



# HOW TO SET UP A VOLUNTEER CENTRE

2025

VOLUNTEER BC  
*THE VOICE OF VOLUNTEERISM*

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# COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS: SET UP A VOLUNTEER CENTRE

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## ABOUT THE HANDBOOK

Volunteer BC's revised "Community Connections: Volunteer Engagement Handbook", is a guide for communities wanting to promote, encourage and match people to local volunteer opportunities. Individuals are looking for safe, meaningful opportunities and sustainable local volunteer engagement. We enhanced this handbook to reflect the challenges individuals & communities are facing in a post-pandemic landscape.

## ABOUT VOLUNTEER BC



Volunteer BC is the voice of volunteerism with the goal of promoting the value of volunteerism and building healthy BC communities.

### OUR VISION

Volunteer BC is the voice for supporting & connecting the voluntary sector to achieve excellence in volunteerism for the benefit of all British Columbians.

### OUR MISSION

To be a strong and relevant provincial voice in promoting the development and value of volunteerism in BC by working cooperatively with the general public, volunteer centres, voluntary organizations, governments, businesses, and volunteer-involved organizations.



# **VOLUNTEERING BASICS**

2025

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Click on the section titles to jump to that section

3	<a href="#"><u>Disclaimer &amp; Acknowledgments</u></a>
5	<a href="#"><u>Introduction</u></a>
6	<a href="#"><u>1. Getting Started</u></a>
7	<a href="#"><u>2. Setting the Stage</u></a>
7	<a href="#"><u>3. Do Your Research</u></a>
7	<a href="#"><u>4. Network with Other Community Organizations</u></a>
8	<a href="#"><u>5. Steering Committee</u></a>
9	<a href="#"><u>6. Conducting a Community Needs Assessment</u></a>
10	<a href="#"><u>7. Structure &amp; Organization Framework</u></a>
11	<a href="#"><u>8. What Will it Cost?</u></a>
11	<a href="#"><u>9. Funding Sources</u></a>
13	<a href="#"><u>10. Develop a Business Plan</u></a>
14	<a href="#"><u>11. Recruiting a Board of Directors</u></a>
15	<a href="#"><u>12. Legally Establish as a Society</u></a>
16	<a href="#"><u>13. Publicity, Outreach, and Media Relations</u></a>
18	<a href="#"><u>Appendix</u></a>
19	<a href="#"><u>References and Resources</u></a>

# INTRODUCTION

Purpose and Use of This Document  
This document provided as a guideline only, for those planning or considering the establishment of a volunteer centre in their community. It is not a definitive resource, but rather thoughtful information gathered to assist you in your journey.



# 1. GETTING STARTED

[Do You Fit The Definition As Defined By Volunteer Canada?](#)

[Find A Volunteer Centre In Your Area](#)

## WHAT OTHERS HAVE TO SAY

[Volunteer Canada](#): Volunteer Centres work in local communities to strengthen volunteering and citizen engagement. With more than 200 in Canada, each volunteer centre's name, size, structure, and services reflect the unique characteristics of their community. Many volunteer centres are independent non-profit organizations, while others are part of a United Way, Social Planning Council, Community Information and Referral Centre or municipal services.

[Volunteer BC](#): With a multitude of volunteer centres in British Columbia, each providing common services as well as a unique mix of programs to fit the needs of the community. See our [Volunteer Centre Fact Sheet](#) for a list of all the great things they do in communities. Volunteer BC remains committed to fostering strong ties to both existing and new/emerging volunteer centres across BC. Our staff and board members are available in person or via other methods to provide consultation, host mentorship sessions, and attend community roundtables and workshops within your community. We continue to work with potential partners to help find ways to communicate with centres, community groups, and organizations around the province utilizing the most cost-effective technology.



## 1. GETTING STARTED

[Volunteer Alberta](#): Volunteer Centres play a strategic and vital role in local communities. They are a source of leadership on local trends and issues affecting volunteerism and offer access to local training opportunities. Volunteer Centres enhance the capacity of non-profit and community organizations to achieve their missions, increasing their impact on Alberta Communities.

[Charity Village](#): Volunteer Centres and Bureau refer volunteers to community opportunities of their choice, based upon volunteer needs listed with the Centres by member agencies in each community served. Many also provide training, development and other services to non-profit organizations, as well as specialized publications for the voluntary sector

## 2. SETTING THE STAGE

You have concluded that a volunteer centre is a good idea. Now what?

### BASIC STEPS FOR A START UP

1. Think you need a volunteer centre in your community?
2. Gather like-minded people who think so too.
3. Do the research and make your case. Is a volunteer centre really needed?
4. Come up with a solid business plan.
5. Establish a Board of Directors, incorporate a non-profit society, register as a charity, and hire your staff.
6. Now you are ready to start a volunteer centre!

### 3. DO YOUR RESEARCH

Many volunteer centres are independent non-profit organizations, while others are part of a United Way, Social Planning Council, Community Information and Referral Centre or municipal services. Though diverse in many ways, they share common functions:

Does your community already engage in activities that meet the core functions of a Volunteer Centre?

- Promote Volunteering
- Build the capacity of organizations to engage volunteers
- Facilitate connections between people with volunteer opportunities
- Provide leadership on issues related to volunteering and citizen engagement

*Volunteer Canada*

### 4. NETWORK WITH OTHER COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

It is essential and necessary to research existing services and activities that groups and organizations currently offer in your community. Build on those important relationships and where possible consider a partnership and collaboration in efforts.



Documented Research has shown that Volunteer Centres do indeed play an important role in community. Successful centres are effective in building community leadership and in improving the quality of services carried out. Seek out the opportunity to connect with other Volunteer Centres, after all these folks are the voice of experience of which to draw upon.

## QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

How Do Other Volunteer Centres:

- Meet established community needs and be a recognized part of the community's overall plan for services.
- Remain sensitive to the special needs of the community, such as culture, language, and heritage, and to individuals with mental health problems.
- Gain sufficient commitment of interest from community groups in promoting Volunteer Centre services to ensure sustained leadership.

## 5. STEERING COMMUNITY

A small working group tasked with the goals and objective to investigate that there is a reason, need, and desire to start a volunteer centre. Sourcing the ways and means to start, sustain, and maintain a volunteer centre.



Who should be on the Steering Committee? There is no ideal number of members for a Steering Committee, and much will depend on your community and the expertise and commitment within it.

The most accurate, and thorough information possible is critical to reach your goals and objectives. Experience shows that the most comprehensive method of getting the best information about your community's need (Community Needs Assessment) is for the Steering Committee to engage with key people in purposeful conversation.

## THOUGHTS ON HOW TO CONDUCT A NEEDS ASSESMENT

- A Survey: A number of excellent online survey tools are available, i.e. [Survey Monkey](#) to assist in conducting a community/needs assessment
- Informal conversations and Focus Groups
- Speaking to non-profit groups, groups and organizations
- Conversations with For-Profit, Government and Public business and organizations

*ITtoolkit.com*

## 6. CONDUCTING A COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

### QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- What will your centre look like?
- What service will you provide to the public?
- Will it be a Stand Alone, Virtual, Municipal Volunteer Centre, or as part of a larger Multi-service agency?
- Historically, has there ever been a volunteer centre in your community? If yes, try to track down those who were involved such as former staff, board members, or volunteers.
- Why did the centre close? What challenges did it face?  
Understanding the experience of any previous volunteer centres will help you in your planning. Is there a role for anyone who was involved in the former centres? Can they share experience, contacts, policies, or lessons learned?
- Is any organization in the community currently offering services similar to a volunteer centre services?
- Are there partnership opportunities to share resources?
- Is there data on volunteering available for your community?
- Are there funding opportunities in the community for a volunteer centre?
- Whom will the volunteer centre serve?
- Do you have suitable expertise for a strong board of directors?
- Can you meet the legal requirements of establishing a new society?
- Do you have the support needed and necessary for this endeavor?

## 7. STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION FRAMEWORK

The structure and organizational framework of a non-profit organization ultimately depends on how it is set up. This will determine operational needs including staff requirements, programs, and administration, all depending on the purpose, goals, and objectives of the Volunteer Centre.

### Two Options for Consideration:

1. Be registered under the provincial Societies Act as a non-profit, independent organization with a constitution and by-laws.
2. Function as the department of such a society with its own advisory committee, with a representative sitting on the society's board to report on behalf of the service, or it may function as a government agency with its own advisory committee.
3. The board or advisory committee should be representative of the community, including representation from a high percentage of volunteers with some agency staff (selected for their expertise).

### THOUGHTS AND IDEAS

- Have you identified resources already available within your community?
- How will you finance? Start up, over the short term & long term.
- What are the staffing requirements for a start-up over the short term & long term? Where would you set up an office? Do you need a physical office?
- Can it be a home office?
- What services will be provided to the public?

- Informing about volunteer opportunities
- Training and consulting services and events
- Volunteer Management Resources
- Resource Centre
- Learning Initiatives
- Special programs to support volunteerism
- Promote National Volunteer Week
- Act as a collective voice for groups and organizations that engage volunteers
- Collaborate with businesses that are interested in developing an employer supported volunteer program

## 8. WHAT WILL IT COST?

The big question, how will you sustain and maintain your centre in its start up and over the short term & long term?

A realistic, understandable financial plan and budget is critical to the health and success of your Volunteer Centre. Depending on the expertise found on your board, you may also need to call in a financial professional to assist with setting up your budget and your centre's financial systems.

### ORGANIZING THE INITIAL BUDGET

The budget is a valuable management tool, and it deserves a high level of attention and energy from the board and staff of your volunteer centre.

Establishing an initial budget is uniquely challenging as you are starting with little or no financial history for your new volunteer centre. To gain ideas for budget items and costs a good point of reference would be reviewing budgets of similarly established volunteer centres and other agencies. Although specific requirements vary by jurisdiction, all incorporated groups have some requirements for annual reporting. Ask your financial experts to explain your obligations.

*Community Tool Box*



## 9. FUNDING SOURCES

Revenues are all the funds that your volunteer centre could potentially receive, including donations, grants, fees for goods and services, fundraising activities and project contracts. You will be looking for start-up and seed funding to get your volunteer centre going, as well as core funding for your on-going operational budget.

Finding reliable sources of funding is one of the biggest challenges faced by non-profit agencies. Consider approaching your local United Way and service clubs for funding assistance, and investigate appropriate foundation grants, as well as support from local businesses.

Government funding varies both provincially and federally. As an example, in BC funding opportunities are made available through the Ministry of Community, Sport and Cultural Development - Community Gaming Grants. This supports eligible not-for-profit organizations that deliver community programs benefiting British Columbians.

The province of BC also enjoys the benefit of the British Columbia Association for Charitable Gaming (BCACG). The BCACG represents charities and community groups, promoting access to gaming revenues that are licensed and regulated by the Province of British Columbia.

[BC Association for Charitable Gaming](#)

[Community Gaming Grants](#)

[Grand Advance](#)

[Wild Apricot](#)

## 10. DEVELOP A BUSINESS PLAN

Dedicating time and effort in the development of a solid business plan is always time well spent. It is critical in providing a clear roadmap towards the Volunteer Centres future, and its potential for success.

A detailed timeline outlining plans for sustainable and attainable goals and objectives in the short and long term for the Volunteer Centre.

### A BUSINESS PLAN SHOULD INCLUDE:

- A clear statement of the organization's mission, vision, and mandate
- Develop and communicate a manageable course of action
- How the organization will support growth?
- How will the organization secure funding? What is the plan on sustaining and maintaining the centre?
- How will the organization manage cash flow?
- An analysis of revenues, costs, and projected profits
- A mechanism in place to track performance. Benchmarks along the way.
- An understanding of the landscape. SWOT (Strengths, Weakness, Opportunity, and Threats)
- What services will be offered?
- Marketing and Promotion. What means will be utilized to get the word out?
- How will the organization build solid community relationships with all sectors?
- Non-Profit, For-Profit, Government, Public, and Business?
- Action plan to overcome potential roadblocks and detours along the way
- Handbook describing who and what the organization is

Give thoughtful consideration to the skill set needed and necessary for success. Remember to be inclusive in all respects. Strive for diversity with a broad community representation, including Non-Profit, For-Profit, as well as local businesses. Identify those individuals who have their ear to the ground in all matters community, and can realistically commit to a board position.



## 11. RECRUITING A BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Typically, your original Steering Committee forms the nucleus of your first Board of Directors. This founding board has a tremendous responsibility; in many ways, the work it does, and the legacy it leaves, will determine the success or failure of your volunteer centre.

Your goal is to have a group of informed, productive and committed Board Members. Board recruitment, management, and roles are very important and complex aspects of starting and running any volunteer centre.

### BOARD LIABILITY AND INSURANCE

The Board of Directors is ultimately responsible for the management of the volunteer centre, and thus each Director has a legal liability towards the organization. In brief, board members who conduct themselves honestly and in good faith, and who use due care, diligence, and skill in their volunteer activities are most protected by the law.

Liability in these situations depends on the type of organization and its legal status. There are some ways for directors to protect themselves, and for the organization to indemnify its directors including, in some cases, the purchase of Directors and Officers Liability Insurance. This comes under the auspices of Risk Management planning for the present and future of the organization.

[Cooperators](#)

[Under Our Wing Insurance](#)

[Volunteers and the Law \(Peoples Law School\)](#)

[Volunteer Canada](#)



## 12. LEGALLY ESTABLISH AS A SOCIETY

### INCORPORATION

Incorporation means your Volunteer Centre has legal status as a registered society. It does not automatically register your association as a charity; that is a separate process.

### STEPS TO INCORPORATION:

Contact the Office of the Registrar of Companies for your provincial government for information on incorporation of a non-profit society or refer to their website. This package will include forms, fee schedules, name reservation information, and a copy of the Act, which governs this activity.

### CONSTITUTION AND BY-LAWS

A constitution can be a very simple document. Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) outlines the minimum requirements for a constitution (to register your society for income tax purposes).

### BY-LAWS

Your by-laws outline the rules of management for the board of your volunteer centre. In all cases, however, you must comply with the provincial requirements set out in the Society Act or its equivalent.



[Law for Non-Profits](#)

[Incorporating a Society in British Columbia](#)

[Canada Revenue Agency \(CRA\) Registration as a Charity](#)

## 13. PUBLICITY, OUTREACH, AND MEDIA RELATIONS

### POTENTIAL IDEAS TO PROMOTE YOUR VOLUNTEER CENTRE:

- Public Service Announcements
- News Releases
- Local cable station
- Short telethon or auction asks for pledges in hours not dollars
- Simple flyer with your message; circulate for including in statement stuffers (banks, utilities, cable outlets) and in Continuing Education and Recreation mailers, on grocery bags, and as “filler” in newspapers
- Involvement in a Speakers Bureau
- Feature story in local magazine
- Submit stories and photos to newsletters: corporations, realtors, other non-profits, colleges, and stories in other organizations’ newsletters
- Using your website to disseminate stories, and photos to the public
- Social Media
- Using volunteers to be your ambassadors

### ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS ON GETTING YOUR MESSAGES OUT TO YOUR COMMUNITY

- Volunteer recognition
- Your volunteer centre as a valuable and reliable source of timely information
- Community events
- Recognition of sponsors and supporters
- Keeping the idea of volunteering current in people’s minds
- Educational activities



# AND NOW YOU ARE READY TO LAUNCH



## APPENDIX

### CLEAR COMMUNICATION IS A TOP PRIORITY

Clear communication in volunteer engagement is critical to the ongoing success of any volunteer program. Volunteers (either new or ongoing) continue to seek out organizations for up-to-date information about current opportunities, organizational changes, and current community needs.

### TRANSPARENCY IS EQUALLY IMPORTANT

Organizations should always be transparent in their reporting while providing a solid support system for their volunteers. Continue to send a positive message in that their volunteer service contributions provide much-needed support to those affected in their community.

### GOOD COMMUNICATION WITH VOLUNTEERS WILL INCLUDE:

- Current and ongoing information about how they can help
- The organization strives to provide detailed instruction and thoughtful flexibility
- Providing information about alternate ways to give (beyond volunteering)
- ALWAYS being consistent and transparent in everything



## REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

- [BC Association for Charitable Gaming](#)
- [Canada Business Network \(Government of Canada\)](#)
- [Canada Revenue Agency \(CRA\) Registration as a Charity](#)
- [Charity Village](#)
- [Community Tool Box](#)
- [Graff, Linda L.](#)
- [Grant Advance](#)
- [Incorporating a Society in British Columbia](#)
- [Law for Non-Profits](#)
- [Our Community.com](#)
- [Volunteer Canada](#)
- [Wild Apricot](#)

### LOOKING FOR MORE RESOURCES?

The Volunteer BC [Resource Centre](#) provides access to some of the most common resources for Volunteering, Managing Volunteers or Enhancing Your Community Engagement Programs.