

VOLUNTEERISM IN THE B.C. SPORT SECTOR

Examining the current landscape

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REPORT CONTEXT

Why study volunteerism in the B.C. sport sector?

Volunteers are the heartbeat of the sport sector in British Columbia and beyond. viaSport recognizes that volunteers play a critical role in the delivery and operation of programming at all levels of the Canadian sport system¹. The B.C. Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture's 2020-2025 strategic framework for sport in B.C. identifies volunteerism as a priority in multiple areas. Priorities include building capacity through the development of volunteers at the participatory and high-performance levels, and leveraging event hosting to attract community support from volunteers to promote the value of quality and inclusive sport².

Sport organizations rely on volunteers to deliver quality sport programming, yet many sport organizations face barriers related to volunteer recruitment and retention. In a 2022 survey of the B.C. sport sector, organizations identified volunteer engagement, volunteer recruitment, and volunteer retention³ as the top three challenges related to volunteers. Volunteerism in the Canadian sport sector has seen some troubling trends over the last few decades. A decline in volunteer rates, increased demand for volunteers, increased skill levels required from sport volunteers, and a lack of diversity among sport volunteers have led to an increasingly complex volunteer landscape^{5,6,7,8}

viaSport had three primary objectives in producing this report:

1. To examine the current landscape of volunteerism in the BC sport sector
2. To better understand the barriers, enablers, and motivators for the recruitment and retention of volunteers in sport
3. To recommend strategic actions for viaSport and best practices for organizations to better support the recruitment and retention of volunteers in B.C. sport

This report will provide valuable information and ideas for sport organizations to sustainably strengthen volunteer recruitment, retention, and engagement. Further, this report will provide resources and strategies to support sport organizations in their efforts to diversify their volunteer base.

Method

The findings and recommendations in this report are based on a combination of secondary research and stakeholder engagement. viaSport undertook an extensive review of academic literature and industry reports from the past 15 years on the topic of volunteerism, with a focus on recruitment and retention of sport volunteers. The majority of the reviewed research was conducted in a Canadian context. Select international studies were included that had particular relevance to sport-related volunteer behaviours and activities.

This literature review was supported by two stakeholder engagement tools administered by viaSport to the B.C. sport sector. The first was a sector impact survey conducted in 2021, designed to highlight the impacts and changes experienced by B.C. sport organizations in the previous 12 months. The second was a volunteerism workshop held at viaSport's "Sportscape" event in September, 2022, attended by close to 100 sport leaders in B.C. This session was designed to encourage current B.C. sport leaders to imagine an ideal future of volunteerism in the sport sector and to provide ideas for strategic action in order to realize these goals.

Between the review of existing research and the ideas put forward by current leaders in the B.C. sport sector, key findings and recommendations were developed to support and strengthen volunteerism in the sector.

ENVIRONMENTAL OVERVIEW

Before we address the findings related to volunteer recruitment and retention, it is important to understand the current state of volunteerism in the B.C. sport sector. Due to the limited number of reports specific to volunteerism in B.C. sport, this section has been divided into three sub-sections:

1. The volunteer landscape in B.C.: Patterns and trends related to general volunteerism in British Columbia
2. The volunteer landscape in Canada: Patterns and trends related to general volunteerism in Canada
3. The volunteer landscape in the Canadian sport sector: Patterns and trends specific to sport volunteerism in Canada

The volunteer landscape in B.C.

According to Statistics Canada, British Columbia's formal volunteer rate was 43.9% in 2018, almost 3% above the national average⁹. An analysis of British Columbia's statistics from the Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering, and Participating found that volunteer rates were second highest among sports and recreation organizations¹⁰.

The Vancouver Foundation's 2019 Vital Signs report found that 62% of British Columbians aged 18 and above engaged in volunteering or activities that involve giving their time to an organization, community or cause. This report found some variation in the types of volunteer activities preferred by generation, with younger generations expressing a preference for short-term volunteer opportunities and older generations favouring long-term volunteer commitments¹¹.

The volunteer landscape in Canada

In 2018, over 24 million people in Canada aged 15 and above volunteered in formal or informal capacities, totaling 79% of the surveyed population. While the likelihood of volunteering was found to decrease with age, however the number of hours volunteered were highest among older generations. In comparison to younger generations that had higher volunteer rates but the average hours volunteered were lower¹².

According to Volunteer Canada, the lack of diversity in the Canadian volunteerism sector is a long-standing issue. Recent statistics show that the immigrant volunteer rate in Canada is seven percent lower than the volunteer rate of individuals born in Canada, although immigrant volunteers have been found to volunteer more hours per year¹².

The research also highlighted an increase in informal volunteering, suggesting a shift in the way that Canadians choose to volunteer¹³. This is further supported by research conducted on the impact of COVID-19 on the Canadian volunteer landscape, which found an increase in informal and virtual volunteering opportunities³.

The volunteer landscape in the Canadian sport sector

Sport and recreation organizations make up 21% of Canada's nonprofit and voluntary organizations, and one fifth of volunteers in Canada are involved in the sport sector¹⁴. There is clearly a strong connection between sport and volunteerism, as 65% of lifelong volunteers report that their first experience volunteering was through sport or recreation¹⁵. With over 60% of Canadians reporting present or previous community sport experience¹⁶, it seems that recruiting volunteers through community sport is not only a way to strengthen volunteerism in the sport sector, but to encourage lifelong commitment to the values of volunteerism.

According to a 2020 survey from the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute (CFLRI), 27% of surveyed Canadian adults (18+) had volunteered in sport within the previous 12 months¹. Despite the strong volunteer presence of Canadian volunteers in the sport sector, the sector faces some key challenges related to volunteerism. While diversity is a challenge among the Canadian volunteer sector as a whole, the issue is even more prominent in the sport sector. Statistics show that the sport sector has the widest gap of all organization types between the percentage of volunteer hours from immigrants to Canada versus Canadian born volunteers (see Figure 1)¹⁷.

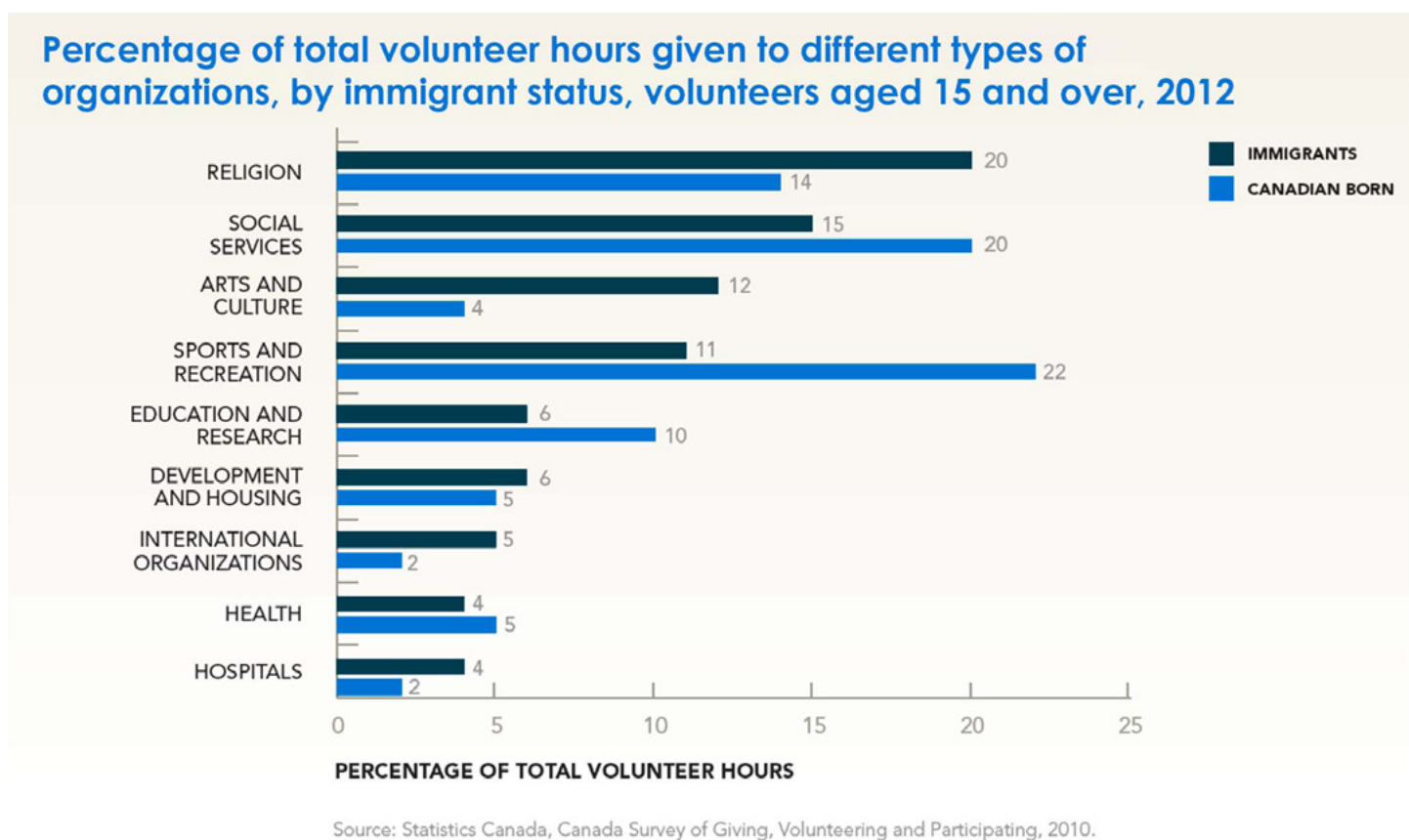


Figure 1. Retrieved from Volunteer Canada.

Other underrepresented groups in sport volunteerism include older adults (65+), women, and adults with lower incomes. Demographic information from the CFLRI 2020 survey showed a 10% decrease in sport volunteer rates among adults aged 65+ (19%) compared to those aged 18-64 (29-31%). Further, 25% of women reported volunteering in sport compared with 29% of men. Women are underrepresented as community coaches, where they make up only 25% of all coaches in the Canadian sport system¹⁸. Adults who are married or living with a partner and adults who have a university degree are more likely to report volunteering¹.

Finally, organizational challenges exist where many Canadian and B.C. sport organizations report difficulties in recruiting and retaining volunteers, as well as maintaining stable volunteer levels^{3,4}. The environmental context of the B.C. and Canadian sport sector were taken into consideration when developing the recommendations and best practices of this report.

MOTIVATORS, ENABLERS, AND BARRIERS TO VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION IN SPORT

This section outlines common themes from the literature review. First, motivators for individuals to volunteer in sport are identified, followed by enablers and barriers to volunteer recruitment and retention. Barriers for the sport organizations will also be discussed. This identifies patterns related to different demographics of volunteers, where motivators, enablers and/or barriers may differ based on volunteer age, gender, cultural background, or disability status.

The volunteer landscape in B.C.

In general, sport volunteers are motivated by a combination of altruistic factors and personal benefits, with the altruistic factors often becoming more prevalent the longer the volunteer remains involved. The extent to which the volunteer's needs or expectations are met has a significant impact on their likelihood to remain involved in volunteering. Individuals' motivators to volunteer in sport can be broken down into four main themes: The volunteer landscape in Canada: Patterns and trends related to general volunteerism in Canada

1. Social connections
2. Opportunities for learning and career development
3. Giving back to the community
4. Passion for the sport or organization

1. Social connections

Social connections act as motivating factor across all demographics of sport volunteers. Sport volunteers are often recruited through friends and family, and those who make positive social connections through volunteering are more likely to remain involved^{1,20,21}. The benefits of developing social connections through volunteering can be particularly motivating for newcomers to Canada, as an opportunity to build up a social network¹⁸. Further, studies have found that social factors can lead to increased volunteer retention among student volunteers²².

2. Opportunities for learning and career development

Another common motivator for sport volunteers is the opportunity for learning or career development. While this motivating factor is relevant across all volunteer demographics, it is most prevalent among younger volunteers and can vary widely between age groups. For example, younger volunteers are often motivated to volunteer as a way to advance their careers through skill development and networking^{23,23}. For middle-aged and older adults, volunteering is a great way to use their existing skills^{24,25}. Newcomers to Canada may benefit from the opportunity to develop their English language skills and make professional contacts¹⁸.

3. Giving back to the community

The first two themes identified are driven by personal benefits. The most altruistic motivator is the desire to support or give back to the community¹. Many volunteers, particularly coaches, are motivated by the opportunity to contribute to the development of youth by passing on knowledge and values. Research has found this motive to be highly prevalent among women coaches, along with a desire to promote gender equity in sport¹⁹.

Parent coaches, older adults, and volunteers who have been involved with an organization for several years are often motivated to give back to the community^{26,20}. However, when volunteers are engaged from a young age, volunteerism can be instilled as a personal value through the influence of their family, friends, or sport organization²¹. Some studies show that promoting volunteerism through values and altruism rather than personal reward leads to greater volunteer retention. While newer volunteers are often motivated by personal growth and reward, those who remain committed for the longest are the ones who volunteer for altruistic reasons^{21,27,28}. Overall, there is a strong family component to this theme, as many parents are motivated to volunteer due to their children's involvement in sport and their children often carry on a tradition of volunteering if they grew up watching their parents volunteer^{29,25}.

4. Passion for the sport or organization

Finally, many volunteers are motivated to get involved and stay involved because of their passion for sport. Athletes often develop strong athletic identities and close personal connections to their sport. As a result, volunteering can be an avenue for athletes to maintain their connection to a sport after they retire from playing³⁰. This motivator is also closely linked to retention, as studies have found that many older adults who volunteer in sport have a long history of commitment to the sport^{25,27}. In addition to the connection to sport, volunteers can be motivated by a connection to the organization. Volunteers are more likely to remain involved and engaged when they believe in the purpose or cause of the organization through shared values. A strong connection to the organization leads to high levels of commitment, often resulting in long-term volunteer retention²⁰.

Enablers for the volunteer

In addition to the motivators identified above, the following two themes outline the most common structural supports that enable individuals to get involved and stay involved in sport volunteering:

1. Organizational support
2. Role fit and flexibility

1. Social connections

The most important enabler to sport volunteering from an individual standpoint is organizational support. When an individual feels supported and valued by the organization, they will demonstrate higher levels of commitment to the organization, leading to increased engagement and retention²². Organizational support can come in many different forms, such as training, inclusion, and recognition, to name a few.

Organizational support is a critical enabler across all volunteer demographics, but different volunteer groups may benefit from various types of support. For example, volunteer mentorship is a great way to support volunteer coaches.

New coaches or young coaches may lack confidence in their abilities and benefit from having an experienced mentor to support them. Mentorship is also a useful tool for underrepresented groups such as women coaches, who may be looking to grow their professional networks^{19,29}. Support with English language skills is found to be an enabler among newcomer volunteers, while the use of accessible technology and communication practices is an enabler for volunteers with disabilities^{18,30,31}.

2. Role fit and flexibility

Role fit and flexibility is another enabler for sport volunteers to remain involved and engaged. The alignment between the volunteer and the organization is important in terms of both the volunteer role and the alignment of values. Volunteers are more likely to remain involved and engaged when they believe in the purpose or cause of the organization through shared values²⁰ and when their volunteer role matches their skill set and interests²². To achieve good role fit, organizations need to communicate with volunteers early and often to find out their interests and skills. Volunteers who feel that they are making a meaningful contribution by using their unique skill set are more likely to stay in their volunteer role²⁷.

Role flexibility can support individuals with busy schedules, physical limitations, or geographical barriers to find a volunteer role that suits their needs^{19,27}. Role flexibility can come in different forms, such as job sharing or adapting volunteer roles. An increasingly popular type of role flexibility is the offer of virtual volunteering opportunities. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the use of virtual volunteering and many organizations have continued to adapt volunteer roles for a virtual setting^{3,32}. Virtual volunteering has many benefits for both the volunteer and the organization. Volunteers enjoy reduced time constraints because of a decrease in travel time and an increase in flexibility to complete tasks on their own schedules¹. Further, virtual volunteering is a way to make volunteer opportunities accessible for individuals with physical limitations. For example, virtual volunteering can benefit individuals with disabilities, health concerns, or mobility challenges. It also provides an option for individuals facing geographic barriers, such as a lack of reliable transportation or those living in remote areas^{8,37,38}. This type of role flexibility is beneficial to the organization as well, because it opens up opportunities to a broader and more diverse volunteer community¹².

Barriers for the volunteer

Although sport volunteers are motivated and supported by a variety of factors, some individuals face barriers to get involved or stay involved in sport volunteering. The most common barriers are summarized in the four themes below:

1. Time commitment
2. Volunteer conditions
3. Skills and confidence
4. Access and knowledge of opportunities

1. Time commitment

The most common and universally applicable barrier is the time commitment required to volunteer in sport^{1,10}. While this barrier exists across all volunteer demographics, it has been found that different age groups have various competing priorities. For example, younger volunteers may be balancing school and part-time work, while middle-aged volunteers are often juggling their career and family priorities²⁰. Older adults who are retired might not want to be tied down by volunteering or may face pressure from family and friends who think that they are doing too much²⁵. These factors related to time constraints can pose challenges for both recruitment and retention of sport volunteers.

2. Volunteer conditions

A commonly cited barrier specific to volunteer retention is the working conditions of the volunteer role. Volunteers may become less engaged or leave their volunteer role altogether if they are unhappy with their working conditions. For example, many sport organizations rely on a small number of highly dedicated volunteers and lack sufficient secondary volunteers^{7,17}. As a result, those who commit the most time are often overworked and become susceptible to burnout. Due to the over-reliance on these volunteers, organizations often struggle to backfill volunteer roles. This can lead volunteers to stay in their role out of obligation, which results in low individual satisfaction for the volunteer²². These issues are most prevalent among parent volunteers and long-term volunteers who have a high level of commitment to the organization. For younger volunteers, conditions such as a lack of growth opportunities can decrease their likelihood to remain involved²⁸.

3. Skills and confidence

Some individuals lack the required skills or confidence to get involved or stay involved in sport volunteering. Research shows that the community sport landscape is becoming increasingly complex and bureaucratic. As a result, sport organizations need highly skilled volunteers to navigate leadership and administrative roles^{7,17}. Some volunteers lack the required skill while others lack confidence in their skills, either of which may deter them from pursuing or remaining in volunteer roles^{1,34}. Low confidence is more likely to affect younger volunteers, particularly coaches, who have less experience²⁸. When newer coaches or volunteers in leadership roles do not get adequate training and support, they are less likely to remain involved.

4. Access and knowledge of opportunities

It is important to acknowledge that sport volunteering is more accessible to some demographic groups than others. To avoid duplicating information, demographic barriers and enablers will both be outlined in this section. Several studies identify enablers and barriers related to an individual's income level, education, family status, gender, immigration status, (dis)ability, and sport background. Some of the most common demographic enablers are being parents of school-aged children with mid to high income levels, having a high level of education, and being married or living with a partner^{1,15,29,30}. Men are found to have greater access to sport volunteering opportunities, while women, immigrants to Canada, and individuals with disabilities face added barriers to accessing volunteer roles in sport^{8,10,15,30}.

A related barrier to volunteer recruitment is a lack of knowledge of volunteer opportunities in sport. This barrier is prevalent among younger demographics (18-24) and volunteers over 65 years old^{1,25}. Beyond the lack of knowledge of volunteer opportunities, some demographic groups face barriers to accessing certain types of volunteer roles. For example, studies have found that immigrant volunteers are less likely to obtain leadership roles in sport organizations and women may be channeled into administrative roles rather than coaching positions due to gender stereotypes^{19,35}.

Barriers for the sport organization

After review of the motivators, enablers, and barriers that are most common among sport volunteers, it is important to identify the barriers that sport organizations face related to volunteerism. Sport organizations experience barriers related to the following four categories:

1. Volunteer recruitment
2. Volunteer retention
3. Volunteer management and organizational capacity
4. Time and resources

1. Volunteer recruitment

Sport organizations face a number of challenges related to volunteer recruitment. With volunteers often unable to commit due to time constraints, organizations may struggle to match volunteers to an appropriate role. As alluded to previously, the sport sector as a whole is becoming increasingly complex, which means that sport organizations often require highly skilled volunteers to fill certain roles. Challenges with recruitment can lead organizations to fill these roles with volunteers who do not have the skill set required to carry out all responsibilities^{6,17}.

In addition to finding suitable volunteers, many sport organizations struggle to recruit a diverse volunteer base. Research shows that many non-profit organizations, particularly in sport, do not have a volunteer base that is representative of the community they serve^{6,18,32}. The difficulty to recruit diverse volunteers can come from a variety of factors. Some volunteers may face physical or geographic barriers^{8,12}, or underrepresented groups might feel unwelcome due to insufficient support and a lack of role models^{19,36}.

2. Volunteer retention

Once volunteers are recruited, many sport organizations struggle to retain existing volunteers. As identified in the environmental overview, there is a trend in volunteerism where younger generations show a preference for short-term volunteer opportunities. This may decrease an individual's commitment to the organization, leading to lower retention rates. If organizations do not have a

retention plan in place to maintain a relationship with short-term volunteers, these volunteers end up committing only for short periods of time or one-off events⁶.

Time commitment can also act as a barrier to retention, as volunteers may be hesitant to take on more or may leave their volunteer roles due to demanding time commitments^{7,10}. Further, volunteers might leave the organization if the role does not align with the volunteer's expectations when they took on the position. Sport organizations that rely heavily on a small number of highly skilled volunteers face challenges with succession planning. When a key volunteer leaves their position, the organization may not have the ability to replace the individual with an equally skilled and committed volunteer^{7,22}.

3. Volunteer management and organizational capacity

The majority of B.C. sport organizations operate with limited financial resources, which creates challenges related to volunteer management and organizational capacity. In many sport organizations, volunteer managers are unpaid volunteers, or volunteer management is a portion of an employee's job description. As a result, volunteer managers often lack the time and resources to implement structured volunteer management practices. For example, organizations may have difficulty providing sufficient volunteer training, communicating effectively with their volunteers (particularly through digital platforms), and providing sufficient volunteer recognition^{3,6}. Under-developed volunteer management practices have been linked to issues with volunteer retention^{32,37}. A lack of strategic planning related to volunteer resources is often linked to sport organization's challenges with volunteer recruitment and retention^{7,38}.

4. Access and knowledge of opportunities

One of the greatest challenges of the sport sector in B.C. is organizational capacity. In order to mitigate the barriers listed above, volunteer managers require time and resources. Research shows that organizations with staff or volunteer positions that are dedicated exclusively to supporting and managing the volunteer base often have better volunteer management practices^{6,32}. While some organizations might be hesitant to dedicate more resources to volunteer management, it is a worthwhile investment that can save the organization time and resources in the long term. Implementing practices that increase retention will improve organizational efficiency, with more time focused on managing existing volunteers and less time spent recruiting and onboarding new volunteers²⁴.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND BEST PRACTICES

This section provides recommendations and best practices to promote and increase volunteerism in the sport sector. This section begins with a broad list of best practices for sport organizations to improve volunteer recruitment and retention. It then highlights specific strategies for targeted recruitment and retention, broken down into different volunteer demographics. Finally, this section outlines potential strategic actions for the B.C. sport sector to strengthen capacity related to volunteerism. These recommendations are based on both the literature review outlined in the previous section, as well as stakeholder recommendations from viaSport's 'Sportscape' event in September, 2022.

Best practices for sport organizations

1. Use Human Resource Management (HRM) principles to design a volunteer program.

Research shows that the use of HRM practices leads to increased retention of volunteers. Organizational practices such as planning, strategic recruitment, training, and recognition have all been connected to high levels of commitment and dedication from volunteers^{6,20,32}. With that said, it is important to recognize the unique needs of a volunteer workforce. Organizations must find a balance to manage volunteers in an organized and efficient way, while maintaining a level of flexibility. Human resource management practices for volunteer groups should be more informal and relational than they would be for paid employees^{6,32}.

It is recommended that sport organizations adopt some level of HRM principles that is appropriate to the scope and capacity of the organization. The most basic principles include taking a strategic approach to volunteer recruitment, outlining roles, responsibilities, and time commitments for the volunteer, providing volunteer orientation and training, and providing opportunities for evaluation and feedback³². In order to implement effective HRM practices, it is important that the organization has at least one dedicated individual to support and manage the volunteer workforce⁶.

Organizations may find [Volunteer Canada's Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement](#) to be a useful guide to design and implement a volunteer program.

2. Prioritize building relationships.

Communication and interpersonal relationships are important elements of volunteer motivation and volunteer management. As outlined in the previous section, volunteers are more likely to remain involved when they have organizational support and a strong connection to the organization. Therefore, a retention strategy for sport organizations is to prioritize building relationships with their volunteers. Organizations should communicate regularly with their volunteers to keep them in the loop, ensure their needs are being met, and make volunteers feel like valued members of the organization^{3,14}.

Since social connections lead to increased retention, sport organizations can also facilitate events and activities to foster relationships between volunteers, and with the organization's staff members^{6,39}. Prioritizing relationships can lead to an increase in volunteer recruitment, while strengthening the organization's social network⁷.

3. Provide a range of flexible volunteer roles.

As this report has demonstrated, the needs and preferences of volunteers vary depending on the individual's personal context and identity factors. Sport organizations must have the flexibility to address the different needs of volunteers in order to recruit a diverse volunteer workforce. This includes offering a range of different commitment levels, from one-off opportunities to long-term volunteer positions. Virtual volunteering along with online training and orientation resources should be provided to accommodate busy schedules, physical barriers, and geographic barriers. Organizations should ensure that volunteer roles and tasks are appropriate to the volunteer's skill, experience and confidence, while supporting the volunteer's development²¹.

1. Recruitment: Promote volunteering using a balance of altruism and personal reward.

Volunteers are generally motivated by a combination of altruistic factors and personal rewards, with altruistic motivation often strengthening over time. Sport organizations should consider this when developing recruitment messages by highlighting both the altruistic benefits and personal rewards. To increase retention, sport organizations might choose to promote altruism to a greater extent, as volunteers who are motivated by altruistic factors tend to have higher levels of retention. This can be achieved by outlining the importance of volunteers and how they contribute to the sport, the organization, and the community. Sport organizations can promote volunteerism as a core value of the organization in order to encourage individuals to develop a sustained habit of volunteering²¹.

Targeted recruitment and retention: Recommendations for sport organizations

Young volunteers

1. **Provide professional development opportunities that support career advancement and skill development.** Young volunteers are often motivated by personal benefits related to career development. Sport organizations can meet these volunteer needs by offering professional development opportunities for volunteers, such as a mentorship program or networking opportunities.
2. **Promote volunteerism as a fundamental value of the organization.** Individuals who volunteer from a young age are more likely to become lifelong volunteers. Sport organizations can facilitate this by encouraging and supporting young athletes to volunteer. By developing the habit of volunteering at a young age, individuals may adopt volunteerism as a personal value, increasing the likelihood of volunteer retention.

Middle-aged volunteers

1. **Provide a range of opportunities to get the most out of their skills.** Middle-aged volunteers often have extensive career experience, yet may be busy with competing priorities such as career and family responsibilities. Ensure that a range of opportunities in terms of skill level and time commitment are available in order to get the most out of these diverse and highly skilled volunteers.
2. **Promote opportunities for family volunteering.** Research has found that individuals who saw their parents volunteer growing up are more likely to volunteer themselves, continuing what is referred to as the volunteer lifecycle²⁵. One way to encourage this shared value is for sport organizations to promote opportunities for family members to volunteer together, such as parents, their children, and even grandparents. This is beneficial to the parent or grandparent, as they do not need to worry about losing family time or finding childcare.

Older adult volunteers

1. **Offer flexible roles and job sharing.** Older adult volunteers may have a wide range of needs and motivations to volunteer. Many retired adults volunteer to remain physically and mentally active, yet may face barriers related to health concerns and competing plans for retirement^{25,27}. In order to address these various needs, sport organizations should offer flexible volunteer roles that can be adapted to meet the needs of the volunteer. Job sharing may be a useful strategy to alleviate time constraints and adapt tasks to the skill set of the volunteer.
2. **Targeted recruitment strategies.** Research has found that older adults who are involved in sport volunteering have wide social networks²⁵. Sport organizations can connect with the networks of these volunteers as avenues for new recruitment. Previous sport participants or coaches are also recommended for targeted recruitment of older adult volunteers. In addition, older adult volunteers are more motivated by altruistic factors than personal rewards, so recruitment messages for older adults should be tailored to the altruistic benefits of volunteering.

Volunteers with a disability

1. **Provide virtual volunteering options and role flexibility.** Many individuals with disabilities experience physical barriers that may inhibit their ability to volunteer in a traditional sport setting³⁸. Sport organizations can mitigate these barriers by providing virtual volunteering options or by having some flexibility in volunteer roles to meet the needs of the volunteer. Ensure role flexibility is communicated to prospective volunteers. Get to know the strengths of the prospective volunteer and assign or redesign tasks to maximize the use of their strengths.
2. **Identify and reduce barriers for individuals with disabilities.** Make accessibility and inclusion an expectation within the sport organization, rather than making reactive accommodations. This allows for diverse participation without placing the responsibility on the volunteer to disclose their accessibility needs. Volunteer Canada has multiple resources to support organizations with creating an accessible volunteer environment. Refer to [Volunteer Canada's Engaging People with Disabilities webpage](#) for a list of up to date resources to help your organization become more accessible for volunteers.

Newcomers to Canada

1. **Facilitate social integration.** Newcomers to Canada are often motivated to volunteer by the opportunity to meet people or to learn more about the community. Sport organizations can facilitate welcoming opportunities for social connection by creating a buddy program, where a newcomer volunteer is matched with an experienced volunteer to support training and integration¹⁸.
2. **Use a strengths-based approach to recruitment.** Sport organizations benefit from engaging newcomers by widening their pool of potential volunteers, gaining diverse perspectives, and raising cultural awareness within the organization. Organizations should recognize the strengths of having a diverse volunteer base, as well as the strengths of each volunteer³⁸. Assess the skills of each volunteer and provide development opportunities as needed.

- 3. Intercultural awareness: Identify and reduce barriers.** In order to create a welcoming environment for newcomer volunteers, it is the organization's responsibility to educate themselves and their staff. Volunteers and staff should be provided with training and resources to integrate newcomer volunteers¹⁸. As a starting point, sport organizations can refer to [Volunteer Canada's Engaging Newcomers webpage](#) for resources to support newcomer volunteers. Further, the [Guide for Cultural Competency Application of the Canadian Code](#) is a useful resource to create welcoming and inclusive environments for volunteers.

Women and girls

- 1. Increase retention through organizational support.** Retention rates among women and girls are found to be negatively affected by unwelcoming sport environments and perceived lack of support, leading women to feel isolated in their volunteer roles. Sport organizations can mitigate this challenge by providing support for women volunteers in their early years of coaching such as professional development, mentorship opportunities, and networking opportunities¹⁹. Communication and organizational support are essential to increasing retention.
- 2. Examine how policies impact women's involvement and experience in volunteer sport roles.** Particularly among volunteer coaches, women and girls have been historically underrepresented due to gender role stereotypes. Organizations should ensure that their policies and practices are inclusive and consider the needs of women volunteers. For example, inflexible volunteer schedules and unclear coaching pathways can negatively impact women's experiences and retention rates¹⁹.

Strategic actions for the B.C. sport sector

The following recommendations represent areas for strategic action to support the development of volunteerism across the B.C. sport sector.

1. Cross-sport collaboration and resource sharing

Sport organizations can benefit from the opportunity to collaborate and share resources related to volunteerism in order to relieve some of the stress on the limited resources of individual sport organizations. Organizations should look to collaborate on strategies related recruitment and retention of volunteers. The Sportscape session identified a desire for a centralized volunteer database for sport sector volunteers. This would both streamline volunteer onboarding processes and create a master list of sport volunteers that could be accessed by all local and provincial sport organizations. viaSport's strategic plan (2022-2027) outlines a priority to support the development of sector volunteer strategy and the development of an online volunteer resource hub.

2. Supports or incentives for youth volunteers

The literature review demonstrates that engaging volunteers from a young age can increase volunteer retention. Since younger volunteers are often motivated by personal rewards and career development, the sector would benefit from looking into education, supports, and incentives to engage youth volunteers. This might involve collaboration between the B.C. sport sector and the B.C. school system to explore possible volunteer and leadership development opportunities. Possible initiatives could include targeted recruitment of high school students towards their 30 volunteer hours required for high school graduation or promotion of the [External Sport Credentials Program](#).

3. Recognition, appreciation, and incentives for volunteers

Volunteer recognition is important for volunteer motivation as it demonstrates to the volunteer that they are valued by the organization. Sportscape surfaced some ambitious ideas related to recognition of volunteers (e.g. – tax incentives), but highlighted a need for the sector to look at a broader range of ways to recognize volunteers. Appreciation for volunteers can come in a variety of forms, including thank you notes, gift cards, swag, travel vouchers, appreciation events and/or awards.

4. Governance education

As outlined in the literature review, the management of sport organizations is becoming increasingly complex. The B.C. sport sector should continue to support governance education for board members and executives of provincial sport organizations and local sport organizations. This could include training opportunities such as CCES Governance Essentials program or utilizing viaSport's governance resources to develop a plan for onboarding new Directors.

ENDNOTES

¹“Monitoring & Tracking the Field: Volunteering in Sport,” *Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute*, 2022. <https://cflri.ca/sites/default/files/2022-03/CFLRI-TrackingTheField-Sport%20Monitor-Volunteering-EN-Final.pdf>

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