



2020-2021 Annual Report

We acknowledge our work happens on the land of the traditional territories of the Huron-Wendat, the Anishinabek Nation, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. We are proud to promote the spirit of helping, sharing and caring for our neighbours without expectation, a value that was first, and continues to be, exemplified by each of these nations, as the first peoples of this land. In that tradition, we are grateful for the ongoing opportunity to live, work, and build community in Tkaronto.

A Message from Volunteer Toronto



Rise to the occasion and create a better tomorrow.

This was our ethos stepping into 2020-2021. It guided a year of action. It reminded us to listen closely and adapt quickly, and spurred the development of new programs designed to mobilize hundreds of thousands of volunteers where they are needed most.

There was no silver bullet. And it hasn't been easy. But we couldn't be more proud of the role our Volunteer Centre played in meeting this moment, empowering organizations and volunteer-led initiatives to help our city's most vulnerable residents.

Over the past 12-months, our dedicated teams have adapted to a new virtual service model that kept our clients, staff, and volunteers safe. We couldn't step back. What we knew long before COVID-19 is that our social safety net is powered by volunteers. As the pandemic challenged volunteer engagement, we stepped in to consult and support one program, one organization, and one sector at a time, ensuring our volunteer community continued to deliver for those who needed it most.

This year, you'll notice we've focused on intensifying engagement with both non-profits and grassroots groups. This is in direct response to the disruptions we saw on the frontlines:

- Fewer active roles on our website
- 1 in 2 volunteer managers experiencing significant employment disruption
- 60% of non-profits expressing concerns about their short-term future

A Message from Volunteer Toronto

To troubleshoot these challenges, we've cultivated opportunities to partner with GTA Volunteer Centres, essential services, and support networks to create new paths to volunteer engagement. This work has required more ears on the phones and boots on the ground, but funders made it possible with increased investment in our organization.

We have also prioritized the needs and impact of building spaces of belonging, and to better understanding our colonial history. With the support of experts specializing in this work, our staff team is dedicated to identifying transformational priorities for the organization by challenging long-standing conventions, and ourselves. This year we have:

- Ensured that Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour serving, engaging & led groups have dedicated space to recruit and recognize volunteers through our communications channels
- Created new policies for groups accessing our services to ensure our platform does not enable harmful volunteer practices
- Created a new volunteer team focused on ensuring all roles on our site abide by the Ontario Human Rights Code

We know we have more work to do.

Despite all of the challenges we've faced as a city, this year has taught us so much about our role. It's served as a resounding reminder of the value of volunteerism in our society. This year has given us an opportunity to reimagine what meaningful and ethical community engagement can be.

Toronto's 1.6 million volunteers contribute an estimated \$1.04 billion to Canada's GDP every year (Volunteer Canada, 2020). This translates into millions of hours of capacity for causes in our city, and new connections, skills, reduced isolation, and increased employability for volunteers. Our work directly contributes to making Canada's volunteer rate among the highest in the world. However, COVID-19 has disrupted this baseline, and in doing so, has transformed the gravity of our mission and outlook over the next five years. Our recent response programs, research and leadership has been just the start of a drastically new chapter in our history.

With this annual report and at this moment in time, on behalf of Volunteer Toronto's Board of Directors, we are pleased to release Volunteer Toronto's new Strategic Plan for 2021-2025. You can **download the full Plan here**.

A Message from Volunteer Toronto



[Watch an overview of our Strategic Plan here](#)

Volunteer Toronto's Strategic Plan is founded on two clear insights from the early response to the pandemic. First, that specialized expertise, lived experience, 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 our actions over the next five years. The delivery of our Strategic Plan will be approached through two key pillars— fostering and elevating volunteerism—to reflect the immediate needs of our city recovering from COVID-19 and the advancement of the future of volunteerism.

Volunteerism is a critical aspect of our social and economic recovery as a city and as a country. Shifting the systemic support to enable ethical volunteer engagement will take dedicated time and capacity to do so, but it's also our responsibility. We will take the lessons learned this year, and continue to build informed programs, cross-sectoral relationships, and a body of evidence that reinforces the essential role of volunteerism.

These are our commitments to our city, to our non-profit sector, and to you.

Maryann Istiloglu
Board Chair

Joanne McKiernan
Executive Director

2020 - 2021 Impact Dashboard

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS



25% of all inquiries are about finding opportunities for youth to get involved



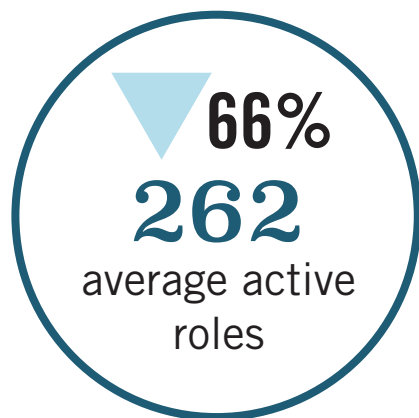
Youth (18-24) and seniors (55+) are the top demographics searching for roles



Volunteers have expressed increased concerns with the digital privacy of their information during engagement

2020-2021 Impact Dashboard

SECTOR SUPPORT



Our Youth Engagement Playbook, virtual game, and remote volunteer case study were the most accessed resources



1 in 2 employed volunteer managers in Toronto have been dismissed or redeployed



Employed volunteer managers are expressing extreme levels of burnout



Non-profits from multiple sub-sectors are asking about vaccination screening policies for their volunteers

2020-2021 Impact Dashboard

Volunteer Toronto would also like to thank the below media outlets for profiling our programs, data, and leaders during 2020-2021.

toronto.com

CANADIAN
ARRIVE
SUCCEEDED
INSPIRE
IMMIGRANT

**FUTURE
OF GOOD**



MoneySense

alive
magazine



» **TORONTO STAR** «



RADIO-cANaDa

Research and Key Findings

Understanding how COVID-19 has impacted our audiences in real-time was a top priority for Volunteer Toronto's response initiatives. To build meaningful interventions that enable volunteerism, we sought to better understand how the sector has been disrupted, the needs of essential programs, and the evolving mix of grassroots and non-profits stepping up to fill gaps in the community.

Our research and key findings collected during the 2020-2021 year continue to inform our work in rehabilitating the voluntary sector and will help us reimagine the future of volunteerism in the next five years.



310

**non-profits engaged in
mini-consultations**

With funding provided by the United Way of Greater Toronto, Volunteer Toronto intensified non-profit engagement tactics during Ontario's Stay-At-Home Order in the winter of 2021. Through personalized phone and email-based outreach, we proactively assessed the status of volunteer programs and offered consultations to help organizations adapt during the COVID-19 pandemic. The outreach campaign helped us understand how organizations have adapted their services typically powered by volunteers and was used for a detailed analysis on highly impacted sub-sectors. **Watch here to see what we learned.**



23

**active grassroots groups
interviewed**

Engaging grassroots groups was also a priority given the sheer quantity of new groups founded in 2020-2021 and their effectiveness in responding to the pandemic. Despite what appears to be the sudden and vast emergence of groups and individuals stepping up in response to a global health crisis, grassroots community-led initiatives and Mutual Aid efforts have long and meaningful histories. Organizing of this nature is not just for crisis moments and big disasters. Day-to-day, ongoing, collective participation helps strengthen communities, build new social relationships, and shift systems of knowledge and power.

With the same funding support, we hosted interviews with 23 members and/or founders of 100% volunteer-run groups in the winter of 2021. This research revealed significant differences between how non-profits, mutual aid networks, and grassroots groups operate. Our research unpacked urgent needs, and needs for the future, as well as how groups perceive their role in addressing community issues from the ground up. **Watch here to see what we learned.**

Research and Key Findings

With a Seed Grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, Volunteer Toronto conducted research and released a report on the barriers new immigrants face when accessing sport. The research included focus groups with 11 newcomers, interviews with five community sport organizations, and online research supported by a **team of volunteers**.

Here's what we learned:

Newcomers face barriers to accessing volunteer roles very similar to paid roles in the employment sector

Motivations for newcomers becoming a sport organizer include: building a professional network, integrating with Canadian culture, personal fulfillment

All sources indicate that implementing sports leagues, teams, and clubs in Toronto is nuanced and complex

Key learning areas include interpersonal relationship management, Canada sport culture and ethics, permits and regulations, infrastructure of organized sport programs



Hear from the
Co-Founders of
Footvolley Canada

The research directly informed the development of a **Getting Started as a Sport Organizer** pilot training program which addressed the knowledge gaps identified. The pilot included online modules, recorded webinars, a workbook in three languages, and live Q&A sessions. At completion, the course gave students not only the certification and training they need to break into sport, but also the confidence needed to enter the sector as coaches, organizers, and volunteers.

32

participants enrolled
in the training
program

100%

of participants
reported a good
learning experience

14%

of participants
founded a new league
in 2021

47%

of participants plan to
lead or coach a sport
group

Research and Key Findings



In our third year of an ongoing partnership, the University of Toronto Scarborough Campus (UTSC) conducted primary research for Volunteer Toronto. This year, in the Winter of 2021, students drilled into the impact of COVID-19 and the virtual volunteer experience.

The research team drew from two sources – a survey and focus groups. The survey looked to measure how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted experience(s) of volunteering, specifically volunteers in virtual roles. Afterward, the team's focus groups recruited survey participants to better understand individual experiences.

Generally, the research concluded that virtual volunteering is not experienced the same by everyone, and that the need for internet access can amplify accessibility and social barriers in volunteer experiences.

#1: What areas do virtual volunteers need more support in?

There are several areas in need of support, including mental health, connectivity, physical health, and accessibility

#2: Is there strong enthusiasm for online/virtual volunteering?

Most interviewed volunteers identified issues associated with giving back online and prefer an in-person experience if given the choice



This year, Volunteer Toronto was selected to participate in TD Bank's corporate volunteer program: TD Analytics for Social Good. The program connects TD employees as skilled volunteers and select non-profit partners to solve a question, problem, or explore an idea through data and analysis using the organization's own information sources.

Research and Key Findings

The Volunteer Toronto project focused on quantifying the impact of COVID-19 on volunteering using non-profit data, volunteer postings, and Google Analytics. More specifically, the team determined how interest in volunteer opportunities changed over the course of the pandemic, which sub-sectors (e.g. homelessness and housing, arts and culture, seniors and long-term care) required the most or least support to recover from pandemic-related impacts, and how more senior (age 60+) volunteers are engaging with Volunteer Toronto's website.



It was a pleasure to work with Volunteer Toronto as part of the Mindpower initiative at TD. This was a very valuable experience for our team, as it allowed us to use and further enhance our analytics skills and to give back to the community in a meaningful way. We were pleased that the insights we provided will be able to help Volunteer Toronto to understand which organizations and sub-sectors were most affected, how they can allocate their resources to help organizations to recover from pandemic-related impacts, and modify their website to increase engagement from interested volunteers. All in all, we were very grateful to have the opportunity to work with Volunteer Toronto on an impactful project!



— Sarah Kaissi & Amanda Easson, TD Project Leads

We continue to leverage new data to inform our decisions. Access further insights on the volunteer sector during COVID-19:

**Data Release:
74% of
Canadians
Volunteer
Informally**

published on July 5,
2021 on
VolunteerToronto.ca

**Data Release: 43%
of Volunteer
Managers at
Non-Profits Have
Been
Laid-Off or Have Seen
a Reduction of Hours**

published on July 3, 2020
on VolunteerToronto.ca

**125,000 People
Visited Our
Portal from
April-June 2020**

published on July 27,
2020 on
VolunteerToronto.ca

Sector Leadership

Leadership for the Volunteerism Sector

Volunteerism has been top of mind for many government, funder, community, and media stakeholders during the pandemic. As Canada's largest volunteer centre, Volunteer Toronto has been a key voice for the state of volunteerism, and the ethical engagement of volunteers, throughout 2020-2021. Not only has our advocacy enabled meaningful volunteerism in Toronto, it also provided a springboard for engagement in national publications and committees.

While positive volunteerism stories in response to COVID-19 were shared aplenty in media outlets across the world, some outlets knew that volunteering was undergoing a dramatic disruption and sought to profile thought leaders. In the early stages of the pandemic, Volunteer Toronto was sourced to write two opinion editorials to speak to our observations from the frontlines. One for a national publication and another for a local publication. Read excerpts from both below:



“ At a time when demands are this great, and donations have dipped, more than half of interested volunteers during the pandemic haven’t heard back from non-profits. Why have we dismissed and ignored millions of volunteers in Canada when we need them most? The easy answer — safety concerns. The hard answer — a consistent dismissal, at the leadership level, of the necessity of investing in volunteerism. ”

FOUNDATION
The Business & Spirit of Philanthropy in Canada 🍁

“ Boldly put, volunteer management must become a core function that enables social services to increase capacity. Not only is this necessary to meet ongoing community needs, but also to compensate for decreased donations and precarious funding during an economically challenging time that will undoubtedly last longer than a handful of months. ”

toronto.com

Sector Leadership

For many high school students at the beginning of the pandemic, it was difficult to know whether Ontario's 40-hour volunteer mandate still applied and would impact their graduation, particularly for grade 12 students. Our Remote Volunteer Advisors also reported several parents reaching out with questions about how the pandemic would impact their child's ability to volunteer.



Recognizing our community needed answers, we reached out to the Toronto District School Board, Ministry of Education, and our own high school student volunteers to source up-to-date information on the status of the mandate. From this outreach we proactively shared updates with local media outlets and through our public-facing programs.



Ontario's education ministry has waived the requirement for high school students graduating this year to complete 40 hours of community volunteer work. But some advocates say that doesn't mean they should stop volunteering — especially now.



toronto.com

Youth volunteerism was also a top issue for the federal government, who announced a Canada Student Service Grant in the spring of 2020, where eligible youth would receive payment for reaching a pre-determined number of volunteer hours. However, questions about the grant swirled from every audience in our network, and as a major enabler of volunteerism, we knew we needed answers.

To secure more details about the Canada Student Service grant program, we contacted our national counterpart, Volunteer Canada, and various Members of Provincial Parliament. We learned that the design of the program was not in line with our own perspective of ethical volunteerism, as it put both youth and non-profits at risk of unfair labour practices. In response, Volunteer Toronto offered commentary to national media outlets covering the program's announcement and roll-out. Eventually, the Canada Student Student Grant program would be cancelled.

Sector Leadership

“Placing student volunteers en masse makes it less likely that they will find valuable roles for their development or the charity's work, says Joanne McKiernan, executive director of Volunteer Toronto. “It's a recipe for the development of ‘make work’ projects,” she says. It could also disadvantage small organizations that can't handle that kind of influx, many of which have been hit hardest during COVID-19.”

**FUTURE
OF GOOD**

As government looked to fund COVID-19 response initiatives in 2020, Volunteer Centres across the country were in need of a unified advocacy strategy to communicate our active role in mobilizing volunteers and building capacity for non-profits.

In collaboration with Volunteer Canada's advocacy committee, Volunteer Toronto led the development of an Advocacy Toolkit which was deployed in both English and French across the country. The toolkit increased each centres' confidence in their ability to influence change at local, provincial/territorial, and federal levels. It also provided a national approach to identifying priority issues and key messages for the voluntary sector.

The toolkit's hallmark was an open letter, signed by 44 centres, which was then deployed through local media outlets in each region to mark Labour Day 2020.



Sector Leadership

“ Volunteer Ottawa has been engaged in a comprehensive ongoing advocacy campaign with our city Council for over three years in an attempt to secure core funding from the municipality. But there has been an ongoing need for consistent, concise and forceful messaging around the role of volunteer centres. The Volunteer Centre Advocacy Toolkit not only filled these needs but was an excellent template upon which to tailor and build our messaging and activities – a resource that proved to be invaluable.

”

— Marie Eveline, Executive Director of Volunteer Ottawa

“ Volunteer centres are catalysts for impact, building and supporting the voluntary sector often behind the scenes. The Volunteer Centre Advocacy Toolkit was an actionable resource to advocate for the work of centres across the country. It offered PIN – The People and Information Network a new opportunity to connect with MPP's, MP's and municipal government to discuss the importance of volunteerism, the impact of COVID and how the leadership of volunteer centres was vital to responding and rebuilding.

”

— Kim Cusimano, Executive Director of The People and Information Network (Waterloo)

Thank you to the City of Toronto, United Way of Greater Toronto, the Toronto Non-Profit Network and Volunteer Canada for hosting calls for community agencies, all of which have held a significant role in prioritizing our advocacy efforts. We continue to collaborate with community leaders to advocate for the meaningful engagement of volunteer labour.

Sustaining Capacity

Sustaining Capacity for the Non-Profit Sector

While interest in volunteering reached an all time high during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, non-profits—a key enabler of volunteerism—were experiencing major operational disruptions. And while they pivoted, grassroots, mutual aid and "caremongering" initiatives were formed at a record pace to fill urgent requests, such as mask-making and food delivery. Identifying the needs of both formal and informal groups became necessary to start rehabilitating the system of volunteerism in Toronto.

The work started with listening. With a dramatic drop in non-profit volunteer recruitment across all sub-sectors, we prioritized time and space to learn more. To better understand what was happening on the ground, we hosted sector forums for volunteer program leaders in essential services, such as: meals on wheels, food banks, tax clinics, housing, mental health, seniors support, and employment programs.



While challenges varied group to group, an approach to reducing knowledge gaps emerged through new ways to deliver resources and facilitate ongoing and supportive connection points. Thankfully, the United Way of Greater Toronto has consistently demonstrated an understanding of how meaningful volunteerism is enabled. And with additional emergency funding, a new partnership between Volunteer Toronto, Volunteer Markham and Volunteer Mississauga, Brampton, Caledon was formed to expand our collaborative efforts and explore a unified approach to address one of the Greater Toronto Area's most in need roles – volunteer drivers. In the summer of 2020, the collaborative deployed a new **Driver Matching Program**.

425+

one-on-one consultations
provided in 2020-2021

20%

increase in volunteer
engagement as a result

75,000+

volunteers screened,
trained, and/or recruited

Sustaining Capacity

Training expertise was also leveraged across all regions to create a COVID-19 Learning Library, with comprehensive resources to support both virtual and in person volunteer programs. Leaning further into the benefits of one-on-one support, a non-profit engagement team was created to reach out to hundreds of groups and organizations through phone consultations and interviews. This United Way of Greater Toronto investment in our capacity also led to the creation of a permanent learning management system : learnVT.ca.

“

At the beginning of the pandemic, our team rapidly shifted gears to begin delivering food boxes to families in-need. Repurposing and expanding our existing operations, we were in desperate need of drivers to help carry out our deliveries. Volunteer Toronto's Driver Matching Program has provided us with dozens of pre-screened, committed drivers looking to help out wherever they can. By helping with our recruitment needs, it allowed us to focus more on our operations and spend less time on staffing.

”

—William Oestreich, Director of Operations



Sustaining Capacity

Pre-pandemic, Volunteer Toronto identified the most in need role was Volunteer Drivers. Organizations that require drivers to deliver food or provide transportation to vulnerable individuals were always recruiting. When the pandemic hit, these groups—who struggled to secure volunteers—indicated a dramatic increase in demand for services given more individuals were isolating.



Suddenly, an ongoing challenge in the sector became an urgent challenge. As a Volunteer Centre, we needed to do something to ensure people are fed and kept safe. It was out of this urgency, and our GTA partnership, that a brand new Matching Program was created.

The new program pre-screened volunteers that aligned with specific organization's needs for Volunteer Drivers. Volunteers were then referred to the organization based on their location, availability to deliver, and whether they already had a Police Check and/or a Vulnerable Sector Screening.

The pilot was effective in matching 200+ Volunteer Drivers for immediate needs. However, the systemic issue of needing more Volunteer Drivers is ongoing. Our team continues to evaluate the effectiveness of matches and is exploring new technology, such as an app, to sustainably address Volunteer Driver placement beyond the pandemic.

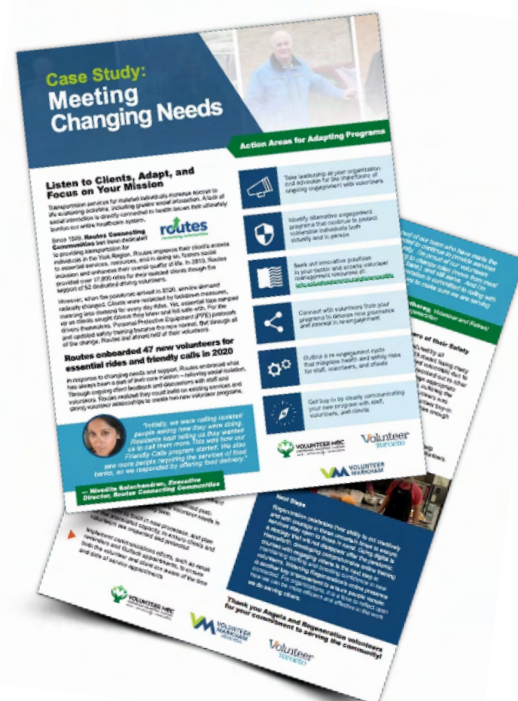
23

**Matching Partners were in
urgent need of drivers**

Sustaining Capacity

One of our biggest takeaways in engaging with non-profits and grassroots groups during the pandemic, was that micro-learning options were absolutely necessary. If we want to inform real change in volunteer programs, we need to develop resources that can be quickly absorbed and accessed with ease. We also learned that case studies of real programs and practical tools would help groups adapt sooner.

Throughout the year, our team released free resources through our brand new **COVID-19 Learning Library**. We interviewed effective programs and shared their learnings, covered the basics through webinars and one-pagers, and created tools for immediate use, such as our virtual game, BRINGO, as well as a letter template for essential volunteers in case they are stopped by police during stay-at-home orders.



1500+

volunteer managers
engaged in training

75+

new sessions and
resources developed

As a special initiative to support Toronto's mass vaccination efforts in Spring 2021, we opened recruitment services to any organization providing vaccinations, including pharmacies. To ensure sites were prepared, we deployed a micro-resource video to train leaders on their responsibilities to protect volunteers in high risk environments.



The Toronto Association for Volunteer Administration (TAVA) provides professional development for their members through educational events, networking, mutual support, and raising awareness of the importance of volunteerism in the community.

Sustaining Capacity

This year brought a lot of instability for those whose job it is to lead volunteers, making our partnership with TAVA important to stabilizing the sector. We provided financial contributions to subsidy memberships, alternated the hosting of monthly professional development workshops, co-designed an annual conference, and assisted with COVID-19 program recovery plans.



For the 2021 conference, TAVA and Volunteer Toronto held their first-ever virtual event. The "Change Makers" joint conference saw volunteer managers from across the country tune in to an engaging group of speakers. Attendees heard from the Ontario Non-Profit Network, dove into strategic foresight reflections, and asked questions of a panel with real-life examples of adapting programs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Youth volunteers are some of the most active volunteers in our city and the most likely to adapt to virtual roles. With the pandemic stretching on, volunteer managers needed our help engaging this key demographic of volunteers. It was in partnership with Pledges for Change, a youth-driven grassroots group in Canada, Volunteer Toronto addressed this challenge with the creation of a Youth Virtual Volunteer Engagement Playbook, released in November 2020.

The Playbook helps groups looking to create, improve, and enhance their youth (under 18) virtual volunteer programming. Throughout the process of designing the Playbook, more than 30 youth and 20 non-profit leaders were consulted. The Playbook includes infographics, case studies, and six tools that can be used today.



Sustaining Capacity

In early 2021, our workshops for volunteer managers made a return, with all new updated content for the pandemic environment. Thousands joined us online to learn leading practices in volunteer engagement from our training experts. Topics included: Screening, Conflict Management, Recruiting Youth Volunteers, Privacy and Data Collection, Legislation & Policies, Police Checks & the Ontario Human Rights Code.

For non-profit leaders, we hosted eight training sessions on board member related topics. Our updated content educates participants to value their diverse and lived experiences and the importance of including new voices and perspectives at the leadership level. For those looking to join boards, we shared information on what it takes to secure a role and what you can expect once you're on a board. For those already active, we held intensive sessions covering all of the essentials--from legal obligations to liability and committee meetings.

2604

**leaders of
volunteers trained**

330

**board members
and/or leadership
trainees**

“

I felt a sense of ease throughout the session and really enjoyed the engaging format. The facilitator offered a wealth of well-balanced information, and the session provided the insights I was looking for to better understand the roles and responsibilities of a non-profit Board Member.

”

— **Becoming a Board Member workshop trainee**

Community Mobilization

Mobilizing Volunteers for Community Response

The COVID-19 pandemic sparked hundreds of thousands of individuals to search for opportunities to help one another. In the first few months of response, our services for volunteer seekers saw unparalleled participation. To funnel interest where it was needed most, our newsletters, Volunteer Advisors, and information sessions were a necessary introduction to volunteering in an evolving crisis environment.

We were quick to observe that volunteer interest was ramping up exponentially after the federal announcement of a lockdown in March 2020. It took only three days for us to form the COVID-19 Volunteer Response Team, which would become the city's core call-to-action for anyone looking to support pandemic-specific needs through volunteering. The team saw an average of 200 people joining every single week, and continues to see an increase in members with every new lockdown measure put in place.



To ensure that volunteer interest was funnelled only where it was needed most, virtual and in person volunteer roles for urgent needs were curated on a weekly basis for Response Team Alerts. This was a crucial step in meeting the specific needs of non-profits, many of whom were overwhelmed by general volunteer interest.

11,400+

**volunteers on the
COVID-19 Response Team**

48

**alerts deployed from
March 2020-April 2021**

300+

**curated volunteer roles
promoted to the team**

Community Mobilization



Organizations that are administering the COVID-19 vaccine, including pharmacies, have a place to turn to if they need volunteers to support their efforts. Volunteer Toronto says more than 500 people with varying levels of experience in health care have registered to help. They did so within 24 hours of Volunteer Toronto's call out for health-care volunteers, and they're now ready to be deployed to vaccination clinics.



toronto.com

Over several months, we learned that there was an urgent need for the expedited recruitment of volunteers with specific skills or qualifications. With enhanced funding from the United Way of Greater Toronto, our team began pre-screening volunteers for Police and/or Vulnerable Screening Checks to assist vulnerable populations, as well as healthcare experience in preparation for vaccination support roles. Most notably, alongside Volunteer Markham and Volunteer Mississauga, Brampton, Caledon, we ramped up a matching program for Volunteer Drivers—the Greater Toronto Area's most in need role.



**one-on-one Volunteer
Advisor touchpoints**

Our Volunteer Advisor program has been running for 45-years, but saw it's busiest period ever during the first few months of the pandemic. Our Advisors guide thousands of volunteer seekers every year through one-on-one phone or in person appointments, and email support. In March 2020, the team shifted online to provide remote services, and consistently for three months, appointments were booked solid.

Advisors were on the frontlines of our COVID-19 response. The City of Toronto and Mayor John Tory funneled interested volunteers directly to the inbox and voicemail of our Advisors. It was with **this volunteer team's** support, that we mobilized thousands.

Community Mobilization

14,990

participants in information sessions

Volunteer Toronto's free information sessions have been a staple of our community outreach for decades. However, when the pandemic hit, all of our sessions needed to be updated for a new volunteer landscape.

From 2020-2021, our updated sessions covered "How to Volunteer During COVID-19" and "Self Care for Superheroes" targeting both those interested in volunteering, and those already in active frontline volunteer roles.

With up-to-date content, our teams delivered 22 information sessions for the public and through our partnership with the Toronto Public Library.



2 million

visits to VolunteerToronto.ca

21,100+

monthly searches for
volunteer roles

As Ontario's most visited volunteer recruitment portal, our website continues to facilitate a high-volume of connections between non-profits, community groups, and volunteers.

In 2020-2021, we saw an increase in website visits correlated with each new lockdown announcement in Ontario, and during high relevancy periods such as National Volunteer Week and International Volunteer Day.

Although the quantity of roles available for volunteers has declined due to disruptions in the non-profit sector, our website data reveals that both seniors and youth have been the most active demographics searching for roles during the pandemic.

Community Mobilization

The annual Legacy Awards is a popular recognition program for Toronto's volunteers. In 2020, we recognized six Legacy Award recipients, and all of our nominees, with an entirely virtual celebration on International Volunteer Day in December.



Click here for the stories of Volunteer Toronto's six 2020 Legacy Award recipients.



Our first ever virtual celebration created more opportunities to showcase all of our nominees by including their names on a Digital Wall of Fame. And to recognize our six exceptional volunteers, our in person ceremony evolved into socially distant recognition efforts, including a mini-film sharing the recipients' volunteer stories, and the delivery of gift boxes of Toronto inspired items to each recipients' doorstep.

All exceptional nominees and volunteers deserve to be recognized, and in light of the pandemic it was only apt to hold a space for all those who gave back to their community. We were proud to mark the contributions of all 90+ nominees for the 2020 Legacy Awards and plan to repeat the success of our virtual celebration and Digital Wall of Fame in 2021.

Funders and Financials

Our core funders have been incredibly receptive to the evolving landscape of volunteerism during the COVID-19 pandemic. They have consistently recognized the role of our Volunteer Centre in stabilizing non-profits, mobilizing volunteers during a crisis, and as a thought leader on the needs of the voluntary sector. We are immensely grateful for this recognition, and the increase in funding, that allowed us to hire more staff to deliver urgent response programs, research needs, and deploy more volunteers to the frontlines in 2020-2021.



**Ontario
Health**



**United Way
Greater Toronto**



Ontario
Trillium
Foundation



Fondation
Trillium
de l'Ontario

Funders and Financials

Volunteer Toronto was faced with incredible uncertainty at the beginning of the pandemic, alongside the entire non-profit sector. With operations and services in transition, our projected revenue could have been disrupted on a number of fronts. However, the gravity of our mission and essential role in responding to a crisis was recognized early on by funders, which continued to bring stability throughout the year.

Our leadership team also focused on reducing operating costs. This resulted in sharing our office space with a community partner and accessing relief programs that helped the organization reinvest funds in program capacity and long-term stability.



Total \$1,017,317



Total \$981,332

Funders and Financials

We would like to specifically thank the United Way of Greater Toronto for demonstrating strong support through emergency funding to create intensive solutions across the GTA. So many programs, such as our research efforts, Matching program, and Learning Library, were informed and enabled through our GTA partnership.

Through community partnerships we have had the privilege of accessing expertise, space, and digital advertising to further enable our programs and research. Thank you!



UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO
SCARBOROUGH

tpl • toronto
public library

 **NORTON ROSE
FULBRIGHT**

 **Scotiabank®**



Google Ads

Community Profiles

Volunteers and Community Leaders in Toronto

The people behind volunteerism are compassionate, action-driven, and the reason we love what we do. This year, our own volunteers stepped up, new grassroots groups were formed, players became founders, and new partnerships were forged. This is just a small sample of the countless contributions volunteers made in 2020-2021. Read their stories by clicking below.



Volunteer Advisors: Mobilizing Thousands of Volunteers in Toronto

They are the first point of contact at Volunteer Toronto when someone is looking for information on how to volunteer. Each one of our Advisors makes a difference in the lives of thousands of volunteer seekers.



The People's Pantry: Solidarity not Charity during COVID-19

This volunteer-run initiative, led by women, queer, and trans* Black /People of Colour, was born in the early days of the pandemic. They deliver food, 100% free of charge, no fixed address, to people in need.



Gustavo, Lucas & Leandro: Bringing a New Sport to Canada

As a popular sport in Brazil, Footvolley is a community-builder for newcomers to Canada and those looking to make friends while being active. See how this volunteer-powered league came to fruition.



Pledges for Change: Partnering with a Youth-Led Organization

Learn about one of Volunteer Toronto's partners, Pledges for Change. This youth-led group is transforming how young people get involved in social issues. Read all about our collaboration and their mission.

Read More About the Volunteer Teams that Power VT Programs

They are researchers, copywriters, digital receptionists, posting assistants, dedicated Advisors, and amazing people. We are proud to highlight each volunteer team that directly supports Volunteer Toronto's work.

Community Profiles: Volunteers and Community Leaders in Toronto

Volunteer Advisors

Volunteer Advisors: Mobilizing Thousands of Volunteers in Toronto

They are the first point of contact at Volunteer Toronto when someone is looking for information on how to volunteer. Each one of our Advisors makes a difference in the lives of thousands of volunteer seekers. Read more about their impact or get to know the people behind the role by scrolling below.



Volunteer Advisors: Roshini, Ida, Sandra, Samah, and Edwin

"I enjoy volunteering for the simple reason that it makes me feel good. Call it 'Helpers High' or not, we could all do with a little kindness, and what better and simpler way to give and take that is through volunteering."

Meet Roshini Mathews, Volunteer Advisor since 2019

Roshini is a foodie and a bibliophile. You'll find her with/around books or exploring places on a self-guided food safari, trying new cuisines and flavours. Her go-to flavours gravitate towards Middle Eastern or Japanese cuisines and Indian food.

Community Profiles: Volunteers and Community Leaders in Toronto

Volunteer Advisors

"While volunteering is a major contributor to community development and collaboration, it helps me to understand the community I am living in a better way. Moreover, by volunteering I can always relish the fact that I am giving back to the community and be confident of my betterment and professional growth."

Edwin Selvan, Volunteer Advisor since 2018

Edwin says that Canada has given him plenty of opportunities, so it would be only fitting to give back by contributing to the community. He enjoys binge-watching, traveling, and helping people who want to come to Canada on a student or permanent residency Visa. His favourite food is Zucchini, after finding out it can be BBQed from his fellow volunteers.

"I think that volunteerism is important to enable everyone to give back to their community through selfless action. The type or scale of action is not important as long as the contribution to the community is helpful. I realize that the meaning of helpful can be subjective."

— **Sandra Varanesi, Volunteer Advisor since 2019**

"Volunteering is about connections...I am more connected to my city and I thrive on the connections with our clients. Best of all, as a VT volunteer, I connect people who want to help to groups who need their help."

— **Anonymous Volunteer Advisor**

Meet Jim Brown, Volunteer Advisor since 2019

Most of Jim's life has been devoted to his family and career. He says it's now time to give a helping hand to others who are less fortunate or need a kind word of support or encouragement. His favourite musicians are Elton John/Beatles and he likes to learn about wine and read mystery novels.

"A city like Toronto has many affluent and successful people that drive the economy, culture and general well-being of it's inhabitants. However, without people giving of their time to help those less fortunate, a city's soul and reputation as "A Liveable City for all" would fail. A person's success is not just about money, achievements and possessions, but compassion and caring for your neighbours regardless of their personal status or success."

Community Profiles: Volunteers and Community Leaders in Toronto

Volunteer Advisors

"There's a gap between those who want to volunteer and the organizations that need volunteers. I like to think that I'm helping close that gap with my role as an advisor. That's what motivates me."

Noor Abbas, Volunteer Advisor since 2020

Volunteering is important to Noor because it helps strengthen ties to her community. Her favourite artist right now is Doja Cat, she loves to play chess, and highly recommends the donuts from Eataly !

Ida Liao, Volunteer Advisor since 2021

Ida believes that during COVID, volunteering may help alleviate some of the challenges people are facing. She's listening to "Somewhere Only We Know" by Keane on loop, and loves pasta. She recommends Trattoria Nervosa and ARDO Restaurant.

"I'm motivated to volunteer as it's a great way to meet new people, change up my routine, and potentially get out of the house! As a volunteer advisor I've enjoyed helping community members navigate volunteer opportunities, as well as connecting with fellow advisors. It's really been a breath of fresh air to volunteer."

Read More About the Volunteer Teams that Power VT Programs

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Community Profiles: Volunteers and Community Leaders in Toronto

The People's Pantry

The People's Pantry: Solidarity Not Charity—Showing Up for Community



“

People who receive social supports and provisions do so because we live in a white heteropatriarchy capitalist society conditioned by settler colonialism, which, by design, gives more to some people and less to others. People are not 'less fortunate' - they are systematically oppressed and disenfranchised. Solidarity models recognize this and treat volunteerism and donating as ethical responsibilities of those who are unfairly, systematically, given more resources and power. Solidarity is about investing in our common humanity and existence and operating under the belief that we should show up for one another because it is just the right thing to do. Solidarity is about radical love, while charity is about repackaging inequality as altruism. We believe in the former, not the latter. You don't get to determine the conditions of solidarity work, the community does.

”

**– Jade Crimson Rose Da Costa,
Co-founder of The People's Pantry**

Community Profiles: Volunteers and Community Leaders in Toronto

The People's Pantry

The People's Pantry: Solidarity Not Charity—Showing Up for Community

The People's Pantry

Born in the early stages of COVID-19, The People's Pantry (TPP) is a women, queer, and trans* Black/People of Colour led, volunteer-run, grassroots initiative. Each week they deliver home cooked meals and grocery bundles to food insecure families living in the Greater Toronto-Hamilton Area—100% free of charge, no questions asked, no fixed address required.

As of June 2021, the group has cooked 15,877 meals and has packed 2,584 grocery bundles for particularly hard-hit communities, including QTBIPOC, single parents, sex workers, precariously housed persons, those with medical conditions or disabilities, newly-arrived immigrants, and the elderly.

The People's Pantry practices solidarity not charity, rooted in the fact that traditional charity systems are hierarchical, placing people either into the category of “the altruistic citizen” or “the less fortunate.” However, when you approach community organizing from the point of view of solidarity, as TPP does, volunteers are guided by the overarching belief that “giving back” is a social and ethical responsibility, as opposed to a luxury or an “additional” act of kindness and charity.

It was through Toronto's biggest “Caremongering” Facebook group and neighborhood networks that the founders of TPP connected, realizing they were doing similar work and could pool resources to help more people. Today, more than a year later, community requests remain high and despite having 500 volunteers in their roster, recruitment is ongoing.

Logistics volunteers are the most in need—community members who can coordinate meal and grocery deliveries. But there are also roles for volunteer chefs, who prepare hundreds of meals on a weekly basis, customizing each based on each household, preferences, and dietary restrictions. For seamless delivery, volunteers then complete a non-contact drop-off in the community.

Community Profiles: Volunteers and Community Leaders in Toronto

Gustavo, Leandro & Lucas

Gustavo, Leandro & Lucas: Bringing a New Sport, Footvolley, to Canada



Watch to see how Gustavo, Leandro, and Lucas, co-founders of Footvolley Canada, connected with other athletic leaders to bring their passion to Canada. With guidance from our Getting Started as a Sport Organizer pilot program, funded by Ontario Trillium Foundation, this league was formalized in 2020-2021.

As a popular sport in Brazil, Footvolley is a community-builder for newcomers and those looking to make friends while being active. Learn more at: [**footvolleycan.ca**](https://footvolleycan.ca)

Community Profiles: Volunteers and Community Leaders in Toronto

Pledges for Change

Pledges for Change: Partnering on a Youth-Informed Engagement Playbook

“ Youth inject such creativity into an organization and role. No matter where they are, not only can they bring creativity, but you can use that creativity. If you haven't thought about it, think about how you can engage youth and how you can create positions for youth in your organization. ”

– Amanda Wu, Co-Executive Director, Pledges for Change



PLEDGES FOR CHANGE



Pledges for Change is a group of incredible students, who are passionate about transforming the way young people engage in social impact activities. In collaboration with governments, companies, and social sector organizations, Pledges for Change designs, develops, and discusses unique and meaningful ways for youth to give back in support of the causes they care most about.

Community Profiles: Volunteers and Community Leaders in Toronto

Pledges for Change

With the COVID-19 pandemic looming over the world, the question of how youth can be engaged in volunteerism became top of mind. This past year, in collaboration with Volunteer Toronto, Pledges for Change developed the Youth Virtual Volunteer Engagement Playbook to assist non-profits engaging youth through a virtual lens.

The pandemic has not slowed down the desire of youth looking to help others. In response, Pledges for Change developed another meaningful way to engage youth in the Greater Toronto Area. The annual Ignite Fair pairs non-profit groups with students looking for ways to give back to their community. By shifting online in 2020, it attracted virtual attendees from all over the Greater Toronto Area in search of volunteer opportunities. The event was so successful, Volunteer Toronto and Pledges for Change will be co-hosting a virtual fair in 2021.

Pledges for Change continues to encourage non-profit organizations to make space for youth in volunteer programs. Students truly care about impact when looking for a volunteer position. Pledges for Change, along with the Ignite Fair, will be there to bridge the gap between non-profit groups seeking out youth and the young people's appetite for giving back.

Our Team

Powered by Volunteers

“A number of our programs this year were led and driven by volunteers, many of whom adapted to remote support or took on new responsibilities to meet increased demand during the COVID-19 pandemic. Each VT volunteer team has brought skills and time that directly contributed to mobilizing thousands of volunteers. We've said it before, but we can't say it enough, your contributions are essential—thank you!”

—Joanne McKiernan, Executive Director

159 volunteers gave
4,651 hours in
2020-2021

Before the pandemic, ten dedicated Volunteer Advisors provided one-on-one support to members of the public during in-office shifts. As volunteerism experts, they share information on navigating VolunteerToronto.ca, volunteer postings, and application processes.



At the start of the pandemic, it took only one week for the entire Advisor team to adapt to provide remote services. And for months, appointments were booked well in advance due to a surge of people looking to volunteer.

Over the next 12-months, our Remote Volunteer Advisors held one-on-one touch points with 4,593 volunteer seekers. Thank you to the full team for supporting the public on the frontlines of our COVID-19 response.

Our Volunteer Ambassador team was also welcomed back in 2021 after a brief pause to in person information sessions during the pandemic. In delivering presentations to the public, now virtually, these volunteers have supported the reach and impact of our volunteer-seeker services. Thank you!

If you send a message to Volunteer Toronto on social media, you'll connect with one of our two volunteer Digital Receptionists: Angela and Vinson. These high school students were recruited in 2018 to test a new flexible virtual role supporting our online presence.

Our Team

When the pandemic began, the remote nature of the Digital Receptionist role meant this team was more than prepared to continue responding to individuals and non-profits reaching out with questions about volunteerism through social media.

This year, Angela and Vinson spent 5,580 minutes, logged in 15-30 minute daily increments, responding to messages online on behalf of Volunteer Toronto.

You may also be familiar with the stellar written contributions—and creative puns—of our Volunteer Copywriter, Roop. Every other week, Roop writes our Opportunities of the Week social media posts, promoting timely volunteer roles that are actively recruiting. Roop has also lent her skills to write content for the 2020 Legacy Awards, and a case study for our non-profit Learning Library.

This year, Roop wrote 50 pieces of copy for various Volunteer Toronto programs and channels. Thank you!



A new volunteer role and team was formed at the beginning of 2021: Posting Support Assistants. This team ensures every role on VolunteerToronto.ca has all of the information a potential volunteer would want to know, including safety precautions. The Posting Support Assistants also look out for conflicts against the Ontario Human Rights Code and Volunteer Toronto's Anti-Oppression Policy to ensure that our recruitment platform enables safe, equitable roles.

Through weekly shifts, the Posting Support Assistants actively reach out to non-profits to secure missing information and flag roles that need to be reviewed for policy conflict. Their efforts directly contribute to ensuring Volunteer Toronto's recruitment platform is the safest, highest quality resource for volunteer seekers.

As of March 2021, Kyle, Michelle, Nancy, Rose-Ines, Shauna, Vanessa and Samra, as Posting Support Assistants, have reviewed 460 roles for quality and safety.

Volunteer Toronto's research efforts were supported by several skilled volunteer teams in 2020-2021 who focused on analyzing our data, drawing correlations, and conducting desk research to directly inform upcoming programs.

Our Team

Excitingly, this year Volunteer Toronto was selected as a client for TD Bank's Analytics for Social Good program, pairing skilled volunteers with non-profits to solve a question through data analysis. The TD team dove into Volunteer Toronto's website and non-profit data to answer complex questions, such as, what are hardest hit non-profit sub-sectors during the pandemic? And how has COVID-19 changed volunteer participation for seniors?

Thank you to the TD team leads: Sarah and Amanda, as well as the full analytics team, for sharing your time and skills!

Additionally, to support a project funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation, we engaged several research volunteers who conducted literature reviews, environmental scans, and desk research. Their goal was to find source material on the **barriers newcomers face when starting sport leagues**. This research directly contributed to a research report, and a pilot training program rolled out in 2021.

With thanks to our sport research volunteer team: Erin Lloyd, Laura Ramos, Max Dibu-Cairole, and Michelle Green.

“ To help with this influx the charity, which connects 400,000 volunteers with about 1,000 organizations each year, has also set up a team of remote volunteer advisors who will be available by email or phone to answer questions and provide assistance starting Monday, March 23. ”

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Our Team

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Canada*



Mack Rogers

Past President

*Vice President of
Learning & Public
Programs,
Royal Ontario
Museum.*

Our Team

A Growing Staff Team

With the support of United Way of Greater Toronto and Service Canada grants, our staff team grew in order to mobilize volunteers and help community organizations adapt during the pandemic. We are thankful for the additional capacity, incredible talent, and compassionate individuals who joined our team for student and pandemic-related contracts during 2020-2021.

Joanne McKiernan
Executive Director

Annu Aikulola*
Assistant, Projects

Cara Eaton
Director, Strategic Communications

Jess Gillis*
Assistant, Marketing

Iona Frost
Director, Programs

Ladan Issa*
Assistant, Engagement

Sammy Feilchenfeld*
Manager, Training

Heather Johnson*
Assistant, Engagement

Kasandra James*
Manager, Programs

Roshini Mathews*
Assistant, Engagement

Niranjala Mariathas
Manager, Operations

Joya Mukherjee*
Assistant, Engagement

Deirdre Millin*
Training Officer

Jillian Rago*
Assistant, Advisor Program

Olivia Sonnenberg
Specialist, Engagement

Sina Ramezanali*
Assistant, Communications

Ambrose Fan*
Researcher, Grassroots Groups

Alyssa-Marie Talotta*
Assistant, Matching Program

*Employed for part of the 2020-2021 fiscal year