

# Study: Volunteering counts: Formal and informal contributions of Canadians in 2018

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Volunteers play an important role in maintaining community well-being and contributing to the overall Canadian economy. Their annual volunteering time commitments equalled more than 2.5 million full-time jobs in 2018.

While volunteering has continued during the COVID-19 pandemic, the need to mitigate public health risks has brought about changes in the ability of volunteers—of all ages—to participate in the same way as they did before, particularly traditional in-person volunteering.

Sectors shifted the way they delivered services, modifying, postponing or even halting their volunteer programming. At the same time, individuals took action to directly support their neighbours and communities, writing letters to those in long-term care homes, making masks for vulnerable populations, or delivering food to those in need.

Today, in conjunction with National Volunteer Week, Statistics Canada is releasing an article that sheds light on the important contributions and dedication of volunteers in Canada. While the latest data on volunteering predate the pandemic, they provide a baseline for measuring the impact of the pandemic on volunteerism.

The new study is based on data from the 2018 General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating (GSS-GVP). With a focus on generational differences in volunteering, results may shape how the volunteer sector responds to ongoing restrictions and the re-opening of the economy, including approaches to age-specific recruitment, retention and re-entry campaigns.

## **About 8 in 10 Canadians volunteered their time in 2018**

In 2018, 79% of Canadians aged 15 years and older reported volunteering, either as part of an organization or on their own without the involvement of a group. Altogether, 24 million people contributed to improving the health, well-being, education and safety of the Canadian population and enhancing Canadian communities.

On average, volunteers dedicated 206 hours of their time in 2018. Hospitals and the religious sector saw the highest numbers of annual hours of formal volunteer support: volunteers dedicated an average of 111 hours per year to hospitals and an average of 110 hours per year to churches, mosques, synagogues, temples and other religious organizations.

Other organizations with high levels of volunteer engagement in 2018 included sports and recreation (105 average hours per year) and arts and culture (104 average hours per year). These organizations are among the sectors most impacted by the pandemic.



**Chart 1**

**Average annual volunteer hours, by organization type, among formal volunteers aged 15 and over, 2018**



**Note(s):** Categories are not mutually exclusive. Please note that the estimates for categories "Law, advocacy and politics", "Environment" and "International" should be interpreted with caution.

**Source(s):** Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, Giving, Volunteering, and Participating, 2018.

Among Canadians participating in some form of direct help or community involvement (not on behalf of an organization), an average of 137 hours per year was spent helping someone outside the household—be it a neighbour, family or friend. Additionally, an average of 45 hours per year was dedicated to improving the community directly, such as maintaining a park or public space.

**Older Canadians less likely to volunteer but contribute more hours**

As seen in the past, both formal and informal volunteering was more commonly reported by younger generations, though the hours spent volunteering were far greater among older Canadians. In 2018, the highest rate of formal volunteering was observed in iGens—those born in 1996 or later—with just over half (52%) having volunteered on behalf of an organization in the preceding year. The oldest generation —Matures—were less likely to formally volunteer (32%), but these Canadians born between 1918 and 1945 logged almost three times the average number of hours per year (222 versus 82 for iGens).

In fact, the oldest generations were much more likely to be considered the top volunteers, defined as the 25% of volunteers who provide the most hours (at least an average of 132 hours or more in 2018). Nearly one-third (31%) of Baby Boomers—born between 1946 and 1965—and 40% of Matures were top volunteers, compared with 18% of iGens. For these older generations, entering retirement can mean more time to devote to activities outside of paid work, with some transitioning from paid work to volunteering pursuits.

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## Underlying motivations for volunteering differ by age

Not only do younger and older generations differ in the rates and intensity of volunteering, they also have different motivations for helping on behalf of an organization or group.

Topping the list of reasons given by iGens was the desire to improve job prospects, identified by 38% of the youngest volunteers. These volunteers were also the most likely to state that their contributions were tied to co-op, graduation or employment requirements, with about 10% of their volunteer hours representing mandatory unpaid work. In general, these types of programs saw reduced requirement hours during the pandemic. Based on the Statistics Canada crowdsourcing survey, "[Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on postsecondary students](#)," over one-third (35%) of post-secondary students said that their planned work placement was delayed or cancelled.

Volunteering to enhance future job opportunities or career-oriented volunteering was far less common among older generations with more labour force experience. Instead, older volunteers often cited skill use, a desire to support a political or social cause, or religious or spiritual beliefs as reasons for formally volunteering.

## Millennial and Baby Boomer women had higher rates of volunteering than men within the same generations

Overall, women (44%) were more likely than men (38%) to participate in some form of formal volunteering. This gender difference was mainly driven by Millennials—those born from 1981 to 1995— and Baby Boomers. There were no observed differences among other generations.

Beyond age and gender, understanding variations in formal volunteering rates by other population groups can provide important insight into differing patterns of volunteering and even indicators of social integration. While the GSS-GVP collected information on diverse populations, such as the Indigenous population and immigrant population, the sample size was too small to permit reliable estimates on volunteering. Other indicators of ethnocultural diversity, such as belonging to a group designated as a visible minority, were not collected by this survey.

## Event organization and fundraising most common types of formal volunteering

The two most common formal volunteering activities in 2018 were event organization and fundraising. In 2018, almost 1 in 5 Canadians (18%) helped organize, supervise or coordinate activities or events, with the youngest generation, iGens, being most likely to participate in these types of volunteering activities. Meanwhile, 16% of Canadians helped an organization raise money.

The next most common formal volunteering activities reported in 2018 included sitting on a committee or board (13%), teaching or mentoring (12%), collecting, serving or delivering food (11%) and providing advice or counselling services (10%).

## Helping others directly often involved help with housework and home maintenance

Almost twice as common as volunteering on behalf of an organization or group was informal volunteering. In 2018, almost three-quarters (74%) of Canadians aged 15 years and older made a difference by directly helping people outside their household or by getting involved to improve their community. While many of these Canadians were the same as those who volunteered on behalf of an organization, over half (52%) of informal volunteers exclusively contributed in an informal way.

Direct helping can involve lending a hand to neighbours, acquaintances, family (living outside the household), friends, or the larger community. It most commonly involved housework, outdoor work or home maintenance, as reported by 49% of Canadians. Other leading forms of informal volunteering included driving someone to appointments (39%) and providing someone with health-related or personal care (39%). Within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, many examples are emerging of Canadians ensuring that seniors are able to be vaccinated against COVID-19, arranging appointments and providing transportation to vaccination sites.

The top helping activities were the most common across all generations. That being said, there were a few generational differences, particularly among the least prevalent tasks. The likelihood of teaching, coaching and tutoring consistently declined with age, ranging from 20% among iGens to 5% among Matures. Additionally, helping others with paperwork, including writing letters, doing taxes and banking were far more common among Millennials, Gen Xs (born between 1966 and 1980) and Baby Boomers than among iGens and Matures.

### Note to readers

This release summarizes findings of the article released today, [Volunteering counts: Formal and informal contributions of Canadians in 2018](#). The article includes an overview of volunteer rates and number of volunteer hours, the types of volunteering activities, and the sectors benefiting from volunteerism. The article is based on data from the 2018 General Social Survey – Giving, Volunteering and Participating.

The article highlights generational differences in volunteering, recognizing that the prevalence and nature of volunteering has historically varied across younger and older generations. Generations are groups of people who experience the same significant societal events, or similar cultural experiences, within a time period. Although there is no agreed upon name and designated age range for generations, the following specifications are used in this release:

- *iGen (also referred as Generation Z): Born between 1996 and 2012 (15 to 22 years of age at the time of the survey)*
- *Millennials: Born between 1981 and 1995 (23 to 37 years of age)*
- *Gen X: Born between 1966 and 1980 (38 to 52 years of age)*
- *Baby Boomers: Born between 1946 and 1965 (53 to 72 years of age)*
- *Matures: Born between 1918 and 1945 (73 to 100 years of age)*

The article "[Volunteering counts: Formal and informal contributions of Canadians in 2018](#)" is now available in *Insights on Canadian Society* ([75-006-X](#)).

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; [STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca](mailto:STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca)) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; [STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca](mailto:STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca)).