
REPORT ON THE 2007 CANADA SURVEY ON GIVING, VOLUNTEERING AND PARTICIPATING

*By Terrance S. Carter**

A. INTRODUCTION

In June 2009, Statistics Canada published *Caring Canadians, Involved Canadians: Highlights from the 2007 Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating* (the “2007 Survey”).¹ A survey of giving, volunteering and participation in the voluntary sector is conducted approximately every three years by Statistics Canada. The 2007 Survey used a representative sample of almost 22,000 Canadians aged 15 and older, including residents of Canada who were not citizens.

The results indicate that from 2004, which was when the last survey was undertaken, the rates of donating, volunteering and helping in Canada have generally remained unchanged. However, there has been some growth in the total value of donations, the average size of donations and total hours volunteered, based on a comparison of statistics from 2004 and 2007 as indicated below:

- \$10 billion were donated in 2007, an increase of 12% or \$1.1 billion;
- the average donation was \$437 in 2007, an increase from \$400;
- 2.1 billion hours were volunteered in 2007, a 4.2% increase; and
- the average number of hours volunteered was 166, which is about the same as before.

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¹ Michael Hall *et al.*, *Caring Canadians, Involved Canadians: Highlights from the 2007 Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2009). Available at http://www.givingandvolunteering.ca/files/giving/en/csgvp_highlights_2007.pdf.

This *Charity Law Bulletin* provides an overview of the 2007 Survey and summarizes some of the key findings that will be of interest to charities.

B. OVERVIEW AND SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

The introduction provides an indication of the motivation behind conducting the 2007 Survey, commenting that “[o]ne of the remarkable features of Canadian life is the extent to which we reach beyond our families and friends to contribute to others and our communities through charitable giving, by volunteering time to charitable and nonprofit organizations and by helping individual Canadians directly.”²

A national survey of this nature and magnitude provides the opportunity to assess how and why Canadians engage in giving, volunteering and direct helping, which the 2007 Survey cumulatively refers to as *prosocial behaviour*. Moreover, a regularly-conducted survey allows a continuing understanding of any changes in the trends of prosocial behaviour in Canada.

The 2007 Survey uses three chapters to highlight particular areas of data that the 2007 Survey provided – statistics pertaining to charitable giving; volunteering and direct help, and an assessment of the interconnectedness of the three types of prosocial behaviour.

1. Charitable Giving

In the twelve-month period covered by the 2007 Survey, almost 23 million Canadians, 84% of the population made a financial donation to a charitable or nonprofit organization. This figure is virtually the same as the amount of 85% that was reported in the previous survey conducted in 2004. The total amount donated was \$8.9 billion in 2004 and \$10 billion in 2007, which represents a 12% increase, and the amount of the average donation increased by 9% from \$400 to \$437, but the dollar amounts in the survey have not been adjusted to take into account any effects of inflation.

A significant majority of the total donations are made by a disproportionate minority of Canadians, as 25% of all donors gave 82% of all donations, and 10% of all donors gave 62% of all donations. The 2007 Survey also indicated that certain characteristics of a Canadian would have an effect on his or her

² *Ibid.* at 5.

likelihood to give. The 2007 Survey states that a donor who gives the most is more likely to be someone who:

- was older,
- had a higher household income,
- had more formal education,
- was married or widowed, and
- was religiously active.

However, although donors with higher household incomes typically donated *more in total* than those with lower incomes, the donors with lower household incomes typically donated *a larger proportion* of their incomes. There was no significant difference between the likelihood of donating for an immigrant (82%) versus a Canadian-born person (85%). However, immigrants donated noticeably larger amounts (\$505) than those born in Canada (\$423).

With respect to the beneficiaries of these donations, religious organizations accounted for 46% of the total dollar value of donations. The next largest category was health organizations, but they only accounted for 15%. However, 56% of Canadians gave to health organizations, more than the 36% that made donations to religious organizations. The average donation to a religious organization was higher though, amounting to \$469.³ Social services organizations accounted for only 10% of recipients.

The significance of religion is prevalent in other statistical categories as well, in that 42% of the total value of donations was collected at places of worship. According to the 2007 Survey, Canadians who are religiously active tend to give more when they donate, and while most of those donations do go to religious organizations, religious Canadians also donate significant amounts to non-religious organizations as well.

The most common method Canadians used to donate was through the mail, with 16% of donations being made this way. This does not necessarily mean this method accounts for the bulk of donations made by charitable organizations and nonprofits. Although 12% of all donations were made in response to canvassing in shopping centers, this amounts to just 1% of the total value of donations.

³ *Ibid.* at 15.

In terms of motivations for giving, compared to earlier survey in 2004, there has been little change. The exception, however, is a small increase in the percentage of donors who felt that tax credits were an important factor, with an increase from 20% to 23%. The most frequently cited motivation was feeling compassion toward people in need at 90%.

Of those Surveyed, 34% of donors indicated that they did not give more because they did not like how the request was made. This can be useful information for charities and nonprofits, with the most frequent issues identified being the tone of request at 43%, followed by 24% not happy about the volume or frequency of requests. Lastly, 15% indicated that they did not like receiving multiple requests from the same organizations.

2. Volunteering and Direct Helping

For the purposes of the 2007 Survey, volunteering is defined as “doing activities without pay on behalf of a group or organization, and includes mandatory community service.”⁴ Mandatory community service is used as a term to distinguish mandated contributions of time versus completely voluntary contributions. For example, schools, employers, governmental authorities and charities themselves may mandate a minimum amount of volunteer hours. The 2007 Survey did not distinguish between particular authorities, but generally, mandatory community service appears to have a limited impact on volunteers because only 7% of volunteers stated that they were required to volunteer for the organization to which they contributed the most volunteer hours.

Nearly 12.5 million Canadians or 46% of the population volunteered during the twelve-month period covered by the 2007 Survey, which is almost the same as the amount of 45% reported in 2004. The average number of hours volunteered also remained relatively constant, decreasing marginally from 168 to 166 hours. Very similar trends of proportionality as those in charitable giving also exist in volunteering, as most of the volunteer hours were attributable to a minority of volunteers. In this regard, 25% of volunteers contributed 78% of total hours, and 10% of volunteers contributed 52% of total hours.

⁴ *Ibid.* at 49.

There were some unique variations in the characteristics of ‘typical’ volunteers. The profile of a Canadian who was *most likely to volunteer* was someone who:

- was younger,
- had a higher level of education
- had a higher household income,
- had school-aged children in the household, and
- was religiously active.

However, the profile of a Canadian who was *likely to volunteer the most hours* was someone who:

- was a senior,
- had a higher level of education,
- had a lower household income,
- had no children in the household, and
- was religiously active.

These two lists, combined with the aforementioned list for charitable donations, indicate that a high education level and being religiously active are two characteristics that are consistently prevalent in Canadians who donate and volunteer more. There was some disparity between the likelihood of volunteering for an immigrant (40%) versus a Canadian-born person (49%). However, immigrants volunteered slightly more time (171 hours) than those born in Canada (163 hours).

The major beneficiaries of these volunteers were organizations involved in sport and recreation, social services, education and research, and religion. The parity between these four major categories is noticeable, with each receiving 10% to 11% of total volunteers, and 11% to 18% of total volunteer hours.

Volunteers identified a number of skills they learned as part of their experience. Two thirds of the volunteers reported an increase in interpersonal skills through understanding and motivating people. Almost half cited communication skills as a learned benefit, as well as 39% obtaining organization and managerial skills. Other benefits reported were fundraising skills and increased knowledge about specific areas like health, women’s or political issues, criminal justice or the environment.

Of concern to charitable organizations and nonprofits may be the barriers to volunteering identified by the 2007 Survey. The Survey cites as an example that 30% did not volunteer more because no one asked, 15% did not know how to get involved and 9% were dissatisfied with a previous experience. Additionally, there was a slight increase on all reported barriers compared to the survey in 2004.

As a related but statistically separate concept from volunteering, the 2007 Survey also took into account Canadians who “helped individuals living outside their household, without involving an organization”,⁵ which is referred to as *informal volunteering* or *direct helping*. Examples of this category include helping with work at someone’s home (e.g. cooking and cleaning); providing health-related personal care (e.g. emotional support and counselling); shopping or providing rides; doing paperwork (e.g. writing letters or filing taxes); or teaching and tutoring. According to the 2007 Survey, 84% of Canadians provided some form of direct help, which is virtually the same as the amount of 83% reported in 2004.

3. Relationships between Prosocial Behaviours

The 2007 Survey also assesses the correlation between each of the three forms of prosocial behaviour. Canadians who engage in one type of prosocial activity are more likely to engage in one or both of the other two. According to the 2007 Survey, 37% of Canadians were involved in all three types, 41% were involved in two, and only 17% were involved in only one type. These statistics remain virtually the same as they were in 2004.

A comparative assessment of the different behaviours also yielded interesting findings. According to the 2007 Survey, volunteers were more likely than donors and direct helpers to engage in more prosocial behaviour. For example, 80% of volunteers also made donations and provided financial help. On the other hand, less than 50% of donors or direct helpers engaged in all three types of behaviour.

The 2007 Survey also suggests that engaging in more forms of prosocial behaviour led to greater intensity of involvement. Canadians involved in one type of behaviour gave an average annual donation of \$269; those involved in two types donated \$305; and those involved in all three types donated \$614.

⁵ *Ibid.* at 52.

C. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The 2007 Survey has provided an invaluable resource for understanding the nature of Canadian giving, whether it is the giving of money, property, time or services. It is hoped that Statistics Canada will continue with the survey in the future, (which will presumably be conducted in 2010), in order to shed further light on statistical trends over the current decade.

Readers are encouraged to refer to the 2007 Survey for further information on its findings. Those who are interested in the statistics for a particular region should note that the appendices of the 2007 Survey include data tables relating to each of the Canadian provinces and territories. The full 2007 Survey is available for download from Imagine Canada at the website <http://www.givingandvolunteering.ca>.