



June 26, 2020

At Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations, we believe that youth are vital to volunteerism and the non-profit sector. One of our key strategic priorities is to *encourage volunteerism so that the sector has a rich repository of human capital to draw upon*. Certainly, youth are fundamental to this goal, as they bring invaluable new ideas and approaches to enhancing our communities.

Last week, the Canada Student Service Grant (CSSG) was announced to encourage Canadian post-secondary students to volunteer and support their communities. Participants can receive \$1,000 - \$5,000 based on the number of hours they contribute between June 25th and October 31st, 2020 supporting a non-profit in their community.

Volunteerism, by its very definition, does not involve financial compensation. Platforms have emerged recently to more effectively connect volunteers and non-profits, including a rapidly-expanding Volunteer Connector (www.volunteerconnector.org). ECVO also encourages conversations around volunteerism online (www.ecvo.ca/volunteers).

Ultimately, we encourage both students and non-profits to determine how the CSSG program can meet their needs. However, the Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations will not support this initiative, as we see significant issues at hand:

1. We believe that this is a misinformed attempt to encourage volunteerism in young Canadians. The CSSG program undermines volunteers' fundamental role in communities across Canada and does not align with recommendations from the Senate of Canada's 2019 report *Catalyst for Change*. The program is limited to a specific subset of Canadians and financially incentivizes their willingness to give back, which is in direct opposition with the report's first recommendation:

"That the Government of Canada, through its departments and agencies, develop and implement a national volunteer strategy to encourage volunteerism by all Canadians in their communities, recognizing that the needs of northern, rural and urban communities are unique."
(Catalyst for Change: Recommendation 1)

This sets a precedent for current and future generations of volunteers to be compensated monetarily, rather than through meaningful experiences and opportunities to affect change in their communities. This could have significant consequences on non-profits' ability to attract and maintain strong volunteer bases.

2. Participants are set to receive compensation that equates to rates below minimum wage. This reinforces a long-standing undervaluing of charities, non-profits, and volunteers and their contributions to our communities, cities, and economies. This

also contradicts the Senate of Canada's *Catalyst for Change*, whose recommendations include:

"That the Government of Canada, through Labour Canada, work with the charitable and non-profit sector to develop and implement a human resources renewal plan to ensure the long-term sustainability of the sector workforce, recognizing that the needs of northern, rural and urban communities are unique." (Catalyst for Change: Recommendation 6)

This further blurs boundaries between volunteerism and employment and verges on violating the human rights of Canadian workers.

3. This program disproportionately benefits more privileged and well-funded agencies in Canada and excludes those without the flexibility to invest immediately in volunteer programs, during a time in which COVID-19 has left many organizations with significantly lower capacity. This program reinforces ongoing issues of sustainability for non-profits in contradiction to the Senate of Canada's *Catalyst for Change* recommendation:

"That Government of Canada initiatives that support the sustainability of for-profit sectors, particularly with respect to overhead and infrastructure costs, be extended to the charitable and non-profit sector." (Catalyst for Change: Recommendation 11)

Operating with reduced capacity, it is difficult—and in many cases impossible—for organizations to provide meaningful experiences to volunteers in these circumstances. It is unreasonable to expect the CSSG to suit the needs of students and the charitable sector without significant pre-investment.

Canadians are notably charitable and community focused citizens, and we appreciate the Government of Canada's attempt to invest in promoting volunteerism across Canada. However, with the aforementioned unresolved issues at hand, the Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations believes the program could have negative consequences on Canada's non-profit sector and volunteer landscape today and into the future.

Respectfully,



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