



TWO DECLINES, ONE STORY

What the Data on Volunteering and Donating Tells Us About the Future of Giving in Canada

Based on Statistics Canada's Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating (SGVP 2023) and the General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating (GSS-GVP 2018).

Data released November 21, 2025 · All figures in constant 2023 dollars where applicable

About the data

The Survey

Statistics Canada's General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating (GSS-GVP) and the 2023 Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating (SGVP). Most recent data released November 2025.

What it measures

Formal and informal volunteering, charitable donations, and civic participation for Canadians aged 15 and older. Tracks individual behaviour nationally and provincially across time.

Its sector importance

The only longitudinal dataset tracking giving AND volunteering simultaneously at the national level. The 2018–2023 comparison covers the full pre- to post-pandemic arc, published by Statistics Canada.

Population and Scope

Persons aged 15 and older living in the 10 provinces. Figures exclude the territories, residents of First Nations reserves, and full-time residents of institutions.

Data Sources and Table References

Category	Measure	Source
Volunteer data	Volunteer rate & average annual volunteer hours	Tables 45-10-0039-01 to 45-10-0046-01 (by age, gender, education, income, labour force, marital status, children, religious attendance)
	Total & formal volunteer hours, top-10% concentration	The Daily 11-001-X, June 23, 2025; Table 45-10-0039-01
	Wage rate for value of volunteer labour	Labour Force Survey, Table 14-10-0064-01 (\$33/hr, 2023)
Donor data	Donor rate & average annual donations	Tables 45-10-0031-01 to 45-10-0037-01 (by age, gender, marital status, education, labour force, income, children)
	Total value of donations (constant 2023\$)	The Daily 11-001-X, June 23, 2025
	Number of donors (2023)	17.8 million donors; The Daily 11-001-X, June 23, 2025
Population & derived	Population aged 15+	Statistics Canada population estimates, Table 17-10-0005-01
	Derived figures (est. donor/volunteer counts, avg gift)	Calculated: rate × population; marked "derived" on slides

Reference period: Collected Sep 2023–Mar 2024; 10 provinces, age 15+, excluding institutions and reserves.

Sources: Statistics Canada, Tables 45-10-0031–0046; The Daily 11-001-X (2025-06-23); LFS Table 14-10-0064-01; Population Table 17-10-0005-01.

The National Picture: Six Numbers, One Direction

Every major measure of civic participation declined between 2018 and 2023

72.8%

Overall Participation Rate

Down from 79.4% (−6.6pp)

32%

Formal Volunteer Rate

Down from 41% (−9pp)

4.1B hrs

Total Volunteer Hours

Down from 5.0B (−18%)

173 hrs

Avg Hours per Volunteer

Down from 206 hrs (−16%)

54%

Donor Rate

Down from 68% (−14pp)

\$13.4B

Total Donations (2023\$)

Down from \$14.0B (−4.3%)

The Donor Story: Fewer Donors, Stable Totals

68% → 54%

Donor Rate (2018 → 2023)
-14 percentage points

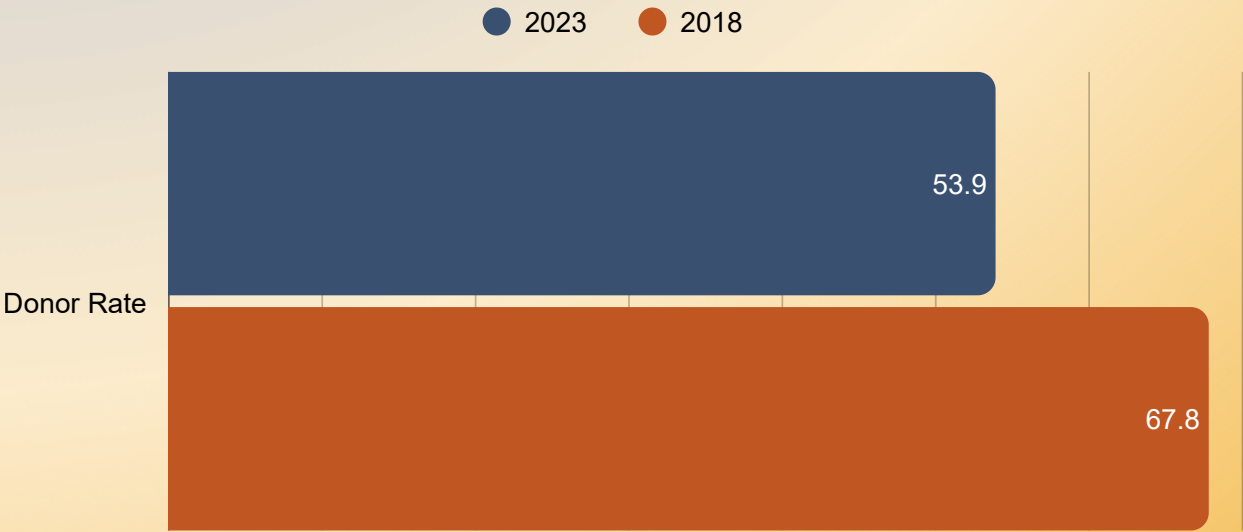
~-2.7M

Estimated Donor Loss
Despite population growing +2.7M

The population math

Measure	2018	2023	Change
Population aged 15+	~29.6M	~32.2M	+2.7M
Donor rate	68%	54%	-14pp
Estimated donor population (derived)	~20.1M	~17.4M	-2.7M

Population grew by 2.7M. Donor base shrank by 2.7M. They cancelled each other out.



Stable Totals, Fragile Foundations

The headline looks reassuring: total donations barely moved. However, stability in dollar value while donor numbers collapse identifies a fragile donor foundation.

-\$600M

Change in Total Value

-4.3% (\$14.0B → \$13.4B)

~-2.7M

Estimated Donor Loss

2018 to 2023

+11%

Rise in Avg Gift

\$696 → \$770 per donor

Consider The Following: The Effects of Concentration

01

When total value holds while the donor population shrinks, average gift per donor rises. That looks like health. It is concentration risk.

02

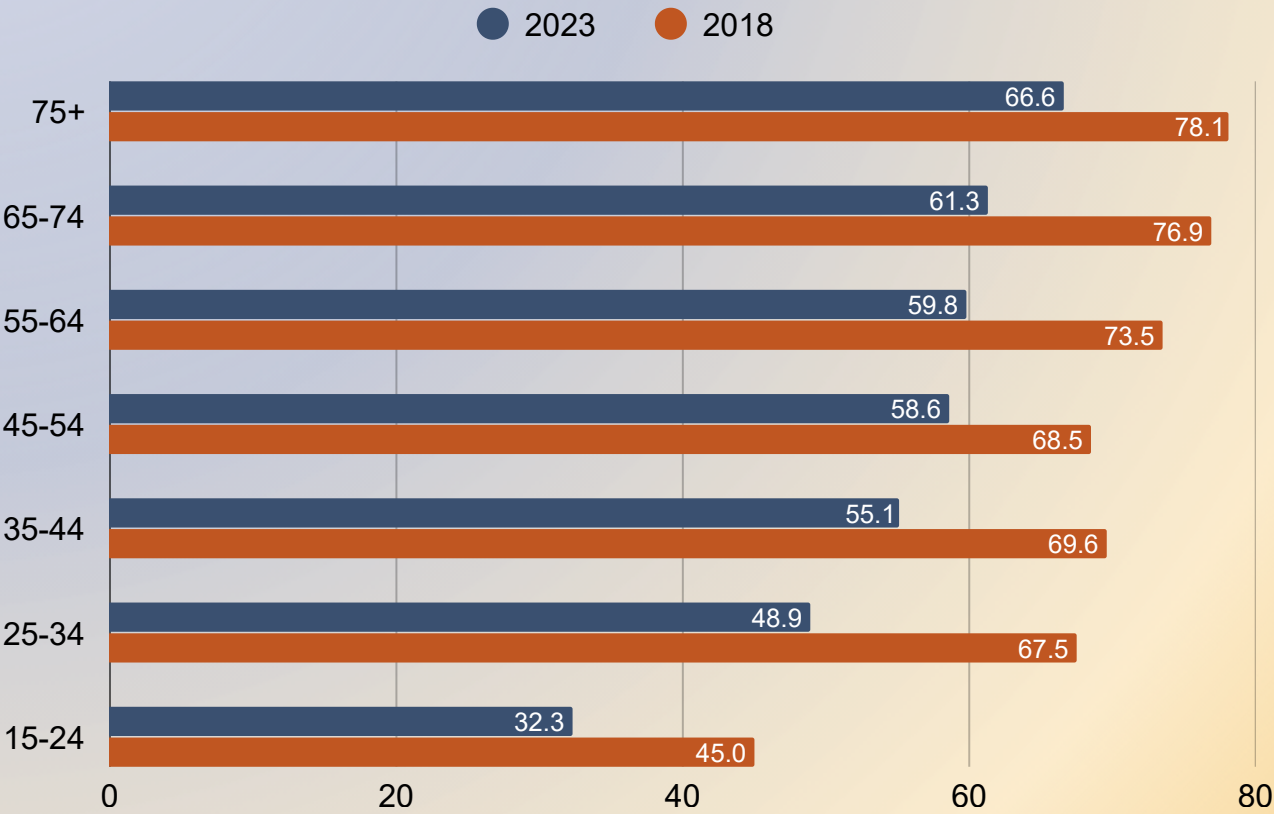
An 11% rise in average gift is not generosity growth, this is the arithmetic of a shrinking base.

03

If your high-average-gift donors reduce or lapse, there is no depth beneath them to absorb the loss.

Avg. donation derived: total donation value ÷ estimated donor population (donor rate × population aged 15+, 2018 ~29.6M, 2023 ~32.2M).

Donor Rate by Age Group and Gender



By Gender

Male

Donor rate: 63.6% → 49.7%
Avg donation: \$578 → \$821 (2023\$)

Rate decline: -13.9pp

Female

Donor rate: 71.7% → 58.0%
Avg donation: \$557 → \$698 (2023\$)

Rate decline: -13.7pp

The Volunteer Story: A Double Decline

Not only are fewer Canadians volunteering, but those who continue are giving less time. Both the rate and the depth of participation have contracted.

41% → 32%

Formal Volunteer Rate
-9 percentage points (-22%)

206 → 173

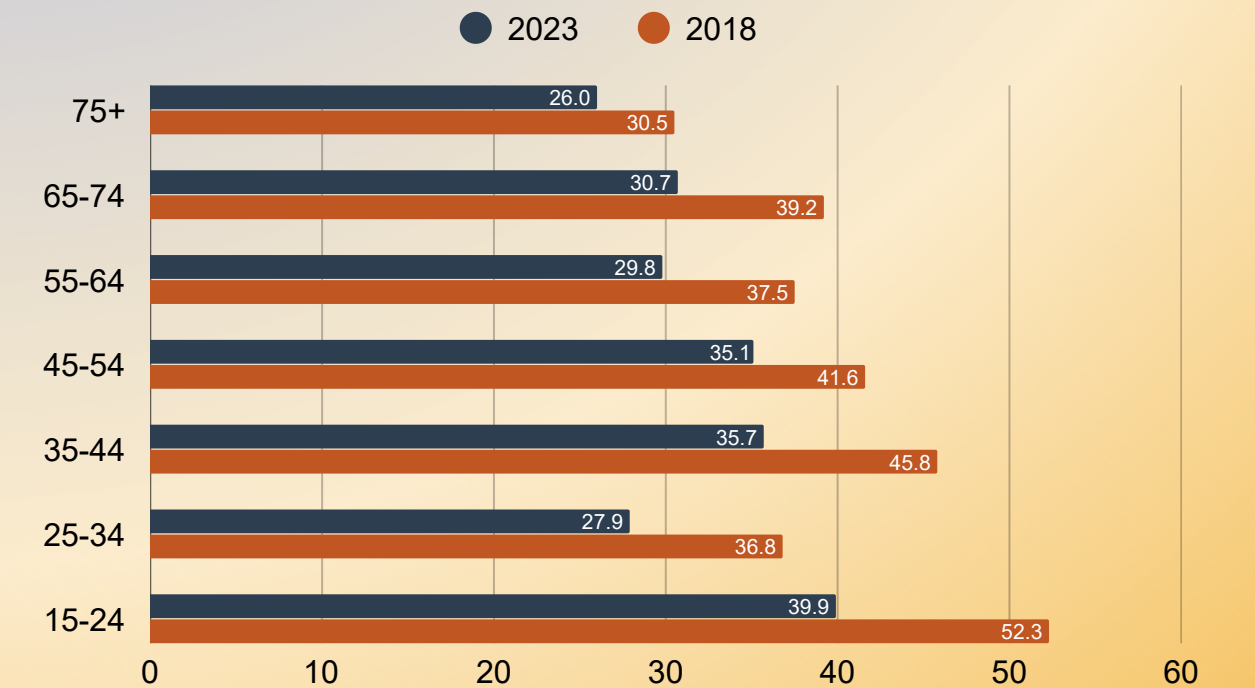
Avg Hrs/Volunteer (Overall)
-33 hours (-16%)

5.0B → 4.1B

Total Volunteer Hours
-18% (-900M hours)

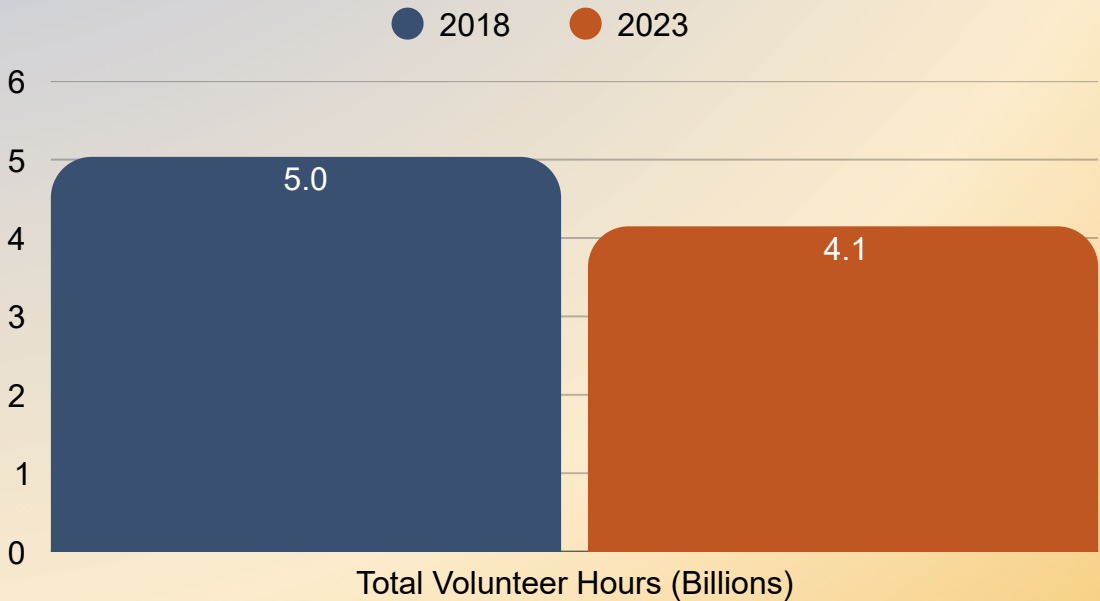
131 → 112

Avg Hrs/Volunteer (Formal)
-19 hours (-15%)



900 Million Hours Lost: The Economic Scale of Decline

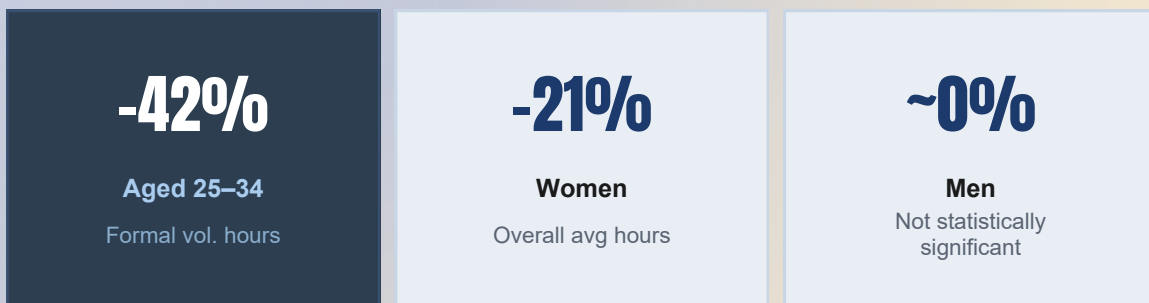
Total volunteer hours fell from 5.0 billion to 4.1 billion, a loss of 900 million hours. Applying Statistics Canada's average hourly wage produces a floor estimate of the civic labour lost.



Floor estimate only. Does not capture social, democratic, or relational value of volunteering. Source: Statistics Canada LFS Table 14-10-0064-01 (\$33/hr, 2023).

Who Stopped: Cohort and Gender Breakdown

The aggregate -18% decline masks a sharper story. Two populations are driving the loss disproportionately: the 25–34 cohort and women.

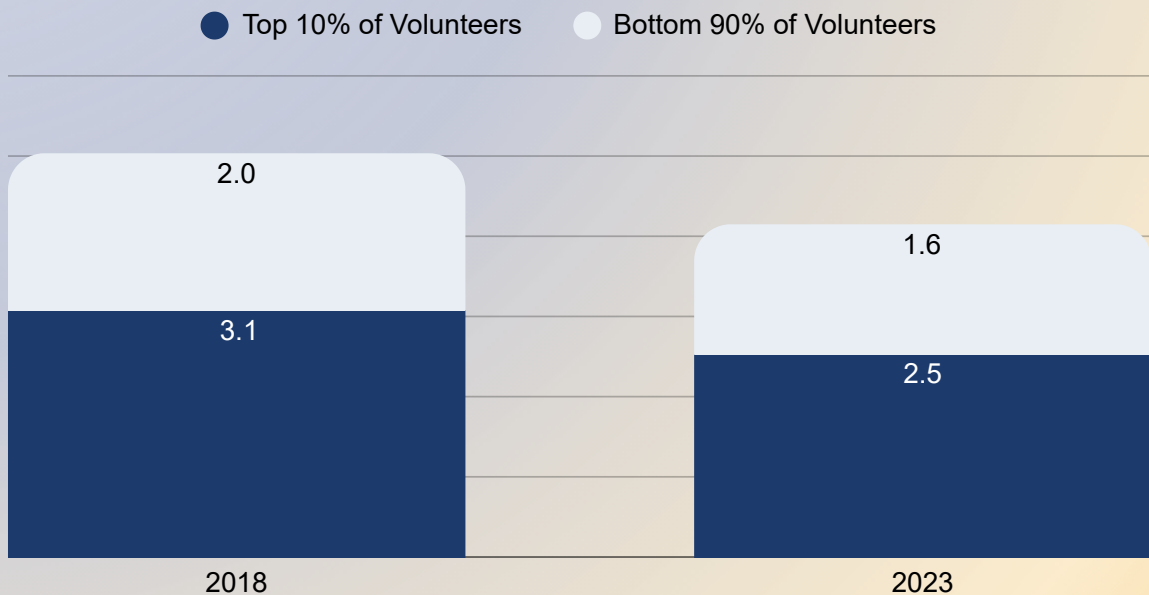


Why this matters for the long term:

- 1** The 25–34 cohort is where long-term civic identity is formed. A 42% decline in formal volunteer hours in this group is not a pandemic blip- it is a structural withdrawal from civic life during the years when habits are set.
- 2** Women have historically contributed the majority of volunteer hours. A statistically significant -21% decline in average hours, compared with an insignificant decline for men, represents a meaningful shift in who carries the civic sector.
- 3** The 25–34 cohort are also the future major donors, board members, and advocates organizations are not yet losing, but will if trends persist.

Concentration Risk: The 61/10 Problem

61% of all volunteer hours are held by just 10% of volunteers. This ratio was identical in 2018. The concentration has not worsened, but it operates on a smaller and shrinking total.



01 Unchanged from 2018

The 61/10 ratio was identical five years ago. Despite significant overall decline, concentration did not improve.

02 The core is also shrinking

Total hours fell 18%. The absolute hours held by the top 10% declined alongside the periphery.

03 No replacement pipeline

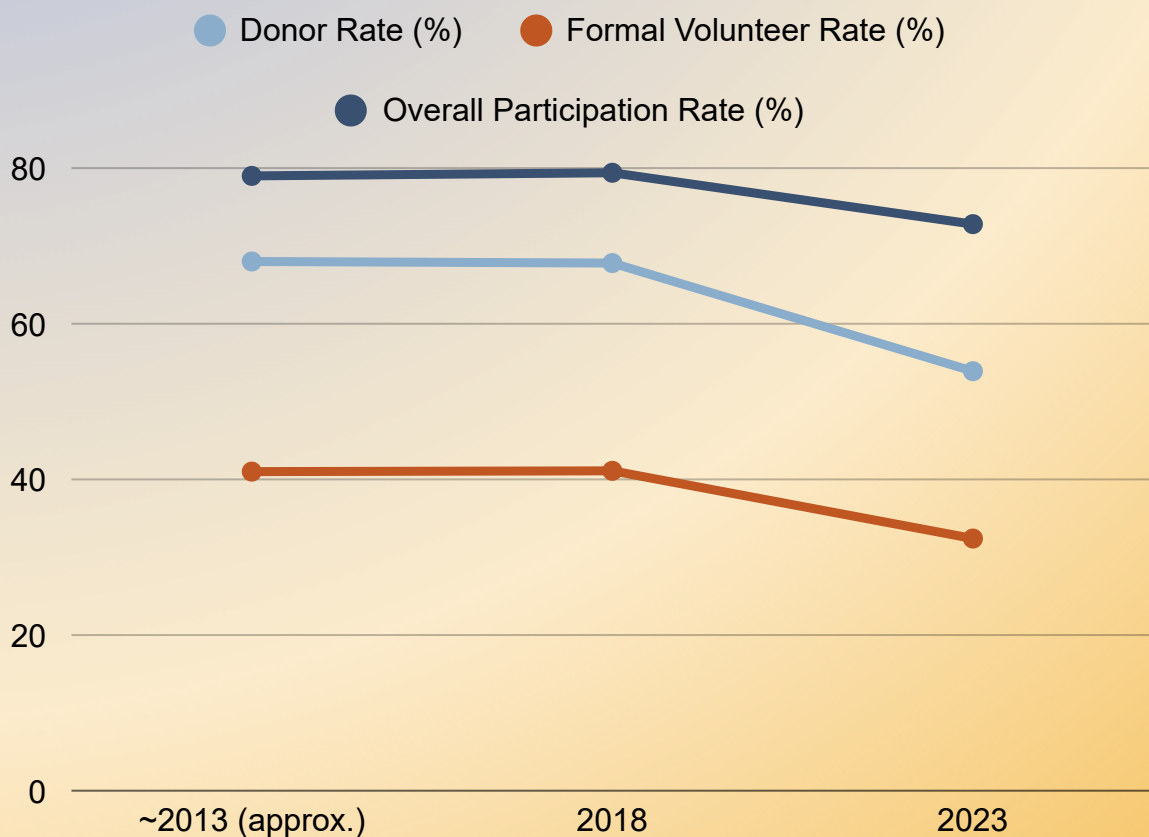
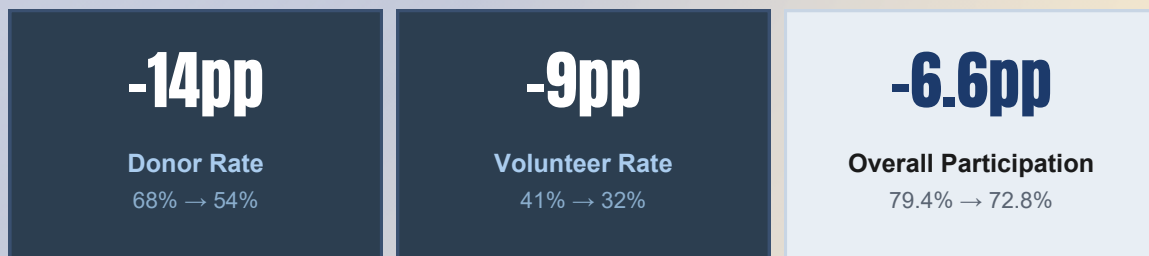
The 25–34 cohort, the natural replenishment pool, has already withdrawn 42% of its hours.

04 A fundraising parallel

The same structural logic applies to your major donor portfolio. Concentration is fragility, not strength.

Where the Two Stories Meet: Moving Together

All three civic participation measures declined in the same five-year period. The 2018–2023 transition was the steepest recorded in the GSS-GVP series.



Parallel Concentration: The Same Fragility on Both Sides

The volunteer sector's 61/10 ratio mirrors the donor story exactly. In both cases, a shrinking base of highly committed participants is carrying a disproportionate share of total output.

	Volunteer Sector	Donor Sector
Concentration ratio	61% of hours held by 10% of volunteers	Donation value stable while donor base shrank -13%
Trend in concentration	Unchanged from 2018 — ratio identical over 5 years	Average gift rose 11% (\$696 → \$770) as base contracted
Base size trend	Total hours fell 18%; top-10% hours also fell proportionally	Donor population fell ~2.7M while total value held
Replacement pipeline	25–34 cohort withdrew 42% of formal hours (future core)	25–34 donor rate fell from 67.5% to 48.9% (-18.6pp)
Risk implication	If core volunteers reduce, no depth beneath to absorb loss	If major donors lapse, no depth beneath to absorb loss

The parallel: In both cases, fewer participants, higher stakes per participant, no replacement pipeline visible in the data.

What This Means for Fundraisers

Assumptions to Retire

Current Assumption	What the Data Shows
Volunteer management and donor development are separate organizational functions	The S-GVP tracks both behaviours for the same individuals - parallel declines in the same survey suggest shared structural pressures, not two independent problems
Volunteers are operational resources; donors are revenue sources	Declining volunteer participation and donor rates moved together - organizations that monitor both may see pressures earlier
Civic participation trends are sector context, not fundraising strategy	Both are declining simultaneously, driven by the same structural forces
Pipeline development begins with the donor database	Pipeline development begins with civic participation - before the database

A Realistic Organizational Response

- 01

Connect your volunteer and donor databases.
If you cannot currently see which of your donors also volunteer, you are managing two halves of the same population without seeing the whole picture.
- 02

Make the internal case with S-GVP data.
Leadership and boards respond to national evidence. Volunteer decline is a fundraising risk, not a programme operations problem.
- 03

Reframe volunteer engagement as pipeline strategy.
The ask to a volunteer who already believes in your mission lands on prepared ground.
- 04

Advocate for the civic conditions that produce future donors.
\$29.7B in lost civic labour is an advocacy number.

Key Takeaways

- 01 The donor rate fell from 68% to 54% and the volunteer rate from 41% to 32% in the same five-year period, driven by overlapping structural forces, not independent organizational challenges.
- 02 North American research shows that volunteers are demonstrably more likely to donate. In Canada, estimated 2.7 million donors were lost while the adult population grew by 2.7 million. The pipeline is emptying as the country grows.
- 03 61% of volunteer hours held by 10% of volunteers mirrors the donor concentration pattern. Donation value held while the donor base shrank- average gift rose 11%. Both sectors carry the same fragility.
- 04 The 25–34 cohort (–42% in hours) and women (–21%) are the sharpest points of decline. These are the future major donors, board members, and advocates your organization may not yet losing, but will if trends persist.
- 05 \$29.7 billion in unreplaced civic labour is a floor estimate and a policy number. Civic participation data is a leading indicator for fundraising. The warning light has been on since 2018.