

Dianne: Welcome to module number 11 where we're talking about adapting to our audience, which is something that volunteer managers are doing on the fly as they see who responds to their roles and the, and the various ways they promote them. There is a science to looking at your volunteer recruitment and that's what I think this module is going to talk about a little bit. We can reflect on that. And so glad to have Kim Cusimano, Executive Director for the PIN, People and Information Network in Guelph and Emily Vincent as well from the center- she is the sole staff person, full-time staff person that's held. Often these organizations, non-profits are small, but mighty. So, how do you do it all? What is the, how do you adapt trends? Where do you find them? What's, how important is it to look at the trends? Kim, do you want to give it a stab to start?

Kim: Sure. Trends are vital to understand the national landscape or even globally, but also provincially and right home, you know, right in your own community to understand the cultural makeup of your community, age. You know, really understanding what it is that your organization is seeking to bring volunteers in- to welcome volunteers into your organization to support your mission. What are the skills that you need to have in order to fulfill those roles? And are you aware of what gaps might be happening in your organization when it comes to recruitment and engagement if, of that? Are you creating roles that meet the needs and interests of youth, of families, of newcomers? You know, are you, do you have inclusive practices? You know, so understanding what those trends are will help to define and, and bring your focus to what will work best for your organization.

Dianne: Emily, do you want to add anything to that? About the trends piece- you're, you're always working in them, but you're probably not doing that overarching. We've looked at a lot of documents that are referenced in our materials is, you know, the conference board of Canada, Volunteer Canada does great trend surveys, gaps in surveys. What, maybe there's something, a specific tool that you would find is helpful to, to finding the volunteers that fit for, for organizations. Is the skills matrix- I think you spoke about in, in your modules. Can you speak to that a little bit? Like, is that part of it- is just finding out about who your volunteers are.

Emily: Well, and I think it's really important to understand the big picture- the global, national, shift in trends because the on the ground work is really affected by it. And so important to be able to be responsive and to make those changes within how you are working with the community engaging volunteers and participants to ensure that you have a really robust program that is inclusive of all people in the community. In terms of a skills matrix, I think it is really important to be able to then take that, the trends information and have a close look at what kinds of skills and expertise you're needing within your organization. And it really in combination helps you to be able to provide a much more robust, longer lasting kind of service and program within the community.

Dianne: And addressing those gaps. Like the, I mean, we have had one recently with the pandemic trend. Maybe you'd like to speak about that, Kim.

Kim: Sure, sure, absolutely. So, what I've referred to it through, through the work of PIN is really a dichotomy of supply and demand. So, you know, formal organizations, closing programs, canceling events. In some cases, closing their door, redeploying, or laying off their volunteer managers. And so, what does that look like for individuals? The trend, you know, there were volunteers- there were people in our community that were interested in test and trace. They were interested in using their skills and experience in the healthcare field in order to help, but there was no roles for that. There were no formal roles for that. As organizations are clamping down, you know what we would see locally, and I do believe this is also provincially and across, across the country, is that there were an increase in non-pro, or pardon me, in grassroots groups. Who are seeing, well, wait a minute, there's still a need in our local community so we're going to organize the food- we're going to organize this particular support because there was a gap. And so, you know, the trend just in informal volunteering. The most recent Stats Can research around volunteering counts informal and formal, you know, 74% of Canadians were volunteering informally as of 2018. And I think that that's, that's something really important to understand when we're talking about your audience. So, and especially through COVID, if there were individuals and, in some cases, the very first time they had volunteered before, because they were acting on a call to action for an emergency, and what will that translate then to ongoing support, volunteer support for organizations? And how are, how are organizations working towards making that transition and understanding what their new needs are as we've all evolved through the pandemic? So those as, as Emily said, those national trends, those local trends are incredibly important. You know, we did a community benefit sector survey in 2020 as well as 2021. And we can see that there is, you know, a 50% decrease in the number of individuals contacting organizations to volunteer. What would be really interesting is understanding, did those individuals just do something on their own? Were they helping their neighbours? Were they driving a friend to a cancer appointment? Were they making sure that their, you know, peers in their congregation were receiving, receiving food or support that they need? It would be really interesting to see what that would look like. But I think when you're identifying gaps and speaking to your audiences at any to understand the skills that you need, like Emily said, and the, the geography I think of your community and understanding whether, whatever format that looks like is that a simple Excel spreadsheet, you know, whatever, however you determine the data. I think it's about understanding the landscape, it's understanding your community. And I also think that it's knowing what skills are required and how to adapt that language in order to recruit. So, when we're, when we're making recruitment postings or we have a strategy for recruitment, does that include the language and the pieces that would be involved to support, you know, to capture someone's interest and be able to translate that into an active volunteer? There's so many, you know, intricate parts that are part of that. And I, I think sometimes where the need comes from is, you know, from perhaps leadership in the organization saying we need 50 volunteers. Well, the, you know, is, is that inclusive? Is that, are you, are you putting up barriers for individuals to come and access your programs? Is there ways that you can use informal trends to be able to support some of the work that you're doing in not such a formal way? You know, what does that look like? In some organizations that would not be possible- if it's perhaps healthcare or hospital, for example. There's certain structures in place, but are there ways that you can invite youth to come and volunteer who maybe don't want to go through a formal process or individuals who identify in

the black, indigenous, people of color communities or LGBTQ that perhaps feel that that is just another barrier to accessing, you know, being in, being involved in accessing those involvement opportunities in the community.

Dianne: Sounds pretty complicated to me. Emily, have you figured it out? Have you got suggestions?

Emily: Well, I think, I think what's really key for an organization that works with volunteers and depends on them to help them achieve their mission is to have leadership that is willing to be responsive to the changing landscape of the community. So, knowing the trends is important, but also being able to be responsive to the changes. And certainly, the pandemic was a good illustration of how we all had to change really quickly. You know, certainly keeping in mind the importance of volunteer management and structures to support that work in the, in the organization and the community, but also just being responsive so that you can very quickly change in how your focus and how you're working with volunteers and including them. Because I think it, it, if you are rigid then, then you are missing out on some really important opportunities. We certainly saw that with the involvement of informal volunteers and the connections and the partnerships in the communities- that happened as a response to organizations and people willing to be more responsive and flexible in how they were working in the community.

Dianne: And having to be, I mean, that obvious one is the virtual volunteering response to the pandemic and how it's here to stay, right. We're not, we're not going back. We're going forward with what we've learned and transitioning into the, the new forms of, of volunteer engagement, which I think is so great that we're talking about the informal and that somebody's actually paying attention to what is maybe just a cultural awareness- that volunteerism doesn't, it's not a word in everybody's vocabulary, but what is it that builds community? And it seems to be that Canadians are learning about their culture more so now than years before. But maybe that's our personal awareness and the life experience too. So just.

Kim: That's a great point. Yeah, absolutely. I think at the end of the day, you know, people want to feel as though they belong, right. And they want to be I think contributing an investment in their own community. We all have the ability to contribute in a way to the community that- we love to work, live, and play in our community. And what does that look like? And while some of that might be informal volunteering because you're helping your neighbours, you know, again, an individual that in your congregation or that sort of thing. But what does that look like when it comes time to being more formally involved? And are you able to access that information? Are we recognizing potential access to internet, to computers? Are we screening folks out because they don't have access to those, those pieces? So again, adapting to your audience and understanding the needs of your organization. So that needs assessment is really key. Identifying what those gaps are and the skills that are required and, and fleshing out a plan that is not just a done and done, you know, a written and done sort of thing is that it's- it needs to be adaptive and evolving as well because we're all evolving with our roles and as humans, right,

through every day. And this pandemic, again, has, has shown the, the real need to be more adaptive. And I do think that, you know, structure is, is important because it eliminates, it mitigates risk for those that you're serving. And it helps to, to ensure a good experience for individuals as long as those structures that are in place are not screening people out. And, you know, I think that that's really important to, to consider.

Dianne: And I guess that we can talk further Emily about this, the barriers and how we're addressing those barriers for people through the intake that we have to, the never-ending adaptation process, which is saying everyone is welcome. You know, you all belong, and we want you to participate, but maybe it's not at this organization. That's why volunteer centers are so great because we see the whole menu of choices. But it is still a challenge and there's the, the topic of attrition and turnover rates that I wanted to sort of bring up because you mentioned it's, it's another piece of, you know, how can we be everything to everybody and deal with a volunteer who comes for a short period of time or doesn't have a good fit. And there's a lot of things that go on that are very challenging. Did you find some best practices around the attrition and turnover rate, Emily? Can you give us gems of wisdom on that?

Emily: Well, I think what's really important- definitely the structures are, are important to ensure that we mitigate risk as much as possible, but in that to be as inclusive as, as possible throughout that process really important to go back and take a look at it. You know, certainly in the past applications have been very common practice as a way of inviting somebody in to participate. But actually, when you take a closer look at it, it creates barriers for so many people in terms of perhaps language. Perhaps access to technology to be able to complete that application. Perhaps, you know, just some other barriers for, for individuals not being able to complete it themselves- maybe needing another person to assist in that process. So, I think you need to really go back and look very closely at the processes that you have as an organization. And even, you know, a step beyond, before completing an application, how is it that you're making your needs requests known to the broader community. And the languaging that you use and the methods that you use to try and invite people in to help can be very, open doors or they can be, create barriers. And so, you want to sort of take that very close look at all of your processes from the application through the, your complete screening process to find ways to be able to invite people in and remove those barriers. And certainly, we know our requirement for police records check may be a requirement for your organization, but it also creates barriers for many people being involved. And so how do you go back to that requirement and look at, are there ways that you can take a different approach and still ensure that you're involving people who are not going to create risks for your organization and that you will still be able to have a very robust screening approach. And yet, I guess, make that whole, whole approach more inclusive and accessible to people.

Dianne: It seems, it seems like when you talk about it now that this is kind of a unique and ridiculous in some ways, right. But it's, it's working. There's lots of things that are working. We take the fall out with, you know, take it on the chin and we carry on, right. There's people that come through volunteering just for a time and they realize more things about themselves during the process, which is great, but there are challenges to the organizations. And that

brings me back to the informal, which is where it all began. Right, so it still exists. It started things that were informal to begin and perhaps become more formal- when you talk about grassroots, right? So, you've got that spontaneous combustion of joy. People coming together in a church or an idea for a program. And then it's the maintenance that sets in because if you have a good idea that you want to last, these are the things we have to do to keep it going, right. So, I think there's a lot in your, your module here that will hopefully help people prepare for adapting to audiences. And I think sharing with each other is one of the biggest things that we can do to help us learn best practices like you talk about, you know, spending time on collecting. That's what volunteer centers are trying to do. And that network of support that we have to, to help each other through all the difficulties of being resilient and responsive. So, kudos to you guys. I don't need to go on and say how wonderful you are, but you're both wonderful. And I know you support hundreds. How many organizations have you got in your membership now, Kim, do you have your impact statement handy?

Kim: My elevator speech?

Dianne: Your elevator speech. Go for it.

Kim: PIN is proud to, to support 200 plus members in the city of Guelph and in the county of Wellington. And it's just, it's a real honor to be able to support those organizations to engage volunteers that will support the mission and vision of their organization.

Dianne: So, not only is there a microcosm of, of interesting ideas within each organization- here's a network of a whole community full of organizations that you're supporting and adapting to your audience is what you're doing all the time. So, kudos to you guys. We can talk forever, but I'm going to let people want more. And if you're wanting to talk to these fine folks at the People and Information Network, PIN, in Guelph, I'm sure you'll be able to find them.

Kim: Absolutely.

Dianne: Thanks so much. Yep.

Emily: Thank you.

Kim: Thanks, Dianne.

Dianne: Take care, guys.