
STATISTICS CANADA RELEASES NEW SURVEY ON GIVING AND VOLUNTEERING

*By Terrance S. Carter**

A. INTRODUCTION

On January 30, 2015, Statistics Canada released its initial analysis of data from the 2013 General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering, and Participating in its [*Spotlight on Canadians: Results from the General Social Survey*](#) (the “Report”).¹ The General Social Survey is conducted every three years. The Report provides an early view of the trends regarding how Canadians support each other, either directly or indirectly, by volunteering, including the number of hours volunteered, or by donating to charitable and non-profit organizations,² including donation rates and amounts. The Report provides a picture of volunteering and giving in 2013, as well as comparisons between the 2013 data and information collected in 2010, 2007 and 2004. This *Charity Law Bulletin* provides a brief review of the findings in the Report. This information will be important for charities and non-profit organizations so that they can fully understand recent societal trends shaping their work.

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¹ Martin Turcotte, *Spotlight on Canadians: Results from the General Social Survey – Volunteering and Charitable Giving in Canada* (30 January 2015), online: <<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-652-x/89-652-x2015001-eng.pdf>> [Spotlight].

² Government of Canada reports use the specific term “non-profit organization” as defined in subsection 149(1)(l) of the *Income Tax Act* as “a club, society or association that, in the opinion of the Minister, was not a charity within the meaning assigned by subsection 149.1(1) and that was organized and operated exclusively for social welfare, civic improvement, pleasure or recreation or for any other purpose except profit, no part of the income of which was payable to, or was otherwise available for the personal benefit of, any proprietor, member or shareholder thereof.” This *Bulletin* reflects this language to be consistent with its use in the Report.

B. VOLUNTEERING (NATIONALLY)

In 2013, 44 percent of Canadians age 15 and older volunteered in some capacity. This is a decrease from the 47 percent reported in 2010.³ This occurred despite the fact that the total Canadian population aged 15 and over increased by approximately one million during this time.

Additionally, in 2013, volunteers contributed approximately 1.96 billion hours to their volunteer activities, which is equivalent to about 1 million full time jobs.⁴ The average volunteer contributed 154 hours in 2013, which is unchanged from 2010, but lower than the total in 2004.

1. Youth Volunteering

The survey showed that young people (aged 15-19) were by far the most likely to volunteer, with 66 percent participating in some sort of volunteer work, as compared to rates between 40–45 percent for most other age groups.⁵ This is likely influenced by “mandatory” volunteer requirements at many high schools. One in five volunteers (20 percent) in this age group reported that they were required to volunteer. This is markedly higher than the seven percent of the rest of the population who reported being required to volunteer.

2. Older Volunteers

After youth and middle-aged adults (often those with school-aged children), there is a general decline in the volunteer rate. Thirty-eight percent of adults aged 65-74 and only 27 percent of adults aged 75 and older report volunteering. However, it is interesting to note that while older volunteers are less likely to volunteer, those that do volunteer tend to contribute more hours. For example, volunteers aged 65-74 contributed 231 hours annually while volunteers aged 35-44 reported just 122 hours.⁶ The amount of volunteer hours contributed by seniors is higher than their share of the overall population. Additionally, seniors over age 65 represent 38 percent of the “top volunteers,” i.e., the 25 percent of volunteers who contribute the most hours.⁷

³ *Spotlight*, *supra* note 1 at 4.

⁴ *Ibid* at 5.

⁵ *Ibid*.

⁶ *Ibid* at 6.

⁷ *Ibid* at 8.

These trends show that, similar to the general population, Canadian volunteers are aging. Charities and non-profit organizations should take note of this trend, particularly because older volunteers may be more likely to contribute to certain types of volunteer work, such as sitting on a committee or board, when compared to young volunteers.

C. GIVING (NATIONALLY)

Similar to the historical pattern, in 2013, the donor rate in Canada was substantially higher than the volunteer rate — 82 percent of Canadians reported making some sort of donation to a charity or non-profit organization. This is likely because giving money takes less time, effort, and resources than volunteering. The 2013 rate is two percent lower than in 2010. However, during this time, the total amount donated by Canadians increased by 14 percent to approximately \$12.8 billion.⁸ This figure is significantly higher than the total amount Canadians claim for the charitable donation tax credit because it includes donations made to non-profit organizations, which cannot issue tax receipts, as well as situations where no tax receipt was requested, such as donations made at certain fundraising events, and donations made by individuals who may not claim the tax credit because of their personal tax circumstances.

1. Who Makes Donations?

Similar to the trends amongst the general population and amongst volunteers, the average donor in Canada is aging. The survey also found that older donors are more likely to make larger donations, such as the fact that donors over age 75 gave an average of \$726 in 2013 while donors age 35-44 gave an average of \$427. Overall, donors over age 55 make up 35 percent of all donors but they accounted for 47 percent of all donations.⁹

2. How Important are Certain Donations?

It is also important to note the relative impact of the “top donors” in Canada. This is shown by the fact that the 25 percent of donors who contributed the most money accounted for 84 percent of all donations.¹⁰ Further, the top 10 percent of donors makes an even larger impact, accounting for 66

⁸ *Ibid* at 10.

⁹ *Ibid* at 12.

¹⁰ *Ibid*.

percent of all donations and making up most of the 2013 growth in total donations. These statistics have increased throughout the history of the General Social Survey.

3. Where do Donations Go?

It is also important to consider which types of organizations are most likely to receive donations. For example, religious organizations receive 40 percent of all donations, making them by far the largest group of beneficiaries. However, this is lower than the 47 percent of all donations that religious organizations received in 2004.¹¹ Following religious organizations, health organizations received the second greatest amount with 13 percent of all donations and social services received 12 percent of all donations.

D. VOLUNTEERING AND GIVING (PROVINCIALY)

The Report also considered data on volunteering and donation rates in the provinces. The volunteer rate ranged from a high of 56 percent in Saskatchewan to a low of 32 percent in Quebec. It is also notable that the volunteer rate in many provinces decreased between 2010 and 2013, which is different from the progressive increases seen between 2004 and 2010. These drops were particularly significant in provinces in eastern Canada.

Donation rates ranged from a high of 87 percent in Newfoundland and Labrador to a low of 78 percent in British Columbia. However, donors in Alberta, British Columbia, and Manitoba made significantly higher donations than did donors in many eastern provinces.¹²

E. CONCLUSION

This Report illustrates several important trends in giving and volunteering since 2010, such as the fact that both the total number and the proportion of volunteers decreased. However, despite this decrease, the total number of volunteer hours did not change. Additionally, the amount of donations increased significantly from approximately \$11 billion in 2010 to \$12.8 million in 2013. The increasing impact of older volunteers and donors is also noteworthy. It will be interesting to follow how this changing demographic impacts the

¹¹ *Ibid* at 13.

¹² *Ibid* at 15.

charitable sector in terms of the type of volunteer activities and the type of volunteer organizations that will potentially receive a greater impact from volunteers and donors.