

Dianne: Hello again, to our two panelists who have done a second module in our 12-part modules series on volunteer management and the non-profit sector. Coming to us from Volunteer Canada, our, our lead organization that supports over 150 or more volunteer centers across Canada among other things. I've had the pleasure of working within and alongside Volunteer Canada staff, and have known Deb for quite a number of years, getting to know Marisa. And they're both here to, to further help us understand what employer-supported volunteering is all about. It's a complicated territory when we put the non-profit sector alongside the corporate sector. So again, it's, it's building that platform to help us all understand a little bit more about how to approach and what we've learned over the years. So, Marisa, would you like to start a little bit to tell us what the employer-supported volunteering module's all about.

Marisa: Of course, so first of all, the in- when we talk about employer-supported volunteering, some, this is, this is the current term. Some older terms might include corporate volunteering, business. So, in, in essence, it's any employee-supported activity that encourages their employees to either volunteer or work within the community. And so, one of the things that we know from the Statistics Canada, 2018 general social survey on giving, volunteering, and participating.

Dianne: It rolls off your lips. Very well done- congratulations.

Marisa: Incredibly well, yes. So roughly, so roughly, 34% of employed Canadians said that there was such a program in their place of work that encouraged volunteering in, in different ways. And of course, when we think about employer-supported volunteering, the first thing that comes to mind are days of caring or group volunteering, that's the first thing. But, what we know is that, for many reasons, it's a great idea to look across lots- there's actually lots of different things that can be done. In colla- for, with non-profit organizations collaborating with employers or businesses, yep.

Dianne: Deb, did you want to add anything or should we just keep moving on? I think we talked about the spectrum, right? The spectrum of involvement. And this is on that spectrum. An individual informal to formal. Entry-level to leadership. The spectrum is huge and the spectrum also exists within the employer-supported volunteering sector about how much an organization or a company can give to community. But it is part of, part of that.

Deb: It is. And I think that those same, that same rationale around the spectrum of involvement that we talked engagement, that we talked about with the Canadian code for volunteer involvement applies here because these are volunteers. And so that same idea of volunteers bring many different things, capacities, interests, expertise to their want to volunteer and contribute in community. And they do that along a spectrum. So, not only do we look at a spectrum from the volunteer's perspective of how much time and what kinds of skills and expertise they would like to be able to share and in what capacity. As Marisa said, we often think about days of caring and group volunteering, shorter activities, but we also know that programs include pro bono volunteer contributions. They include skills-based volunteering.

They include board service. All kinds of different volunteer opportunities that land along that spectrum including learning about issues that are, that are of importance and happening in their communities so that they can develop an interest and see what is interesting. What is happening in our communities? How can I learn more? And then perhaps work directly within an organization. Sometimes that first experience of volunteer involvement can trigger something. And we've seen that in group volunteering activities and days of caring, where they're in an organization and hear from an organization about the impact that their short-term volunteer activity is having on the mission of the organization and its clientele. And we often- we do hear from volunteers who will say I'd like to stay involved. I'd like to get involved to do something else either with this organization or with another organization that has that same mission or cause involved. But that's not the only part of the spectrum that applies in a workplace. We know that as diverse as volunteers are so are businesses. And so, they also have different sizes, different capacities. We often think of big business having great capacity. Well, they don't all. They're not all large, big businesses. Some are smaller and have different capacities and different interests. And so, they can contribute in different ways. We also know that workforces are changing and if the pandemic has taught us nothing else, it's, it's one of those things that has made a big shift. And many businesses operated even before the pandemic in different ways- in shift work, a call center where not every employee can take a day off for volunteering to be able to go out to an organization and volunteer. But businesses want to be able to be inclusive and have volunteer opportunities that everyone within their workforce can choose to take part in. So, we have that as well along the spectrum of how businesses are able to offer opportunities so that all of their volunteers can have, can see a place for themselves to volunteer. Maybe that's onsite, during somebody's lunch hour that they can do a kit building project because that's the time they have available depending on their role and their position within the company. Maybe it's offsite doing something else, but we have businesses who are looking at, what are the kinds of opportunities that we can offer for our employees so that everybody can be involved if they wish to? So, that spectrum applies to the interests and of the volunteers in how they want to contribute and spend their time. But it's also for the businesses to look at what are the spectrum- what along the spectrum of opportunities can we offer so that all of our employees in their different roles can find a place so that if they want to contribute they can?

Dianne: And that's something that you talk about Marisa too- is, is that the conversation, you know, where do we start this conversation and, and what do you recommend in terms of how to identify the best match of ideas to employer-supported volunteering groups?

Marisa: Mhm. And so, definitely, and I know that Deb can add quite a lot too to this, but, I think that one of the things that's really important is sometimes employers or companies and non-profits too, non-profit organizations as well, we're victims of our own judgment about the other, right? So the other, the other, right. So, and we sometimes go in with what we presume about the other party and sometimes it's true and sometimes it's not. But the, the one important thing to know about that is that the conversation can travel. So even if initially the conversation starts at- hey, non-profit in my community, I would like to bring in 120 people for, you know, one afternoon next week.

Dianne: Oh, no.

Marisa: Exactly. It doesn't mean that, that's where the conversation has to stop. And Deb, did you want to continue on the, on changing the conversation? A little bit about that.

Deb: Sure. I think it, to reinforce what Marisa was saying. It's around making sure that there is a conversation and that the non-profit also has thought about, and sometimes that's possible and sometimes it isn't. Sometimes you're picking up the phone to that, to that request that comes across. But to be able to really think about, what is the capacity of our organization to be able to fulfill this request? And to be empowered to say actually that's not going to fit with our mission and we don't have the capacity. And there are very few organizations that have the capacity to engage a group more than 10 or 20, realistically. And so sometimes as Marisa said, it's a question of having that conversation in a realistic way with the business who may not know that. And so, this is part of a conversation that has to be had, and non-profit should feel empowered to say as much as we'd like to do that, it's not a good fit for us either. It's not a good fit for us right now, or at all because we don't have the capacity to engage you in the way that that you're asking for us to do. And I think that's part of the piece that is important, is having that conversation to set out and understand the expectations on each side and find that right fit. When we talk about that it has to work for both sides- it really does. And it is possible to, to say not at this time. You'll find that there are some organizations who are proactive. Who think about, have decided yes, we would like to engage employee volunteers in our organization. And they set out to, to identify projects or activities that support their mission that would be suitable for employee volunteers. So, they have a bit of a roster, and some put it on their websites and have engaged in that way, in a very proactive way. So that businesses can look on their website and find that information about- when do they engage group volunteers? How much does it cost? What are the types of activities that are available that fit for the mission of the organization? So, there is that that happens and that happens for, group volunteering is a big part of that, but there are other skills-based volunteering opportunities. There may be pro bono activities that, that an organization could think about that may be a good, good match for a business who's coming in and wanting some of their volunteers, employees to volunteer there. The other thing to think about is that not every first interaction with the business will lead to a longer-term relationship with that business. And sometimes non-profits will have that expectation. And it's not realistic. That doesn't mean that the relationship isn't a good one. If it is event based or group volunteering based or one-off, if that experience is good for both, then that was a success. And I think that it's important to note that not every, not every initial contact and interaction is going to lead to that long-term relationship. And so, non-profits have to be aware of that as well, but that it doesn't have to mean that that first event or volunteering opportunity wasn't a succ, success. It certainly can be.

Dianne: Thank you. I, I think that, you know, this is such another rich topic and I'm sure there's people in that, listening to this going well, we did this and we did that. And I wish that there was a forum where we could actually have an interaction with our audience right now, because that's where the fun stuff happens. I remember hearing about Sonovos or Synovis, I'm not sure.

And they had done some really cool research around the conversation of having, what should our company do? We want to do so- so they did spend time conversing simply with their staff first. So, they came to the table and said, we want to work with youth. So, they narrowed it down. Because we know the charitable sector it's like saying. Where do you go shopping? And it's like, well, there's a lot of choices. So, it's the same with the non-profits, right? So, it's, it's about relationship building. It's about throwing some ideas out there and just having some fun shopping around with charities too. But with, with some consideration to how you can maybe build a relationship or offer a sustainable contribution. And I think that's one thing when I did a Trillium grant for group volunteering, team volunteering for corporate groups or businesses or whichever groups want to do group stuff. Group stuff is always a challenge. Think of it this way. So, the one model I really liked was the ongoing team model. Where meals on wheels, for example, every community has that. So, you need somebody to deliver meals, but you work and you're busy. But if you have a team of four or five, realtors have done this in our local area, where they say, okay, we'll get that route. And we'll take turns. It's just once a month now, because we have a, we have a system that sustains the group involvement. And it's not one day it's all year long. So, we really do encourage that, don't we? And Marisa, you were at a volunteer center, how did you deal with all those calls? We want a group to come.

Marisa: Well, I think that it's, it's a lot about- I remember when I was at Volunteer Toronto, we had an actually quite an excellent person who took care of employer-supported volunteering. And the very first thing she did, and her name was Miyako Isei, and she had this workshop that was called, companies are from Mars and non-profits are from Venus. And it was a kind of a, kind of a funny take on, you know what you're getting, you're getting into a relationship with, with people who may have, may or may not, you don't want to assume, but may or may not have a very different concept of collaboration. What is productivity? What is output? You know, and, and all of that. And so, the first thing that happened was both the organizations and the business, the company got this little briefing. And so, everybody was laughing and, and stuff like that, and it was actually quite, quite funny. So, definitely. The other thing that I wanted to just like reinforce is that the more an organization has thought about, a non-profit organization, has thought about how they- what kind of projects work in their own organization for employer-supported volunteering? You know, and it's actually could be very productive, and that's being proactive. To think about it before the knock comes on the door because then you have a better sense of what you can say no to, but you have a better sense of what you can say yes to. And, you know, that famous yes, and? You know, the building conversation. So, definitely being proactive. The way that we plan to recruit students in August, or, you know, the way that we put it in our calendar, you know, we're going to go do fairs in September, October, whatever. If organizations can start thinking also about employer-supported volunteers as a very potential source of support for their mission, I think that that works really well for both parties. Yeah.

Dianne: It's, it's being prepared and being open-minded at the same time and, and working with, with what offers come, but not getting off track. That's always a juggle in our sector is- oh, good, they're calling us, but now we don't know what to do. It's a fear factor. I, I've done enough painting of a building to know what it's like to get the offer. It does, it takes you away for a full day or two to prepare a one afternoon event. So, we've worked with United Way,

which is obviously a great partner in our communities across the country. And what we've started to offer is what we could. And so, here's an example is, you know what, we're here to serve. We're here to educate. Knowledge network like you're talking about Marisa is your expertise. You know, we're not here to create more work for ourselves. Our job is to help connect. And so, connecting people who can take it forward is really what we have to do is hand that torch over. So having United Way come to us and say, we want to be, we want to start the conversation. So, we just do, what's called an innovation circle. I'm going to steal the planetary references from Mars and Venus. So, that's great cause it's a great analogy. You have different, different experiences. And I used to think the non-profit was so different from the for-profit.

Deb: Not always. No, not always. And I think that's an assumption that we make of the other sometimes and having that conversation can help bridge that gap so that there is a common understanding. And sometimes that works out really well. And sometimes you may have to say no- yeah, not a good fit for us or we're not the right organization for you or it's not the right project at this time. Sometimes as you said, Dianne, you can switch something up to make it work in the way that you talked about your meals on wheels example. That that, that that can work for a group in a different way, right. So, it's part of, it's the idea of having that conversation in an open and honest way and making sure that you are true to your organization's mission, it's work, and your capacity to be able to that.

Dianne: And in the project that I did get to work on, and I will share as an attachment to this module, is, one of it is, you know, resource, resource generating. So, it could be funds. It could be packing kits for, for, like you say, the United Way had a great kit making for, during the pandemic where you could simply write a card to the frontline workers. So, it was a great, easy takeaway. So, a third party where they just do it wherever they are, have the team building that they want on the topic that we provide them the resource to connect to an idea. It's really simple. Human relationships are, are human relationships. And I think that, employer-supported volunteering is another manifestation of our humanity that, we're, we're navigating pretty well.

Deb: And I think the pandemic too has added another layer to that where In-person volunteering, which a lot of group, most group, group, group volunteering traditionally has been in person- through the pandemic, where we're not able to do that, we have innovated. And so, we've, we've continued with that idea of group, but it's been in a virtual format and there've been many adaptations now. Obviously, not as many opportunities as there have been pre-pandemic, but it's that idea of talking, having the conversation and figuring out is there something that can fit even during this time. What adaptations do we need to make? But that's part of a conversation that you have to be able to make it work for everybody, so.

Dianne: And simply acknowledging the offer of goodwill is volunteering. The, the education, as you said, you know, learning about an issue and learning about how you can support the learning curve is what we're all about. We need people from all different spectrums, whether they're youth, baby boomers, or whenever they come to volunteering, which keeps it

interesting, for sure, to, to have the spectrum open to everybody. We haven't always been able to do that. When they put the, kids in high school have to vol, have to volunteer, do community involvement, which turned into volunteering. You know, there was a shift in the sector where oh, high school students can't do this stuff. Well, let's find out what they can do so then it'll move. And what about the, this one, the micro volunteering? Did you know that doing a tweet for an organization is volunteering? So, how many employees are sitting at their desks on their cell phone? If they follow a charity or two and retweet something, they've just volunteered for us- the charitable sector. So, that's the conversation and we've had many, so we could go on. Is there any final thoughts either of you would like to add? Did we leave something out, Deb Marisa? I think we covered it, you know, changing our conversations to be understanding of each other's limitations or visions. Those are fun. I remember at my 20 years at the independent living center having strategic planning conversations and thinking this is really interesting. You mean, we get to talk about the future of this organization as a group. I don't think in the for-profit sector- you don't get that. Would that be fair to say you're not, not always part of the huge strategic plan for that company? Depending on where you are, of course. Leave you with that or cut it out.

Deb: The other thing that I would say too in terms of what we're seeing, not just across corporate, but when you were talking about the way that people engage- in 2017, Paula Speevak, our former CEO, wrote a paper and we, it was around recognizing volunteering. And when you think of that term, you think of volunteer recognition and how do we acknowledge volunteering. She flipped that phrase on its head to say, what do we see as volunteering? What do we consider to be volunteering? And wrote a paper around individual social responsibility using that term and how people engage. And I think it's very true when you talk about that spectrum from learning about a cause and what can, how you can engage once you're along that spectrum it's, it broadens that definition of volunteering and what does that include. And to your point about all of those different ways to be able to contribute to community and the choices that we make every day, and that, that's included in businesses, when they're looking at, how do we, in what area do we want to contribute to develop in community? So, it's all of those different ways that individuals contribute and choose and make choices of how they're, how they're going to contribute in their community and how it builds stronger and more connected communities.

Dianne: Well said. Marisa, did you remember your thought?

Marisa: Just, just wanted to say, Dianne that I think it's going to be great, that you're going to be attaching, your, the document that you mentioned, which is some real concrete information. And I just wanted to say also that if people do want to go with some group volunteering activities, there's a great checklist, that Volunteer Canada developed, and it's, it's listed in the resources slide of the module. As well as the, as well as how to think about and how to implement the Canadian code for volunteer involvement in an employer-supported volunteering context. And while that document, speaks to employers or companies, it's also a great resource for non-profit organizations who want to engage because it proposes some real, some real leads on changing the conversation. You know, we talk about this reciprocity and,

and making sure that the, that the relationship is productive and that there's clear communication. There's a lot of that in CCVI for the employer-supported volunteering. Yeah.

Deb: And I think we're seeing that this has become over the last decade or two, much more mainstream. When Marisa stated the stats from the GSS GVP about how many employed Canadians are supported by their businesses, that's not by accident. We know that when people, people are bringing what they call their whole selves to work and they are, and they're looking for those values and in their employer that are matching their own. And part of that is how does that business contribute to community? And I, as an individual volunteer in my community, how can you support me as, as my employer to be able to do that? Either on my own time or through my workplace. And that's where this whole field has evolved over the last 10 or 20 years, becoming much more mainstream where individuals who are looking to choose an employer, are asking those questions to make sure that their values align with the business where they're going to spend a good part of their day. And this is why I think you see more and more employers who are supporting their employees in this part of their life as well and doing it through their workplace and supporting them also if they're volunteering outside of their work hours- in that range of ways to contribute to community, which we, in the end is the goal for all of us. To have a stronger, more connected community where everyone has a place and a space and can thrive. And that happens at home and it happens at work and it happens through organizations and individually outside of organizations and with the support of businesses and employers and just on its own. And that's the way that-

Dianne: Hockey teams and-

Deb: Absolutely. Yeah.

Dianne: There's a lot that can be done with joint priorities. And I think sometimes in our work, we, we have them help find the issues. And then there's an awareness of oh, services they didn't know existed. So not only do they find volunteering, but they find out that there are community. And I think the pandemic really brought that to the forefront of, of how important our work is. When people were feeling isolated, there were call programs that increased. And the pandemic pushed us to that, finding those more isolated and building the infrastructure of technology to reach those who are isolated. To build more sup- we work together really well. I think one thing we didn't touch on here is the list of names. And I know we don't want to shame anyone, but I do want to give praise to those companies that have participated in the Volunteer Canada Corporate Council. So, I don't know if we want to throw a slide in there at some point of the current list, but I can speak to the top of the list that I'm aware of. Because we had a smaller corporate group here in Kitchener-Waterloo with PricewaterhouseCoopers, Deloitte, at one point Blackberry, RIM- that kind of tech sector. We, we couldn't sustain our corporate group. We know it exists and supports the United Way. So, we're leaving the, the, the leadership and we're working more as a collaborative community organizations because we all don't have the same type of resources. So, we are better together to support the corporate engagement. And Manulife, another example, how they would let staff select something and

then a donation could come towards this. The same with Google, what is it- they call it dollars for donors or something.

Deb: Dollars for doers, yep.

Dianne: Doers.

Deb: Yep. So, at Volunteer Canada, there is a corporate community engagement council of companies from more than 20 companies across the country who have strong vol, corporate community engagement programs and provide leadership in that area. In resource development, like the development of the Canadian code for employer-supported volunteering, and also to encourage other businesses to support their volunteer, their employees in this way, and provide, you know, the examples of how their programs have developed and evolved over the years. And that's a very strong program, for us. Yeah.

Dianne: Final thoughts, ladies, before we head out today. We could go on. There's no shortage of things to talk about. Every situation's unique. Thank you very much for your contributions. It's wonderful to chat with you, and I hope everyone enjoys our discussion today. Thanks for being here and we'll see you later.

Marisa: Thank you.