



# Poll STATION

With Linda Banister

**E**dmonton has a great reputation for the capacity of its volunteer community. Whether in short, discrete commitments or through ongoing efforts, the success of many events and organizations is due, in part, to the legions of volunteers. Recent literature however, suggests that volunteer levels are declining. In this month's *Poll Station* we asked people about their volunteer activities.

## HAVE YOU VOLUNTEERED IN THE PAST YEAR... PAST FIVE YEARS?

To begin, we explained that volunteering includes doing things on behalf of an organization or group without being paid. This can include any unpaid help provided to schools, religious organizations, sports activities, or community groups. We then asked respondents if they had volunteered in any way in the past year. Fifty-seven percent of respondents said they had volunteered in the previous year, and 76 percent said they had volunteered in the past five years.

Considering those respondents who had not volunteered in the previous year, 23 percent said they planned to volunteer in the next year. Respondents who had no plans to volunteer were then asked for a reason. The most prevalent reason was lack of time (64 percent).

## WITH WHAT TYPE OF ORGANIZATION(S) DO YOU VOLUNTEER?

Those respondents who had volunteered in the previous five years were then asked to indicate the type of organization they volunteered with. Over one-quarter (27 percent) said they volunteered for a social services organization. A similar proportion, 25 percent, volunteered for organizations in the health sector, and 23 percent in the religious sector. Interestingly, women were more likely to volunteer for a health organization than men—30 percent versus 16 percent. Sixteen percent volunteered for a sports organization. Not surprisingly, 26 percent of men volunteered for a sports organization compared with nine percent of women. Finally, only eight percent volunteered for a cultural organization.

Again, respondents that had volunteered at some point in the previous five years were asked how many organizations had they volunteered with. While 38 percent had volunteered with a single organization, 26 percent had volunteered with four or more organizations. Thirty-four percent of respondents had volunteered with two or three organizations.

## HOW WELL ORGANIZED ARE ORGANIZATIONS?

Eighty-eight percent of respondents who had volunteered in the previous five years said the volunteer managers at those organizations were sufficiently knowledgeable to effectively do their jobs. The remaining 12 percent spoke about the need for increased training for the volunteer managers.

Less than half (46 percent) of the volunteers we spoke with said there is a reasonable number of volunteers available for organizations and events. However, only 27 percent said organizations have sufficient funds to manage the volunteers. Fifty-seven percent indicated there were adequate physical facilities for their volunteers. An equal proportion—57 percent—believed that the organizations they have volunteered with had sufficient policies and procedures regarding volunteers.

## HOW CAN ORGANIZATIONS ATTRACT MORE VOLUNTEERS?

Finally, all respondents were asked to suggest strategies that organizations could use to get more volunteers. While 45 percent were unsure what could be done, 33 percent felt the provision of detailed information about the volunteer opportunity would be helpful. This information could include the required or expected time commitment and hours as well as the responsibilities of the position. Eleven percent felt a targeted recruitment process would help organizations get more volunteers.

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