

EVENT VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

STRATEGY

September 2018



**“THOSE WHO CAN DO,
THOSE WHO CAN DO MORE,
VOLUNTEER”**

- Author unknown

Questions?

Visit whitby.ca/volunteer or contact the Special Event Team at volunteer@whitby.ca
or call 905.430.4300 x 2238.

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BACKGROUND

Between 2011 and 2016, the Town of Whitby grew in population from 122,022 to 128,377 – a 5.2 per cent increase.¹ This growth is projected to continue in the years to come, with the population expected to reach 156,915 in the year 2021 and 192,860 in the year 2031.²

The three largest age groups in Whitby are the 40 to 49-year-old group (20,215), the 50 to 59-year-old group (19,740), and the 10 to 19-year-old group (18,640). Within the current population, the median age rose from 37.6 in 2011 to 39.5 in 2016.³

A recent briefing from the Conference Board of Canada to Volunteer Canada noted that while young Canadians have high volunteer participation rates, those aged 55 and over contribute a higher number of volunteer hours on average.⁴

In a recent Town of Whitby volunteer engagement survey, 76.6 per cent of respondents fell within the three age groups noted above. This comparison underscores the importance of targeted volunteer recruitment efforts and the design of volunteer opportunities towards these growing age groups.

Volunteers want to give back and help Whitby, while also developing and applying their skills and meeting new people. In a recent engagement study, Whitby's event volunteers were asked why they are motivated to contribute to their community and what they like most about volunteering. An overwhelming majority of respondents noted that their primary motivation is giving back and making a positive impact in their community.

While the total impact of volunteers in Whitby – including event, Boards and Committees, senior and youth volunteers – has not been fully measured, it is clear that volunteers help to make the Town a vibrant and supportive place for all residents to call home.

¹ Statistics Canada, 2016 Census.

² Ontario Ministry of Finance, Population Projections.

³ Statistics Canada, 2016 Census.

⁴ Conference Board of Canada, "The Value of Volunteering in Canada", April 5, 2018.

INTRODUCTION

A strong and enthusiastic community of volunteers is a pillar for a vibrant, inclusive and engaged municipality. Each year, the Town delivers eight large-scale community events and more than 50 summer programming events. More than 160 volunteers contribute nearly 900 hours to these events each year. The success of these events is dependent on the contribution of time, skills, and lived experience of volunteers.

We recognize that to successfully engage event volunteers, we need to design volunteer opportunities that are aligned with expectations, expertise, knowledge, and interests of those dedicating their valuable time. These active forms of community engagement can instill civic pride and pride of place for residents.

To ensure that the volunteer experience is meaningful, accessible, and seamless, we developed a strategic framework for how the Town attracts, retains, supports, recognizes and celebrates its event volunteers. We believe our new Event Volunteer Strategy is a critical element in planning for the long-term health and well-being of our community.

The Volunteer Strategy has been developed based on feedback from current and past volunteers, senior leadership, and staff, learnings taken from the Town's current volunteer initiatives and best practices from other organizations, festivals and communities across Canada. Most importantly, to ensure the strategy reflects the needs of volunteers and is in alignment with the capacity and resources of the Town. More than 100 staff and event volunteers contributed their ideas and experiences to the process. To ensure our volunteer strategy reflects the needs and aspirations of our volunteers and is in alignment with the capacity and resources of the Town, we also reviewed our current initiatives and best practices from other organizations, festivals and communities across Canada.

We are proud of the outcome of our planning process and excited about the potential of our volunteer strategy – as it will ensure that the Town of Whitby will continue to be a vibrant, welcoming and engaged community.

We thank everyone who took the time to participate, share ideas and give suggestions. Collectively, we will be a thriving and connected community that celebrates our people, place, and our many skills.

THE VOLUNTEER JOURNEY

With eight large scale events and more than 50 summer programming events taking place in each year, Whitby is a wonderful community to live, work and enjoy. The success of many of these events depends on the contribution of our volunteers.

To ensure the best experience for our volunteers, who give so generously of their time, expertise, skills, and energy, the Town of Whitby knows that a robust and comprehensive volunteer strategy must recognize every stage of the volunteer journey.

Volunteers start their journey by learning about the Town's volunteer opportunities and being recruited to share their time and talents. They move into an on-boarding process, where the Town and volunteer have a chance to learn more about one another, the volunteer roles that exist and the criteria that must be met for a volunteer to engage with the Town. From here, volunteers can be matched to opportunities based on their interests, skills, time commitments and experience. Volunteers are then provided important supports including orientation and training sessions to ensure that they are well-equipped to lend a hand. Finally, volunteers are recognized and appreciated for their efforts, and are made aware of the positive impacts they have having on their community.

A successful volunteer journey is one that leads to more volunteer experiences and engagement of new volunteers. It is about the re-generation and renewal of volunteer enthusiasm.

Recognizing each stage of the volunteer journey, our strategy is designed for every volunteer experience to be inclusive, accessible, seamless, and rewarding at every stage. It is hoped that through positive volunteer experiences, it will lead to high volunteer retention, the continued growth of our volunteer program and increased capacity of both staff and volunteers.



OUR VISION FOR VOLUNTEERS

The Town of Whitby fosters a vibrant, inclusive and engaged community through a volunteer program that celebrates and acknowledges the experience and passion of our residents.

OUR VOLUNTEER PRIORITIES

To achieve our vision, we have set out four priority areas.

1. Broadening Volunteer Outreach and Engagement
2. Strengthening Volunteer Capacity
3. Supporting and Empowering Volunteers
4. Recognizing and Celebrating Volunteers



1.

BROADENING VOLUNTEER OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

A well-defined engagement process that is implemented consistently across the organization is key to the Town's community engagement efforts. Each opportunity should be assessed in order to determine the scale and scope of the engagement.

OUR COMMITMENTS

We commit to “Broadening Volunteer outreach and Engagement” by:

- 1.1. Developing accessible digital resources to inform, engage and recruit volunteers;
- 1.2. Exploring new venues to share volunteer opportunities that help strengthen community partnerships and resident engagement;
- 1.3. Strengthening standard communications with current volunteers to ensure they are kept up-to-date with timely, clear and consistent messages; and,
- 1.4. Raising the public profile of volunteers and volunteer opportunities to demonstrate the positive impact that volunteers have on our community.

Recommended action items include:

- Develop a dedicated webpage with volunteer information and opportunities that will be up-to-date, easy to read, and enticing to visit.
- Develop a strategic communications plan to raise the public profile of volunteers, volunteer opportunities and demonstrate volunteer impact.
- Actively engage in strategic conversations with community organizations, educational institutions and local businesses about partnership and volunteer recruitment opportunities.
- Develop standard processes for communicating with volunteers so that it is consistent across the Town.

Attract

2.

STRENGTHENING VOLUNTEER CAPACITY

We recognize the importance of creating structured and clear opportunities that encourage event volunteers to take ownership of their work, ensure a meaningful sense of contribution, and promote growth and development. The Town prioritizes the safety and well-being of all its volunteers and will support them with consistent application of best practice standards.

We will ensure that infrastructure, policies, and procedures are in place that will ultimately enhance the capacity of staff to work effectively and efficiently with volunteers.

Retain

OUR COMMITMENTS

We commit to “Strengthening Volunteer Capacity” to work with and support volunteers by:

- 2.1 Ensuring clear and consistent roles and responsibilities for event volunteers and expectations of staff;
- 2.2 Aligning volunteer expectations, experience and skills with appropriate volunteer event opportunities to ensure that all participants have a positive and meaningful experience;
- 2.3 Providing opportunities for volunteers to give meaningful feedback on their experiences;
- 2.4 Reviewing and strengthening volunteer policies and procedures with a view to enhancing volunteer and staff experiences; and,
- 2.5 Developing a consistent approach to gather, monitor, and analyze volunteer data.

Recommended action items include:

- Invest in an online volunteer management software program to enable the creation of volunteer profiles, future communication, and tracking of volunteers and their contributions.
- Integrate volunteer feedback mechanisms and processes into event volunteer correspondence.
- Mechanisms could include a standardized post-event survey debrief sessions or exit interviews if volunteers state that they will not be returning.
- Developing an event volunteer handbook that outlines opportunities roles descriptions and expectations for staff support.
- Developing policies and procedures that outline how and where event volunteer data is stored and how it is managed. All staff responsible for volunteer data management should also be provided with adequate training to support consistency.

3.

SUPPORTING AND EMPOWERING VOLUNTEERS

We understand that volunteers need support to successfully fulfill their duties. Strong and consistent support mechanisms can empower volunteers to make the most of their time and skills in service of their community while helping to mitigate potential risks, reduce volunteer fatigue and support the long-term sustainability of the volunteer program.

We will work towards creating and implementing strong support measures for volunteers that empowers them to reach shared goals and stay engaged.

Support

OUR COMMITMENTS

We commit to “Supporting and Empowering Volunteers” by:

- 3.1 Renewing the application process for event volunteers so that it is accessible and makes it easy to get involved;
- 3.2 Developing standardized onboarding training and resources to support volunteers and ensure their safety and well-being;
- 3.3 Aligning all application, onboarding, and training resources with current our Human Resources policies and practices to ensure compliance and mitigate risk for staff and volunteers; and,
- 3.4 Exploring and identifying areas for professional and skill development for volunteers that could increase capacity for future volunteer-supported events.

Recommended action items include:

- Develop a stepped registration and screening process including an online application form that will simplify the application process for volunteers and staff.
- Develop an handbook and standard training program that includes key information about the vision and goals of the Town, expectations for volunteers and staff, codes of conduct, critical policies and procedures such as accessibility and health and safety, and event or department-specific training when required.
- Implement annual orientation training sessions for new and returning volunteers.
- Identify types of professional and skill development that could be provided volunteers. For example, a First Aid and CPR course.

4.

RECOGNIZING AND CELEBRATING VOLUNTEERS

We recognize the positive impact that volunteers have on our many community events and know that an important part of an enjoyable volunteer experience is being thanked, recognized and celebrated. By acknowledging and publicly celebrating the work of volunteers, we will ensure that volunteers feel valued and understand the importance their contribution has on the broader community.

We will work to ensure that volunteers are shown gratitude and are thanked for the time, skills and expertise they provide to our events.

OUR COMMITMENTS

We commit to “Recognizing and Celebrating Volunteers” by:

- 4.1 Exploring innovative ways to recognize volunteers that align with volunteer expectations and levels of service;
- 4.2 Finding creative ways to demonstrate and communicate the impact of volunteerism in Whitby; and,
- 4.3 Establishing a system to measure and monitor the volunteer experience and impact so that volunteers can connect their contributions to the benefits for the community.

Recommended action items include:

- Develop a volunteer appreciation program that combines a large appreciation event with smaller, more frequent and personalized demonstrations of appreciation.
- Ensure the volunteer management software can monitor and track volunteer contributions and create standardized recognition tokens that volunteers can aspire to.
- Develop volunteer performance measurements, which will assist staff in ensuring the volunteer program is meeting the needs and expectations of volunteers.

Recognize

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