

# MONITORING & TRACKING THE FIELD



CFLRI'S BULLETIN SERIES MONITORING SPORT AND RECREATION IN CANADA

## Volunteering in Sport

Volunteers play a vital role in the day-to-day operations for many community and non-profit organizations.<sup>1</sup> More specifically, volunteers play a critical role in the delivery system for sport, recreation and physical activity programming at all levels from community- to national-level, and can include various capacities such as coaches, officials, event hosts, administrators, and management support.<sup>2,3,4</sup> The contribution of volunteers helps to ensure that sport programming is more accessible and affordable, by lowering operational costs of service providers.<sup>3</sup>

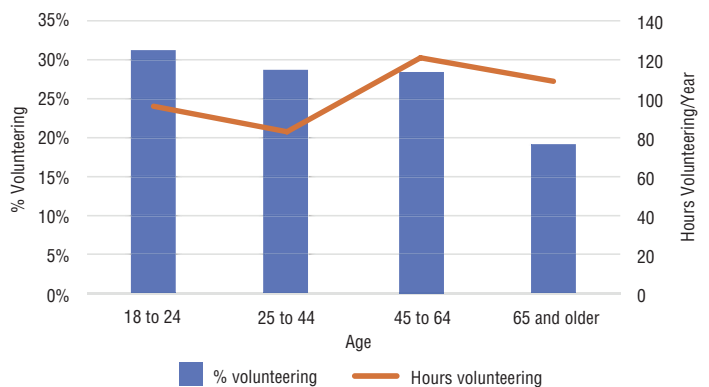
### Percentage and hours volunteering in sport and recreation

According to the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute's 2020 Sport Monitor, just over one-quarter (27%) of adults report volunteering in an activity related to sport in the 12 months prior to the survey, devoting approximately 105 hours on average in a year. Compared to the national average, a greater percentage of adults living in West report volunteering whereas relatively fewer living in Quebec do so.

Among these, a slightly higher proportion of men (29%) volunteer, and also spend considerably more hours (mean approximately 120 hours/year) volunteering in sport compared to women (25% volunteer for an average of approximately 80 hours/year). Older adults (65 years and older) are the least likely to report volunteering compared to younger ages. Adults who are married or living with a partner are most likely to report volunteering, although there are no significant differences with the amount of time spent. Participation in sport volunteering is also related to education and household income level. A higher proportion of adults with a university degree volunteer compared to

adults who have not attended post-secondary education institutions. Generally speaking, the percentage volunteering for sport increases among those living in higher income households. There are, however, no significant differences in the hours spent volunteering by education or household income level.

Figure 1: Volunteering in sport by age



CFLRI, 2020 Sport Monitor

### Attitudes towards volunteering

Among those who volunteer, just over half (56%) say that they have been adequately trained to a moderate or great extent. A further 21% say that they had adequate training to some extent, whereas the remaining 23% report not receiving adequate training at all or else to a limited extent. The percentages were very similar between men and women, across the ages, within education and household income levels, and community size. Compared to the national average, relatively fewer volunteers in Quebec indicate that they feel that they have been adequately



trained to a moderate or great extent, and yet more volunteers in this province state that they did not receive adequate training at all or only to a limited extent.

The overwhelming majority (88%) of volunteers consider their volunteer contribution as valued and 91% indicate that their volunteering provides a positive contribution to the organization or community to a moderate or great extent. When volunteers were asked to rate their experiences as a volunteer in a sport activity, 90% say that their experience has been positive to some extent, whereas 9% are neutral about the experience. These high proportions remain fairly stable across gender, age, education and household income levels, community size and region.

### Reasons for and barriers to volunteering

Both volunteers and non-volunteers were asked to indicate the most important reasons that they (for volunteers) or others (for non-volunteers) volunteer in sport, and the findings are presented in Table 1. A higher percentage of women than men indicate that involvement of family and friends in sport is an important reason to volunteer, whereas a greater percentage of men report social networking or contributing back to the community compared to women. Compared to some younger age groups, a greater percentage of older adults (65 years and older) say that enjoyment/interest of the sport or support of a specific organization is the most important reason that individuals volunteer in sport. On the contrary, relatively more 18 to 24 year olds cite sport development or mentorship as the most important reasons for volunteering

**Table 1:** Most important reasons for volunteering in sport

	% of adults indicating reason
Social networking, meeting people, contributing to the community	26%
For development, mentorship, maintaining or promoting sport	20%
Enjoyment or interest in the sport or organization	18%
Family/friends are involved	14%
For health, fitness, healthy development	11%
Have the time to do it	2%
Required for school or requested to participate	2%

CFLRI, 2020 Sport Monitor

compared to adults 65 years and older. A greater proportion of adults aged 25 to 64 years say that the involvement of family and friends in sport is the most important reason for volunteering compared to older adults.

Adults who do not volunteer were also asked about the most important factors that prevent individuals from volunteering. Time or a busy schedule was ranked highest with 58% of non-volunteers indicating this as a key barrier. Table 2 summarizes the most prevalent perceived barriers to volunteering. More women than men report health, age, or injury as a key barrier. Adults 25 to 44 years of age are most likely to say that lack of time or a busy schedule is a key barrier to volunteering, whereas adults 65 years and older are generally more likely to say that health, age, injury, or lack of motivation or interest are key barriers. Adults 18 to 24 years are most likely to say that lack of access, availability or knowledge of opportunities are key reasons that individuals do not volunteer.

**Table 2:** Most important factors preventing individuals from volunteering in sport

	% of adults indicating barriers to volunteering
Time or busy schedule	58%
Lack of motivation or interest	11%
Lack of access or knowledge of opportunities	11%
Lack of confidence, self-esteem, skill	6%
Health, age, or injury	6%
Negative culture within sport system	4%
Cost, lack of transportation or child care	4%

CFLRI, 2020 Sport Monitor

## Discussion

The global pandemic has imposed additional challenges for the sport sector by reducing and/or eliminating opportunities for participating in sport and physical activity.<sup>1</sup> Across many jurisdictions sport and recreation programs and events have had to be cancelled indefinitely.<sup>1</sup> Despite the many challenges associated with the requirements for social-distancing and added restrictions, the pandemic has also presented sport organizations with a unique opportunity to tap into more innovative ways to keep participants engaged, one such example is use of virtual volunteering.<sup>1,3,4</sup>

Although not a new concept, virtual or digital volunteering has become increasingly popular as we navigate through the digital age, and more recently during the pandemic as organizations have been forced to pivot from the traditional method of in-person volunteering to virtual volunteering.<sup>3,4</sup> Studies have shown that as is the case with traditional volunteering, participation in virtual volunteering depends on various factors, such as gender, age, education level, and employment status; specifically, virtual volunteers are more likely to be young, males, unemployed and have a lower level of education.<sup>4</sup> Despite the potential challenges in shifting to an online system, virtual volunteering may prove advantageous for program sustainability.<sup>4</sup> Specifically, virtual volunteering has the potential to improve retention; for example by allowing older volunteers to continue in their roles from the comfort of their homes thereby mitigating the risk of exposure to the virus as well as addressing concerns with physical ability constraints as they age.<sup>3,4</sup> Another added benefit to virtual volunteering, is its ability to allow for more flexibility thereby addressing issues related to time constraints.<sup>3,4</sup> Through virtual volunteering, organizations may have the opportunity to enhance involvement by expanding recruitment to include individuals from different regions.<sup>4</sup> Virtual volunteering, therefore, may be proven to be considerably useful even after restrictions begin to lift, as it may allow for sport organizations to increase capacity and remain operational.<sup>3,4</sup> Going forward it will be important to understand how these newly imposed challenges and subsequent changes affect future engagement, recruitment and retention of volunteers.<sup>4</sup>

Data from Statistics Canada's 2018 General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating (GSS-GVP) provides additional information looking at the preferences related to volunteering, including whether Canadians volunteer in a formal capacity (i.e., on behalf of an organization, 41%) or informally (i.e., assisting individual/individuals outside an organization, 74%).<sup>1</sup> The 2018 study found that older adults

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tended to spend more *hours* volunteering in a formal capacity than young adults, but that a higher *percentage* of younger adults volunteered informally compared to older adults<sup>1</sup>.

An earlier study (2010) examined the perspectives (e.g., characteristics and experiences) of four key volunteer groups (i.e., youth, baby boomers, families and employer-supported volunteers) and found differences in their reported preferences, barriers and motivation for volunteering.<sup>2</sup> This study found that a small proportion of volunteers are considered 'loyal' or 'champion' volunteers, (i.e., those who consistently volunteer), and tend to be largely comprised of older adults.<sup>2</sup> This finding complements findings from the 2020 Sport Monitor as a higher percentage of older adults indicate that interest in the sport or support of a particular organization are important reasons for volunteering in sport.

With regard to interests or preferences for volunteering, the 2010 study also found that a higher percentage of young adults reported volunteering with sports and recreation (or education/research organizations) and to prefer volunteering with friends whereas family volunteers tend to look for opportunities where the whole family could volunteer together.<sup>2</sup> The 2018 GSS-GVP data (Statistics Canada) shows that higher rates of volunteering are seen in households with school-aged children (54.6%) compared to those with no children in the household (38%) or pre-school aged children (32.4%).<sup>6</sup> Data from the 2020 Sport Monitor shows that a higher percentage of women and 25 to 64 years olds (compared to older adults) cite family and friend involvement in sport as important motivators for volunteering. By far, the lack of time was found to be the number one barrier to volunteering according to the Sport Monitor, followed by a lack of motivation or interest, and by a lack of availability, access, and awareness of opportunities, and these findings are supported by existing research.<sup>2</sup>

# FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS



## Consider family and friends

The involvement of family, friends or the social aspects of volunteering is a critical factor in volunteer involvement. Although this may be an important driver in recruitment, it is necessary to ensure that the volunteer experience remains a positive one to ensure lasting commitment. In addition, this provides an excellent opportunity for sport and recreation organizations to marry volunteer experiences with actual sport participation through the offering of beginner or trial classes, or fun activities such as volunteer versus athlete games.



## Consider age

In view of the global pandemic and its potential negative health implications particularly for the elderly, coupled with an increasingly aging population, the role of younger volunteers in sport is important. Engaging more youth will require organizations to consider both potential barriers as well as factors which may motivate young volunteers to become more involved.<sup>5</sup> Data from the 2020 Sport Monitor shows that volunteering rates are lowest among older adults, therefore, ensuring that older adults feel welcomed to participate as a volunteer in suitable roles and with appropriate training could be a potential area of focus for service delivery organization. Sport organizations should consider adopting web-based volunteer positions as a strategy to appeal to younger volunteers as well as to assist older adults in continuing in their roles.<sup>4</sup>



## Consider technology

Sport organizations may need to investigate and identify opportunities for virtual assistance and address any potential barriers to virtual volunteering (e.g., logistics, financial support for equipment and/or software).<sup>3,4</sup>



## Consider feedback

Research has shown that volunteer satisfaction involves a balance between the needs of the organization and those of the volunteers themselves.<sup>2</sup> Volunteer roles and expectations should be clearly defined and allow for some flexibility to allow volunteers to contribute their skills and experiences.<sup>2</sup>



## Consider the lasting impacts

Ongoing research and surveillance is warranted to determine how the pandemic will influence the post-pandemic concerns, preferences, and interests of potential volunteers as well as to identify any newly emerged challenges,<sup>2</sup> and whether any changes will have a long and lasting impact on the delivery services for sport given the integral role that volunteers play.

## References

<sup>1</sup> Hahmann, T., du Plessis, V., Fournier-Savard, P. 2020. Volunteering in Canada: Challenges and opportunities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Statistics Canada. Accessed from: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/45-28-0001/2020001/article/00037-eng.pdf?st=KidBvO3a>

<sup>2</sup> Volunteer Canada. 2010. Bridging the gap- Enriching the volunteer experience to build a better future for our communities. Summary of findings of a Pan-Canadian Research Study. Accessed from: [https://www.volunteer.ca/vdemo/researchandresources\\_docs/Bridging the Gap Summary.pdf](https://www.volunteer.ca/vdemo/researchandresources_docs/Bridging%20the%20Gap%20Summary.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Baxter, H., Misener K., Kappelides, P., Williamson, L. 2020. Virtual Volunteering in Community Sport. SIRC. Accessed from: <https://sirc.ca/blog/virtual-volunteering/>

<sup>4</sup> Lachance, EL. (2020): COVID-19 and its Impact on Volunteering: Moving Towards Virtual Volunteering. Leisure Sciences. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01490400.2020.1773990>

<sup>5</sup> Rebel, N. 2018. Engaging Youth Volunteers. SIRC. Accessed from: <https://sirc.ca/blog/engaging-youth-volunteers/>

<sup>6</sup> Statistics Canada. (2018). Table 45-10-0044-01 Volunteer rate and average annual volunteer hours, by definition of volunteering and presence of children in household.



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