



**Native Women's
Association of Canada**

Literature Review

Exploring Volunteering among Aboriginal Peoples and Ways of Encouraging and
Sustaining Engagement in Volunteerism

Literature Review

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Submitted by: Teresa Edwards, Native Women's Association of Canada

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BACKGROUND

The literature review aims to present information from various sources on Aboriginal Volunteerism that have already been published on the subject matter. This review has been developed within the framework of the project carried out by the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC): *Exploring Volunteering among Aboriginal Peoples and Ways of Encouraging and Sustaining Engagement in Volunteerism* for Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. This review aims to highlight predominant themes and theories in regards to Aboriginal Volunteerism.

LITERATURE

The sources consulted for this review were found through multiple database searches. The main databases consulted were Google Scholar and Scholars Portal. The searches performed in both database were mainly the following: "Aboriginal Volunteerism", "Aboriginal Volunteer" and "First Nation and Volunteerism". These search parameters produced the more relevant sources. A total of twenty-four (24) publications were consulted. However, after a preliminary review of each document, only twelve (12) were retained as pertinent and valuable information for this review. Most of the publications used in this literature review consist of reports produced by non-profit organizations, and government websites.

FINDINGS

The literature review has allowed for various topics on Aboriginal Volunteerism to be identified. These topics are common to most publications and identify trends, patterns, points of view and best practices in regards to Aboriginal Volunteerism. Aboriginal Volunteerism is a subject matter of very limited coverage for multiple reasons, as will be identified below, but some issues are still being raised by the literature. The topics that have been summarized below were identified during the literature review.

How is volunteering understood among Aboriginal Peoples?

The most recurrent theme was the perception of volunteerism amongst Aboriginal people. It has been established that volunteerism is an inherent part of Aboriginal cultures

as it is built into their values (Volunteer Alberta, 2004). Aboriginal people have strong cultural traditions of sharing, helping and caring for each other without expectations of payment. This is usually referred to as “helping out”. It is not perceived as volunteerism but rather as a social responsibility (Little, Auchterlonie, & Stephen, 2005) In fact, the idea of volunteerism in Aboriginal culture does not seem to be outwardly defined and the term “volunteer” does not exist in most Aboriginal languages (Native Women's Association of the Northwest Territories, Northwest Territories Literacy Council, YWCA of Yellowknife, 2005 ;Volunteer Canada, 2010). It is, instead, an actionable idea, where the actions and philosophy of individuals are an inherent part of the helping out culture. Their involvement in activities to help others is a selfless duty (Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women). It aims to improve the quality of life for others by making the use of individual skills, time and experience (Little, Auchterlonie, & Stephen, 2005).

This strong tradition of sharing, helping, and caring for others was developed in the past, when it was necessary for survival in difficult environments. This tradition has been passed on through family and camp living. As the younger generations mature, they take on the responsibility of helping other. It then becomes a normal and expected behaviour within the concept of sharing (Little, Auchterlonie, & Stephen, 2005). These strong traditions aiming to improve the quality of life for others is especially geared towards essential elements of community life such as food, work, material goods, and caring for the elders and children. These values are continuously nurtured by communal ethics of cooperation and mutual support and respect (Little, Auchterlonie, & Stephen, 2005). This creates a sense of well-being, security and connection among individuals and families; they know others will be there to help if help is needed.

This tradition of helping out creates confusion and difficulties when trying to identify trends and patterns of Aboriginal Volunteerism. Aboriginal people do not see the help that they provide as volunteerism. Volunteering is not promoted or discussed in many communities and this might be one reason why Aboriginal people do not readily make the link between helping and volunteering. Volunteering is then perceived as something difficult, whereas helping out is instead perceived as a way of life where sharing and helping is what keeps the community strong.(City of Vancouver - Social Planning Department, 2011 ; Lois Little, 2005)

What are the perceived differences of formal versus informal volunteering among Aboriginal Peoples? What are the types of roles for each type of volunteering?

The tradition of helping out and its implications, as outlined above, create a clear distinction in the patterns of Aboriginal Volunteerism by identifying two types of

volunteer action: informal volunteerism and formal volunteerism. Aboriginal people perceive the two types very differently.

Informal volunteerism

Informal volunteerism is a form of volunteerism where individuals volunteer for families, neighbours, and communities (Wang, 2010). Aboriginal people predominantly continue to help out in informal settings. They tend to help individuals and families for the well-being of the whole community. They freely help anyone experiencing hardship, loss or need (Little, Auchterlonie, & Stephen, 2005).

Common examples of informal volunteerism among Aboriginal people identified by Little, Auchterlonie, & Stephen (2005) include:

- Cooking;
- Sewing;
- Hunting;
- Watching over individuals;
- Delivering messages;
- Cutting firewood;
- Building and fixing things; and
- Doing chores, as needed.

Formal volunteerism

Formal volunteerism is defined as helping out through a volunteer group or committee such as non-profit organizations, community groups, or non-government organizations (Volunteer Nunavut, Book 1, 2004)

Volunteer Alberta identified the following list of common examples of formal volunteering among Aboriginal people (2004):

List of Activities/Engagement

- Organizing and helping to stage community events and festivities;
- Participating in justice circles;
- Participating in community hunts that respect traditions of harvesting and sharing country foods with elders and others in need;
- Repairing or cleaning up public spaces;
- Interpreting, orienting, storytelling,

List of Roles:

- Toastmasters Leader;
- Community Leader;
- President;
- Youth Organization;
- Aboriginal Headstart Parent Committee;
- Board of Directors;
- President of a University Native Centre;
- Tutors;

- mentoring, and helping young people to keep traditional cultural practices and Aboriginal languages alive.
- Holding special events to welcome strangers;
- Being a board member with a community or a territorial society. (Imagine Canada)
- Elders;
- Personal coach/councillor;
- Presenter.
- Meditation Leadership;
- Volunteer organizer;
- Ice-breaker & Circle Leader;

Due to a tradition of informal volunteerism in the Aboriginal culture, some concerns arise when dealing with formal volunteerism. Apart from the fact that volunteering is a little known concept compared to the tradition of helping out (Little, Auchterlonie, & Stephen, 2005), as mentioned earlier, multiple obstacles to participation in formal volunteerism arise from beliefs. The first obstacle is the impact of the professional and complex setting of the formal voluntary sector that can discourage Aboriginal volunteering. It can be perceived as a barrier to the expression of traditional values.

Secondly, Aboriginal volunteers are less comfortable with structured volunteer activities, goal rather than people-oriented activities. Because of this complex and structured environment, many aboriginal people fear that they do not have the skills required, or perceived as needed. Also, the formal environment tends to have a single focus or interest group. This environment can be contrary to some Aboriginal people's interest as they may not be interested in participating in single interest groups when they value necessity, and a sense of helping others in a social environment. They may also feel reluctant to participate in the competitive environment that is common with single focus interest. Volunteers may also assume that their help is not needed because many volunteer groups have paid staff (Little, Auchterlonie, & Stephen, 2005).

What motivates Aboriginal people to volunteer?

In the Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating (2007), multiple reasons motivated individuals in their decision to volunteer. The main reason listed was the desire to contribute to their community (93% of respondents). Other motivations identified by the respondents were the desire to make use of personal skills and experiences (77%); being personally affected by the cause the organization supports (59%); exploring their own strengths (50%); networking (48%); joining with friends (47%); improving job opportunities (23%); and fulfilling religious obligations or beliefs (22%) (Hall, Lasby, Ayer, & Gibbons, 2009).

In the context of Aboriginal Volunteerism, the most common reasons for volunteering raised in the literature reviewed were as follows:

- To socialize and make contacts;
- To participate in and contribute to the community;
- To get to know the community better and to share with the community;
- To build experience, knowledge and skills;
- To give by sharing knowledge and skills;
- To be helpful and to help each other;
- To obtain work experience and to enhance résumé;
- To do the right thing;
- To help others is to do what comes naturally and is a traditional value. (Institute for Advancement of Aboriginal Women, 2006)

What are the outcomes of formal and informal volunteering by Aboriginal Peoples?

Aboriginal volunteers clearly see the benefits and potential of volunteering. Volunteering is an opportunity to strengthen Aboriginal culture, but also to contribute in making communities better places to live in (Little, Auchterlonie, & Stephen, 2005). The impact of volunteerism can be assessed on three different levels: economic, social and personal.

Economic Value of Volunteering

The first positive impact of volunteerism is the economic value. The work that volunteers perform for free would otherwise have a cost that is now eliminated by the gift of time and effort. It is possible to calculate the economic value of volunteering by determining how many hours people volunteer during a certain time period, and how much a person would get paid for this kind of work (Volunteer Nunavut, Book 2, 2004). It is also important to note that the value of volunteer time may be at different levels depending on the skills on the volunteer or the nature of the position. Measuring the economic value of volunteering can be done in two ways, by calculating funds donated and time volunteers.

The economic value is usually known as an added-value, but is not included in financial accounting of organizations (Wisener, 2009). Embuldeniya and Goulbourne (2002) have identified eight measures to assign economic value to volunteer activity :

1. Estimates of the Value of Volunteer Activity : a dollar value is attributed to each hour of volunteer activity.
2. True Value Added to Personnel : Contribution is calculated by assigning a wage rate and benefits to each hours of volunteer activity

3. Full-time Year-round Job Equivalent : The total number of volunteer hours are converted to the equivalent of full-time positions.
4. Percent Personnel Value Extended : Demonstrates how volunteers extend the value of the organization's personnel.
5. Organization Volunteer Investment Ratio : An analysis is made to see if the organization's investment in the volunteer program has a good return on the money.
6. Volunteer to Paid Staff Ratio : A comparison is made between the number of paid management staff in the volunteer program and the number of volunteers.
7. Volunteer Capital-Contribution : Out-of-pocket expenses incurred by volunteers are calculated.
8. Community Investment Ratio : A comparison is made between the amount the organization invests in the volunteer program and the time invested by volunteers to the program.

Volunteerism also strengthens local economies through volunteer-run events that bring new dollars or encourage spending in the community. Volunteer fundraising events also help generate value to the community's profile (Volunteer Nunavut, Book1, 2004).

Volunteerism contributes to the economic value of society and various communities. This particular value can be measure according to inputs such as donated funds and contributed time, as well as with outputs such as the improved well-being of the community (Wisener, 2009).

Social Value of Volunteering

The social benefits of volunteering are numerous. The social value of volunteering is about how people and communities benefit from volunteering. This focuses on how individuals from all background and ages contribute to the community's well-being (Volunteer Nunavut, Book 2, 2004). For example, Aboriginal volunteers can offer information and knowledge, they can bring new perspectives and awareness, and they have strong adaptability and perseverance skills (Volunteer Alberta, 2004). Volunteers can often relate better to the people they are serving than the businesses or governments who are paid to provide a service to the public because of the structure of the relationship is not as formal.

Volunteering can also offers alternatives to communities such as participating in the justice system, working towards preventing youth from entering the non-Aboriginal justice system, and providing youth with the opportunity to right a wrong. Aboriginal Volunteerism can also help make communities safer and enhance the health and well-being of any community through a range of programs, services and events (Little,

Auchterlonie, & Stephen, 2005). Furthermore, Aboriginal volunteers contribute to the maintenance of urban Aboriginal communities. Volunteers step up and get involved in order to take care of important work that otherwise would not be done due to a lack of resources (The Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres, The Ontario Metis Aboriginal Association and The Ontario Native Women's Association, 2007). The contributions of volunteers make a significant difference to the people who are on the receiving end (Volunteer Alberta, 2004) as well as the individuals who volunteer as will be discussed in the section below.

Personal Value of Volunteering

The personal value of volunteering is how volunteering helps each person and this impact can be physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual. Volunteering can revitalize the human spirit and connection, help people feel good about themselves by helping others and it can make people feel like they belong in their community (Volunteer Nunavut, Book 1, 2004; Little, Auchterlonie, & Stephen, 2005).

Volunteering can also offer very practical personal skills and experience to Aboriginal volunteers. In the 2000 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 79% of volunteers say that volunteering helped them with interpersonal skills. Also, 68% of volunteers said that their experience helped them develop better communication skills and 63% mentioned having an increased knowledge of issues related to their volunteer experience (Canadian Centre for Philanthropy, 2004).

Volunteering also helps volunteers develop job skills (Canadian Centre for Philanthropy, 2004). For example, it allows volunteers to develop a network with mainstream businesses, professional associations, governments and community initiatives. Volunteering can create a bridge between the skills that individuals already possess and give them a chance to apply them in a work environment (Volunteer Alberta, 2004).

In the 2000 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 28% of unemployed volunteers said that their volunteering had helped them obtain a job in the past and 62% of unemployed volunteers believed that it would help them find a job in the future. (Canadian Centre for Philanthropy, 2004).

What strategies are used by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organizations to recruit and retain Aboriginal volunteers?

Recruitment Strategies

Many effective recruitment methods of Aboriginal volunteers were identified by this review. Most of the publications had highlighted the same best practices. For example, when asked, Aboriginal women volunteers identified the most effective recruitment methods as follows:

- 1) through media, especially the Internet,
- 2) by directly asking and
- 3) by word of mouth (Institute for Advancement of Aboriginal Women, 2006).

It has also been suggested that organizations contact the local Aboriginal communities to build relationships with community elders. They can be very helpful with the recruitment of volunteers (Volunteering Australia, 2007) by offering guidance on whom to contact for help and can also smooth interactions between Aboriginal volunteers and the organizations (Institute for Advancement of Aboriginal Women, 2006).

The following suggestions were offered in terms of best practices for recruitment:

1. Link volunteerism with the notion of “helping out” as understood in Aboriginal culture: It is important to tie the recruitment message to the motivations of Aboriginal volunteers in ways which demonstrate the impact that volunteers can have on others’ life and the potential to be a role model. The legacy that would come from volunteering is also an important motivation for Aboriginal volunteers (McKague, Hoeber, Dorsch, Riemer, University of Regina, & Kryzanowski, 2007). Organizations should be specific about what they can offer in terms of opportunity as well as the skills they might develop while volunteering (Volunteering Australia, 2007)
2. Targeted recruitment: This method proposes to initially recruit previous volunteers so that they can in turn recruit new volunteers from their community (McKague, Hoeber, Dorsch, Riemer, University of Regina, & Kryzanowski, 2007).
3. Simple and clear recruitment process: It should not be complicated for people to get involved. Organizations should limit the paperwork, forms, etc. that could hinder the recruitment of volunteers. (Volunteering Australia, 2007)

Lois Little for the Native Women’s Association of the Northwest Territories (2005) identified these key elements that organizations should aim to have if they wish to successfully recruit Aboriginal volunteers:

1. Secure funding: Volunteer organizations should lobby to secure funding in order to find solutions to any funding issues. The issues create barriers to Aboriginal

- volunteer participation and can hinder recruitment efforts made by the organization.
2. **Positive profile:** Having a positive reputation in the Aboriginal communities will help build relationships and engage potential Aboriginal volunteers.
 3. **Credibility and accountability:** Organizations should implement consistent and transparent reports on activities and finances.
 4. **Representation:** Volunteer organizations should hire Aboriginal staff.

Obstacles to Recruitment

In the general context of Canadian volunteerism, multiple obstacles limiting the participation of individuals in volunteer organizations were identified. The main reason identified for not volunteering was a lack of time, followed by many other obstacles such as the inability to make a long-term commitment, having already given time, preferring to give money instead of time, not being asked, not having an interest, health problems, not knowing how to get involved, the financial cost of volunteering and finally being dissatisfied with a previous experience. (Hall, Lasby, Ayer, & Gibbons, 2009)

Aboriginal people can face many challenges which prevent them from participating as volunteers, including:

- Lack of transportation and poor economic conditions;
- Absence of support;
- Systemic barriers, including racism, cultural insensitivity, and lack of relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people;
- Mainstream hierarchical titles (such as chief) conflicting with community values;
- Lack of self-esteem and feeling of purpose;
- Family and extended family crises, such as poverty, crime, incarceration, and substance abuse (Volunteer Canada, 2010).

Retaining Aboriginal Volunteers

Once volunteers have been recruited it is essential to try to retain their involvement. Aboriginal volunteers have a high turnover rate and the following best practices in volunteer retention aims to remedy to this situation:

1. **Training:** A very common issue raised throughout the literature reviewed was volunteer training. It has been established that the training components of any

volunteer position are often incomplete or inexistent. Volunteers would prefer to get pre-session training, but very few are given such a session. (Institute for Advancement of Aboriginal Women, 2006)

The most effective methods for training Aboriginal volunteers are:

- Providing hands-on experience
- Encouraging and acknowledging the work and efforts of volunteers
- Mutual respect of individuals, cultures, traditions and heritage when providing training. This is very important at every level of volunteerism, including recruitment, retention, training and protocol. (Institute for Advancement of Aboriginal Women, 2006)

Training sessions should include the following elements:

- A presentation about the organization
 - An explanation of the volunteer's duties
 - An introduction to the people recruits will be working with
 - A description of procedures and protocols (Volunteers should receive a Volunteer Code of Conduct, if available)
 - Contact information for volunteers if they have any question
 - An explanation of the importance of their contribution
 - A question and answer period with plenty of time to answer questions and discuss concerns
 - The opportunity to shadow a mentor, if possible
 - A comfortable community environment
- (Institute for Advancement of Aboriginal Women, 2006)

2. **Encouraging Family Volunteering:** Community and family are at the heart of the Aboriginal culture and encouraging families to participate allows Aboriginal parents to teach the younger generation about the tradition of helping out (Volunteer Canada, 2010). Family volunteering is a common practice and will ensure a better participation rate and retention as it fosters a sense of community and responsibility (Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women, 2006).
3. **Appreciation:** Volunteers are more likely to remain with the organization if they feel that their contribution is appreciated (Institute for Advancement of Aboriginal Women, 2006). It is also suggested to communicate the importance of volunteering. This message should be promoted at every level including orientation, training and recognition (Little, Auchterlonie, & Stephen, 2005).

4. **Providing Unstructured Volunteer Opportunities:** Unstructured volunteer opportunities are beneficial for Aboriginal volunteers. This setting allows them to take on a variety of tasks in a more comfortable work structure (Institute for Advancement of Aboriginal Women, 2006). This type of setting can remove any discomfort Aboriginal people may have with mainstream hierarchical infrastructure (Volunteer Alberta, 2004). Volunteers should have the opportunity to select events, venues and tasks (Hoeber, McKague, Riemer, Dorsch, & Kryzanowski, 2007). This idea ties in the traditional holistic view of society where specific interests may be seen as irrelevant or not useful by Aboriginal communities. Offering volunteers the chance to choose their duties, for example, will help ensure that they will be engaged by the work they do (Lois Little for the Native Women's Association of the Northwest Territories, 2005).
5. **Creating a Comfortable and Inclusive Environment:** Mutual respect of cultural differences is essential in volunteer retention. Aboriginal people want to feel welcome and comfortable in their work environment. Incorporating cultural practices in the various activities will make volunteers more at ease in mainstream activities (McKague, Hoeber et Dorsch, 2007; Volunteer Alberta 2004). Respect for diversity within a volunteer organization will allow Aboriginal volunteers to feel proud of their differences and unique perspectives. Organizations should keep an open-mind, be genuine, be mindful of cultural values and treat volunteers with respect (Institute for Advancement of Aboriginal Women, 2006).
6. **Building Relationships:** Organizations should get to know their volunteers and show an interest in them as individuals and not just volunteers. (Institute for Advancement of Aboriginal Women, 2006)
7. **Offering Support and Encouragement:** Organizations should provide volunteers with mentors to ensure that they have someone to turn to for advice, help and support (Institute for Advancement of Aboriginal Women, 2006).
8. **Offering Conflict Resolution Solutions:** As in any relationship between parties, conflict is inevitable. Organizations should ensure that they have the proper mechanisms in place to deal with difficult situations. In the case of Aboriginal volunteers, it may be more appropriate to use culturally relevant mechanisms of conflict resolution such as talking and healing circles. Talking circles allow the participant to talk, vent, and heal and are initiated by an individual or group of people who are in conflict with another individual or group of people who seek resolution and guidance (Institute for Advancement of Aboriginal Women, 2006).

Mandatory Community Service:

While two types of volunteerism were previously raised, formal and informal, mandatory community service can be understood as a third type of volunteerism. It is distinguishable from the other two types because it does not have a voluntary nature but is rather court ordered. The federal correctional system uses community service and community reintegration in order to have a system that corresponds to the needs of offenders and that contributes to better communities.

Statistically, Aboriginal individuals are disproportionately represented at all levels of the Canadian criminal justice system. In March 2007, Aboriginal people comprised 17.0% of federally sentenced offenders although the general Aboriginal population is only 2.7% of the Canadian adult population (Correctional Service Canada, Aboriginal Corrections, 2011).

Due to these indicators, a demand for correctional change was put forward by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in 1996. A new Aboriginal correctional continuum of care model has been implemented since 2003 by Correctional Services Canada. This new federal correctional care model focuses on reintegration in the community by involving various stakeholders, including the voluntary sector and Aboriginal communities.

While this new continuum does not focus on community services as the main framework for rehabilitation, it is an important component. It is a major factor contributing to Aboriginal offenders' success upon release. It has been proven effective to have Aboriginal offenders participate in spiritual and cultural activities, as well as programs (preferably delivered by Aboriginal people).

The support they received from family and community is also a very important factor in the rehabilitation process. The community plays a critical role when it provides access to ceremonies and teachings within their unique cultures to Aboriginal offenders. These traditional practices help them re-establish connections with their families and communities and assist Correctional Service Canada in planning for the offender's eventual permanent return. (Correctional Service Canada, Strategic Plan, 2011)

While this does not translate directly to volunteerism, it is easy to see the impact of community service as well as community involvement in the rehabilitation of Aboriginal Offenders.

FURTHER RESEARCH

- More statistical research will be required to develop a clear profile of the status of Aboriginal Volunteerism. The statistical profiles found in the literature reviewed were very limited geographically and not representative of the Canadian reality. Consequently, more information will be required in order to understand how Aboriginal individuals volunteer, what their socio-demographic characteristics are, where they choose to volunteer, how much time they invest, etc. Any information aiming to provide a clear data set for this population group will be helpful in understanding the patterns of Aboriginal Volunteerism. However, due to the difficult nature of identifying activities as volunteerism, in comparison to “helping out”, this may prove to be a difficult exercise.

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