

UNTAPPED RESOURCES

OPPORTUNITIES FOR VOLUNTEERS WITH LIMITED ENGLISH AND FRENCH LANGUAGE SKILLS

**A SELF ASSESSMENT TOOL FOR PROGRAM
MANAGERS**

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**United Way / Centraide
Ottawa-Carleton**



Volunteer Ottawa / Bénévole Ottawa
Linking Volunteer Energy to Community Needs
Le lien entre l'énergie bénévole et les besoins de la communauté

BACKGROUND

Those who choose to serve their community while adjusting to a new country or while searching for paid employment, enjoy the many secondary benefits of voluntary action. Volunteering is viewed as a powerful vehicle for personal growth and career development.

Volunteer Ottawa is a United Way agency mandated to promote volunteerism in the region. We list the volunteer needs of over 350 non-profit organizations and public institutions in the community and refer more than 6000 prospective volunteers to them each year. We also monitor the impact of legislative issues on the voluntary sector and take a leadership role in training and advocacy.

The profile of the volunteer has changed dramatically over the past decade. In 1997, 36% of the volunteers we interviewed were not employed, 32% were under 24 years of age, and **one third listed neither English nor French as their first language.**

Volunteer Ottawa formed a partnership with LASI (Local Agencies Serving Immigrants) in 1998 and received funding from the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation to undertake a strategic sectoral development project aimed at:

- a) Promoting voluntary action to settlement agency clients
- b) Providing an Enhanced Volunteering Program for agency clients
- c) Training resource staff in settlement agencies on volunteer management issues.

As a result of this project, the need to develop volunteer opportunities in community agencies that are welcoming, accommodating, and culturally inclusive was identified. The average placement rate for Volunteer Ottawa is approximately 56% overall. For those listing neither English nor French as their first language, the rate is just over 20%. Prospective volunteers in this group often experience significant barriers within the community.

Non-profit organizations continually face the challenge to develop the capacity to provide opportunities to volunteers with limited English and French language skills. While being aware of the growing needs of these diverse communities, organizations struggle to meet their needs due to limited resources.

As a result, the **VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECT** was initiated. The following are the objectives of the project:

1. To assist organizations in the community-at-large in developing meaningful volunteer opportunities that meet the needs and interests of volunteers of visible and ethnic minority communities
2. To assist organizations in developing both policies and practices that accommodate and are sensitive to the language and cultural needs of volunteers of visible and ethnic minority communities
3. To encourage non-profit organizations and public institutions to reach out to diverse communities when recruiting members for their Boards and committees.

For the purposes of this project, Volunteer Ottawa focussed on language proficiency as the key determinant, as it was revealed to be the major barrier to this population finding a meaningful volunteer placement. Again in 1999, 29% of those seeking volunteer opportunities through Volunteer Ottawa listed neither English nor French as their first language. New Canadians made up the majority of this group.

Volunteer Ottawa has produced a self assessment tool with these objectives in mind. It is for use by those agencies who would like to integrate a multicultural component into their volunteer program or to help assess the effectiveness of existing volunteer programs in being open and welcoming to people with limited language skills. It is designed for use by Executive Directors, Managers of Volunteer Resources, and volunteers who supervise or manage the activities of other volunteers.

The self assessment tool provides a framework to assess the agency's ability to accommodate volunteers with limited language skills and to suggest what changes could be made to more effectively serve this population.

THE SELF ASSESSMENT TOOL

INTRODUCTION

There are a number of circumstances that facilitate the smooth integration of volunteers with limited English and French language skills into a workplace.

Aside from the “organizational framework” issues (policies and procedures related to inclusiveness, equity, anti-racism, etc), there are many practical considerations that a Manager of Volunteer Resources must take into account when evaluating the placement opportunity for these volunteers.

To assist the Manager of Volunteer Resources to identify placement opportunities for volunteers with limited fluency in English and French, Volunteer Ottawa

- Interviewed Managers of Volunteer Resources of several local volunteer programs that have successfully managed to recruit, orient, retain and integrate volunteers with limited language skills into the life of their organization.
- Interviewed newcomers to Canada with limited fluency in English and French, who are currently involved as volunteers.
- Reviewed existing resources designed to enable an agency to assess its current resources and the possibilities to enhance its ability to work with volunteers from diverse cultural backgrounds and limited language fluency.

The information collected was analysed and the Volunteer Centre identified the elements that contributed to the successful placement of these volunteers.

The following self assessment tool will help you to identify similar elements in your organization. It will also highlight some areas where, with minimal effort, the volunteer program could be modified to enhance an organization’s capacity to benefit from the valuable contribution of a largely untapped human resource in our community.

HOW TO USE THIS SELF ASSESSMENT TOOL

Each self assessment area includes a number of questions.

Choose the answer that most closely reflects the situation in your agency. For example,

2. THE STAFF

2.2 Do the staff members receive any orientation/training about working with volunteers?

YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
1	0	<input type="checkbox"/>

- If most of the staff in your organization receive orientation/training....Answer YES
- If only a few staff in your organization receive orientation/training....Answer NO

The questions are scored differently to reflect the impact of each issue.

Notice that there is no value assigned to DON'T KNOW. Please record your answer anyway.

To self assess the opportunities in your organization, you will need to find the answers to all the questions. Use the tool kit as a “check list”.

- You may find the DON'T KNOW answers a handy guide to direct you to key areas that need consideration and might be otherwise overlooked.

SCORING

Add the scores from the YES and NO columns of the four sections (Watch out for question 4.8!)

The optimal score is 30.

1. YOUR ORGANIZATION

	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
1.1 Are you aware of the demographic changes in the region and have they affected the organization or the services it provides?	1	0	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.2 Are the current clients, staff and volunteers representative of the community or area the organization serves?	1	0	<input type="checkbox"/>
1.3 Does the organization have anti-racism, equity or access policies?	1	0	<input type="checkbox"/>
Total			

2. THE STAFF

	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
2.1 Are there staff members who speak languages other than English or French in the organization?	1	0	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.2 Do the staff members receive any orientation/training about working with volunteers?	1	0	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.3 Do the staff members receive any orientation/training about working in a culturally diverse workplace?	1	0	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.4 Do the staff members receive any orientation/training to help them overcome communication barriers due to language?	1	0	<input type="checkbox"/>
Total			

3. THE VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
3.1 Is the outreach/recruitment process suitable for potential volunteers with limited English and French language skills?	1	0	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.2 Is the intake process suitable for volunteers with limited fluency in French and English?	1	0	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.3 Is the orientation process suitable for volunteers with limited fluency in English and French?	1	0	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.4 Is the integration process to “fit” volunteers into the day-to-day work routine suitable for volunteers with limited fluency in English and French?	1	0	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.5 Are the language fluency requirements routinely assessed for <u>each</u> volunteer opportunity?	1	0	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.6 Would most clients/patients accept a volunteer with limited knowledge of French and English?	1	0	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.7 Have there been any prior successful placements of volunteers with limited fluency in French and English?	2	0	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.8 Is there a process to match every volunteer with a “buddy”?	2	0	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.9 If you were to weigh on a balance the resources used to integrate a volunteer with limited fluency in English and French against the specific benefits generated by the placement..... Would you find that it is worth the investment?	2	0	<input type="checkbox"/>
Total			

4. THE SPECIFIC VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY

	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW
4.1 Would fluency in a language other than English or French be an asset?	2	0	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.2 Would the volunteer provide some specific expertise, which would not be available otherwise?	2		
4.3 Are there <u>staff members</u> whose mother tongue is not English or French in the department/area where the volunteer would work?	1	0	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.4 Are there <u>other volunteers</u> whose mother tongue is not English or French in the department/area where the volunteer would work?	1	0	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.5 Would it be possible to provide the volunteer with the appropriate orientation/training to perform the specific functions of the position?	1	0	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.6 Would limited knowledge of English and French from the volunteer cause excessive additional work to the staff or other volunteers?	0	1	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.7 Would there be any additional resources available to support this volunteer placement?	2	0	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.8 Would there be any significant risk of irreparable harm due to miscommunication?	-30	1	<input type="checkbox"/>
Total			

RESOURCES

In order to provide further assistance in addressing the issues that have been identified in the self assessment tool, a list of *Barriers and Pointers for Success* is available at Volunteer Ottawa.

A review of existing literature on integrating volunteers with limited English and French language skills as well as general information on systemic racial discrimination was conducted. The following is a list of recommended resources which may be of use and are available through the Resource Library at Volunteer Ottawa.

Thomas, Barb and Novogrodsky, Charles. *Combatting Racism in the Workplace Reading Kit*. Toronto, Cross Cultural Communication Centre, 1983.

Levant, Rebecca and Seel, Keith. *Creating Bridges. A Practical Guide and Checklist for the Development of a Cross-Cultural Volunteer Program*. Calgary, The Volunteer Centre of Calgary and Freedmand Levant Consultants Inc. 1995.

Eliminating Racial Discrimination in Canada. Ottawa. Multiculturalism and Citizenship Canada. 1989.

Multicultural Multilingual Volunteers. A Guidebook for Community Organizations. Burnaby, The Burnaby Volunteer Centre.

Vangelista, Anita. *Multicultural Volunteering: Reflections on the “Salad Bowl” Approach*. Australian Journal on Volunteering. 1999.

Multicultural Volunteer Programs (A Self Assessment Tool). Vancouver, Volunteer Vancouver. N.D.

Project Markham Breaking Down the Barriers to Ethnocultural Volunteerism. Markham, Volunteer Bureau Markham. 1994.

Behnia, Behnam and Bergin, Betty. *Recruiting and Retaining Latin and Somali-Canadian Volunteers: Suggestions for Mainstream Organizations*. Gloucester, Gloucester Centre for Community Resources. 1999.

Stronger Together: Recruiting and Working with Ethnocultural Volunteers. Ottawa, Central Volunteer Bureau of Ottawa-Carleton, 1990.

Estable, Alma; Meyer, Mechthild; Pon, Gordon. ***Teach Me to Thunder: A Training Manual for Anti-Racism Trainers.*** Ottawa. 1997.

Teachers Kit For ESL Programs. Ottawa, Volunteer Centre of Ottawa-Carleton. N.D.

Hawkins, Gordon. ***The Changing Faces of Ottawa-Carleton. An Introductory Reference Guide to Visible Minority Communities.*** Ottawa, Social Planning Council of Ottawa-Carleton. 1986.

Toward Full Inclusion: Gaining the Diversity Advantage. A Guide to Planning and Carrying Out Change in Canadian Institutions. Hull, Multiculturalism Secretariat, Department of Canadian Heritage. 1993.

Gentium Consulting. ***Transforming Our Organizations - A Tool for Planning and Monitoring Anti-Racism/Multicultural Change .*** Ottawa, A Report of the Access Research Committee of Ottawa-Carleton; Canadian Ethnocultural Council. 1999.

Gentium Consulting. ***Transformer Nos Organisations - Outil de Planification et de suivi du changement axé sur l'antiracisme et le multiculturalisme.*** Ottawa, Comité de recherche ACCESS d'Ottawa-Carleton; Centre ethnoculturel du Canada. 1999.

Volunteers From the Multicultural Community: Programs that Work. Toronto, Volunteer Centre of Metropolitan Toronto. 1992.

Martin, Jay. ***Volunteering in a Culturally Diverse Context: Implications for Project Designers and Managers.*** Australian Journal of Volunteering. 1999.

Good, Gilda and Pike, Susan. ***Volunteering in Canada: Training Tools for First Generation Canadians.*** Ottawa, Volunteer Centre of Ottawa-Carleton. 1993.

AGENCIES VISITED

Volunteer Ottawa would like to acknowledge the contribution of the following agencies for their assistance in developing the self assessment tool.

The following is a list of the agencies which were visited or with which telephone interviews were conducted in order to collect anecdotal reports used to initially establish the self assessment tool:

- St. Vincent's Hospital
- Island Lodge
- Bruce House
- Gloucester Centre for Community Resources
- South-East Ottawa Centre for a Healthy Community
- Pinecrest-Queensway Health and Community Services
- Sandy Hill Community Health Centre

The following is a list of agencies which were visited to test the self assessment tool:

- The Glebe Centre
- Nepean Public Library
- Children's Aid Society
- Sandy Hill Community Health Centre
- Pinecrest-Queensway Health and Community Services
- Perley and Rideau Veterans Health Centre
- Good Companion's Seniors Centre
- Bytown Museum
- St. Patrick's Home of Ottawa
- Jewish Family Services
- Canadian Mothercraft
- Royal Ottawa Hospital
- Big Sisters Association of Ottawa Carleton
- South-East Ottawa Centre for a Healthy Community
- The Rehabilitation Centre

Developing opportunities for volunteers with limited fluency in English and French

BARRIERS	POINTERS FOR SUCCESS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of staff resources to provide support, orientation and training • Volunteers with limited knowledge of English/French may cause too much additional work for the staff • Lack of financial resources hinder employment of paid Manager of volunteers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give staff opportunities to see/hear about “success stories” involving New Canadian volunteers • Give evidence of initial investment of time resulting in desirable outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often strong communication skills are needed, therefore raising the issue of risk management • Clients cannot be put at risk, particularly those of vulnerable populations, such as persons with disabilities, young children, seniors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk analysis to be conducted for each volunteer position • Look at positions with no direct client contact as possibilities for New Canadians • Partner New Canadian volunteer with more experienced volunteer
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff may not be trained in cultural diversity • Staff may not perceive people from ethno-cultural groups as capable • Agency clients may not be prepared to accept volunteers from an ethno-cultural background 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On-going training in cultural diversity for board and staff members • Development and adhesion to policies and procedures for working with New Canadians • Managers of volunteers on staff who is trained in working with New Canadians • Prepare and train staff to recruit and work with volunteers with limited language skills • Promote to staff as valuable pool of volunteer resources with skills to benefit organization i.e. translation, clerical, friendly visiting etc • A welcoming atmosphere, reflecting the multi-cultural diversity of the population being served; non-intimidating telephone systems and access to cultural interpretation would help to provide this welcoming environment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural differences regarding volunteering may exist • People from certain ethno-cultural groups are not familiar with the concept of volunteering • Volunteer work may be perceived as “free” work or a form of exploitation • Volunteer work may be perceived as a “quick route” to paid employment • There may be a discrepancy between the volunteer and the agency needs and expectations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Important to determine the motivation and expectations of the volunteers i.e. opportunity to practice a language, obtain job related skills or Canadian experience • Define the concept of volunteer work and explore any associated myths i.e. volunteer work may become paid employment • Be clear about what the volunteer can gain from volunteer work. Explain the benefits of volunteering other than just language acquisition i.e. work experience, letter of reference etc. • Be clear about organization mandate and how the volunteer fits into the daily operation as well as the overall goals • Take cultural practices into consideration and make allowances where possible and practical i.e. Are women comfortable working with men, dress etc. • Use the ESL kit, developed by Volunteer Ottawa, as a resource in teaching New Canadians about volunteer work

Developing opportunities for volunteers with limited fluency in English and French

BARRIERS	POINTERS FOR SUCCESS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment, training and supervision of volunteers not culturally sensitive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep application forms simple • Organizations may need to adapt interview and orientation procedures, making them as simple and flexible as possible • Provide opportunity for one-on-one orientation • Provide multi-lingual orientation manuals • Multi-cultural staff, whose mother tongue is neither French nor English, is an asset • Opportunity for volunteers to speak their own language with staff and/or clients, gives volunteers a feeling of comfort. Optimize opportunities for socialization • In initial assignment, arrange for simple tasks which do not require advanced language skills • Give clear instructions and where necessary, show the task • Consider short-term placement to allow for such factors as performance reviews, employment opportunities etc. • Look at advantages of “buddy” system where volunteer is matched initially with an experienced volunteer • Reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses • Opportunity to attend workshops and staff meetings are excellent learning and networking opportunities • The level of support that a volunteer receives will affect the length of time New Canadians will stay