

Engaging Young Volunteers in Rural Newfoundland (Overview)

Fran Locke with Penelope Rowe

Community Services Council Newfoundland and Labrador (CSC)



Knowledge Development
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Our research project, *Engaging Young Volunteers (Aged 15 - 34) in Rural Newfoundland*, looked at the perceived divide between how young adults and youth want to volunteer and how organizations attract, use and motivate young people. A related topic is the extent to which nonprofit groups and young volunteers work cooperatively to adapt volunteer programs to changing personal interests, lifestyles and manner of involvement.

Research Objectives

- To explore organizational practices and attitudes likely to attract or “turn off” young volunteers and emerging leaders.
- To identify activities of interest to young people.
- To inquire why some young people may not volunteer.
- To help organizations use this information to develop recruitment and management practices and to encourage emerging leaders.

Methodology

The study began with a telephone scan of 117 nonprofit organizations in five locations in Central Newfoundland.¹ In-depth interviews were conducted with 41 organizations representing a cross-section of the original sample. Five discussion groups were held with a total of 44 young volunteers, who also completed a written survey focused on their personal volunteer experiences. Another 35 young volunteers completed the same survey online. Interviews were also conducted with 11 young people who had formerly volunteered and 10 who never volunteered. Community meetings were organized to present and discuss the research results and training workshops were offered in three communities.

¹ The Central region comprises about 50,000 km², nearly half the island of Newfoundland, with a fifth (100,000) of the province’s population.

Issues

The issues identified are similar to those that arise during most discussions of volunteerism:

- recruitment and retention
- awareness and appeal
- motivations and benefits of volunteering
- leadership
- stress and burnout of core volunteers
- time constraints
- appreciation and respect
- transportation and financial constraints
- exclusion and generation gap
- competition and potential for cooperation amongst organizations

The study showed that even in small communities there is a lack of awareness around volunteer opportunities and the work of voluntary organizations, and that word of mouth through various channels is the most effective means of recruitment. Many young people are not being asked to volunteer. These results support earlier CSC research.²

Young People...

- support causes they believe in
- want to explore their interests and strengths
- want the satisfaction of seeing the results of their actions
- want to build résumés, learn skills and increase employment opportunities
- can be influenced by friends and family to volunteer or not volunteer

² Community Services Council. (2003). *Volunteering in Newfoundland and Labrador*. Retrieved August 23, 2005, from: <http://www.enVision.ca/pdf/FactSheetJan2004.pdf>

Changing Strategies

Organizations should be open to new strategies to include young people in their volunteering programs. New ways of doing things require dedicated human resources and some financial investment. Orientation and training of new volunteers is time consuming in the short-term. Staff and senior volunteers themselves may need training to develop and carry out new methods. Working together or individually, nonprofit organizations can examine and modify their approaches to recruitment, development, and retention of volunteers. Taking time in the short-term to build a positive volunteer experience will result in long-term benefits for everyone involved.

How to Attract Young Volunteers

- Ask non-volunteers to get involved.
- Prepare clear volunteer job descriptions.
- Provide a range of types of volunteer positions, including short-term opportunities.
- Highlight the benefits of volunteering.
- Work cooperatively with other groups.
- Promote opportunities through many avenues.
- Know that word of mouth works best.
- Think inclusively, recognize barriers, devise and promote solutions.
- Realize that friends and family can encourage or deter young people from volunteering.

How to Keep Young Volunteers

- Provide orientation to the position.
- Offer training and other incentives.
- Give adequate supervision.
- Respect young volunteers.
- Appreciate and use their skills, talents, ideas, energy and enthusiasm.
- Give appropriate responsibility.
- Acknowledge their accomplishments.
- Provide learning and leadership opportunities.
- Make volunteering fun.
- Consider training for staff and volunteers to develop volunteer management skills.

Collaboration

Many organizations share similar problems. There may be advantages in seeking joint approaches. Hall et al (2005) showed that Canada's big organizations are getting bigger and the small are getting smaller in several respects, including revenues, numbers of volunteers, and numbers of paid staff. Individual organizations in small communities find it difficult to have a volunteer coordinator or get training for their organization alone. A central shared resource might enable a new approach to collaboration on some of the issues groups have in common. A regional facilitator or trainer could bring together people from many organizations, open their minds to new strategies and assist with action planning, taking some of the pressure off staff and existing volunteers.

Additional findings from our project can be found in three other fact sheets and a report published as part of this series, *Engaging Young Volunteers in Rural Newfoundland*:

- *Key Findings about Young Volunteers*;
- *A Community Profile*;
- *Be a Volunteer! Tips for Youth*; and
- *Engaging Young Volunteers (Aged 15 - 34) in Rural Newfoundland (Report)*.

More information and resources for voluntary organizations and anyone interested in the voluntary nonprofit sector can be found at www.enVision.ca and www.voluntarygateway.ca

Knowledge Development Centre, Imagine Canada
425 University Ave., Suite 900 Toronto, ON M5G 1T6
tel. 416.597.2293 / 1.800.263.1178 fax. 416.597.2294

We welcome your feedback about this research product and how you made use of it. Please e-mail us at kdc@imaginecanada.ca.

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