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**Study Finds Pitfalls and Opportunities in Changing Volunteer Landscape: Organizations Urged to Strengthen Strategies to Improve Volunteer Satisfaction**

OTTAWA . A new study shows that while Canada's voluntary sector is the second largest in the world after the Netherlands, a significant number of volunteers report an experience that is less than satisfying. The latest data on the changing culture of Canada's voluntary sector was released today by Volunteer Canada, the national leader on volunteerism, in partnership with Manulife Financial.

The study found that 62 percent of Canadians who volunteer on a regular basis indicated they had at least one negative experience either due to perceived organizational politics, the belief that their skills were not being put to best use, feeling like they were not making a difference, or frustration with lack of support related to the volunteer activity.

The national research study gathered practical information for use by organizations to attract and retain skilled, dedicated volunteers. The study revealed there are significant gaps between the opportunities organizations are providing and the meaningful experiences today's volunteers are seeking.

"The primary gaps include the fact that many Canadians are looking for group or short-term activities but few organizations have the capacity to offer them or prefer a longer-term commitment," said Ruth MacKenzie, President & CEO of Volunteer Canada.

"In addition, many of those with professional skills are looking for volunteer tasks that involve something different from their work life. While organizations are expected to clearly define the roles and boundaries of volunteers, many Canadians want to create their own volunteer opportunity," she said.

Other respondents indicated that they would like to achieve some personal goals through volunteer work while at the same time help meet the needs of the organization.

"Volunteer Calgary welcomes the awareness that this national survey will create for the key issues and trends influencing volunteerism across the country," said Dani DeBoice, Volunteer Calgary Board Chair.

"This national research will help Volunteer Calgary continue to strengthen and enhance volunteerism in our city through the programs and services we deliver to our non-profit member organizations so that they can deliver fulfilling and unique volunteer opportunities to Calgarians for many years to come."

Unlike earlier surveys that emphasized overall participation rates, this new research captured what Canadians want in their volunteer experiences, how easy it is for them to find satisfying volunteer roles, and what organizations can do to enhance their volunteer base and ultimately build stronger communities.

"Advances in technology, shifting demographics and increased resource pressures mean today's organizations must re-evaluate all facets of their volunteer policies and practices, and ultimately embrace different approaches," added MacKenzie. "The findings suggest the optimal formula for engaging volunteers is one

where organizations are well organized but not too bureaucratic and open to letting volunteers determine the scope of what they can offer."

"The results also clearly indicate that it's important to match a volunteer's skills to the needs of the organization but not assume that the volunteer wants to use the skills specifically related to their profession, trade, or education," she said.

Conducted on behalf of Volunteer Canada in the summer of 2010 by the Centre for Voluntary Sector Research & Development at Carleton University and Harris/Decima, the study provides the most current national data about the changing culture of Canada's voluntary sector and the perspectives of four key groups: youth, baby boomers, families, and employer-supported volunteers.

Respondents in these four groups revealed that the volunteer experiences individuals are looking for change significantly as Canadians move through the different stages of their lives. The results also pointed to an increasing number of recent immigrants of boomer age, who could play a pivotal volunteer role in helping to integrate and support new immigrants into Canadian society, thanks to their unique cultural and linguistic skills.

Compounding the need for new approaches is the fact that Canadians are not necessarily following in the footsteps of Canada's uber volunteers who are getting older. These uber volunteers represent about seven per cent of Canadians who contribute approximately 78 per cent of the volunteer time in Canada.

The research study results offer practical information that Canadian organizations can use to improve the way they involve volunteers by exploring the characteristics, motivations, and experiences of current volunteers, past volunteers, and those who have yet to try volunteering.

Overall, respondents indicated that organizations could improve the volunteer experience by: getting to know volunteers' unique needs and talents; using a human resources approach that integrates both paid employees and volunteers; being flexible and accommodating to recognize volunteers' other time commitments; respecting volunteers' gender, culture, language and age differences; as well as providing more online volunteer opportunities.

"As Canada marks 10 years since we celebrated the United Nations International Year of Volunteers in 2001, applying the lessons learned from this research can help bridge the gap to more meaningful volunteer engagement in the future, and solidify volunteerism not just as a fundamental value of a civil society but as a true act of Canadian citizenship," said Rosemary Byrne, Board Chair of Volunteer Canada.

The study was conducted on behalf of Volunteer Canada and in partnership with corporate leader in the sector Manulife Financial. The research initiative is part of a multi-year program Manulife Financial is implementing to strengthen volunteerism in Canada in order to help build strong and sustainable communities for Canadians. Read the [full report](#) or the [summary](#).

## **About Volunteer Calgary**

Volunteer Calgary ([www.volunteercalgary.ab.ca](http://www.volunteercalgary.ab.ca)) has played a key role in the development of volunteerism in Calgary for 55 years. Established in 1955 as the Central Volunteer Bureau by the Junior League of Calgary, its mandate was to strengthen and expand existing health and welfare programs within the community through the encouragement of individuals to participate as volunteers.

Today the focus of Volunteer Calgary is on leading, promoting, connecting and strengthening volunteerism. Volunteer Calgary's services and programs enhance the ability of more than 425 local member non-profit organizations to engage volunteers in thoughtful and deliberate ways. The Volunteer Calgary website allows thousands of Calgarians to connect with fulfilling local volunteer opportunities. Our vision is "*people with passion and purpose leading the way to vibrant communities.*"

## **About Volunteer Canada**

Volunteer Canada ([www.volunteer.ca](http://www.volunteer.ca)) is the national voice for volunteerism in Canada. With more than 30 years of passionate commitment to the cause of volunteering and civic participation, Volunteer Canada inspires Canadians to be engaged from coast to coast to coast. From its office in downtown Ottawa, Volunteer Canada creates and develops programs, national initiatives, vital research, and tools for the non-profit sector.

Focused on influencing social policy and developing valuable resources around volunteerism, the organization is driven to help non-profits and businesses alike to build capacity for the changing culture of volunteerism. It recognizes the impact of Canada's 12.5 million volunteers through a variety of national campaigns and it works with its Corporate Council on Volunteering to catalyze conversations about corporate community involvement. Founded in 1977, Volunteer Canada works collaboratively with volunteer centres, business, and non-profit organizations to support volunteerism and the ultimate agents of social change, Canada's volunteers.

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***For more information, contact:***

**Karen Franco (403 231-1436; [kfranco@volunteercalgary.ab.ca](mailto:kfranco@volunteercalgary.ab.ca))**

**Kathryn Hendrick (416 277 6281; [khendrick@rogers.com](mailto:khendrick@rogers.com))**