COMMUNITY PLAN ACTION 3.4 FULL REPORT COMMUNITY CONSULTATION ON YOUTH AND OLDER ADULT VOLUNTEERS IN LONDON, ONTARIO



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of a community consultation and survey focused on youth and older adult volunteerism in London. The primary objective was to better understand the motivations, challenges, barriers, and opportunities to strengthen volunteer engagement among youth (18–29), older adults (55+), and service providers.

This project was developed and supported by the Age Friendly London Network (AFLN) and Child & Youth Network (CYN) through the Community Plan, a shared framework focused on building resilient, connected neighbourhoods through inclusion and belonging, basic needs and essential skills, coordinated planning, and collective community action.

A total of 25 youth and older adult participants engaged in in-person, conversation-style community consultations, while 158 older adults and 9 service providers contributed through surveys. These insights informed the findings and recommendations outlined in this report.

Volunteering plays a critical role in building community resilience, particularly during periods of social and economic uncertainty. However, growing concerns about declining volunteer participation highlight the need for a deeper understanding of local trends. While national data shows a significant decline in volunteerism, there remains a gap in localized research specific to London. This report identifies the impacts of COVID-19 and ongoing economic pressures, while emphasizing that many of the barriers to volunteerism are systemic and structural in nature.

A key finding from participants is the disconnect between volunteer needs and existing organizational systems and structures. Common barriers include the absence of a centralized platform to find opportunities, complex and unclear recruitment processes, inflexible scheduling, and transportation and mobility challenges. These findings suggest that unlocking the full potential of youth and older adult volunteers will require systems that are more responsive, accessible, and aligned with their lived realities.

This report outlines a set of participant-informed recommendations to support service providers and organizations in improving volunteer recruitment and retention. Key recommendations include:

- Developing a centralized, user-friendly volunteer portal to improve access to opportunities
- Simplifying and streamlining recruitment and onboarding processes
- Designing flexible volunteer roles, including short-term, evening, and weekend opportunities
- Using clear, welcoming language in role descriptions to encourage participation
- Communicating age requirements early and creating more inclusive, intergenerational opportunities

- Expanding offline access points, such as printed postings, in-person sign-ups, and volunteer fairs
- Strengthening pathways to skills development, mentorship, and employment
- Investing in staffing, training, and shared tools to enhance volunteer coordination, particularly for smaller organizations
- Creating accessible, low-barrier, and meaningful roles, including behind-the-scenes opportunities
- Fostering a sense of connection, recognition, and impact to support volunteer retention

Overall, the recommendations call for a shift from rigid, organization-centered models toward more flexible, volunteer-centered systems. By addressing structural barriers and designing more inclusive approaches, organizations can better support and sustain volunteer engagement across London's diverse communities.

OVERVIEW

Volunteerism is widely recognized as an essential component of civic life and community resilience. Volunteering is not only something people choose to do in their free time; it creates significant social value and forms a critical part of the response when communities face emergencies, economic shocks, or social pressures (Volunteer Canada, 2025). The COVID-19 pandemic provides a recent example of how communities mobilized, with many individuals offering their time and support to help sustain systems and services amid surging demand.

Although there is a notable gap in research on youth and older adult volunteerism trends in London, a growing body of studies across Canada has examined the broader volunteer ecosystem in response to concerns about declining participation rates. Available data indicate that volunteerism dropped by 9% nationally between 2018 and 2023, resulting in a loss of roughly 1.2 billion volunteer hours (Volunteer Canada, 2025). This project is designed not only to understand why these trends occur, but also to identify where gaps remain, to ensure that Londoners who want to volunteer are supported and can do so meaningfully. Although the scope of this project focuses specifically on older adults and youth, it aligns with broader studies conducted by Volunteer Canada through the National Volunteer Action Strategy, which examined volunteer trends across Canada.

Systemic and structural pressures shaping volunteerism

Canada's volunteer challenges are structural and systemic (Volunteer Canada, 2025). Multiple pressures have contributed to these challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic, rising demand in services, and the increasing cost of living (Statistics Canada, 2025), alongside shrinking organizational resources, accessibility barriers, coordination gaps, and screening practices (Volunteer Canada, 2025).

While volunteering in Canada appeared relatively stable from 2004 to 2013, there was a significant shift between 2018 and 2023. The latter period was marked by a substantial decline. Overall (formal and informal) volunteering decreased by 8% in 2023 compared to 2018, while formal volunteering declined by 28% over the same period. Total volunteer hours dropped from 5 billion in 2018 to 4.1 billion in 2023 — an 18% decrease (Statistics Canada, 2025).

This significant disengagement reflects volunteers responding to multiple systemic pressures and structural barriers. Recent findings show that volunteers disengage due to poor volunteer management practices within organizations (Cismaru & Wymer, 2025). Volunteers frequently discontinue their involvement due to time constraints and scheduling challenges. Many balance commitments to work or school, highlighting how competing personal responsibilities affect volunteer engagement. Volunteers are often willing to re-engage if organizations adopt more flexible scheduling practices (Cismaru & Wymer, 2025).

Time constraints, aging, and health are key concerns among older adults

Although the amount of time contributed by those who volunteer tends to increase with age, the likelihood of volunteering declines as people get older (Government of Canada, 2010). The National Seniors Council report indicates that seniors aged 65 and older are among the most committed volunteers, contributing more volunteer hours on average than other age groups. However, they also face barriers such as health issues, age-related limitations, time constraints, and physical mobility challenges (Government of Canada, 2010; Cismaru & Wymer, 2025).

COVID-19 created new volunteer pathways, but youth motivations remain uneven amid declining youth volunteerism

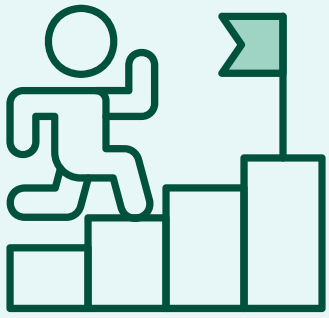
From 2018 to 2023, youth, women, and individuals with higher levels of education were more likely to volunteer. However, COVID-19 and post-pandemic systemic pressures have affected demographic groups differently. Youth aged 25–34 experienced the largest decline in volunteer hours (−42%) between 2018 and 2023 (Statistics Canada, 2025).

At the same time, youth volunteerism evolved in several ways during the COVID-19 pandemic. New forms of engagement emerged through informal and online volunteering opportunities. Many young people became involved in community efforts during lockdowns, often mobilizing around issues such as social justice and climate action (Volunteer Canada & Rideau Hall Foundation, 2024).

These developments show that many youth are motivated to make a difference and explore new ways to contribute to their communities. However, gaps between youth expectations and the realities of the volunteer ecosystem can create unstable or discouraging conditions for sustained engagement. These insights are supported by the findings of the *Community Plan Action 3.4 report*.

GOALS

This community consultation was designed to strengthen the capacity of organizations that recruit and serve volunteers especially youth and older adults. It aimed to better understand the current volunteer landscape, highlight key challenges, and expand opportunities for youth and older adults to get involved. The consultation identified barriers to volunteerism while building supports that encourage both youth and older adult residents to share their time and skills in their neighbourhoods.



Understand challenges, barriers & opportunities

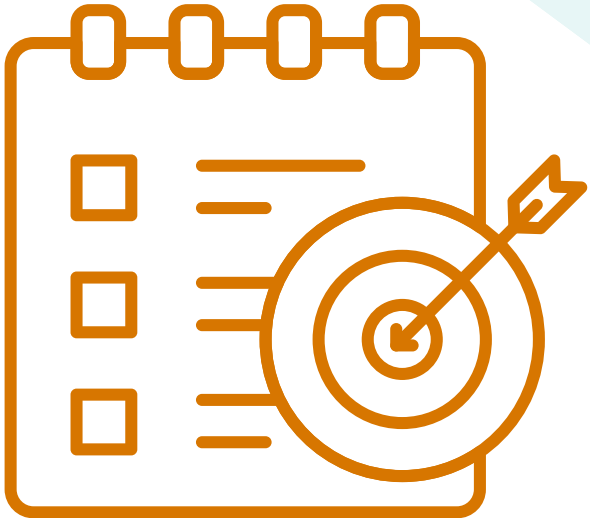


Reduce barriers for youth and older adults



Strenghthen supports for volunteers and service providers

OBJECTIVES



1. Host community consultations for youth and older adults.
2. Identify current needs and challenges to generate ideas for better support, recruitment, and retention.
3. Analyze/summarize themes and gaps
4. Create a final report with recommendations.

Consultation Structure



- Two separate community consultations sessions were hosted:
  - Approximately ten (10) participants attended the first section
  - About fifteen (15) participants attended in the second session.
  - 25 youths and older adults overall participated in both sessions.

- Survey responses were also collected from:
  - 158 older adults
  - 9 service providers

Project Partners



This project, supported through the AFL/ CYN Community Plan was led by **Pillar Nonprofit Network**, with support from AFL/ CYN staff and nine (9) organizations/service providers.

- Alzheimer Society Southwest Partners
- Investing in Children
- Third Age Outreach
- The Salvation Army
- London Public Library
- London Volunteer Administrator Association
- South London Neighbourhood Resource Centre
- Young London
- Cross Cultural Learners Centre

Consultation Approach

A mixed-method approach was used to collect data. This approach allowed for more comprehensive data collection and a deeper understanding of the complex factors that create barriers for youth and older adult volunteers, as well as service providers.

The approach included facilitated group discussions with older adults and youth, alongside young persons who identified as newcomers. Participants responded to a set of open-ended questions through guided discussions. Surveys were also used to collect responses from older adults and service providers.

Participant Definitions and Eligibility

Youth

- Young adults (18–29)

Older Adults

- Adults aged 55 and older

Service Providers

- Organizations that recruit volunteers for a significant portion of their programs

Sampling and Recruitment

Purposive sampling was adopted to focus specifically on youth and older adults within the specified age brackets. The aim of this strategy was to ensure that each group was well represented in the data, allowing facilitators to identify the unique barriers each group faces.

Youth and older adults were selected for the valuable insights they provide into the challenges and opportunities within volunteerism. Service providers were also included in the survey, as they play a critical role in supporting and facilitating volunteer engagement for these groups.

CORE QUESTIONS



What are the current needs and challenges in the volunteer sector in London?

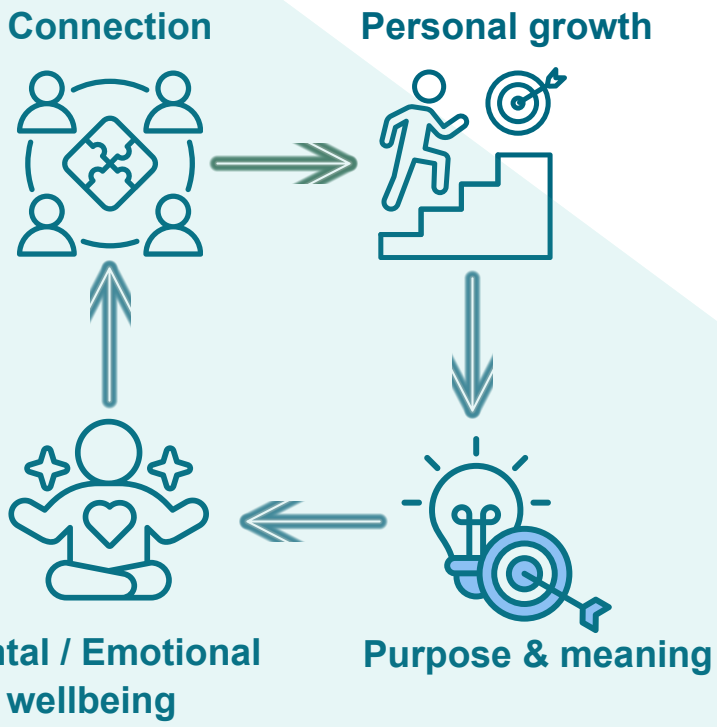


What are the barriers to youth and older adult volunteers?



What are the opportunities to improve support and address barriers for volunteer?

What Volunteering Means to Participants



Volunteering is viewed by participants as a space/way to connect, fulfill purpose, and find meaning in the community. They described volunteering as a pathway for personal growth and positive, impactful contributions.

A common insight shared across groups was the strong desire to build relationships and feel part of something larger than themselves. Beyond simply giving time, participants seek meaningful opportunities to make an impact and to feel valued for their contributions.

Participants particularly older adults described how volunteering brings personal fulfillment, strengthens ties, and deepens their appreciation for the community around them.

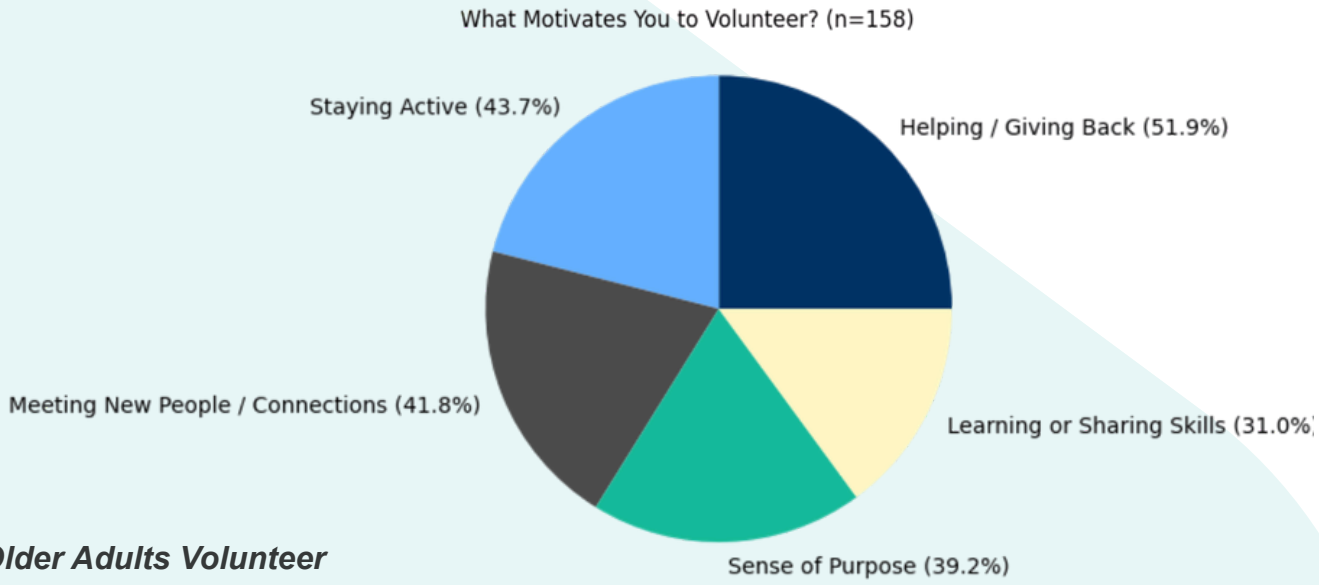
"It brings joy. I can see it in people's faces when I play music or do crafts."
- Focus Group Participant

Beyond personal fulfillment, older adults emphasized that volunteering serves as a source of mental and emotional support as they transition through the retirement phase. They described how volunteering brought them joy, lifted their mood, and deepened their connection to the community.

From mandatory hours to meaningful engagement

Ontario high school students are required to complete a set number of volunteer hours upon graduation. This requirement can initially create a sense of obligation, rather than inspire voluntary participation. Surprisingly, youth participants reported gaining positive experiences that reshaped their perception of volunteer work. What began as a school requirement often evolved into a meaningful opportunity for genuine connection and contribution in the community.

Why Older Adults Volunteer



Older Adults Volunteer Survey, AFLC 2025.

Giving back: Gratitude as motivation

Beyond the desire to stay connected, participants also expressed a deep sense of gratitude toward their community. They acknowledge the role their neighbourhood has played in shaping who they are and describe volunteering as a meaningful way to give back.

For many, volunteering represents a tangible expression of reciprocity.

Notably, our survey shows that **52%** of older adults were motivated to volunteer due to their desire to give back to their community.

> ***"Volunteering is how I give back for the privilege I've had." - Focus Group Participant***

Staying active, engaged, and connected after retirement

For many older adults, volunteering is a valuable way to remain active and socially connected after retirement. Intergenerational volunteering, in particular, was viewed as mutually beneficial. As one participant noted, "*Those of us with life experience, we can charge our batteries with youth".*

About half of the participants expressed a desire to remain engaged in their neighbourhoods long after retiring from paid work. Volunteering is viewed as a way to spend time meaningfully, reconnect with former colleagues and friends, and reduce feelings of loneliness.

> ***" It isn't just about reconnecting with existing networks, older adults want opportunities to build new relationships and meet new people in their community." - Focus Group Participant***

Why Youth Volunteer

- **Job prospects**
- **Confidence-building**
- **Social connection**
- **Networking**
- **Fulfill secondary school volunteer hours**



The opportunity to build a future career

The potential for job prospects is one of the strongest motivations for youth participants to volunteer. It is viewed as a way to build confidence, develop skills that employers look for, and become more job-ready. One participant shared how volunteering helped them build networks and skills that ultimately led to paid employment.

Participants also shared that opportunities for transitioning into paid roles within some organizations are unclear. Volunteers sometimes have to navigate finding paid opportunities on their own, often without mentorship or guidance from the organization. Although volunteering does not necessarily imply that volunteers will be offered a paid position, participants expressed concerns—particularly for long-term volunteers—who feel there should be more direct pathways to paid roles and stronger support systems to help translate their volunteer experience into job opportunities.

For social connection and network-building

While some youth volunteer simply out of a genuine desire to help vulnerable individuals in their communities, we also learned that connection is especially important for young volunteers; volunteerism is a key motivating factor, offering pathways to expand social connections and networks.

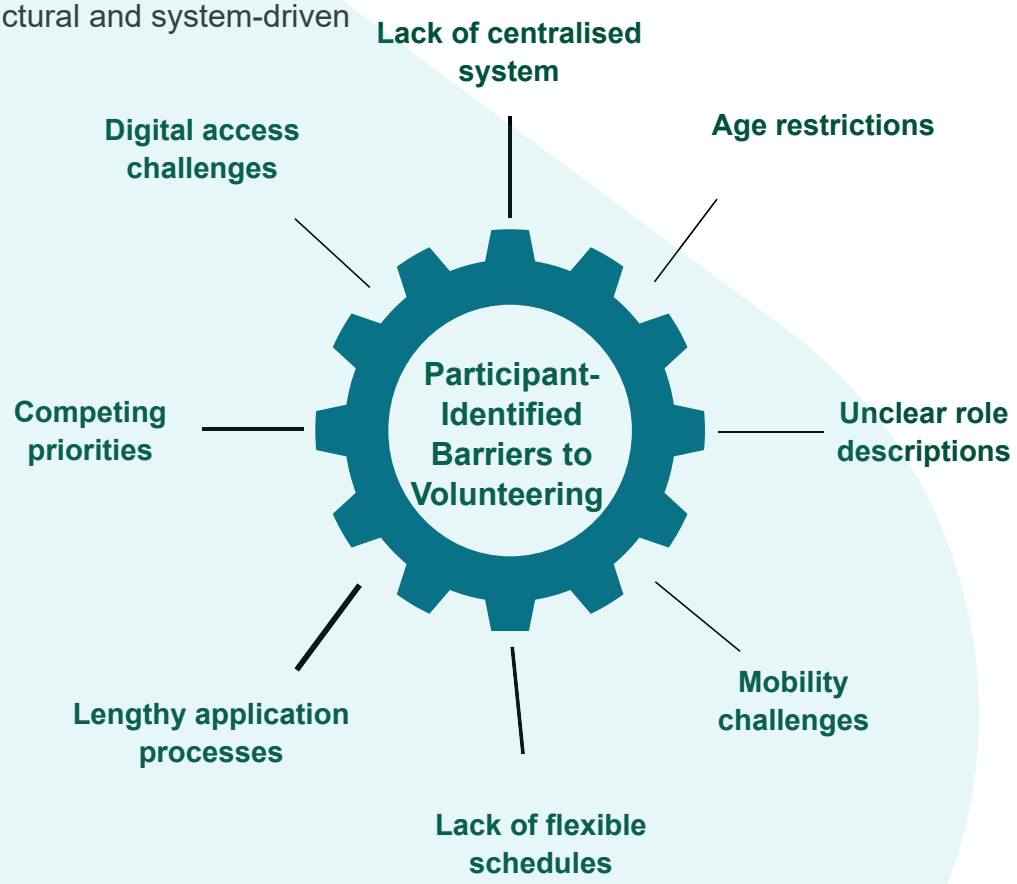
> ***"Volunteering helped me network, build confidence, and eventually land a job." - Focus Group Participant***

Participant-Identified Barriers to Volunteering

Across all participants, we heard that barriers to volunteerism are largely structural and system-driven rather than individual.

They are administrative, financial, informational, and social in nature. Youth and older adults noted that most volunteer-related barriers are rooted in systems and structures that are inequitable, exclusionary, and unresponsive to their needs.

Overall, the primary barrier lies in organizational structures and systems that make it difficult for youth and older adults to participate.



1. **The absence of a centralized volunteer database**

The absence of a centralized, easy-to-use volunteer database is posing significant difficulty in accessing volunteer opportunities. The majority of participants noted that their inability to find opportunities in one place is one of the biggest obstacles they face. High school students completing mandatory hours, newcomers unfamiliar with the system, and individuals without strong networks are especially affected by the lack of clear, organized, and easily accessible information.

“When I came here, I tried to get involved, but I couldn’t find anything on Google.” - Focus Group Participant

Participants relied primarily on online searches and informal sources to access volunteer opportunities. One participant shared how they had tried to find opportunities but found the process both challenging and intimidating. They noted that process can be time-consuming and frustrating, especially for first-time volunteers.

2. **Lengthy and costly application processes**

For many participants, the multiple stages of the recruitment process can feel overwhelming, especially when volunteering for roles involving vulnerable populations. Participants shared that they went through lengthy procedures that often included multiple interviews, police record checks, references, mandatory training sessions, and health requirements such as tuberculosis testing. In some cases, these requirements were disclosed late in the process, creating frustration and placing unexpected burdens on applicants.

> ***"It's so much work just to get in the door that people say, 'I'm not going to do it." - Focus Group Participant***

4. **Using technical language to describe roles**

Some volunteer roles, especially in the health sector, are sometimes described using technical language that is unclear and inaccessible. These opportunities are framed around risk, illness, or heavy responsibility, which can leave potential volunteers feeling unsure or intimidated. A youth participant described it this way, *"People hear, 'You will be working directly with people who live with Alzheimer's,' and that can make you feel like you don't know how or that you don't have the skills."*

> ***"Volunteer opportunities should be framed in a much more inviting way, like: we need someone who can read aloud, bring smiles, or do crafts." - Focus Group Participant***

3. **Digital gaps**

Limited digital access and unfamiliarity with technology create barriers to full participation, especially among older adults. Stories shared by older adults and some newcomers show that relying solely on digital systems risks excluding participants with digital access challenges.

While easy-to-use digital tools are widely supported, not everyone has reliable access to a phone, computer, or even the internet. Participants emphasized the importance of maintaining alternative methods of sharing information, such as strategically placing printed materials in libraries and community centres, using physical bulletin boards, and hosting in-person volunteer fairs.

5. **Transportation and mobility**

Transportation emerged as one of the most frequently shared concerns, particularly among older adults. Participants expressed concern that some volunteer opportunities are located in places that are not easily accessible. This challenge also affects other groups, particularly individuals living in remote neighbourhoods or those without access to a car.

While interest in and motivation for volunteering remain high, barriers such as distance, cost, and access to reliable transportation pose significant barriers to participation.

6. **Age-related restrictions**

Most volunteer roles in the health and social service sectors require participants to be 18 or older. These age restrictions can discourage youth and families from participating and create additional challenges for high school students working to complete their required volunteer hours. They limit opportunities for youth under 18 and restrict families who wish to volunteer together. In many cases, parents are unable to volunteer alongside their children and must arrange childcare instead.

At the same time, postings sometimes fail to clearly stipulate age requirements or outline what youth are allowed to do in each role, early in the recruitment process. This lack of clarity increases recruitment costs for organizations and places an unnecessary burden on young applicants who have already invested time and effort in applying.

A young participant described the disappointment of being turned away late in the process due to age-related restrictions.

"I went through the process and then found out I couldn't apply because I was under 18."
- Focus Group Participant

This may result in negative volunteer experiences for young persons, which can affect their future interest in volunteering.

7. **Competing priorities**

Participants are often unable to take on volunteer opportunities due to busy schedules. While many express a strong desire to volunteer, they struggle to fit it into their routines. Among youth, volunteering is often described as a "luxury" that requires free time, flexibility, and a certain level of financial stability. For youth and newcomers, paid work and school often take precedence over volunteer commitments, making participation particularly challenging. Older adults also identified time constraints and caregiving responsibilities as major barriers to volunteering.

8. **Lack of flexible volunteer schedules**

Participants expressed concern that volunteer opportunities often take place during weekdays and business hours, limiting when and where they can volunteer. This risks excluding those who may be most interested but least able to accommodate rigid schedules. This includes individuals working multiple jobs, shift work, or irregular hours.

Participants also highlighted that while many volunteer roles require fixed shifts or long-term commitments, these expectations can unintentionally exclude people who are new to the community, managing unstable schedules, or balancing multiple responsibilities.

"Sometimes it feels like you have to already have time and stability to volunteer." - Focus Group Participant

Service Provider-Identified Barriers to Volunteerism

Service providers also face significant challenges, many of which mirror those identified by youths and older adults. Many organizations report ongoing difficulties in recruiting and retaining older adult and youth volunteers for various reasons.

Differences in organizational capacity can shape volunteer experience

Differences in organizational capacity create uneven access to volunteer opportunities. Volunteering tends to be more accessible in well-resourced organizations and more challenging in smaller or grassroots organizations. Larger organizations use volunteer management systems that support onboarding and supervision, enable ongoing communication, track hours, store volunteer profiles, and streamline registration processes.

In contrast, many smaller organizations lack access to these tools and dedicated volunteer management portals. This result in their opportunities being less visible, less structured, and harder to access.

Organizational scheduling models often do not align with volunteers' schedules

Youth availability emerged as the most significant obstacle to recruitment, with the majority of service providers identifying it as a major challenge. This reflects a broader misalignment driven by the differing needs of service providers and volunteers.

Traditional volunteer models, typically built around fixed shifts and long-term commitments during standard service hours, may not always align with the lived realities of youth and older adults, who may be balancing school, paid employment, and caregiving responsibilities. For example, one service provider noted that their organization operates only during regular weekday hours, making it difficult for individuals who are available outside those hours to volunteer.

Service providers also cited the challenge of little to no follow-up or inconsistent communication from some youth applicants after they apply. While the reasons for this were not explicitly stated, these patterns suggest that traditional scheduling methods may have an unintentional impact on youth involvement.

Transportation and location access affect youth recruitment

More than half of service providers stated that transportation is a key challenge in recruiting youth, especially when volunteer sites are not geographically accessible. Some programs are located outside central or transit-friendly areas—making it inequitable for applicants with transportation challenges to get involved.

Youth and low-income individuals who are willing to volunteer may not always have the capacity to travel to sites for training and onboarding.

Inadequate staffing affect volunteer coordination

Volunteer programs rely heavily on staffing. Managing applications, onboarding volunteers, and providing ongoing support can be both challenging and time-consuming when staffing is inadequate. Many small, grassroots organizations operate with no dedicated staff which impact their capacity to coordinate recruitment, oversee onboarding, or maintain consistent communication with applicants and volunteers.

Delays caused by staffing shortages, can unintentionally discourage participation, particularly for volunteers who already face financial or time constraints.

Complex onboarding processes strain organizational capacity

Service providers described how complex onboarding requirements affect both recruiters and applicants. In some cases, volunteers are required to complete up to 10 hours of e-learning modules, along with police record checks, TB tests, and immunizations that are often not reimbursed.

Some service providers noted that older adults in particular were less willing to go through lengthy onboarding processes. While many of these steps are necessary for compliance and management, they create a significant administrative burden and stretch the capacity of organizations who are already operating with limited staff.

Digital gaps make recruitment of older adults harder

Service providers shared that some older adults lack the necessary digital skills, which affect recruitment within this group. Although online and formal application systems serve a better option, especially for organizations managing large volunteer requests and data, they can become barriers in recruiting older adults with limited digital skills.

Other barriers highlighted by service providers include:

- Limited outreach and promotion of opportunities due to a lack of marketing and advertising capacity.
- Difficulty recruiting seniors and older adults, as a large proportion of the current volunteer base consists primarily of young people.
- Language barrier and stigma create additional challenges in recruiting and retaining volunteers especially in organizations working with people living with special needs or high needs populations

CONCLUSION

This report shows that while interest in volunteerism among youth and older adults remains strong, the findings suggest that the main obstacles to participation are not individual motivation but structural and system-driven barriers. Youth and older adults continue to face challenges that make participation difficult. At the same time, organizations that rely on volunteers are also experiencing difficulties recruiting and retaining them.

The experiences shared by participants highlight a gap between volunteer needs and the systems and structures used by organizations to recruit and manage volunteers. Common barriers identified by both volunteers and service providers include rigid scheduling, transportation and mobility challenges, digital literacy gaps, and complex recruitment processes.

The report finds that improving volunteer participation among youth and older adults will require a better balance between volunteer needs and organizational requirements. This includes creating more flexible and accessible opportunities, reducing unnecessary administrative steps in recruitment, and developing systems that make it easier for volunteers to access opportunities.

Addressing these barriers and designing volunteer systems that are more responsive to volunteers' lived realities will be key to strengthening youth and older adult volunteerism and improving access to the supports they need.

Participant-Informed Recommendations to Strengthen Volunteerism

- **Build a centralized, easy-to-use volunteer access system to improve searches**
  Information navigation emerged as one of the biggest challenges to volunteerism. Participants highlighted the need for creative solutions that reduce the time spent searching online and improve access for participants. A more streamlined system would increase participation while also improving visibility for smaller and grassroots organizations.

  Recommendation
  Develop a shared volunteer portal that lists opportunities across organizations, with filters by age, neighbourhood, interests, accessibility needs, and schedule.

- **Simplify and streamline onboarding requirements**
  Participants noted that lengthy applications, screening processes, and often unnecessary administrative steps create barriers that discourage continued participation in the recruitment process. Participants expressed a desire for a recruitment process that reduces entry barriers and prevents motivated volunteers from dropping out before they even begin.

  Recommendation
  Adopt a simplified and streamlined administrative process by reviewing and eliminating unnecessary steps, combining recruitment stages where possible, and implementing shared screening models or group onboarding approaches to reduce the burden on both organizations and volunteers.

- **Design flexible and youth-friendly scheduling models**
  Time and scheduling conflicts emerged as one of the biggest barriers particularly to youth volunteers. Participants shared that volunteer schedules are often difficult to navigate for individuals with busy schedules, emphasizing that volunteer opportunities must be realistic and reframed around accessibility rather than as a “luxury.”

  Recommendation
  Design more flexible, short-term, evening, weekend or project-based roles whenever possible.

- **Use clear, inviting, plain-language role descriptions**
  Participants noted that the way volunteer opportunities are described plays a key role in how they perceive and engage with them. Participants are more likely to engage with descriptions that build confidence and reduce the “fear of not being qualified.”

  Recommendation
  Describe volunteer postings in simple, welcoming language that clearly explains tasks and expectations. Focus on what volunteers will actually do for example, reading aloud, singing, or helping with crafts.

- **Clarify age eligibility**
  Clarifying age requirements for volunteer roles emerged as a key priority, particularly for high school–aged youth. Many positions require volunteers to be 18 or older, but these requirements are sometimes not clearly stated or are communicated late in the recruitment process, after applicants have already invested time and resources.

  Recommendation
  Communicate age requirements clearly and early in the recruitment process.

  Create family or intergenerational roles, as well as opportunities that pair youth under 18 with mentors.

- **Utilize non-digital, offline recruitment pathways alongside Online Options**
  Participants noted that less familiarity with online applications contributes to challenges in volunteer participation, particularly among older adults. Adding offline pathways alongside online applications ensures equitable access and broadens participation.

  Recommendation
  Maintain offline recruitment pathways, such as printed postings in libraries and community centres.

  Offer in-person sign-ups and volunteer fairs.

  Provide staff or peer assistance to support older adults and others who may need help going through the process.

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- **Incorporate transportation and location access supports**
  Participants noted that the physical locations of some volunteer programs and opportunities are not easily accessible, creating additional challenges for those without reliable transportation. They also emphasized the need for volunteer opportunities that reduce geographic barriers and increase participation among individuals without access to a personal vehicle.

  Recommendation
  Integrate transportation supports, transit passes/ travel subsidies into volunteer opportunities

  Distribute volunteer opportunities more equitably across neighbourhoods to improve local access.

- **Create Pathways to skills development and employment**
  Youth and newcomer participants view volunteering as a stepping stone to employment and learning opportunities. Participants expressed a desire for more opportunities to build skills and receive support in securing paid employment, either within or outside the organizations where they volunteer.

  Recommendation
  Develop clear pathways within organizations to support youth and newcomers with skill development, references, mentorship, and career opportunities.

- **Strengthen organizational capacity for volunteer management**
  Volunteer organizations are often under-staffed, which limit their ability to effectively support applicants and volunteers. While larger organizations often offer smoother and more structured processes, smaller organizations frequently struggle with onboarding, supervision, and communication, creating uneven volunteer experiences.

  Recommendation
  Invest in dedicated volunteer coordination staff, shared volunteer management tools, and training supports for smaller organizations.

- **Create meaningful, low-barrier, and accessible roles**
  Social connection is not always the primary motivation for participants; in some cases, meaningful, low-barrier, and accessible roles are particularly appealing to youth and older adults.
  Across both groups, participants highlighted the importance of behind-the-scenes roles such as knitting, making decorations, providing reading support, preparing program materials, and assisting with basic needs, especially for individuals who are less mobile or under the age of 18 and therefore restricted from direct-service roles due to age requirements.

  Recommendation
  Create meaningful, low-barrier roles and intentionally design opportunities that respond to the specific needs of youth and older adult volunteers.

- **Design volunteer experiences to foster connection, value and personal recognition**
  Volunteers are more likely to stay engaged when they feel connected, valued, and part of the team. Participants reported that they are motivated when they can see the difference they are making in people's lives through their volunteer work. They are also more likely to remain committed when their contributions are acknowledged through specific and genuine recognition rather than generic appreciation.

  Recommendation
  Design volunteer programs that build relationships, demonstrate impact, and recognize contributions in personal and meaningful ways.

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