



# YOUTH VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT

Youth volunteers ensure a sustainable future

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# YOUTH VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT

## PURPOSE & VALUES

***“Youth make up a relatively small percentage of the total number of volunteers in Canada, but their recruitment and engagement is critical to ensuring the future sustainability of the voluntary sector”. - Building the Bridge to Youth Volunteers***

[https://volunteer.ca/vdemo/EngagingVolunteers\\_DOCS/Building\\_the\\_Bridge\\_to\\_Youth\\_Volunteers.pdf](https://volunteer.ca/vdemo/EngagingVolunteers_DOCS/Building_the_Bridge_to_Youth_Volunteers.pdf)

This toolkit has been created to help communities, individuals and organizations to engage youth in volunteer roles.

Communities rely heavily on volunteers to do the work that municipalities are not able to with the limited capacity and funds at their disposal. Meaning that if we want all the quality of life elements that come with Sport, Culture and Recreation then we need a strong volunteer base to ensure these services continue and grow in our communities. Volunteers are essential to creating healthy, safe and happy societies. Simply put, volunteering is a component of being a good citizen.

## STATISTICS REGARDING YOUTH VOLUNTEERING (AGE 15 TO 24)

- Youth are twice as likely to volunteer if they have one parent that volunteers (64% of non-volunteers reported that no one in their family volunteers.).
- People who volunteer are 26% more successful in obtaining jobs.
- 46% of youth volunteer to develop new skills.
- 65% of youth volunteer because they believe it will help them get a job.
- 40% volunteer in the areas of Sport, Culture and Recreation.
- 35% spend time volunteering for youth events.

## WHY ENGAGE YOUTH VOLUNTEERS

So why should organizations invest time in recruiting youth volunteers? It is part of paying it forward, at one point in time someone spent time showing you the value of volunteering or maybe your parents voluntold you for a position. It is now your turn to mentor the next generation of volunteers. Additional reasons worth noting are:

1. We need to engage youth volunteers to ensure we have volunteers in the future
2. Good for program participants to engage with youth
3. To foster inter-generational opportunities
4. Youth bring a fresh perspective
5. Youth have great skills to offer, many have fantastic technology skills or language skills
6. Youth of today may challenge the status quo, they can help an organization stay relevant



## CHARACTERISTICS OF YOUTH VOLUNTEERS

In order to engage youth volunteers, it is helpful to know who they are and what characteristics/skills they can offer your organization. Spend some time getting to know the youth in your community. Coaches, Teachers, Club Leaders and Parents are your best resource for getting insight into what youth have to offer. Some of these are:



1. Career focused, flexible and receptive to new ideas
2. More open-minded - they have grown up being exposed to greater diversity
3. Energetic and enthusiastic
4. Social - prefer opportunities with friends
5. Technologically savvy
6. Mandatory community service requirement for many
7. See volunteering as a bridge to future
8. Sensitive to perceived age discrimination

## TOP TEN REASONS YOUTH VOLUNTEER

Most adults understand why volunteering and donating to charities are important. After all, in helping others, you ultimately help yourself. But what about younger people? With so little life experience, it isn't always obvious to them why volunteering is so valuable. Here are some benefits you can promote:

1. Gain Job Experience.
2. Improve Your Health and Self-Esteem.
3. Meet Real Community Needs.
4. Gain Entrance to College.
5. Meet New People and Establish Friends, Connections and References.
6. Gain New Skills and Develop Talents.
7. Spread Positive Energy and Hope.
8. Make the World a Better Place.
9. Personal Growth.
10. It's Fun!

## WHAT YOUTH NEED IN VOLUNTEER POSITIONS

You now know a few statistics and why organizations should engage volunteers, but how are you going to attract them? It is essential to know why youth volunteer, so that you can tailor an approach that will appeal to them. Youth have shared that it is difficult for them to find when and where to volunteer and that often they sense resistance to young volunteers within organizations. Young people have stated that the following items are things they seek when getting involved with a volunteer activity:

- Flexibility** – they seek spontaneity and choices in volunteering
- Legitimacy** – information about the range and significance of the volunteer position
- Ease of access** – more information and easy access points
- Experience** – stimulating, interesting, relevant activities
- Incentives** – tangible rewards, especially references
- Variety** – opportunities to fulfill personal interests and goals
- Organization** – efficient, but informal, relaxed, supportive
- Laughs** – enjoyable, satisfying and fun

## BARRIERS TO YOUTH VOLUNTEERING

Youth just like anyone else face barriers that need to be overcome in order to participate. Some of the common barriers youth face are:

1. Lack of time
2. Inability to make a long-term commitment
3. No transportation
4. Not being asked
5. Unsure of how to become involved
6. Volunteer age restrictions
7. Feeling that their opinions and insights are not valued
8. Organizations' perception that youth need services and help instead of seeing youth as having something to give to organizations (especially communications and technology skills)



## HOW TO IMPROVE THE VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE FOR YOUTH

The research found that the following things will help ensure a positive experience for everyone:

1. Promote volunteer opportunities in places youth go to – such as via social media and schools (if allowed), and recreation facilities.
2. Get to know them – what are the individual needs and talents of youth volunteers, this will make sure you can encourage and mentor them in the best way.
3. Capitalize on technology options – offer greater online engagement, such as websites and social media to promote volunteer opportunities. Also, consider developing volunteer opportunities that can be completed virtually.
4. Be inclusive and welcome diversity – respect gender, culture, language, and especially age. Recognize youth have unique skills to offer and should not be undervalued.
5. Be respectful – avoid automatically giving youth jobs considered unskilled 'grunt work'.
6. Be flexible and accommodating – many youths juggle school, part-time work and extracurricular activities.
7. Offer benefits and incentives – such as concert or theatre tickets, references for job, scholarship or program applications.
8. Communicate constructive feedback regularly – recognize efforts in a positive manner, this will help them learn and grow.
9. Clearly outline the purpose of the proposed volunteer activity – explain how it will make a difference and follow up and let them know the impact of the time, energy, and skills they contributed had.

## HOW TO BE A YOUTH FRIENDLY ORGANIZATION

Numerous youths were surveyed, and this is what they had to say:

1. **Check your expectations** - Make tasks and timelines realistic by recognizing youth have unpredictable demands on time. Don't overburden us, build in plenty of time for trial and error, and don't expect us to have bottomless stores of time and energy.
2. **Use the buddy system** - entering a new situation can be confusing at any age. Provide an experienced 'buddy' to welcome and introduce us to the organization and other volunteers and staff. Don't forget sometimes other youth can be the best mentors. Taking on more than one youth also helps to make us feel like we aren't the 'token' youth representative.
3. **Help us get places** - For many we do not have access to a car whenever you need us, so it's important that your place is accessible by bicycle or walking. Also, when booking meetings, respect our schedule (school/work) and host meeting is a place that we can be (avoid bars).
4. **Include our parents** - if including youth in your organization is a challenge, adding our parents to the mix may seem like a lot. However, youth with parental support are often better equipped to participate in volunteer efforts. This is especially true for young first-time volunteers. Feel free to reach out to our parents-just remember that we have our own ideas, so the conversation should always involve both generations.
5. **Cut out the jargon** - Always define acronyms and terms that might be obscure to any newcomer or someone not familiar with your area of work. Use stories and examples to clarify technical points and, when working with documents, highlight main ideas and clarify the content with graphics, tables and illustrations.
6. **Keep things moving** - Youth like to see tangible results fairly quickly, this validates the impact and encourages us to keep at it! Most importantly, respect the timeframe we have agreed to: letting meetings run longer than planned is a sure sign to us that you're not taking our other time commitments seriously.
7. **Get flexible** - Youth recognize that most work environments involve certain rules and structures—we get a lot of this at school and at home. But a vital part of being a young volunteer is exploring new social situations, testing attitudes, and renewing social and organizational practices. Surprise us by letting us surprise you! Understand that social media play new roles in collaborative and innovative work; let us work together to come up with unconventional and creative ideas for producing results. Recognize the changing nature of work -from a "facetime" to a "flextime" model—and see how what may seem like casual presence may in fact be the most efficient way of getting the job done.
8. **If you feed them...**For long working days, provide us with some real sustenance other than coffee and danishes. If you usually eat lunch out of the office, either invite us to join you or contribute to the cost of our meals -fancy panini lunches can really break the bank. Honoraria, per diems, and other forms of remuneration can help make it easier for us to devote our time to your work.
9. **Don't be a control freak** - Micromanagement can make anyone feel like they are considered untrustworthy or incapable. Give us room to breathe! Be respectful and provide the same information and support mechanisms for youth as you do for more senior employees. If you match this support with clear and realistic expectations, we'll tend to work things out just fine.
10. **Celebrate** - Everyone likes to be flattered, and youth are no exception. Recognize our roles, validate our efforts, and reward our contributions to your organization. Small gifts, days off, or write-ups on your website can all make us feel like you're taking the work we do seriously. Sometimes it can be as simple as a heartfelt, direct thank you: you'll find the return on investment, to be huge.

## WORKSHEET

This worksheet has been developed to assist in reviewing volunteer opportunities and analyzing the benefits and barriers associated with a job. Once these are defined you can adjust job descriptions to be better suited to youth volunteers.

|                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Position</i>                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <i>Job Description</i>                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <i>Skills</i>                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <i>Time Commitment</i>                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <i>Benefit to Youth</i>                                                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Flexible<br><input type="checkbox"/> Legitimate - impact of their contribution is easily shared<br><hr/> <input type="checkbox"/> Easy to sign up and learn about opportunity<br><input type="checkbox"/> Experience they will gain?<br><hr/> <input type="checkbox"/> Incentive (reference, rewards)<br><hr/> <input type="checkbox"/> Variety of opportunities<br><input type="checkbox"/> Organizational Culture (relaxed, efficient, training)<br><input type="checkbox"/> Fun!         |
| <i>Barriers to Youth Participation</i>                                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation-are you easy to get to with out a vehicle?<br><input type="checkbox"/> Is the time commitment potentially too much?<br><input type="checkbox"/> Do you have a plan to ask youth directly or an easy way for them to be informed of opportunity?<br><input type="checkbox"/> Do you have volunteer descriptions?<br><input type="checkbox"/> Do youth perceive your organization as being youth friendly?<br><input type="checkbox"/> Do you provide training and mentorship? |
| <i>How can you adjust or accommodate youth to make it more enticing?</i>         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <i>What can you do better?</i>                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <i>What impact will they have?</i>                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <i>Who can you ask?</i><br>(brainstorm groups/individuals that you can approach) |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |

## REFERENCES

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Volunteer Canada-*Ten Ways to make your organization Youth-Friendly*

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Volunteer Canada-*Volunteer Connections: New Strategies for Involving Youth*

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Minnesota Toolkit for giving: *Top Ten Reasons for Youth to Volunteer*

<http://www.givespot.com/lists/youth.htm>