Book 4
Coordinate 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.
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Cover photos:

Left: Susanne Karetaq, left, and Kukik Baker from Arviat, Volunteer Nunavut meeting in Iqaluit. Photo: Northern News Services Ltd.

Right: Corporal Sylvain Lemoyne, community volunteer, Fort Resolution. Photo: Northern News Services Ltd.
What does it mean to coordinate volunteers?

To coordinate volunteers means a person or team of people work to help make sure people have a positive experience when they volunteer.

This work can be formal or informal. Some larger communities may have a paid employee to coordinate volunteers.

In many smaller communities people such as the recreation coordinator, wellness coordinator, or youth worker may help. They can help a volunteer or team of volunteers coordinate other volunteers.

A volunteer coordinator helps volunteers get the message that they are important and that people will support them.

Many volunteer groups don’t have a volunteer coordinator.

The volunteer coordinator makes sure volunteers:

✓ Understand exactly what their job is.
✓ See how their job is connected to a bigger picture or project.
✓ Get the resources, support, and training they need to do their job well.

A volunteer coordinator helps volunteers understand that others need and value them.
Some things make it easier to coordinate volunteers:

- Promote volunteering in the community.
- Make sure there is a plan for the volunteer group or activity.
- Have a job description for each volunteer job.
- Look for and engage enough volunteers.

A volunteer coordinator finds and builds on the strengths in each person or situation.

A volunteer coordinator balances different needs:

- The needs of each volunteer.
- The needs of the volunteer group or the person who needs help.
- The needs of the community.

“Organizing and coordinating volunteers takes a lot of time and needs a lot of support.”

Nancy Karetak Lindell, MP Nunavut (Iqaluit workshop)
To help balance different needs and build on strengths:

1) Have a plan for the volunteer work and follow it.
2) Know the people and resources the group has to do the job.
3) Match people with the jobs that build on their strengths.
4) Communicate, communicate, communicate. Everyone needs to know ‘what, when, where, how, and why’ of their volunteer job.
5) Look after needs and issues as they come along.
6) Be creative. Different problems often need different solutions.
7) Spend time and energy to build positive relationships.
8) Take time to know the volunteer, the group, and the community.
Caribouville turns 50 years old

Caribouville became a community 50 years ago. People from our five churches formed a committee to plan our 50th birthday party. The committee wants everyone to participate and to feel proud of our community.

The plan for the party centres on family events:

- A play about Caribouville's history.
- Family games from the past and present.
- Family sports challenges.
- A music and storytelling event to showcase our community's talented performers.

The committee knows they need many volunteers to make the party a success. Some people have already put their names on a volunteer signup sheet. The committee members don’t have the time or skills to coordinate the event and all the volunteers.

Some committee members want to hire a coordinator. They say it’s too much to ask a volunteer to do. Other members disagree. They say some volunteers might think their work isn’t as valuable as the work a paid person does. They also worry that a paid coordinator might set an example. Then every special event in the community will want to have a paid coordinator.

They discussed all these ideas. Then they decided to ask three experienced volunteers to work together to coordinate the event and the volunteers. These three volunteers have the time and experience, and they agreed. They were honoured that the committee asked them to coordinate the 50th birthday party.
What skills do people need to coordinate volunteers?

To successfully coordinate volunteers is an art. And some people are very good at it.

To successfully coordinate volunteers, the person or team of people should:

- Believe in and make a commitment to the group and their work.
- Believe in and make a commitment to the volunteers.
- Be responsible.
- Listen to all points of view and communicate well.
- Be flexible.
- Enjoy working with a mix of people and ideas.
- Be able to organize people and things.
- Be able to delegate.
- Encourage people to participate.

Many people have some of these skills, but few people have them all. A team of people is a good way to share responsibility, divide up the workload, have fun, learn from each other, and make sure things get done well.
Where can we find people with these skills?

✓ Ask **core volunteers** for advice. These people usually have lots of experience in the community. They may be willing to coordinate or to work with a team of people. They may be able to suggest other people.

✓ Ask **board or committee members** for advice, especially the president or vice-president. They may have someone in mind with the right skills.

✓ Ask **employees who are paid to work with volunteers** for advice. They may have an inventory of people who have the right experience and skills.

✓ Ask **decision-makers and leaders** in the community. They may know about people who have done a good job in the past.

“**When the Mountie (Cpl. Sylvain Lemoyne) arrived in town (Fort Resolution), there were only four young people involved in minor hockey. Now - thanks largely to his volunteer efforts - there are at least 60, and the arena has been given a facelift. That work was started by teenagers as a way to thank Cpl. Lemoyne for his efforts.**”

News/North Monday, April 5, 2004
What do volunteer coordinators do?

Volunteer coordinators support volunteers from the start to the finish of a project or activity. Their work is strongly connected with how volunteer groups and communities promote volunteering and recruit volunteers.

Here are the main tasks volunteer coordinators do:

1) Link volunteers with the volunteer group or project.
2) Talk to or interview volunteers about the project.
3) Do screening and police record checks, and check references.
4) Orient volunteers to the project.
5) Train volunteers.
6) Supervise volunteers.
7) Make sure people recognize volunteers.

“He (Cpl. Sylvain Lemoyne) took responsibility and leadership, and he made things happen.”

Tausia Lal, Fort Resolution, NWT
(Fort Resolution workshop)
1) Make the link.

To begin, the volunteer coordinator needs to link the volunteer with the volunteer group or project and to the community. And they need to build on the volunteer’s strengths.

Here are some tools the coordinator can use to help them make the links and build on strengths.

- **Have a plan** for the project or activity. The plan should clearly show the different volunteer jobs. Look in Book 2: *Promote volunteers and volunteering* for sample plans.

- **Be flexible.** Break big jobs into smaller ones. Ask more than one volunteer to work on certain jobs. Respect the small amount of time that many volunteers have to give. Volunteers appreciate coordinators who make this effort. They are more likely to do a good job and want to help again in the future.

- **Use tools** such as a volunteer assessment, volunteer recruitment guide, volunteer signup sheet, volunteer form, and volunteer job description. Look in Book 3: *Recruit volunteers* for samples of these tools.

“I would recommend getting people to speak frankly, even selfishly about why they volunteer and what they want from volunteering, like their interests and what motivates them. Then it would be easier to meet the needs of volunteers.”

Yoanne Ewald, Inuvik, NWT (Inuvik workshop)
2) Talk to volunteers.

A volunteer coordinator often talks with volunteers in a group. Volunteers should also have some private time with the coordinator.

Talk about the plan so volunteers understand the big picture and the roles and responsibilities of each volunteer. Link the plan with the goals or mission of the volunteer group and the community’s needs. Make sure volunteers are comfortable with their part in the plan.

Explain how the community and the volunteers benefit from the activities or project.

Volunteers under 18 years need to have their parent or guardian’s permission to volunteer. Volunteer coordinators should include parents or guardians when they talk to youth volunteers.

As they talk, the volunteer coordinator and the volunteer agree about three things:

1) What the volunteers needs and expects.
2) What the volunteer groups needs and expects.
3) The best match between these needs and expectations. This helps define the job the volunteer will take on.
What questions should a volunteer coordinator ask when they talk to a volunteer?

1) Do you see yourself fitting into this plan? What role or job do you see for yourself?
2) Do you have any experience to help you in this job?
3) What help do you think you’ll need?
4) Do you foresee any difficulties or problems?
5) What benefits do you see for yourself in the work that needs to be done?
6) Do you feel comfortable accepting this job?
7) (If applicable) Can you provide a police or criminal records check?
8) Do you have enough information to do your job?
9) Are you happy to participate in a group meeting? In the meeting we want to review placements, job descriptions, tasks that need to be done, and the best way to do them.

“People should always build on their knowledge to make things better for everyone.”

Shirley Tagalik, Arviat, Nunavut (Arviat workshop)
When a volunteer coordinator talks to volunteers, they should keep an eye out for:

- General attitudes and emotional reactions.
- Signs of special skills or insights.
- Views on and relationships with others.

These observations can help a coordinator be prepared for conflict or difficult behaviour. Or for work to finish ahead of schedule.
3) Do screening, reference checks, and police records checks.

Screening is a way to find out if volunteers might harm another person, themselves, or the volunteer group.

A reference check is a way to find out what strengths and weaknesses a volunteer has for the kind of work they will do. Talk to former employers or other people who know the volunteer. Ask questions that relate to the work the volunteer will do. Page 16 shows some sample questions.

A police records check is a process to find out if a volunteer has a police record – if they broke the law in the past. Groups should ask a volunteer to do a police records check if they work with vulnerable people, or handle sensitive information or lots of money. Page 17 has some guidelines about how to do a police records check.

No law in the NWT or Nunavut says that a volunteer group must do these kinds of checks.
Why screen, check references, and do police records checks?

There are many reasons to screen, check references, or do police records checks. Here are some:

✓ Many volunteers work with vulnerable people such as children, seniors, and persons with disabilities. These checks help make sure people are safe with volunteers.

✓ Many volunteers handle money. And sometimes it’s quite a lot of money. These checks help us know we can trust people.

✓ Some volunteers may represent or speak for others or a volunteer group. These checks help us know they’ll properly represent other people or the group.

✓ Other people may try to blame volunteers for something they didn’t do or say. These checks help protect volunteers and volunteer groups from this kind of blame.

If a volunteer harms a participant during a planned activity, the volunteer group that planned the activity is legally responsible.

Volunteer groups need to treat people fairly. Groups should plan to screen and check the background of all volunteers when the type of work calls for it.

Screening, reference checks, and police records checks are based on what a volunteer does or wants to do. They may not be important if a person doesn’t work with money or vulnerable people. People who have had trouble with the law can be wonderful volunteers for other kinds of work.
How to screen and check references for youth less than 18 years:

✓ Check with the parent or guardian. Identify any concerns they have if the youth works with children, seniors, or persons with disabilities, or with money.

✓ Get the consent of the parent or guardian. Make sure they are aware of and willing to be responsible for the youth’s volunteer activities.

✓ Check at least two references. Make sure there are no concerns if the youth works with vulnerable members of the community or with money. Page 16 shows some sample questions.

How to screen and check references for adult volunteers:

✓ Tell volunteers why groups screen and check references, and how it’s done.

✓ Ask for and get permission to proceed.

✓ Call at least two references. Page 16 shows some sample questions.

✓ Ask the person to get a police records check, if needed. Page 17 has some guidelines for police records checks.

✓ Assess the results of the checks. Make a decision about the kind of work this volunteer is suited for.

✓ Tell the volunteer as soon as possible the results of the checks. Tell them the kinds of work they are suited for, based on the reference checks.
Volunteer Canada recommends groups use a complete and ongoing screening process.

See their Safe Steps Volunteer Screening Program.  
www.volunteer.ca/volcan/eng/content/screening/safe-steps.php

The Department of Municipal and Community Affairs, GNWT has a brochure called ‘Understanding Volunteer Screening’.

Contact them to get a copy.  Call Yellowknife at 1-867-873-7756 or contact the Senior Advisor, Volunteer Development.

What questions should we ask in a reference check?

Jorden Beaulieu applied for a volunteer job.  He will pick up elders and drive them to and from the curling rink three times a week.

Based on your experience with and knowledge of Jorden:

1) Does this volunteer work fit well with what you know about his skills and knowledge?  Please explain.

2) Have you seen him interact with elders?  If yes, does he get along well with them?  Does he respect them?

3) Are you aware of any reasons why he shouldn't work with elders?

What strengths do you believe he will bring to this position?  What weaknesses would he bring?
A police record check belongs to the volunteer. Volunteer groups must not copy or keep it. Repeat the police record check every three years. Take action if a person has new convictions.

Advice about criminal records checks from “G” Detachment, RCMP Yellowknife, NWT

There is no fee for a criminal records check for a volunteer. When a person asks for a criminal records check they must:

- Show two pieces of ID to the RCMP. One must have a picture.
- Fill out and sign a form called Consent for Disclosure of Criminal Information Form. Get it from the RCMP.
- Sign a consent form for a computer check if they received a pardon for a past sexual offence.

The RCMP do local and national computer checks on the applicant. If anything comes up the volunteer group can ask the RCMP to take fingerprints and send them to Ottawa for a national search.

The RCMP can usually do a search without fingerprints in one week. If they take fingerprints, the search can take months.
Some volunteers aren’t suitable for some jobs. Many volunteers and volunteer groups help vulnerable people, or deal with sensitive matters or money. This type of work probably isn’t suitable for a person convicted of the following crimes:

- Dealing or selling drugs or alcohol in the past five years.
- Violence against another person – such as spousal abuse.
- Child abuse – physical, emotional, or sexual.
- Any crime with a weapon.
- Crimes involving alcohol within the past five years.
- Theft over $5000.
- Theft under $5000 within the past five years.

But these people may be quite suitable for other types of volunteer work.

“Some of our best and most hard working volunteers have been people who have been in jail and are looking to fit back into the community.”

Shirley Kisoun, Inuvik, NWT (Inuvik workshop)

“People who are ‘voluntold’ are very important to voluntary groups and some of these people have been in trouble with the law at some time in their life.”

Sheila Levy, Iqaluit, Nunavut (Iqaluit workshop)
4) Orient volunteers.

Volunteer coordinators help volunteers get down to work. To help them begin, coordinators orient volunteers.

This is where the fun really begins. Volunteers begin to contribute to the big picture. They start to have their own needs and expectations met. They start to build on their strengths.

During orientation every volunteer should have a chance to:

- Meet paid staff, long-term volunteers, people who are responsible for activities, and the people they will work with.
- Ask questions about the work.
- Feel welcome, valued, and prepared for their volunteer experience.
- See the rules and policies the group uses that affect their work.
- Understand how to handle expenses. Get copies of any forms they might need.
- Learn about codes of ethics and good practice.
- Learn about facilities including keys, equipment, and materials they will use.
During orientation every volunteer should get:

- General information about the volunteer group.
- Detailed information about the project, program, or activity they will be involved with.
- Names of people involved in the project and what each person does.
- A schedule of when things have to be done.
- Information about what resources and support volunteers can get to do their work.
5) Train volunteers.

Volunteer coordinators, paid staff, or other volunteers train new volunteers. Groups decide when training is suitable. For example, volunteers don’t need training to help with a community feast. But volunteers probably need some training to answer phones for the AIDS help line or to coach Arctic sports.

Many groups say they don’t have the time or resources to train volunteers. But they should try. Training is a way to balance needs, encourage and support volunteers, and keep volunteers.

For some people, training may be one of the main reasons they volunteer. Other people might be anxious about the idea of training. Or they might be unwilling to make time to participate. Some volunteers may try to avoid training.

Volunteer training can be short-term or long-term. It can be a simple or complex exercise. It can be one-on-one, in a workshop, in a classroom, on the project site, or part of a social activity.

Training is most effective when people are comfortable, and they can relax and have fun. Be creative.

Use all the different ways people learn. Respect each person’s strengths.

- Reading and writing.
- Pictures and charts.
- Hands-on and practice.
- Talking and role plays all help people learn.
Creative training with Caribouville seniors and youth

The Caribouville Seniors Society and the Caribouville Youth Group share an employee.

Our employee asked seniors and youth two similar questions:

1) What new things would we like to learn so we can help our group?
2) What new things would we like to learn so we can help our youth and elders work more closely together?

What a surprise to find out that seniors and youth have similar interests. We all want to learn how to use computers and the internet. We also want to make a video about our language and culture.

So once a week now the seniors and youth have supper together. Before supper the youth help seniors with computer technology. And the youth record seniors’ stories about our language and culture. We all have a lot of fun. And every week it seems more seniors and youth are involved. Training really works!
6) Supervise volunteers.

Another main thing volunteer coordinators do is supervise volunteer work. They make sure the jobs get done and volunteers have a positive and meaningful experience. They try to balance the needs.

To do this they:

✓ Regularly check in with volunteers and ask them how things are going. Are they satisfied and happy? Do they get the support they need? Is the experience what they expected?

✓ Build trusting, respectful, open, and honest relationships with and among volunteers and staff. Everyone needs to feel included and equal, not ‘just a staff member’ or ‘just a volunteer’.

What can help build relationships?

✓ Make a contact list. Include a phone number, address, and email for all staff and volunteers.

✓ Write down what volunteers need. Make time to deal with needs as soon as possible. If the coordinator can’t deal with these needs, make sure someone else does.

✓ Tell volunteers what will happen to deal with their needs, how long it will take, and who is responsible if it’s not the coordinator.

✓ Show a personal interest. Find out if volunteering creates stress, or causes problems with their family, their finances, their work, or other commitments.
Resources to increase and support volunteers

- Ask questions. For example, ‘Did you spend any of your own money doing this volunteer work?’ ‘Can I help you fill out an expense claim?’ ‘Is everything okay at home?’ ‘Is there anything that you need help with?’

- Take time to give honest and supportive feedback. Build volunteer confidence.

Use facts and observations to support comments and feedback. Ask volunteers if they’d like to change anything about how they work.

Use the sandwich approach for feedback or change.

1. Open with a positive statement.
2. Make the comment to correct or change things.
3. End with a positive statement

Here’s an example of the sandwich approach:

Mary, we really appreciate the time you give to help counsel our young people. We know they feel comfortable talking to you.

Do you think it might be a good idea to write down on a calendar the dates and times for your counselling? I know a few youth have been really disappointed when you didn’t show up.

We know you really care about these young people. And we know they can depend on you to not miss your time with them.
A short teambuilding workshop

1) Start with an icebreaker. Put up a colourful poster about volunteering. Ahead of time prepare a puzzle from the same poster on cardboard cut into puzzle pieces. Mix up the pieces and give one to each volunteer. Ask volunteers to work together to create the poster. Talk about people working together.

2) Talk about a community project where people successfully work together. Talk about the things that help people work together.

3) Ask volunteers to work in teams to identify and describe ways to encourage the things that help people to work together.

4) Ask the teams to share their ideas with other participants.

5) As a large group, discuss and agree on how volunteers and the coordinator share responsibility to help build positive relationships for their project.

“Lots of people don’t want to volunteer because everyone wants to get paid.”

Noah Qaqqasik, Kimmirut, Nunavut
(Iqaluit workshop)
7) Recognize volunteers.

Volunteer coordinators help make sure we all recognize and thank volunteers.

This is very important. It’s so important that Book 5: Recognize and thank volunteers is full of good information and resources about this.

Paid vs unpaid – is this a problem?

Coordinators help us deal with volunteering issues.

People wonder if we value volunteering less than paid work. They wonder why people volunteer. People see others get paid for things volunteers do.

Parents may pay fees for their child to play hockey. When they pay a fee they may feel they don’t need to volunteer.

These kinds of ideas can stop people from volunteering. It’s important to bring these ideas into the open and talk about them. Volunteer coordinators can help. For example, they can do a phone-in radio show or write a letter to the newspaper. They can raise issues at a community council meeting and talk to people on the street.

The more people talk about volunteering, the more people understand how valuable it is. It may be more valuable than paid work. We all get very rich from volunteering – we just don’t get any money.
What’s the best way to deal with difficult people and with conflict?

Volunteers and volunteer groups often deal with difficult people and with conflict. Sometimes we don’t understand why people are difficult or why there is a conflict.

Sometimes people just have a bad day. Or maybe they remember an experience from years ago that creates problems today.

Volunteer coordinators need to be able to recognize and deal with conflict right away. Volunteers are too valuable not to.

Volunteer coordinators can ask themselves these questions to help recognize signs of conflict:

- Is there tension among some volunteers?
- Are some volunteers confused? Do they know who does what, how things get done, or what is happening with the project?
- Do some volunteers take sides and not work together?
- Do some volunteers not show up? Have they dropped out?

When coordinators deal with conflict, they may deal with a difficult situation as well as difficult people.
Volunteer coordinators can help to resolve conflict if they:

- Help volunteers talk openly and honestly.
- Ask each volunteer to listen to and respect others.
- Ask for each volunteer’s opinion about how to resolve the conflict.
- Build on volunteers’ suggestions to resolve the conflict.
- Find a solution that respects and meets the needs of the volunteers, the volunteer group, and the community.
- Get each volunteer to agree on the solution and follow up.
- Make sure people put into action their agreed-on solution.

“Break people up and give them different tasks.”
“Confront people that have problems. Tell them to focus on the job not on each other.”
“Add team building to the volunteer activity.”
“Have a potluck or social to bring people together.”

Volunteers, Fort Resolution, NWT (Fort Resolution workshop)

The Government of Nunavut suggests we can best solve problems if we focus on:

- Specific concerns not vague ones.
- Present behaviours not past ones.
- Different options for a solution not a single, right answer.
- Honesty and respect.
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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.