

Volunteerism and Civic Involvement

Volunteerism is a powerful vehicle for helping us address critical social, economic, health and environmental issues. Recent trends signal a crisis in volunteering and civic involvement, marked by declining volunteer rates and increasing demands on organizations that provide essential services. Through the pandemic volunteering rates declined, creating a crisis of community engagement.

Civic involvement is essential because it allows citizens to influence policy, local values, and municipal government priorities. This leads to a higher level of trust, stronger, happier communities and creates agency among residents who are often overlooked and underheard.

In the Community Social Needs Assessment (CSNA) public survey, respondents were asked to identify the quality of life aspects that they felt were St. Albert's greatest strengths. Volunteerism was among the aspects that respondents chose as the community's greatest strengths. Civic involvement was one of the quality of life aspects that ranked the lowest at 21%.

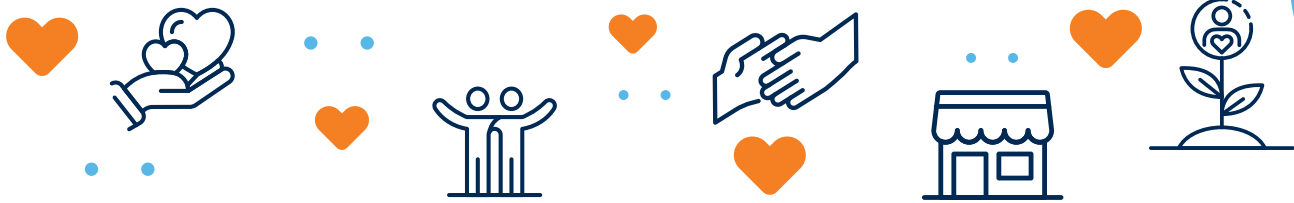
64% of public survey respondents said that someone in their household volunteered locally within the past year. 44% of stakeholder survey respondents identified that recruiting or retaining volunteers is an issue.



Volunteering and civic involvement promote social connection and help combat loneliness across generations. Volunteering forges stronger, more resilient communities and promotes a sense of meaning and belonging.

Canada's social support system and the volunteer landscape are closely intertwined. The nonprofit and charitable sector is responsible for delivering a broad range of essential services and, with 58% of charitable organizations having no paid staff, volunteers play an integral role.

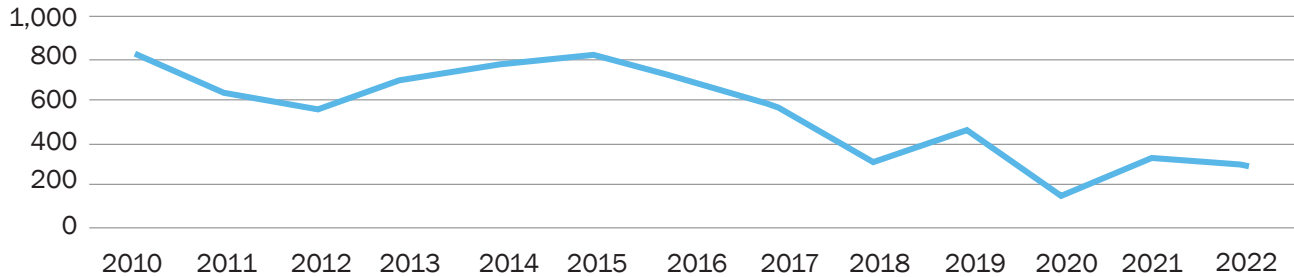
Alberta's Family and Community Support Services Accountability Framework includes current prevention priorities such as promoting and encouraging active engagement in the community, fostering a sense of belonging and promoting social inclusion.



St. Albert Context

Like other communities, the number of volunteers in St. Albert is declining.

Community Volunteerism for FCSS-funded Programming



The economic value of volunteerism is significant. In 2022, 299 FCSS-funded program volunteers donated 9,382 hours, which calculates to \$253,314 worth of donated time.

In St. Albert, volunteerism is supported through:

- the St. Albert & Area Volunteer Manager’s Group
 - This network meets six times per year to share best practices, tools and professional development opportunities, and to promote volunteerism and help build capacity for social sector and volunteer organizations
- an annual Volunteer Fair and Community Information Day
- annual community-wide volunteer appreciation event

Civic involvement is achieved through:

- participation in Council committees
- participating in municipal censuses
- voting in municipal elections
- partaking in City public participation opportunities



- 64% of public survey respondents said that someone in their household volunteered locally within the past year
- 64% of seniors responded that they have volunteered in the past two years
- 57% of youth responded that they have volunteered in past two years

The top programs people volunteer for:

Sports and recreation	18%
Social services	15%
Community events	15%
Other	15%
Neighbourhood activities (Block Parties, Play Streets, etc.)	14%

Community members are less likely to volunteer to support emergency preparedness, civic and/or advisory opportunities, at the library or as a board member.

When asked “what prevents you or someone in your household from volunteering?”, respondents answered as follows:

Nothing	30%
Capacity/too busy	25%
Unaware of opportunities	22%
Health	19%
Other reasons	10%

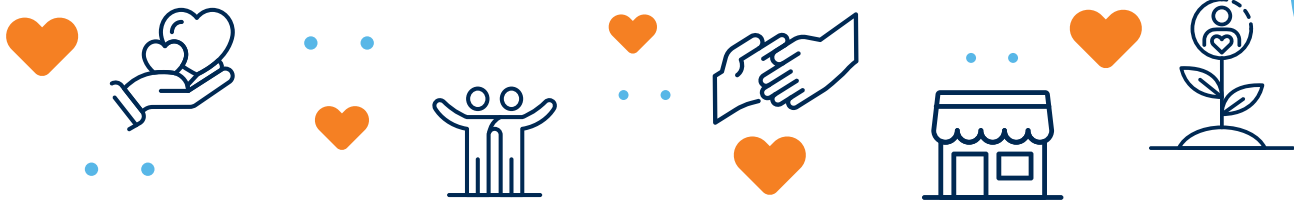


WHAT WE HEARD

- We hesitate to volunteer with organizations that do not align with our values/beliefs
- There aren’t enough volunteering opportunities available in the community.
- Lack of options for teens under 18

Of the respondents to the stakeholder survey:

- 18% identified volunteers as an underserved target population in St. Albert.



National Issues and Trends

According to the Community Foundations of Canada's 2023 National Vital Signs Report:

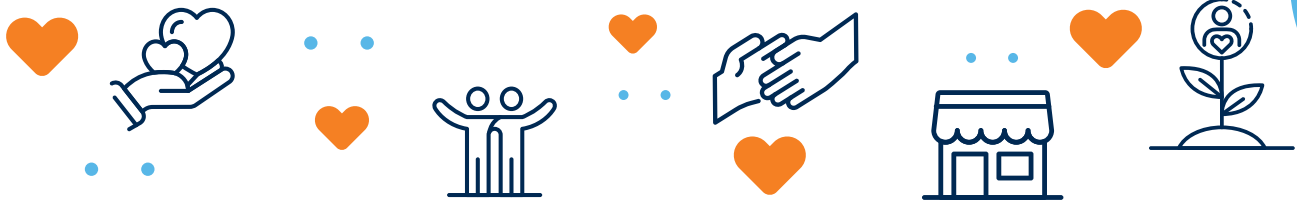
- The proportion of people volunteering has declined by 12 percentage points since 2013.
- Fewer than one in four people are volunteering.
- In 2022, 24% of community members volunteered for an organization within the past 12 months.
- Rates of volunteerism are higher among religiously-active people (51%), those aged 18 to 24 (35%) and people who are racialized (31%).
- Around one quarter of volunteers named contributing to the well-being of the community as a leading motivation for volunteering.
- Volunteerism has dropped among all age groups, but the youngest people continue to volunteer at the highest levels.
- Event organizing and fundraising are the most common type of formal volunteering activity.

Declining volunteerism directly impacts charities and nonprofits' ability to survive and serve their communities. Statistics Canada reports the following:

- 33% of organizations report volunteer shortage has forced them to reduce their programs. 17% of organizations have cancelled programs and services outright.
- 28% of organizations report staff are working more hours; work normally done by volunteers.
- 21% of organizations report that the volunteer shortage is leading to employee burnout.
- 22% of charities had significantly fewer people volunteering than before the pandemic.
- 51% of charity managers or coordinators in Canada have concerns about staff burnout.
- More than one-third of non-profits are expected to have increased reliance on volunteers, while about one in 20 were at risk of closing.

To learn more, visit stalbert.ca/volunteering





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