

Profile of Workplace Volunteering In Canada



Millennials are bringing volunteering back! Not that volunteering was ever gone but for some time there was a concern that volunteerism was in danger of fading away as the older generations ran out of time or days.

According to Volunteer Canada, based on data from 2010, 13.3 million Canadians over the age of 15 participated in volunteering. This was an increase of over 800,000 since the last survey in 2007. These volunteers contributed a total of 2.1 billion hours, unchanged from 2007. This means that there were more volunteers but they were available to contribute less time to their activities. In 2007 the average volunteer donation of time was 166 hours, in 2010 it was only 156.

Historically the majority of volunteer hours have been contributed by a minority of people who contributed a lot of hours. Often these volunteers were older, being lead by the 'greatest' and 'silent' generations (born early in the last century) and the Baby Boomers. Frequently these volunteers were also women and in particular women who did not hold full time jobs outside of the home. Today our workplaces are filled with as many and even more women than men and a much wider range of generations and cultures all of whom have their own vision and approach to volunteering.

Over the past 10 years the face of volunteering has been changing. More younger Canadians, Millennials in particular, have had a requirement to volunteer as part of obtaining their high school diploma. In fact the 2010 data found that Canadians aged 15-24 consistently volunteered more than any other age group with a participation rate of 58%. This trend has most likely contributed to the other emerging trend, the trend to younger employees seeking to combine work with workplace supported volunteer opportunities including the creation of Pro Social volunteer programs.

Workplace Volunteering Trends

According to Stats Canada's Employer Supported Volunteering report about one-third or 33% of volunteers who were employed indicated their employer had a program or policy to encourage volunteering. Additionally 57% reported that they had received one or more formal supports from their employer. Known as 'employer supported volunteering' (EVS) these formal supports often included:

- Lowering barriers to volunteering by addressing scheduling conflicts and reducing high workloads, the two most common supports (at 34%)

- Providing resources, equipment and facilities, 29%
- Providing recognition or letter of thanks to volunteers, 24%
- Providing time off for employees to apply to volunteer efforts, 20%
- Additional incentives/rewards (less than 2%) included donating prizes to those who volunteered, offering gift certificates and other prizes, donating financially to the organization based on volunteer hours, sponsoring an event, donating company goods

It is interesting but not surprising to note that those who received employer support to volunteer contributed more hours, a median of 60 hours compared to 40 hours for those who did not. Furthermore those employees who were able to work with their employer to create flexibility contributed even a higher median average of 75 hours volunteering.

Common Volunteer Activities Offered by Employee Volunteers

Volunteers who received workplace support tended to participate in different activities. The most common volunteer activities contributed by employees receiving employer support were often more leadership related such as organizing, supervising or coordinating activities and events. Those without employer support contributed more 'task' related volunteering such as teaching, mentoring, delivering office work, bookkeeping and fundraising.

For organizations it is useful to keep in mind that many of your employees are seeking to contribute their time to volunteer within their community. As an organization taking the time to identify how you can support employees to enable their volunteering can contribute to a happier and more community engaged employee.