

Foundations of Volunteer Engagement

BLC Board Briefing

This briefing provides a strategic overview of the BLC Foundations of Volunteer Engagement workshop. It highlights key insights, governance-level considerations, risks, opportunities, and recommended actions to respond to changes in the volunteerism landscape and strengthen impact, equity, and sustainability.

Key Strategic Insights

- Volunteer engagement is a system-level function that requires leadership ownership, not just coordination.
- Retention, equity, and impact are outcomes of design decisions across the volunteer lifecycle.
- Volunteer experience (belonging, safety, meaning) is as critical as service outputs.
- Flexibility, co-creation, and inclusive design are essential to modern volunteer participation.
- Measurement should support learning and decision-making, not just reporting.

Risks to Monitor

- Over-reliance on transactional, task-based volunteer models
- Volunteer burnout and declining participation rates
- Equity gaps in access and participation
- Inconsistent supervision and feedback practices
- Data collection without meaningful use

Opportunities

- Align volunteer roles with mission outcomes to increase impact
- Expand access through flexible and skills-based roles
- Strengthen retention through belonging, community collaboration, and meaningful engagement
- Leverage volunteer voice through co-creation and partnership
- Use measurement to drive continuous improvement and strategic decisions

Governance Questions for the Board

- How is volunteer engagement reflected in our strategic priorities?
- What outcomes do we expect from volunteer contributions?
- Who is accountable for volunteer engagement quality and results?
- How are equity and inclusion reflected in our volunteer systems?
- What data informs our decisions about volunteer engagement?

Recommended Actions

- Elevate volunteer engagement as a strategic priority in organizational planning
- Ensure leadership accountability for volunteer outcomes and experience
- Invest in role design, supervision, and training systems
- Adopt equity-centred approaches to recruitment and participation
- Implement simple, meaningful impact measurement tools
- Create regular learning loops to adapt and improve volunteer programs

Implementation Considerations

- Start with pilot redesigns rather than full program overhauls
- Align staff roles and capacity with volunteer engagement goals
- Engage volunteers in co-design processes
- Prioritize changes that improve both impact and experience
- Ensure consistent communication across the organization

Conclusion

Strategic, mission-driven, and equitable volunteer engagement positions your volunteers as a key drivers of mission impact, community connection, and organizational sustainability. With leadership alignment and intentional design, organizations can create more inclusive, effective, and resilient volunteer systems.

Workshop Provided by:

Volunteer Calgary and VolunteerConnector
<https://www.volunteerconnector.org/>