

Nearly half of Toronto's population is made up of immigrants—this means a lot of your volunteers are or may be newcomers. As job-seekers, many newcomers are looking to increase their experience and enhance soft skills. However, newcomers also face barriers in finding meaningful volunteer roles. The information below will help you consider the positive outcomes of engaging newcomers and understand the barriers they may be facing.



Newcomer Volunteer Outcomes

Engaging newcomer volunteers provides benefits to the individual and your organization. Newcomers can gain local experience and a greater understanding of Toronto workplaces while also improving their health and wellbeing through social interactions, connecting with the community and seeing personal and professional growth through their volunteer roles. For organizations, newcomers provide innovative approaches, a diversity of backgrounds and opportunities, and previous skills and experience to draw upon.

“During interviews I’m translating from my language to English in my head. This means I have to talk slower when I answer questions. Sometimes I wonder if this makes people question my intelligence.”

— Newcomer focus group participant, on barriers they face

Barriers Faced by Newcomers

In Toronto, newcomers face a variety of barriers when searching for meaningful volunteer roles. Many of these are systemic and awareness of these barriers will help you find ways to make changes and encourage newcomers to overcome them. Barriers include: strict language requirements (such as “fluency in English”) that may not be required, intensive screening processes (like multiple references) that newcomers can’t complete, and even finding out what roles are available (if someone has limited computer access, for example).

Top 3 Tips

1. Promote your roles in multiple locations and languages (when possible)
2. Reconsider your screening requirements so that all candidates have equal opportunity
3. Create inclusion practices to celebrate the diversity of volunteers

Sources: Volunteer Toronto research into barriers facing volunteers
Vital Signs Toronto 2017 report (<https://torontofoundation.ca/vitalsigns>)
TRIEC Diversity and Inclusion Insights report (<http://triec.ca/how-are-we-doing-a-snapshot-of-diversity-and-inclusion-in-gta-workplaces/>)
Perceptions of Employment Barriers report (http://www.hireimmigrants.ca/wp-content/uploads/Malatest_report_with_appendices.pdf)