



**Our Role in
Enabling Recovery**

The Evolution of Volunteerism

2021-2025 Strategic Plan



Our Mission

Volunteer Toronto increases the positive impact that volunteering has on the City of Toronto through innovative initiatives that inspire, inform, and connect volunteers and the organizations that need them.



Our Vision

We envision a Toronto that is caring, inclusive, and engaged where volunteering is an important avenue through which everyone has the opportunity to participate and contribute meaningfully.



Our Values



Being What is Needed: Filling gaps in support using experience and knowledge to deliver services.



Inclusion: Everyone is able to contribute in a meaningful way.



Positive Change: Exploring new and better ways to support volunteerism in Toronto.



Growth and Learning: Empowering people and communities to develop and thrive.



Connecting: Building valuable relationships with each other and those we interact with.

Introduction

Volunteer Toronto's local roots run deep, ingrained over a 90-year history of encouraging social and economic opportunity through volunteerism. What began as a necessity in the wake of the Great Depression has grown into a powerful characteristic of our city's identity, and an essential enabler of our vibrant non-profit sector.

Toronto's 1.6 million volunteers contribute an estimated \$5.6 billion to Canada's GDP every year.ⁱ This translates into millions of hours of capacity for causes in our city, and new connections, skills, reduced isolation, and increased employability for volunteers. We are proud of our significant contribution to making Canada's volunteer rate among the highest in the world.

Without question, COVID-19 has disrupted this baseline and in doing so has transformed the gravity of our mission and outlook over the next 5 years.ⁱⁱ

Watch Our Strategic Plan
Introduction Video Below:





Current Landscape

Collective compassion has grown exponentially as a result of the pandemic—demonstrated by a resounding number of Torontonians expressing interest in giving back.ⁱⁱⁱ In fact, our communities have strengthened formal volunteerism enabled by non-profits, to go directly to the source.

The agility of grassroots leaders and the willingness of individuals to pivot to meet the challenges of the pandemic has translated into an outstanding response to COVID-19, and we've seen more people in our communities willing to contribute time to a cause than ever before. In contrast, the operational challenges organizations are facing as a result of the pandemic is creating an environment in the non-profit sector where volunteer supply is outstripping availability of volunteering opportunities despite surging community need.

60% of non-profit organizations are financially constrained by increased demand for their services, systemic underfunding, and significant losses in revenue due to the pandemic.^{iv} Volunteer professionals were quick to feel these consequences, with 43% of volunteer leaders facing lay-offs, reduced hours, or in the largest organizations, working without any support staff.^v As a result, hundreds of thousands of volunteers have been dismissed from their pre-pandemic roles, and many organizations continue to struggle to adapt and engage volunteers to deliver on their missions, either in person or online.

It is resoundingly clear that **Volunteer Toronto is needed now more than ever** to support the volunteer sector. The pandemic has left a record number of Torontonians in search of a stepping stone to employment. While volunteering is proven to be that step for so many, there is much work to be done to ensure that there are meaningful roles available to be filled. As **individuals face more isolation, high unemployment, and greater competition for available roles**, there is risk of further marginalizing and harming those looking to give back as part of their life journey. **It will take learning, new systems, and accountability to ensure equity, diversity and inclusion is a priority for our future** as an organization and for the voluntary sector.

A Look Ahead

With decades of experience, we know that it takes expertise, and capacity, to respond quickly and effectively to recruit, train, and manage volunteers to serve clients safely. And what's more, we know how to leverage the skills and interest of volunteers to build **meaningful roles** that grow personal experience, and therefore, economic and social opportunity. We will lean into these specialized skills in order to develop **intensive support** where it is needed most. Perhaps even more importantly, is that we will do this work with a lens of **anti-racism and anti-oppression** to create an environment where all Torontonians can participate in meaningful volunteer experiences facilitated by both grassroots and non-profit organizations.

While the impact of COVID-19 continues to unfold, Volunteer Toronto's **Strategic Plan** is founded on two clear insights from the early response to the pandemic. First, that specialized expertise and intensive support will be necessary in rehabilitating the voluntary sector, and second, that technology alone will be ineffective in levelling out the forces of volunteer supply and demand.

Stabilizing the voluntary sector is our responsibility, and this goal will guide the actions of the organization. We intend to embrace this moment in our history as an opportunity to further evolve volunteerism in our city.

The delivery of this plan will be approached in two key phases that reflect the immediate needs of our city recovering from COVID-19 and the advancement of the future of volunteerism. Within each phase, activities will be delivered to build the foundations of **two strategic pillars**:



Foster Volunteerism: Enable the recovery of Toronto's volunteer infrastructure, creating an environment where all Torontonians can participate in meaningful volunteer experiences.



Elevate Volunteerism: Influence local, regional and provincial decision makers to recognize the value of volunteerism by funding, promoting, and consulting in recovery initiatives and beyond.

While it's clear that **volunteerism is a powerful characteristic of our city's identity**, we've learned that the role of a Volunteer Centre is far from understood. **Volunteerism is a critical aspect of our social and economic recovery**, and we will tirelessly build intensive programs, cross-sectoral relationships and a body of evidence that reinforces its essential role in building back a **strong non-profit sector** and strengthening community resilience.

Foster Volunteering

Strategic Pillar & Enablers

Over the next 5 years, here is how we will enable the recovery of Toronto's volunteer infrastructure, creating an environment where all Torontonians can participate in meaningful volunteer experiences.

OBJECTIVE	PHASE 1: RECOVER (YEAR 1-2)	PHASE 2: ADVANCE (YEAR 3-4)
Re-bound rates of volunteerism to “pre-pandemic” levels	▶ Enable volunteerism by developing intensive learning and recruitment initiatives that are tailored to the new reality facing volunteers, organizations and community-led groups as they adjust to the social and economic impact of COVID-19 ▶ Ensure grant proposals align with strategic priorities to enable volunteerism	▶ Meet the future needs of volunteerism by investing in new technologies to ensure Volunteer Toronto's infrastructure (e.g. matching portal remains the largest and most diverse database in the GTA). ▶ Strengthen programs designed to eliminate barriers, and encourage greater volunteer representation and participation among youth, newcomers, job-seekers and seniors
Increase visibility and engagement across non-profit sectors with a focus on community recovery	▶ Build capacity for organizations meeting essential needs (e.g. health care, food security and social services) and for sub-sectors severely impacted by COVID-19 (arts, festivals & fairs) ▶ Lead and support networking and advocacy initiatives for volunteer management professionals by partnering with relevant professional associations	▶ Establish formal partnerships with diverse networks and organizations across the GTA to: ▶ Design and deliver initiatives that promote and highlight the essential role of volunteerism ▶ Develop programs and services that support accessible and accountable volunteer programs
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Develop intentional systems that expand perspectives, knowledge and comfort to meaningfully respond to the complexities of social change related to anti-racism, anti-oppression, equity, diversity, inclusion and decolonization (ARDEID)	▶ Support a culture shift from reactive, solution-based responses to reflective, life-long learning of ARDEID awareness and appreciation ▶ Expand community connections and engage in discussion that value lived experience and foster trust, growth and learning ▶ Review internal programs, services and communications to identify and understand the gaps that reduce barriers to engagement ▶ Continue to increase diversity of board, staff and volunteers	▶ Update and create programs, services and policies to reflect community needs through learned ARDEID lens
SUCCESS MEASURES		
▶ Increased rates of volunteerism from COVID-19 ▶ Increased # of subscriber organizations ▶ Increased program representation from priority sectors ▶ Increase board, staff and volunteer diversity (50%+)		

Elevate Volunteerism

Strategic Pillar & Enablers

Over the next 5 years, here is how we will influence local, regional and provincial decision makers to recognize the value of volunteerism by funding, promoting, and consulting in recovery initiatives and beyond.

OBJECTIVE	PHASE 1: RECOVER (YEAR 1-2)	PHASE 2: ADVANCE (YEAR 3-4)
Invest in and develop sector leadership in research & data that creates reliable evidence about volunteerism and the unique conditions in Toronto	▶ Develop a data and program evaluation strategy that tells a richer story about volunteer participation, and the social and economic impact of volunteerism in Toronto ▶ Leverage new data and expand scope of research with academic partners to publish	▶ Enhance thought leadership in the sector, highlighting transformation areas for growth and improvement, shaping policy and conversations about the future of volunteerism
Continue to enhance Volunteer Toronto's brand through robust communication strategies to promote greater awareness of volunteerism, and Volunteer Toronto as critical infrastructure in the non-profit sector	▶ Develop a compelling, multi-year communications strategy to deliver key messages with priority audiences and raise the organization's profile ▶ Expand internal communications capacity to support and promote key programs	▶ Intensify Volunteer Toronto's reach through media sponsorships and campaign partnerships ▶ Evaluate strategic opportunities to partner, source capital revenue, and improve the user experience for Volunteer Toronto's recruitment platforms
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Increase representation and leadership at government and sectoral leadership tables, to bring awareness to the needs and challenges of the voluntary sector	▶ Elevate volunteerism within the sector whereby volunteering is prioritized as driver of recovery and organizational success by maintaining a strong presence in sector-wide convening tables (e.g. City-Wide Agency Network, Toronto Non-Profit Network) ▶ Build proactive government relations strategy with a focus on expanding the awareness of the cross-sectoral impact of volunteerism, including providing newcomers with Canadian work experience	▶ Sustain engagement and momentum with the government sector, accelerated through the COVID-19 pandemic ▶ Taking a leadership role in convening the voluntary sector, e.g. Ontario Volunteer Centre Network
SUCCESS MEASURES		
▶ Volunteerism embedded in the COVID-19 recovery strategy for Toronto ▶ New and diversified funding sources ▶ Frequency of published research ▶ Continued increase and diversification of media coverage ▶ Increased web traffic, social media followers, and newsletter subscribers		

Sources

ⁱ The Ontario Nonprofit Network, "About the Sector," 2019, <https://theonnn.ca/about-the-sector/>.

ⁱⁱ Statistics Canada, "Study: Volunteering in Canada: Challenges and opportunities during the COVID-19 pandemic," 2020, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/200626/dq200626c-eng.htm>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Volunteer Toronto, "125,000 People Visited our Platform from April-June 2020," 2020, <https://www.volunteertoronto.ca/news/518995/125000-People-Visited-Our-Portal-from-April-June-2020.htm>.

^{iv} Imagine Canada, "Sector Monitoring Report," 2020, https://imaginecanada.ca/sites/default/files/COVID-19%20Sector%20Monitor%20Report%20ENGLISH_0.pdf.

^v Volunteer Canada, "The Volunteering Lens of COVID-19," 2020, <https://volunteer.ca/index.php?MenuItemID=433>.