

# Engaging Older Adults in Volunteering

Older adults are an essential demographic for organizations dependent on volunteers. It is, therefore, important to recognize what older adults are looking for in a volunteer experience, if we want to continue engaging them meaningfully in our work.

Volunteer Canada is currently engaged in research and consultations with seniors, non-profits and community-based senior serving organizations to better understand the shifting landscape of older adult participation in volunteering. As we learn more about the current motivators and barriers that impact older adults' experiences of volunteering, we can better adapt and evolve our volunteer engagement strategies and opportunities to meet their unique needs. Here are some of our findings so far.



## MOTIVATIONS

Older adults are still motivated by giving back to their community and helping others, but there are other motivations that encourage them to participate. Some folk report they get involved because they are lonely or bored and like the social aspect of volunteering. Others report that they like to share their skills and knowledge and offer mentorship to others.

### What can we do?

- Ask current volunteers what motivates them to be engaged
- Use motivations as the focus of your recruitment – highlight the aspects that folks are looking for
- Encourage your volunteers to spread the word and invite their friends – we hear that one of the best recruitment tools is still word of mouth. When asked why they start volunteering, one of the top answers people give is 'because someone asked me'



## BARRIERS

For many, transportation barriers are a big obstacle for engaging in volunteer opportunities. This has been exacerbated by the rise in gas prices and cost of living. The challenging financial situation currently impacting the country is often cited as a large barrier for people.

Having less time available for volunteer activities has also been shared as a barrier for engagement. Some older adults are having to take on paid jobs because of the rising cost of living. Others find they are acting as caregivers for their grandchildren, with parents having to take on second jobs or not able to afford childcare.

### What can we do?

- Create more flexible volunteer opportunities, with shorter-term commitments
- Consider offering honorariums to cover some of the costs of volunteering, like gas
- Encourage intergenerational or family volunteering – encourage older adults to bring their grandchildren!



## COMMUNITY CONNECTION

- Talk about the impact of your work as well as the logistics – show people the difference they can make in their community.
- Go out into the community and talk to older adults where they are already gathering. Speak about the impact of your work and encourage friend or work groups to volunteer together



## STEWARDSHIP

Stewardship is essential to foster a positive relationship between a volunteer and your organization.

- Make sure you are clear about your opportunities – with folks being more discerning about how they spend their time, they want to know exactly what they will be doing
- The application process can be long and complicated – consider supporting older adults through the process, even having monthly application clinics to help. Go one step further and look at streamlining the process.
- Be mindful to create a welcoming environment. Check your language is inclusive and easy to understand. Make new volunteers feel welcome by connecting them with an experienced volunteer buddy.
- Get to know your volunteers, find out their strengths and let them shine!
- Show your appreciation. Not all folks are looking for recognition but that doesn't mean we shouldn't show it! Let volunteers know the impact they are having and have a recognition program to show how important they are to your team. You can also ask them how they'd like to be recognized.
- Engage in National Volunteer Week! This Volunteer Canada hosted event takes place every April and offers ideas and resources for recognizing the contributions of all your volunteers.
- More resources & details on how to get involved in National Volunteer Week are on our website, [volunteer.ca](http://volunteer.ca)

