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Canada's Volunteer Awards

CELEBRATING CANADIANS
WHO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

**VOLUNTEERISM – Exemplary Practices
For Your Organizations**

Developing and Engaging Your Organization's Volunteers
Managing Your Internal Operations
Serving Your Clients – Models for Program Delivery

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Canada's Volunteer Awards: Volunteerism – Exemplary Practices for Organizations

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Canada's Volunteer Awards: Volunteerism – Exemplary Practices for Organizations

Introduction

Every year, about 13 million Canadians volunteer. To promote and support volunteering across Canada, the Government of Canada celebrates and recognizes some of Canada's top volunteers at an annual ceremony in their honour. Canada's Volunteer Awards celebrate Canadians who are making a difference in their communities. The awards pay tribute to individuals, businesses and not-for-profit organizations that have sacrificed time and energy to build stronger communities and find innovative ways of addressing social issues facing Canadians.

“[We have] one simple
value guiding all activities—
leaving the world a better
place than when
you found it.”

- Rev. (Dr.) Deborah Olukoju

Canada's Volunteer Awards recipients all have one thing in common: the desire to improve the lives of Canadians. Volunteerism is essential to the social fabric of our communities and country. Volunteers are a great asset to many Canadian organizations and often are at the centre of their survival. Individuals who volunteer use their time, energy and passion to help those around them and to make a meaningful contribution to their communities.

On March 18, 2015, 18 volunteers from across the country received Canada's Volunteer Awards honouring them for their exceptional contributions to Canadian society. Following the ceremony, award recipients met to discuss their work and the people they serve. The discussion focused on identifying exemplary practices that maximize the limited resources available to volunteering activities. Three areas of exemplary practices emerged. The details are presented below.

1 Developing and engaging your organization's volunteers

Match passion with priorities. All participants stressed the importance of tapping into the passion of volunteers by ensuring their skills and dedication to a cause matched their work. Finding out what drives volunteers and nurturing it by matching this passion to the priorities of the organization is a best practice adopted by many of the recipients. As a result, volunteers are more engaged and become ambassadors for the organization, going on to mobilize others.

Cultivate leadership. Encouraging and cultivating leadership among volunteers was another important action for maximizing the impact of volunteering in communities. Most recipients look beyond simply recruiting volunteers to meet an immediate need. Instead, they nurture a volunteer’s vested interest in the organization. They find ways to draw in volunteers, often by leveraging their passion, and ensure they remain with the organization to take on leadership roles with the next generation of volunteers.

Transfer knowledge. Many recipients emphasized that the frequent staff turnover in not-for-profit organizations makes transferring knowledge from outgoing to incoming volunteers essential to ensuring uninterrupted service delivery. Some ways of achieving this process are mentorship between experienced and new volunteers and through written materials such as instruction manuals.

2 Managing your internal operations

Recipients differ in the services they deliver, but they all successfully structure their internal operations to maximize the impact of their limited resources. Recipients work with new technologies and find innovative ways of meeting their organizational objectives.

Use values as a compass. For most recipients, identifying core values was the point of departure when deciding on a volunteer recruitment and service delivery strategy. Recipients acknowledged that activities are meaningless unless they are connected to guiding values. Some recipients took this a step further by examining how the values of the organization aligned with their practices and making course corrections when things did not match up.

“Our volunteers become
our ambassadors...
they give above and beyond.”

- Annie Corriveau, *La Tablée des Chefs*

Teamwork: divide the task and multiply the successes. Recipients have built supports in their organizations to remove barriers to volunteering. For example, some organizations make volunteer work a family affair by allowing volunteers to bring their children with them. This provides a meaningful experience for the family and instills the sense of volunteerism in children.

Old tricks with new media. The way we communicate is rapidly changing. Social media is here to stay, and volunteers and organizations that use it to engage their communities are realizing the greatest impact. Recipients stressed the importance of a social media strategy and high-quality communication materials to support social and traditional media campaigns. But they also noted the importance of in-person interaction with target audiences and with other stakeholders that play a key role in delivering on an organization’s mandate (e.g. business, community and government leaders).

Run it like a business. This year, recipients noted that branding, public relations and media relations are key to ensuring that the community hears their message. As a best practice, recipients adopted communication and marketing strategies from the private sector and tailored them to suit their needs. By borrowing these business models, recipients were able to run their organizations more efficiently while still respecting their bottom line: improving social outcomes. The core business of one recipient was advising not-for-profits how to apply business model approaches to strategic planning and service delivery.

3 Serving your clients – Models for program delivery

Society and technology are shifting rapidly. Partnerships are being struck to meet social needs. Collaboration to solve society's multi-faceted problems is the new norm, leading to new ways of delivering programs and services.

Time and expertise – the new currency. While financial and material resources remain scarce in today's knowledge economy and with the rapidly evolving role of technology, organizations often value expertise and time over monetary donations. For example, corporations encourage employees with essential skills (e.g. accounting, legal, project management) to add volunteering to their training plans. Business leaders have been using volunteering as a way to further refine the skill sets of their employees. The practice of creating a network of volunteer professionals who can assist charitable and not-for-profit organizations with seed funding, communications and business management has been found to be effective.

Unique partnerships maximize impact. As a best practice, many organizations are developing innovative partnerships with non-traditional partners outside their sector, resulting in a unique combination of services that tackle social issues from a different angle. Examples include artists in remote northern communities commissioned by the Government to paint local fishermen's boats, and businesses in the hospitality industry partnering with community-based organizations to redirect food towards those who need it. Other organizations are finding new ways to support vulnerable children, using music and orchestra to teach them about teamwork, consistency and the need to strive for excellence.

Collaboration – a means to a more impactful end. Recipients demonstrated that collaboration is key to achieving organizational goals. Some collaborated with other organizations on projects that built bridges between communities, as well as achieving social outcomes. For example, a pastor at a community church worked with the Jewish community to build accessibility ramps for churches and synagogues; a business in a rural community partnered with local not-for-profits to strengthen the social cohesion of their town.

Conclusion

The discussions provided insight and guidance on measures that volunteers and volunteer organizations across the country have adopted to maximize their impact. The award winners have harnessed their energy to find innovative ways of tackling social challenges. Their creative solutions will be helpful to the not-for-profit and social business sectors.

We thank the extraordinary individuals, not-for-profit organizations and businesses who participated in this session. Participants included Dr. Syed Aslam Daud (Community Leader, Ontario), Rev. (Dr.) Deborah Olukoju (Community Leader, Prairies), Ken MacLeod of the New Brunswick Youth Orchestra (Social Innovator, Atlantic), Jean-François Archambault of La Tablee des Chefs (Social Innovator, Quebec), Heather Fullerton of Haven on the Queensway (Social Innovator, Ontario), Reed Andrew of Canadian Western Agribition (Social Innovator, Prairies), Rowena House of the Nunavut Arts and Crafts Association (Social Innovator, BC and the North), Corey Rogers of LaHave River Credit Union (Business Leader, Atlantic), Jean-François Boulet of Industrial Alliance (Business Leader, Quebec), Rick Zasada of Chandos Construction Limited (Business Leader, Prairies), and Shafin Diamond Tejani of Victory Square Labs (Business Leader, BC and the North).

For more information on how these dedicated volunteers have been improving the lives of Canadians across the country, please visit **Canada.ca/volunteer-awards**.