A GUIDE TO
Successful Volunteering
ADVICE TO THE READER

We recommend that you begin by reading the sections that are relevant to your situation or needs:

فجر DO YOU WANT TO KNOW WHAT VOLUNTEERING INVOLVES?  pp. 10 to 11
فجر ARE YOU WONDERING HOW VOLUNTEERING WILL ENRICH YOUR LIFE AND THE LIVES OF OTHERS?  pp. 12 to 14
فجر DO YOU WANT TO VOLUNTEER BUT FEEL YOU CAN’T MAKE A REGULAR TIME COMMITMENT?  p. 20
فجر ARE YOU WONDERING WHAT RESPONSIBILITIES ARE ASSOCIATED WITH VOLUNTEERING?  pp. 25 to 26
فجر DO YOU ALREADY HAVE VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE?  pp. 28 to 35
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HOW TO MAKE A SUCCESS OF YOUR VOLUNTEERING

Volunteering and mutual-aid exist in one form or another in every society in the world. A Guide to Successful Volunteering deals with volunteering as it is practised in Canada, and especially in Quebec.

In line with the vision of Accès Bénévolat, this guide promotes inclusive volunteering and encourages citizen involvement among people who want to contribute to the well-being of their community, regardless of their age, background or walk of life.

It also offers a brief history of volunteering in Quebec. You will learn that volunteering started to become more democratic during the 1960s, although it continued to be associated with charity for a long time. Today, volunteering is a vehicle for inclusive social participation based on egalitarian relationships.

A Guide to Successful Volunteering was made possible thanks to the talent and passion of Martine Leroux. In her capacity as guidance counsellor for volunteers at Accès Bénévolat, Martine conducted personal interviews with some 5,000 aspiring volunteers. The knowledge she acquired from these involved citizens over the years inspired her to write this guide.

Written in simple language, A Guide to Successful Volunteering aims to enlighten and inform while addressing the practical questions that confront volunteers, whether new or experienced, both in our community and elsewhere.

Accès Bénévolat wishes you good reading!

Patrick Demars
President

Françoise Boucher
Executive Director
ABOUT ACCÈS BÉNÉVOLAT

Accès Bénévolat is one of the volunteer action centres serving the Island of Montreal. Active in the east end for over 40 years, initially under the name Service bénévole de l’Est de Montréal, Accès Bénévolat is a non-profit organization that puts volunteering and mutual aid at the service of the community. Its mission is to promote and support volunteering while referring volunteers to social and humanitarian agencies that adhere to the Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement.

Accès Bénévolat encourages volunteering that is inclusive and representative of the diverse social makeup of the Montreal of today. Such volunteering stimulates interaction between groups and cultures. It is a means of participation open to all: youth, seniors, immigrants, the disabled—whether or not they have previous volunteer experience, and regardless of their level of schooling, social and economic circumstances, or religious beliefs. Inclusive volunteering is practised in an organized, safe and welcoming environment for the benefit of an individual, a group or an agency, taking into account each volunteer’s values, skills and interests.

Accès Bénévolat regards volunteering as a willing, freely chosen and unpaid act of citizen participation. Our values are altruism, reciprocity, fairness, solidarity and transparency.

Each volunteer contributes to the development of a just and democratic society in which there is a place for everyone. Each in their own way can advance the cause nearest to their heart, while finding in volunteering a source of personal enrichment.

Every agency to which we refer volunteers is expected to recognize their valuable contribution—whether on a routine basis or during Volunteer Week, which is held in April, on International Volunteer Day, which is celebrated on December 5th, or on other occasions. In 2010 Accès Bénévolat, in collaboration with other volunteer action centres and community and ethnocultural agencies, organized The Human Chain of Volunteers of all Origins—an event that was honoured with a Solidaires Mobilization award from Centraide of Greater Montreal in April 2012.
OUR SERVICES

FOR PEOPLE WHO WANT TO VOLUNTEER:
• Information on volunteering
• Personalized referral to a volunteer opportunity, and follow-up on your volunteer experience
• If necessary, referral to another volunteer opportunity

FOR COMMUNITY AGENCIES:
• Counselling on volunteer management
• Pre-selection and referral of volunteers
• Follow-up on the referral

FOR LOW-INCOME ADULTS IN LOSS OF AUTONOMY:
• Accompaniment and transportation to medical appointments

THE TERRITORY WE SERVE

Accès Bénévolat serves the following boroughs and districts:

Plateau Mont-Royal
Ville-Marie
Mercier / Hochelaga-Maisonneuve
Pointe-aux-Trembles / Montreal East
Anjou
Saint-Léonard
Villeray / Saint-Michel
Ahuntsic
Rosemont / La Petite-Patrie
Mercier / Hochelaga-Maisonneuve
Plateau Mont-Royal
Ville-Marie

If you are reading this guide but don’t live on the Island of Montreal, bear in mind that there are over 100 volunteer action centres throughout the Province of Quebec, and twice as many more in the rest of Canada. Don’t hesitate to contact the volunteer action centre nearest to you.
A BRIEF HISTORY OF VOLUNTEERING IN QUEBEC

To better understand how volunteering is practised today, it helps to look back at our history. The English and French are considered the founding peoples of Canada, although the Aboriginals, also known as the First Nations, were already living here when Christopher Columbus “discovered” America.

Canada was built in the 17th century by settlers, who were taught by the Aboriginal peoples how to survive in a harsh natural environment. These pioneers were granted by the then governor a plot of land, which had to be cleared and supplied with drinking water, and on which they could build a house to shelter themselves during the severe winters. To survive, they had to group their houses together around a body of running water, and to help each other in building and repairing them. As villages and cities developed, there emerged a new middle class whose members were more educated and affluent that the early settlers.

In 1682, citizens rallied together to fight the great fire that ravaged the Lower City of Quebec. Their efforts were unfortunately not sufficient: many residents lost their houses and belongings, and then fell into poverty. In response, the citizens of Quebec City created the province’s first volunteer organization, the Bureau des pauvres. Beginning in the 18th century, volunteers at charitable organizations helped the needy in many ways, notably by distributing heating wood, operating soup kitchens and clothing banks, and visiting the sick and disabled.

In the 19th century, the rise of industrialization caused an exodus from the countryside to the cities. New neighbourhoods sprang up to accommodate factory workers. There was no drinking water, and overcrowding and poverty were rampant. That’s when wealthy ladies of the bourgeoisie, who had a lot of free time on their hands, began volunteering with charitable organizations. These “Dames Patronnesses,” as they were called, provided care and comfort to the sick.
At the same time, the Catholic and Protestant religious communities began founding hospitals. Nuns taught in the schools and worked in orphanages, until these institutions were eventually taken over by the government. During this era, the Dames Patroennes, religious communities, volunteers and government social workers worked side by side. The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul was founded in Quebec City in 1846 to meet the same social needs, while also promoting social justice. Thirty years later the Society was operating everywhere in the province, and today it is still active in Quebec as well as in the rest of Canada.

Until the middle of the 20th century, neighbourhood and village life in Quebec revolved mainly around the front stoop of the parish church. People met there to chat, share the latest news and make arrangements to give each other a helping hand. In 1937, the first secular organization devoted to volunteering, a volunteer action centre, was founded in Montreal to address the social needs created by the Second World War.

Around 1960, social upheavals brought Quebec into the modern world. It was the era of the Quiet Revolution. Education became more democratic, and family members began living more individual lives. Gradually, mutual aid among family members and neighbours declined, giving way to volunteering. When citizens identified or were affected by a social problem (poverty, lack of access to housing, violence, etc.), they rallied around activists who advocated social change and promoted their case to the authorities. During the 1970s this trend led to the establishment of a number of community agencies, and volunteer action centres sprang up in several cities throughout Quebec to promote volunteering.

The presence of social activists gradually resulted in the professionalization of the community movement. At the same time, volunteering, like education, became more democratic. Today anyone—not just affluent ladies—can become a volunteer. Volunteering is practised in a variety of settings by diversified teams of citizens who improve society, little by little, each in their own way, in a context where needs are great and financial resources are limited.
WHAT IS VOLUNTEERING?

Volunteering is a selfless activity that people perform in an organized manner at a non-profit agency that relies on volunteers. It entails:

- Getting involved of your own free will in serving society;
- Taking pleasure in helping to improve the quality of life in your community;
- Sharing your energy, knowledge, abilities, interests and passions;
- Giving of your time without pay to meet a social need.

“Volunteering is universal, inclusive, and embraces free will, solidarity, dignity, and trust. We value, recognize and encourage the contribution of volunteerism to the well being of people, their communities and our planet. We celebrate volunteering as an essential expression of common humanity.”¹ As well as being a valuable contribution to society, volunteering is also a personally enriching experience.

¹ Final declaration of the Global Volunteer Conference, Budapest, September 15-17, 2011
VOLUNTEERING: TRUE OR FALSE?

1. I already do volunteer work by occasionally taking care of my neighbour’s children.

2. I would need to have a lot of free time in order to be able to do volunteer work.

3. Volunteering will help me to find a job.

4. I’m already doing volunteer work. I don’t like it, but I have to continue because I signed a contract.

5. We aren’t paid any money when we do volunteer work.

6. I have a physical disability and use a wheelchair to move around. I would never be able to find volunteer work.

7. I mainly want to get out of the house and meet people. I don’t think that’s a valid reason for doing volunteer work.

8. I’m an immigrant. Volunteering could help me to become more familiar with Quebec culture.

9. In order to do volunteer work, you need to have experience in the field where you want to volunteer.

10. I love hockey. I’m sure I could find an opportunity to volunteer in this sport.

11. I would like to propose a new project at the place where I volunteer. It’s too bad I can’t do that.

12. Volunteering is serious business.

Answers on page 36
THE VALUE OF VOLUNTEERING

Anyone can contribute significantly to their community or to a cause that is close to their heart. The benefits of getting involved are numerous and often unexpected: many volunteers maintain that they get more than they give. What’s more, whenever you contribute your time, you usually accomplish more than you realize. Here’s why:

- By taking the time to listen to someone, I am enabling them to feel understood and less isolated.
- By helping children to do their homework and learn their lessons, I am helping them to like school and succeed at it.
- By welcoming participants at a social event organized by a community agency, I am helping to make the event a success.
- By accompanying persons to their medical appointment, I am helping them to take care of their health.
- By helping the educators in a drop-in centre, I am promoting the development and learning of young children.
- By leading an arts workshop for seniors, I am bringing some colour into their daily lives.
- By preparing small dishes, I am helping people to eat healthy and sufficiently, as well as offering them an opportunity to meet other people.
- By doing repair and paint work at a community agency, I am showing vulnerable people that they are sufficiently important to merit clean and welcoming premises.
- By revising or translating texts, I am making quality information available to people in their own language.
- By raising funds for a health cause, I am helping to develop a new medication or treatment.
THE BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING

The benefits of volunteering are considerable for the population and society. Volunteering promotes equality, justice and dignity, gives hope and confidence to people in distress, and makes it possible to offer new, more, and better services.

Volunteering also has positive impacts on the volunteers themselves. Let us introduce you to Mrs. Tremblay, Bruno and Mr. Lopez, three very different people who are interested in volunteering. They believe that volunteering can change their lives, as well as affording them the pleasure of giving and the feeling of being useful.

Mrs. Tremblay has been a self-employed translator for 15 years. She is attracted to volunteering because she wants to give back some of what she has received. What can volunteering do for her? It can allow her to:

- Have fun
- Promote a cause
- Share her interests and passions
- Take up a challenge
- Find fulfillment in doing something different
- Enjoy enriching human relationships
- Live in harmony with her values

Bruno is 18 years old. He would like to finish high school and then find a job in a field that interests him. How would volunteering change his life? It would allow him to:

- Gain experience and knowledge
- Further a cause that is near to his heart
- Get to know himself
- Learn how to work in a team
- Confirm his study or career choice
- Discover his fields of interest
- Make a concrete contribution to his neighbourhood
- Build his self-confidence
- Have new experiences
Mr. Lopez recently arrived from Mexico, where he worked as a cook. He has just moved into the neighbourhood. What would volunteering do for him? It would allow him to:

- Improve his knowledge of French
- Participate in the life of his neighbourhood
- Be a part of a team
- Practise his trade in Quebec
- Meet Quebecers and people from all over the world
- Familiarize himself with Quebec culture
- Get out of the house

Although the proportion of volunteers among immigrants is smaller than among native Canadians (40% vs. 49%), the number of hours they devote annually to volunteering is slightly greater (171 vs. 163).²

WHAT VOLUNTEERS THEMSELVES HAVE TO SAY:

Many volunteers say that their volunteer activities gave them an opportunity to acquire new skills. For example, almost two-thirds (64%) report that their human relations skills have improved. Volunteers also believe that their volunteering experience has allowed them to improve their skills in the area of communication (44%), organization (39%), fundraising (33%) and technical or office work (27%).

One-third of volunteers (34%) maintain that volunteering has enabled them to increase their knowledge of subjects such as health, political issues, women’s issues, criminal justice and the environment.³

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WHO CAN VOLUNTEER IN CANADA?

Whether you are a:

- Disabled person
- Young person aged 14 or more
- Senior
- Full-time or part-time worker
- Job seeker
- High school graduate or not
- Person who has never volunteered before
- Recipient of unemployment insurance, social aid, CSST or SAAQ benefits (without penalty)
- Permanent resident or refugee claimant, or on a study or work visa
- Tourist

ANYONE CAN VOLUNTEER!

More than 13.3 million Canadians, or 47% of the population aged 15 and over, volunteered their time through a group or organization.4

“I’M A NEWCOMER. WHAT ABOUT ME?”

While reading this guide you will have realized, if you did not already know, that volunteering is accessible to everyone in Canada. Everyone, including you—regardless of your immigrant status.

In some countries of the world, volunteering is practised exclusively by students or high-income people. In many others, it simply involves services or acts of kindness between neighbours. In Canada, however, volunteering is much more structured: it depends not on a spontaneous decision, but rather on a planned approach to serving a cause or an organization.

Your volunteer involvement as a newcomer will yield many benefits of inestimable value, including the opportunity to help others, develop ties with people, familiarize yourself with Quebec culture, acquire work experience that is recognized in Canada, improve your mastery of one or both official languages and participate in the community life of your adopted country.

VOLUNTEERS: A VALUABLE ASSET TO THE COMMUNITY

Volunteers have in common a desire to enrich the life of their community, as well as their own lives, by contributing their time and skills. Some participate in occasional volunteer activities, while others make a longer-term commitment.

Volunteers are active in almost all sectors of society. They positively influence our world by making it more equitable and more human.

Here are the main areas in which volunteers work:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IMMIGRANT WELCOME</th>
<th>HOSPITALS</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>POLITICAL ACTION</td>
<td>INFORMATION, REFERRAL AND LISTENING SERVICES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARTS AND CULTURE</td>
<td>SOCIAL INTEGRATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESIDENTIAL CARE FACILITIES AND SHELTERS</td>
<td>AGENCIES THAT FIGHT ADDICTIONS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SENIOR CENTRES</td>
<td>AGENCIES THAT FIGHT POVERTY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION</td>
<td>FAMILY AGENCIES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BASIC EDUCATION, CONTINUING EDUCATION AND RESEARCH</td>
<td>YOUTH AGENCIES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION</td>
<td>WOMEN’S AGENCIES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEALTH RELATED ESTABLISHMENTS</td>
<td>RELIGIOUS AGENCIES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADVOCACY GROUPS</td>
<td>SPORTS AND RECREATION</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WHAT KIND OF VOLUNTEERING IS RIGHT FOR YOU?

REGULAR VOLUNTEERING

Volunteering on a regular basis requires a long-term commitment on your part to further a mission or to perform a task at a specific agency. It allows you to be a part of a team, develop ties, share your skills, and improve your knowledge and abilities.

Here are some examples of regular volunteering. You can tick the activities that interest you.

**ACCOMPANIMENT**
- To the bank or drugstore
- To a medical appointment
- During a sports activity
- To go grocery shopping
- During a leisure outing

**PERSON-TO-PERSON HELP**
- Literacy or French lessons
- Food distribution
- Listening ear and helping relationship
- Pairing, mentoring or friendly visiting
- Reading
- Academic support

**EXAMPLE**

Mrs. Cherbib worked in the health field in her country of origin. She has just arrived in Montreal and wants to volunteer. What can she do?

- Accompany people to their medical appointments (see to their transportation and offer a listening ear);
- Listen to and support sick people in their homes or in the hospital;
- Handle the reception desk at a hospital, a clinic or a blood donation event;
- Be a first aider at festivals and sports events.
EXAMPLE
Pierre is 19 years old and has just obtained a diploma of college studies in accounting and management. He would like to acquire experience in this field. What kind of volunteering can he do?

- Develop fundraising strategies;
- Serve on an agency’s board of directors;
- Help people to prepare their tax returns;
- Manage projects or organize events.
**EXAMPLE**

Mr. Côté is a 66-year-old former shop owner who was highly appreciated by his customers. Today he misses the personal contact involved in providing direct services. What kind of volunteering can he do?

- Welcome and inform visitors;
- Be a member of the leisure team at a hospital or nursing home;
- Home deliver meals to seniors;
- Prepare and distribute food baskets to the needy;
- Sell clothes and other items in a thrift shop.

**CUSTOMER SERVICE**
- Welcome and information
- Hairdressing
- Operating a lending library
- Telephone reception
- Operating a gift shop in a hospital
- Sorting and selling clothes in a thrift shop

**MANUAL WORK**
- Sewing, knitting
- Decorating
- House cleaning
- Handling and packing
- Repairing and painting

**COMPUTER WORK, OFFICE WORK AND OTHER SERVICES**
- Website creation
- Data entry and filing
- Graphic design
- Secretarial work and bookkeeping
- Computer technical support
- Translation or revision
OCCASIONAL VOLUNTEERING

Volunteering on an occasional basis involves helping out at a specific event, on a specific date, on a one-time basis. This kind of volunteering enables you to vary the places where you volunteer and the tasks that you accomplish. You also get to work with new fellow volunteers each time.

Here are some examples of occasional volunteering. You can tick the activities that interest you.

**EVENTS**
- Welcoming guests
- Arranging and decorating the hall
- Providing face painting, games and supervision for the children
- Taking photographs during the event
- Ensuring the safety and security of the premises
- Serving meals
- Selling flowers to raise funds

**CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR**
- Welcoming guests
- Helping out in the kitchen
- Preparing Christmas baskets
- Wrapping presents
- Serving meals

**MANUAL WORK**
- Delivery
- Handling and packing
- Maintenance of the premises
- Painting

**OFFICE WORK AND CUSTOMER SERVICE**
- Telephone calls
- Data entry
- Mailings
- Information booths
- Preparation of information kits
- Supervision during vaccination clinics
GROUP VOLUNTEERING

Friends, co-workers or neighbours may wish to volunteer together, as a group. Very often they choose to do a big painting job, sort food, or help out at a party or a fundraising activity. If you are interested in volunteering as a group, be sure to offer your services in advance so the agency concerned can prepare for your arrival.

FAMILY VOLUNTEERING

Some agencies are pleased to welcome volunteer families, although they usually require the children involved to be 14 years of age or over. Family volunteering strengthens families, gets young people socially involved, and helps to create a new generation of volunteers.

VOLUNTEERING FROM HOME

Some people cannot or prefer not to leave their homes. They may have variable working hours, or little free time. Stay-at-homes can get involved by performing volunteering work that can be done at home, such as translating or writing texts, creating or updating a website, doing design, graphic illustration, knitting and so on.

YOUTH VOLUNTEERING

Some teenagers want to get socially involved. Others are in a school program that requires them to do a certain number of hours of volunteering. Whatever their situation, young people can find a volunteer activity that fits their abilities and interests.

Young people aged 15 to 24 are proportionally more likely to help others directly (87%) and to provide direct help almost every day (23%).

When you accept a volunteer position at an agency, you are taking on a freely chosen moral commitment that is in line with the agency’s requirements and needs. Although there are more volunteer opportunities during standard business hours, it is still possible to volunteer in the evening or on weekends. What kind of volunteering is right for you? To find a volunteer activity that fits your interests, abilities and availability, it can be useful to start by doing a self-analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MY LIKES AND INTERESTS</th>
<th>MY SKILLS AND STRENGTHS</th>
<th>MY AVAILABILITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I like doing sports.</td>
<td>I’m patient and sociable. I like teaching what I know.</td>
<td>Two evenings a week.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like the world of business and finance.</td>
<td>I’m good at maths and have a logical mind. I have a college diploma in accounting.</td>
<td>Once a month.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like helping people.</td>
<td>I’m a good listener and have strong empathy.</td>
<td>Saturdays.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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IN THE HEART OF THE ACTION
Once you have determined what kind of volunteer activity is right for you, you will be in a position to seek and apply for a suitable volunteer position. Your first contact with the agency you choose, or are referred to, will be a meeting with the volunteer coordinator. This meeting will include an opportunity to visit the premises, soak up the atmosphere of the agency, learn more about it, and find out what will be expected of you. If the volunteer coordinator then invites you to join the agency’s team of volunteers, the moment will have come for you to decide whether to go through with your choice.

The volunteer coordinator will have expectations of the agency’s volunteers. Depending on the agency’s mission and the activity you have chosen, the aptitudes and abilities required of you may include:

- Having or showing a desire to promote the agency’s cause and to share your knowledge and abilities;
- Enjoying dealing with the people helped by the agency, if your task involves being in direct contact with them;
- Being sociable, a good listener and patient;
- Taking your volunteering seriously; being punctual, diligent and respectful;
- Being able to carry on a conversation in English or in French, depending on the community served by the agency;
- In some cases, having experience in your chosen field of activity;
- In some cases, having intermediate level knowledge of certain computer software programs.

Depending on the agency’s mission and the tasks entrusted to you, you may also be required to have no criminal record. This requirement is designed to protect the agency’s vulnerable clients.
According to Volunteer Canada, these are some of the questions aspirant volunteers may wish to ask of the agency they have chosen:

- What are the cause, mission and philosophy of the agency?
- How will my volunteer work help the agency to carry out its mission?
- What skills will I be called upon to use or acquire?
- How much time will I be required to contribute?
- Will I undergo a probationary period?
- Who can I refer to if a problem arises?
- In what environment will I do my volunteer work?
- Will I be reimbursed for the travelling expenses I incur in connection with my volunteer work?
- How many volunteers work at the agency?

Once you become a volunteer at an agency, you will be given the information and training you need to accomplish your task or mission with confidence. There will always be employees present, and sometimes other volunteers as well. A resource person will be available to help you familiarize yourself with the agency, to answer your questions, and to offer you the encouragement and expressions of appreciation that are essential to a volunteer.
RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE AGENCY

- The agency shall recognize volunteers as full-fledged members of its team.
- The agency shall inform aspirant volunteers of its mission and activities as well as of its policies and procedures, including those concerning volunteering.
- The agency shall inform aspirant volunteers of the details of the selection process, which may include a criminal record check.
- The agency shall supply volunteers with a detailed description of their duties and responsibilities.
- The agency shall provide volunteers with the necessary space and equipment as well as a safe environment to do their work.
- The agency shall establish an orientation and oversight process that takes into account the needs of volunteers and the nature of their tasks.
- The agency shall assign volunteers meaningful tasks that take into account their training, abilities, preferences and experience.
- The agency shall provide its volunteers with the training they need as well as the opportunity to vary their tasks or to participate in a new project.
- The agency shall listen to its volunteers, encourage them to discuss their experience, and respect their opinions.
- The agency shall treat its volunteers with respect, dignity and fairness.
- The agency shall regularly show its gratitude and appreciation to its volunteers, either individually or collectively.
RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE VOLUNTEER

 Volunteers shall report for an information and selection interview. Where appropriate, they shall also consent to a criminal record check.

 Volunteers shall accept the level of responsibility that is suitable for them. They shall make sure they have a thorough understanding of their assigned task.

 Volunteers shall undertake to work for the agency while respecting its mission, values and regulations, and observing its rules of confidentiality.

 Through their actions, attitudes and words, volunteers shall show respect for the agency’s clients, employees and other volunteers, and demonstrate integrity.

 Volunteers shall express their expectations, make suggestions, and share their experience so that everyone can benefit from it.

 Volunteers shall take part in the training sessions and activities that are offered to them.
VOLUNTEERING AND JOB HUNTING

It is possible for you to volunteer even while you are in the process of job hunting. All you have to do is schedule some specific time for your volunteer work. Volunteering is great for keeping your morale up, taking your mind off things and meeting people. It’s also an opportunity to give back and help others. While job hunting, many people are prompted to reconsider their career or study choice. Volunteering gives them excellent opportunities to explore their options.

Your education, work experience and volunteer experience, whether acquired in Quebec or elsewhere, will be recognized by the agency you volunteer with. To reconcile the demands of volunteering and job hunting, you can do occasional volunteer work until you land a job. Then you can look for a volunteer position that fits in with your new work schedule or offers flexible hours.

Volunteering increases your chances of finding employment. It can help you to build your self-confidence, acquire skills and experience, learn to work on a team, discover new interests, and learn more about Quebec. What’s more, in Canada a number of employers consider volunteering as work experience—we therefore recommend that you add a “volunteer experience” section to your resume. You can also use the agency as a reference after conferring with the volunteer coordinator. As well, you can access the hidden job market (openings not advertised in the newspapers or on the Internet) by consulting the bulletin board at the agency and letting it be known that you are looking for a job.
EXPERIENCED VOLUNTEERS

When does a person start feeling like an experienced volunteer? Some will answer, “After four weeks working for the same cause.” Others, by contrast, will say, “After five years working for different causes.” Some people have been volunteering for many years without realizing it (they are experienced volunteers). How is that possible? Well, for them, accompanying their child’s class on an outing, or serving on the board of directors of their photo club, is simply a normal, spontaneous and pleasant activity—they don’t think of it as volunteering. Who said that volunteering couldn’t be fun?

The purpose of this section of the guide is not to judge the value of your volunteer experience—your experience is unique, so there are no real terms of comparison. Rather, we want to offer you some approaches that will help you to progress as a volunteer while taking stock of your volunteer experience.

“*I receive so much yet I give so little.*”

If that’s what you think, then you truly appreciate your volunteer activity. You realize its positive impact on your morale, on your social network, on your sense of self-worth and perhaps even on your career. You probably didn’t expect volunteering to be so rewarding. Yet it is natural that doing good should be good for you.

However, it is a mistake to think that you are giving *so little.* In our modern world with its emphasis on performance, time becomes very important because it is a measure of efficiency. But how can we evaluate the value of four hours a week of volunteer work when needs are boundless?
It’s not the number of hours you put in that counts, it’s what you do and how you do it. Contributing your time to organize an event that will advance the cause of the environment, or to listen to an isolated individual who will feel less lonely afterwards, is a very special gift that has no price for the person, group or cause you are helping.

“What is the real impact of my involvement?”

We sometimes hear a volunteer say, “My contribution is a drop in the ocean.” But every drop is important because, as the proverb says, “Little drops of water make a mighty ocean.”

Let’s take this notion even further by considering the fable of the stone breakers by Charles Péguy. During a pilgrimage to Chartres, today the site of one of the most magnificent cathedrals in France, Charles Péguy came across an exhausted stone breaker drenched in sweat. Seeing his miserable mood, Péguy asked him: “What are you doing, friend?” Impatiently, the man replied, “Can’t you see, I’m breaking stones.” Further along, he saw another stone breaker. Although the man looked tired, he seemed relaxed. “Hello friend, what are you doing?” “I’m breaking stones; I have a family to feed and it’s the best job I could find.” Further still, he saw a third stone breaker. This one, however, was beaming with joy. Puzzled, Péguy stopped and asked him, “Whatever are you doing, my friend?” Proudly, the man replied, “I’m building a cathedral!”

This third man gave a meaning to his work. What makes your volunteering meaningful to you? Would you not agree that a cathedral is built stone by stone, and that each stone is essential to its beauty and unity? Just as every drop of water in the ocean counts?

“Where does my responsibility start and end? How far does my commitment go?”

Your responsibility starts and ends with performing the volunteer assignment you accepted, according to the guidelines you agreed upon with the volunteer coordinator. Within the framework of these guidelines, you may wish to suggest a change in your task or in your work schedule. You may take time off for a vacation, because of illness or bereavement, for a medical appointment, or for a visit to the ministry of immigration. You may be asked to attend a party or special event organized by the agency, as well as training sessions or occasional meetings.

If you are in doubt about your responsibility in a given situation, you can refer to the statement of the respective responsibilities of the volunteer and the agency that will have been transmitted to you, either orally or in writing, when you began your volunteer assignment.
“What is my place as a volunteer?”

Above all, you are part of the great family of over 13 million Canadian volunteers. Although we are not personally acquainted with all the members of this extended family, each of us keeps it in our heart, because as volunteers we all share a common experience and the common values of caring, openness to others, and sharing. Closer to home, you are a full-fledged member of the agency in which you have chosen to volunteer.

Its staff team must facilitate your efforts to become more familiar with the agency and its work, and must listen to your opinions. Remember that this team is supported by the agency’s management and board of directors, who believe in the value of volunteering and in the importance of the individual contribution of each volunteer. Dare to express your vision of volunteering, your opinion about your volunteer assignment, your wishes and your dissatisfaction.

“I like volunteering, but I tend to accomplish my task all alone in my corner and then go home. I’m starting to get bored.”

Volunteering is rich in values. It offers varied experiences and the opportunity to interact with many different kinds of people. In short, it transcends the task. What meaning do you give to your volunteering? Do you feel like someone who is simply breaking stones, or like someone who is building a cathedral? What kind of relationships have you developed with your fellow volunteers? The agency where you volunteer obviously wants you to enjoy what you are accomplishing there. It also wants to offer you a place where you can develop, not only as an involved citizen but also as a person.

By participating in discussions over a coffee before going home, or brief exchanges in the heat of the action, you can get to know the other volunteers, the staff and the people the agency helps. Then you will begin to feel that you are part of something bigger than yourself, part of a common cause—and your boredom will magically disappear.

“I’d like to break out of my routine from time to time. How can I do that?”

Offer to lend a hand at a party or special activity at the agency where you volunteer. Participate in training workshops, where you will acquire new knowledge or a new perspective as well as enjoying the pleasure of conversing with other volunteers. Look for opportunities to get together with others at the agency in order to become better acquainted and share with them.

Attend the agency’s volunteer recognition event. Savour the moment when you are told what a difference you make and how much you are appreciated. You can be proud that you devote some of your time to making the world a better place, when you could just as easily spend the time on your personal interests.
“I feel less and less motivated by my volunteer work.”

Before rushing to quit the volunteer assignment you were keenly interested in just a short while ago, ask yourself a few questions. Quitting is not necessarily the best solution. Did you know that people’s motivations often change over time? For example, if your initial motivation for accepting a volunteer assignment was to acquire experience in a specific area, what will happen when you feel that you have achieved that goal? You may choose to continue in your assignment because you find the cause inspiring, the work challenging, and the people you deal with interesting. Ask yourself what specific reason makes you want to quit. Is it the routine? If so, you have the possibility of changing tasks, or making your task more interesting by varying the places where you perform it. Have you kept your dissatisfactions to yourself? If so, it’s time to talk about them in order to clear the air so you can start afresh.

After thinking things over very thoroughly, it is possible you may conclude that the time has indeed come to leave the agency in order to find a volunteer assignment that is more in line with your new aspirations. In that case, you can leave without doubting your decision, because it will have been carefully considered.

“I have some things to say (both positive and negative). How should I proceed? And what should I do if there is a problem?”

Choose the mode of communication that suits you best. If you are more comfortable expressing yourself in writing, you can compose a letter and then give it or read it to the volunteer coordinator. It will serve as a starting point for the discussion that follows. You can also make an appointment with the coordinator to ensure that you will have all the time you need. You may not receive an immediate response to your questions or complaints. The volunteer coordinator may wish to take some time to reflect, consult the agency team, or meet other volunteers to gain a larger perspective on the issue. However, you do have the right to expect an answer within a reasonable period of time.

If you are not necessarily looking to receive an answer, you can use the suggestion box if there is one.

In the event of a problem, consult the procedure set forth in the agency’s code of ethics. Evaluate the problem in light of the mutual responsibilities of you and the agency. If you’re still unsure, go and see the volunteer coordinator, or another resource person on staff, in order to discuss the situation and find a solution.
“I love volunteering so much that I don’t know when to stop.”

Did you know that job burnout can affect volunteers as well, if they’re not careful? Many people don’t realize that, like any other activity, volunteering can be stressful and exhausting. You can prevent job burnout while maintaining your enthusiasm, by:

- Contributing your time within the limits of your ability.
- Always being on the lookout for signs of physical or mental exhaustion.
- Knowing how to say “no” to taking on a new task, or to working additional hours, if you have neither the desire, the time nor the energy.
- Taking annual vacations.
- Taking advantage of training sessions to refresh and strengthen your skills.
- Realizing that everything does not rest on your shoulders. The agency has a responsibility to recruit new volunteers in order to distribute the work more evenly. Other people can take up the slack, because volunteering is a collective responsibility.
“Can I refuse to put in more hours than indicated in my initial agreement?”

It may happen that the volunteer coordinator proposes that you come in more often. The coordinator expects you to refuse if that is not convenient for you, because you are under no obligation to contribute more time than you originally agreed to. Even if you have some free time, you may wish to use it differently.

Refusing will not put your volunteering at risk, or make you less eligible for other tasks that may interest you at the agency. It is better to refuse politely than to accept simply because you find it hard to say “no”. Agreeing to work more hours than you want could affect your well-being by making you feel bitter. When bitterness sets in, some volunteers end up quitting an assignment that they actually like.

“The agency has a new volunteer coordinator who plans to put in place a volunteer management policy. How will I be affected?”

The new volunteer coordinator will want to meet each volunteer, hear their comments, and learn what they are happy or unhappy about. The new coordinator may also want to review and possibly adapt the agency’s procedures for volunteer recruitment, orientation, training and recognition. But all this will be done gradually.

“I’m not sure how to deal with the new volunteers. Some want me to teach them everything I know, while others don’t want to hear about my past volunteer experience even though we will be working together as a team.”

New volunteers and existing volunteers have to adapt to each other. This requires not only mutual good will, but also a process for integrating new volunteers that takes into account the contribution of both groups. Some agencies pair new volunteers with experienced volunteers. As well as acting as their official resource person, the experienced volunteers help the new volunteers to adapt—by playing the role of a mentor, or at least by being someone with whom they can discuss their volunteer experience and share their ideas. In this way, both new and existing volunteers are recognized by the agency as being important and having skills to contribute. They get to know each other better and build ties that facilitate teamwork.

Other agencies form a committee of volunteers whose concerns include the integration of new volunteers. Such a committee is composed of existing and new volunteers who offer to serve on it. In this way, people can step back from their immediate task, gain a broader perspective and find
solutions. The committee needs to be supported by the agency in order to have any real decision-making power.

It is possible that neither of these two options can be implemented in the short term at the agency where you are volunteering. In that case, it is essential that you inform the volunteer coordinator of the problem situation. If you wish, you can also help the coordinator to develop a means of addressing it.

“Considerable efforts are put into recruiting volunteers. While that is important, I think much needs also to be done for the volunteers who are already in place.”

That’s absolutely right! If the volunteers in place, like you, feel the agency is devoting much more energy to new volunteers, there is going to be serious dissatisfaction. You may feel that you are considered less important and are less appreciated, that you are being taken for granted, or even that, unfairly, you are being expected to adapt whereas the new volunteers are not.

Of course, the agency has to invest some time and energy in recruiting, training and integrating new volunteers. However, you have needs and expectations too. You appreciate it when you are thanked for being there; when you are complimented on your skills, progress, ideas and projects; when people show an interest in you. You expect to be listened to, consulted, and treated fairly and respectfully. You expect to be offered training sessions, opportunities for discussion, and recognition to help you recharge your batteries. Loving what you do is the beginning of a wonderful adventure.

It goes without saying that the volunteer coordinator, the agency team and the board of directors are responsible for establishing recognition procedures so that the agency’s existing volunteers will continue to feel as highly appreciated as when they first arrived.

“I love my volunteer work, but I can no longer find the time for it.”

A promotion at work, the birth of a child, an aging parent in need of care: as their lives evolve, some people find themselves without enough time to continue volunteering. It hurts you to be in that situation because you find volunteering stimulating and enriching. But a new possibility has opened up to you: you can become an ambassador for volunteering in your family, at your office, among your circle of friends and acquaintances. No need to prepare a speech—simply talk about your volunteer experience from the heart! In this way, you will have the pleasure of remaining in contact with an activity you love and perhaps becoming a source of inspiration to others.
“I’d like to try doing something else at the agency where I volunteer, because I really enjoy it there.”

With the agreement of the volunteer coordinator, your assignment could change a little—or even a lot! You could switch tasks or add a new one. You could play an additional role by serving on the board of directors or the committee of volunteers, or by representing the agency at an information booth or on a round table committee. You could also get involved in the recruitment, orientation and training of new volunteers.

There are other ways of volunteering as well. You could bring the members of your family along to volunteer together at an agency party or event; propose that your company get involved by participating in a day of caring at the agency, either on a one-time or more frequent basis; or volunteer from home via the Internet by doing graphic illustration, writing or editing texts, doing translations, creating a website, and so on.

“When I take stock of my personal experience as a volunteer, I’m very satisfied.”

Through volunteering, I get to know myself. I feel useful. I acquire knowledge and skills. I learn to communicate and interact with others. I rub shoulders with some extraordinary people. I meet challenges. I’m in the action. In short, I feel that my life is full and being constantly enriched by all the time I give to others.

Regularly taking stock of your volunteer experience is very worthwhile. It allows you to determine to what extent your original expectations have been fulfilled, and to see how those expectations have evolved over time.
VOLUNTEERING: TRUE OR FALSE? THE ANSWERS

1. I already do volunteer work by occasionally taking care of my neighbour’s children.
   - False
   - What you do is called “mutual aid”. It means lending a hand to a neighbour, a member of your family or a stranger. You are offering your time on your own initiative—and someone, possibly the person you helped, will eventually help you in return.

   Volunteering involves contributing your time, energy and skills as well. But in a more structured way: at an agency, for a cause that is important to you or your neighbourhood.

2. I would need to have a lot of free time in order to be able to do volunteer work.
   - False
   - You only need to be available for a few hours a week—unless you prefer to do occasional volunteering, for example, once a month or once a year.

3. Volunteering will help me to find a job.
   - True
   - It is true that volunteering can help you in your job search. Read the section entitled Volunteering and Job Hunting on page 27.

   The proportion of people who volunteer is higher among those who are employed (50.4%) than among those who are not in the labour force (44.4%) or unemployed (34.1%). However, volunteers not in the labour force contribute more time (an average of 189 hours a year) than volunteers who are employed (139 hours) or unemployed (132 hours).  

4. I’m already doing volunteer work. I don’t like it, but I have to continue because I signed a contract.
   - False
   - If you don’t like what you are doing, we suggest that you meet the volunteer coordinator. If no satisfactory solution is possible, you can consider looking for volunteer opportunities at other agencies.

Although you committed yourself, in most cases the commitment is moral rather than contractual. But even if you signed a contract, volunteering is by definition voluntary: you can terminate it at your discretion. However, if you began this volunteer assignment recently, we suggest you take the time to familiarize yourself with your new environment before quitting.

5. We aren’t paid any money when we do volunteer work.

We receive neither money, nor clothes, nor any other goods. However, some agencies reimburse the transportation expenses of their volunteers and offer them a free meal for a full day of volunteering. Your pay takes the form of smiles, encouragement and “thank yous”. Your reward is the opportunity to meet people, to enjoy yourself, to receive while you give, and to have the pride and satisfaction of knowing you are helping to make the world a better place.

6. I have a physical disability and use a wheelchair to move around. I would never be able to find volunteer work.

All you have to do is select an agency that is wheelchair accessible and apply for a volunteer activity that is within the scope of your abilities.

7. I mainly want to get out of the house and meet people. I don’t think that’s a valid reason for doing volunteer work.

Everyone has a personal motive for becoming a volunteer, and all motives are valid. Whether you are an idealist or a pragmatist, you can contribute just as much to those in need.

8. I’m an immigrant. Volunteering could help me to become more familiar with Quebec culture.

Volunteering will enable you to interact with Quebecers and to build a social network while immersing yourself in a work environment.
9. In order to do volunteer work, you need to have experience in the field where you want to volunteer.

Some fields require specific knowledge (e.g. accounting, computer graphics, translation) and agencies will therefore expect candidates for volunteer assignments in those fields to have the necessary experience.

Your aptitudes and life experience are of value to many agencies. Don’t forget that you will receive training, as well as support for as long as it takes for you to be able to work independently. Volunteering can also be a means of learning or of trying out new experiences.

10. I love hockey. I’m sure I could find an opportunity to volunteer in this sport.

You could accompany young people to the rink, be a referee or coach, or help children to play hockey. Your passions, hobbies and pastimes can guide you in your search for a volunteer activity.

11. I would like to propose a new project at the place where I volunteer. It’s too bad I can’t do that.

It is true that you were recruited to help the agency carry out a specific mission. However, nothing prevents you from proposing a new project or a new way of doing things. Your initiative could help the agency to develop.

12. Volunteering is serious business.

As a volunteer, you are expected perform your task responsibly, to treat people respectfully, and to follow the agency’s procedures.

Volunteering is more than just serious business. It is also an opportunity to meet people, make new friends and enjoy yourself.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CLIENT</strong></td>
<td>A client or user is a person who uses a service, belongs to an association, or is helped by a community agency.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>COMMITMENT</strong></td>
<td>A pledge or promise to do something.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>COMMUNITY</strong></td>
<td>All the people living in a specific locality. A body of people unified by common interests, habits, opinions or characteristics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>COMMUNITY AGENCY</strong></td>
<td>A non-profit organization composed of people who come together around common goals to meet one or more individual or collective needs.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>DISTRICT</strong></td>
<td>A section or neighbourhood of a city, town or borough corresponding to an administrative area or presenting certain distinctive characteristics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EXPECTATIONS</strong></td>
<td>A strong belief that something will happen or be the case in the future. A belief that someone should or will achieve something.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MISSION</strong></td>
<td>The goal or objective that an individual or group seeks to achieve. Its reason for existence. An agency’s mission statement spells out its main goal and articulates what the agency is, what it does and what path it is taking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MOTIVATION</strong></td>
<td>The reason(s) one has for doing a certain thing. The incentive or inducement for a person to act.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>MUTUAL AID</strong></td>
<td>Mutual aid or self-help involves people helping each other to manage or overcome problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ORGANIZATION</strong></td>
<td>A human community or group structured to achieve common aims. For the purposes of this guide, organizations include public enterprises, community agencies, associations (cultural, sports, etc.), and institutions (academic, health, etc.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>VALUE</strong></td>
<td>An ideal principle that serves as a reference point for the members of a community, e.g. social, moral and esthetic values.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>VOLUNTEER</strong></td>
<td>A person who works for an organization voluntarily and without pay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>VOLUNTEER ACTION CENTRE</strong></td>
<td>A non-profit agency dedicated to promoting volunteer and community involvement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>VOLUNTEERING</strong></td>
<td>Undertaking a task of one’s own free will, without obligation, and free of charge. Volunteering covers all the activities performed in an organized framework by individuals or groups acting willingly, without prospect of payment, in the public interest or good.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TO LEARN MORE

WEB SITES

Accès Bénévolat
Volunteer Canada
Bénévoles d’affaires
Fédération des centres d’action bénévole du Québec
Imagine Canada
Réseau de l’action bénévole du Québec
Secrétariat à l’action communautaire autonome et aux initiatives sociales (SAC AIS)
Secrétariat à l’action communautaire autonome et aux initiatives sociales, Volunteering in Québec.
Statistics on giving and volunteering

www.accesbenevolat.org
www.volunteer.ca
www.benevolesdaffaires.org
www.fcabq.org
www.imaginecanada.ca
www.rabq.ca
www.mess.gouv.qc.ca/sacais
www.benevolat.gouv.qc.ca
www.donetbenevolat.ca

DOCUMENTS AVAILABLE FOR CONSULTATION ON THE INTERNET

http://en.copian.ca/library/research/heritage/compartne/tradval1.htm

Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement.
http://volunteer.ca/content/canadian-code-volunteer-involvement

http://iave.org/content/global-volunteer-conference-budapest

http://volunteer.ca/content/making-connections-social-and-civic-engagement-among-canadian-immigrants

OTHER SUGGESTED READING


IF YOU LIKED THIS GUIDE AND DON’T USE IT ANYMORE, GIVE IT TO SOMEONE ELSE!