

Book 1

Understand volunteers and volunteer groups



Resources to increase and support volunteers

The nine books in this series are for volunteers and volunteer groups in small and large communities.

The main themes are to engage, respect, and value a diverse mix of volunteers. Please use these books to plan a workshop or special event, or as an everyday reference.

Book 1: [Understand volunteers and volunteer groups](#)

Book 2: [Promote volunteers and volunteering](#)

Book 3: [Recruit volunteers](#)

Book 4: [Coordinate volunteers](#)

Book 5: [Recognize and thank volunteers](#)

Book 6: [Plan a workshop about volunteering](#)

Book 7: [Understand funding and fundraising](#)

Book 8: [Understand leadership and decision-making](#)

Book 9: [Tools, references, and CD](#)

The first eight books have:

- ✓ Information about volunteers, and quotes and stories from the Northwest Territories and Nunavut.
- ✓ Stories from Caribouville – a make-believe place.
- ✓ Tools volunteers can use or change to meet their needs.



Book 1

Understand volunteers and volunteer groups

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Cover photos:

Left: Volunteer rangers. Photo: Northern News Services Ltd.

Right: Volunteers Ian Vaydik and Tanya Grissore fill grocery bags at the Yellowknife Food Bank. Photo: Northern News Services Ltd.



Resources to increase and support volunteers



Who is a volunteer?

Volunteers are people who:

- ✓ Freely choose to help out.
- ✓ Don't expect money in return.
- ✓ Benefit because they feel good, make a difference, and learn things.

"Volunteering is from the heart and anything you may receive from it is a gift of gratitude not payment of any kind."

Carol Tootoo, Iqaluit, Nunavut (Nunavut Consultations)

"...being a volunteer means giving my time and effort to improve others' lives."

Lloyd Bruner, Hay River, NWT
(Looking in Reaching Out)

"I like to help people and it is a healthy way to spend my time, feel good, and have fun."

George Eckalook, Resolute Bay, Nunavut (Nunavut Consultations)

"Volunteering is like opening the door.
... The more you help, the more you can help."

Diane Angmak,
Arviat, Nunavut
(Arviat workshop)



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Volunteers are people who:

- ✓ Care
- ✓ Show respect
- ✓ Meet new people
- ✓ Help out
- ✓ Try new things
- ✓ Take a chance
- ✓ Share
- ✓ Respond to needs
- ✓ Make a difference
- ✓ Work for something or someone they care about

There are two basic kinds of volunteers: informal and formal.

- 1) **Informal volunteers** are people who help out on their own. They may be people others look to, to learn traditional ways. They often help people in crisis.

What do we know about informal volunteers?

No one knows for sure how many informal volunteers there are or all the things they do.

But here are some examples of what they do for others:

- ✓ Give care and emotional support.
- ✓ Clean and cook.
- ✓ Hunt and fish.
- ✓ Write letters, make phone calls, or fill out forms.
- ✓ Organize community feasts or prepare the dead for burial. They may be responsible for these things as part of their traditions or their relationships with others.



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Volunteers prepare for a very special visitor

It's 1989. A very special person from Rome is coming to Fort Simpson, Northwest Territories. This special person is the Pope. We know the eyes of the whole world are on our community. We know we'll have many visitors.

Everyone in the community is really excited to meet the Pope. People of all ages want to help and be part of this special event. We all want to welcome the Pope and make his visit as special as he is.

We have lots to do to get ready:

- ✓ Build a place to gather.
- ✓ Make gifts.
- ✓ Harvest and prepare fish, moose, and other country foods.
- ✓ Cut firewood.
- ✓ Clean up and decorate the community.
- ✓ Organize and practice cultural performances.

"The spirit and good feelings that come from lots of people helping to make something happen is very powerful."

**Robert Hardisty, Fort Simpson, NWT
(The Emerging Third Sector)**



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Include others

Today is a day full of magic. The sun is warm and the snow glistens as our snow machines and sleds glide over the ice on the way to our favourite fishing spot.

Two elders have joined our family for a day of ice fishing. They are so happy to be on the land. They smile, laugh, joke, tease, and tell stories all day long. Their good humour spreads to everyone and pretty soon my whole family is laughing and telling stories.

When we chisel an ice hole, drink tea, or fry trout everyone is having fun. My children say ice fishing is a lot more fun when we bring elders along.

It makes me happy to bring the elders and see them so happy. It reminds me how important it is to involve others in the things we do and help others enjoy life. I know the elders can't get out on the land on their own. I'm so glad my family could share this magical day.

"It feels good to volunteer
and feeling good is
something we all want."

Yvonne Carpenter, Inuvik, NWT
(Looking In Reaching Out)

"When I help others,
I feel good."

Sarah Kittosuk,
Sanikiluaq, Nunavut
(Iqaluit workshop)



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- 2) **Formal volunteers** are people who help out through a volunteer group or committee. Volunteer groups are also called voluntary, non-profit, or community groups, or non-government organizations (NGOs).

The 2000 'National Survey of Giving, Volunteering, and Participating' says:

- ✓ **27% of Canadians 15 years and older volunteer with a group.**
- ✓ **57% of volunteers help a group with their events.**
- ✓ **40% of volunteers are members of a board or committee.**
- ✓ **40% of volunteers canvass, campaign, or fundraise.**

Volunteer groups have some common, important features:

- ✓ Members of the group elect their own leaders – usually a board of directors or a committee.
- ✓ Volunteer groups are independent of government and business.
- ✓ They involve volunteers in meaningful ways.
- ✓ People form a group because they care about something and they want to take action.
- ✓ Volunteer groups do not give any profit to their members.

Some volunteer groups register with the territorial government as a non-profit society. This legal status gives the group certain rights and responsibilities. Some groups also register as a charity with the federal government through the Canada Revenue Agency. This status has other rights and responsibilities.



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Some volunteer groups don't register with the government. These groups have no legal status and they tend to be more informal and loosely structured.

Serve others

My volunteer group offers free family and personal counselling and support services. These services were once available through the government. But with cutbacks people either can't get these services or they pay a lot of money for them.

Many people in my community need these services. Our group tries to meet peoples' needs. And we couldn't do it without our volunteers. Volunteers sit on our board of directors, help raise money for programs, operate the help line, and encourage and support our paid staff.

How do we define volunteer group?

People don't always agree on how to define a volunteer group. Groups and individuals may have their own ideas about what it means to be a volunteer group.

- ✓ Are health and social services boards volunteer groups?
- ✓ Are education boards volunteer groups?
- ✓ Are groups with a volunteer board and paid staff volunteer groups?
- ✓ Do volunteer groups give their board members honoraria?



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People who do community service are not true volunteers.

Some people help out because they are told to. They are **'voluntold'**. For example:

- ✓ Courts may tell people to do community service as part of their sentence.
- ✓ Schools may tell students to volunteer a certain number of hours to graduate.
- ✓ Income support programs may tell people to volunteer as a condition to get income support.

"We really value the people who are 'voluntold' (people who are told to volunteer). There are many things that wouldn't get done without them."

Sheila Levy, Iqaluit, Nunavut (Iqaluit workshop)

Generally, these people can't freely choose. Because they can't say no they aren't true volunteers.

But they help people, volunteer groups, and their community. They may have a good experience. And because of their experience, they may be more likely to volunteer in the future.



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What is the volunteer sector?

The volunteer sector includes volunteers and volunteer groups.

The volunteer sector is also called the voluntary, non-profit, or third sector. The other sectors are the government or public sector and the business or private sector.

The three sectors have complementary but different roles and responsibilities.

	Volunteer sector	Public sector	Private sector
Who?	Volunteers and volunteer groups.	Government agencies. Legislative bodies. Courts.	Business and industry.
What?	Supports and promotes active citizenship and well-being.	Makes and implements public laws and policies. Provides public programs and services.	Builds and carries out commercial activities. Aims to make profits.



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What do volunteers do?

Volunteers do many things. Formal volunteers usually do things they plan, schedule, or organize with a group.

Informal volunteers help out on their own rather than through a group. They may not have a schedule. They help when they see a need.

Some examples of formal volunteer work	Some examples of informal volunteer work
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Work as a board member.✓ Organize a special event.✓ Coach a sports team.✓ Fundraise or write a proposal.✓ Keep financial accounts.✓ Work with the Canadian Rangers or Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary.✓ Run a club like cadets.✓ Work as firefighters.✓ Work at a community radio station.✓ Sell raffle tickets.✓ Help run a youth group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Help people with special needs.✓ Visit sick people.✓ Hunt, fish, or haul ice for people.✓ Talk to or counsel people.✓ Set up tents at spring carnival.✓ Transport elders to things.✓ Tell stories or read to kids.✓ Show others how to set a trap, make bannock, sew a parka, or use a computer.✓ Play music for a feast.✓ Interpret for elders.✓ Cut people's hair.✓ Babysit.



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How is volunteering different now than in the past?

In the past, volunteers were good neighbours and helped people in their community. They:

- ✓ Looked after children.
- ✓ Helped take care of sick people.
- ✓ Helped look after elders.
- ✓ Cooked food.
- ✓ Helped build houses.
- ✓ Cut wood, hunted, and picked berries.
- ✓ Shared transportation or took people places they needed to go.

“In the past we were more aware of the help that people needed and more willing to help. In our modern world, we aren’t so connected with the people around us or aware of their needs.”

Noah Qaqqisik, Kimmirut, Nunavut (Iqaluit workshop)

“The difference for me between what is and what was, is that it (volunteering) used to be part of survival and now it is separate from the day to day ... I think there’s a culture of volunteering, that volunteering is now a culture of its own.”

Yoanne Ewald, Inuvik, NWT (Inuvik workshop)



Resources to increase and support volunteers



Today a volunteer is still a good neighbour and helpful community member. And volunteers still help when and where they can.

But today volunteers also schedule and plan where and how they help out. For example, a volunteer might:

- ✓ Participate in board meetings once a month.
- ✓ Lead Girl Guide activities every Wednesday at 6 pm.
- ✓ Work with a special needs child at the school two mornings a week.
- ✓ Feed stray dogs at the community dog pound on weekends.
- ✓ Lobby candidates during elections to protect the environment.
- ✓ Do research and make presentations at community meetings about issues that are important.

“People are losing their connection with each other and who has needs.”

Agatha Ubluriak, Arviat, Nunavut
(Arviat workshop)

“People used to be trained for specific roles and responsibilities. For example there was an individual whose role it was to cut ice holes for everyone in the camp.”

Shirley Tagalik, Arviat, Nunavut (Arviat workshop)



Resources to increase and support volunteers



Volunteering has changed over time and will likely continue to change. And there are many reasons why things change.

Trends in volunteering	
The past	Today
Volunteers usually helped out around the home or on the land.	Volunteers often help out in seniors' homes, schools, or at the community hall or arena.
Volunteers helped people as part of everyday life.	Volunteers organize and plan their time to volunteer.
Volunteers were often people who didn't have a regular job. They were mainly women and seniors.	About two-thirds of formal volunteers who work with groups are people who work full-time at a regular job.
People volunteered just to help out. They followed a tradition of helping.	People may volunteer to learn a new skill or meet new people, as well as to help out.
Volunteers were usually there whenever you needed them.	Volunteers have less free time and the time they have is less flexible.
To promote volunteering, we talked about what volunteers could do for the community or volunteer group.	To promote volunteering, we talk about how the community, the volunteer group, and the individual can all benefit.



Resources to increase and support volunteers



Take responsibility for others

In the old days helping out was necessary for survival. Helping out made many tasks and life in general more enjoyable and productive.

We helped make sure that everyone had food, shelter, and clothing. We took time to give advice, build relationships, and help people live a better life. Back then we didn't care if we had a bigger truck and more things than other people had.

We were raised to understand that helping out is everyone's responsibility. And that people or families had different roles because they're good at certain things. Helping others wasn't called volunteering. It was just a way of living.

Helping out was a source of pride and a measure of honesty. It was a way to socialize, participate, and be accepted. Helping out gave people status and influence. It was part of day-to-day living and expressed our values and culture.

Today volunteering is still about helping out. It is still about influence, respect, acceptance, status, and participating in our communities. It is still about respecting culture and seeing the needs of others.

But today our communities are much bigger and our own lives more complicated. It's harder to stay strongly connected to others and see their needs.

But the need to help out is still strong and still part of who we are. It is still part of our identity as Canadians.



Resources to increase and support volunteers



Why are volunteers important?

Volunteers make a difference. They help individuals, our communities, and society as a whole. They are the backbone of our communities.

Volunteers affect every part of our lives. For example they:

- ✓ Help look after the environment.
- ✓ Contribute to the arts, culture, and languages.
- ✓ Help keep us safe.
- ✓ Help provide health, social, and education services.
- ✓ Operate programs for sport and recreation, children, and youth.
- ✓ Help to meet our spiritual needs.

With volunteers, we have more services and activities in our communities. And we pay less for them.

When people volunteer they:

- ✓ Learn or develop skills.
- ✓ Learn about themselves.
- ✓ Help make a difference.
- ✓ Help things change.
- ✓ Meet new people.
- ✓ Have better health and well-being.
- ✓ Feel good about themselves, others, and the world.
- ✓ Feel needed and valued.
- ✓ Build self-confidence.
- ✓ Get work experience.
- ✓ Have a sense of belonging.



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When a community has volunteers things happen:

- ✓ People have more things to do.
- ✓ People have more choices.
- ✓ More people help make decisions.
- ✓ The community treats more people fairly and equally.
- ✓ The community has less crime and violence.
- ✓ People have a healthier place to live.
- ✓ More people get along better.
- ✓ People respect each other more.
- ✓ More people who need help get help.

The United Nations chose 2001 as the International Year of Volunteers. They wanted to recognize the important role volunteers play in our lives and our communities.

Volunteer Canada is a national group that promotes, recognizes, and supports volunteering. Their **Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement** sets a standard. It helps groups and communities think about how they can best involve and support volunteers.

Page 17 describes the 11 parts of the **Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement**. We adapted this from part of a Nova Scotia Toolkit, written by Nancy Waldman. Look for the complete code at Volunteer Canada's website **www.volunteer.ca**.



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11 Parts to the Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement

- 1) **Executive support:** Leaders care about and help volunteers.
- 2) **Policy and procedure support:** Everyone knows what to expect and why.
- 3) **Effective coordination:** Volunteers know who to go to if they have problems or questions.
- 4) **Proactive recruitment:** Volunteer groups try hard to find the right people and a diverse mix of people.
- 5) **Consistent screening:** Volunteer groups carefully and fairly choose volunteers for their jobs.
- 6) **Practical orientation and training:** Volunteers know what their work is and how to do it by the time they start.
- 7) **Meaningful assignments:** Volunteers do work that matters.
- 8) **Appropriate supervision:** Volunteers get regular instruction and help.
- 9) **Planned feedback:** Volunteers have a chance to talk and volunteer groups listen.
- 10) **Valued treatment:** Volunteers feel safe and important.
- 11) **Regular and special recognition:** Volunteers know they are valued, even loved.



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How does volunteering reflect our values?

Our values guide the way we live our lives, make decisions, and take action. Our values affect how we choose to help out.

Values are part of our identity – part of who we are. Sometimes when we talk about values we realize different cultures often have similar values.

We share your values

We're having a territorial election on November 14th. Our community has four candidates to choose from. It's important to find out what each candidate stands for, what their values are.

Our community has some very bad social problems. But we also have strong people and good ideas to deal with these problems. We need to elect someone who really cares about us and wants to help.

Terry and her friends talked to the four candidates. One candidate said she really cares about us and wants to work with us. We think she shares our values.

We always look for leaders who can help, who care, and who want to cooperate. So we're volunteering for this candidate. We'll help with her campaign and work hard to get her elected.



Resources to increase and support volunteers



Some Dene values – from NWT Education, Yellowknife

Dene values include sharing, respect, caring, equality, self-respect, and pride. People express these values in:

Relationships with others:

- ✓ Participate for the benefit of the whole community.
- ✓ Know the individual has a right to belong and to make decisions.
- ✓ Learn from wisdom and age.
- ✓ Care for and share with one another.
- ✓ Encourage friendship.

Individual action:

- ✓ Be willing and able to support others in need.
- ✓ Be mindful of our own affairs.

Relationships with the land:

- ✓ Honour and care for the land as the spiritual and sustaining life force.
- ✓ Spend time on the land.
- ✓ Learn skills and knowledge for living on the land.
- ✓ Use Dene laws to help in relationships with the land.

“My mother got me involved and in my eyes she is really the best example of a volunteer ... so I’ve been volunteering since I was a kid.”

Lynn Feasy, Inuvik, NWT (Inuvik workshop)



Resources to increase and support volunteers



Some Inuit values – from Nunavut Education, Arviat

Inuit have special stories to describe each value.

- | | | |
|----------------------|----------------------|------------------|
| ✓ Love | ✓ Cooperation | ✓ Oneness |
| ✓ Respect | ✓ Generosity | ✓ Honesty |
| ✓ Sharing | ✓ Family | ✓ Mastery |
| ✓ Trust | ✓ Strengths | ✓ Volunteer |
| ✓ Resilience | ✓ Practice | ✓ Survival |
| ✓ Conservation | ✓ Teamwork | ✓ Patience |
| ✓ Listening | ✓ Resourcefulness | ✓ Perseverance |
| ✓ Moving forward | ✓ Significance | ✓ Adaptability |
| ✓ Observation | ✓ Consensus | ✓ Responsibility |
| ✓ Endurance | ✓ Strength | ✓ Generosity |
| ✓ Unity | ✓ Apologize | ✓ Acceptance |
| ✓ Helping | ✓ Improvisation | ✓ Equality |
| ✓ Interconnectedness | ✓ Take the long view | |

“I think people everywhere want to help out. I don’t think Nunavut is unique in that respect ... it’s very fundamental. People like to help out. It doesn’t matter where you’re from.”

Charlotte Borg, Iqaluit, Nunavut (Nunatsiaq News, March 19, 2004)



Resources to increase and support volunteers



Why should we learn about volunteers?

We learn about informal and formal volunteers to understand the important role they play in our communities. We learn about volunteers and volunteering so we can:

- ✓ Recognize and celebrate them.
- ✓ Promote and encourage them.
- ✓ Support them.
- ✓ Understand and value them.
- ✓ Show others how volunteers are the backbone of our communities and improve our quality of life.

Volunteers and volunteer groups have helped out in our communities longer than many of us can remember. We haven't always recognized or valued them.

In recent years individuals, families, and communities depend more and more on volunteers. There are two main reasons for this:

- 1) Governments don't have the money to provide all the services people need or want.
- 2) People who need or want services don't have the money to pay for them.

"You can't always see the results of volunteering but you'd certainly see it if it didn't happen."

Lynn Feasy, Inuvik, NWT (Inuvik workshop)



Resources to increase and support volunteers



While more people depend on volunteers and volunteer groups, fewer Canadians volunteer today than in the past. There are many reasons why fewer people volunteer.

Some of the main ones are:

- ✓ People are too busy working.
- ✓ No one asked them.
- ✓ People struggle to cope with their own lives.
- ✓ People do not feel responsible or want to help out.
- ✓ People are not connected to or aware of their community's needs.
- ✓ People think they have nothing to contribute.
- ✓ People believe they can't make a difference.

Everyone is affected when the demand for volunteers is greater than the supply.

The general public, government, and business need to be more aware of the problems the volunteer sector faces. And what will happen in our communities if these problems aren't fixed?

No matter where you look in Canada volunteers and volunteer groups face similar problems.



Resources to increase and support volunteers



Volunteers and volunteer groups face challenges. The 2001 research report **'NWT Voluntary Sector Development – the Emerging Third Sector'** identified these challenges:

- ✓ Uncertain roles, responsibilities, and expectations.
- ✓ Fewer volunteers.
- ✓ Too much to do and too little to do it with.
- ✓ Low profile and lack of understanding.
- ✓ Unstable funding or lack of funding.
- ✓ Lack of support for advocacy.
- ✓ Unsupported partnership activities.
- ✓ Heavy demands to evaluate programs and account for funding, and little support to do it.
- ✓ More formal ways to organize and run volunteer groups.
- ✓ Poor relationships with government.
- ✓ Uncertain relationships with business.
- ✓ Unclear relationships with First Nations and Inuit groups.
- ✓ Maintaining meaningful relationships with the community.
- ✓ Too little time and money, and too few people to really benefit from new technologies.



Resources to increase and support volunteers



How can we learn about volunteering?

One way to learn about volunteers is to do research. The questionnaires on pages 25, 26, 27, and 28 can help with research.

To do research about volunteering in the community, follow these six steps.

- 1) Get or make a list of volunteers and volunteer groups in the community. Ask the community government office or recreation coordinator. If they don't have an up-to-date list, ask a couple of active volunteers to help make one.
- 2) Ask all volunteer groups to complete a questionnaire. There is a sample questionnaire for volunteer groups on pages 25 and 26.
- 3) Ask volunteers to complete a questionnaire. There is a sample questionnaire for volunteers on pages 27 and 28.
- 4) Bring together the results of both questionnaires.
- 5) Share the results of the questionnaires with community leaders and with everyone who participated.
- 6) Use the results of the questionnaires. Volunteers and volunteer groups can use the results to write a funding proposal, recognize or recruit new volunteers, or plan a workshop about volunteering.



Resources to increase and support volunteers



Volunteer Groups - Questionnaire (2 pages)

Answer each of the 10 questions the best way you can.

1) What is the name of your volunteer group?

2) What is your group's main purpose?

- Provide health, social, education, or training services.
- Offer human or community development services.
- Do public education, research, or advocacy.
- Promote and protect civil and human rights.
- Carry out arts, cultural, or heritage activities.
- Carry out religious or spiritual activities.
- Do sports or recreation activities.
- Other: _____

3) Who makes decisions for your group?

- Volunteer board.
- Volunteer committee.
- Board who are paid an honoraria.
- Other: _____

4) How many paid workers did your group have last year?

Include full-time, part-time, casual employees, and contractors.



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Volunteer Groups - Questionnaire (2 pages)

5) How many volunteers did your group have last year?

6) In total, how many volunteer hours did they give?

7) Last year how many volunteers in your group did each of these things?

- i) Served on a board or committee. _____
- ii) Helped with special events. _____
- iii) Counselling people and helped them heal. _____
- iv) Shared traditional skills or knowledge. _____
- v) Coached or refereed sports. _____
- vi) Raised money or wrote proposals. _____
- vii) Helped children or youth. _____
- viii) Provided emergency or rescue services. _____
- ix) Performed with a theatre, singing, or dance group. _____
- x) Other. _____

8) Does your group have enough volunteers? Yes No

9) What is your group's main concern about volunteers and volunteering?

10) Would someone from your group participate in a workshop about volunteering? Yes No



Resources to increase and support volunteers



Individual Volunteers - Questionnaire (2 pages)

Answer these nine questions the best way you can.

1) What are the main reasons I volunteer?

- Have fun.
- Feel needed.
- Get work experience.
- Help other people.
- Meet new people.
- Feel good and happy.
- Build my self-confidence and self-esteem.
- Give something back to the community.
- Thank people who helped me in the past.
- Other: _____

–

2) On average, how many hours a week did I volunteer during the past year?

3) Which one of these best describes how I volunteer?

- Scheduled, as part of a group.
- Not scheduled, on my own.
- Both as part of a group and on my own.
- Other _____



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Individual Volunteers - Questionnaire (2 pages)

4) Last year, how did I spend my volunteer time? It should add up to 100%

- Served on a board or committee. _____ %
- Helped with special events. _____ %
- Counsellled people and helped them heal. _____ %
- Shared traditional skills or knowledge. _____ %
- Coached or refereed sports. _____ %
- Raised money or wrote proposals. _____ %
- Helped children or youth. _____ %
- Provided emergency or rescue services. _____ %
- Performed in a theatre, song, drum, or dance group. _____ %
- Other: _____ %

5) Does my community have enough volunteers?

- Yes No

6) What is my main concern about volunteers or volunteering in my community?

7) Would I participate in a workshop about volunteers and volunteering?

- Yes No



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Volunteer NWT and Volunteer Nunavut have all nine books in this series on their websites. Version française disponible.

Please contact Volunteer Nunavut for books in Inuktitut.



Nunavut Network
Canada Volunteerism Initiative

Volunteer Nunavut



Réseau du Nunavut
Initiative canadienne sur le bénévolat

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Canada



Northwest Territories Network
Canada Volunteerism Initiative

Volunteer NWT



Réseau des Territoires du nord-ouest
Initiative canadienne sur le bénévolat

2004