

# New Canadians Talk About Volunteerism: Perceived Motivations and Barriers

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## Background

Canada's nonprofit and voluntary sector is composed of more than 161,000 organizations (Hall et al., 2005.) and an estimated 12 million people volunteer their time each year with these organizations (Hall et al., 2006, p.10).

Budget cuts are forcing organizations to review their practices and to call increasingly on volunteers to ensure the delivery of their services. As Canada becomes increasingly multicultural (Scott et al., 2003, p.2), one of the challenges facing organizations is to increase civic engagement among immigrants.

In an effort to assist community organizations with this challenge, AIDE conducted research in cooperation with the University of Sherbrooke on the perceptions, attitudes, and motivations of New Canadians with regard to volunteerism.

## Research

Ninety-eight (98) New Canadians living in Quebec for at least four years answered a questionnaire about their motivations for volunteering, the barriers they perceive to their involvement, and their opinions on methods of recruiting volunteers.

These people, originating for the most part from Africa and Central and South America, were between the ages of 25 and 55. Most had a Grade 12 or higher level of education. About half had volunteering experience in Quebec.

The information was collected in December 2006.

## Results

Most of the respondents viewed volunteerism as an opportunity to help people in need, enhance people's quality of life, and offer more activities and services to the population.

The level of motivation of the respondents to volunteer was high: 86.4% were considering the possibility.

## Motivations

The main motivations for volunteering among these New Canadians were to:

- help someone,
- serve a cause, and
- apply their values.

The following secondary motivations were also given (by order of importance):

- help other immigrants,
- create new social connections,
- use personal skills and experiences,
- achieve something of which one can be proud,
- personal development,
- increase one's chances of finding a job,
- fit better into the host society,
- practice one's French,
- acquire new skills, and
- learn more about Canadian life and culture.

## Barriers

New Canadians who want to volunteer face several barriers, including:

- lack of time, or inflexible volunteer time schedules,
- lack of information about how to become involved,
- difficulties expressing themselves in French,
- a poorly structured organization,
- need for long-term commitment,
- expenses associated with volunteerism,
- lack of training for volunteers, and
- subtle discrimination against immigrants.

## Recruitment

Three quarters of respondents prefer to approach an organization directly to offer their volunteer services rather than be approached by an organization.

However, some people feel that being contacted on an informal basis within the framework of a specific activity is acceptable.

## Recommendations

The main barrier to fostering volunteering among New Canadians that organizations have some control over is the lack of information on how to volunteer. We recommend that organizations join together to create a joint information document to address this issue. A comprehensive yet concise document containing general information about volunteering and specific information on each organization would be a very useful recruitment tool. This could be complemented by some leaflets containing specific information.

The document should include:

### 1. General and common information

- importance of volunteering within the community,
- reasons for approaching New Canadians,
- benefits to be derived, and
- selection requirements and procedures.

### 2. Specific information on each organization

- names and complete contact information of the organization, the contact person, and the steps to take to volunteer,
- mission and services of the organization,
- number of employees,
- number of volunteers and their ethnic diversity,
- duties assigned to volunteers and the skills required to perform them,
- level of fluency required in French or English,
- training or coaching opportunities,

- minimum amount of availability required and flexibility or inflexibility of schedules, and
- information to address concerns about the costs of volunteerism.

A full research report entitled *Perceptions, attitudes and motivations of New Canadians regarding volunteerism* by the same authors is also available.

### You can contact AIDE at:

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## References

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