be stimulated and learn something new. For those that are mid-career or transitioning to retirement, volunteering offers a good try-out for a potential new area of work. Community organizations should consider volunteer recognition in the form of educational opportunities (vs. the volunteers tea!) and should be prepared to work with the volunteer to assess their learning interests and to design their volunteer involvement in a way that makes it possible to achieve them. An investment in the capacity of the organization to provide interesting and effective training and orientation will have a benefit both in terms of volunteer recognition and retention in addition to the obvious impact of having well-trained volunteers to achieve the organization's mission.

Malcolm Knowles in *The Adult Learner: The Definitive Classic in Adult Education and Human Resource Development*, discusses the characteristics of adult learners and suggest that trainers consider them. With training and learning as such an important element of the Baby Boomer volunteer experience, Managers of Volunteers would do well to think strategically about the approaches that will be taken within their volunteer programs. Knowles presents the following list of considerations:

Adults are different than young people – they think and learn differently, their interests are years apart so don't try to teach and train generically.

Adults must want to learn.

Adults will learn only what they feel they need to learn.

Adults learn by comparing past experiences with new experiences.

Adults need immediate feedback concerning their progress.

Adults want their learning to be practical.

Adults try to avoid failure.

Adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction.

Adult learning is problem-centred rather than content-oriented.

Adults are demanding...they need a very concrete way for them to give feedback.

- Providing supervision is critical to ensuring that the volunteer is satisfied with the work and able to continue doing it. It's a way of learning that the volunteer's contribution is meaningful—for them and the voluntary organization. Even Michael Adams' Autonomous Rebel wants to know he has a framework under which he is working. Anxious Humanitarians are interested in respect but want to know that they are "doing something for others" and in order to achieve satisfaction they also need a framework and to be thanked. Connected Enthusiasts are interested in compressing as much as possible into the time they have on earth and they demand that they be given the respect and consideration they deserve through acknowledgement of their good deeds. Finally the Disengaged Darwinists (more than any other of the four groups) are the least likely to volunteer and to become involved—they will need some convincing and supervising them will not be easy.

## ADAPT YOUR TRAINING TO BABY BOOMERS

Once the basics are covered, you'll need to tailor your training approach to the Baby Boomer generation. Training the Boomer volunteer should be approached in a different fashion than training children and young people.

Researchers have developed a set of principles to help trainers working with volunteers aged 50+.

### **Draw upon the volunteers' previous experience and skill.**

Older volunteers have years of experience you can use as a foundation for learning new skills. Take some time to inquire about the experiences possessed by your older volunteers and use them in your training session.

### **Involve volunteers in planning and implementing training activities.**

Involving adults in their training is considered a hallmark of adult education. Find out what your volunteers want and need to learn. It demonstrates respect for the volunteers and the experience they bring to your organization.

### **Show respect and increase motivation.**

According to educator Malcolm Knowles, there is a need to explain to those you are training why specific things are being taught.

### **Create a climate that encourages and supports learning.**

Some older volunteers may believe that they're too old to learn new things. They might be reluctant to enter new situations. If you can make the learning environment welcoming and comfortable, you will encourage learning. Consider a peer exchange training approach where Baby Boomers are trained by their peers in a co-operative exchange. Malcolm Knowles stresses that instruction for adult learners should be task-oriented rather than simple memorization.

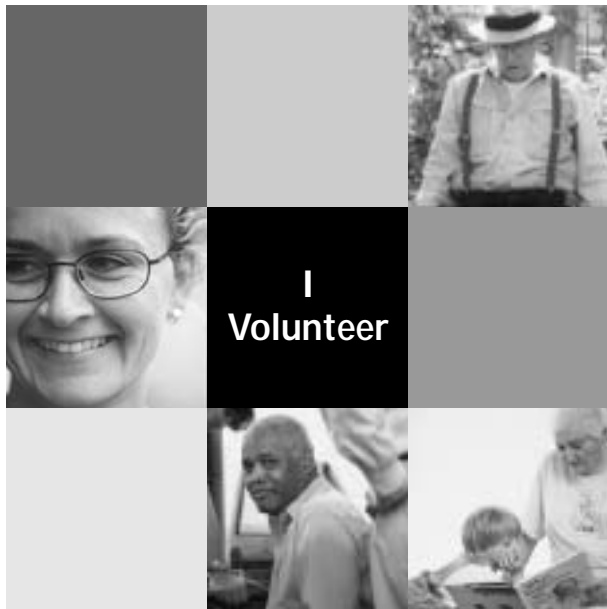
### **Encourage self-directed learning.**

Self-directed, as opposed to teacher-directed, learning is effective in cultivating confidence, awareness and empowerment of older volunteers. Consider involving the trainees in the training process, allowing them to learn things on their own. Stay in the background, however, to provide support and help if mistakes or problems occur.

### **Train in small groups.**

Another hallmark of adult education, using small groups, has the benefit of encouraging discussion among older volunteers. This in turn allows for sharing of experiences and learning from one's peers. It also encourages collaboration and teamwork.

(Crocoll, *Inspiring Volunteer Development: A Resource Book for Training Senior Volunteers in Intergenerational Programs*.)



## A Question of Time

The availability, or lack, of time is still cited most often as the reason that people do not participate, or participate more, in volunteer activities. According to the Vanier Institute of the Family, one third of Canadians say they worry that they do not spend enough time with their families or friends while both Jones and Porritt confirm that Canadians say they are having trouble balancing their work and family lives (Jones, 2000; Porritt 1995). The 1998 General Survey confirms Frederick's (1995) findings that over the years total workloads have increased as have role responsibilities. These issues are compounded by the necessity for dual income families, increased part-time work and people holding down more than one job to meet their needs. Combined work and caregiving hours have increased for men and women to an all time high in the past 10 years. Where the traditional view has been that people will find themselves with more time when they retire, the fact is that many people retire to find themselves caring for elderly parents, grandchildren as well as engaging in other family related responsibilities.

Given these facts it is not surprising to recall that although the amount of time spent volunteering increases with age—and volunteers aged 65+ currently lead the way in the number of hours devoted to donating their time and efforts—the actual numbers of older adults who volunteer are considerably lower than other age groups (18% of all seniors compared to an average of over 28% in the other age groups). Contrary to the prevalent myth that most volunteers are older people, the rate of volunteering was actually higher in 2000 for 15- to 24-year-olds (29%) and those in their mid-adult years (30% for both 35- to 44-year-olds and 45- to 54-year-olds) than among other age groups. For 55- to 64-year-olds the rate fell from 30% in 1997 to 28% in 2000 and for those 65 and older there was an even greater decline from 23% to 18%.

However, older Canadians who volunteered their time in 2000 gave more hours than their 1997 counterparts and more hours than any other age group. In 1997, 55- to 64-year-olds spent an average of 160 hours volunteering each year. By 2000, that amount had jumped to 181 hours. Similarly, for those 65 and older, the average number of hours volunteered in 1997 was 202 hours, rising to a whopping 269 hours in 2000. This appears to support the view that for the one out of five older people who do choose to dedicate time to volunteering, the choice implies a significant commitment. Frank Jones of Statistics Canada reports, "Seniors in their fifties gain considerable free time once they retire from paid work. Although most of the added free time goes into leisure pursuits (time spent at entertainment functions, at sports and hobbies, or with media such as television), some is channelled into unpaid work (domestic or household chores, child care and volunteering)."

Confounding our examination of the participation of older adults is the fact that they are often more engaged in informal volunteering versus the formal volunteering done through organizations. Seniors appear to spend a lot more time providing support to

each other, to their extended family and within their circles of friends and community than other age groups. According to Statistics Canada, over 64% volunteered informally in 1997—maybe they helped a friend recovering from surgery or perhaps they provided childcare services to a neighbouring family.

Statistics, of course, never paint a complete picture although they do provide a compelling outline for volunteering in Canada. Statistically, older volunteers—the 65+ population of today—aren't volunteering at very high rates but when they do they are contributing consistently more time than any other age group. This appears to tell us that volunteering, for older adults, is an “all or nothing” kind of choice—either they do none at all or they do tons of it. The picture is less black and white for Baby Boomers who volunteer at higher than average rates and give fairly average amounts of time—although this is diminishing. Using statistics as a baseline, non-profit and voluntary organization policy makers would be wise to consider the changing face of volunteering and plan responsive strategies.

### **The Volunteer Management Implications:**

- Consider the words of Dawn Lindblom in her book *Baby Boomer and the New Age of Volunteerism*: “This generation will be seeking volunteer opportunities in which they can make a meaningful contribution, in a shorter amount of time. This reflects the urgency for organizations to reflect on the potential for short term opportunities that exist and determine if there is a role for senior volunteers to contribute.” Therefore, there is a need to create more episodic, short-term positions to meet Baby Boomer requirements.
- The extensive use of job design strategies (e.g. clearly stated tasks related to mission, use of contracting between volunteer and organization) will help mediate the impact of less available time. The Volunteer Canada resource, *A Matter of Design*, provides an excellent overview on the issue of job design and step-by-step guidelines on rethinking this key aspect of volunteer program management.
- Consider creating team approaches to volunteering thus reducing the time required of any one volunteer but allow the position to remain intact.
- Clearly differentiate between short and long-term commitments. When a volunteer is being asked to fill a more time intensive position, the investment by the organization in training, support and recognition will need to be high. The pay-off to the volunteer for the higher commitment should be clear; they will develop certain skills, receive accolades, be exposed to a new kind of work, be clearly tied to senior management, etc. Giving the longer term, time intensive position a high profile in the organization can make such a position more alluring. Shorter term/lower input positions, while still important, will not require the same level of investment by the organization (or volunteer for that matter). Non-profit and voluntary organizations should seek to create a range of positions so that potential volunteers can participate in a variety of ways and may move through a number of positions before moving into one of the “high end” positions.

- Think about ways to redesign jobs so that a family volunteering together could participate. Recruit and implicate volunteers and family members in programs and provide opportunities for families to spend time together. Volunteer Canada has published a discussion paper on family volunteering that may be of interest. The paper can be accessed at [www.volunteer.ca](http://www.volunteer.ca).
- Create volunteer opportunities that build on the leisure interests and activities of Baby Boomers (for example, a walk or run for a favourite cause, or a golf tournament).
- Encourage virtual volunteering. Any number of volunteer positions can be designed to be carried out by volunteers on-line. Introducing all or part of some volunteer positions via computer allows busy people to squeeze in a bit of volunteering on their lunch hour or from home.
- Look carefully at organizational volunteer recruitment strategies. When new or additional volunteer work needs to be done, are current volunteers the first to be asked? Has the input of longer-term volunteers increased? Are existing volunteers carrying a heavier load in the absence of new recruits or as the ranks begin to thin?

#### **HAVE YOU CONSIDERED “SHARING” YOUR VOLUNTEERS?**

An aging population means that a growing number of people will need volunteer services. Even though many members of the large Baby Boomer population stand ready to volunteer, some experts believe that increased pressure on the volunteer pool will make it ever more difficult for organizations to recruit volunteers.

“Sharing” volunteers is one solution to this potential dilemma. Organizations could “partner,” joining forces to access a pool of volunteers. Let’s say a community health organization recruits and trains volunteers to move through their community providing services to a variety of other organizations, including for example, seniors’ centres, palliative care programs, and hospitals.

The statistics concerning seniors and volunteering suggest “sharing” may be an advisable route for many organizations. Older adults provide a wide variety of services but they tend to focus on just one or two organizations, according to the 1997 NSGVP. In 1997, 61% of seniors worked in only one organization, 22% volunteered for two.

David Foot, *Boom, Bust & Echo*





## Why Volunteer? Why Not? Understanding the Motivation Question

Motivation is an important area of interest for organizations that want to capture the time and energy of Baby Boomers. The reasons people choose to get involved as volunteers are as varied as the people themselves and yet there are some commonalities underlying the choice. First among them is a sense of commitment to a cause. Almost every volunteer polled through the 2000 NSGVP indicated a belief in the cause as a reason for volunteering. They also cited being personally affected by the cause—volunteering for the Cancer Society, for example, because they or someone close to them had dealt with the disease.

While the NSGVP didn't identify the phenomenon of being “volun-told,” it is a well known dynamic especially within the areas of organizations serving youth, sport, recreation and culture. In these instances the motivation for volunteering is that the volunteer has someone (often a child or sometimes a parent or person close to them) involved in a program and it is “understood” that part of the arrangement is that volunteering will be done in support of the organization or project.

Many volunteers (81%) agree that finding an opportunity to use skills and experience is a major reason for volunteering. Among older people and Baby Boomers one presumes that the emphasis here is more on use of existing skills and wisdom compared to the strong desire by young people to develop skills that may advance their interests in the labour market.

Researchers have begun to examine the positive links between good health and volunteering and “the volunteer literature provides evidence that those who volunteer receive health benefits from this activity.” What we do not know is the extent to which selectivity operates—hat is those for whom volunteering is beneficial continue to volunteer, and those who are in good health to begin with, are the ones who volunteer” (Chappell, 1999). Greeley (2001) also asks us to consider that volunteering can improve the well being of individual volunteers primarily, but not exclusively, by enhancing social support networks. These networks can act as a buffer against stress and illness. Some experts have concluded that the health benefits of social relationships may be as important as avoiding health risks such as smoking, physical inactivity and high blood pressure.

Volunteering can also enhance self-esteem, personal coping skills and resources—all of which have health benefits. People with a strong sense of their own effectiveness, coping abilities, social usefulness, and who are socially active tend to have better health, lower mortality and healthier lifestyles. Volunteering enhances health because it provides an additional role or identity. In other words, individuals with many interests and roles have increased well being. “Volunteerism Improves Seniors' Satisfaction with Life” reads the headline in The Seniors Research Group Member Newsletter. A recent national study

conducted in the United States by the Senior Research Group found that 52% of seniors age 62 and older who volunteer in their community on a regular basis feel very satisfied with their lives compared to only 37% of seniors who never volunteer in their community. “This study supports a strong link between volunteerism among older Americans and a vital outlook on life,” said Maude Dornfeld, research director for the group and “it is especially interesting to note that volunteering seems to have a close association with a strong sense of self confidence and accomplishment.”

Moving away from motivation that might be defined as rooted in self—perhaps even self-interest (although this is a slippery intellectual slope, it must be acknowledged)—are the reasons for choosing to volunteer that are tied to an adherence to a value set or religious demand. Although only 26% of volunteers indicated that fulfilling religious obligations was a motivation to volunteer, among the seven percent of Canadians who do 73% of all the volunteer work, almost all were self-identified as people of faith. Add to that the fact that most of the seven percent (around 1.7 million people) are older Canadians we see that the motivations for volunteering do appear to change with age and become more spiritual and less external than for younger people.

Reasons for not volunteering are harder to discern from the 2000 NSGVP. The most common answer to the question of why people don’t volunteer, or why volunteers don’t do more, is a lack of time. The second reason given is a lack of knowing how to get involved. While both of these issues are clearly important trends (and supported by other research and elsewhere in the survey data) they likely don’t tell the whole story. It’s pretty clear that a large statistical tool can’t capture more complex issues like feeling unwelcome as a volunteer, being less motivated toward community and more motivated to work or making money, or preferring to spend time in leisure activities, as the “real” reasons people don’t volunteer. How many would, even if asked, admit to being too selfish, lazy or angry to volunteer?

Motivation is always a tricky area to assess. There are so many subtleties tied to individuals’ interests, personalities, upbringing, culture, language, abilities that to discern what really makes any one of us choose to volunteer is nothing less than presumptuous. The motivations for volunteering are complex, deeply personal and will change over time.

As we come to better understand the overall interests and life experiences of Baby Boomers we see that their motivations are often tied to family responsibilities. As Boomers live out the reality of being the first real “sandwich” generation (i.e. sandwiched between young children and aging parents) they run headfirst into the related phenomenon of being “volun-told.” The altruists, old hippies and ideologues among them are also motivated by a deep desire to see systemic change in the world around them. Where today’s seniors are clearly motivated by religious drivers it appears that this will change as Baby Boomers move into retirement without—at the moment—

being as attached to the faith sector as their parents have been. Likewise, Baby Boomers differ from younger volunteers who have faced and still face serious challenges breaking into the labour market and turn to volunteering as a way to ameliorate their situation. Baby Boomers have faced numerous challenges, especially those in the working classes, but they have by and large been first to scoop up available jobs before the Generation X cohort following them.

#### REASONS FOR VOLUNTEERING

Cause in which one believes—95%

Use skills and experience—81%

Personally affected by cause—70%

Explore own strengths—57%

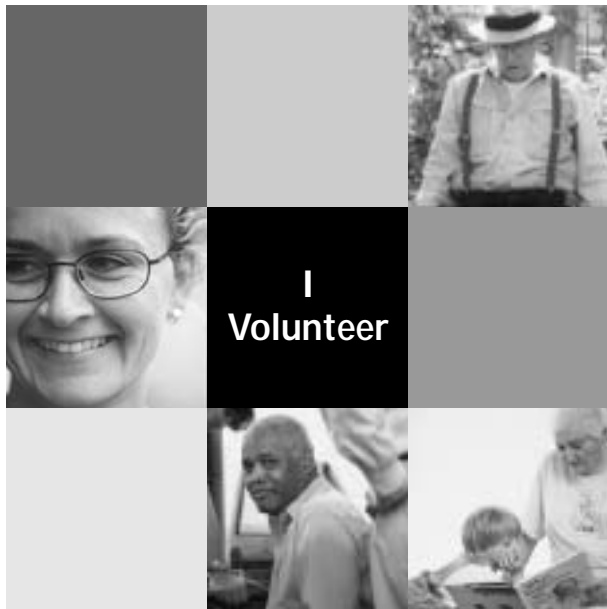
Friends volunteered—30%

Religious obligations or beliefs—26%

Source: 2000 NSGVP

#### The Volunteer Management Implications:

- It is apparent that religion has long had a role to play in volunteering but organizations are cautioned that even in this arena volunteering has declined by seven percent since 1997—a substantial number. Organizations need to engage religious institutions in a new and different way as they clearly play a vital role in the practice of philanthropy. Weekly attendees are far more likely to volunteer than those who do not (41% versus 24%). Consider a partnership project with a church or mosque, placement of a volunteer recruitment notice in a synagogue newsletter or seeking out a youth group or women's group affiliated with a place of worship to help organize a volunteer program.
- Organizations will need to find a new language to explain the purpose and outcome of their work and the reasons why someone should consider helping out. The voluntary sector has benefited from—depended on—a generation of people whose moral imperatives were collective, created and regularly reinforced by the faith community that most belonged to (however sporadically). The voluntary sector could assume an understanding of the concepts of service, even ministry or philanthropy—words that have less and less resonance in a post faith-based Canada. While Baby Boomers may very well have a strong moral sense, they do not generally reflect the shared and collective morality that the previous generation held.



## Conclusion

The world is changing. The population is changing. No one can predict with accuracy just how Baby Boomers will respond to the opportunity to volunteer in their post-work years. However, in order to benefit from what may be a tremendous influx in the volunteer pool, Managers of Volunteers need to act now.

The first step is to audit existing volunteer programming for its fit with this looming demographic. Using criteria based on the motivations of Baby Boomers as discussed in this manual, the evaluation would include questions such as:

Do our recruitment strategies appropriately target the 50+ age group? Baby Boomers want information, and they want to know how their efforts will bring about change, are we providing this?

Is there room for input from volunteers in program planning and design?

Is there enough range in the volunteer positions to appeal to the diversity that exists within the population of Baby Boomers?

Are there short-term or episodic volunteer positions—how many?

How many older adults are currently engaged as volunteers? Do they have comments or suggestions on what we do well, what we might change, their plans for continuing?

Secondly, Managers of Volunteers will want to plan for an increase in older volunteers by:

Identifying and developing family volunteering opportunities.

Using job design theory to create new positions, re-vamp the volunteer program, clarify roles.

Developing clear, concise marketing materials both for the organization and the volunteer positions.

Revisiting recognition methods to ensure that the incentives offered are meaningful to this group. Does the work allow the older volunteer to learn something new, can an educational component be offered as a reward?

Perhaps above all, Managers of Volunteers must prepare for an unexpected and yet stimulating dynamic in volunteerism. This new generation of volunteers, Canada's Baby Boomers, have experience to share. This is a skilled, educated group with strong opinions. Our organizations must be ready to hear what they have to say, to input their modifications, to encourage their comments.

If we can meet the challenge of successfully recruiting a high percentage of Baby Boomers, if we can encourage them to factor time for volunteering into their active lives, then we can effect a positive lasting change on the ecology of volunteerism in Canada. This manual is about the challenges that confront non-profit and voluntary organizations and Managers of Volunteers in a climate of changing attitudes and behaviours. Volunteering is not just about giving; it is also about receiving. Whether it is about gaining a sense of accomplishment, experiencing something new, or challenging new horizons volunteering can be a very satisfying experience. Organizations need to be aware of the different skills and talents that Baby Boomers bring to the table and act on them accordingly. Flexibility, a variety of volunteering opportunities and a large dose of respect are but three of the ingredients that are needed to reach this large group of potential volunteers.

## Appendix A: A Profile of Employer-supported and retiree volunteerism

It is estimated that more than two-thirds of Canada's volunteers are members of the paid work force. The work force, therefore, is an ideal location to connect with and engage potential volunteers. Employer-supported volunteer initiatives represent a tremendous opportunity for businesses to make a difference in the community, to prove their commitment to good corporate citizenship and to increase profitability through the personal and professional development of employees. Establishing a connection between your organization and a company along with their employees leads to new understanding about giving to community and generates fresh attitudes about who can be involved in meeting community needs and how this can be done.

Now, take this employer-supported volunteer concept one step further to include retirees of a specific business. Today, many companies recognize the benefits of supporting their retirees in the community. They know that retirees who volunteer and stay physically active are intellectually stimulated and healthier. They also recognize that retirees help promote the company's "neighborly image" in communities in which the company operates. Below is one of many examples of active retiree volunteer programs that are supported by a company:

### **TRANSALTA CORPORATION**

TransAlta Corporation is Canada's largest non-regulated electric generation and marketing company.

### **POWERFUL POWER**

"The tenacity of the volunteers and their ownership and pride in their work makes POWER what it is. The volunteers take responsibility for their community and are committed to doing this work.

POWER is the simple and strong name of a group of energetic retirees from Calgary-based TransAlta. Understanding that retirees have constraints on their time and may be limited by health concerns, POWER has assembled a program that allows maximum participation from TransAlta retirees. Knowing that their volunteers are interested in what they're working toward, POWER strives to create opportunities for members to:

Have a positive impact in their communities;

Enhance the lives of members through fellowship and helping create a feeling of self-satisfaction;

Create a positive image in the minds of the public regarding TransAlta, its employees, and its retirees and partners."

- Cheryl McNeil, Community Investment Co-ordinator

## Appendix B: A Profile of Baby Boomers in Action

### MANAGEMENT ADVISORY SERVICES MAS

In 1993, Dave Ferguson with Canadian Executive Service Organizations (CESO) had a problem—too many talented volunteers with high-level skills and experience and nowhere to put them. He needed to find ways to involve them and he had an idea.

Don Taylor—a dynamic volunteer who spends a great deal of his time promoting and coordinating MAS recently stated:

“We wanted to bridge between all these senior people and all the non-profits who needed assistance. We wanted to market the skills of our members to agencies to help them to solve problems in the areas of HR, marketing and finance by providing assessment and evaluation of the organization as well as facilitate workshops around staff and volunteer management. If we don’t have the skill set needed by an organization, we are happy to find someone who does and make the referral.”

Don states that partnership is an essential key and refers to MAS’s long-running relationship with the Volunteer Centre of Toronto. According to Don, “the Volunteer Centre is a good place due to connections with non-profits, etc. We liked the Executive Director and her willingness to get involved and she agreed that the Volunteer Centre was the right home for this organization of extraordinary volunteers.”

MAS now has another up and coming idea—to use the organization to match the skills of older volunteers with young people looking to improve their skills.

This is a unique operation associated with Volunteer Centre of Toronto providing hands-on guidance to non-profits in Toronto requesting assistance in solving wide range of management problems.

MAS is currently working with about 80 agencies per year.

Some of the agencies are large—like the Salvation Army, Y.W.C.A., St Christopher House, and we also have many small ( 3 staff or less) agencies.

A large proportion of requests come from referrals from satisfied clients.

Many non-profits come back for assistance several times.

Many volunteer consultants have served MAS for years... and there is a continual stream of men and women wishing to become part of the program.

MAS has received 620 requests for assistance from 377 agencies since it was formed in 1993 as joint initiative of Volunteer Centre and C.E.S.O.

The service is operated entirely by 120 highly skilled, experienced volunteers free to non-profits.



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