



Starting a Volunteer Centre



VOLUNTEER
BÉNÉVOLES
CANADA

Getting started

So You Want to Start a Volunteer Centre?

In our experience, these are the most frequently asked questions about establishing a new Volunteer Centre.

What is a Volunteer Centre?

a) Volunteer Centres come in all shapes and sizes – they reflect the community they serve.

However, Volunteer Centres, as defined by Volunteer Canada, are organizations which:

Have non-profit status preferably with registered charitable status or have a ‘qualified donee’ status (as defined by the Charities Division of Canada Customs and Revenue Agency)

Under the Income Tax Act, qualified donees are organizations that can issue official donation receipts for gifts that individuals and corporations make to them (including municipalities). For full description see: <http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/tx/chrts/plcy/csp/csp-q01-eng.html>

Or Volunteer Centres

b) Are hosted by a non-profit status organization preferably with registered charitable status.

If (b) must have:

- (i) An advisory committee and / or terms of reference clearly indicating a mandate to promote volunteerism to the entire community, and how this will be accomplished within the structure of the host organization; and
- (ii) The word “volunteer” contained in the name of the volunteer centre or its host organization; and
- (iii) A designated person responsible for the Volunteer Centre; and
- (iv) A separate budget for the Volunteer Centre.
- (v) Are eligible for membership with their provincial Volunteer Centre body (where they exist)?
- (vi) Have a statement of purpose (mission/ mandate/ vision) that aligns with the following national definition?

National Definition: Volunteer Centres exist primarily to foster and develop volunteerism in the community as a whole. Volunteer Centres engage in four general kinds of activities:

1. Promoting volunteerism

Volunteer Centres raise awareness of the power of service, encourage people to volunteer, provide information about volunteerism and recognize the contribution of volunteers. Some examples include celebrating National Volunteer Week, Global Youth Service Day, and International Volunteer Day and conducting volunteer fairs.

2. Building capacity for effective local volunteering

Volunteer Centres help voluntary sector organizations, and other groups and individuals that work with volunteers, do a better job recruiting, managing and retaining volunteers. Some examples include offering training programs, one to one consultations, and providing support to organizations that work with volunteers.

3. Providing leadership on issues relating to volunteerism

Volunteer Centres serve as a convener for the community and a catalyst for action. They work through local partnerships and collaborations with various groups and organizations, government, schools, and community leaders to identify needs and mobilize volunteer response. Some examples include speaking on behalf of volunteers, convening or participating on committees & collaborations, and advising volunteers of community needs.

4. Connecting people with opportunities to serve

Volunteer Centres provide people with easy access to a wide variety of opportunities to connect to their community through service. Some examples include targeting programs for special populations, offering recruitment and referral services, and managing direct services involving volunteers.

What can a Volunteer Centre do for my community?

Because each community is different, the challenge lies in designing a Volunteer Centre that will effectively and efficiently meet all of its individual needs, within the limits of available resources.

This can be accomplished by researching other successful Volunteer Centres and their programs and carefully assessing your community's particular requirements and resources.

How are Volunteer Centres structured?

There are various Volunteer Centre models. Some are stand-alone organizations with their own Board of Directors. Others operate as part of an umbrella organization (e.g. a United Way or Family and Community Social Services host a Volunteer Centre). Yet others operate in conjunction with another service (e.g. a Volunteer Centre and an Information Centre within the same organization).

How do we determine if our community needs or will support a Volunteer Centre?

You will need to survey community agencies and organizations to find out what kind of volunteer opportunities are available, who offers them and what kind of support they have. It's important that this initial assessment be done very carefully, because the purpose of it is to ensure and confirm that a Volunteer Centre will fill a "gap" in your community's services and not duplicate a similar service. Perhaps a kind of Volunteer Centre is already among these services but isn't readily found in the telephone book or publicized under such a name. Another agency might be providing similar services and programs that an official Volunteer Centre would offer; however, these may not be fully developed and therefore not widely advertised.

Produce a checklist of all key players. Try contacting your municipality for a list of all the social services offered in your area, check in newspapers, newsletters and bulleting boards and contact agencies such as:

- United Way
- Your municipality
- Social Planning Council
- Chamber of Commerce
- Community Information Centre
- Local/regional offices of provincial government departments
- Provincial associations of Volunteer Centres (Volunteer BC, Volunteer Alberta, Ontario Volunteer Centre Network, la Fédération des centres d'action bénévole du Québec)
- Provincial/Territorial Local Networks established through the former Canada Volunteerism Initiative (note that some of these may no longer be active)
(<http://www.volunteer.ca/en/volcan/canvol-init/local-networks>)
- Hospitals
- Schools and learning institutions like literacy centres, colleges, universities, adult education programs
- Churches and religious organizations

- Community centres, multicultural centres
- Arts councils and organizations
- libraries
- police departments and correctional services
- senior's centres
- recreational facilities and sports and recreational groups
- interest clubs
- local radio and TV stations
- employment centres
- other nonprofit organization

The specific questions to ask on the survey will vary with each community but essentially will include an explanatory letter and questionnaire to each contact you have identified. You may decide to follow up with a visit or phone call from a member of the Volunteer Centre Start-Up Steering committee. The committee must ensure that they collect enough information to reach a final decision about pursuing the establishment of a Volunteer Centre based on your community's reactions and interest levels towards a Volunteer Centre.

What are the steps involved in starting a Volunteer Centre?

Generally speaking, the steps are:

1. Identify key people to join a Volunteer Centre Start-Up Steering Committee.
2. Conduct a community needs assessment to determine if your community needs and would support a Volunteer Centre.
3. Identify the structure and types of services that your Volunteer Centre will provide.
4. Understand the costs associated with the Volunteer Centre start up process and longer term sustainability and research sources of funding.
5. Develop a business plan.
6. Recruit a Board of Directors.
7. Legally establish the Volunteer Centre as an organization.

What are the main responsibilities of the Volunteer Centre Start-Up Steering Committee?

A typical steering committee is a working group of five to seven people (usually an odd number for voting purposes) who have joined together to see if there is a reason and a way to create a permanent organization and structure. Just as you think a Volunteer Centre is a good idea for your community, it is important to find out if your community knows what a Volunteer Centre is all about and if it is interested in having one. This means doing a little investigative work and asking those very questions.

The steering committee is responsible for the organizational and planning stages of founding a Volunteer Centre. Initially, the goal of the steering committee is to answer the question, “Do we really need a Volunteer Centre in our community?” All other steering committee work takes place after the community says “yes” to that question.

At your first meeting, you will need to establish operating guidelines for your steering committee:

- Who is the chairperson?
- What are the roles and responsibilities of all other members?
- Where will meetings take place?
- At what time and for how long?

The steering committee will also need to develop a mandate which is a two or three sentence statement that expresses the reason a group exists and its basic philosophy. The mandate is useful for explaining the purpose of your group to new members, the community, media, funders, government, etc. Remember, the first stage, is about coming together to find out whether or not your community needs a Volunteer Centre and how much potential support it would have. Therefore, your immediate mandate should reflect this.

How do I recruit a Volunteer Centre Start-Up Steering Committee?

Founding a steering committee means finding a committed group of people who are ready, willing and able to contribute their energy, skills and time towards achieving a long-term goal. Ideally, the composition of a steering committee is quite mixed – yet not so diverse that it cannot function as a group. Balance is the key here, so it’s important to gather people who represent a cross-section of outlooks, dispositions, skills, experiences, ages and gender.

What to look for in potential committee members:

- familiar with and committed to the concept of Volunteer Centres and issues in volunteerism
- convinced of the value of investigating a community’s need for a Volunteer Centre
- able to deal effectively with the organizational and managerial needs of conducting and assessing a community survey and ultimately a Volunteer Centre
- comfortable with the legal issues involved with establishing a non-profit agency
- capable of functioning well with all aspects of the community and of pulling together a community effort such as a Volunteer Centre
- reflective of the geographic and ethnic community
- credible and influential within your community
- representative of non-profit agencies who would be served by your Volunteer Centre
- representative of groups which might supply large numbers of volunteers
- people who care about the value of volunteerism

Getting the right mix of people to form a balanced steering committee may seem like a difficult task. However, it can be done quite easily if you know what types of people you are looking for and where to find them. Thinking practically about the skills and expertise you need. Consider calling a Volunteer Centre in a nearby town or a few non-profit agencies and asking for the names of people who have the right skills and experience. Ask around for the names of people who are active in the community and represent a cross-section of your particular community. Think about local heroes and outstanding citizens in the news. What about local business owners, lawyers, municipal politicians or the local media? Brainstorm to compile a well-rounded list of potential steering committee members.

When you do contact each of these individuals, remember to explain the role of a Volunteer Centre, the principal goals of the committee, why you are contacting them particularly, and the workload and time commitment.

What kind of human and financial resources will we require?

Thinking ahead, you will need to itemize the human and financial resources of your Volunteer Centre. Again, polling other [Volunteer Centres](http://www.volunteer.ca/en/find-volunteer-centre) (<http://www.volunteer.ca/en/find-volunteer-centre>) will be very helpful and the Volunteer Centre Toolkit will provide you with information about how other Volunteer Centres are set up with regards to human and volunteer resources and financial resources. Remember, Volunteer Centres are models when it comes to effective volunteer involvement so it is very important to follow volunteer resource management best practices.

Where can I apply for funding?

How much further can you go without money? Until now, members of the Steering committee likely paid for expenses out of their own pocket. Things like stationary, long distance phone calls, Internet connection, transportation costs, etc. are only the beginning of expenditures and your committee is likely wondering where the rest of the funding is going to come from.

This is a crucial matter and the survival depends on finding sources of funding to pursue the goal of opening a Volunteer Centre. Even though a group has not yet registered itself as a non-profit organization, it might still be eligible to receive certain “start up” funds from various levels of government (particularly at the municipal level) or foundations. You may also consider low cost fundraising activities or asking for in-kind donations from community groups and businesses.

What are the legal considerations for setting up a Volunteer Centre?

The legal considerations for setting up a Volunteer Centre are the same as any other organization.

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<http://www.charityvillage.com/>, e-mail: help@charityvillage.com)

1. **Incorporation**

You can incorporate your organization either provincially or federally and the process is much the same as it is for incorporating a company. It is relatively straight forward, and can be handled by a competent solicitor with some experience in this area. Without incorporating or registering, your organization will not be legally recognized as a nonprofit, nor will your group's name be protected against use by other legal entities. Below are links to government web pages that deal specifically with nonprofit incorporation.

[Canada](http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/tx/nnprft/menu-eng.html) (<http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/tx/nnprft/menu-eng.html>)

- [Income Tax Guide to the Non-Profit Organization \(NPO\) Information Return](http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/E/pub/tg/t4117/README.html) (<http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/E/pub/tg/t4117/README.html>)
- [T1044 Non-Profit Organization \(NPO\) Information Return](http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/E/pbg/tf/t1044/README.html) (<http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/E/pbg/tf/t1044/README.html>)
- [Alberta](http://www.servicealberta.gov.ab.ca/services/cnfb/) (<http://www.servicealberta.gov.ab.ca/services/cnfb/>)
- [British Columbia](http://www.fin.gov.bc.ca/registries/corppg/forms/reg20.pdf) (PDF format) (<http://www.fin.gov.bc.ca/registries/corppg/forms/reg20.pdf>)
- [Manitoba](http://www.companiesoffice.gov.mb.ca/index.html) (<http://www.companiesoffice.gov.mb.ca/index.html>)
- [New Brunswick](http://www.web11.snb.ca/snb7001/e/1000/CSS-FOL-SNB-45-0007E.pdf) (PDF format) (<http://www.web11.snb.ca/snb7001/e/1000/CSS-FOL-SNB-45-0007E.pdf>)
- [Newfoundland and Labrador](http://www.gov.nf.ca/business/startup.html) (<http://www.gov.nf.ca/business/startup.html>)
- [Northwest Territories](http://cap.ic.gc.ca/english/8921.htm) (<http://cap.ic.gc.ca/english/8921.htm>)
- [Nova Scotia](http://www.gov.ns.ca/snsmr/paal/rjs/paal268.stm) (<http://www.gov.ns.ca/snsmr/paal/rjs/paal268.stm>)
- [Nunavut](http://www.gov.nu.ca/Nunavut/English/departments/JUS/index.shtml) (<http://www.gov.nu.ca/Nunavut/English/departments/JUS/index.shtml>)
- [Ontario](http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/E/pub/tp/it496r/it496r-e.html) (<http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/E/pub/tp/it496r/it496r-e.html>)
- [Prince Edward Island](http://www.gov.pe.ca/infopei/index.php3?number=16920&lang=E) (<http://www.gov.pe.ca/infopei/index.php3?number=16920&lang=E>)
- [Quebec](http://www.revenu.gouv.qc.ca/eng/entreprise/impot/osbl/index.asp) (<http://www.revenu.gouv.qc.ca/eng/entreprise/impot/osbl/index.asp>)
- [Saskatchewan](http://www.saskjustice.gov.sk.ca/Corporations/formingnonprofit.shtml) (<http://www.saskjustice.gov.sk.ca/Corporations/formingnonprofit.shtml>)
- [Yukon](http://www.gov.yk.ca/depts/community/corp/faq.html) (<http://www.gov.yk.ca/depts/community/corp/faq.html>)

2. **Charitable Status**

The Canada Revenue Agency (CCRA) -- formerly Revenue Canada -- is the government department responsible for granting organizations charitable tax status. The process routinely takes

6 months to 18 months and requires applicants to fulfill a number of requirements. One of the major advantages of obtaining charitable status is that the organization is able to issue receipts to donors for income tax purposes. This can be a major advantage when soliciting for donations. In addition, charities receive certain tax exemptions.

Not to be overlooked however, is the fact that registered charities are subject to a number of regulations and restrictions. One such restriction is the limitation on a charity's ability to advocate for a specific cause. Currently, groups with charitable tax status can only use 10% of their budget for advocacy. As well, charities are required to file an income tax return at least every two years and these files are available to the public, along with other official documents pertaining to the organization. Below are relevant links to the CCRA web site:

[Canada Revenue Agency](http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/) (formerly Canada Customs and Revenue Canada, <http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/>)

- [Information For Charities](http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/tax/charities/menu-e.html) (<http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/tax/charities/menu-e.html>)
- [Application to register a charity under the Income Tax Act](http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/E/pbg/tf/t2050/README.html) (<http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/E/pbg/tf/t2050/README.html>)
- [Charities Division Contact Information](http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/tax/charities/contact-e.html) (<http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/tax/charities/contact-e.html>)
- [Policy](http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/tax/charities/policy/policy-e.html) (<http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/tax/charities/policy/policy-e.html>)
- [Forms](http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/tax/charities/publications_list-e.html) (http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/tax/charities/publications_list-e.html)
- [Newsletters](http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/tax/charities/newsletters-e.html) (<http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/tax/charities/newsletters-e.html>)
- [List of Canadian Registered Charities](http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/tax/charities/online_listings/charity_listings-e.html) (http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/tax/charities/online_listings/charity_listings-e.html)

Canada Revenue Agency now makes the following information publicly available about registered charities:

- a charity's governing documents (i.e., the letters patent, articles of incorporation, trust deed, constitution);
- the application form (completed by a charity when it sought registration or re-registration);
- the notification of registration or re-registration (a letter sent by the Department to notify a charity of its registered status);
- the letter the Department sends to a charity that has been de-registered, explaining the reasons for
- the Department's action; and
- the names of the persons who are or have been directors/trustees of the charity, and the periods during which they served as directors/trustees.

To request public information on charities, call 1-800-267-2384 for toll free long distance calls.

What kind of timelines can we anticipate?

There is no sure-fire answer to this question. Timelines depend on many factors including the Volunteer Centre Start-Up Steering Committee, community needs, funding, volunteer or staff commitment, if it is autonomous or hosted within another organization, etc.

What kind of support will I receive from Volunteer Canada and other Volunteer Centres?

Volunteer Canada and Volunteer Centres in Canada have a unique relationship based on a common goal: the promotion of volunteerism. Volunteer Canada develops programs, products and services that respond to Canadian trends and priorities to enhance volunteer development. And, Volunteer Centres develop and deliver local programs and services that respond to local priorities as well as offering programs based on the resources developed by Volunteer Canada.

In the fall of 2000, Volunteer Canada established a working group of Volunteer Centres to develop the framework for an Advisory Council of Volunteer Centres. The Advisory Council provides advice to Volunteer Canada regarding:

- strategies for Volunteer Centre development;
- the involvement of and impact on Volunteer Centres of Volunteer Canada programs.

[Click here](#) to view the policy that outlines Volunteer Canada's relationship with Volunteer Centres and Provincial/Territorial Associations, frequently referred to as the "Relationship Policy":

(<http://volunteer.ca/sites/volunteercanada/files/Final%20amended%20relationship%20policy%20-%20vol%20ctr%20and%20vc%20-%20Feb%2026%2005.doc>)

As well, Volunteer Canada staff is available to offer guidance and suggest resources. Do not hesitate to contact them: 1 800 670-0401 or info@volunteer.ca.

Again, polling other [Volunteer Centres](#) (<http://volunteer.ca/en/find-volunteer-centre>) will be very helpful and the Volunteer Centre Toolkit will provide you with information about how other Volunteer Centres are set up.

What is the Volunteer Centre Toolkit and how will it help us?

The Toolkit contains samples, lessons learned, ideas, policies and procedures, forms and templates from other Volunteer Centres plus key reading material specifically geared to the unique needs of Volunteer Centres across Canada. The Toolkit contents come from the needs expressed by Volunteer Centres and focus on internal operations and systems, remaining relevant in your

community and the four core functions of a Volunteer Centre. It is available online so it can hold as much information as possible and be updated easily.

Volunteer Canada is committed to providing leadership to the Volunteer Centre Network and creating opportunities to enhance capacity to promote volunteerism and involve volunteers in communities. The UPS Foundation has granted funds to Volunteer Canada to develop a “Volunteer Centre Toolkit” – a resource that will support and empower Volunteer Centres to strengthen their baseline operations. The goal is to provide the tools and resources to help Volunteer Centres be strong, healthy and relevant in their communities.