Volunteer Programs in Recreation and the Factors That Contribute to Their Success and Sustainability

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Executive Summary

The use of formalized volunteer management programs (VMs) in Recreation is widely accepted by B.C. municipalities. This research, by way of collecting credible information and data as well as first-hand accounts from external industry professionals, aimed to answer the question:

> *What factors contribute to successful and sustainable volunteer programs for diverse programming for older adults (55+ years) and how can these inform the development of a formalized volunteer program for District of Squamish Recreation (DOSR)?*

The focus of this research was intended for diverse 55+ programs specifically, nonetheless, findings from broader public recreation programs were considered as applicable since there was a gap in the literature pertaining specifically older adult programs.

Secondary research into academic studies, industry resources, and volunteer management theory sources revealed, inarguably, that the use of volunteers has tremendous value on many levels. The idea of reciprocal benefit (among volunteers, organizations, and community) was also repeated throughout the literature.

Aspects of VMs that emerged from the research, and which impacted their success and sustainability included: the importance of planning, understanding volunteer motivations (which were found to be mostly intrinsic), and the value of effective leadership and recognition of volunteers (volunteer satisfaction is linked to the quality of the volunteer-management process.) Primary research of Metro Vancouver municipalities revealed more specifically: that the volunteer 'lifespan' for older volunteers, when engaged effectively, is "for life" while youth, though an easily renewable source, have a much shorter tenure, that reputation played a strong part in the success and sustainability of their VM, and that the volunteer management resource - *Better Impact* was widely adopted.

Recommendations for DOSR when developing their own VM are as follows.

1) Foster an organizational culture of volunteer appreciation; demonstrating to volunteers through everyday and more-focused actions that they are valued and appreciated is the responsibility of the organization.

2) Be deliberate with planning including strategic goals and a mission that aligns with District of Squamish core values and that can evince connection and enthusiasm from volunteers and appeal to their values.

3) Clearly define the roles and responsibilities of the Supervisors and of the individual Volunteers. Create several opportunities on which to build connections, and consequently, a reputation.

4) Ensure that processes are consistent with all volunteers; such equality would show consistency and neutrality with regard to the treatment of volunteers.

5) Commit to the VM including marketing via new channels, for example Volunteer Information sessions - with incentives such as food. Further commit by developing a comprehensive and user-friendly "Volunteer" webpage within www.squamish.ca/rec and consider subscribing to the volunteer management system, *Better Impact*.

The value of volunteering is multidimensional and has been proven to benefit the greater community within which it operates. Therefore, there is an inherent duty of municipal governments to foster these benefits.

Introduction

Public recreation has a history of relying on volunteers (Silverberg et al., 2001). The use of formalized volunteer management programs (VMs) in public Recreation is widely accepted in B.C. Volunteer time and/or expertise can address gaps and increase capacity to enhance or complement municipal recreation in the delivery of programs, services, and events (Volunteer Canada, 2009, City of Vancouver, 2022, City of Richmond, 2018). Further, it shifts some of the responsibility of the service delivery model onto the community it serves and has the "power to optimize that service delivery and strengthen communities" (Holly, 2020).

By collecting credible information and data, and getting first-hand accounts from external industry professionals, this research aimed to identify the factors that support effective VMs in public recreation currently. In turn, the findings and recommendations that follow aim to help inform District of Squamish Recreation in the development of their own formalized VM.

The research question (RQ) that guided this research was as follows:

> *What factors contribute to successful and sustainable volunteer programs for diverse programming for older adults (55+ years) and how can these inform the development of a formalized volunteer program for District of Squamish Recreation (DOSR)?*

Key terms operationalized

"Successful volunteer program" - resulting from implementation of initiatives and actions as described in the strategy (City of Richmond, 2018); measurable from participant registration numbers in added or expanded volunteer-led programs as well as by positive volunteer and participant feedback and volunteer retention rates. Quantitative metrics may include key performance indicators as set out by the framework.

"Sustainable volunteer program" - a commitment on behalf of the municipality to support and engage volunteers including succession planning (Richmond, 2018) in a maintainable program in the long-term in such a way as to continue to add value to the community. With the right policies, procedures, and strategy, a "well-structured leadership team can provide direction, support, and motivation for … volunteers" for sustainable success (Ayotte, Step 7, 2024).

"Volunteering is a cornerstone of community and resilience in Canada, contributing significantly to the socio-economic fabric of the nation and to individual well-being" (Nakamura et al., 2024, p.3).

Background and Context

The sponsor organization for this research project is **District of Squamish - Recreation and Culture (DOSR)**. The Agency advisor is **Director of Recreation and Culture - Jay Deo.**

Though DOSR does not have a formalized VM, the 55+ portfolio uses volunteer drivers for the bus trips and volunteer Contract Instructors for several (9) other programs. While these volunteers underwent a due diligence process for coverage under the District's liability insurance through MIABC (Municipalities Insurance Association of BC), there is no volunteer management framework. The volunteer-led programs therefore lack credibility and are at risk of being sustainable without a framework that supports and recognizes them. Losing them would be detrimental to the 55+ portfolio as a whole as well as a loss for DOSR and the community. Without a formalized volunteer program, the challenges of recruiting new volunteers are also magnified. New volunteers are needed to keep up with the normal attrition that happens due to a variety of reasons such as moving away, health issues, reduced availability, etc. A well-considered and formalized VM would better show consistency, neutrality, and that the organization cares about the experience of the volunteer (Volunteer Canada, 2016). Further, it would support all three interest-holders: DOSR, volunteers, and the community. The focus of this research was intended for 55+ programs specifically, nonetheless, findings from broader public recreation programs were considered as applicable.

Application of this research has the potential to align exactly with the Mission of District of Squamish: "We lead, facilitate and partner to ensure a liveable and sustainable Squamish" (District of Squamish, 2024) because the same could be said about a VM. The District of Squamish's core values are listed as: Respect, Integrity, Connection, and Progress (District of Squamish, 2024). A comprehensive volunteer program would strengthen the integrity of the recreation department and bring about more connections. All of these values would be integral to a successful and sustainable volunteer program.

Literature Review

Secondary research into academic studies, industry resources, and volunteer management theory sources revealed, inarguably, that the use of volunteers has tremendous value on many levels; this was visually represented on the 'Value of Volunteering Wheel' (see Appendix A). The wheel laid out some of the benefits of volunteering for not only the volunteers themselves (i.e. wellbeing, sense of belonging/community engagement, skills development) but also for organizations (i.e. increased capacity, diversity, community engagement) and society (i.e. enhanced democracy, just society, citizen engagement) (Volunteer Canada, n.d.). The idea of reciprocal benefit (among volunteers, organizations, and community) was also repeated throughout the literature (Allen et al., 2022, Silverberg et al., 2001, Volunteer Canada, 2017). Peer-reviewed papers examined in this review explored several dimensions of volunteer management.

The value for volunteers and for organizations was reciprocal in that they supported one another - which in turn benefited other interested parties. The concept of a 'volunteer' in parks and recreation was analyzed on the basis of: free choice, [lack of] remuneration, structure, and intended beneficiaries (Barnes & Sharpe, 2006). According to the different literature cited here, the desired outcome of mutually assured benefit has many approaches, which are expanded on further on in this paper.

Volunteer Canada published and keeps current the *Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement* (2017). It includes ten (10) 'Standards of Practice for Volunteer Involvement' (Volunteer Canada, 2017). Building on this, the Canadian Volunteerism

Initiative released a guide for small nonprofit organizations which includes (10) 'Best Practices' to guide volunteer programs in Canada (Canada Volunteerism Initiative, 2005). In 2024, *What it Takes: Key Strategies for Optimizing Volunteering* was published in partnership with the Canadian Alliance for Social Connection and Health; it was aimed at volunteer-employing organizations as well as government and policymakers (Nakamura et al. 2024). These documents are essential in informing volunteer policy and when developing a volunteer management program framework such as for DOSR.

Most academic research had a specific focus or context for studying volunteering. Professional sources, conversely, tended to be generic in their examinations. Literature selected for this review was considered with a *Recreation* lens; there was a gap in the literature pertaining more specifically to volunteering in older adult recreation programming.

Aspects of volunteer management programs that emerged from the literature and which impacted their success included: understanding motivations of volunteers, having a strong framework to the volunteer management process, challenges to recruitment, and the extent of leadership into engaging volunteers.

Volunteers' motivations for volunteering were understood to be primarily intrinsic, pure, and/or altruistic (Allen, 2022, Barnes & Sharpe, 2009). However, there were circumstances in which extrinsic motivation was apparent whereupon volunteer efforts were more self-interested and/or for material or experiential gain (Barnes & Sharpe, 2009, Burns and Graefe, 2006, Statistics Canada, 2021). It cannot be discounted though that motivations were often fueled by social and or contextual factors (i.e. volunteering for causes to which the volunteer has a connection) (Anđelković et al., 2022).

Literature pertaining specifically to volunteer management emphasized the importance of developing clear Mission/Vision and strategic goals for the program framework (Ayotte, 2024, Brudney & Nezhina, 2005, Ellis, 2005, Kaur et al., 2022, Quinn, 2023, Team Better Impact, 2025, Volunteer Canada, 2017). Recruiting and engagement

practices could then focus on how volunteer efforts fit with the organization's overall vision and how that vision aligns with a volunteer's values (Quinn, 2023). Further, the training and task assignment as articulated in the framework could be a means of retention by matching tasks to volunteer skills and preferences (Kaur et al., 2022).

Where there were challenges to recruitment, it was identified that a lack of awareness of the volunteer opportunities may be a reason for the challenge. Despite its charitable nature, getting volunteers 'in the door' was as capitalist as marketing any product. A lack of marketing-dollars for public awareness perpetuated an imbalance that resulted in a gap in volunteers (Young, 2022).

There was much literature about the theory and practice of leadership and engagement of volunteers. Research revealed that volunteer satisfaction is linked to the quality of the volunteer-management process (Arnon et al., 2023) and poor management of volunteer work is a major obstacle to building a volunteer pool (Brudney et al., 2005). Supervisors' played an ongoing role of continued monitoring for job satisfaction so that adjustments to changing preferences could be made (Silverberg, et al. 2001, Anđelković et al, 2022). When the framework was considered from a volunteer-centric approach, it put the onus of 'engageability' ("ability to engage, motivate, and manage volunteers to maximize their potential and sustain the volunteering human resource") directly on the organization, and to allow for flexibility/adjustability to accommodate volunteers (Arnon et al., p.1633, 2023).

Volunteerism has inherent value, of this there was no debate. However, research revealed minor contradictions within the field of volunteer management.

Barnes and Sharpe suggested that "traditional volunteer management structures may actually be hindering engagement and called instead for a more vocation-based, networked, and collaborative approach which affords greater autonomy to the volunteer and sees power being shared between agencies and volunteers" (p.170, 2009). Their research focused on a city park in Toronto that utilized an extensive network of volunteers who self-identify as "Park Friends" and who offered programs, events, and even a newsletter (Barnes & Sharpe, 2009). The activities in the park were monitored

by city staff to ensure they adhered to the broader role of a public park and did not fall victim to self-interest. The framework of any given volunteer management program would benefit from considering the potential of an vocation-based and/or autonomous approach.

Extensive studies have been conducted about what motivates people to volunteer. These studies collected data using surveys/questionnaires, interviews, and observation (Allen, 2022, Anđelković et al., 2022, Burns 2006). Anđelković et al. (2022), collated and categorized 233 motivation statements retrieved from extensive research. The categories were *social*, *personal*, and *contextual* (to help and support the cause or organization). Motivations were not necessarily exclusive to any one category and overlap was identified using a Venn diagram. Motives not only ranged from altruistic to self-interest, they were also different at different times (Barnes & Sharpe, 2009). It was specifically identified that motivations can change from the initial motivating force to that which sustains action over time. Research by Asah and Blahna, quoted in Anđelković et al., found that "social and personal benefits were better predictors of the frequency of participation [in volunteering] than more-often reported [contextual] reasons" (p. 163, 2022). Understanding what motivates volunteers will aid managers in the task of keeping volunteers engaged and satisfied.

In looking to understand impacts of recreation fees, Burns and Graefe (2006) found that low-income earners were strongly in favour of complimentary passes for those who volunteer at the site. This speaks to an extrinsic motivation that offers a material return on a volunteer's investment of time and effort. Support for this model by all levels of income earners was attributed to how it "reflect[s] a societal value regarding the importance of work" (Burns and Graefe, p. 17, 2006). Value-driven motivations are a primary motivator for volunteering according to research by Allen et al. (2022).

A 2018 study by Statistics Canada concluded that, different from younger volunteers, older volunteers often cited 'enrichment' as their reason for volunteering formally (2021).

To pay or not to pay; "several studies report[ed] on the risk of crowding out intrinsic motivations if [organizations] promote personal benefits such as financial rewards (Stien

et al. quoted in Anđelković, p. 165, 2022). "On the other hand, it may promote inclusiveness by enabling participation of diverse volunteers that could have financial barriers (Pateman et al. quoted in Anđelković et al., p. 165, 2022).

The Canadian spirit of volunteerism has always been a point of pride; it is part of the social, economic, and cultural fabric of Canada (Rosterfy, 2024). It was identified back in 2001 that the volunteer sector was in decline (Canadian Volunteerism Initiative, 2001). The COVID-19 pandemic then disrupted any gains made, forcing organizations to look at new approaches to volunteer management (Bolton et al., 2022). Volunteers in today's landscape want to understand their potential impact and to have a deep connection to their chosen cause, all while expecting flexibility (Rosterfy, 2025). The Canadian Volunteerism Initiative and the Canadian Alliance for Social Connection and Health advocate for increased efforts to grow the number of volunteers (Canadian Volunteerism Initiative, 2001, Nakamura et al., 2024). Volunteerism concepts can be applied to answering the research question even though they are not specific to older adult recreation programming.

The literature referenced used strategies that follow the volunteer management cycle (Better Impact Team, 2025) which can be loosely broken down into 'Before', 'During', and 'After' implementation. Further research into the practical application of the volunteer management cycle in recreation was expected to offer insights into how DOSR could implement their own procedures. The 'Before' steps involved planning and laying the groundwork by defining the Mission and Goals, establishing formalized volunteer roles and volunteer management as well as policies and procedures. Next steps involved actions of recruiting (including screening) and orientation (including training and skill matching) and supervising (including engagement). The 'After' steps of the volunteer management cycle involved recognition (including rewards) and evaluation (including tracking, measuring, and reporting) of the successes and challenges encountered (Ayotte, 2024, Brudney & Nezhina, 2005, Ellis, 2005, Kaur et al., 2022, Quinn, 2023, Team Better Impact, 2025, Volunteer Canada, 2017).

The framework for a successful volunteer program requires a great deal of consideration, due diligence, and maintenance. One of the Standards of Practice from the *Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement* involved an integrated human resource management approach (Volunteer Canada, 2017). This recognized that volunteers deserve similar consideration to paid employees of the organization. There were readily available tools to support managers in this endeavour including the *Code for Volunteer Involvement* and from *Volunteer Canada*.

Strategies for recruitment and engagement will depend on volunteer motivations in the context of DOSR. Several considerations of volunteer motivations have been reviewed in this literature including some transferable recommendations, such as, "Consider whether volunteers can have a larger role in co-designing or collaboratively developing the project. Asking (potential) volunteers about their needs and wishes before and during a project enables the targeting of specific audiences and adapting to their needs" (Anđelković et al, p.166, 2022). It should be recognized that this may not always be feasible and again, the context of DOSR will determine the strategy.

In this literature review of secondary research, some key factors were identified in managing successful and sustainable VMs in recreation that may be transferable to diverse public recreation programming for older adults (55+ years). The research made clear the reciprocal value and benefits of volunteers for themselves, organizations, and the greater community. Understanding volunteer motivations (including whether they are intrinsic or extrinsic) also held value in recruiting and engaging their ongoing commitment. The research delved into the importance of professional volunteer-management processes including their role in volunteer satisfaction and retention. There were many resources available to volunteer managers to support understanding motivations, developing a volunteer management framework/processes, and leading volunteers. Building on these resources and this research, much of which is relevant to a Canadian municipality and/or is current (recently published), along with industry 'Best Practices' and the primary research that follows, DOSR can be sure to have the required theoretical knowledge to frame their own volunteer program and policy.

Methodology

In order to get the most relevant, real-world information pertaining to the current use of volunteers in municipal recreation in BC, research data was collected directly from several municipalities. Interview questions, general public observation checklists, and content analysis criteria had at their forefront the goal of identifying factors as stated in the Research Question. Focus was on understanding how established municipal volunteer management programs function well so that DOSR may consider how to apply others' success to Squamish's planning.

Primary Research Plan & Rationale

The goal was to identify factors that may inform municipal policy, therefore the sources for the primary research were Sea to Sky and Lower Mainland (Metro Vancouver) municipalities. Though the Metro Vancouver communities are larger than Squamish, it is with whom there exists the closest networking opportunities and along with whom Squamish is a part of the Recreation Facilities Association of BC (RFABC) Zone. Eleven (11) municipalities who were found to have a "Volunteer" page linked to their recreation webpage were contacted to solicit interviews with their Volunteer Coordinator; it was anticipated that these positions would offer the most real-world insight into what contributes to the success and sustainability of their VM.

Seven (7) of the municipalities contacted agreed to be interviewed (see Table 1.)

Two (2) popular volunteer-lead programs with DOSR were observed using general public observations (see Table 2.) in an attempt to ascertain what contributes to their success as well as what might be missing. Observation checklist items focused on the professionalism of the volunteer and the quality of the program.

Five (5) Municipal websites were analyzed (see Table 3.) for their content pertaining to their recreation volunteer programs as made publicly available to potential volunteers. The development of interview questions, observation checklists, and content analysis criteria was further informed by recommendations from the Volunteer Management Handbook (Volunteer Canada, 2016).

Table 1. Interviewees

Municipality	Name of Interviewee	Format	Date	Time
New Westminster	Jill Howey	Zoom	Thu Feb 27	2:00pm
Whistler	Sylvie Allen	Phone call	Thu Feb 27	3:30pm
Richmond	Wing Ho	Teams	Fri Feb 28	1:30pm
Delta	Laura Grandison	Zoom	Mon Mar 3	2:00pm
Surrey	Sheri Masaro	Teams	Mon Mar 3	3:40pm
Burnaby	Kelli Tibbles & Mikaela Graham-Radford	Teams	Tue Mar 4	1:30pm
Coquitlam	Maria Bamba	Teams	Tue Mar 4	3:00pm

Interview questions (see Appendix B) sought insight into effective recruitment tools, recognition practices, strategic goals identification, understanding volunteer motivations and expectations. These were all factors identified in the literature review as impacting volunteer management programs' success and sustainability. Speaking more specifically to the sustainability of their volunteer management programs, every municipality interviewed had had a formalized program for over 15 years.

Table 2. General Public Observations of Volunteer-led programs

Program	Volunteer name	Location	Date	Time
55+ Bus Trips	Will Black	Brennan Park	Mon Feb 24	11:30am & 5:30pm
Line Dancing (19+)	Sharon Slater	The 55 Activity Centre	Tue Mar 4	6:00pm

Observation checklist items (see Appendix C) reflected the existing protocol for how DOSR performs program evaluations; by holding volunteer-led programs to the same standards as staff-led programs, it engendered them with credibility.

Table 3. Content Analysis Criteria

Municipality	Content: web page(s)
Vancouver	https://vancouver.ca/people-programs/volunteering.aspx https://policy.vancouver.ca/ADMIN028.pdf
North Vancouver	https://www.nvrc.ca/about-us/employment-volunteering/volunteering
Port Moody	https://www.portmoody.ca/en/city-hall/volunteering.aspx
Port Coquitlam	https://www.portcoquitlam.ca/explore-poco/volunteering/volunteer-recreation
New Westminster	https://www.newwestcity.ca/city_hall/employment/volunteer.php

Content was analyzed on how well it conveyed the framework of the volunteer management program, which has been identified as essential for any program (Ayotte, 2024, Brudney & Nezhina, 2005, Ellis, 2005, Kaur et al., 2022, Quinn, 2023, Team Better Impact, 2025, Volunteer Canada, 2017). Content analysis criteria (see Appendix D) also considered the content from a volunteer perspective including available opportunities, application process, requirements and expectations, and likewise what volunteers could expect from the municipality if they volunteered.

Research still needed:

Primary research so far has yielded few results about the success and sustainability of specifically 55+ public recreation programs. Instead, some volunteers for 55+ programs are managed through seniors societies (member-based) which operate in partnership with municipal recreation. In these instances, the municipality may offer support but are not directly responsible for the volunteer management process. Squamish has a 55+ society, the relationship with whom has been unstable, exacerbated by multiple leadership changes for both them and for DOSR.
Primary research into key performance indicators and benchmarking may also reveal more factors that impact the success and sustainability of volunteer management programs.

Research Findings and Analysis

Findings, as outlined below, have been sorted into three categories: 'Planning', 'In theory', and 'In practice'. The findings pertaining to planning apply primarily to the groundwork stage of the volunteer management lifecycle. 'In theory' findings pertain to that which was understood to be true based on the research and which will look different depending on the context; for example, that benefits to volunteering are multidimensional. Findings under the 'In practice' category pertain to the actual materialization of the program.

Planning

- Successful volunteer management programs (VMs) require a well-developed framework/processes. This is supported by much of the literature as cited earlier and was further supported during the interviews. Interview question #8 asked, "How many people are involved in the onboarding and supervision of your volunteers?" Each of the Metro Vancouver municipalities had answers that included several staff in various roles, all of whom played a part in the established processes of their VM.
- Of the municipalities interviewed/content analyzed, few had a volunteer program specifically for 55+ recreation programs (excluding lunch programs for which volunteers worked serving) managed by the municipality themselves; some had partnerships with seniors societies for that purpose. Most did not separately identify volunteers with 55+ recreation programs, and some used a centralized approach for all their volunteers regardless of the duties (ie. Richmond - see Appendix E)
- A significant struggle regarding recruitment for 'younger' VMs was lack of awareness in the community of the available volunteer opportunities. This came up in Young's essay in the collection of essays "Rethinking Volunteer Engagement for a Rapidly Changing World" and for the Resort Municipality of Whistler whose VM has only been in effect for five (5) years (see Appendix E.) It was less of an issue for the long-standing VMs who had built up a reputation and

who mostly used word-of-mouth and their website to recruit. (See 'In practice findings.)

In theory

- The benefits of volunteering are reciprocal (benefiting all involved parties). This was supported time and again in research and during interviews. The goal of connection (which is understood in the community to be multidirectional) was also a recurring theme during the seven (7) interviews (see Appendix E.) Interviewees spoke of strategic goals of their VMs to foster connections when people attend or volunteer in public recreation programs and also of the connections made with volunteers during their years of service.
- Factors that motivate volunteers to volunteer often change from the initial motivating factor to that which motivates continued service. Most municipalities engage intrinsically motivated volunteers. (Only Whistler used a valuable incentive and acknowledged that it was that which motivated their volunteers.) However, that which initially motivates a volunteer to apply is not the same motivation that keeps them coming back. Understanding motivations is an integral part of successful and sustainable volunteer management.
- Older volunteers, when engaged effectively, are typically volunteers for life; youth have a much shorter tenure often because they are motivated by gaining experience that will help them get desirable employment and/or were working towards their high school diploma requirements.

In practice

- Each of the Metro Vancouver municipalities interviewed and for whom the content of their website was analyzed, used *Better Impact* software for receiving applications, scheduling, and tracking of volunteers. That is to say that all of the long-standing VMs researched had adopted the use of *Better Impact* and Interviewees lauded its capabilities.
- Recognition of volunteers took many forms but all (except for Whistler) was based on an understanding that volunteers are intrinsically motivated. All of the

Metro Vancouver municipalities interviewed included events or actions taken during National Volunteer Week (April 27 to May 3, 2025.) It is worth noting that food was repeatedly cited as a useful tool in volunteer recognition during interviews (see Appendix E.)

- Reputation contributes immeasurably to recruitment while the website was the primary source for applications. The idea that reputation matters to a VM's success was supported by studies about volunteer satisfaction and by answers to interview question #7, "What recruitment tool has worked best for you?" (see Appendix E.)

Though the findings came up short on 55+-specific factors, that may be attributed to the fact that some municipalities use a centralized approach that does not categorize volunteers in such a way.

The findings outlined above not only identify several factors that contribute to the success and sustainability of VMs in public recreation but also offer guidance for DOSR in navigating their way to the development of their own VM; especially that a well-developed VM strategy (including goals and mission) will guide processes and aid in targeting the right volunteers. Until such time as 'reputation' can be relied on as a recruitment tool for DOSR, marketing dollars will be necessary. New Westminster, for example, held catered, open volunteer information/training sessions monthly. While youth are a renewable source for new volunteers, older adults can often be counted on for longer and don't require onboarding every few years. There will be additional expenses related to formalized VMs (other than marketing), but some interviewees made it clear that *food* is one expenditure that offers good value.

Though volunteer motivations are mostly intrinsic/altruistic/pure, it is still important to understand those motivations (and how they may change) so that VMs can retain and continue to engage them in service for a sustainable program.

In order to build a reputation, thereby facilitating recruitment and growth, DOSR could take a two-pronged approach - well-managed processes and long-term commitment to the VM. This is integrated into the recommendations following.

Recommendations

Included below are general and specific recommendations for DOSR in the development of their own formalized volunteer management program. They are in priority order based on the level of commitment to the program that DOSR may pursue.

1) Foster an organizational culture (OC) of volunteer appreciation. The shared beliefs and values that make up an organization's OC are "established by leaders of the organization and present a powerful set of forces … which are deep, broad, and stable" (Sun 2008). An organizational culture of volunteer appreciation, such as the one in Surrey where Volunteer Administrators are directed to offer daily recognition to volunteers (among other recognition activities), will offer stability for volunteers and the organization. It can create a "feeling of identity among [volunteers] and commitment to the organization" (Sun, p, 140, 2008) which will further impact the sustainability of the program. More than an affinity for DOSR values or even the desire for connection, it is the experience of the volunteer while volunteering that is the better indicator of their satisfaction (Arnon et al, 2023, Silverberg et al, 2001); demonstrating to volunteers through everyday and more-focused actions that they are valued and appreciated is the responsibility of the organization.

2) Be deliberate with planning. Consulting volunteer management resources such as the *Volunteer Management Handbook, Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement,* and *Better Impact* (discussed in recommendation 5b.) consider the needs of the community, the capacity of the department, and the potential opportunities for positive connections. Research revealed that volunteer satisfaction is linked to the quality of the volunteer management process (Arnon et al, 2023). Volunteer management framework/process planning should include (but is not limited to) the following:

    a) Develop strategic goals and a mission of the program that align with District of Squamish core values and that can evince connection and enthusiasm from volunteers and appeal to their values (Quinn, 2023). Researchers studying volunteer motivations revealed that connection to the cause was a strong initial motivator (Anđelković et al., 2022).

3) Ensure that processes are consistent with all volunteers (Volunteer, 2017). For example, where volunteers must meet requirements that incur them costs, stipulate which costs will be reimbursed fully and/or partially. Make the policy applicable to all volunteers, fairly and consistently. As indicated in the *Volunteer Management Handbook* (Volunteer Canada, 2016), such equality would show consistency and neutrality with regard to the treatment of volunteers (Volunteer Canada, 2016).

4) Clearly define the roles and responsibilities of the:
   i) Volunteer Management Supervisor - providing them with adequate training and support as well as given enough worktime to perform the role with integrity. Research identified that poor management of volunteer work is a major obstacle to building a successful and sustainable volunteer pool. (Brudney et al., 2005). Further, during the interviews with municipalities, a recurring theme of 'reputation' was identified as a factor in their program's success and sustainability.

   ii) Volunteers - Start with simple and several opportunities with the singular goal of growing the program and its reputation. Coquitlam identified that volunteers wanted more one-off opportunities. DOSR should evaluate its needs and build a list of one-time volunteer opportunities as well as more regular ones. When marketing these opportunities, this variety will have a broader appeal. More opportunities translate to more connections - a core value of the District of Squamish (District of Squamish, 2024).

5) Commit to the program - 'Commitment' was included in the operationalization of the term "sustainable volunteer program". DOSR should commit to their program making it a priority to support the framework as well as staff managing the volunteers (as outlined in recommendation #5.)
   a) Marketing to bring awareness to the opportunities via new channels, for example Volunteer Information sessions - with food. Several municipalities specified using food as a tool in recognizing volunteers (New Westminster,

Delta, Burnaby, Coquitlam); this successful tool can also be used in recruiting and engaging volunteers in direct marketing channels. Lack of awareness of opportunities was identified as a challenge to volunteer recruitment (Young, 2022).

b) Developing a comprehensive and user-friendly "Volunteer" webpage within www.squamish.ca/rec and consider subscribing to *Better Impact*. Primary research (interviews and content analysis) indicated that their website was a municipality's core source for volunteer applications, though this should not discount non-technical options for older volunteers. Each of the municipalities except the Resort Municipality of Whistler (which was an outlier in other regards as well) used the *Better Impact* software for volunteer scheduling and each indicated satisfaction with the widely used resource. This step may also provide avenues for support from and/or networking with Metro Vancouver neighbours who use this software.

Conclusion

This research identified factors that contribute to successful and sustainable volunteer management programs in public recreation. Factors revealed by this research included: the importance of planning, understanding the value of reciprocal benefits for all parties, understanding volunteer motivations, that awareness is a major challenge to recruiting, the value of effective leadership and recognition of volunteers, and the wide use of the volunteer management resource - *Better Impact.* The list of factors identified, though not exhaustive, and not necessarily specific to older adult (55+) recreation programs was understood to still be applicable to such in theory.

The findings and recommendations herein will inform DOSR in the development of their own volunteer management program, should they choose to formalize it. These recommendations were based on the expertise of others as informed either by academic research or by real-world application. As such, it would benefit DOSR to carefully weigh how each of these can be applied to align with the District of Squamish's core values and mission to advance volunteering in their community.

With commitment, the demonstrable value of volunteering, though not without its costs, can be optimized to the advantage of all parties. As repeated throughout this paper, the value of volunteering is multidimensional and undoubtedly benefits the greater community within which it operates. Therefore, there is an inherent duty of municipal governments to foster these benefits.

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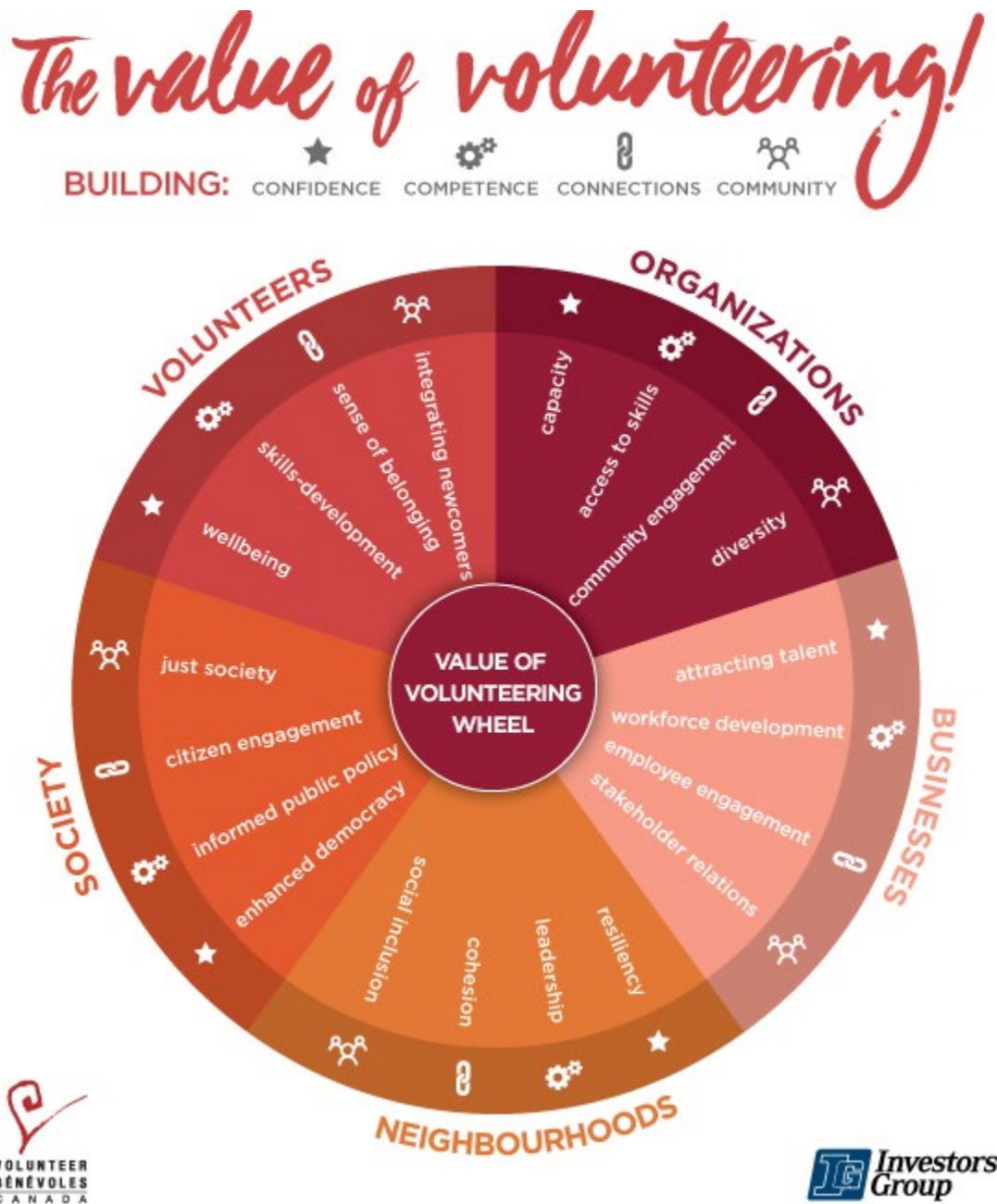
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Appendices

Appendix A

Figure 1. Value of Volunteering Wheel ([Volunteer Canada](#))

Appendix B

4400 Interview Questions   Stephanie Brown

Date: _____

Name: _____   Municipality: _____

Speaking to sustainability

1. How long have you had a formalized volunteer program(VP)?

2. What has changed about your VP since COVID-19?

3. What is the typical 'lifespan' of your volunteers?

4. How do you recognize &/or reward your volunteers? How, if at all, has this changed in recent years?

Speaking to success

5. What is the strategic goal of your volunteer policy?

6. Have you noticed a trend in what motivates your volunteers?

7. What recruitment tool has worked best for you?

8. How many people are involved in the onboarding and supervision of your volunteers? How much time is spent onboarding?

9. Run me through what a volunteer can expect during a shift? (Who will they interact with? Will they direct-report to anyone? What documentation is done by them or by others about them?)

Appendix C

4400 Observations   Stephanie Brown

Date: _____

Time: _____

Location: _____

Volunteer being observed: _____

Program being observed: _____

Session # _____ in a Set of _____ sessions.

Was the volunteer on time?

Did the volunteer 'check-in' with anyone upon arrival?

Did the volunteer set up the program space for themself or was it already set up?

Did the program start on time?

Did the volunteer take attendance?

Does the volunteer engage with individual registrants? Use their name in doing so?

How does the volunteer handle challenges as they arise?

How does the volunteer dismiss the class? Do registrants seem satisfied and keen to return?

Did the program end at the scheduled time?

Did the volunteer 'check-out' with anyone at the end?

Appendix D

4400 Content Analysis   Stephanie Brown

Municipal websites' pages pertaining to "Volunteers"

- Is the current policy/strategy available online?

    - If not, is the VM vision/mission &/or goal available online

- Do they offer volunteer opportunities specifically for 55+ recreation programs?

- Are the volunteer roles/duties descriptions listed

- Are the prerequisites listed?

- Is there an online "application" process?

- Does the website list a non-digital "application" process available?

- Is the training process outlined/explained?

- Is there a contact listed as VMC?

- What indications are there that the content is current?

Appendix E

2pm Zoom

~~Thu Feb 27 – phone call was the only availability~~

~~Sylvie Allen with Meadow Park Sportsplex – RMOW~~

Jill Howey New West
pop 84k

Speaking to sustainability

1. How long have you had a formalized volunteer program (VP)?

Pre COVID many years
but was overhauled since
COVID (& centralized)
Century House is a partnership

750 volunteers
in database
300 who have
worked this
year

2. What has changed about your VP since COVID-19?

See notes below.
She maintains all the volunteers for
the city (all department)

Volunteerism in municipalities is not established
some munis use a centralized process some
don't.

3. What is the typical 'lifespan' of your volunteers?

depends on age:
— Srs last longer
— youth = 1 - 1.5 yrs
— more short term (ie newcomers)

4. How do you recognize &/or compensate your volunteers? How, if at all, has this changed in recent years?

National Volunteer appreciation week — they
receive a letter from the Mayor. Parks & Rec
4-visit pass; annual appreciation event ie cream
sundaes

monthly volunteer info sessions
Century House volunteers must be 50+

New West: background Health Care
VC ~~doing~~ since COVID
Century House (50+ programs) → Volunteer
visioning sessions → vm strategy. BetterImpact use
Cdn!!
She triages the volunteers via a single application

Speaking to success

5.   What is the strategic goal of your volunteer policy?

Jill will send

Google:
volunteer
life-cycle

6.   Have you noticed a trend in what motivates your volunteers?

nope
all the usual suspects

7.   What recruitment tool has worked best for you?

- they are not short on volunteers
- single application found on city website
- no advertising

8.   How many people are involved in the onboarding and supervision of your volunteers? How much time is spent on onboarding?

Jill is always the first point of contact
except for Century House : United Way
grant to support the VC it's a full time
role
10 hrs of her time until they're on shift

9.   Run me through what a volunteer can expect during a shift? (Who will they interact with? Will they direct-report to anyone? What documentation is done by them or by others about them?)

Century House Food Services/Concierge/
office volunteers
    Better Impact manages hours
    grab name tags, interact w/ staff
    supervisor - some volunteers have (ownership)
    created some of their own roles

Thu Feb 27 – phone call was the only availability

Sylvie Allen with Meadow Park Sportsplex – RMOW

yes keep.

Speaking to sustainability

1. How long have you had a formalized volunteer program (VP)?

15 years

2. What has changed about your VP since COVID-19?

nothing

3. What is the typical 'lifespan' of your volunteers?

Min req 6 mos
6 month
Some long timers

4. How do you recognize &/or compensate your volunteers? How, if at all, has this changed in recent years?

comp pass to MPSC
incl. classes incl.
squash court with
some restricts

Speaking to success

5. What is the strategic goal of your volunteer policy?

never written up
goal 2pp/day 2hr shifts
summer = 1/day

6. Have you noticed a trend in what motivates your volunteers?

besides the free pass ...
helping comm.

7. What recruitment tool has worked best for you?

— posters in the facility
— Instagram
— muni website

8. How many people are involved in the onboarding and supervision of your volunteers? How much time is spent on onboarding?

2 people
1 w/ super casual interview supervisor
1 w/ ~~trainer~~ trainer
comms/admin/interview/train

9. Run me through what a volunteer can expect during a shift? (Who will they interact with? Will they direct-report to anyone? What documentation is done by them or by others about them?)

— arrive in logo shirt
— sign into vol. binder (& out) intialed
     by trainer
— log book of duties (maybe directed
     by trainer) of mostly cleaning

Thu Feb 27 – phone call was the only availability

~~Sylvie Allen with Meadow Park Sportsplex – RMOW~~, Wing Ho - Richmond

Speaking to sustainability

1. How long have you had a formalized volunteer program (VP)?

17 years + fragmented
central application then non-centralized
(streamlined)

2. What has changed about your VP since COVID-19?

moved to be more tech-oriented
vol perception of tech.
(re: scheduling)

3. What is the typical 'lifespan' of your volunteers?

volunteers ~~volun~~ wear many hats so
it is hard to say.
HS student = min hours but that has Δ'd
surge of 25-35yrs who come back

4. How do you recognize &/or compensate your volunteers? How, if at all, has this changed in recent years?

Richmond struggles with this
city wants one big celebration
but wing advises individual
recognition
— depends on level of volunteer
— recognition video

Speaking to success

5. What is the strategic goal of your volunteer policy?

Richmond's is different b/c it encompasses
all departments → for cross-support

6. Have you noticed a trend in what motivates your volunteers?

25-35 yrs have been returning
to "serve the comm"

7. What recruitment tool has worked best for you?

volunteer software, connection to comm,
reputation, school district network,

8. How many people are involved in the onboarding and supervision of your volunteers? How much time is spent on onboarding?

depends on role
interview/ref check (2 wks)
training done by dept
online scheduling

9. Run me through what a volunteer can expect during a shift? (Who will they interact with? Will they direct-report to anyone? What documentation is done by them or by others about them?)

Parks Open House in mall
vol description is posted & streamed to
vol sign-up, notification all appropriate
pre-shift briefing
Clear communication about expectations

Mon Mar 3   2pm   Zoom

~~Sylvie Allen with Meadow Park Sportsplex – RMOW~~   Laura Grandison – Delta

Speaking to sustainability

1. How long have you had a formalized volunteer program (VP)?

   20 yrs +

2. What has changed about your VP since COVID-19?

   typical vol assignments w/ a heightened
   ~~be~~ health screening; hand sanistns.

3. What is the typical 'lifespan' of your volunteers?

   13 yrs (gr20 course) until grad.
   adults   year after year.

   some ~~~~~ specific Kennard & McKee
                to 55+:

4. How do you recognize &/or compensate your volunteers? How, if at all, has this changed in recent years?

   – BBQ – animal services
   – appreciation dinner combined
        with an in-service
   – Nat'l vol. week – Media & website
   – highlight a special vol
               children w/
   vol support diverse needs

Speaking to success   uses Better Impact

5.   What is the strategic goal of your volunteer policy?

— to create more inclusive vol env.
— partnering with Kindred
    — targeting youth who
    have aged out of HS
— new partnerships & service group

6.   Have you noticed a trend in what motivates your volunteers?

(specific to adults) not so much.
awareness of opportunities
(youth) Aed to single day of a week
of daycamp (not over summer).

7.   What recruitment tool has worked best for you?

Website, social media
word of mouth (for youth)
Leaders of Tomorrow course (15-25)

8.   How many people are involved in the onboarding and supervision of your volunteers? How much time is spent on onboarding?

volunteer coordinator w/ an
ass't (15hr/wk)
—interview (zoom), PLC (holding pattern)

9.   Run me through what a volunteer can expect during a shift? (Who will they interact with? Will they direct-report to anyone? What documentation is done by them or by others about them?)

Events — report to VC
apply online, confirm with successful
volunteers, given a point of contact,
ensure trasportation is avail to
shift, 1st shift = tshirt & lanyard.
Evaluations /l& feedback forms (Better Impact

Mar 3   3:40pm   Teams

Speaking to sustainability

Sheri Masaro-
Surrey

1. How long have you had a formalized volunteer program (VP)?

~ 20 yrs = formalized.

2. What has changed about your VP since COVID-19?

55/55+ volunteers didn't really
come back
However, Surrey still has a
robust program

3. What is the typical 'lifespan' of your volunteers? — Recreation volunteers

each department has a volunteer
administrators:
Rec has 832 volunteers of 7690
                                    in Parks/Rec/Culture
55+ = 156 volunteers @ 6 town ctrs
        2mo → 3yrs.   → ~2 yrs

4. How do you recognize &/or compensate your volunteers? How, if at all, has this changed in recent years?

small gifts on
Vol. Day (umbrella)

- Vol admins are directed to after
  DAILY recognition
- VIP area @ Bear Creek Lights
- Nat'l Vol Week; soc. media campagnes/vol. stories
                        IG, Linkdin, FB
- billboards
- website   + smaller TY
- email every vol during Vol week + events

Surrey has largest VP in the area
Healthy Comm = Parks/Rec/Culture
              security policies
FD, Animal Control, Library

total volunteers: 8400

Uses Better Impact

Speaking to success

5. What is the strategic goal of your volunteer policy?

‒ Purpose: recognizing vol engagement is a vital & valuable element to service delivery; it is a reciprocal relationship

‒ Build a healthy cohesive commu. ed to

6. Have you noticed a trend in what motivates your volunteers?

Referenced VM cycle

[55+] giving back to their interest; less interested in any material recognition

7. What recruitment tool has worked best for you?

[Better Impact]

‒ School Fairs / poster w/ QR code
‒ some e-news / Rec Guide
‒ reputation

8. How many people are involved in the onboarding and supervision of your volunteers? How much time is spent on onboarding?

each dept has a volunteer admin who are all involved

9. Run me through what a volunteer can expect during a shift? (Who will they interact with? Will they direct-report to anyone? What documentation is done by them or by others about them?)

55+:[56] ‒ arrive @ Town Ctr.
‒ sign in/onto binder (to track hours)
[online check in uptake is not there]
‒ start the duty / run the duty-program / clean up
‒ Facility Director is on site
‒ check-ins similar to probationary review
no opportunity for feedback

Tue Mar 4 @ 1:30pm   Teams

Burnaby Kelli Tibbles +
Mikaela Graham-Radford

Speaking to sustainability

1. How long have you had a formalized volunteer program (VP)?

30+ yrs.

2. What has changed about your VP since COVID-19?

Struggled w/ getting vol's back but we're
back to normal / flourishing now
Ned over to a new system for
logging hours.

3. What is the typical 'lifespan' of your volunteers?

for life

4. How do you recognize &/or compensate your volunteers? How, if at all, has this changed in recent years?

> 35hrs Annual vol appreciation lunch at
the centre where they volunteered

Annual coffee bar does one as well

Speaking to success

USES Better Impact

5. What is the strategic goal of your volunteer policy?

[stumped] there is no "policy"
wanting residents to come in for
social & emotional connection and
to feel part of the comm.

6. Have you noticed a trend in what motivates your volunteers?

intrinsic

Sr lunch = External – got leftover food (no longer
running)
↳ past tense

connection & bonds w/in comm.

7. What recruitment tool has worked best for you?

word-of-mouth / reputation

comms & online is not effective
w/ Srs

8. How many people are involved in the onboarding and supervision of your volunteers? How much time is spent on onboarding?

2+ hr/vol
city staff

training w/ group leader
support for tracking.

9. Run me through what a volunteer can expect during a shift? (Who will they interact with? Will they direct-report to anyone? What documentation is done by them or by others about them?)

City: ~~Group Leader~~   ~~Society~~ = Group Leader
        Staff
Better Impact for hrs tracking.

(this answer was VERY vague)

Tue Mar 4   3pm   Teams

Speaking to sustainability

Maria Bamba – Coquitlam
Community Services Coordinot

1. How long have you had a formalized volunteer program (VP)?

30+ years

2. What has changed about your VP since COVID-19?

took a while for vol's to come back
had to ensure OHS protocols
looking for more one-off opportunities
now offers a supported volunteer program
for vols w/ disabilities

3. What is the typical 'lifespan' of your volunteers?

By. younger volunteers are
short-term 1-2yrs   — reduced barriers
                             simplified onboarding
older vols stick around for years (5tot)

— aiming to retain younger volunteers to recruit

4. How do you recognize &/or compensate your volunteers? How, if at all, has this changed in recent years?

— Nat'l Vol week pop-up events; "appreciation
stations"
— movie night w/ food & games
— tickets to local hockey games
— catered lunches at 55+ ctr.

had community services team helped
her with these answers.

2025 wl for Coq. is to revamp the volunteer
                                        program
Big ask for a VMC

Speaking to success

Uses Better Impact

5. What is the strategic goal of your volunteer policy?

Currently working on this
- mentorship of volunteers
- life-skills through volunteering

6. Have you noticed a trend in what motivates your volunteers? — 55+

— food - they love the catered lunches
(2-3/yr) with live music.

- opportunities that lead to involvement
(more younger vol.)

7. What recruitment tool has worked best for you?

- Social media campaigns of opportunities
- local HS visits that support the application process
  group onboarding/orientation
- Fairs

8. How many people are involved in the onboarding and supervision of your volunteers? How much time is spent on onboarding?

- Community services team (4) ~~# ~~
+ Rec Leader + Clerk = 6
  then pass them off for training.
- want to have a framework whereby they
  stay in comm/supporting

9. Run me through what a volunteer can expect during a shift? (Who will they interact with? Will they direct-report to anyone? What documentation is done by them or by others about them?)

arrive for shift - sign in to logbook - interact w/ staff/Rec Leaders
(like assistant to PC) introductions + site tour,
participants (maybe parents); report
directly to Program Leader - PC's will be
doing evaluations (informal) and report to
                                    Rec Leader

ATs all "approved" in Better Impact