



Evaluation of the Canada Service Corps 2018 – 2023

Report

April 2024



Evaluation of the Canada Service Corps

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PDF

Cat. No. Em20-191/1-2024E-PDF

ISBN 978-0-660-72511-6






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List of abbreviations

CSC – Canada Service Corps

ESDC – Employment and Social Development Canada

YDG – Youth Digital Gateway



Executive summary

The Canada Service Corps (CSC, also called “the Program”) is a nationally delivered grants and contributions program which promotes civic engagement among youth in Canada aged 15 to 30. It has a particular focus on engaging Indigenous and under-served youth. It creates and facilitates access to volunteer service opportunities for youth. The Program provides funding to national, regional, and local organizations to offer volunteer service placements that allow youth to serve and help communities across Canada. It also provides funding to organizations to distribute micro-contributions (micro-grants) to youth. Micro-grant funding supports the implementation of small-scale youth-led projects where youth identify, develop, and carry out their own community service ideas.

Given that the Program had an official launch date of January 2018, this evaluation covers the 5-year period from 2018 to 2019 to 2022 to 2023. The 10 contribution agreements signed in 2017 as part of the former Youth Service Initiative (pre-design phase) were also examined. Over this period, the Program had actual expenditures of about \$204.4 million.


This formative evaluation draws from multiple lines of evidence to inform the ongoing need of the Program, its effectiveness and efficiency. Of note, the Program’s data for Canada Service Corps was available from 2021 to 2022 onwards. Therefore, over the 5-year evaluation period until 2022 to 2023, data was available for only the last 2 years. This evaluation relied largely on qualitative data, which limits the ability of this report to provide conclusive trends about results.

Ongoing need for and relevance of the Program

- Community-led programming, which the Program supports, can play a role in fostering youth civic engagement, and complement school-led activities.
- The Program was described as unique and valuable by most recipients. Few could think of other programs that provide the same or similar opportunities. Most organization representatives stated that their programs would not exist without funding from the Program. Youth participants felt that opportunities through the Program address some needs and gaps in youth civic engagement and in their community.

Program’s immediate outcome

- The Program is reaching Indigenous and many under-served youth populations: 79% of participating youth in fiscal years 2021 to 2022 and 2022 to 2023 identified as 1 or more of the under-served groups targeted by the Program.
- While the majority of focus group and surveyed participants indicated that they completed their project or placement, early results pointed to relatively lower completion rates among certain groups. There were some key differences in socio-demographics of youth participants who did not complete their flexible volunteer service placements. Specifically, Indigenous youth, non-binary youth, youth living with disabilities, those from official language minority communities, and 2SLGBTQIA+ youth were less likely to complete their flexible placements compared to their counterparts. When comparing the share of participants alongside the profile of the Canadian youth



population at large, newcomers, youth with disabilities and those from official language minority communities were also under-represented.

- Common barriers to participation point to time constraints due to competing priorities as well as financial factors. Still, unique barriers to volunteer service exist for Indigenous and under-served youth. Lack of culturally inclusive opportunities and lack of accessible opportunities are 2 such examples.
- Organizations are using Program funding to help youth overcome barriers to civic engagement. Still, interviewed organization representatives, surveyed applicant organizations, and youth focus group participants felt other forms of support could be provided to reduce barriers to participation. Interviewed funded organization representatives did not seem to be aware of some of the current participant supports that are eligible costs under the Program, such as transportation costs, which further suggests they may not be taking full advantage of them.
- Information about the Program funding opportunities was accessible to organizations, but the extent of youth's ease of access to information and awareness of the Program is mixed. The key factor affecting youth participants' ease of finding information/resources was the extent to which one was involved in or connected with networks and/or organizations familiar with pathways to such opportunities.

Program's impact on youth and communities

- Most focus group and surveyed Program participants indicated that their experience helped them develop skills, meaningful connections, and self-confidence. The main type of skills youth participants developed across fiscal years 2021 to 2022 and 2022 to 2023 were communication, collaboration, leadership, adaptability, and creativity and innovation.
- Most focus group and surveyed Program participants felt the Program is having positive impacts on communities. Various lines of evidence suggest that the Program appears to be having a positive effect by:
 - offering positive engagement for youth
 - increasing youths' belief that they are making a difference
 - building a more inclusive Canada
 - increasing environmental benefits, and
 - increasing civic engagement now and into the future.

Program implementation

- Some organizations experienced challenges with Program administration. This included lack of predictable funding, tight timelines for submission, and lack of clear communication.
- The COVID-19 pandemic affected the nature and quality of placements, but organizations were largely able to adapt. The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the nature and quality of volunteer service opportunities was related more to the youth's personal experiences. However, more than half of interviewed organization representatives reported that they were able to adjust their programs to deliver virtually or in a hybrid way.

- The introduction of the mandatory 25% leveraging requirement had negative impacts in that it:
 - disproportionately affected smaller organizations
 - prevented organizations from applying, and/or
 - forced organizations to change their projects.
- The Program made adjustments to the 2023 Call for Proposal. For example, funding predictability has been increased through longer term agreements and the mandatory 25% leveraging requirement was removed.

Performance measurement

- In 2018, Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) began work with Statistics Canada on the design of a longitudinal survey of Program participants to assess program impacts. In 2019, the work on the longitudinal survey was discontinued due to low response rates and insufficient program data. Further, data was collected from recipient organizations only at aggregate levels.
- To resolve this issue, the Program launched an updated data collection strategy in April 2021, which allowed for the collection of disaggregated (participant-level) data on youth participants.
- While data collection requirements were well-understood by organizations, some organizations faced some barriers to collecting the data required by the Program, such as organizational capacity for sufficient data collection and reporting.
- There were some limitations with the Program's data strategy, such as low response rates when reaching youth participants directly, duplication of efforts, lack of capacity to conduct intersectional analysis, lack of in-house capacity, and measuring the intermediate and ultimate outcomes.
- Despite its success in reaching Indigenous and many under-served groups, the extent to which opportunities available through the Program are both accessible and inclusive could be informed from a broader perspective (for example, beyond simply reach and examining the extent to which barriers can be addressed).

Recommendations

1. It is recommended that the Program continue to explore alternative program design approaches, within a Grants and Contributions framework, to understand and address barriers to youth civic engagement among Indigenous and under-served youth.
2. It is recommended that the Program continue to take steps to improve awareness and visibility of Canada Service Corps and the volunteer service opportunities available for youth.
3. It is recommended that the Program take steps to improve its data capacity and collection methods to better support and inform policy analysis, research, and evaluation activities.



Management response and action plan

Overall Management Response

Recommendation #1

It is recommended that the Program continue to explore alternative program design approaches, within a Grants and Contributions framework, to understand and address barriers to youth civic engagement among Indigenous and under-served youth.

Management Response

Management agrees with this recommendation. Efforts to foster civic engagement among Indigenous and under-served youth are underway as the program continues to explore enhancements to program design within the Grants and Contributions framework.

Management Action Plan 1.1

The Department is analyzing the efficacy and suitability of the current hourly requirements for full-time (360 hours) and part-time (120 hours) service placements. This work seeks to understand the extent of one barrier identified in the Evaluation Report, namely, “the most commonly reported reason for youth to not complete their placement was too many hours/not enough time to complete their placement...” The analysis of this work will be available by June 2024.

Planned completion date: 2024 June

Action status: In progress

Accountable lead(s): Director General, Youth Service and Learning Directorate

Management Action Plan 1.2

The 2022 Call for Proposals introduced new program options with Accelerator Micro-grants, Micro-grant diversity and lowering the age of eligibility pilots as options for permanent program changes pending their short-term observed results. These pilots are underway and will be assessed shortly.

The 2023 Call for Proposals was designed with the goal of improving youth participants’ access to culturally appropriate programming which will be assessed through a future program evaluation.

Planned completion date: 2024 October

Action status: In progress

Accountable lead(s): Director General, Workforce Development and Youth Directorate; Director General, Youth Service and Learning Directorate

Management Action Plan 1.3

The Department is pursuing a new initiative to support direct youth engagement in Canada Service Corps programming via an initiative called *Connect*. *Connect* contributes to this framework through its proposal to deliver programming directly to youth to foster a feeling of belonging, with a continued focus on reaching Indigenous and under-served youth.

Connect has 3 main objectives, which include: (i) raising the profile of Canada Service Corps with youth and youth-serving organizations; (ii) providing tools and resources that enrich youth’s service journey; and (iii) fostering a clear path to sustained involvement in community service for youth across Canada.



Planned completion date: 2025 December

Action status: Yet to commence

Accountable lead(s): Director General, Youth Service and Learning Directorate

Management Action Plan 1.4

The Department will make additional efforts to communicate eligible expenditures that may help funding recipients in removing barriers to participation.

Planned completion date: 2024 October

Action status: Yet to commence

Accountable lead(s): Director General, Workforce Development and Youth Directorate; Director General, Youth Service and Learning Directorate

Recommendation #2

It is recommended that the Program continue to take steps to improve awareness and visibility of Canada Service Corps and the volunteer service opportunities available for youth.

Management Response

Management agrees with this recommendation. To improve awareness and visibility of the Canada Service Corps and the volunteer opportunities available for youth, the Program will continue to leverage the Youth Digital Gateway with the aim of expanding its digital reach. The program will also expand on its strategic communications strategy to highlight the impact of funding.

In advance of the 2023 Call for Proposals the Canada Service Corps undertook additional measures to increase visibility and awareness of the 2023 Call for Proposals. This included the distribution of Member of Parliament kits and tailored outreach to ensure awareness among Indigenous stakeholders.

Management Action Plan 2.1

Increase the number of placement and microgrant opportunities posted on the Youth Digital Gateway. Expand on communications and marketing strategy.

Planned completion date: 2024 December; 2025 March

Action status: In progress


Accountable lead(s): Director General, Youth Service and Learning Directorate

Management Action Plan 2.2

The Department is pursuing a new initiative to support direct youth engagement in Canada Service Corps programming via an initiative called *Connect*. *Connect* contributes to this framework through its proposal to deliver programming directly to youth to foster a feeling of belonging, with a continued focus on reaching Indigenous and under-served youth.

Connect has 3 main objectives, which include: (i) raising the profile of Canada Service Corps with youth and youth-serving organizations; (ii) providing tools and resources that enrich youth's service journey; and (iii) fostering a clear path to sustained involvement in community service for youth across Canada.

Planned completion date: 2025 December



Action status: Yet to commence

Accountable lead(s): Director General, Youth Service and Learning Directorate

Recommendation #3

It is recommended that the Program take steps to improve its data capacity and collection methods to better support and inform policy analysis, research, and evaluation activities.

Management Response

Management agrees with this recommendation. Efforts were already underway during the evaluation period to improve the program's data collection and analysis abilities. This includes introducing the use of new statistical software to better understand intersectionality among program participants and expanding data collection to further inform to what extent low-income youth are engaging in the program.

Management Action Plan 3.1

Eliminate duplication in survey efforts and increase use of statistical software to improve analysis of Canada Service Corps data.

Planned completion date: 2025 March

Action status: In progress

Accountable lead(s): Director General, Youth Service and Learning Directorate

Management Action Plan 3.2

Continue to share best practices for data collection with and between funding recipients and build user-friendly collection options to limit errors. Re-structure the data collection schedule to limit duplication and make the process more straightforward.

Planned completion date: 2025 March

Action status: In progress

Accountable lead(s): Director General, Youth Service and Learning Directorate

Management Action Plan 3.3

Provide opportunities for recipient organizations to share data on whether program participant youth are from low-income households.

Planned completion date: 2025 January

Action status: In progress

Accountable lead(s): Director General, Youth Service and Learning Directorate

Management Action Plan 3.4

Review the tools and data elements collected, as well as best practices for outcome measurement, to support the identification of methods to better measure program outcomes.

Planned completion date: 2026 January

Action status: In progress

Accountable lead(s): Director General, Youth Service and Learning Directorate

1. Introduction

This report presents the findings of the evaluation of Employment and Social Development Canada’s (ESDC’s) Canada Service Corps program. The Canada Service Corps (also called “the Program”) aims to promote civic engagement among youth in Canada by creating and facilitating access to volunteer service opportunities. It focuses on reaching Indigenous and under-served youth.

The objectives of this formative evaluation were to examine the ongoing need, effectiveness, and efficiency of the Program. Multiple lines of evidence were used, including document, literature and administrative data review, survey of organization representatives, key informant interviews and focus groups. It was completed in compliance with the *Financial Administration Act* and the Policy on Results.

2. Background

Canada Service Corps was announced in Budget 2016 and was formally launched as the Youth Service Initiative in 2017 before changing its title in 2018. It was created under the Core Responsibility “Learning, Skills Development and Employment” to help Canadians access education, training and lifelong learning supports to gain skills and work experience.

It is a nationally delivered grants and contributions program. Its objective is to promote civic engagement among youth across Canada aged 15 to 30¹, with a particular focus on youth from Indigenous and under-served communities. The Program creates and facilitates access to volunteer service opportunities for youth, which includes volunteer service placements and micro-grants (youth-led projects). The Program streams are further discussed in Section 2.2.

Canada Service Corps particularly seeks to engage Indigenous² and under-served youth³, which in the context of the Program also includes:

- visible minority and racialized youth⁴
- youth with disabilities⁵
- youth living in rural or remote areas⁶

¹ The Program is also exploring ways to reach youth as young as 12 years of age. However, this falls outside the scope of this evaluation.

² Self-identifies as Inuit, Métis, First Nations or Non-Affiliated.

³ For the context of this evaluation, the most recent definitions as per the Performance Information Profile were used.

⁴ Refers to whether a person belongs to a visible minority group as defined by the Employment Equity Act and, if so, the visible minority group to which the person belongs. The Employment Equity Act defines visible minorities as ‘persons, other than Indigenous peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour.’

⁵ Self identifies as having a disability which includes: agility, hearing, mental health, developmental, intellectual, visual, motor skills, speaking, and learning.

⁶ As defined by the participant, with guidance from Statistics Canada definitions on rural areas and remoteness. Statistics Canada. (2016). *Dictionary, Census of Population, 2016. Rural area (RA)*. Retrieved from <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/dict/geo042-eng.cfm>
Statistics Canada. (2023). *Index of Remoteness*. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/17-26-0001/172600012020001-eng.htm>.

- 2SLGBTQIA+ youth⁷
- youth from low-income households⁸
- newcomer youth⁹; and
- youth from Official Language Minority Communities (OLMC)¹⁰.

2.1 Program objectives

The Program aims to create, promote, and ease access to volunteer service opportunities that are meaningful to youth, particularly youth from Indigenous and under-served communities. The Program also aims to support lasting civic engagement and to give youth life and work skills. The Program's logic model can be found in Appendix A.

The Program has the following expected outcomes¹¹:

- diverse youth are able to participate in accessible and inclusive service placements and youth-led projects (immediate)
- participating youth develop and improve skills and self-confidence (intermediate) and
- following their participation in service placements and youth-led projects, diverse youth across Canada contribute to a culture of service (ultimate).

The Program defines a “culture of service” as a lifelong commitment to serving others through formal and informal actions that work to ease or mitigate the predicaments and uncertainties created by poverty, hunger, racism, sexism, epidemics, calamities, inequality, and so on.

The Program does recognize that Program alumni may choose to engage in helping activities or actions for reasons other than their participation in a Canada Service Corps service opportunity. For this reason, the Program does not claim that the Program, or its alumni, will be solely responsible for a “culture of service” in Canada but is rather contributing to this outcome.

2.2 Program streams

As per the Program's Terms and Conditions, Canada Service Corps supports activities under 3 different funding streams:

- Volunteer Service Placements (National and Regional scale projects)
- Micro-Contribution Youth-led Projects (micro-grants), and

⁷ Self identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and 2-spirit individuals, as well as any other sexual or gender identity not listed.

⁸ As defined by the participant, with guidance from the Statistics Canada definitions on low income. Statistics Canada. (2015). *Low income cut-offs*. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75f0002m/2012002/lico-sfr-eng.htm>.

⁹ Person who left another country to settle in Canada within the last 5 years.

¹⁰ An Official-language minority is either a French-speaker or French-speaking population living outside of Quebec, where English is predominant, or an English-speaker or English-speaking population living in Quebec, where French is predominant.

¹¹ These Program outcomes reflect the period covered by the evaluation. As of fiscal year 2023 to 2024, these outcomes have been slightly updated.

- Innovative Engagement and Outreach.

These funding streams are further described below.

2.2.1 Volunteer Service Placements

The Service Placements streams fund national and regional scale projects. The Service Placements are designed to ease access to service opportunities and allow youth to become engaged in communities across Canada. Organizations receiving funding through this stream are expected to create and promote service opportunities that allow youth to gain leadership skills and grow their personal and professional networks skills.

The national scale projects¹² offer full-time or flexible volunteer service placements across Canada. The regional scale projects offer flexible or full-time¹³ volunteer service placements that occur in local areas and smaller communities in Canada. The full-time placements need at least 30 hours of service per week for a continuous period of at least 3 months. Flexible placements need at least 120 hours of service over a 1-year period.

2.2.2 Micro-Grants (youth-led projects)

The Micro-Grant stream funds small-scale volunteer service projects, which allows youth with service ideas to design and carry out projects at the local level. Youth who receive micro-grant funding have an opportunity to take ownership of an issue that is important to them, propose a solution and carry it out at the local level. Up to \$5,000 per youth is distributed to cover their project-related costs.

2.2.3 Innovative Engagement and Outreach


The Innovative Engagement and Outreach stream is intended to increase awareness of youth volunteer service and volunteer service opportunities through the Canada Service Corps and improve access to service placements. Eligible activities include:

- implementing innovative methods to reach under-served youth
- exploring, testing, and developing innovative solutions, best practices, and capacity-building tools
- promoting civic engagement and,
- facilitating knowledge development.

There were 4 projects under the Innovative Engagement and Outreach stream that were delivered by recipient organizations until March 2023. Key outputs delivered can be found in Appendix B. Currently, projects delivered under the Innovative Engagement and Outreach stream are publicly known as the Micro-Grants Diversity and Accelerator Micro-Grants streams (more information about these streams

¹² For the 2018 intake, eligibility criteria included “The applicants must demonstrate that they have a national network and partners with whom they can collaborate in terms of delivery, outreach and/or funding.” For the 2022 Call for Proposal, eligibility criteria stipulated that projects must take place in at least 2 or more provinces/territories and have a minimum of 100 service placements annually.

¹³ For the 2022 and 2023 Call for Proposals, the regional projects have only been able to offer flexible service placements.



can be found below). These new funding streams represent innovative pilots to test new ways of reaching diverse youth and offer more (non-financial) incentives to participate in service.

2.3 2022 Call for Proposals – 2 Added Funding Streams (Pilots)

The 2022 Call for Proposals included 2 added funding streams under the Innovative Engagement and Outreach stream. These took the form of pilots and were developed based on the Program’s 3 original funding streams described above.

2.3.1 Micro-Grants Diversity Stream - Pilot

The Micro-Grants Diversity Stream was created with the aim to pilot onboarding diverse organizations that are well-placed to reach and support Indigenous and under-served youth in their communities. In this stream, organizations are required to confirm that they meet the diversity-related eligibility criteria. This meant that their leadership and/or governance is representative of the populations they serve¹⁴ to be eligible to receive funding. Specifically, organizations are asked to confirm that at least 50 per cent of their leadership/governance is from 1 or more of the groups that the applicant indicates it serves.

2.3.2 Accelerator Micro-Grants Stream – Pilot

The Accelerator Micro-Grants Stream was created with the aim of testing financial incentives that would lead to scaling up of micro-grant delivery with the Program’s alumni. These are youth who have already completed a service opportunity with Canada Service Corps. This stream had a competitive solicited intake. Organizations in this stream design and deliver financial incentives to motivate altruistic behavior, help remove barriers, including financial ones, and to enable service objectives. Canada Service Corps alumni participants are eligible to receive accelerator micro-grants up to \$5,000 per participant. This is meant to speed up or incubate their pre-existing ideas for service and civic engagement.

2.4 Program results and resources

As per the Departmental Results Reports, information on the number of volunteer service opportunities created is provided in Table 1. Further, Table 2 provides information on the number of funded projects by Program stream and Call for Proposal/Intake year.

¹⁴ Although included in the definition of Indigenous and under-served youth, the eligibility criteria does not include newcomer, rural and remote, or low-income household populations.

Table 1: Number of volunteer service placements created, including the Micro-Grants Stream (youth-led projects).

Fiscal year	2017 to 2018*	2018 to 2019**	2019 to 2020**	2020 to 2021	2021 to 2022	2022 to 2023
Total	N/A	2,920	8,720	9,265	10,338	9,017

Source: Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS). (2024). *Infographic for Canada Service Corps*. Retrieved from <https://www.tbs-sct.canada.ca/ems-sgd/edb-bdd/index-eng.html#infographic/program/HRSD-BGO07/financial>.

*Results are not available for 2017 to 2018 as the Program was in its pre-design phase. While the Canada Service Corps program was formally launched in January 2018, the pre-design phase of the Program called the “Youth Service Initiative” was launched in 2017.

** In fiscal years 2018 to 2019, and 2019 to 2020, the results presented are for the number of youth participants in funded service projects, as reported by funded recipients.

Table 2: Number of funded projects by Program stream and Call for Proposal/intake year

Program Stream		2018 to 2019	2022	Total
Volunteer Service Placement	National	12	15	27
	Regional and Local	99	42	141
Microgrant	-	1	22	23
Innovative Engagement and Outreach	Innovative Engagement and Outreach	4	-	4
	Accelerator Microgrant	-	4	4
	Microgrant Diversity	-	28	28
Total		116	111	227

A total of about \$204.4 million in grants and contributions was spent from fiscal year 2017 to 2018 until fiscal year 2022 to 2023. Overall, 89% (\$182.1 million of the \$204.4 million) of the expenditures were through the Volunteer Service Placement streams, 5% through the Micro-Grants stream, and 6% through the Innovative Engagement and Outreach Stream (see Table 3).

Table 3: Annual actual expenditures by Program stream– transfer payments (\$ million) by fiscal year

Program Stream	2017 to 2018*	2018 to 2019	2019 to 2020	2020 to 2021	2021 to 2022	2022 to 2023	Total
Service Placement	2.8	13.4	39.9	46.9	34.8	44.3	182.1
Micro-Grant	0.6	1.6	1.9	2.0	2.4	1.6	10.1
Innovative Engagement and Outreach	1.3	2.8	1.7	2.3	2.1	2.1	12.2
Total – Transfer Payments**	4.7	17.8	43.5	51.2	39.3	48.0	204.4

Source: Chief Financial Officer Branch, ESDC (January 18, 2024).

*While the Canada Service Corps program was formally launched in January 2018, the pre-design phase of Program called the “Youth Service Initiative” was launched in 2017.

**Total Program expenditures, including all standard objects such as transfer payments as well as personnel, amounted to \$19.6M in 2018 to 2019, \$49.7M in 2019 to 2020, \$57.1M in 2020 to 2021, \$47.6M in 2021 to 2022 and \$55.4M in 2022 to 2023 (Source: Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS). (2024). *Infographic for Canada Service Corps*. Retrieved from <https://www.tbs-sct.canada.ca/ems-sgd/edb-bdd/index-eng.html#infographic/program/HRSD-BG007/financial>).

The Youth Digital Gateway (YDG) was also implemented in fiscal year 2021 to 2022 to offer core information technology services for the Canada Service Corps. The YDG aims to be the channel for digital services and tools supporting youth employment, skills development and service for the Canada Service Corps and the Youth Employment and Skills Strategy. In fiscal year 2021 to 2022, \$2.6 million was spent, and in 2022- to 2023, \$3.6 million was spent on the YDG project for the Program. This includes salary and non-salary expenditures. The YDG is further discussed in Section 5.5.

Within ESDC, resources and responsibilities are divided between 3 entities:

- the Youth Service and Learning Directorate within the Learning Branch, which provides program policy leadership for the Program (program design, policy development, and program results)
- the Program Operations Branch which delivers the national streams¹⁵ of Canada Service Corps programming, the YDG and provides program oversight of all streams (establishing intakes, committing funding and tracking expenditures), and
- Service Canada¹⁶ regions, which delivers the regional streams¹⁷ of Canada Service Corps programming.

¹⁵ National Service Placements and Accelerator Micro-Grants.

¹⁶ As of April 1, 2022. Prior to this, Regional and Micro-grants were delivered by the Program Operations Branch.

¹⁷ Service Placements – Regional, Micro-grants, and Micro-Grants Diversity.

3. Evaluation context

In January 2018, ESDC officially launched the “design phase” of the Canada Service Corps. During this phase, over 800 diverse youth across Canada were involved in co-creating the Program by:

- identifying barriers to their engagement in volunteer service
- proposing solutions to address these barriers, and
- refining their ideas into tangible program elements.

This phase was concluded on March 31, 2019. The full implementation and scale-up of the Canada Service Corps program began in fiscal year 2019 to 2020, with added funding provided through Budget 2019.

Given that the Program had an official launch date of January 2018, this evaluation covers the 5-year period from 2018 to 2019 to 2022 to 2023. This includes examining the application process, as well as the introduction of the mandatory leveraging requirement¹⁸, for the 2022 Call for Proposals. The 10 contribution agreements signed in 2017 as part of the former Youth Service Initiative (pre-design phase) were also included in the overall evaluation.

Evaluation questions

The following 4 evaluation questions were examined as part of this formative evaluation:

1. To what extent is the Program addressing a need?
2. To what extent has the Program been implemented to fulfill its objectives?
3. To what extent are the Program’s outcomes being achieved?
4. Are the Program’s performance measurement tools collecting sufficient data to support ongoing monitoring and decision’s making?

Since this is the first evaluation of the Program, it focused on immediate and intermediate outcomes. The evaluation also examined the extent to which information and resources on Canada Service Corps were accessed by youth and youth partners via the YDG platform¹⁹ (immediate outcome).

Evaluation methodology


The data collection consisted of a mixed-methods approach that included the perspectives of various groups involved with the Program. Furthermore, this evaluation incorporated a gender-based analysis plus lens to the extent possible.

The evaluation used 7 lines of evidence:

1. Document and literature review

¹⁸ As of April 1, 2023, recipients were required to contribute a portion of the project funding from sources other than funds from ESDC towards their project. This means that ESDC’s contribution towards approved projects will be for a maximum of 75% of the total project’s cost and the organization must source funds of 25% of the total project costs. The leveraging requirement may also be satisfied by cash or in-kind contributions to the project by the Applicant organization. This requirement was no longer applicable for the 2023 Call for Proposal.

¹⁹ Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC). (2024). *Youth Digital Gateway*. Retrieved from <https://youth-jeunesse.service.canada.ca/en>.

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2. Administrative data review, including 2021 to 2022 and 2022 to 2023 Program Participant surveys
 3. Survey of all applicant organizations (including funded and not funded)
 4. Internal key informant interviews with government officials
 5. External key informant interviews with funded organization representatives
 6. Focus groups with youth participants (including Photovoice exercise²⁰), and
 7. Web analytics.

Evaluation limitations

Of note, the administrative data, specifically the “Policy Analysis Research and Evaluation” data for Canada Service Corps was available from 2021 to 2022 onwards. Therefore, over the 5-year evaluation period until 2022 to 2023, this administrative data was available for only the last 2 years. This limits the ability of this report to give conclusive trends about results (further discussed in Section 8).

Further, administrative data collected by the Program typically informs the profile of participants and immediate outcomes following their participation. Therefore, this helps contextualize the contribution of the Program towards its expected outcomes. However, from an evaluation perspective, one of the limitations is the lack of a counterfactual to inform and understand what would have happened in the absence of the Program. Without a counterfactual to compare against, any observed outcomes cannot be confidently attributed to the Program. That is, would the youth have participated in civic engagement activities in the absence of the Program. Although qualitative lines of evidence carried out in this evaluation helped gain a more in-depth understanding of youth experiences, results from qualitative research cannot be generalized to the entire population. The evaluation matrix and methodology, including limitations, are further outlined in Appendix C and D.

The subsequent sections (4 to 8) of the report present the key findings from the evaluation on the:

- ongoing need for and relevance of the Program
- Program’s immediate outcome
- Program’s impact on youth and communities
- Program’s implementation, and
- performance measurement of the Program.

4. Ongoing need for and relevance of the Program

4.1 Community-led programming, which the Program supports, can play a role in fostering youth civic engagement, and complement school-led activities

The Program’s aim is to support a vision of Canada where youth become active citizens within their communities and support a culture of service across Canada. Among the literature reviewed, a recent report from Statistics Canada (2022) noted that civic engagement among youth is an important area to examine. It has a significant impact on youth development in terms of learning rights and

²⁰ Photovoice is a qualitative research method that combines photos and accompanying words generated by participant, and was used to illustrate the impacts of the Program.

responsibilities, and effects on their health and well-being.²¹ For instance, a longitudinal study demonstrates that extracurricular involvement in adolescence was associated with civic engagement across adulthood.²² A form of civic engagement is volunteering.

According to Statistics Canada (2021)²³, volunteerism is the participation in purposeful helping activities without monetary compensation. It can involve various activities taking place occasionally, or a more consistent commitment such as a weekly commitment to a specific cause. Volunteering benefits groups, persons, or the community by providing support on a diverse breadth of causes. For example, this can range from health care, education, fire and rescue to the arts and sports). Volunteerism can either be mediated by organizations (formal volunteering) or be direct help without the involvement of an organization or group (informal volunteering). The formal volunteer rate in Canada is 46% among youth aged 15 to 30, compared with 44% for those aged 31 to 46 and 38% among those aged 47 and older.²⁴ The higher rate of formal volunteering for youth may be partly influenced by “mandatory” volunteering required by school or some other way.

In Canada, schools play an important role in promoting civic participation among youth through the curricula and programs that they provide, such as mandatory service programs. Some provinces and territories require secondary school students to complete a minimum number of volunteer hours prior to graduation. For example, Ontario secondary school students must complete at least 40 volunteer hours to receive their diploma²⁵. However, this does not mean that the school provides these opportunities directly; students must still navigate the available networks to fulfill this requirement.

Access to civic engagement opportunities and the ways in which youth engage civically are affected by socioeconomic factors.²⁶ Given that, community-led programming, which the Program supports, can play a role in fostering youth civic engagement, and complement school-led activities. In particular, the

²¹Statistics Canada. (2022). “Chapter 6: Political participation, civic engagement and caregiving among youth in Canada” in *Portrait of Youth in Canada: Data Report*. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/42-28-0001/2021001/article/00006-eng.htm>.

²²Greenfield, E.A. and S. M. Moorman. (2017). “Extracurricular Involvement in High School and Later-Life Participation in Voluntary Associations.” *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B*, Volume 73, Issue 3. Pp. 482-491. Retrieved from https://academic.oup.com/psychsocgerontology/article/73/3/482/2926138?itm_medium=sidebar&itm_source=trendmd-widget&itm_campaign=The_Journals_of_Gerontology%253A_Series_B&itm_content=The_Journals_of_Gerontology%253A_Series_B_0&login=true.

²³Statistics Canada. (2021). *Volunteering counts: Formal and informal contributions of Canadians in 2018*. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2021001/article/00002-eng.htm>.

²⁴Statistics Canada. (2022). *Portrait of youth in Canada: Political participation and civic engagement*. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2022036-eng.htm>.

²⁵Government of Ontario (2023). Volunteering in Ontario. Retrieved from <https://www.ontario.ca/page/volunteering-ontario>.

²⁶Abdelaal, N., C. Kemeni, and K. Bardeesy. (2022). “Knocking on the Door”: Youth Civic Engagement and its Impact on Social Connectedness and Wellness.” Retrieved from https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5fec97c81c227637fcd788af/t/636c9ec36328e25b234bd5fc/1668062919450/CivicEngagementReport_V8.pdf.

Program was designed to encourage outreach to under-served groups of youth who may not have had the opportunity to offer service in their communities. Youth from Indigenous and under-served groups are also less likely to complete secondary and post-secondary education,²⁷ which impacts their ability to access volunteer service opportunities through school. The literature review noted that volunteering can be a means to reduce inequalities, especially in vulnerable communities²⁸. Community engagement and volunteering is a recognized way for youth, including marginalized youth, to develop skills that are relevant to the labour market and to promote greater civic engagement and inclusion. Volunteerism serves as a particularly important method of accelerating the social integration of under-served groups of youth by helping to reduce stigma, discrimination, and social isolation. However, barriers to volunteerism continue to exist for Indigenous and under-served groups²⁹, which is further discussed in Section 5.

4.2 The Program was described as unique and valuable by most recipients

Most funded organization representatives interviewed stated that their programs would not exist without funding from the Program. The remaining funded organization representatives felt that their programs would exist but in a much smaller capacity. Further, funded organization representatives interviewed and youth focus group participants both felt that no other programs would offer this type of funding opportunity if the Program did not exist. Indeed, most felt that the Program was unique in that it does not duplicate or overlap with other programs. Only a few felt that it was complementary to others (such as provincial or school-led programs – see text box above).

Of note, almost all the organization representatives interviewed also received funding from other Government of Canada’ initiatives in the past 5 years. The majority received funding from other ESDC programs (such as Canada Summer Jobs).

²⁷ Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC). (2021). *Research summary – Education and training experiences of Indigenous People*. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/corporate/reports/research/education-training-indigenous.html>.

Statistics Canada. (2021). “Chapter 3: Youth and Education in Canada” in *Portrait of Youth in Canada: Data Report*. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/42-28-0001/2021001/article/00003-eng.htm>.

Statistics Canada. (2022). *Educational participation and attainment of lesbian, gay and bisexual people in Canada*. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-28-0001/2022001/article/00001-eng.htm>.


Enns, S.A. (2018). The impact of poverty on children’s educational potential. Retrieved from <https://open.library.ubc.ca/soa/cIRcle/collections/graduateresearch/42591/items/1.0437723>.

²⁸ Cruz, S., M.R. Ferreira, A. Borges, and B. Casais. (2022). *Barriers to volunteering in the field of intellectual disability: a cluster analysis*. Retrieved from <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12208-022-00343-5>.

²⁹ Lindsay, S. (2016). “A scoping review of the experiences, benefits and challenges involved in volunteer work among youth and young adults with a disability.” *Disability and Rehabilitation* 38 (16). Pp. 1533-46. Retrieved from <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26678410/>.

Hylton, K., R. N. Lawton, and W. Watt. (2019). *Review of Literature, in the ABC of BAME new, mixed method research into black, Asian and minority ethnic groups and their motivations and barriers to volunteering*. Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/38498689/The_ABC_of_BAME_New_mixed_method_research_into_black_Asian_and_minority_ethnic_groups_and_their_motivations_and_barriers_to_volunteering.

Southby, K. and J. South (2016). *Volunteering, inequalities and barriers to volunteering: a rapid evidence review*. Project Report. Volunteering Matters. Retrieved from <https://eprints.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/id/eprint/3434/>.



Nearly all youth focus group participants felt that the service opportunities available through the Program address some needs and gaps both in youth civic participation and in their community. Most of the youth focus group participants could not think of any other service programs like Canada Service Corps. This was aligned with what was reported by funded organization representatives interviewed, who reported that they could also not think of any other similar programs.

Among funded organizations who responded to the applicant organization survey, approximately half (48%) reported that their projects would “not at all” have achieved the same results without funding from the Program. Moreover, 22% reported that they would have only “a little extent”.

1. Program’s immediate outcome

The Program’s immediate expected outcome was that diverse youth were able to participate in accessible and inclusive service placements and youth-led (micro-grant) projects. Indicators used to measure this included:

- the percentage of diverse youth in the Program, and
- the diversity of the participants across demographics proportionate to the diversity of youth across Canada.

The findings are presented below.

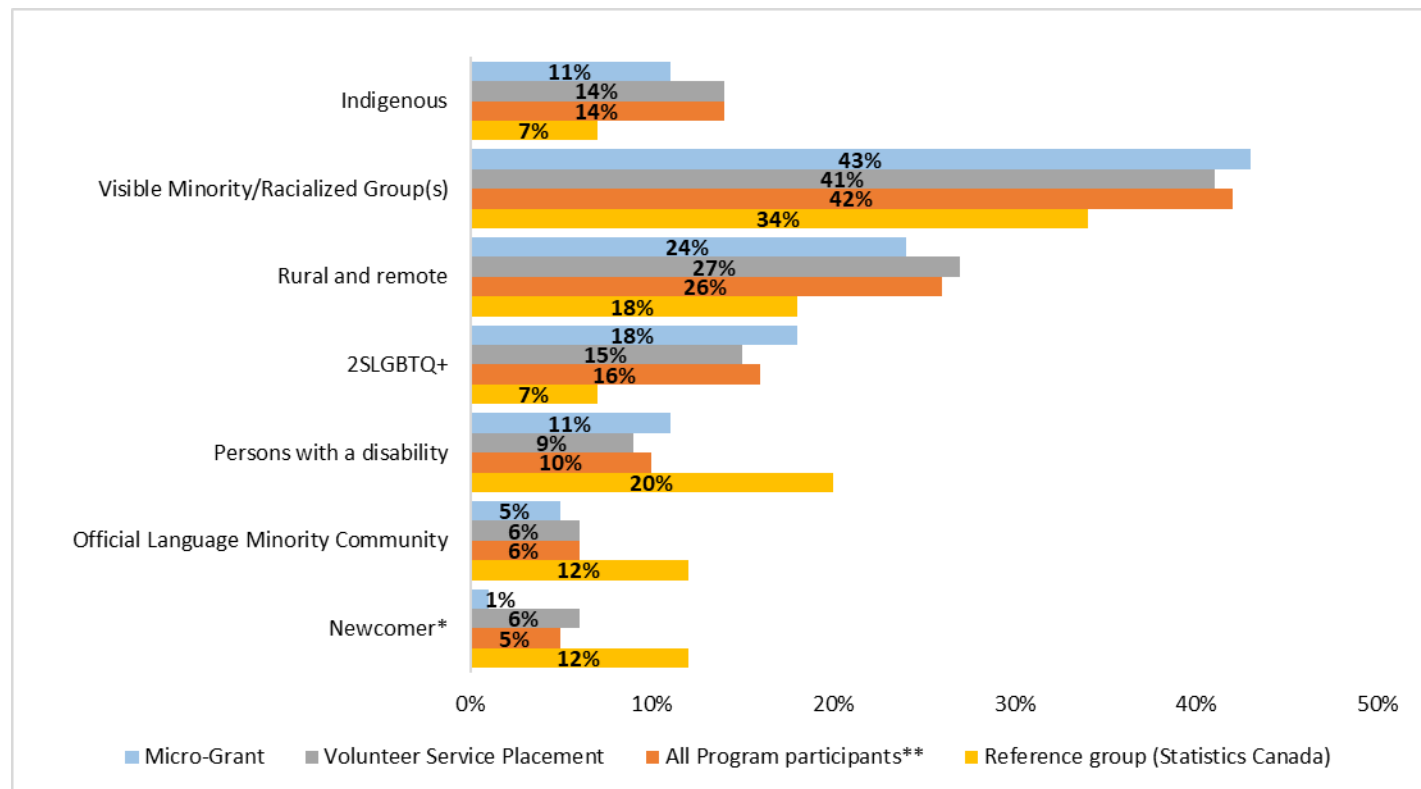
5.1 The Program is reaching Indigenous and many under-served youth populations

According to the Program’s “Policy Analysis Research and Evaluation” data, 79% (n=12,953) of participating youth (n=16,431) in fiscal years 2021 to 2022 and 2022 to 2023 identified as 1 or more of the under-served groups targeted by the Program.³⁰ More specifically:

- 14% as Indigenous
- 42% identified as belonging to a visible minority/racialized group
- 26% as living in a rural/remote area
- 16% as 2SLGBTQIA+
- 10% as a person living with a disability
- 6% as living in an official language minority community, and
- 5% as newcomers (see Figure 1).

³⁰ This data only includes what is already collected by organizations. Some organizations may not collect certain data points, and some youth may choose not to share certain data points.

Figure 1: Share of participating youth who identified as under-served youth groups, in 2021 to 2022 and 2022 to 2023



Source: Program’s “Policy Analysis, Research and Evaluation” data (February 16, 2024)

*Information on newcomer youth was collected as of June 2022, and was not available for fiscal year 2021 to 2022. Also, the reference group for newcomer youth may not be fully accurate for comparison purposes. Only those who are citizens, permanent residents, or refugee status are eligible to participate in the Program.

**All Program participants includes Accelerator Micro-grants and Micro-grants Diversity streams.

For comparison purposes, the share of participants is presented alongside the profile of the Canadian youth population at large³¹. As shown, further efforts could be made to understand and address barriers for youth with disabilities, official language minority youth and newcomer youth:

- In 2022, 20% of youth in Canada aged 15 to 24 had a disability³²; however, about 10% of Program participants identified as a member of this group.
 - This difference should be interpreted with caution since some youth may not self-identify as having a disability. However, they would be considered as having one based on the screening questions of the Canadian Survey on Disability.

³¹The reference group may not include the full age group (15 to 30) of the Program participants (15 to 30). Further specified in the text.

³² Statistics Canada (2023). *Canadian Survey on Disability, 2017 to 2022*. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/231201/dq231201b-eng.htm>.

- According to the 2021 Census, 12% of youth in Canada aged 15 to 18 were eligible for instruction in the minority official language³³; whereas 6% of youth participants identified as a member of this group.
- Further 12% of youth in Canada aged 15 to 24 were recent immigrants (newcomers) in Canada³⁴, whereas 6% of youth participants identified as a member of this group.

However, the Program appears to be reaching many of the other groups:

- While Indigenous youth (aged 15 to 24) in Canada represent about 7% of Canadian youth as per the 2021 Census, about 14% of Program participants identified as Indigenous.³⁵
- Approximately one-third (34%) of youth in Canada aged 15 to 24 identified as members of a visible minority³⁶, while 42% of the Program participants identified as a member of this group.
- The total rural population (including all age groups) in Canada is about 18%, while 26% of Program participants identified in this group.³⁷
- About 7% of youth aged 15 to 34 identified as 2SLGBTQ+³⁸, whereas 16% of the Program participants identified in this group.
- More than half of the participating youth were between the ages of 15 to 19 (about 56%) and identified as female (about 57%) across the 2 fiscal years and for both types of volunteer service opportunities (not shown in Figure 1).

The Program's "Policy Analysis Research and Evaluation" data did not capture information on low-income status for fiscal years 2021 to 2022 and 2022 to 2023. However, according to the 2021 to 2022 and 2022 to 2023 CSC Participant Surveys, 37% identified as living on low-income.

Moreover, 72% of funded organizations from the 2022 Call for Proposals confirmed that at least 50% of their organization's leadership³⁹ is composed of Indigenous and/or under-served populations. More than one-quarter of funded organizations (29%) confirmed that at least 50% of their organization's leadership is composed of youth aged between 15 and 30⁴⁰.

³³ Statistics Canada (2022). *Eligibility for instruction in the minority official language by age and gender: Canada, provinces and territories, census divisions and census subdivisions*. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=9810053401>.

³⁴ Statistics Canada (2022). *Focus on Geography Series, 2021 Census of Population*. Retrieved from <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/as-sa/fogs-spg/page.cfm?lang=E&topic=9&dguid=2021A000011124>.

³⁵ Statistics Canada (2022). *Indigenous identity by Registered or Treaty Indian status and residence by Indigenous geography: Canada, provinces and territories*. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=9810026401&pickMembers%5B0%5D=1.1&pickMembers%5B1%5D=2.1&pickMembers%5B2%5D=3.1&pickMembers%5B3%5D=4.1&pickMembers%5B4%5D=5.1>.


³⁶ Statistics Canada (2023). *Visible minority by gender and age: Census divisions*. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=9810035201>.

³⁷ Statistics Canada (2022). *Population counts, population centre size groups and rural areas*. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=9810000801>.

³⁸ ESDC calculation based on Statistics Canada (2022). *Canada at a Glance, 2022: LGBTQ2+ people*. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/12-581-x/2022001/sec6-eng.htm>.

³⁹ Director or above and, if applicable, their organization's governance body such as Board of Directors.

⁴⁰ The accelerator micro-grant agreements were not included in these calculations as the organizations were not asked to answer the applicable questions when applying.



More than half of the interviewed funded organization representatives reported that they do not have challenges reaching their target populations. This was reported mainly to be due to their strong ties within local communities. When organization representatives reported recruitment difficulties, it was most often related to COVID-19. Other difficulties included parental consent, youth interest/engagement, and relationships with the communities. Respondents noted that youth have many competing priorities which may affect parental consent and/or youth interest/engagement (for example, academic and work). Further, organization representatives reported more difficulties if they were not well established within their communities (such as newer organizations).

5.1.2 Canada Service Corps – Program reach by province and territory

Table 4 examines the distribution of Program participants by provinces and territories relative to the distribution of Canadian Youth at-large by stream. This information is based on the Program’s “Policy Analysis Research and Evaluation” data for fiscal year 2021 to 2022 and 2022 to 2023. However, it is important to note that the Program does not currently have targets established for participants by province/territory. The analysis below is for comparison purposes only.

- **Volunteer service placements (National and Regional):** Relative to the profile of Canadian youth, the shares of Program participants were higher for British Columbia, Northwest Territories and Nunavut, and lower for Ontario and Quebec.
- **Micro grants:** Relative to the profile of Canadian youth, the shares of Program participants were higher in the Atlantic provinces and the Territories and relatively lower in Quebec.

There is a need to further examine how the operational and funding landscape across provinces/territories may impact the distribution of Program participants in service placements and micro-grants. For example, Act M-30⁴¹ in Quebec may be a factor that effects an organization’s decision to apply or ability to receive funding.


⁴¹ Organizations located in Quebec who receive more than 50% of their funding from the Government of Quebec cannot enter into any agreement with another government in Canada or one of its departments or government agencies, or with a federal public agency, without the prior authorization of the Quebec government. More information about Act M-30 can be found at the Secrétariat du Québec aux relations canadiennes (2021). *Approval and Authorization Process: What is a Canadian Intergovernmental Agreement Within the Meaning of An Act Respecting the Ministère du Conseil Exécutif (Act M-30)?* Retrieved from <https://www.sqrc.gouv.qc.ca/relations-canadiennes/ententes-intergouvernementales/processus-approbation-autorisation-en.asp>.

Table 4: Distribution of youth participants in the volunteer service opportunities (aggregated for fiscal years 2021 to 2022 and 2022 to 2023)* relative to the distribution of youth in each Province/Territory

Province/Territory	Volunteer Service Placements (N= 13,739)	Micro-Grants (N=2,463)	Proportion of Youth 15 to 30, Census 2021
Ontario	30%	36%	40%
British Columbia	21%	12%	13%
Quebec	13%	10%	21%
Alberta	11%	10%	12%
Manitoba	6%	4%	4%
New Brunswick	3%	7%	2%
Nova Scotia	2%	7%	3%
Saskatchewan	2%	4%	3%
Newfoundland and Labrador	2%	3%	1%
Northwest Territories	3%	2%	0.1%
Prince Edward Island	1%	3%	0.4%
Nunavut	3%	2%	0.1%
Yukon	0	1%	0.1%

*Data extracted from the Program's "Policy Analysis, Research and Evaluation" data on February 16, 2023. Rounded to the nearest percent.

To promote equitable distribution of contributions funding across the country under the Service Placements Regional stream, the Program developed a new funding allocation model for the regional organizations. This was based on the proportion of youth 15 to 30 by province and territory as per the Census population. This model was used for the 2022 Call for Proposals and will be used again for the 2023 Call for Proposals. The Program officials indicated that they will re-evaluate the regional funding allocation model in future years to target Indigenous and under-served youth in service.



5.2 While the majority of focus group and surveyed youth participants indicated that they completed their volunteer service opportunities, early results pointed to relatively lower completion rates among certain groups.

Youth focus group participants generally described the environment in which they worked as suitable in the sense that they were able to participate fully in their volunteer service placement and complete their micro-grant project as designed. In addition, participants indicated that they had generally received the level of support needed to successfully complete their placement or project.


- Potential bias should be noted for youth participants. Those who took part in the focus groups and completed the survey may have had a more positive experience with their volunteer service opportunities.

All micro-grant youth recipients that participated in the focus group described the expectations and deliverables associated with the funded project as reasonable. Aside from the effect of the pandemic, feedback on the project's environment and its impact on the ability to complete it or fully participate in the placement was positive. A majority of focus group participants who took part in a volunteer service placement did so through the flexible stream. All but one said they completed their service placement and there was agreement that the placements were the right length of time. The main reasons for describing their placement as the right length of time were due to placement fit with participants' academic schedules, summer breaks or time off from studies.

Similarly, almost all (91%) of the 2021 to 2022 and 2022 to 2023 CSC Participant Survey respondents (N=691) completed their micro-grant projects. About half of the respondents across fiscal years invested about the same number of hours as they had originally planned in their micro-grants. Nearly half invested more time than they originally planned. As for the volunteer service placements, 69% of the CSC Participant Survey respondents completed their flexible placement within the required timeframe. Most (81%) of the youth who participated in a full-time placement were able to complete the required hours.

More than half of the funded organization representatives interviewed also reported high completion rates. The remaining funded organization representatives reported difficulties with completion mainly due to COVID-19.

The most common challenges reported amongst youth that participated in these volunteer service opportunities were working with the organization and administrative challenges, and funding constraints for those that participated in the micro-grant projects. According to the results of the 2021 to 2022 CSC Participant Survey, there were some key differences in socio-demographics of those who did not complete their flexible volunteer service placements. This may suggest additional barriers for these groups. Specifically, Indigenous youth, non-binary youth, youth living with disabilities, those from official



language minority communities and 2SLGBTQIA+ youth were less likely to complete their flexible placements compared to their counterparts.⁴²

5.3 Common barriers to participation point to time constraints due to competing priorities such as school and work as well as financial factors. Still, unique barriers to volunteer service exist for Indigenous and under-served youth

The Program considers service placements and youth-led projects to be “accessible and inclusive” when 1 or more barriers to participation in service have been addressed. Even though the Program has been able to reach Indigenous and most under-served youth populations (see Section 5.1), information gathered from interviewed and surveyed participants point to some under-served groups experiencing more barriers than others. It is important to note that there is a difference between factors affecting the ability of youth to take part in the Program in the first place and ability of youth to complete their projects/placements.

Findings from the applicant organization survey and 2021 to 2022 and 2022 to 2023 CSC Participant Surveys identified the following as the top barriers for youth to take part in volunteer service opportunities (see Figure 2)⁴³:

- lack of time due to employment or academic commitments
- lack of culturally inclusive opportunities
- lack of financial support (such as transportation costs or meals), and
- lack of compensation for time⁴⁴.

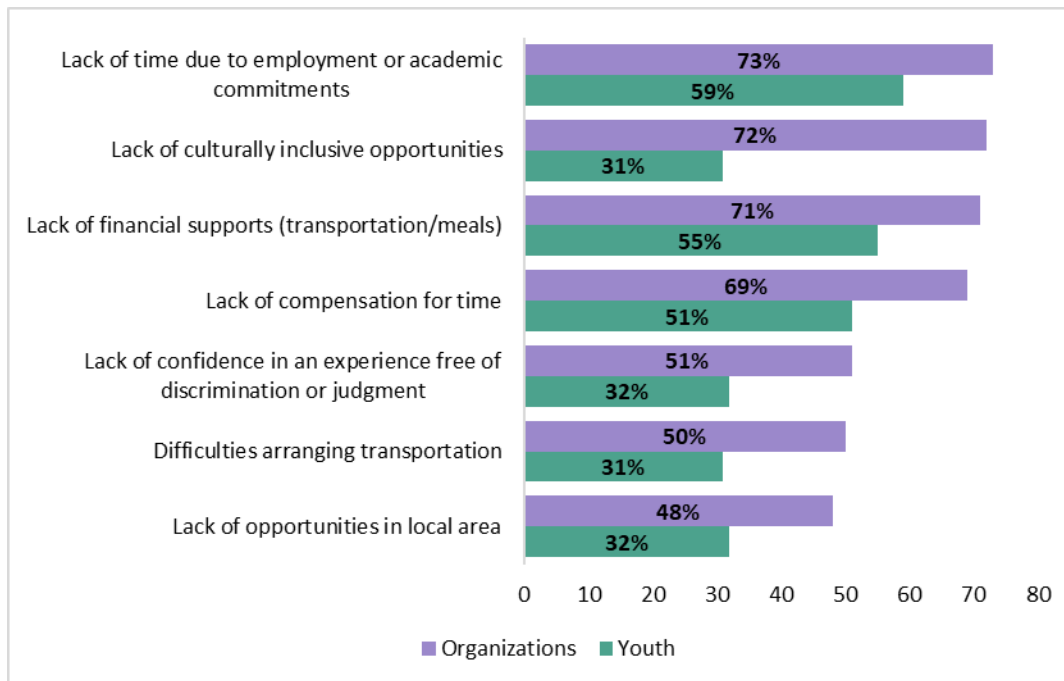
While 72% of applicant organization survey respondents reported lack of culturally inclusive opportunities as a barrier, this was a barrier reported by an aggregated 31% of CSC Participant Survey respondents.

⁴² “Counterparts” refers to those not part of the identified category. In this case, non-Indigenous, cisgender, without disabilities, those from non-official language minority communities, and non-2SLGBTQIA+, respectively.

⁴³ Throughout this document, lack of financial support includes non-financial incentives, such as transportation or meals; lack of compensation for time includes financial incentives, such as stipends or honoraria.

⁴⁴ Although lack of compensation for time was identified as 1 of the main barriers, financial compensation is not the intent of the Canada Service Corps as it does not align with the objectives of the Program.

Figure 2: Barriers identified by youth and applicant organizations



Source: CSC Participant Survey 2021 to 2022 and 2022 to 2023, N=691; Applicant organization survey N=158.

Similarly, funded organization representatives interviewed noted that the most common reason for youth to not complete their volunteer service placements was too many hours required/not having enough time to complete their projects due to other commitments.

Youth focus group participants also most often identified financial factors and lack of time/time constraints as the main barriers. They noted that the need to work due to financial instability or insecurity can impact the amount of time they can devote to volunteer service opportunities. This may make it unrealistic to take part in an unpaid activity. Further, lack of time/time constraints were often linked to financial constraints. The participants reported that they must work during the summer months to help finance their studies, and the summer months are a period during which many service opportunities are available. Lack of time/time constraints were also associated with other priorities, such as family or academic responsibilities.

As found in the literature, defining youth based on the age cohort of 15 to 30 provides for a broad spectrum of youth experiences, particularly in terms of academic and financial obligations. For instance, in 2022, 83% of youth aged 15 to 19 were in education, whereas the proportion was only at 13% for those aged 25 to 29.⁴⁵ Older youth might be more likely to be full-time employed, preventing them from participating in a full-time service placement opportunity.

⁴⁵ Statistics Canada (2023). *Percentage of 15-to 29-year-olds in education and not in education by labour force status, highest level of education attained, age group and sex*. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3710019601>.

Applicant organization survey respondents, interviewed funded organization representatives, and the reviewed literature also identified a lack of culturally appropriate programming for youth, especially Indigenous youth. Moreover, interviewed funded organization representatives and reviewed literature⁴⁶⁴⁷ stated that the Western concept of volunteering may not accurately reflect the idea of giving back within an Indigenous context. It was found that volunteering can often take on an ethnocentric focus. This may lead to their participation being insufficiently recognized, supported, or valued by society. According to the literature, Indigenous people are less likely to go through formal volunteer channels since they did not often define their volunteer activities as such⁴⁸. Further, the term “volunteering” has varying or little significance despite being an inherent part of Indigenous culture⁴⁹⁵⁰. The term “volunteering” has connotations of formality and is most often thought of in terms of structured activities carried out within organizations⁵¹. Since the Program uses the term “service” to go beyond “volunteering,” definitions of volunteer activities should be clarified with participants to ensure common understanding of what constitutes volunteer work⁵².

Reviewed literature asserts that a lack of culturally appropriate programming can also be related to issues with discrimination and racism for Indigenous and visible minority youth⁵³. Institutional factors, such as a “stigmatizing or exclusionary context” were also noted in the literature⁵⁴. Similarly, funded organization representatives and government officials interviewed reported a lack of trust in the government and formal institutions among Indigenous youth.

Indigenous youth focus group participants⁵⁵(N=3) identified lack of communication and outreach as 1 of the main challenges to their participation. They felt that mentorship opportunities and links to community organizations/networks among Indigenous youth within their communities would improve the Program.

In addition, the lack of accessible volunteer service opportunities, especially issues with arranging transportation, was identified for youth with disabilities and youth living in rural or remote communities. Interviews with funded organization representatives highlighted transportation issues for those living

⁴⁶ Estes, M.L., K.J. Sittner, K.X. Hill, M.B. Gonzalez, and T. Handeland (2023). “Community engagement and giving back among North American Indigenous youth.” *Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship* 15 (2). Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10101223/#>.

⁴⁷ Kerr L, Savelsberg H, Sparrow S, & Tedmanson D (2001). *Experiences and perceptions of volunteering in Indigenous and non-English speaking background communities*. Retrieved from <https://unisa.edu.au/SysSiteAssets/epserver-6-files/documents/eass/hri/sprg/volunteering-report.pdf>.

⁴⁸ Native Women’s Association of Canada (n.d.). *Fact Sheet #1 – Findings: Volunteering Among Aboriginal Peoples – Ways of Encouraging Volunteerism*. Retrieved from <https://www.nwac.ca/assets-knowledge-centre/2012-NWAC-Volunteering-Among-Aboriginal-Peoples-and-Encouraging-Volunteerism-Fact-Sheet.pdf>.

⁴⁹ Ibid in Kerr L, Savelsberg H, Sparrow S, & Tedmanson D (2001).

⁵⁰ Ibid in Native Women’s Association of Canada (n.d.).

⁵¹ Ibid in Kerr L, Savelsberg H, Sparrow S, & Tedmanson D (2001).

⁵² Ibid in Native Women’s Association of Canada (n.d.).

⁵³ Mutamba, M. (2022). *An Anti-Racist Approach to Volunteering*. Retrieved from https://volunteerberta.ab.ca/app/uploads/an-anti-racist-approach-to-volunteering_zpG1k3c.pdf.

⁵⁴ Southby, K., J. South and A-M Bagnall. (2019). A Rapid Review of Barriers to Volunteering for Potentially Disadvantaged Groups and Implications for Health Inequalities. Pp. 907-920 in *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* Volume 30.

⁵⁵ These findings cannot be generalized due to the small sample size.

outside of downtown areas since that is where many opportunities are located. Youth focus group participants also reported lack of access to public transportation. Interviews with government officials also pointed to issues with the physical accessibility of buildings and events. Further, accessibility of materials was also noted as a concern (for example, the reading level of materials or support for those with learning disabilities during the volunteer service opportunity). Further, funded organization representatives noted that it is not typical for organizations to be equipped to provide services to youth with disabilities. Literature noted that the cost and availability of transportation in rural and remote areas is a major barrier for recruitment and retention of volunteers⁵⁶. Difficulties arranging transportation also create barriers for youth with disabilities⁵⁷. In addition, travel/transportation barriers have been identified for recent newcomers to Canada, especially women, who may lack confidence to navigate public transportation alone.⁵⁸

Indigenous focus group participants also had insights on how to attract more Indigenous youth to the Program. Specifically, they encouraged a strong emphasis on environmental issues and conservationism; allowing Indigenous youth to take the lead on projects; and disseminating/publicizing success stories of Indigenous youth involved in previous opportunities with the Program.

Further, there were some regional differences among organizations reporting barriers to increasing youth participation in volunteer service opportunities. For example:

- survey respondents in Quebec were more likely to report “lack of opportunities in official language of choice” and “language barriers”
- survey respondents in British Columbia were more likely to report “lack of time due to employment or academic commitments,” and
- survey respondents in the Prairies were more likely to report “lack of opportunities” in their local area as compared to other regions.

⁵⁶ Rural Ontario Institute (2017). “Rural Volunteerism: How Well is the Heart of Community Doing?” in *Rural Ontario Foresight Papers*. Retrieved from

https://www.ruralontarioinstitute.ca/uploads/userfiles/files/Rural%20Ontario%20Foresight%20Papers%202017_Volunteerism%20and%20Northern%20Perspective.pdf.

⁵⁷ Lindsay, S. (2016). “A scoping review of the experiences, benefits and challenges involved in volunteer work among youth and young adults with a disability.” *Disability and Rehabilitation* 38 (16). Pp. 1533-46. Retrieved from <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26678410/>.

5.4 Organizations are using Program funding to help youth overcome barriers to civic engagement. Interviewed organization representatives and participants felt other forms of support could be provided to reduce barriers to participation

When applicant organizations are developing their project proposals, they can refer to the Applicant Guide to understand the scope of a funding opportunity. This includes understanding the eligibility of applicants, project activities and costs. This information in turn helps organizations to ensure that the proposals they develop are within scope, while having the flexibility to propose projects that best reflect their operational and community needs. When a project is approved for funding, organizations can adjust eligible activities and costs during negotiations with the Department. Further, eligible activities and costs can be adjusted over the course of their funded duration, should this need arise. Current supports offered by the Program include participant costs and supports under all streams, such as:

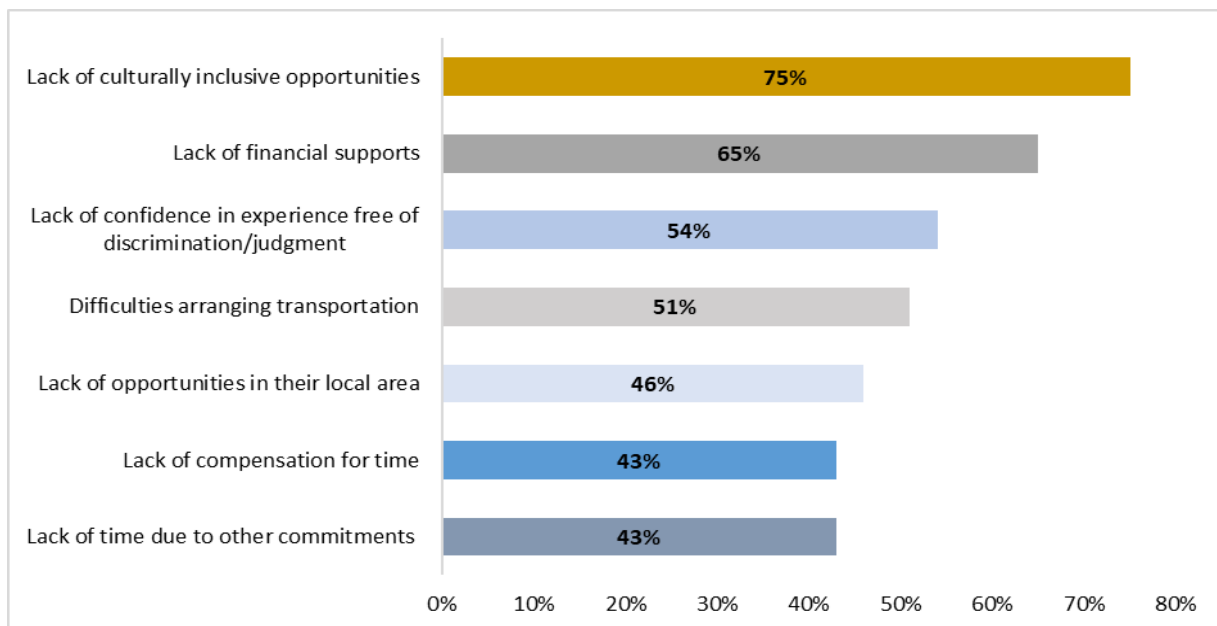
- living expenses
- equipment or services that enable virtual service opportunities
- mentorship
- dependent care
- transportation
- accommodation
- specialized services or referrals to appropriate resources, and
- arrangements or equipment for persons with disabilities⁵⁹.

While living expenses are an eligible cost under the Program, accommodation costs need to be directly linked to the activity. For example, this could include paying for accommodation if the full-time placement is away from the participant's principal address). The living expenses eligible under the Program are not designed to substitute or act as an employment or income support. This is consistent with standard Grants and Contributions administration.

Based on the applicant organization survey, Figure 3 below shows how funded organizations sought to help youth overcome barriers to civic engagement with the Program funding. Surveyed organization representatives were most likely to try to use the Program funding to help youth overcome the barriers identified in Figure 2. Namely, 75% of surveyed organizations tried to help youth overcome lack of culturally inclusive opportunities and 65% for lack of financial supports. This is directly linked to the Program objectives.

⁵⁹ Canada Service Corps - Projects for youth-serving organizations – Eligibility Information (2018 Applicant Guide); Applicant guide: Funding for the [stream title] – Canada Service Corps (2022 Applicant Guide)

Figure 3: Barriers funded organizations tried to help youth overcome with the Program funding*



Source: Applicant organization survey, N=158.

*Only barriers mentioned by 40% or more organizations were included in this figure.

Despite current participant supports that are eligible costs under the Program, interviewed funded organizations, surveyed applicant organizations and youth focus group participants believe more could be offered. They were not aware of some of the current supports offered or were unclear about eligibility requirements for such supports. Their suggestions for additional supports to reduce barriers align with what is already available under all streams. As shown in Figure 2, 71% of organization survey respondents and 55% of youth survey respondents reported lack of financial supports, including transportation, as 1 of the main barriers for participation in volunteer service opportunities. Yet, costs for transportation can be covered by the Program if clearly requested and linked to the project proposal.⁶⁰ As shown in Figure 3, 51% of surveyed funded organizations tried to address the transportation barrier with the Program funding. Arrangement of transportation for persons with disabilities could also be covered as part of the Program' costs.

Moreover, over one-third of surveyed applicant organizations who provided a written response (N=64) felt that the Program was not doing enough to address barriers faced by under-served populations. This was especially noted for low-income youth or youth who are struggling with mental health. They stated that volunteering is often a luxury that low-income youth cannot afford, and that mental health is becoming more of an issue. They felt that the Program could increase flexibility in funding. For example, they felt that the Program could better align with youth availability, such as fewer hours or a longer timeframe to complete their hours to better accommodate work and academic schedules. They also felt

⁶⁰ As per the current Terms and Conditions of the Program, a funded organizations could not make a request and receive financial support for transportation if was not part of their initial project proposal.

that the Program should allow for more non-financial incentives. This is even though 70% of surveyed organizations reported that they used non-financial incentives, supports and/or recognition to attract and retain youth. Non-financial incentives could include completion certificates, digital badges, and networking opportunities).

Similarly, more than half of interviewed funded organization representatives felt that more could be done to address lack of time. To add, close to one-third believed that financial incentives⁶¹ should be offered. This is further reflected by the results of the 2022 to 2023 CSC Participant Survey, which highlight that many youth participants reported that the Program could be improved through:

- increased financial support (59%)
- more hours available to complete service opportunities (52%), and
- increased training opportunities offered by organizations (47%).

Some youth focus group participants that participated in micro-grant projects also noted that offering honoraria and/or financial support would help address challenges to accessing meaningful and inclusive service opportunities. They further pointed to the need to have access to longer-term/multi-year projects.⁶²

When compared to a similar program in the United States, the Canada Service Corps does not offer similar financial incentives/support. For example, AmeriCorps⁶³ is the American federal volunteer service program and offers money for college and trade school, loan deferment and interest forbearance. AmeriCorps provides financial support without financially compensating individuals.


Further, focus group participants and 2022 to 2023 CSC Participant Survey respondents felt that the Program could increase outreach and awareness efforts for volunteer service opportunities. For example, focus group participants stated that the Program could:

- actively partner and coordinate with young people already involved in similar activities
- work with existing youth networks and go into or extend support to rural/remote communities
- have more outreach to schools and organizations working with youth
- raise awareness year-round, or
- include other outreach channels beyond the Internet, such as paper format.

⁶¹ Though this is noted by both organizations and youth participants, it is important to note that financial compensation is not an eligible expense or goal of the Program.

⁶² Prior to 2023, the Program did not have access to multi-year funding which impacted recipient organizations' ability to scale up as they did not know from one year to the next if they would be funded. Notably, however, for the 2023 Call for Proposals, more funding stability through longer-term funding agreements can now be offered.

⁶³ AmeriCorps (n.d.). *Members and Volunteers: Your Benefits*. Retrieved from: <https://americorps.gov/members-volunteers/your-benefits>.



Surveyed applicant organizations felt they could reach more youth with more financial supports. However, interviews with funded organization representatives indicated that many organizations are not taking full advantage of the supports that are available.

5.5 Information about the Program funding opportunities was accessible to organizations, but the extent of youth's ease of access to information and awareness of the Program is mixed

Most surveyed applicant organizations and interviewed funded organization representatives indicated that they heard about the Program through the Program website/online searches or through word of mouth/from other organizations. Very few survey respondents (3%) and no funded organization representatives interviewed heard about the Program through the YDG platform. The YDG platform was implemented in fiscal year 2021 to 2022.

More than half of funded organization representatives interviewed felt that information was easily accessible, while the rest did not speak to this question. Additionally, 63% of applicant organization survey representatives reported they were “somewhat to fully satisfied” with searching for information about the Program on the Government of Canada website.⁶⁴

As per internal research, 40% of non-volunteering youth cite a lack of information regarding how to become involved with volunteer service as a main reason for not engaging in volunteer service. According to focus group participants, youth were most likely to report learning about the Program opportunities through word of mouth, social media, and organizations. Some also noted that they heard about the Program through school, online searches, or newsletters. Micro-grant recipients more often said they learned about the initiative through an organization, while participants in a service placement more often said they found out about the opportunity through social media. Interviews with funded organization representatives highlighted the potential for the Program to conduct more outreach/promotion of the Program through schools and other youth-centred events. Organization representatives interviewed felt that more support to reach youth directly by going out into the field would be advantageous for them in terms of recruitment. Additionally, interviews with Government officials also illustrated opportunity to partner with schools or setting up booths at local events to increase awareness of the Program.

Youth focus group participants' views on the ease of accessing information/resources on these opportunities were mixed. The key factor affecting the ease of finding information/resources was the extent to which one was involved in or connected with networks and/or organizations familiar with pathways to such opportunities. Moreover, the literature noted that being part of a social network significantly increases the chance of formal volunteering.⁶⁵ Close to half (47%) of volunteers find

⁶⁴ For example, finding general information, attending information sessions, eligibility criteria, steps to apply for funding, and information they needed to give.

⁶⁵ Wang, L., L. Mook, and F. Handy (2017). “An Empirical Examination of Formal and Informal Volunteering in Canada.” Pp. 139-161 in *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* Volume 28.

opportunities through word of mouth⁶⁶. Further, 26% of Canadians under the age of 35 look online for opportunities⁶⁷, which may provide opportunity for the YDG to reach more youth.

According to web analytics, the number of unique visitors⁶⁸ on the Program home page⁶⁹ increased by about a quarter on the English and French websites (23% and 26%, respectively) between 2021 to 2022 and 2022 to 2023. From fiscal year 2021 to 2022 to 2022 to 2023, the number of unique visitors on the Program “about”⁷⁰ English and French websites more than doubled from:

- 2,849 to 7,851 unique visitors on the English website (266% increase), and
- 378 to 1,163 unique visitors (208% increase) on the French website.

In fiscal year 2022 to 2023, the website landing page was redesigned to feature the “about” page, which drew more attention due to the placement and colour of the button.

The YDG team’s efforts focused on designing and developing the Organization Platform, allowing the Program to publish service opportunities on the YDG and Program websites. The team also developed enhancements to the Search functionality on the YDG website. This allowed users to find service opportunities by keyword, name, and location to make it easier for youth to find opportunities relevant to them. A full list of YDG deliverables for the Program are available in Appendix E.

The share of traffic on the Program’s English and French home page by province and territory was generally reflective of the Program distribution of Canadian youth (see Table 4 in Section 4). From fiscal year 2021 to 2022 to 2022 to 2023, 51% of unique visitors were from Ontario, 15% from British Columbia, 14% from Quebec and 10% from Alberta. On the other hand, about 1% of unique visitors were from the Territories. Similar trends were observed for the YDG home page. Overall, there were 19,804 unique visitors on the YDG platform in 2021 to 2022, and 23,186 in 2022 to 2023, representing a 17% increase. Nevertheless, in fiscal year 2022 to 2023, about 1% of the unique visitors on all Canada Service Corps webpages were coming from the YDG platform (1 or more pages).

Additionally, while 82% of interviewed organization representatives reported notifying youth that their projects were funded by the Program, the CSC Participant Survey found that only about two-thirds (65%) of youth knew that their experience was funded by the Program. About one-fourth (24%) of survey respondents did not know that their experience was funded through the Program. Interviewed

⁶⁶ Anon. (n.d.) *The Canadian Volunteer Landscape*. Retrieved from https://volunteer.ca/vdemo/IssuesAndPublicPolicy_DOCS/Canadian%20volunteer%20landscape%20EN.pdf.

⁶⁷ Ibid in Anon. (n.d.) *The Canadian Volunteer Landscape*.

⁶⁸ There are limitations to assuming each “unique visitor” is truly unique, further discussed in Appendix C. More information about this metric can be found at Adobe Analytics (2024). *Unique Visitors*. Retrieved from <https://experienceleague.adobe.com/docs/analytics/components/metrics/unique-visitors.html?lang=en>.

⁶⁹ Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC). (2022). *Canada Service Corps*. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/youth/canada-service-corps.html>.

⁷⁰ Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC). (2022). *About the Canada Service Corps*. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/youth/canada-service-corps/about.html>.

organization representatives noted that just because they tell the youth does not mean that youth are aware or remember.

On the other hand, while a majority of the focus group participants knew that their service opportunity was part of the Program, few knew anything about the Program itself. The majority of interviewed government officials also felt that many youth participating in the Program were not aware that it was funded by the Government of Canada. Further, 73% of surveyed organizations observed increased awareness of opportunities for youth engagement in their community from a “good” to “full extent.”

“Hit and miss. Our staff definitely talk to them about it. We’ve made it clear as part of the curriculum that staff talk about it. And yet, when we survey young people like in our survey is the question, I think it was in the ESDC questions and we were able to see those responses. It’s kind of hit and miss. So whether young people make the connection or not, but we do. We do help them understand or try to help them understand where the money comes from, that it’s part of this bigger thing.”

—Program-Funded Organization Representative

6. Program’s impact on youth and communities

6.1 Most focus group and surveyed Program participants indicated that their experience helped them develop skills, meaningful connections and self-confidence

All focus group participants described their overall experience with the Program as positive or very positive and reported that they would recommend the Program to other young people. Nearly all focus group participants indicated that they have benefited from their experience in the Program. Additionally, 90% of CSC Participant Survey respondents rated their experience as somewhat to extremely positive. Similarly, all interviewed organization representatives believed that the Program had positive impacts on youth. The most common reason for surveyed organization representatives to recommend the Program to other organizations was the positive impacts on youth.

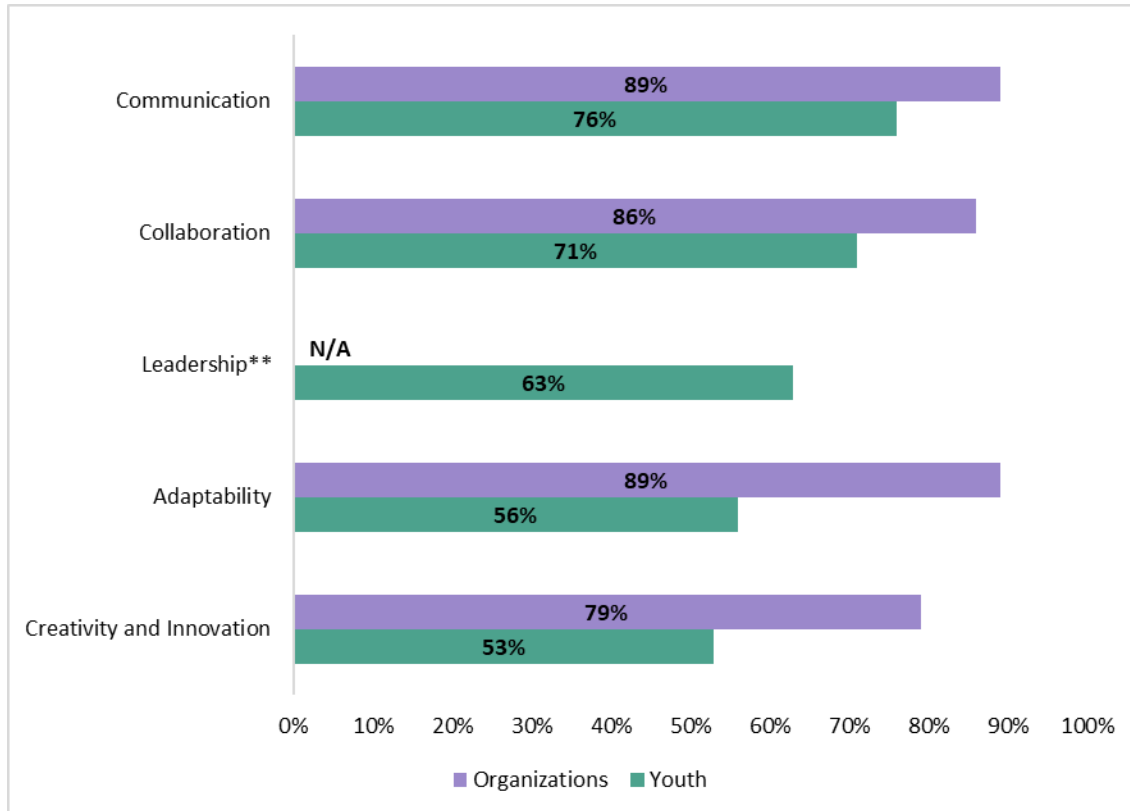
Virtually all focus group micro-grant participants who grew up in low-income households and had a disability said that they had a very positive experience. Most participants in a service placement who said they had a very positive experience were also low-income and identified as 2SLGBTQIA+.

6.1.1 Skills development

According to the results of the CSC Participant Surveys and the organization survey, youth participation in the Program helps with skills development and enhancement. As shown in Figure 4, the main type of skills identified across the 2 fiscal years were: communication, collaboration, leadership, adaptability, and creativity and innovation. From the perspective of funded organization representatives who responded to the applicant organization survey, youth also developed their problem-solving skills (76%). All funded organization representatives interviewed felt that there were positive impacts on youth, most notably leadership/project management skills and improved self-confidence (further discussed in

Section 6.1.3). The most common service theme⁷¹ identified by organization representatives was “strengthening youth resilience” (68%), with an emphasis on increased mental health and peer support available through the Program.

Figure 4: Skills developed by youth participating in Program-funded opportunities*



Source: Applicant organization survey N=158; CSC Participant Survey N=691 (aggregated across fiscal year 2021 to 2022 and 2022 to 2023).

*Only includes skills that were reported by over 50% of youth and organizations.

** “Leadership” was not an option in the Applicant Organization Survey.

Participants who undertook a micro-grant were more likely to report that they developed their leadership and creativity and innovation skills compared to those who took part in volunteer service placements. Among youth who participated in a micro-grant⁷², 98% felt that they have developed new leadership skills.

Similarly, focus group participants most often identified “skills acquisition” as a way in which they have benefited from their experience. The most common skills mentioned were leadership, interpersonal,

⁷¹ Service themes identified in the application for funding include reconciliation; building an inclusive Canada; preserving the environment; promoting civic and democratic engagement; strengthening youth resilience; and potential new themes that are youth-identified.

⁷² TakingITGlobal (2022). *#RisingYouth Community Impact*. Volume 2. Retrieved from <https://takingitglobal.uberflip.com/i/1477966-risingyouth-community-impact-volume-2/0?>

communication, technical, organizational, project management, financial, time management, and attention. Skills acquisition/improvement of skills was more often identified as a personal benefit by micro-grant recipients. In contrast, feeling more connected to one's community was more often identified by participants in a volunteer service placement.

6.1.2 Meaningful Connections

Literature demonstrated that youth who feel connected to people within their communities may have better health and well-being outcomes in the long term.⁷³⁷⁴ Among youth who participated in a micro-grant⁷⁵, 97% felt that they have developed meaningful connections because of their experience. Youth focus group participants were often motivated to provide young people with the opportunity to build connections with other young people and by a desire to make friends/connections. They described the personal benefits of meeting more people and making more connections greater than expected. Most of the participants who developed connections through their experience described these as “meaningful” for several reasons, including:

- enduring connection
- developing into lasting friendships
- finding a mentor
- developing professional relationships/opportunities
- helping foster stronger ties to one's community, and
- renewing connections.

Additionally, 84% of funded surveyed organization representatives felt that youth developed meaningful connections to a good or full extent. 71% reported the development of formal or informal mentor relationships to a good or full extent. Similarly, 64% of CSC Participant Survey respondents felt that they developed meaningful connections with their peers to a good or full extent. 61% also felt that they developed meaningful connections with mentors and role models to a good or full extent.

6.1.3 Development/improvement of self-confidence

Based on a self-assessment, the participating youth indicated that their experience helped them develop and improve their self-confidence. At least half of the CSC Participant Survey respondents noted that their recent Canada Service Corps experience helped them improve their self-confidence from a good to full extent in terms of:

- establishing long-term goals

⁷³ Steiner, R.J. et al. (2019). “Adolescent Connectedness and Adult Health Outcomes.” *Pediatrics* 144(1). Retrieved from <https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/144/1/e20183766/37106/Adolescent-Connectedness-and-Adult-Health-Outcomes>.

⁷⁴ Foster, C.E. et al. (2017). “Connectedness to family, school, peers, and community in socially vulnerable adolescents.” Pp. 321-331 in *Children and Youth Services Review* 81. Retrieved from <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0190740917301172?via%3Dihub>.

⁷⁵ TakingITGlobal (2022). *#RisingYouth Community Impact*. Volume 2. Retrieved from <https://takingitglobal.uberflip.com/i/1477966-risingyouth-community-impact-volume-2/0?>

- completing tasks successfully, and
- in their ability to face challenges (see Table 5).

Table 5: CSC Participant Survey self-confidence indicators aggregated across fiscal years 2021 to 2022 and 2022 to 2023

Extent to which recent experience helped improve self-confidence	Responses aggregated across fiscal years 2021 to 2022 and 2022 to 2023 (N=691)*
A) Ability to face challenges	
5 – To a full extent	23%
4 – To a good extent	45%
3 – To some extent	22%
2 – To a little extent	4%
1 – Not at all	1%
No response	5%
B) Complete tasks successfully	
5 – To a full extent	28%
4 – To a good extent	37%
3 – To some extent	23%
2 – To a little extent	5%
1 – Not at all	2%
No response	5%
C) Establish long-term goals	
5 – To a full extent	23%
4 – To a good extent	34%
3 – To some extent	26%
2 – To a little extent	8%
1 – Not at all	2%

Extent to which recent experience helped improve self-confidence	Responses aggregated across fiscal years 2021 to 2022 and 2022 to 2023 (N=691)*
No response	6%

*Rounded to the nearest percent.

When asked explicitly about improvements in their self-confidence, most youth focus group participants said that they feel more self-confident because of their volunteer service opportunity. Most participants said that they have become more self-confident in their ability to complete tasks and face challenges, make a difference in their community, and apply the skills they have gained in other settings. A majority of youth focus group participants felt that they have become more self-confident in these areas at least to a moderate extent because of their volunteer service opportunity. Smaller numbers described themselves either as much more confident or slightly more confident in these areas.

Some youth focus group participants took part in the Photovoice exercise to illustrate how their experiences were in line with the objectives of the Program. Through their photos, they demonstrated the ways in which their experiences were meaningful to them, and helped them to build personal skills, as illustrated below:



“I chose this photo because it represents a growth mindset throughout the program. The colourful [water beads] represent the diversity of culture and experiences I had over the few years...

I took a photo of this because I feel like my life is at a stage of rediscovering myself. I want to highlight the feel that [water beads] are all different in sizes. Some are big and some are extremely small....

This photo tells me that I am always changing and constantly building my resiliency, it shows that I am surrounded by people who have many talents and life skills. The impacts of CSC Program tell me that it had touched many lives in this world and it will continue to serve generations to come.”

–Focus Group Participant

6.2 Most focus group and surveyed participants felt the Program is having positive impacts on communities

Various lines of evidence suggest that the Program appears to be having a positive effect on communities by:

- offering positive engagement for youth
- Increasing youths’ belief that they are making a difference
- building a more inclusive Canada, increasing environmental benefits, and
- increasing civic engagement now and into the future.

However, it is not clear to what extent the Program participants will take part in community service in the future. This would require data to be collected on Program participants over time.

More than 80% of 2021 to 2022 and 2022 to 2023 CSC Participant Survey respondents stated that their recent experiences had a positive impact on their communities. More than 60% of 2022 to 2023 CSC Participant Survey respondents stated that the most important impact of their recent experience on their community was positive engagement for youth. Further, 72% of youth believed that they are making a difference in their community from a good to full extent (see Table 6 below).

Table 6: Share of participants who believed that their recent experience helped make a difference in their community

Helped you to further your belief that you are making a difference in your community	% of respondents *
5 – To a full extent	37%
4 – To a good extent	35%
3 – To some extent	17%
2 – To a little extent	5%
1 – Not at all	1%
No response	6%

Source: 2021 to 2022 and 2022 to 2023 CSC Participant Survey results, N=691.

*Rounded to the nearest percent.

According to the CSC Participant Survey, more than half (52%) of 2022 to 2023 micro-grant participants stated that the goal of their project was to build an inclusive Canada. The most common reason for 2022 to 2023 youth to take part in their most recent experience was to contribute to community (74%).

Similarly, 65% of surveyed organization representatives reported the service theme of “promoting civic and democratic engagement.” 62% reported the service theme of “building a more inclusive Canada”.

Close to three-quarters (71%) of surveyed funded organization representatives qualified the impact of youth’s recent experience on their community as “extremely positive.” 16% qualified it as “somewhat positive.” All interviewed funded organization representatives felt that there were positive impacts on the communities. The most commonly reported benefits to the community were:

- increased engagement, inclusion, and awareness
- positive perceptions of youth
- networking opportunities, and
- addressing specific barriers in the community (for example, food insecurity).

Moreover, most youth focus group participants said that they have become more self-confident in their ability to make a difference in their community. They felt that their community benefited from their project or placement, with perceived benefits including:

- benefits to youth (such as increased social connectedness)
- environmental benefits (such as through community clean-ups)
- capacity-building (such as increased access to resources), and
- benefits to specific groups (such as creating support networks).

Micro-grant recipients were more likely to name capacity-building benefits and benefits to specific groups. Volunteer service placement participants were more likely to report feeling more connected to one's community.

Focus group participants who participated in the Photovoice exercise noted the themes of:

- promoting community wellness and environmental sustainability
- nature preservation and environmental stewardship, and
- the role of community in shaping cultural heritage and identity.


Participants emphasized that making contributions towards the environment and the community also made them feel powerful and confident. For example, the image pictured below depicts a micro-grant recipient's direct effort to promote environmental well-being.



“What you may immediately notice in this picture is a young woman, posing atop a rather substantial pile of trash on a relatively sunny day. What you do not see, is that she is wearing 4 sweaters, 3 pairs of socks, and in no way did she collect all of that trash by herself - in fact, there were 2 other piles of similar sizes along that stretch of trail she is pictured on. I chose this photo of myself because I felt exhausted, cold, slightly dehydrated...as well as so incredibly grateful and happy...

This photo was taken at the end of the project, concluding a whirlwind of amazing experiences that have helped to shape who I am to this day, and forged so many new community connections.”

– CSC Focus Group Participant



Lastly, the positive experiences of youth translated into intent to take part in future volunteer service placements or community projects:

- 98% of micro-grant⁷⁶ respondents stated that because of their experience, they are more likely to take part in community service in the future
- 79% of 2022 to 2023 CSC Participant Survey respondents were willing to take part in future volunteer service placements or community projects
- 70% of funded organization survey respondents reported youth’s intention to continue taking part in community service in the near future, and
- Most youth focus group participants said they plan to continue taking part in community service or projects.

7. Program implementation

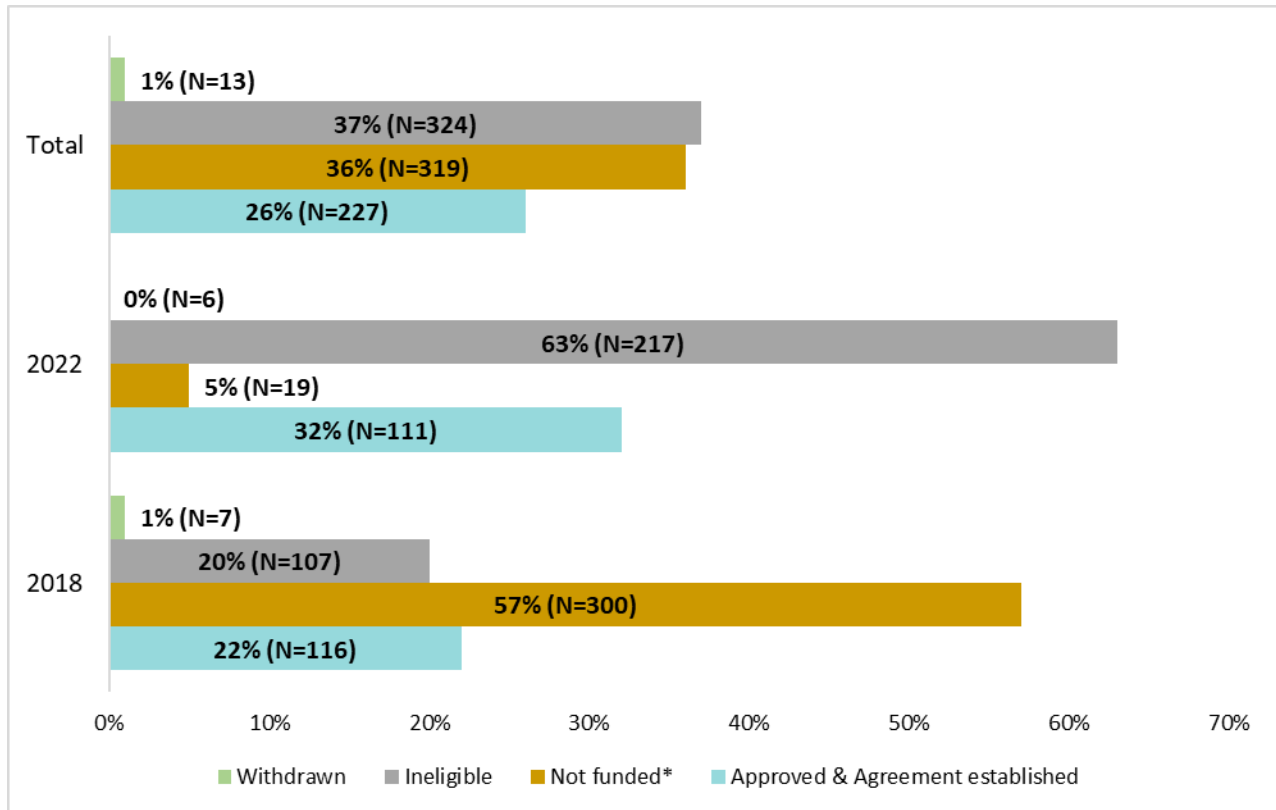
7.1 Some organizations experienced challenges with Program administration, namely around lack of predictable funding, tight timelines for submission, and lack of clear communication

While most interviewed government officials believed that the Program’s design was effective in some capacity, most also discussed communication challenges for the Program. Most mentioned challenges related to lack of predictable funding for recipient organizations since the beginning of the Program, as well as the tight timelines specifically for the 2022 Call for Proposals. Interviewees also discussed issues that organizations faced due to short-term funding agreements and unclear funding communications, further discussed below.

Figure 5 below provides a high-level overview of the share of applications by status and year of intake or call for proposal. A detailed breakdown of the application status by Program stream and fiscal year is provided in Appendix F. Overall, 37% of all applications were ineligible, 36% were not funded, 26% were approved and had an agreement established, and 1% were withdrawn. The majority (63%) of applications through the 2022 Call for Proposals were ineligible. This suggests that organizations may not have understood the eligibility criteria (further discussed in Section 7.1.2).

⁷⁶ TakingITGlobal (2022). *#RisingYouth Community Impact*. Volume 2. Retrieved from <https://takingitglobal.uberflip.com/i/1477966-risingyouth-community-impact-volume-2/0?>

Figure 5: Share of applications by status and year of intake/Call for Proposal



*Not funded indicates those projects that were screened in and assessed but not funded. Ineligible indicates those projects that were screened out as they did not meet the eligibility criteria. These were ineligible to be assessed.

7.1.1 Lack of predictable Program funding presented challenges for organizations

Interviewed organization representatives referred to funding issues as the main barriers to their participation. Funding issues identified included the short timeframe (6 weeks) to submit the application and uncertainty after they submitted their application. This in turn affected their staffing and planning (for example, organization representatives reported needing to lay off their staff due to funding uncertainty). Lack of predictable funding also required funded organizations to either achieve the same deliverables in a shorter timeframe or reduce the scope of their proposals.

Table 7 shows the lapsed program funding by fiscal year. There was a significant amount lapsed each year. Some of the main reasons for the lapses were due to challenges with Program implementation, described in a 2022 internal review of the Program. This includes:

- short project durations, preventing the Program from establishing multi-year agreements
- the longer time required to assess proposals or confirm recommendations

- the Program’s funding profile increasing year-over-year to encourage a ramping up of placements without the ability to have stable access to that funding
- funds not being spent due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic
- delays for the 2022 projects, with the vast majority not starting until the 2023 to 2024 fiscal year, and
- the introduction of the 25% mandatory leveraging requirement during the 2022 Call for Proposals. This meant that fewer organizations applied as they could not find ways to raise the 25% (further discussed in Section 7.3).

Table 7: Lapsed program funding by fiscal year

Fiscal Year	2017 to 2018	2018 to 2019	2019 to 2020	2020 to 2021	2021 to 2022	2022 to 2023
Approved program funding	\$4,350,000	\$23,455,780	\$43,548,155	\$80,577,316	\$78,925,000	\$81,937,500
Actuals	\$4,626,033	\$17,723,753	\$43,542,058	\$51,153,583	\$39,334,966	\$47,975,447
Difference	\$-276,033	\$5,732,027	\$6,097	\$29,423,733	\$39,590,034	\$33,962,053

Source: Chief Financial Officer Branch, 2024.

7.1.2 Timelines and lack of clear communication for the 2022 Call for Proposals presented challenges for organizations

Some interviewed funded organization representatives felt that the timelines related to the Call for Proposals were rushed. This may have led to insufficient time to apply or expected turnarounds being much quicker than anticipated. The launch of the 2022 Call for Proposals projects was delayed, with the majority of projects not starting until the 2023 to 2024 fiscal year and affecting the 2022 to 2023 targets and expenditures. This was due to several factors, including:

- the election year
- quality control issues
- longer negotiations for new organizations, and
- operational delays (such as workforce availability).

Additionally, more than half of the surveyed applicant organization representatives (57%) were “somewhat” to “completely” dissatisfied with the timeliness of funding decisions.

Further, some interviewed organization representatives felt that communication from ESDC about the Call for Proposals was lacking, and the eligibility requirements were not clear.

Of the 11% of surveyed applicant organizations that would not recommend this Program to other organizations⁷⁷, the most common reason cited was administrative burden/capacity of smaller organizations (n=12/30). Approximately half (49%) of surveyed organizations were “somewhat” to “fully satisfied” with support from the Department. Main issues reported by organization representatives that provided qualitative responses were unclear/inconsistent communications from ESDC, timelines for funding decisions, and heavy administrative burden.

Additionally, as per an internal review, fewer applications of sufficient quality were received than anticipated for the 2022 Call for Proposals. For example, the eligibility criterion most often not met across all streams (except for the Accelerator Micro-grants stream) was “meeting the stream objectives.” One-quarter (25%) of screened out applications did not meet this criterion.

7.2 The COVID-19 pandemic affected the nature and quality of volunteer service opportunities, but organizations were largely able to adapt

Among surveyed funded organizations, 62% reported that the nature and quality of service placements were affected due to the pandemic. For example, they could no longer offer in-person opportunities. However, more than half of interviewed organization representatives reported that they were able to adjust their programs to deliver virtually or in a hybrid way.

Virtual and/or hybrid delivery during the pandemic was generally viewed more negatively by interviewed (68%) and surveyed organization representatives who provided a qualitative response (94%). They found it to be less productive/engaging for youth. Similarly, CSC Participant Survey respondents across both fiscal years noted difficulties engaging in online events. Also, lack of in-person events was noted by the 2022 to 2023 CSC Participant Survey respondents, with Indigenous youth more likely to report this as a challenge.

Regional organizational partners identified barriers impacting the following priority demographic communities, especially in the context of COVID-19⁷⁸. However, it is important to note that some of these barriers go beyond the scope of the Program.

- Indigenous youth:
 - isolation, access to devices/Internet, access to mental health supports, addictions/substance use, food/housing/financial insecurity, weather, and unsafe communities
- rural and remote youth:
 - isolation, access to devices/Internet, and access to resources/programming
- refugee and newcomer youth:

⁷⁷ 60% of surveyed organizations would recommend this Program to other organizations, and 29% were not sure or preferred not to answer.

⁷⁸ TakingITGlobal (2022). *#RisingYouth Community Impact*. Volume 2. Retrieved from [https://takingitglobal.uberflip.com/i/1477966-risingyouth-community-impact-volume-2/0?_This list may not be exhaustive](https://takingitglobal.uberflip.com/i/1477966-risingyouth-community-impact-volume-2/0?_This%20list%20may%20not%20be%20exhaustive).

- culturally relevant mental health support, access to devices, digital illiteracy, language barriers, integration into Canadian society, lack of privacy, and food/financial insecurity)
- youth with disabilities:
 - isolation, increased risk of contracting COVID-19, and “Zoom fatigue”
- Francophone youth:
 - isolation and “Zoom fatigue”
- visible minority youth:
 - access to devices/Internet, access to mental health support, and employment/financial/housing insecurity
- 2SLGBTQIA+ youth:
 - access to mental health support, and housing/food/financial insecurity

However, focus group participants who took part in volunteer service opportunity spoke of this in a more neutral way. While the format and scope of the placements/projects needed to accommodate public health directives, youth activities continued. The most often identified impact of the pandemic was the need to switch activities from an in-person to an online format. Moreover, funded organizations interviewed, the 2021 to 2022 CSC Participant Survey respondents, and applicant organization survey respondents noted that virtual programming can increase the accessibility and geographical reach of the Program and offer youth the flexibility to finish projects at home.

Finally, most interviewed organization representatives and interviewed government officials felt that ESDC was flexible during the pandemic. Flexibility was noted through:

- the administration of funding agreements
- extensions provided to organizations for submitting data/reports
- extensions of agreements, and
- other additional supports (for example, adjusting to virtual or hybrid programming).

7.3 The introduction of the mandatory 25% leveraging requirement negatively affected the ability of most organizations to apply

As of April 1, 2023, recipients were required to contribute a part of the project funding from sources other than funds from ESDC towards their project. This is known as the leveraging requirement. This meant that ESDC’s contribution towards approved projects would be up to 75% of the total project’s cost and the organization would have to fund the remaining 25%. This leveraging requirement was introduced as a mechanism of accountability and to enhance partnerships between recipient organizations and other funding partners.

Almost three-quarters (71%) of surveyed organizations reported that they did not apply for funding in 2022 due to the introduction of the mandatory leveraging requirement. As demonstrated in the administrative data, fewer applications were received from the 2022 intake in comparison to the 2018 intake (see Figure 5 and Table 8 in Appendix F). Additionally, more than half (55%) of all organization

representatives surveyed reported that the leveraging requirement was “somewhat” to “extremely challenging.” The negative affect of the leveraging requirement on their organizations included resource/staffing constraints, competitive disadvantages for smaller organizations, and late funding decisions impacting their ability to leverage. Only 8% of surveyed organizations stated that this requirement was “not at all challenging.”

The majority of interviewed organization representatives that received funding in 2022 believed that the leveraging requirement was too high. Organization representatives reported having to change the scope/objectives of their projects due to the leveraging requirement or not apply at all. Similarly, interviewed government officials believed that the introduction of the leveraging requirement had detrimental effects on organizations. Half of the government officials interviewed believed that 25% was too high. Others reported that it prevented organizations from applying or that it disproportionately affected smaller organizations.

“We did not apply for the most recent [Call for Proposal]. There’s a number of reasons; the biggest one for us was the 25% leverage fee. [We are] a very small organization. We were not able to meet that. We wouldn't have been able to fundraise to have that leverage fee covered.”

– Organization Survey Respondent

The introduction of the mandatory 25% leveraging requirement was believed to have negative impacts. This was because it:

- disproportionately affected smaller organizations (due to lack of capacity)
- prevented organizations from applying, and/or
- forced organizations to change their projects (such as making the scope smaller).

Of note, the impact of the leveraging requirement is not fully known. Projects with leveraging requirements began in fiscal year 2023 to 2024, which was outside the scope of this evaluation.

However, since the 2022 Call for Proposals, the following adjustments were made:

- increased funding predictability allowing for multi-year agreements
- increased application period from 6 to 10 weeks
- simplified the parameters and reduced the eligibility requirements, which enabled assessments to be streamlined
- revised how the experience criteria is assessed, and
- removed the mandatory 25% leveraging requirement, which was a condition imposed on the Program for the 2022 Call for Proposals.

8. Performance measurement


8.1 The Program launched an updated data strategy in 2021 to 2022, which allowed for the collection of disaggregated (participant-level) data on youth participants

In 2018, ESDC began work with Statistics Canada on the design of a longitudinal survey of Program participants to assess program impacts. In 2019, the work on the longitudinal survey was discontinued due to low response rates and insufficient program data (that is, no targets or benchmarks set for measurement). Further, data was collected from recipient organizations only at aggregate levels. This data did not provide sufficient participant information to support an understanding of the Program's reach and outcomes.

To resolve this issue the Program launched an updated "Policy Analysis, Research and Evaluation" data collection strategy in April 2021 to better measure program results and guide policy development. This included 4 data streams:

1. **The Organization Data Input Window:** collects administrative and demographic data on youth participants. This allows the Program to assess program reach and adapt the Program approach as required. This information was displayed on the Program's Power BI tool.
2. **The Participant Contact Information Window:** collects participant contact information from youth. They must consent to share their information and be over the age of majority or have consent from a parent or legal guardian to share their information. This information can be used to directly contact Program participants during the Program evaluation to ask them about their experience with the Program.
3. **The CSC Participant Survey (shared by recipient organizations):** collects self-reported demographic information from youth participants as well as information on their experiences with and impacts of the Program. It is a voluntary and anonymous survey whose link organizations must share with their participants during each fiscal year. The number of responses has been low, and incentives are not provided to the youth participants through this data stream.
4. **The CSC Participant Survey (administered and shared by the Program):** collects self-reported demographic information from youth participants as well as information on their experiences with and impacts of the Program. A third-party was hired by the Program to help improve response rates by providing incentives to the Youth Participants. These annual surveys covered fiscal years 2021 to 2022 and 2022 to 2023. The third-party was also responsible for conducting the data analysis and preparing the technical reports.

This new data strategy has allowed ESDC to inform the Program's progress in reaching youth from identified target groups (Indigenous and/or under-served youth). It has also provided additional information that the Program can use to guide policy development to enhance youth service opportunities and inform the overall success of the Program. In addition to these 4 data source streams,



the Common System for Grants and Contributions collects information from each organization's application submitted for funding. This included:

- information for each application on the organization type
- the stream applied
- year of application
- project status (approved, rejected, withdrawn)
- project start date/end date, and
- Program specific questions such as whether they offer services to Indigenous and under-served populations (only available for the 2022 Call for Proposals).

Of note, while the evaluation covered fiscal years 2018 to 2019 to 2022 to 2023 (including the 10 contribution agreements signed in 2017), the Program's "Policy Analysis, Research and Evaluation" data, including the CSC Participant Survey results were only available from 2021 to 2022 onwards and representing the last 2 years of the 5-year evaluation period. Since this is a formative evaluation, the ability of this report to give conclusive trends about results is limited.


8.2 While Data collection requirements were well understood by organizations, some organizations faced some barriers to collecting the data required by the Program.

All interviewed funded organization representatives reported that they collect data to inform their projects and understood ESDC's data collection requirements. However, some were confused with the different formats requested (such as the Organization Data Input Window implemented in 2021).

Interviews with government officials highlighted that there were discrepancies and duplication between various sources of data. For example, they noted there was redundancy, overlap and duplication between some data collection tools, including double counting of participants. Some funded organization representatives interviewed were also a bit confused with the different formats of data being requested (such as through the Organization Data Input Window) and with repetition of questions.

The review of the administrative data also found that youth's sociodemographic characteristics are being collected more than once. This is through both the Organization Data Input Window and the 2 separately delivered CSC Participant surveys, with the CSC Participant Survey as a sub-sample of the full population. Youth are being asked to share their personal information multiple times, directly with the organization and/or with the Program. There is duplication of efforts with potential for the same youth participants to respond to both surveys. Moreover, there were discrepancies in actual expenditures between data obtained from the Common System and Grants Contribution database and the Chief Financial Officer Branch.

Most interviewed funded organization representatives felt that the data required by ESDC was useful. Those that did not find it useful reported that the data collection requirements were too burdensome even though they felt they understood the requirements. Less than half of surveyed organizations (40%)



were “somewhat” to “fully satisfied” with the reporting requirements. Additionally, interviewed organization representatives as well as internal interviewees identified challenges leading to gaps in information. The most common reason was organizational capacity for sufficient data collection and reporting. Organization representatives also reported issues with youth not providing the data (for example, obtaining consent or youth not filling out the forms or questions).

8.3 There were some limitations with the data strategy, such as low response rates when reaching Youth participants directly, the lack of capacity to conduct intersectional analysis, and measuring ultimate outcomes.


The CSC Participant Survey was the only means for the Program to reach youth directly to check the extent to which Program outcomes have been achieved. However, response rates for the CSC Participant Survey (administered and shared by the Program) were relatively low. The response rate was 23% for 2021 to 2022 and 17% for 2022 to 2023 despite using financial incentives. The Program does not have data for all youth in terms of outcomes. The low response rate and resulting small sample size of the CSC Participant Survey limits its generalizability. Therefore, the evaluation relied on the “Policy, Analysis, Research and Evaluation” data on youth sociodemographic characteristics as it was more complete.

Moreover, there are specific limitations with regards to conducting intersectional analysis with the Program’s data. The data was not available in a format amenable to data analysis. It was also not possible to conduct intersectional analysis across the youth participants. For example, the distribution of Indigenous youth participants by province and territory. This could have offered additional insights on the reach of the population.

A breakdown of those that participated in and completed full-time versus flexible service placements was also not available. However, will be available for the 2023 to 2024 fiscal year. As most youth are either in education and/or in employment, it would be interesting to understand the characteristics of youth participating in full-time service placements.

Additionally, the Program data collection strategy should be mindful of representativity of the sample of participants who take part in data collection activities. For example, only 8% of the 2021 to 2022 and 2022 to 2023 CSC Participant Survey respondents identified as Indigenous while they represented 13% of Program participants. The “Policy Analysis, Research and Evaluation” data strategy also does not collect data to inform whether youth live in low-income households despite it being 1 of the target groups.

The importance of accurate and reliable data needs to be emphasized. For example, socio-demographic data for the 2022 to 2023 volunteer service opportunities collected as part of the “Policy Analysis, Research and Evaluation” data was still incomplete or missing at the time of writing the administrative technical report in Fall 2023. The data fields in the Common System for Grants and Contributions were also not all updated consistently or on time. There are challenges with the Common System for Grants and Contributions in manually collecting and inputting the application data. Organizations have also faced challenges in learning how to complete the application data. The data remains reliable once it is closed out for a fiscal year. Changes may be due to missing, duplicate or incomplete application data, all



of which gets verified and checked manually. As the Program's data collection continues to progress and improve, and organizations get more familiar with the process, application and participant data for a given fiscal year will be collected more efficiently.

Further, while there has been an improvement in the data collection strategy, there continue to be challenges in measuring immediate and intermediate outcomes of the Program. The extent to which opportunities available through the Program are both "accessible and inclusive" could be informed from a broader perspective, such as the extent to which barriers to volunteering were addressed. The Program's intermediate outcome (development and improvement of self-confidence and skills development) is based on the participating youth's self-assessment. This may affect the validity of the results. Additionally, it is unclear to what extent skills could have been improved via other activities (at school, via a summer job). The Program could also benefit from a more thorough understanding of the extent to which it is supporting youth who would or would not have volunteered outside of the Program.


Finally, there also continue to be challenges with measuring the ultimate outcome of the Program (see Appendix A). As mentioned in section 8.1, in earlier years, the Program collaborated with Statistics Canada and recipient organizations to support a longitudinal analysis through a Youth Community Involvement Survey. This had not yielded sufficient results due to low survey response rates. According to Statistics Canada, participation from the recipient organizations presented the most significant challenge to the survey process. To mitigate this challenge, several recommendations were provided such as:

- increased collaboration between all partners involved
- gathering data early-on
- streamlining of data collection
- continually improving data collection instruments
- integrating data within the application process, and
- providing information to participants on how personal information would be protected.

While the response rate has increased with the CSC Participant Survey, there continue to be challenges with measuring the ultimate outcome. Other tools to examine the long-term social impacts on alumni participants, such as a social impact assessment, are being considered.

9. Conclusions

This formative evaluation of the Program had the goal of examining the ongoing need, effectiveness, and efficiency of the Program. According to this evaluation, the Program appears to be unique and valuable and can complement school-led activities. The evaluation findings suggest that the Program is reaching Indigenous and many under-served youth populations. However, despite its success in reaching these groups, the extent to which opportunities available through the Program are both accessible and inclusive could be informed from a broader perspective (for example, beyond simply reach and examining the extent to which barriers can be addressed). Early results point to barriers to completion of volunteer service opportunities, such as lack of accessible opportunities, still existing for some under-



served populations. Organizations are using Program funds to help address some of these barriers, yet they still feel additional forms of support could be offered. This suggests they may not be fully aware or taking advantage of some of the current participant supports that are eligible costs under the Program.

This evaluation also noted that youth felt that their participation in the Program helped them develop their skills, meaningful connections, and self-confidence. Youth and organizations also felt that the Program is having positive impacts on communities.

Information about the Program funding opportunities was accessible to organizations, but the extent of youth's ease of access to information and awareness of the Program is mixed. This was dependent on the extent to which youth were involved in or connected with networks or organizations familiar with pathways to such opportunities.

Some organizations faced challenges with Program implementation, such as a lack of predictable funding, tight timelines for submission, and lack of clear communication. However, changes have been made to respond to these issues.

Finally, while there has been an improvement in the data collection strategy, there were some limitations. For example, low response rates from youth, duplication of efforts, lack of capacity and challenges measuring ultimate outcomes were noted in this evaluation.

There are areas where improvements can be made, as reflected in the recommendations proposed by the evaluation.

10. Recommendations

Recommendation 1:

It is recommended that the Program continue to explore alternative program design approaches, within a Grants and Contributions framework, to understand and address barriers to youth civic engagement among Indigenous and under-served youth.

While the Program has been able to reach Indigenous and many under-served youth populations, preliminary evidence from this evaluation suggests that some groups face more challenges to accessing and completing volunteer service opportunities. The most commonly reported reason for youth to not complete their placement was too many hours/not enough time to complete their placement/project due to other commitments. Also, it remains unclear which youth populations can participate in full-time service opportunities. Some groups were also less likely to complete their placements compared to others due to specific barriers. For example, culturally appropriate programming for youth, especially Indigenous youth, was identified as a barrier. In addition, the lack of accessible opportunities, especially issues with arranging transportation, was an issue identified for youth with disabilities and youth living in rural or remote communities. As such, the Program may want to continue to make efforts to better understand and address barriers for Indigenous and under-served youth.



Recommendation 2:

It is recommended that the Program continue to take steps to improve awareness and visibility of Canada Service Corps and the volunteer service opportunities available for youth.

Focus group participants, CSC Participant Survey respondents, and interviewed organization representatives all highlighted that youth have little awareness of the availability of volunteer service opportunities through the Canada Service Corps. Limited traffic on the Program website through the YDG platform also suggests a lack of visibility of the Program. Focus group participants noted that they needed to be “connected” to know about available opportunities. As such, there could be opportunity for the Program to conduct more outreach with schools and/or other youth-centered events to increase promotion and awareness of the YDG platform and the Canada Service Corps. Further, evaluation findings also suggest that organizations may not be aware of eligible expenses or be fully taking advantage of available funds to address barriers to participation. Therefore, the Program would benefit from increasing the awareness and clarity of eligible expenses amongst organizations.

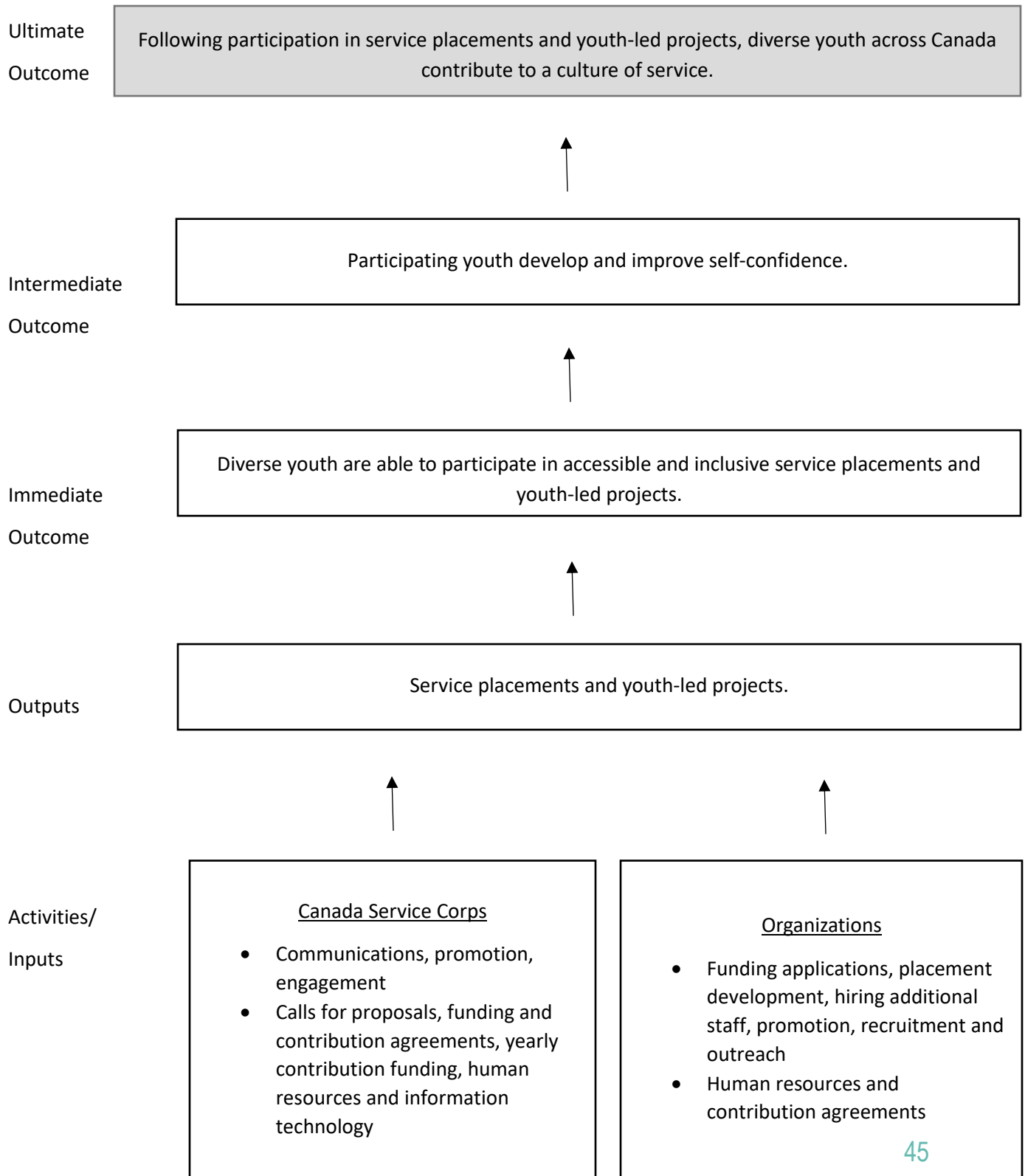
Recommendation 3:

It is recommended that the Program take steps to improve its data capacity and collection methods to better support and inform policy analysis, research, and evaluation activities.

As the CSC Participant Survey is the only means for the Program to reach youth directly to assess the extent to which Program outcomes have been achieved, it is recommended that the Program continue to increase its in-house capacity. Further, steps should be taken to avoid duplication of efforts, such as streamlining the 2 separately delivered CSC participant surveys. There are some inconsistencies arising from manual collection and entry, organizational challenges, and missing or duplicate data. Additionally, it is recommended that cross-tabulations and further breakdown of data be possible to increase understanding of intersectionality among participant demographics and the barriers they face. Moreover, it is recommended that the Program collect data to inform whether youth are from low-income households as this is 1 of its target groups. Regarding the immediate outcome, the extent to which opportunities available through the Program are both accessible and inclusive could be informed from a broader perspective (for example, beyond simply reach and examining the extent to which barriers can be addressed). Additional indicators to measure the immediate outcome could be considered. As for the intermediate outcome, information available to determine whether CSC participants had improved their skills and self-confidence was based on self-reported data. Finally, there continue to be challenges measuring the ultimate outcome of the Program.

11. Appendices

Appendix A – Logic model





Appendix B – Innovative Engagement and Outreach Stream: project output examples

- Created partnerships with other organizations to support outreach, engagement, and support for specific demographics
- Organized awareness and outreach activities hosted by community organizations or youth outreach coordinators
- Developed Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs) with volunteer centre hubs (1 per province/territory) connecting volunteer centres across Canada
- Created communications and engagement plans with volunteer centres
- Provided promotional items and marketing materials, including social media and digital engagement tools
- Collected participant testimonials of their experiences through photos, videos, and text
- Published reports highlighting successes and lessons learned by youth
- Consulted youth to help understand barriers to service and develop recommendations to improve youth service engagement within the context of the Program
- Developed training sessions and tools for participants to become comfortable and confident in their volunteer roles
- Provided professional development opportunities for participants, such as conferences
- Created a toolkit to help youth discover their interests and skills, and prepare for volunteering, including the interviewing process
- Organized mentorship opportunities to youth through teachers, peers, community leaders, and professionals.
- Developed bilingual volunteer matching services through online databases.



Appendix C – Evaluation matrix

The Program evaluation made use of multiple lines of evidence. Various data collection methods and sources (see Appendix D) helped address different aspects of the evaluation questions. This approach ensured adequate data triangulation to support robust evidence-based findings, conclusions, and recommendations to the Program.

Evaluation question 1: To what extent is the Program addressing a need?

Lines of evidence

- document and literature review
- organization survey
- key informant interviews

Evaluation question 2: To what extent has the Program been implemented to fulfill its objectives?

Lines of evidence

- document review
- administrative data
- organization survey
- key informant interviews
- focus groups with youth participants (including Photovoice exercise)
- web analytics

Evaluation question 3: to what extent are the Program’s outcomes being achieved?

Lines of evidence

- administrative data
- document review
- organization survey
- key informant interviews
- focus groups with youth participants (including Photovoice exercise)

Evaluation question 4: are the Program’s performance measurement tools collecting sufficient data to support ongoing monitoring and decision-making?

Lines of evidence

- document review
- administrative data
- key informant interviews

Appendix D – Methodology

Administrative data

There were 3 main sources of administrative data used in this evaluation (described in section 8.1):

- Organization Data Input Window
- Common System for Grants and Contributions
- Canada Service Corps Participant Survey 2021 to 2022 and 2022 to 2023

Key limitations

Organization Data Input Window:

Data was not extractable into other data analytics software (for example, into an Excel file) from the Power BI tool. The detailed sociodemographic data breakdown was also difficult to analyze as it required the user to hover over the boxes. Moreover, the Power BI tool did not allow for cross-tabulations of the data. Therefore, additional analyses were not possible to determine whether the Program was reaching under-served youth in each province and territory.

The Power BI tool also does not present statistics on youth from low-income households, as the Program did not collect this information through the Organization Data Input Window. Therefore, the Evaluation Directorate relied on statistics available from the Canada Service Corps Participant surveys for this group.

Finally, accurate and reliable data was a challenge. The socio-demographic data for the 2022 to 2023 volunteer service opportunities was still incomplete at the time of Evaluation Directorate's analysis, with the data constantly changing between August and September 2023.

Common System for Grants and Contributions:


There were inconsistencies in how information was entered into the system. Information was either manually entered by Project Officers or automatically uploaded directly from the Grants and Contributions Online System. This led to inconsistent denominators for each of the target groups since it was unclear whether blank cells represented a "No" response.

Moreover, there were some discrepancies in actual expenditures between the Common System for Grants and Contributions database and the Chief Financial Officer Branch.

CSC Participant Survey 2021 to 2022 and 2022 to 2023:

A limitation for both surveys was the relatively low response rate despite the use of financial incentives (23% in 2021 to 2022 and 17% in 2022 to 2023). This had the potential to result in sampling and non-response bias and weaken the external validity and generalizability of findings.

The 2021 to 2022 survey sample only included those that were the age of majority in their province/territory, although those under the age of majority represent approximately 50% of all Program participants based on available data. This further limited the generalizability of the results.



Further, the analysis of the 2021 to 2022 and 2022 to 2023 survey results were conducted by a third-party contractor. Some analysis on comparisons between priority groups and type of volunteer service opportunity were not conducted in 2021 to 2022.

Key Informant Interviews

There were 14 internal interviews conducted with government officials involved with the design, delivery, and policy aspects of the Program.

External interviewees were identified through the surveys in which they were asked to provide consent for a potential key informant interview. The Evaluation Directorate invited 29 external stakeholders from funded projects in various regions across Canada to participate in an interview. In total, there were 22⁷⁹ interviews conducted with funded organizations: 12 with Volunteer Service Placement – Regional and Local Stream; 3 with Volunteer Service Placement – National Stream; and 7 with Micro-grant streams (including Diversity and Accelerator Streams).

Key limitations

A general limitation of key informant interviews is that the findings cannot be generalized using only this line of evidence due to the small sample size and potential for biased responses.

The external key informant interviews and the survey captured the same individual organization's experiences and viewpoints which may have exacerbated the selection bias. Additionally, unsuccessful applicants were not interviewed, which may also cause some bias in the responses. However, a deeper understanding of the issues, challenges, successes, and outcomes associated with the Program were gained through the key informant interviews.

For the external interviews, there was also limited representation from the Territories and Atlantic provinces. Further, there was limited information on the barriers, experiences, and outcomes for specific target populations as most organizations reported that they target all under-served youth.


Organization Survey

The survey targeted all applicant organizations who applied for or received Program funding between the 2018 to 2019 and 2022 to 2023 fiscal years. The survey sample of applicants was provided by the Program Operations Branch.

The Evaluation Directorate carried out the web survey questionnaire and data analysis in-house. The survey was administered through ESDC's Interactive Fact-Finding Service's web survey platform. This platform is fully customizable and meets the departmental web accessibility requirements.

The overall survey response rate was 24%: 23% for the non-funded applicants and 25% for the funded applicants. The response rates appeared to vary somewhat across sub-groups, particularly based on the:

⁷⁹ Some organizations received funding under multiple streams. There were 7 interviewed funded organizations from British Columbia, 1 from the Prairies, 11 from Ontario and 3 from Quebec. While there appears to be no representation from the Atlantic provinces and the Territories, it is possible that some of the funded national projects occurred in these regions.

- 
1. fiscal year (for example, organization representatives from 2022 to 2023 responded more (29%) than organization representatives from any other fiscal year (ranging from 0 to 21%), and
 2. regions (for example, Quebec was the most likely to respond to the survey (31%) compared to any other province or territory (ranging from 13 to 25%).

Key limitations

As the survey was administered only once at the end of the evaluation period, this may have resulted in recall bias and non-response bias. This means that organization representatives may not accurately remember their past experience, and may be less likely to complete the survey, respectively.

Over this time, organizations may have also experienced employee turnover. This generated bounce-backs (at 8%) when the survey was distributed via email.

Additionally, a database of non-applicants was not available. Therefore, reasons for non-participation in the Program's Calls for Proposals was not explored.

Data collection activities also occurred over an extended period of time (greater than 6 months) due to ongoing approval processes for the most recent funding agreements. This resulted in the survey being administered in phases. This also led to 6 organizations completing the survey twice.

Web Analytics

This line of evidence provided information on the number of unique visitors and average time spent on the various Program websites by fiscal year. Traffic on the Program website through the YDG platform was also explored.

Key limitations:


There were limitations to assuming each "unique visitor" was truly unique since a new unique visitor was counted if they:

- clear their cache (browsing history) at any time
- open a different browser on the same computer
- use a different device or
- open a private browsing session.

Therefore, the methodology for calculating unique visitors was not 100% accurate, but served as a general indicator to assess Program awareness.

Focus Groups/Youth Key Informant Interviews (including Photovoice exercise)

5 focus groups and 1 dyad were conducted with youth participants: 4 with participants in the 2021 to 2022 Program, and 2 with participants in the 2022 to 2023 Program. 3 groups were conducted with participants in a micro-grant project, 2 with participants in a volunteer service placement, and 1 Indigenous dyad which included a participant in a micro-grant project and a participant in a volunteer service placement. In addition, 1 key informant interview was completed with an Indigenous youth who



took part in a service placement. In total, feedback was received from 35 Program participants, including 3 Indigenous Program participants.

Focus group participants were also asked to take part in the Photovoice exercise. Photovoice is a visual arts-based exercise that explores an individual's experiences using 'photo-journalistic' methods. Focus group participants were asked to present their point of view through photos that were reflective of their experience. They were asked to answer a few brief questions about the photos. This helped the evaluation team understand the significance of the photo and why it was relevant to the individual's experience. Of the 34 focus group participants invited to complete the exercise, 17 youth completed the exercise.

Key limitations:

- A general limitation of focus groups (and photovoice) is that the findings cannot be generalized to the full population of Program participants
- Engagement was low. Despite multiple contacts by email and telephone (when numbers were available), a modest monetary incentive, and the option to take part in an interview rather than a focus group, participation was low. Engagement was particularly low among Indigenous youth. Only 3 of the 35 youth who participated identifying as Indigenous, despite the target of 18. While those who participated are referred to as focus group participants in the report, the analysis is based on the 3 whom took part in either the dyad or key informant interview
- Additionally, there was a lack of representation of Program participants from the Territories and from French-speaking youth who are members of an official language minority community. The findings do not include the experiences and perspectives of these youth
- Finally, the evaluation engaged with youth who had participated in the Program in the 2021 to 2022 and the 2022 to 2023 fiscal years. The 2021 to 2022 cohort of participants may not have been able to recall their experience as accurately as the youth who participated in the Program in the 2022 to 2023 year. In addition, these youth were more difficult to recruit, with fewer responding to the request to participate in a focus group

Appendix E – Youth Digital Gateway Platform deliverables for Canada Service Corps

2021 to 2022:

- Before delivering the first release of the Youth Digital Gateway (YDG), the project team delivered the Civic Participation Pilot Intake form and unbiased candidate selection tool, to support Program efforts in delivering the pilot. This digital solution allowed youth to submit their application to the Program. Further, it allowed the Program to select qualifying candidates without bias like a lottery system
- In the Fall 2021, the YDG delivered the Opportunity Finder. This tool allows youth to find Service opportunities available through the Program by searching for volunteer opportunities on the YDG website. An application programming interface (commonly known as an API) was also delivered. This allowed for the Service opportunities to be posted on the Program Website
- In the Spring 2022, the YDG team released an Organization Platform proof-of-concept. The initial product allowed the Program Agents to generate and self-publish Service opportunities on behalf of funded organizations directly on the YDG and Program websites

2022 to 2023:

- The project team's efforts focused on developing the Organization Platform foundations and incrementally releasing improvements. This included:
 - A Content Management Service allowing Program Agents more options when creating, maintaining, and archiving Service opportunities on behalf of funded organizations.
 - Further expansion of the Organization Platform with the goal to onboard and provide self-service capabilities to Program funded organizations. Features were introduced to:
 - support account creation
 - management authentication
 - organization profile management
 - self-service capabilities to submit Service opportunities for posting, and
 - a comprehensive Dashboard, where organizations can see their Service opportunities.
- The project team continued to improve the search functionality across the YDG website. This allowed youth to find the Service opportunities available to them through the global search, the Opportunity Finder search and filtering, and Service opportunities by location
- Other YDG deliverables were introduced in the Fall of 2022. This included personalization features such as "liking" a Service opportunity and saving it to the My List feature to bookmark it for later

Appendix F – Share of applications by stream, status, and year of intake/Call for Proposal

The below table provides information on the application status by stream and year of intake/Call for Proposal.

Table 8: Share of applications by stream, status, and year of intake/Call for Proposal (based on available data)

	2018 Intakes	2022 Call for Proposal	Proportion
National Service Placement Stream*			
Approved and Agreement established	12*	15	44%
Not funded ¹	0	8	13%
Ineligible ²		26	43%
Withdrawn	0	0	0
<u>Total</u>	12*	49	100%
Regional and Local Service Placement Stream			
Approved and Agreement established	99	42	22%
Not funded	300	5	47%
Ineligible	107	85	30%
Withdrawn	7	0	1%
<u>Total</u>	513	132	100%
Micro-Grants Stream			

	2018 Intakes	2022 Call for Proposal	Proportion
Approved and Agreement established	1*	22	32%
Approved and withdrawn before signature	N/A	5	7%
Not funded	N/A	3	4%
Ineligible	N/A	42	58%
<u>Total</u>	1*	72	100%
Micro-grants Diversity Stream			
Approved and Agreement established	N/A	28	29%
Approved and withdrawn before signature		1	1%
Not funded		3	3%
Ineligible		64	67%
<u>Total</u>		96	100%
Accelerator Micro-grants Stream			
Approved	N/A	4*	100%
Not funded		0	0
Ineligible		0	0
Withdrawn		0	0

	2018 Intakes	2022 Call for Proposal	Proportion
<u>Total</u>		4*	100%
Innovative Engagement and Outreach Stream			
Approved	4	N/A	100%
Not funded	0		0
Ineligible	0		0
Withdrawn	N/A		0
<u>Total</u>	4		100%
<u>TOTAL</u>			
Approved and Agreement established	116	111	26%
Not funded	300	19	36%
Ineligible	107	217	37%
Withdrawn	7	6	1%

* A solicited intake method was used.

1. Not funded indicates those projects that were screened in but not funded.
2. Ineligible indicates those projects that were screened out. Therefore, these were ineligible to be assessed.