

The Sustainable Development Goals and The Volunteer Factor

Exploring the link between volunteering in Canada and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

Prepared by Volunteer Canada



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Forward

[Volunteer Canada](#) was contracted by Employment and Social Development Canada to develop a national strategy to promote volunteering as a key component in achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) with a focus on recruitment and recognition strategies for the non-profit sector.

In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly adopted [17 Sustainable Development Goals](#) to mobilize global efforts to improve social, economic and environmental conditions around the world. Canada is one of 193 member states that agreed to work towards achieving these goals by 2030. Volunteer Canada has adopted the goals because volunteering is an essential vehicle to help us tackle some of the pressing challenges facing the world. The theme for National Volunteer Week 2019 is “The Volunteer Factor – Lifting Communities” and will highlight 17 ways that volunteers lift communities, linked to the SDG's.

Volunteer Canada provides national leadership and expertise on volunteerism. Since 1977, we have been committed to increasing the participation, quality and diversity of volunteer experiences. To achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, we need to harness and support the efforts of volunteers.

Employment and Social Development Canada promotes and recognizes volunteers, and leads volunteerism initiatives on behalf of the Government of Canada. The department generates knowledge on volunteering and recognizes volunteers through Canada's Volunteer Awards.

With our shared interests and mandates to strengthen volunteerism, we embarked on this collaborative project **to increase volunteering to help achieve the SDGs**. With increased knowledge, the public, private and not-for-profit sectors will be better positioned to:

- **Promote** specific types of volunteer opportunities that align with each goal.
- **Build** the capacity of organizations to recruit volunteers to work towards the goals.
- **Focus** on the impact of volunteering to help achieve each goal.
- **Collaborate** with volunteer centres to mobilize local communities.
- **Encourage** businesses to include the SDGs in their employer-supported volunteering programs.ⁱ

We explored the link between volunteering and the SDGs by analyzing existing data on volunteering, putting the goals in the Canadian context and gathering input from key stakeholders.

Acknowledgements

We wish to acknowledge the Community Development and Homelessness Partnerships Directorate for their leadership on volunteering and their active collaboration in exploring how the activities of Canadian volunteers align with the SDGs. In particular, we wish to thank Carey Hill, Maya Nightingale, Biljana Savic and Greg Graves for shaping this project, convening roundtable discussions, co-creating content and reviewing drafts of this report.

We also thank members of the Volunteer Canada network for their early research, editing and production support, including Lainie Towell, Samantha Dignam and Joanna Kaleniecka.

Volunteer Canada appreciates the significant contributions made by the local volunteer centres that provided examples of community partnerships that address many of the issues related to the SDGs, such as food security, youth employment, literacy, clean water and gender equality.

Finally, we wish to recognize the millions of Canadians who already volunteer in areas that directly contribute to achieving the SDGs.

Volunteer Canada
December 2018

Introduction

Every one of the [17 Sustainable Development Goals](#) involves volunteers. Volunteers contribute to eliminating poverty, advocating for human rights, protecting the planet and creating thriving and resilient communities.



In 2017, Volunteer Canada started the process to collaborate with Employment and Social Development Canada to explore the link between the volunteer activities of Canadians and the Sustainable Development Goals. We wanted to:

1. Raise awareness that the SDGs are as relevant to Canada as they are to other regions of the world.
2. Illuminate how volunteers already contribute to the goals.
3. Test whether promoting volunteering within the framework of the SDGs is a compelling recruitment and recognition strategy.

We began by mapping the types of volunteer activities reported by Canadians in the 2013 General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating against the SDGs. Volunteer centres across the country provided concrete examples of volunteers supporting initiatives that address the various goals.

We also convened two roundtables: one with local volunteer centres and one with federal departments that engage volunteers. Roundtable participants linked volunteer activities in their communities, departments and programs with the SDGs. This activity was a springboard to explore the effectiveness of integrating the SDGs in volunteer recruitment and recognition efforts. Participants unanimously agreed that linking their programs to the SDGs was valuable for reporting, program development, volunteer recruitment and volunteer recognition.

This report provides a summary of our findings:

- Volunteering in Canada
- Sustainable Development Goals
- Volunteering and the Sustainable Development Goals
- Roundtable discussions
- Conclusion

I Volunteering in Canada

Canadians express their social values everyday through their health, purchasing, transportation and employment, and by how they stay informed, communicate, advocate and build communities. Nationwide, 44 per cent of Canadians 15 years of age and older, or 12.7 million Canadians, volunteer an average of 154 hours per year¹. Volunteer rates, interests, motivations and reported benefits vary significantly by age and location.

In recent years, we have seen an expanded definition of volunteering, along with an increase in organic movements such as the “MeToo Movement”, that highlighted industry cultures of sexual harassment and abuse, and the “Occupy (Wall Street) Movement”, that promoted awareness of the inequities inherent in wealth distribution to 1% of the population, with the slogan “We are the 99%”, informal volunteering and the use of social media to raise awareness about issues, raise funds for causes and mobilize people to work together on important social and environmental issues.²

Changes in volunteer rate, average annual volunteer hours and number of volunteers from 1997 to 2013³

	1997	2000	2004	2007	2010	2013
Volunteer rate (%)	31.4	26.7	45	46	47	43.6
Average hours per year	149	162	168	166	156	154
Number of volunteers (millions)	7.4	6.5	11.8	12.4	13.3	12.7

¹ Ibid

² IPSOS Public Affairs & Volunteer Canada (2017), Recognizing Volunteering in 2017

³ Statistics Canada, General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2013, the Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2010, 2007 & 2004, and the National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2000 & 1997.

Volunteer rate (%) in provinces and territories by age group

Province or territory	Average	15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75+
Newfoundland and Labrador	46.4	66.8	41.7	49.2	51.8	39	37	22.6
Prince Edward Island	50.4	44	37.5	55.6	52.2	42.9	64.3	30
Nova Scotia	50.9	72	47.8	62.1	54.8	39.6	41.2	28.4
New Brunswick	40.6	55.6	36.7	41.9	42.2	33.6	40.8	30.8
Quebec	32.1	40.1	34.4	38.7	31.3	27.1	26.3	19.8
Ontario	44.3	55.9	41.4	45.5	45.9	43.6	40.1	27.1
Manitoba	52	61.7	52	54.7	49.7	49.4	44.4	43.6
Saskatchewan	56.2	61.6	54.4	66.2	53.7	54.8	53.7	38.6
Alberta	50.1	56.3	43	56.7	58.1	46.3	42.9	31.1
British Columbia	49.1	53.6	50.5	53.1	52.1	48.4	45.3	30.9

The volunteer rate remains highest among youth⁴, many of whom are motivated to shape their communities, restore the planet, and to express their identity as global citizens. The benefits that younger volunteers report include the development of skills, gaining experience to educational programs or to enter the paid workforce, and

⁴ Statistics Canada (2015), 2013 General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering, and Participating (GSS GVP)

connecting with their peers.⁵ Older adults have a lower volunteer rate, however, they contribute the most hours (more than 200 hours per year) and they are motivated to give back to their communities, to leave a legacy for future generations through social justice initiatives, and to be of direct support to individuals experiencing health issues. The benefits that they report include staying connected to community, preventing social isolation, and maintaining a sense of purpose and value to society.⁶

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

II Sustainable Development Goals

In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly adopted [17 Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs), also known as global goals, to mobilize global efforts to improve social, economic and environmental conditions around the world. Canada was among the 193 member states that adopted these goals, with a commitment to achieve them by 2030.⁷

The SDGs replaced the eight [Millennium Development Goals](#) (MDGs) for 2015. While those were not fully achieved, there was considerable [progress](#). For example, there were fewer people living in extreme poverty, fewer children under the age of five dying, more children with access to primary education, more women serving in government positions and more people with access to safe drinking water.⁸ Motivated by that progress and momentum, the United Nations developed the SDGs with a broader scope and clearer link to both developing and developed countries.

For each goal, the United Nations outlines facts and figures, sets targets and links to relevant UN organizations. For example, the first goal is No Poverty. The United Nations notes that 767 million people live below the international poverty line of \$1.90 per day. The target for this goal is to “reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions” by 2030. The relevant organizations are UNICEF and the World Bank Group.

Canada has committed to support the SDGs through international aid and to recognize the relevance of the goals in Canadian communities. The first goal is relevant to Canada, as there are 4.8 million Canadians or 13.9 per cent of the population living in poverty. In response to the sixth goal, Clean Water and Sanitation, Indigenous Services Canada⁹ committed to end long-term water advisories on public systems on reserves by 2021.

⁷ United Nations <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5G0ndS3uRdo>

⁸ United Nations (2015), Human Wellbeing: Progress on the Millennial Development Goals

⁹ Government of Canada, Indigenous Services accessed November 14, 2018 <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1506514143353/1533317130660>

In July 2017, the [Global Indicators Framework](#) was developed to provide a standardized system to track global progress. Each goal has a number of targets with 232 indicators. Statistics Canada created the [Sustainable Development Goals Data Hub](#) to provide a centralized system to track Canada's progress.¹⁰

“Statistics Canada is central focal point for reporting Canada's data for the global SDG indicators and works as a coordinating body for the National Statistical System. Statistics Canada is responsible for the collection, collation, analysis, presentation and dissemination of data for regular monitoring of Canadian progress against the global indicators and has developed this on-line data hub for disseminating Canada's SDG data.”

-Data Hub website

¹⁰ Statistics Canada Sustainable Development Data Hub launched in October 2018. <https://www144.statcan.gc.ca/sdg-odd/index-eng.htm>

III Volunteering and the Sustainable Development Goals

Linking the activities of Canadian volunteers and the organizations they support with the Sustainable Development Goals can help us achieve several objectives:

1. Raise awareness that the SDGs are relevant to Canadian communities.

The SDGs further the Millennium Development Goals by applying to all countries, not just developing ones. The SDGs challenge Canadians to think about how they can contribute, such as by helping reduce hunger and inequality in their communities.

2. Illustrate how volunteers already contribute to achieving these goals in Canada and abroad.

During the roundtables, we discussed our shared responsibility to look forward and broaden our understanding of how volunteers currently contribute to the goals. Many not-for-profits are tackling these difficult issues.

3. Demonstrate how community organizations are working to achieve the SDGs through their missions, programs, services and activities.

4. Identify areas where increased volunteer effort is needed.

By linking volunteer activities with the goals, we can see which goals are not getting as much attention and adjust our efforts. We can also increase volunteer engagement by using the SDGs as a framework to recruit volunteers and mobilize communities.

5. Communicate to volunteers their impact in a clear and compelling way.

The 2013 Volunteer Recognition Study indicated that volunteers are most motivated by knowing the impact of their efforts. The connection between effort and impact could motivate new and old volunteers alike.

The General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating

The categories in the graph below are based on the International Classification of Non-profit Organizations, which was developed by a team of scholars working on the Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project.

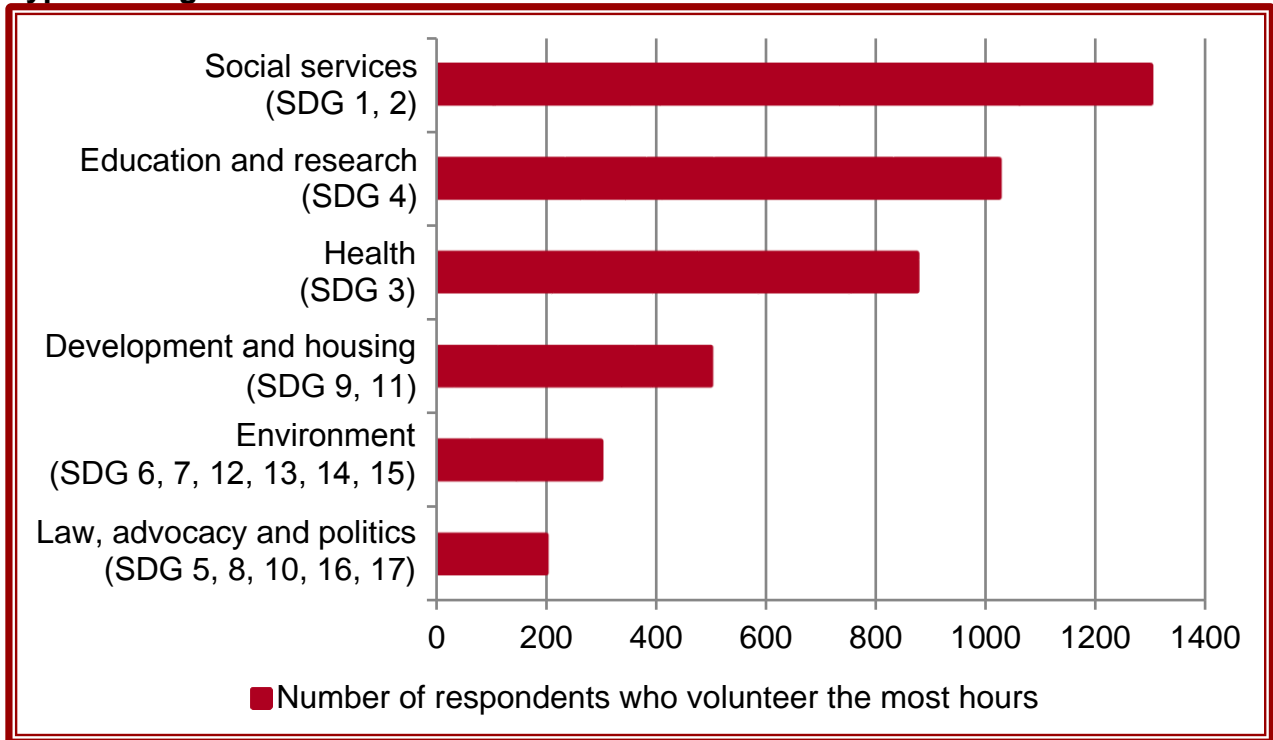
Canadian volunteers contribute most of their time to the types of organizations that are associated with only one or two goals, like social services and education on research.

The types of organizations that are associated with the greatest number of goals, such as law, advocacy and political organizations, see fewer volunteers who contribute most of their time to that cause. This is not surprising as law, advocacy and political organizations are often concerned about losing their charitable status by engaging in the types of activities associated with the goals.

Direct-service organizations with charitable purposes aimed at alleviating poverty, education, religion, and community benefits are often reluctant to engage in efforts that promote systemic changes to improve peoples' circumstances. This is because many organizations with charitable status are unclear as to how much of their resources they can devote to permissible political activities that advocate for public policy and legislative changes.

This stark difference could help us identify a gap that needs to be addressed to achieve the SDGs that relate to the environment. With few volunteers contributing most of their time to environmental causes, we may need to focus our efforts on mobilizing volunteers to further the environmental goals.

Types of organizations Canadians volunteer with most



The results of the 2018 General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating will be available in early 2020. We will re-analyze how volunteer activities and types of organizations relate to the Sustainable Development Goals, and determine where to focus our efforts.

Stories from volunteer centres

Our network of 220 volunteer centres identified a range of community organizations and initiatives that demonstrate the link between volunteer activities and the Sustainable Development Goals.

The first goal is to end poverty in all its forms. The [Chatham-Kent Prosperity Roundtable](#) is composed of residents, businesses, government agencies and not-for-profits from Chatham-Kent. Representatives from each group collaborate to find innovative solutions to poverty and to build an inclusive community. In Chatham-Kent, 17.6 per cent of

adults and 28.6 per cent of children live below the poverty line. One of the activities the roundtable has undertaken is to campaign for a living wage.¹¹

The roundtable is working towards two relevant targets:

1. By 2030, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions.
2. Create sound policy frameworks at the national, regional and international levels, based on pro-poor and gender-sensitive development strategies, to support accelerated investment in poverty eradication actions.

The fourth goal is Quality Education. [Project Literacy Kelowna](#) offers free tutoring for adults who want to improve their numeracy and literacy.¹² Their relevant target is to ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy by 2030. Their programs include a one-to-one reading program, parent-child pre-school program, four-week course to equip immigrant parents to support their children's literacy, and several online resources to support a range of learning styles and literacy challenges.

¹¹ Chatham-Kent Prosperity Round Table website accessed in May 2018 <http://www.prosperityroundtable.com/>

¹² Project Literacy Kelowna British Columbia website accessed in May 2018. <http://projectliteracykelowna.org/>

IV Roundtable 8 discussions

Volunteer Canada and Employment and Social Development Canada convened two roundtables in spring 2018 to gather insights about how volunteer activities, mandates and program objectives align with the Sustainable Development Goals.

The first roundtable brought together 20 people from volunteer centres and not-for-profits across Canada. The second roundtable involved staff from seven federal departments and programs that engage volunteers, including the Department of National Defence, Canadian Coast Guard, Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada, Parks Canada, the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, the Cadet and Junior Canadian Rangers Programs and Canada's Volunteer Awards. Participants came from Ontario, Nova Scotia, Alberta, Quebec, the Yukon and Newfoundland and Labrador.

After a short presentation about the goals, participants played a game to link various not-for-profits with the SDGs. This was an illuminating exercise and many participants noted that each organization was addressing more than one goal. Federal departments were asked to identify which goals aligned with their programs and several concrete examples were discussed.

Participants agreed that the SDGs provide both a compelling visual and an intellectual lens through which to think about volunteer engagement. Many commented that the SDGs are an interesting way to communicate about their volunteer initiatives and programs internally and externally. Some comments included:

- "The SDG framework mobilizes everybody."
- "When you talk about things people can relate to, such as ending poverty and hunger, people are able to see the link between the SDGs and the volunteer role."
- "It can reinforce the direction/mission of an organization."

Many participants recommended creating a brief survey to raise awareness about the SDGs and to get a better sense of how organizations feel they align with them.

Participants felt that linking volunteering with the SDGs demonstrates that a single act of volunteering has a broader purpose. You can inspire people with “the power of one,” and how they are helping the world from their community. Connecting with the SDGs was seen as a way to enhance how people identify as global citizens.¹³

The roundtables identified some areas where the goals could be improved, such as increasing belonging, addressing seniors and aging, focussing on Indigenous peoples and the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and furthering arts and culture. However, participants noted that these concepts could be integrated in the current goals.

Participants made the following recommendations to Volunteer Canada and Employment and Social Development Canada:

1. Develop a presentation that can be used by volunteer centres for community workshops and by not-for-profits to engage their boards, staff, volunteers and other stakeholders.
2. Develop a brief survey about which goals an organization or department is aligned with, according to their programs, mission and goals.
3. Undertake asset mapping with multi-sector participants to identify groups in the public, private and not-for-profit sectors that are contributing to the SDGs.
4. Collect stories about volunteering that supports the SDGs.
5. Reach out to volunteer matching software developers to include the SDGs as a search field.
6. Convene federal departments that engage volunteers on a regular basis to further explore the link between volunteering and the SDGs.

¹³ Globescan (2016) Report on Global Citizenship Identity <https://oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/do-people-identify-as-global-or-national-citizens-new-report-suggests-a-tipping-point-but-north-and-south-heading-in-opposite-directions/>

V Conclusion and Next Steps

Canadian volunteers are already contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals. More research is needed to map updated data from the 2018 General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating once it is released. It would be beneficial for not-for-profits, volunteer centres and federal departments to align their volunteer activities with the Sustainable Development Goals. This could enhance their credibility and increase resources for volunteer programs. Linking volunteering to the Sustainable Development Goals is seen as a compelling volunteer recruitment strategy.

The following next steps would provide Employment and Social Development Canada with an opportunity to further develop programs and policies to strengthen volunteerism in Canada:

1. Work with the (Canadian) Sustainable Development Goals Data Hub to ensure that volunteer contributions are measured and reported;
2. Analyze the data from the 2018 General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering, and Participating to map the volunteer details against the Sustainable Development Goals;
3. Convene a cross-departmental working group on volunteering to exchange ideas and resources and to further explore the link between their volunteer programs and the Sustainable Development Goals;
4. Collaborate with leaders in the not-for-profit sector to raise awareness and capacity to link volunteering to the Sustainable Development Goals¹⁴;
5. Collaborate with Canadian initiatives that are bringing businesses together to direct their community investment resources to the Sustainable Development Goals¹⁵;
6. Connect with international players that are linking volunteering to the Sustainable Development Goals.¹⁶

¹⁴ In May 2019, [Volunteer Management Professionals of Canada](#) and Volunteer Canada are co-hosting a national conference on volunteerism. [The Federation of Volunteer Centres of Quebec](#), [Ontario Volunteer Centre Network](#), [Volunteer Alberta](#), [Volunteer BC](#), and [Volunteer Nova Scotia](#) each have annual conferences in their jurisdictions. There may be opportunities to integrate this work through collaboration.

¹⁵ [Impact 2030, Realized Worth](#), and the [Corporate Council on Volunteering](#) are all active in promoting the link between businesses and the Sustainable Development Goals.

¹⁶ United Nations Development Program and the United Nations Volunteers (UNV).