

Newcomers as Volunteers

This edition of Migration Matters focuses on volunteerism and organizational supports for newcomer volunteers. It explores the scale and shape of newcomer volunteerism, as well as motivations, benefits, and barriers. Information for organizations on engaging and managing newcomer volunteers is also provided.

Introduction

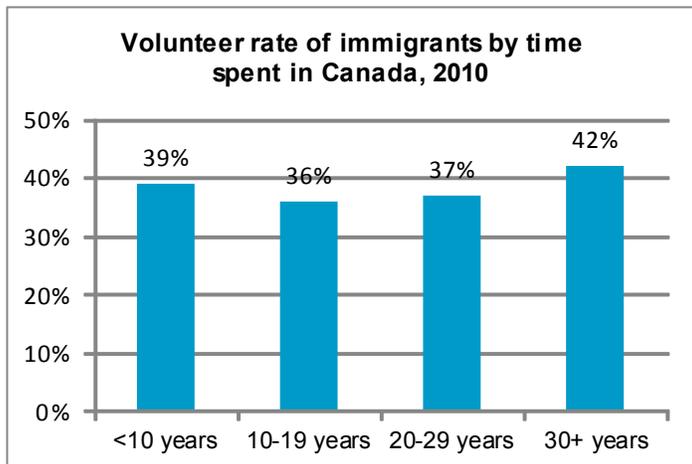
Statistics Canada describes volunteers as “people who have provided a service, without monetary compensation, for a group or organization at least once during the [past year].”¹ According to this measure, 50% of people in BC participate in some form of volunteering.² Many regard volunteerism as an important part of Canadian culture, with benefits for both wider society and volunteers themselves.³

Newcomer volunteerism

Newcomers are less likely than the Canadian-born to volunteer, with a volunteer rate of 39%.⁴ In addition:⁵

- Those newcomers who do volunteer contribute about the same number of hours as Canadian-born volunteers.
- Low-income newcomers are just as likely as low-income Canadians to volunteer.
- Newcomers who spoke English or French at home were more likely to volunteer than newcomers who spoke another language at home.

Previously, research indicated that the longer newcomers lived in Canada, the more likely they were to volunteer. However, more recent data shows new immigrants volunteering to a much greater extent than before.⁶ Perhaps as a result, many organizations are reporting an increasing number of newcomers seeking volunteering opportunities.⁷



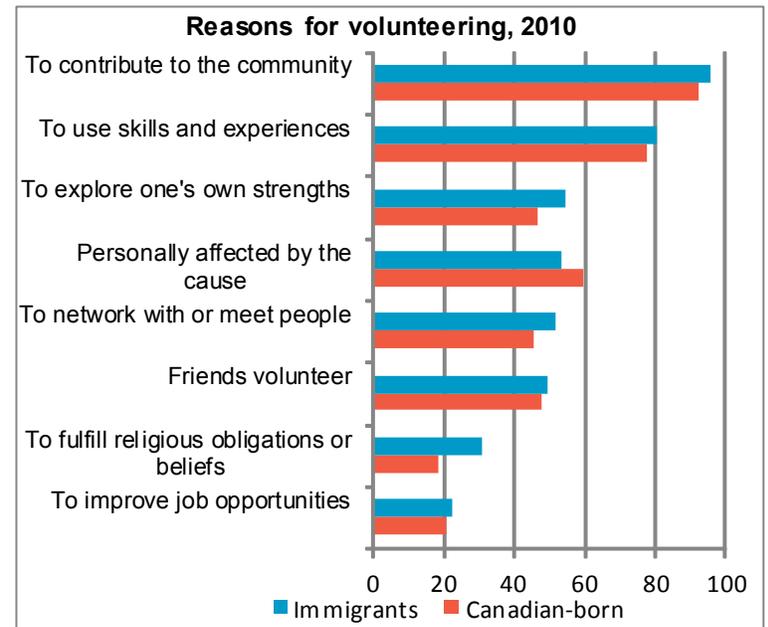
Source: Thomas, D. (2012)

References

- ^{1,2} Turcotte, M. (2015). [Volunteering and Charitable Giving in Canada](#). Statistics Canada.
- ^{3,13} Volunteer Canada (2012). [Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement](#).
- ^{4,5,6,9,14} Thomas, D. (2012). [Giving and Volunteering Among Canada's Immigrants](#). Statistics Canada.
- ⁷ Volunteer Canada (2013). [Building the Bridge for Volunteer Engagement: The Canadian voluntary sector's perspective on the trends and issues identified in Bridging the Gap](#).
- ⁸ Behnia, B. (2012). [Volunteering with Newcomers: The Perspectives of Canadian- and Foreign-born Volunteers](#). *Canadian Journal of Nonprofit and Social Economy Research* 3, no. 2.
- ^{10,19} Heintz, M. (2012). [Building Blocks for Newcomers: A Guide on Volunteering](#). Volunteer Canada.

Motivations for volunteering

Newcomers and volunteer coordinators may have differing understandings of newcomers' motivations for volunteering. While volunteer coordinators were more likely to attribute language and skills development as reasons for newcomers to volunteer, newcomers saw language and skills development as *bonuses* to volunteer work.⁸ They generally shared the same motivations as the Canadian-born.⁹



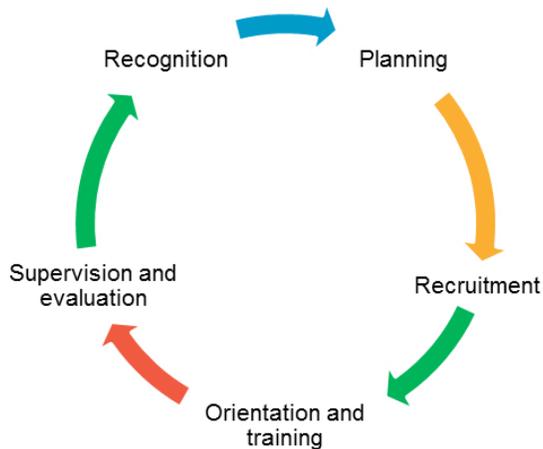
Source: Thomas, D. (2012)

Settlement and integration benefits

Volunteering can also have a positive impact on settlement. Volunteering provides newcomers with opportunities to:¹⁰

- Practice and develop language and employment-related skills
- Increase their intercultural competency
- Learn about other services and programs in their community
- Build social and professional networks
- Build their sense of belonging by making a positive contribution to the community

The volunteer management cycle¹¹



Each stage of the volunteer management cycle has an impact on volunteer retention and satisfaction.¹² Newcomers may have distinct barriers, needs, and interests at each stage of the cycle.

The Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement¹³

Volunteer Canada's *Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement* is designed to help organizations strengthen their volunteer programs. Several of the indicators of organizational standards for volunteer involvement include reference to the importance of diversity in volunteer programs:

- Program policies should enhance the experience of a diversity of volunteers.
- Genuine effort should be made to recruit and select volunteers from a broad range of backgrounds and experiences to reflect the diversity of the community.
- Training should be provided in a diversity of formats to ensure accessibility.
- Volunteer recognition should be appropriate to the volunteer role and arrangement, and respects cultural values and perspectives.

Barriers to volunteering

Newcomers' reasons for not volunteering are broadly similar to those of other Canadians: the top reasons are short- and long-term time constraints, as well as having made the choice to give money instead of time. However, newcomers are more likely to say they do not volunteer because "no one asked" and they "did not know how to get involved."¹⁴

References

^{11, 12} Community Literacy of Ontario (n.d.) [The Volunteer Management Cycle](#). *Literacy Volunteers, Value Added*.

^{15, 16, 18} HR Council for the Nonprofit Sector (2012). [Recruitment and Retention of New Immigrants and Members of Visible Minorities in the nonprofit sector's workforce](#).

¹⁷ Speevak Sladowski, P. (2012). [Building Blocks for Engaging Newcomer Volunteers: A Guide for Organizations](#). Volunteer Canada.

²⁰ WorkInCulture (n.d.) [Part 6: Volunteers and Board of Directors](#). *Inclusive HR Toolkit*.

Other barriers identified by newcomers are similar to the barriers faced in finding employment, including:

- Limited language skills¹⁵
- Difficulty of obtaining reference checks¹⁶
- Lack of necessary credentials such as Driver's License¹⁷
- Discrimination and organizational preferences for volunteers with Canadian experience¹⁸
- Inability to absorb financial costs associated with volunteering, such as transportation costs¹⁹

Volunteers with low levels of English

WorkInCulture's *Inclusive HR Toolkit* offers tips for working with volunteers where language skills may be a barrier.²⁰

- Identify tasks where English communication is less important
- Use 'plain language' volunteer job descriptions and simple application forms
- Host info sessions or interviews to ease potential volunteers' concerns about language abilities while allowing an opportunity to assess the support that might be needed.

Resources for Organizations

- Volunteer Canada: [Building Blocks for Engaging Newcomer Volunteers: A Guide for Organizations](#)
- Volunteer Ottawa: [Untapped Resources: Opportunities for Volunteers with Limited English and French Skills](#)
- Volunteer Canada: [Best Practices in Volunteer Management: An Action Planning Guide for Small and Rural Nonprofit Organizations](#)
- WorkInCulture: [Inclusive HR Toolkit, Part 6 - Volunteers and Board of Directors](#)
- Multicultural Council of Windsor and Essex County: [Involving Volunteers from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds: A Practical Application of the Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement](#)

Resources for Newcomer Volunteers in BC

- Volunteer Canada: [Building Blocks for Newcomers: A Guide on Volunteering](#)
- [GoVolunteer.ca](#)
- Volunteer Canada: [BC Volunteer Centres](#)
- AMSSA: [Volunteer Opportunities](#)
- [Volunteer BC](#)