

How Charitable and Caring are Canadians?

“Caring Canadians, Involved Canadians: Highlights from the 2007 Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating”, published June, 2009.

What is the nature of the charitable behaviour of Canadians? Are Canadians’ behaviours with respect to charities impacted if they are religious? Based on a broader national study of the charitable behaviour of Canadians, this is a brief analysis of the charitable behaviours of Canadians. More specifically, it is an analysis of the tendencies of Canadians to donate money and in-kind gifts to charitable and non-profit organizations of these types, to volunteer with these organizations and to provide direct help.

In 1997, in 2000, in 2004 and most recently, in 2007, surveys were taken of Canadian “prosocial behaviours” in an effort to gauge how these behaviours develop and manifest themselves. In June of 2009, a report entitled, “Caring Canadians, Involved Canadians: Highlights from the 2007 Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating” (hereinafter, the “CSGVP”) was published. (see <http://www.statcan.gc.ca>). The results are fascinating and are truly relevant for all Canadians, but especially for those who have an interest in the charitable sector, also known as the “Third Sector”. Charitable leaders will also be interested in these results as they provide a comprehensive picture of the institutions and activities that Canadians value. Advancement activities will benefit from a thorough understanding of this Report. The comparison with 2004 results demonstrates a dynamism in Canadian interests and pursuits. While the general rate of donation/voluntarism and helping are not changed, there has been a growth in the total value of gifts, average size of gifts and total volunteer hours. Changes among provinces are also manifest and illuminating.

Another initial note to make is that these results reflect 2007 data. Canada in 2009 is experiencing the effects of a recession, so some of these results should be examined with that important perspective. The author’s view, though, is that this data is all the more important given the 2009 economic situation.

The author, more than simply recounting the data, suggests that advancement (fundraising, stewardship, marketing) behaviours can be adapted to make positive use of this data. All of donors, volunteers, charities and advancement professionals can benefit by a serious analysis of the statistics reflected in the plenary Report.

Principal Findings

Nearly 23 million Canadians, representing 84% of the over-age 15 population, made a financial contribution to a charity or non-profit organization in 2007. While that rate of donation remained unchanged from 2004, the number of donors increased 2.9% due to Canadian population increase.

In terms of sum, Canadians donated \$10 billion in 2007, an increase of 12% from the previous survey’s 8.9 billion.

The definition given to “Donor rate” is as follows: “...*the percentage of a given population that made at least one donation of money to a charitable...organization in the 12-month reference period preceding the survey*”. (See Appendix, p. 63)

Religious groups were the greatest beneficiaries of the largesse, receiving 46% of all donations, followed by health organizations (15%) and social service entities (10%).

The average annual donation increased by 9% (\$400 to \$437), while the average number of donations decreased from 4.3 to 3.8.

Following charitable giving orthodoxy, a minority of donors account for most of the dollars given. The top 25% of donors (who gave \$364 or more annually) accounted for 82% of the total value of donations. The top 10% (\$1002 or more) accounted for 62% of total value.

Who Gives the Most?

Those who give the most tend to be older, have higher household incomes, have more formal education, be married or widowed and be religiously active.

Canadians give most often when asked in the mail, or asked in a public place. However, in terms of amounts given, 42% of the value is given in places of worship, while 16% is donated in response to mail asks.

Also, those who planned their gifts in advance and supported the same organizations repeatedly gave *significantly* more than others.

Motivations for Giving

The most common motivations for making donations were feeling compassion for those in need, wanting to assist a cause in which the donor personally believes, and wanting to give to one’s community. Donors also gave when they or someone they know has been personally affected by the organization’s cause, or because of religious obligations.

The reasoning for **not** giving more is also most illuminating for charities. Reasons given included the following ones:

- (a) they were happy with what they gave;
- (b) they could not afford to give more;
- (c) they were not asked!;
- (d) they had made direct donations, rather than giving through an organization.

Additionally, however, large numbers of Canadians responded that they did not like the way that requests were made of them, that they did not think that the money would be used efficiently and simply, that they were not asked! This sort of information is invaluable to charity fundraisers.

Part II - Volunteering

The definition given to volunteering in the study is, “*doing activities without pay on behalf of an organization*”. Additionally, this definition, for the purposes of the study, includes mandatory community service.

Much like donations, the **rate** of volunteering is unchanged from 2004, though the number of volunteers increased by 5.7%. Almost 12.5 million Canadians, or some 46% of the population over 15 volunteered their time.

Canadians volunteered 2.1 billion hours, representing a 4.2% increase since 2004. The average number of hours volunteered remained essentially the same at 166 (from 168 in 2004). The most hours contributed went to sports and recreation, social services, education and research and to religious organizations.

Like donations, a small minority of Canadians account for the bulk of volunteer hours. The top 25% who contributed 171 or more hours accounted for 78% of total hours volunteered. The top 10% (421 hours or more) contributed 52% of hours.

The **highest rates** of volunteering were among young Canadians, those with higher levels of education and income, those with school-aged children in the home and the religiously active. Those who contribute the **most hours** are different. They are most likely to be seniors, have higher levels of education, lower levels of household education, no children and to be religiously active.

The most frequent volunteer events were likely to be the following ones:

- (a) organizing or supervising events;
- (b) fundraising;
- (c) sitting on committees or boards;
- (d) teaching, educating or mentoring.

The role of the Internet is slowly increasing. Nearly a quarter of volunteers responded that they used the Internet (23%) in the course of their volunteering, as compared to 20% in 2004.

Canadians volunteer for a variety of reasons, including to make a societal contribution, to use skills and experiences and because they were personally affected by the cause for which they volunteer. Additionally, they volunteer to explore strengths, to network or because their own friends volunteered.

Benefits of volunteering were many, including the development of interpersonal skills, communication skills, and organizational or managerial skills.

Bars to volunteering more, or at all, included lack of time, inability to meet a long term commitment and not being asked. Also cited were not knowing how to get involved and the costs associated with volunteering.

Part III - Directly Helping

In 2007, 84% of Canadians reported that they provided direct help to others who live outside of their household. The figure was 83% in 2004.

The most common activities included the following ones:

- (a) helping around someone's household;
- (b) personal care (visiting);
- (c) shopping or driving someone to appointments.

Half of these people provided this type of help at least once per week. It was provided by those aged 15-34 and those with higher incomes and higher educational attainment.

Links

Participation in one of the giving, volunteering or direct helping is associated with participation in others. Some 37% of Canadians engaged in all three of the behaviours, while 41% engaged in two of the behaviours. Just 17% participated in only one of the social behaviours. Also, the intensity of participation in any behaviour increases as the number of them undertaken increases.

Note: The top 25% of donors who volunteer are referred to in the full report as “core supporters”.

Again, support to non-profits is concentrated among a small minority of Canadians. The top one-quarter of donors (who gave \$364 or more) who also volunteered at least one hour in 2007 accounted for just 14% of the population, but contributed 59% of total donations and 40% of total volunteer hours.

Conclusions

The 2007 CSGVP is a detailed Report based upon a series of complex factors involving demographics, the economy, public policy, religion and other social values. It shows that the three prosocial behaviours focused upon, namely donating, volunteering and directly helping, are most important to Canadians. In fact, if one person involves himself or herself in one of these actions, they are more inclined to involve themselves in others of them. This civic involvement reveals a powerful story. Yes, as is recognized around the world, Canadians are a compassionate and giving people. They care to act more than in the *de minimus*, “me only” fashion. That fact is one that Canadians can take pride in.

Another most notable conclusion that can be made from this work is that religion plays a very large role in the charitable activity. Persons who attend religious institutions give more, volunteer more and help more and not just to their personal religious organizations. The importance of church and the value of stewardship to Canadians is real.