

# 2009 Volunteer Summit Report



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## MINISTER'S MESSAGE



As Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs (MACA), I am pleased to present the 2009 Volunteer Summit Report.

Volunteerism has a rich tradition in the Northwest Territories (NWT) and volunteers will continue to play a vital role in the wellbeing and sense of community in the North. Volunteers are firefighters, coaches, organizers, mentors, and individuals dedicated to making our communities sustainable, vibrant and safe.

The 2009 Volunteer Summit provided an opportunity for volunteers to express their needs, concerns, and ideas surrounding the voluntary sector, and this report outlines the key findings from the Summit in the areas of volunteer recruitment, coordination, recognition, and training. The feedback received provided us with a broad picture of the NWT voluntary sector, and will help us renew the GNWT's Volunteer Support Initiative, and create a new 2009-2012 Volunteer Support Initiative Action Plan.

I would like to extend a sincere thank you to all participants, speakers, co-chairs, facilitators and Youth Ambassadors for your insightful contributions.

Honourable Robert C. McLeod  
Minister of Municipal and Community Affairs

## INTRODUCTION

On March 6 and 7, 2009, the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs (MACA) hosted the Northwest Territories (NWT) Volunteer Summit to consult with a wide range of volunteers to gather their input on ways the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) can improve its support for volunteers and voluntary organizations.

The Summit involved twenty-four participants who are active volunteers in the Northwest Territories (NWT). The participants were divided into four working groups, and had a mix of participants from all regions of the NWT, as well as a mix of participants with a wide range of volunteer experiences.

Working groups participated in round table discussions facilitated by a MACA staff member and a Youth Ambassador Alumni. Each session asked participants what is currently happening in the voluntary sector, and what are some ways to improve the sector.

### Workshop Focus Questions

#### 1. The Coordination and Management of Volunteers

The success of an event relies heavily on the coordination and management of volunteers. What can be done to make the coordination of volunteers a more efficient and effective process in the Northwest Territories?

#### 2. Volunteer Recruitment and the Next Generation

Recruiting new volunteers prevents burnout, spreads the workload, and builds a stronger sense of community. In what ways can the Northwest Territories attract new volunteers and what can be done to further engage our youth population?

#### 3. Volunteer Training

An important part of encouraging and supporting the volunteer population is to provide necessary training. What specific types of training do volunteers in the Northwest Territories require and what can be done to provide more opportunities for this training?

#### 4. Volunteer Recognition

Every act of volunteerism deserves recognition and appreciation. What steps can be taken in the Northwest Territories to better recognize the efforts of our volunteer population?

## BACKGROUND

In 2005, the GNWT Volunteer Declaration, a statement of commitment and support to the voluntary sector, was announced. A related Action Plan outlining the steps that the GNWT would take to promote and support volunteerism was announced at the same time. The NWT Volunteer Support Action Plan has four goals:

1. Address the challenges of recruiting, retaining, recognizing and rewarding volunteers by raising public awareness and understanding of volunteering; and promoting active participation and good citizenship through volunteering.
2. Build capacity among volunteers and voluntary organizations to advocate and respond to community and social service needs by strengthening and expanding the skills and knowledge of volunteers and voluntary organizations; and seeking financial stability within voluntary organizations.
3. Promote and strengthen healthy and equal relationships within the voluntary sector and with the government and business sectors including Aboriginal organizations in each sector by launching new ways of working with communities; and recognizing and protecting the voluntary sector's basic role in promoting active citizen participation in society, and advocating for and influencing change in public policy, programs and legislation.
4. Facilitate connections and relationships within the NWT's voluntary sector and connect the sector with federal initiatives that support volunteers and voluntary organizations by linking GNWT and federal government voluntary sector support initiatives.

From 2005 to 2008, MACA and other GNWT Departments supported implementation of the Volunteer Support Initiative (VSI) by:

- Sponsoring the Fire Service Merit Awards that recognizes both volunteer and paid personnel working in this sector;
- Recognizing a number of key sport and recreation volunteers at the Champions for Children Dinner sponsored by Sport North Federation;
- Incorporating volunteer development, information and training sessions into semi-annual regional workshops;
- Providing direct support to volunteer training through the Volunteer Organization Development Fund;

- Lobbying Statistics Canada to include the NWT in national surveys on volunteering, to establish a baseline of information on northern volunteers;
- Sponsoring the annual Outstanding Volunteer Awards Program which recognizes volunteers in several categories and includes an annual territorial awards ceremony;
- Establishing the Youth Ambassador program for major games and other Department initiatives (Canada Winter Games, Arctic Winter Games, North American Indigenous Games, Olympics, the Volunteer Summit and the 2009 Outstanding Volunteer Awards) to provide youth with volunteer opportunities; and
- Promoting National Volunteer week and International Volunteer Day.

In late 2008, it was decided that while reasonable progress had been made, additional efforts are necessary to support continued growth of this important element of NWT communities.



*Youth in the NWT volunteer (47%) less than youth in other parts of Canada (55%). They also contribute fewer hours – 83 hours compared to the Canadian average for youth of 139 hours. – Statistics Canada*

## QUESTIONS WITH FEEDBACK

The following is a summary of the feedback provided during the Summit including recommended actions and activities that will help to improve support for the voluntary sector.

### QUESTION 1: THE COORDINATION AND MANAGEMENT OF VOLUNTEERS

*The success of an event relies heavily on the coordination and management of volunteers. What can be done to make the coordination of volunteers a more efficient and effective process in the Northwest Territories?*

#### WHAT IS CURRENTLY HAPPENING?

Organizations are too busy and do not have enough people to coordinate and manage their volunteers efficiently and effectively. A lack of management ends up costing organizations more money and a loss of volunteers. People are more willing to volunteer when there is good management.

#### WAYS TO IMPROVE?

##### **Develop a Network**

The coordination of volunteers can be more efficient and effective, if a network of volunteers between communities is created. A network can be useful in sharing resources and tips. Volunteers could even go on exchanges to other communities to help at events. A volunteer website with a bank of volunteers and their area of interest could support the network.

##### **Support for Volunteer Organizers**

The key to organizing volunteers successfully is effective communication and solid management. Good communication between the organizer and the volunteer will help create a positive experience, and as a result, volunteers are more likely to continue volunteering. Effort needs to go into improving the capacity of event organizers in the areas of effective communication, establishing suitable workloads for volunteers, and maintaining a stable organization.

## QUESTION 2: VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND THE NEXT GENERATION

*Recruiting new volunteers prevents burnout, spreads the workload, and builds a stronger sense of community. In what ways can the Northwest Territories attract new volunteers and what can be done to further engage our youth population?*

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### WHAT IS CURRENTLY HAPPENING?

Volunteer recruitment can be a challenge in the NWT. Currently, volunteers are recruiting other volunteers by inviting family members and friends to events, but to increase the volume of available volunteers, other modes of recruitment need to be identified. As a Territory, we need to raise the percentage of volunteers as a whole, and not just the amount of time an individual volunteers.

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### WAYS TO IMPROVE?

#### **Youth Involvement**

There are many great youth volunteer programs available, such as the Northern Youth Abroad and Youth Ambassador Program, but youth need to be encouraged to apply. Community leaders need to be good role models and talk to youth to encourage them to volunteer.

A volunteer mentorship program should be developed to pair youth volunteers with an elder or adult. The adult can help the youth if they feel overwhelmed and can provide guidance. The mentorship program should encourage youth to find a field that they enjoy.

Through families and community leaders, a culture of volunteerism needs to be created to teach youth to recognize and appreciate the value of volunteering.

#### **Community Involvement**

Encouraging and recruiting new volunteers needs to start at the community level. Communities need to take the lead in strengthening their voluntary sector through methods such as hosting a volunteer fair or creating an “Adopt a Volunteer” program where experienced volunteers can provide guidance to new volunteers. Overall, communities need to foster a sense of selflessness in residents so they will donate their time and energy.

## Offer Incentives

When recruiting volunteers, it is important to entice people to volunteer. “Sell” the adventure of volunteering by offering interesting opportunities or experiences through travel, and such. Smaller incentives such as free daycare service provided while they volunteer, and training opportunities provided through volunteering are also selling points. With youth, it is important to link volunteer work as a valuable opportunity to create and improve job skills. Participation in volunteer activities improves job readiness skills and improves opportunities for advancement.



*Residents who volunteer will feel involved in the community and develop a sense of community pride.*

### QUESTION 3: VOLUNTEER TRAINING

*An important part of encouraging and supporting the volunteer population is to provide necessary training. What specific types of training do volunteers in the Northwest Territories require and what can be done to provide more opportunities for this training?*

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#### WHAT IS CURRENTLY HAPPENING?

Although volunteers are being offered various training opportunities – including First Aid/CPR; Pleasure Craft Operators Card (PCOC); and program management – there is still a need to offer more training. Smaller communities, in particular, are in need of more training opportunities, and financial support for such opportunities needs to be made available.

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#### WAYS TO IMPROVE?

##### **Provide More Training Sessions**

There are many training opportunities available, but there could still be more offered. Management training sessions should include proposal writing, risk management/liability, good governance, and time management. Financial training sessions should include budgeting and bookkeeping. Communications related training should focus on event planning, advertising, and public speaking.

##### **Share Resources**

Volunteer organizations should look to share resources to help cut down on costs and to share knowledge. Northern volunteers can learn a lot from each other through exchange programs between communities, and through networking. A database with a list of training opportunities available to all organizations could be used to reduce costs and provide enough participants to host a course. The database would list what is being offered, in what community, and when, and different organizations could team together to offer the course together. The courses offered through MACA's School of Community Government would also be valuable if voluntary organizations could attend. Finally, video conferencing equipment should be used to train people across the NWT, especially for the smaller communities who do not always have the resources to offer training.

## QUESTION 4: VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION

*Every act of volunteerism deserves recognition and appreciation. What steps can be taken in the Northwest Territories to better recognize the efforts of our volunteer population?*

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### WHAT IS CURRENTLY HAPPENING?

Organizations are recognizing the efforts of their volunteers in various ways. Some organizations hold thank-you dinners where volunteers have an opportunity to relax, meet each other, and share a meal, while others offer gifts such as photos, pins, t-shirts, and thank-you cards. Volunteer awards – such as the GNWT’s NWT Outstanding Volunteer Awards, TSN’s Chunky Soup Coach contest, and ‘good person of the day’ awards on radio stations – are another way that volunteers are being recognized.

Although volunteers are being recognized, there is the feeling that we are focusing too much on super volunteers and not praising regular volunteers enough. Volunteers that put in a few hours tend to be “unsung heroes” and still need to be thanked for the little things they do.

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### WAYS TO IMPROVE?

#### **Recognition Events and Tokens**

It is important to thank all volunteers for their time and effort. When volunteers are recognized and appreciated, it will make them feel that what they are doing is important. With new volunteers, in particular, it is important to recognize them so they feel valued and will continue to volunteer.

Organizations, that are not currently doing so, can consider recognizing their volunteers through events, such as thank-you dinners, or offering tokens, such as t-shirts or flowers. When prizes are limited, organizations should consider drawing names for a prize.

Thanking volunteers through newspapers, local/school newsletters, emails, or letters is another great way to tell residents who is helping make the community a better place.

## CONCLUSION AND POST-SUMMIT ACTION

Volunteers and the voluntary sector play an important role in developing and maintaining sustainable, safe, and vibrant NWT communities. MACA promotes and supports volunteers in their efforts to help build effective and sustainable communities.

This report is the first step in strengthening the voluntary sector. Through the feedback received during the 2009 Volunteer Summit, a broad picture of the voluntary sector of the NWT was developed. MACA is now using the input received to develop the “2009-2012 GNWT Volunteer Support Initiative.” The VSI will focus on initiatives that improve training opportunities for volunteers, with a particular emphasis on community capacity building; promote the social and health benefits of volunteering to all residents; engage NWT youth as new volunteers; and support the development of resources to complement these activities.

For more information on volunteerism, please visit the Department of Municipal and Community Affairs website at [www.maca.gov.nt.ca](http://www.maca.gov.nt.ca) or contact:

Sport, Recreation and Youth  
Municipal and Community Affairs  
Tel: (867) 873-7245



*Four Steps for Success in the  
Voluntary Sector: Recruit –  
Respect – Reward – Retain*