

Barriers to Volunteer Engagement in the Canadian Humanitarian Workforce Program

Thomas Beveridge, CD
Royal Roads University

Dr Larry Wolfe
Royal Roads University

Dr Kyle Breen
Texas A&M University

Why a Volunteer Workforce Matters?

- A volunteer workforce offers a surge option to disaster response,
- The challenge is the continuing decline of volunteer engagement, and
- This research identifies barriers to volunteering and proposes strategies for improvement

Background

- 65% of pre-pandemic volunteers have not returned (Volunteer Canada, 2023), and
- Public Safety Canada funded five NGOs to participate in the workforce program:
 - Canadian Red Cross,
 - St. John Ambulance,
 - Salvation Army,
 - Ground Search and Rescue, and
 - Team Rubicon

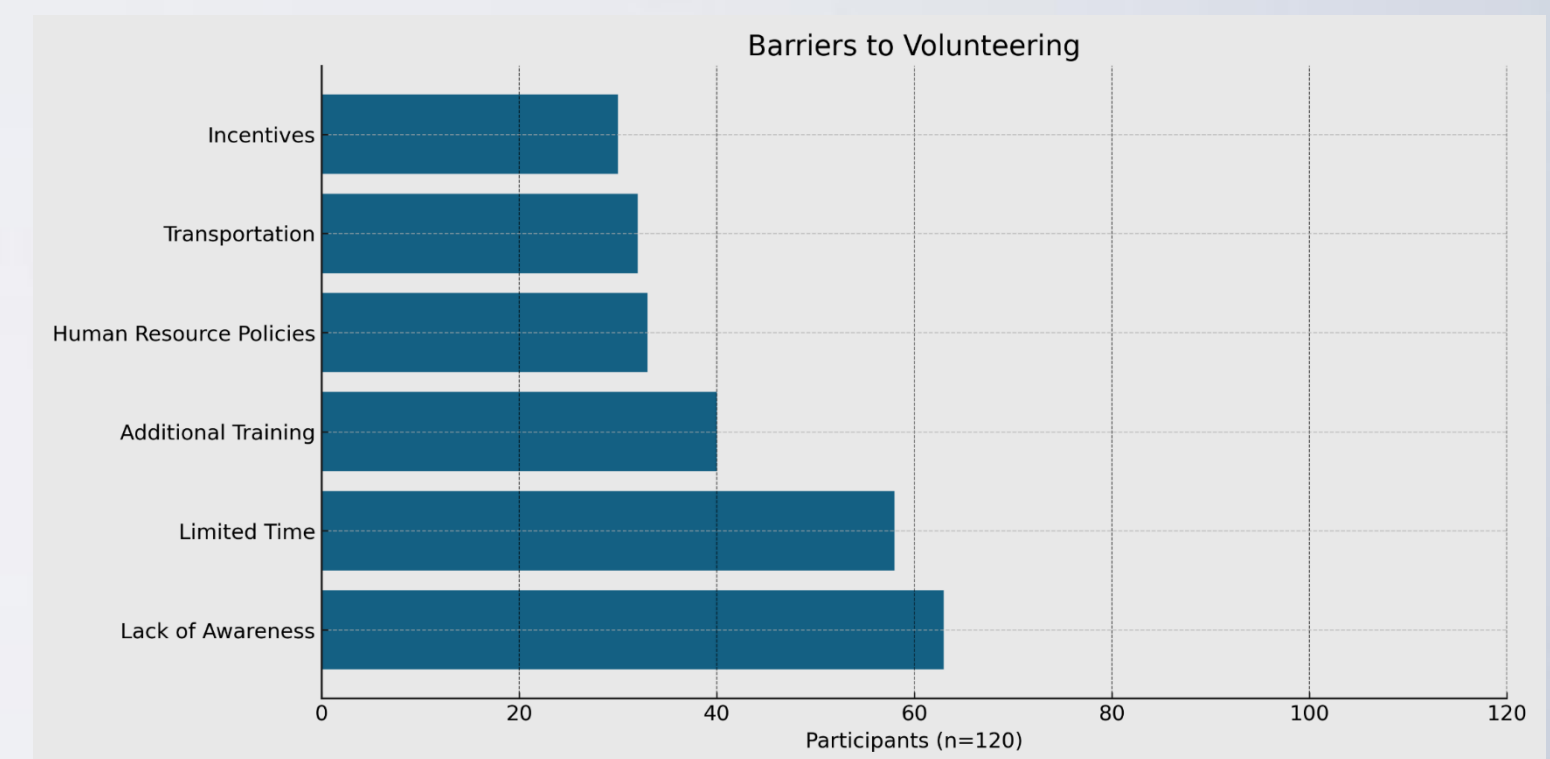
Research Design

- Mixed methods bricoleur design
- 120 online survey respondents
- 2 focus groups (n=6)

Suggested Resource

Beveridge, T. (2025). *Strategies for Revitalizing the Humanitarian Workforce program* [Masters Thesis, Royal Roads University].
<https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.16971.91688>

What are the Barriers?



Bridging the Barriers to Volunteering

Persistent barriers to volunteering must be addressed by:

- Reviving a culture of volunteering,
- Government and NGOs aligning their expectations with what people are looking to volunteer for, and
- Enacting measures to recognize the personal time and costs involved while people are volunteering.

Action to Improve Volunteer Engagement

Key suggestions to increase volunteer engagement include:

- Improve awareness and outreach campaigns
- Modernizing training methods, including alternatives.
- Government, NGOs and industry must coordinate to mitigate the personal time and cost involved with volunteering
- Develop tiered incentives available to all participating volunteers.

Estimated Impact of Resolving Barriers

- Resolving barriers could engage up to 1.4 million new volunteers.
- NGOs may gain up to 266,000 additional volunteers for the workforce.
- This represents a 330% increase over current levels, significantly expanding national surge capacity.