



**The  
Value  
of One**



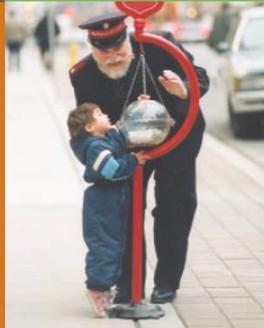
**The  
Power  
of Many**



**The  
Value  
of One**



**The  
Power  
of Many**



# The Canada Volunteerism Initiative

The Report of the National Volunteerism Initiative Joint Table

## Executive Summary



**Voluntary  
Sector**



**Canada**

December 2001

ISBN: CH4-54/2001-1 0-662-66202-4

This complete report is available on the Internet at [www.vsi-isbc.ca/eng/cvireport](http://www.vsi-isbc.ca/eng/cvireport)



Printed on recycled paper.

# Executive Summary

## Introduction

Canada is celebrated for its quality of life and the fundamental values of freedom, respect and community which influence who we are and how we act. Our compassion, dedication to caring for those in need and our sense of togetherness allow us to enjoy times of relative peace and harmony and to navigate turbulent times, confident in our commitment to one another.

The importance of volunteers to our quality of life cannot be overstated. We see them in our hospitals and at our museums; coaching our children in sports and the arts; protecting our communities, the environment and wildlife; providing services for the elderly; helping out in schools; caring for the under-privileged; fighting fires and conducting emergency search and rescue operations; helping out at major events like the Canada Games; giving blood; working in food banks and on the streets with the homeless; as well as sitting on boards of voluntary organizations. Much of our quality of life depends upon the commitment and service of volunteers.

The events of September 11, 2001 shocked people worldwide and eroded some of the trust that Canadians have for one another and their institutions. However, that unthinkable tragedy has also brought the importance of family and community more vividly into focus. The contributions of voluntary organizations and volunteers were clearly visible to people as events unfolded, and many Canadians were moved to participate as they always do in times of crisis. Floods, famine, tornadoes, fires, ice storms and drought have always brought out the force of Canadian generosity.



## Forging a New Relationship to Better Serve Canadians

Two years ago, the Government of Canada and the voluntary sector decided to begin a journey of renewal. They jointly established six groups (referred to as “Joint Tables”) to examine the various aspects of their relationship. This Voluntary Sector Initiative (VSI) was announced in June 2000. Its goal is to examine new ways of working together and strengthening the relationship between the voluntary sector and the federal government for the benefit of all Canadians.

This report on the *Canada Volunteerism Initiative* (CVI) is the result of the work of one of the VSI Joint Tables. This particular Joint Table focused its efforts on determining how to encourage more Canadians to volunteer with, participate in and contribute to voluntary organizations. It also focused on how to enhance the ability of voluntary organizations to benefit more from the contributions of volunteers. The report highlights what we know and don't know about the state of volunteering in Canada today, and makes recommendations that address some of the obstacles and challenges faced by both volunteers and voluntary organizations.



## Canada's Volunteer Force is Eroding

While more than 6.5 million Canadians actively volunteer in over 175,000 voluntary organizations both in Canada and around the world, the 2000 *National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating* (NSGVP) tells us that volunteer resources are eroding. One million



fewer Canadians volunteered in 2000 than in 1997. Further, only 7 percent of Canadians contributed 73 percent of volunteer effort in 2000. While this central core of 'super' volunteers is remarkable, dependence on such a small and shrinking number of people is neither wise nor sustainable. Efforts must be made to deepen and extend the pool of volunteers.

The consultations and research conducted by the Joint Table revealed a number of important challenges related to volunteer recruitment, retention, support and recognition. Much needs to be — and can be — done to enhance the capacity of voluntary organizations to administer volunteer resources and attract and retain new volunteers.

The findings and recommendations set out in this report represent an attempt to better understand, sustain and enhance volunteerism in Canada. It is hoped that these recommendations will both reflect and reinforce the values of community, caring and mutual responsibility that continue to define Canada.





## Critical Needs and Recommendations

The NSGVP findings, research and consultations with individuals and groups of Canadians all tell us that more needs to be done to help volunteer activity grow and contribute to stronger communities in Canada. There is a need for a coherent, sustained approach to any new investment so that voluntary organizations can plan for the future, maximize their effectiveness and better support the involvement of volunteers.

Each of the recommendations that follow is a part of a continuum of initiatives that, taken together, will strengthen volunteerism, improve the capacity of voluntary organizations to engage and support volunteers, heighten awareness of the contribution of volunteers to Canada's quality of life and encourage more Canadians to volunteer.

### Networking and Information Exchange

There is a considerable amount of existing knowledge and experience on practices and issues related to volunteerism across Canada. Often, this information is not readily available, nor easily shared among voluntary organizations. Participants at numerous consultation sessions pointed out the benefit of hearing from others in the session. This was particularly so in the session with representatives from rural Canada. Management expertise developed in one type of voluntary organization — health organizations for example — may be easily adapted for use in other types of organizations. Likewise, tools, resources and ideas that address volunteer mobilization skills need to be widely distributed and



supported by training, consultation and peer support.

Technology gives us the ability to improve information-sharing, but technology alone is not sufficient. Voluntary sector leaders, governance volunteers and individual volunteers have confirmed that personal interaction, networking and exchange — followed up with technology support — are the best ways to achieve a transfer of knowledge from organization to organization, and from person to person.

During consultations, strong support emerged for local development activities — such as establishing local networks, improving access to training and consultation, and providing more opportunities for discussion and resource exchange — supported by regional and national expertise.

- ▶ **It is recommended that regionally based, nationally connected volunteer resource networks be established. These networks would be mandated to provide a range of capacity/knowledge-building services to grassroots organizations.**
- ▶ **Together, these networks would form a leadership resource to support and enable the establishment of similar, community-based networks around volunteer development. These networks should be developed by enhancing existing organizations.**



## Research and Innovative Projects

Seventy-three percent of all volunteer effort in Canada is provided by only 7 percent of all Canadians.

We need to further our understanding of why this is the case. We need to find out why Canadians do, or do not, volunteer. What factors or practices encourage and sustain volunteering? What are the best ways to recognize and celebrate volunteer contributions?

A thorough analysis of research needs related to volunteerism was carried out during 2001, the International Year of Volunteers, and many serious knowledge gaps were identified. As well, an environmental scan on volunteering and improving volunteering carried out for the Joint Table in the spring of 2001 identified several areas in need of further investigation, including the social and economic value of volunteering to volunteers, the community and the government; the nature of the demand for volunteers; and employer support for volunteering.

A sustained investment in research on volunteerism will increase our understanding of volunteering and allow for the development of tools, resources and methods that enhance the ability of Canadians to participate as volunteers. As well, the results of the research must be made available to those who need it. This can be accomplished through the volunteer resource network outlined earlier.



There is an equally urgent need to develop and test new methods for encouraging, sustaining and supporting volunteerism for the future. Community organizations need support to try out locally



relevant strategies that will strengthen volunteerism and community engagement.

Pilot projects could focus on important population segments such as youth and seniors, and enable groups such as Aboriginal peoples and new Canadians to develop culturally appropriate strategies for their communities. What is learned from successful projects could then be more broadly applied throughout Canadian society. These approaches will encourage a stronger link between research, learning, and knowledge application, leading to more concrete results.

- ▶ **It is recommended that resources be dedicated to analysis and research that will improve our knowledge about, and understanding of, the dynamics of volunteerism in Canada, and that the resulting knowledge be clearly presented and broadly disseminated.**
- ▶ **Further, it is recommended that resources be dedicated to enabling innovative pilot projects at the community level.**

## Promotion, Recognition and Outreach

Volunteerism in Canada cannot be taken for granted, nor will it flourish without broad awareness of its many contributions and the importance of the voluntary sector organizations that support it. The benefits of volunteerism and the contributions of millions of volunteers need to be recognized, supported and celebrated. Without sufficient recognition or understanding of the investment of time, energy, commitment, expertise and excellence of



volunteers, we risk weakening this vital force that builds community in Canada.

The International Year of Volunteers provided the opportunity to begin raising awareness and appreciation for the individuals and organizations engaged in voluntary activities in our communities. However, the activities of this past year alone will not result in broad awareness and increased understanding of the efforts of volunteers or the voluntary sector, nor increase engagement in volunteering throughout Canada.

A sustained recognition, awareness, promotion and outreach campaign is required to ensure that volunteerism and civic participation are recognized as basic elements of Canada's way of life and that the efforts of volunteers are acknowledged and applauded. At the same time, the campaign would encourage more Canadians to volunteer.

- ▶ **It is recommended that a multi-year campaign of promotion, recognition and outreach be developed and implemented to help Canadians better understand and appreciate volunteer activity and encourage them to volunteer.**



## Leadership and Engagement

The goals of the Joint Table were to examine what is needed to encourage volunteerism and improve the capacity of organizations to benefit from the contribution of volunteers. The Joint Table was asked to undertake this work in order to ensure a lasting legacy to the International Year of Volunteers. Canadians have told us that a



lasting legacy requires ongoing leadership and broad engagement across our society.

Throughout the work of the Joint Table, and especially during the consultations, participants talked about the pressing need for a continuing, high-level dialogue about the role of volunteerism in building the kind of society Canadians want for the years ahead.

The voluntary sector, private sector and all orders of government currently work with groups and individuals towards the goal of stronger communities. Working together, Canadians must define what is required to sustain the health and vibrancy of volunteerism and voluntary organizations as core contributors to Canada's quality of life, the strength of its communities, and the bonds of its shared citizenship.

All sectors (voluntary and private sectors, government, academe) and individual Canadians must work together to engage in a dialogue to achieve this objective. The ultimate effectiveness of the recommendations set out in this report depends on this important national dialogue.

► **It is recommended that a forum be established to lead the involvement of all sectors in this work.**

The recommendations presented here cannot solve all of the challenges that volunteers and voluntary organizations face. However, these recommendations respond to a number of those challenges in a measured and practical manner. The *Canada Volunteerism Initiative* can be a first – but crucial – step in a journey of renewal and partnership between the Government of Canada and the voluntary sector.