



# Youth Volunteer Retention in Québec



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## Introduction

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Volunteers are major contributors to nonprofit organizations in Québec and across Canada. Despite their contributions, studies reveal that volunteer retention is an aspect that remains neglected (Merrilees, Miller & Yakimova, 2020). There are many reasons why people give their time and remain in the same nonprofit. Consequently, there is no individual factor that guarantees retention; it differs depending on age group, gender, socio-economic background, area of volunteerism, etc. Improving retention is in the best interest of nonprofits. Although youth are the age group that volunteer the most (according to [Volunteers Canada](#)), Québec is the province with the lowest rate (as stated by [statcan](#)) and has much to learn from the rest of the country.

## Context

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Volunteerism has a significant impact on Canada's economy. The nonprofit sector's economic activity was responsible for 8.5% of Canada's GDP in 2017. Volunteer activity in the nonprofit sector was responsible for an additional CA\$41.8 billion in Canada's economy in 2013, representing 22.3% of the nonprofit GDP that year ([Statistics Canada, 2019](#)). This exposes how active and important volunteerism is within this sector of Canada.

Youth are the age group that volunteers the most in Canada; 53% of people between 15 and 24 years old while the national average is 44% ([Volunteers Canada](#)). It is important to focus on the volunteer situation in Québec's because it has the lowest rates of volunteering in the country: 32%, and the lowest average of hours volunteered per year, 123 hours, while the national average is 154 hours ([statcan](#)). Québec can improve its participation as well as retention rates.

There are many reasons an individual chooses to volunteer. According to the [Réseau de l'action bénévole du Québec](#), 41% do it for pleasure and because of their personal interest in an activity or a particular cause. 19% volunteer to socialize and exchange or develop a sense of belonging to a group

they share interests with. There are also diverse reasons for a person to continue volunteering at the same organization: 26% are motivated by contributing to their community; 18% to apply their knowledge and experience and 18% because they have a personal interest in the mission of the organization. Research suggests that the feeling of being valuable for the success of the organization's mission is one of the main reasons that guarantees retention ([Conn, Barr & Imagine Canada, 2006](#)). Because there are many different reasons and expectations from one individual to the next, there is no definitive means of addressing retention. Nevertheless, there are measures that can be taken through the volunteer experience and even after they have left the organization that can increase retention.

Unlike other provinces, it is not mandatory for students to have a certain number of volunteer hours to graduate high school in Québec. Chloé, a youth from Québec, explained during an interview that she has volunteered in high school because she was interested in it but it was not demanded by her school. Although she has been interested in volunteering, only this semester, because a university course pushed her, she started volunteering again to complete the mandatory hours for that class. Although many people are interested in volunteering, a push from school is sometimes necessary for them to invest their time into it. During an interview with some youth from southern Ontario, they have stated that 40 hours of volunteer work were necessary to graduate high school; although 40 hours does not seem like a lot, it is an incentive for people to get into volunteering, understand the process and possibly spark future interest. Volunteering since a young age can introduce people to what it means to be a volunteer and induce their interest in the non-profit sector.

## Retention Strategies

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Firstly, a clear definition of every role and expectation should precede the launching of any volunteer program. Then, it is important to strategically launch new volunteer programs or opportunities; new or

recurrent participants must feel excited to be a part of the projects. According to the online webinar by [Nonprofit Courses](#), organizations could give recurrent volunteers the first choice of role to incentivize the feeling of being important and necessary to the nonprofit. After that, an initial discussion should establish expectations of both the volunteer as well as the organization and identify a clear statement of their role. It is in the best interest of an organization to align the volunteer's goals with their desired outcomes. Recurrent check-ins are also a valuable tool to ensure tasks are still exciting. By creating a personal link between individual interests and usefulness to the nonprofit, return and retention rates are improved.

While volunteering, an individual must perceive how their work is useful for the organization to guarantee the feeling of accomplishment and see volunteering as an opportunity to learn. According to the [Nonprofit Courses](#) online class, structural rewards act as incentives for participation. For example, giving small rewards or certificates each time a certain amount of hours is reached, can improve retention. In addition, keeping an interactive online platform where tasks and common questions are stated are easily attainable steps that will help organizations keep their volunteers on track. Platforms including Google docs or Slack are great ways to keep people connected and informed without being wearing or too time-consuming. Providing a phone number or having a channel on slack where questions and concerns can be addressed quickly are good ways to reinforce good communication. Communication between organizations and their volunteers should be open and easy.

Volunteers are donating a valuable asset which is their time and attention and should be treated as any other donor of a nonprofit. In addition to using a good communication channel, there should be regular check-ins to assess the satisfaction of the volunteer as well as the workplace environment ([Nonprofit Courses](#)). From that point on, improvements can be made based on the feedback received. These feedback loops are useful for the organization to understand what brings people to give their time and engage with them and what can be changed for the better. They can be done online or in person,

anonymous or not; the decision should be made based on the quantity and type of participants and workplace.

Volunteer managers have many responsibilities and taking management courses can help them be more effective in their work. There are online and in-person options with a wide price and time range. It is up to the volunteer manager and nonprofit organization to decide its budget and time limit for the completion of the training but there are many options of price and length of duration.

In Québec, bilingualism and volunteering in a second language can be a source of insecurity. In this case, creating more accessible opportunities to volunteer in both languages would be beneficial for nonprofits by expanding the demographic of possible participants. Engaging with a nonprofit in a second language can be challenging and uncomfortable for the youth, preventing them from fully engaging with the community.

Finally, the Québec government should encourage the province's youth to volunteer from a young age. Implementing a volunteer program and mandatory hours for all high school students like other provinces have done would be beneficial to increase volunteering rates and retention.

## *Conclusion*

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The more important, relevant and connected to the organization's cause a volunteer feels, the higher the chances of them committing their time. The specific strategies for retention are not general nor work for every organization, however there are general tactics that can be implemented to improve retention. The objective is to make it easy for participants to be interested, engage and come back to the organization. Volunteering in a second language should not be an obstacle for youth to become engaged in volunteering initiatives and Québec can improve their engagement and retention if language barriers were smoothed. Youth volunteer retention depends on organized positions, a system of reward, consistent check-ins and acknowledgement for their time invested in the nonprofit sector.



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