

CANADIAN CODE FOR VOLUNTEER INVOLVEMENT

Volunteer
Bénévoles
Canada

Volunteer Management
PROFESSIONALS OF CANADA

PROFESSIONNELS EN
gestion de bénévoles
DU CANADA

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TERRITORY ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

At Volunteer Canada, we recognize and acknowledge the Indigenous Peoples as the original stewards of the lands on which we live, work and volunteer. We humbly express our gratitude for their longstanding presence and enduring connections to this land.

We understand that our physical head office is located on the unceded and unsurrendered Anishianbewaki and Algonquin territory, along the banks of the Ottawa River, and we recognize the role the Algonquin Peoples play as traditional waterkeepers and defenders of the river and the land.

We recognize this as part of reaffirming our commitment and responsibility to improving relationships between nations, as well as our own understanding of local Indigenous Peoples and their cultures.

From coast to coast to coast, we acknowledge the ancestral and unceded territory of all the Inuit, Métis and First Nations Peoples.

As we move forward, we recognize the collective responsibility we hold in promoting truth, understanding and positive change. We encourage all Canadians to join us in this journey of reconciliation as we work toward building a more just, equitable and inclusive society for all.



ELEVATING VOLUNTEERING TO GROW CONNECTION, COMMUNITY AND BELONGING

The updated 2026 Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement, which builds on the 2017 edition, were developed at a time when Canada's volunteer landscape is undergoing a seismic shift. Nonprofit organizations of all sizes are navigating constrained resources, a declining volunteer base and increasing demand for services. At the same time, our sector is responding to growing social isolation and polarization. These realities underscore why this document is both timely and necessary for the sector.

We believe that volunteer engagement elevates connection, community and belonging by empowering and enabling people to come together and contribute to their communities in meaningful ways. When managed with care and intention, as the ten principles in the Code describe, volunteering has been proven to lead to community and individual transformation and sustainability.

This document can serve as a guide for organizations of all sizes that are working to improve their volunteer engagement approach across all demographics. They can use this document to work to ensure that everyone—including newcomers to Canada, youth, seniors and members of racialized communities—feels welcomed and valued as volunteers.

Underpinning this updated set of principles is the belief that everyone has something to contribute and, equally, has something to gain from volunteering. It might be a new skill, a new sense of confidence or well-being, or a renewed sense of community belonging.

It is our role to work together to build a strong, unified infrastructure for volunteerism to thrive in communities across the country. To re-engage volunteers by making their roles more meaningful, flexible and accessible. This document is a step toward the future that we will build together.



Megan Conway
President & CEO,
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President,
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FOREWORD

The Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement (CCVI) was initially developed for the 2001 International Year of Volunteers and continues to be a seminal resource for the voluntary sector. CCVI was inspired by a diverse group of voluntary sector leaders. With the release of the 2026 Updated CCVI, Volunteer Canada and Volunteer Management Professionals of Canada have developed a resource which recognizes and values the evolving dynamic of volunteerism and volunteer engagement as a driving force of community innovation, belonging, and expression of humanity. The 2026 Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement builds on the strong foundation of the original CCVI by creating safe, welcoming and supportive volunteer engagement environments.

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Original Author, Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement



INTRODUCTION

Volunteer Canada

Since 1977, Volunteer Canada has acted as a national leader in advancing volunteerism across the country. A registered charity with over 1,000 organizational members, we work with a wide range of corporate, charitable, nonprofit and educational partners nationwide to strengthen the quality, quantity and accessibility of volunteering. Our mission is to provide leadership and expertise that enhances the quality and diversity of volunteer experiences. Through our work, we aim to strengthen communities, promote social inclusion and create opportunities for people to contribute meaningfully.

Volunteer Management Professionals of Canada (VMPC)

The Volunteer Management Professionals of Canada (VMPC) is Canada's National Volunteer Engagement Professional Association. We are committed to efforts that champion the volunteer engagement profession through the pillars of advocacy, professional development and partnership that elevate volunteerism across Canada. VMPC collaborates with provincial, national and international organizations to support its membership and strives for volunteer engagement management to be recognized and respected as a leading profession of choice.

Developing the Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement

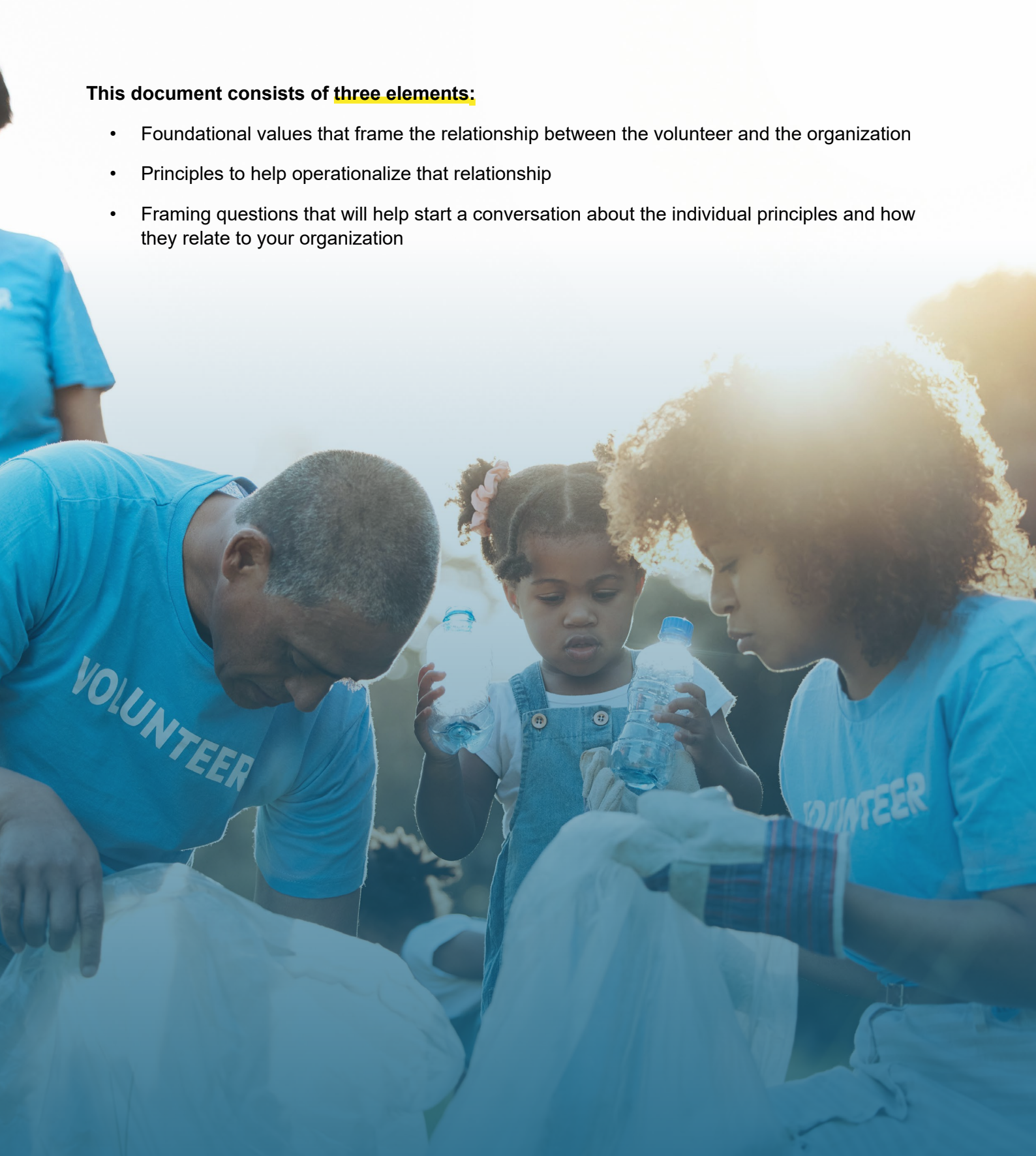
First developed in 2001, and building on the Volunteer Management Professionals of Canada's Professional Standards, this latest revision of the Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement has been adapted to meet the needs of the changing landscape of volunteering in Canada.

The ten principles help organizations develop and assess their volunteer engagement strategy and investment. They support fair access to volunteer opportunities that reflect the organization's vision, mission, goals and structure. Volunteers benefit when volunteering is an organizational priority and part of wider community-building efforts.

- The principles were developed to be flexible and adaptable for organizations of all sizes, with different levels of resourcing, led by a professional leader of volunteers, other paid staff or volunteers. While these principles are focused on formal volunteering engagements, they can also be used to guide more informal volunteering arrangements.
- The updated principles support flexibility, recognizing the different settings where volunteers are engaged. By adapting to each context, the principles also help welcome diversity and promote inclusion in all types and sizes of organizations.

This document consists of three elements:

- Foundational values that frame the relationship between the volunteer and the organization
- Principles to help operationalize that relationship
- Framing questions that will help start a conversation about the individual principles and how they relate to your organization



Consultation

Surveys, virtual consultations and collaborative feedback tools were used to provide input into the Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement. Perspectives were gathered from across the sector, including from volunteer centres, VMPC members, youth and newcomers. In addition, consultations were facilitated as part of the broader process to develop the National Volunteer Action Strategy, allowing for a wider and more diverse group of participants.

FOUNDATIONAL VALUES OF VOLUNTEER INVOLVEMENT

The following **foundational values** help to ensure that the relationship between volunteers, organizations and the greater community is reciprocal, fulfilling and beneficial.

- Volunteers contribute expertise, care, creativity and cultural knowledge that builds community resilience, equity and connection.
- Every volunteer engagement is transformative and reciprocal. The volunteers, organizations and individuals being supported all benefit.
- Volunteering is a driver of collective well-being, spanning physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health.
- Volunteering is vital to building strong, inclusive communities and integral to addressing social isolation, economic disparities and systemic inequities.
- The nonprofit sector, and the abundance of volunteering within it, contributes both social and economic value to the broader society.
- Across all cultures and communities, people support one another in many different ways. Not all of these forms of support are referred to as "volunteering". The formal volunteering addressed in these principles represents a progression within the wider tradition of mutual aid, generosity and shared responsibility.
- Volunteer frameworks that centre emotional and psychological safety, trust and empowerment help foster a trauma- and violence-informed approach.
- Volunteering must be non-exploitative and mutually beneficial. Forced service, replacing paid work with unpaid roles or misleading people into unpaid labour violates volunteering principles and may have legal consequences.

TEN PRINCIPLES FOR VOLUNTEER INVOLVEMENT

These principles set goals for a rewarding relationship between an organization and its volunteers. Rather than simply a checklist of step-by-step instructions, these principles are intended to support organizations to plan meaningful volunteer engagement, identify improvements and assess progress.

Apply the principles in ways that fit your organization's size, resources and circumstances. Use them as:

- a high-level guide to help with planning
- a checklist to identify opportunities for improvement
- an assessment tool to be used in a more formal way to measure progress

PRINCIPLE	DESCRIPTION
1. Volunteering is appropriately prioritized by the organization's governance and leadership	The vital role that volunteers play in achieving the organization's strategic goals is supported, acknowledged and respected by the Board of Directors, senior staff and other governing or advisory bodies. The role of volunteers is formalized in the organization's strategic framework, organizational structure and key planning documents.
2. Volunteers are integral to an organization's success. Their contributions are valued, protected and supported.	Volunteering is recognized for its unique and essential role in advancing the organization's efforts, ensuring volunteers are recognized, supported, and valued. When supported, volunteers join in achieving organizational goals, benefitting all. The roles and responsibilities of staff and volunteers are clearly delineated.
3. Volunteer engagement is integrated into all aspects of an organization	Volunteer engagement is not free. Every organization that involves volunteers must plan and budget for it. This includes staff time, volunteer support and recognition, and tools such as a volunteer database. Clear policies and procedures guide the work across the organization. Volunteer engagement professionals need adequate resources, professional development and access to regional and national networks.
4. The success of an organization's volunteer engagement is measured broadly and includes impact	Evaluation includes both numbers, such as volunteer hours and participation, and the difference volunteering makes. It considers learning, community change and benefits for volunteers and people served. Positive outcomes may include greater social connections, increased community capacity, and/or volunteers moving on to paid work, education or another opportunity. Volunteers and people served help define success and identify improvements.

PRINCIPLE		DESCRIPTION
5.	**As valued members of the team, volunteers are recruited in a way that is intentional, equity-driven and reflective of the communities they engage**	Recruitment clearly explains volunteer roles, requirements and community impact. Organizations work with communities to reach people with diverse backgrounds and lived experiences. They identify and address barriers to participation and respect different forms of volunteering. Volunteer teams that reflect the communities served can strengthen belonging, trust and safety.
6.	**Risk is proactively managed so that volunteers can be safely and meaningfully engaged**	The organization and its volunteers share responsibility for identifying, managing and reducing risks. These include physical, emotional, reputational and relationship risks. Risk management is part of the organization's health, safety and equity practices. Responsibilities are clear, and procedures support a timely and appropriate response when an incident occurs.
7.	**Volunteer screening processes are context-based, balancing safety with accessibility**	Screening is an ongoing part of risk management, not just a police record check. It should be ethical, fair and culturally responsive. Screening matches volunteers' interests, experience and motivations with role requirements while supporting safety, trust and inclusion. Avoid using screening as a means of exclusion. If a role is not a suitable match, explore other appropriate opportunities or referrals without compromising safety.
8.	**Volunteer training and orientation are an organization-wide responsibility that supports outcomes, teamwork, retention and risk mitigation**	Effective orientation and training help volunteers feel prepared, stay engaged and contribute meaningfully. Learning opportunities continue throughout a volunteer's involvement, including for long-standing volunteers. Training methods adapt to different needs. Responsibilities for each level of training are clear. Volunteer feedback and regular reviews help improve training.
9.	**Volunteers receive the support and supervision they need, with a focus on mentorship, inclusion and mutual accountability**	Support and supervision help make volunteering accessible, inclusive and equitable. Mentorship, two-way feedback and open communication build trust and shared accountability. Volunteers and staff know how to raise concerns, where to seek help and what response to expect.
10.	**Volunteer recognition and appreciation are embedded into an organization's culture, and efforts are consistently sustained**	Volunteers are recognized, appreciated, respected and valued in everyday interactions. Recognition is sustained throughout the year and agreed upon with volunteers, reflecting what is meaningful to them across communities and roles.

ADOPTING AND IMPLEMENTING THE TEN PRINCIPLES

Using the principles for a practical assessment

Depending on your needs and capacity, you can start with one principle or review all ten. Include volunteers, staff and leadership, as possible. They will all bring different perspectives and ideas to inform your volunteer engagement practices. To guide your assessment:

1. Discuss the framing questions for each principle you are reviewing.
2. Record what is working and the supporting evidence, such as policies, budgets, volunteer feedback or stories from people served.
3. Mark each principle as an established practice, progressing towards implementation, or not yet started. Record any additional information or resources you need to move the principle into an established practice.
4. Choose priority improvements. For each principle under review, agree on an action, the person or team responsible, any required resources and a target completion date.
5. Create a simple assessment record and set a review date to revisit the evidence with staff, volunteers and people served to assess progress. Include the following in the assessment record: the practice being reviewed, current practice and supporting evidence, gaps and resources needed to close them, next actions and who's responsible, and a review date.



FRAMING QUESTIONS

1. Volunteering is appropriately prioritized by the organization's governance and leadership	Why does your organization engage volunteers? How is volunteer engagement championed by the organization, including senior leadership? How does volunteer engagement align with your organization's strategic goals? Does your organization recognize Board members as volunteers and include them in its volunteer engagement approach?
2. Volunteers are integral to an organization's success. Their contributions are valued, protected and supported.	How are you engaging volunteers in your planning processes? How are volunteer and paid staff roles clearly delineated/defined/differentiated? How are volunteer and paid staff roles clearly defined and kept distinct? What policies and processes protect staff who also volunteer, including ensuring they do not volunteer for tasks they are normally paid to perform?
3. Volunteer engagement is integrated into all aspects of an organization	How are you resourcing, investing and planning for organizational readiness for volunteers? How is volunteer engagement integrated across the organization? Does your organization prioritize volunteer engagement by hiring a professional with experience in this area? How are volunteer roles developed, supported and evaluated? How does your organization budget for volunteer engagement staff, volunteer support, recognition and infrastructure, such as a volunteer database? How does your organization support the professional development of volunteer engagement staff?
4. The success of an organization's volunteer engagement is measured broadly and includes impact	What metrics are in place to collect both quantitative and qualitative data to measure the success of a volunteer initiative? How are you sharing the data, insights, stories and feedback about volunteering to volunteers, staff, leadership and the greater community? How is this data used to address challenges and improve efforts? How do you measure and communicate positive outcomes when volunteers move on to paid work, education or other opportunities? With their consent, how do you collect and share impact stories from people served to celebrate volunteers' contributions?

5. As valued members of the team, volunteers are recruited in a way that is intentional, equity-driven and reflective of the communities they engage	How are recruitment, onboarding and training plans created, sustained and evaluated? How are you welcoming people who show an interest in volunteering? How have you planned the volunteer journey and experience? How do you identify, monitor and address current or potential barriers to volunteer participation? How do you involve the communities served in recruitment so that volunteer teams reflect their backgrounds and lived experiences?
6. Risk is proactively managed so that volunteers can be safely and meaningfully engaged	Are staff and volunteer safety policies aligned while accounting for volunteers' specific roles and needs? Does your insurance cover all volunteers and the activities they perform, including older volunteers? What age limits, exclusions or additional coverage requirements need to be addressed? Whose risk is prioritized, and how does this impact the safety of everyone in your organization's community? How do you assess risks in each volunteer role, and who is responsible for reviewing and updating those assessments?
7. Volunteer screening processes are context-based, balancing safety with accessibility	Do you have role-based criteria for screening different volunteer opportunities across the organization? Are volunteer roles written with clear requirements and tasks, enabling volunteers to determine if they are aligned with the role? If a volunteer is not a suitable match for one role, what other safe and appropriate roles or referrals to another organization can you offer?
8. Volunteer training and orientation are an organization-wide responsibility that supports outcomes, teamwork, retention and risk mitigation	How do you ensure orientation and training are effective? Do you have a variety of training methods and resources to ensure effective learning? How do you assess the effectiveness of volunteer training? How do you plan ongoing learning opportunities for long-standing volunteers? Who is responsible for orientation, role-specific training and ongoing learning across the organization? How do you use volunteer feedback and retention patterns to improve orientation and training?



9. Volunteers receive the support and supervision they need, with a focus on mentorship, inclusion and mutual accountability	How are staff supported in their supervision of volunteers? How are supervisors evaluated on volunteer support and supervision? Are there processes in place to collect feedback from volunteers on the support and supervision they receive? Do volunteers and staff know the procedure for raising a concern or issue, who to contact and how concerns will be addressed?
10. Volunteer recognition and appreciation are embedded into an organization's culture, and efforts are consistently sustained	How are you stewarding and recognizing your volunteers, both formally and informally? Does your organization have a year-round recognition strategy and plan? What are some daily appreciation actions that can be integrated into the volunteering experience?

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Active Citizenship	An umbrella concept regarding the rights and responsibilities of citizens. It urges people to be more engaged with the world around them. (The Canadian Encyclopedia)
Board	Those persons responsible for providing leadership and direction to the organization and tasked with governing the organization's affairs on behalf of its members. (updated from CCVI)
Capacity	The human and financial resources, technology, skills, knowledge and understanding required for organizations to do their work and fulfill the expectations of stakeholders. (CCVI)
Culture	The way a group of people engages with one another. It refers to the shared language, values, traditions, norms, customs, arts, history or institutions of a group of people.
Diversity	A broad term that refers to the differences among individuals and groups, including differences in age, culture, faith, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and ability. (CCVI)
Employer-Supported Volunteering	The practice of employers providing the time, space, infrastructure and support for their employees to volunteer in the communities where they live and work. (updated from CCVI)
Formal Volunteer	A person who does any activities without pay on behalf of a group or organization. (Statistics Canada)
Informal Volunteer	A person who helps someone or their community on their own (i.e., not on behalf of a group or organization). (Statistics Canada)
Intern	An individual who receives training from an employer in a skill that is used by other employees. The intern doesn't replace volunteers or employees, but instead benefits from their internship by learning skills. (Volunteer Toronto)
Mission	The overall goal of the organization. (updated from CCVI)

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Mutal Aid	Working cooperatively to meet the needs of everyone in the community and beyond. (Mutual Aid Canada)
Non-Profit Organization	Self-governing organizations that exist to serve the public benefit and generate social capital but do not distribute private profit to members. (updated from CCVI)
Placement	Someone sharing their time with an organization as part of a co-curricular or credit-based requirement of their schooling. A student placement is neither a volunteer nor an employee, but must follow the volunteer policies. (Volunteer Toronto)
Policies	Specific statements of belief, principle or action to guide decisions and achieve outcomes. (CCVI)
Procedures	A series of steps to help implement policy. The steps indicate who will do the work and how it will be done. (CCVI)
Screening	An ongoing process that matches people with suitable roles and helps create and maintain a safe environment. Screening is based on the risks of the role and extends from role planning through a volunteer's involvement. (Adapted from Public Safety Canada, Best Practice Guidelines for Screening Volunteers; accessed October 29, 2026.)
Staff	Individuals who perform paid work on behalf of an organization. (CCVI)
Volunteer	A volunteer is a person who shares time, skills and energy to provide support to communities and causes without pay. (Volunteer Toronto)
Volunteer Engagement Professional	An individual responsible for the volunteer lifecycle in an organization, including functions related to planning, recruiting, screening, supporting, engaging and recognizing volunteers.



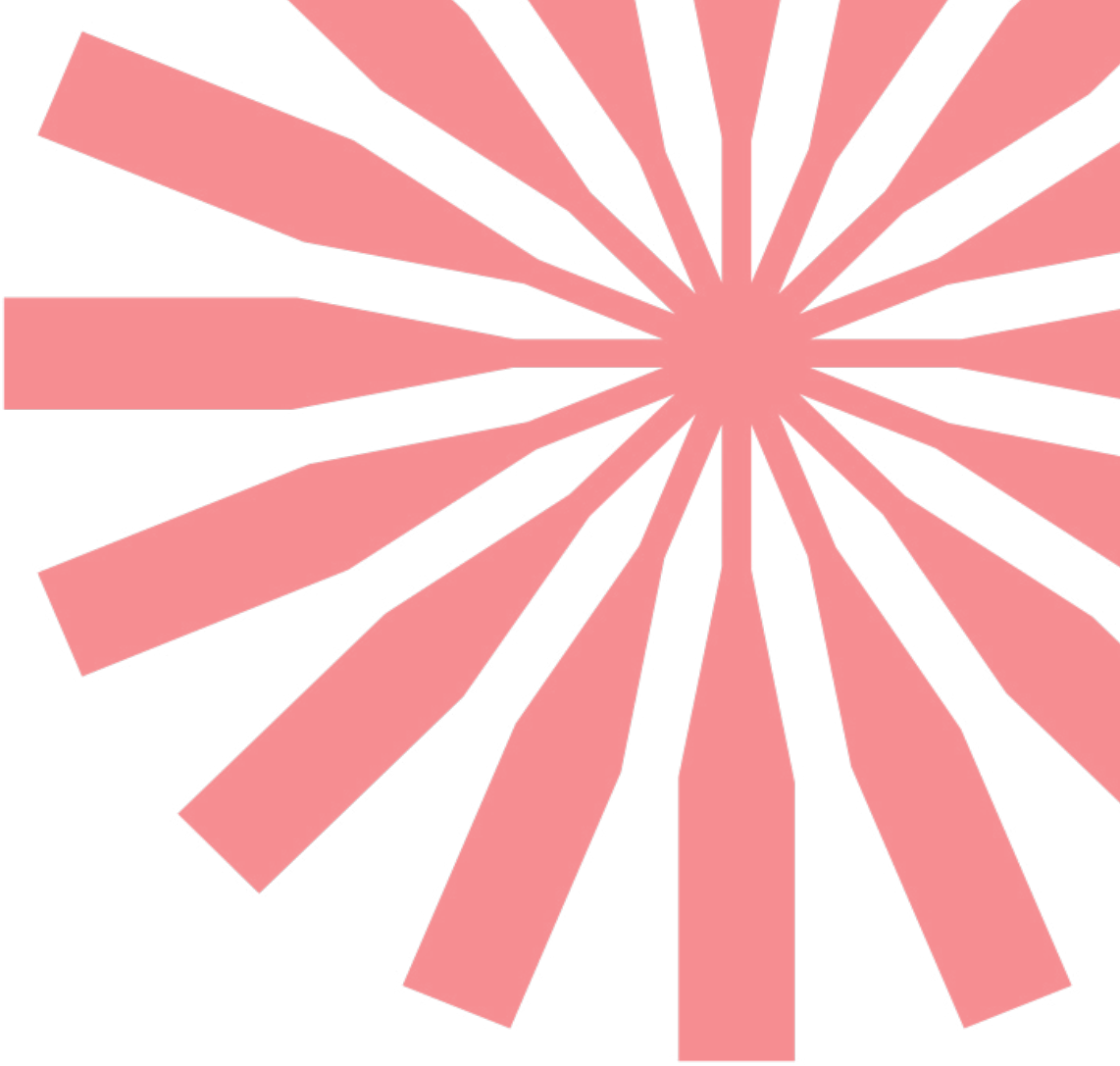
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Volunteer Bénévoles Canada

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