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# Recruiting & Retaining Youth Volunteers

*What the data says about volunteers ages 15-24 and what volunteer leaders can do about it*

## Young people aren't disengaged. They are volunteering *differently* than before.

**81%** of Canadians aged 15–24 volunteered in 2023- the **highest rate of any age group** (national average: 73%).

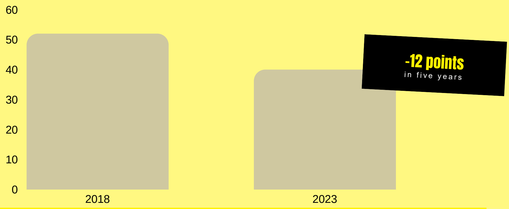
**40%**
**Volunteered formally**
Through a charitable or non-profit organization.

**72%**
**Helped informally**
On their own - for neighbours, friends, and community.

**Youth willingness is not the problem-- pathways to volunteering are.**

## Formal youth volunteering is slipping.

*Formal volunteer rate, ages 15–24 in Canada · 2018 vs 2023*




**The doors are still open - *fewer young people are walking through them.***

*The steepest decline among the groups still volunteering at above-average overall rates.*

How do youth give their time?

## Small doses, given often.

**30 hrs/year**

Median annual hours among formal youth volunteers, about **2.5 hours a month**.

One dot = 10 hours · vs a median of ~40–50 hrs among the oldest cohorts (55+)

**14.5% → 13%**

Youth are ~14.5% of the population but contribute ~13% of all formal volunteer hours - they show up, in bite-sized commitments.

**Translation:** youth show up, but in bite-sized commitments. **Design for the trend.**

What this means for volunteer managers and leaders

## Five low-lift moves for youth engagement

**1 Recruit through micro-roles.**
Offer 2–3-hour, episodic tasks as the entry point. A 30-hour-a-year volunteer is the norm (not a failure).

**2 Meet them in informal spaces.**
Most youth already help informally: frame your asks as "keep doing what you do, with us" rather than "become a Volunteer™."

**3 Lower the onboarding friction.**
Long applications, multi-week training, and rigid schedules filter out youth. One simple form, one fast yes. Integrate training, development, and more sophisticated scheduling as volunteer commitment grows.

**4 Make growth visible.**
Retention improves when small tasks ladder into skills, references, and leadership. Name the ladder explicitly and honestly.

**5 Ask, specifically.**
Youth volunteer rates are high partly because they say yes when asked directly or may have a requirement to (ex. High school volunteer service hours). Consistent invitations, clear asks, and sustained communication make it easier for youth to jump in and out of opportunities.

Provincial Insights

## Youth volunteering isn't one national story.

**British Columbia** — The bright spot
46.7% → 48.6%
The only province with a reliable (unflagged) rise in youth formal volunteering (2018→2023), and the highest unflagged rate in Canada, almost 9 points above the national youth rate. PEI is nominally higher but its estimate is E-flagged. What's working in BC? Worth exploring.

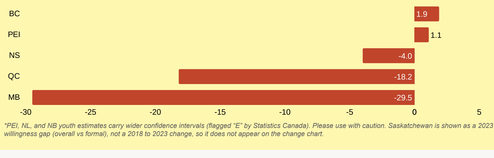
**Quebec** — Steepest overall drop
50.4% → 32.2%
Formal volunteering fell 18 points; overall youth volunteering dropped 17 points (91.8% → 74.5%), the largest overall decline in Canada. Even so, Quebec youth still volunteer formally (32.2%) at a higher rate than the province's general population (25.2%).

**Manitoba** — Steepest formal drop
62.0% → 32.5%
A 29.5-point collapse: the steepest in the country. Now the only province with a reliable estimate where youth volunteer formally at a lower rate than the general population (38.3%).

**Saskatchewan** — Wide willingness gap
85.9% vs 40.2%
Highest youth overall volunteering in Canada, but formal participation fell to 40.2%. That ~46-point willingness gap is a clear "they're helping, just not with you" signal.

**PEI & Atlantic Canada** — Holding steady
52.3% → 53.4%
PEI held firm with the highest nominal youth formal rate in Canada, though its estimate is E-flagged; Nova Scotia dipped only ~4 points. Strong community ties may be doing the retention work that formal programs must do elsewhere.

**Change in Youth Formal Volunteer Rate · 2018 → 2023 (Percentage Points)**




*"PEI, NL, and NB youth estimates carry wider confidence intervals (flagged "E" by Statistics Canada). Please use with caution. Saskatchewan is shown as a 2023 willingness gap (overall vs formal), not a 2018 to 2023 change, so it does not appear on the change chart.*

The take-away

## Youth are your most willing, and most fragile, volunteer pipeline.

Recruit with **small asks** . Retain with **flexibility and visible growth** . The 40% who volunteer formally today can be tomorrow's board members.

**Source:** Statistics Canada. 2023 Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating & 2018 GSS GVP (Table 45-10-0039-01). "Formal" = unpaid service through a charitable/non-profit organization; "informal" = direct help given independently. 2023 estimates for some youth subgroups carry wider confidence intervals; rates cited are national-level.

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