

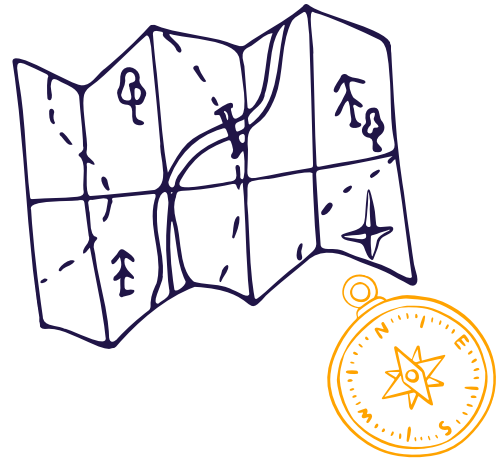


Strategic Dreaming Compass 2024 - 2026

Our North Star Strategy Document to
Navigate the Future with Intention and Care



Volunteer Alberta's Strategic Dreaming Compass 2024 - 2026



An Introduction

The words “strategic” and “dreaming” do not usually appear as a pairing. Generally speaking, the realm of “strategy” is understood to be logical, dispassionate, and linear in nature, while the realm of “dreaming” is generally viewed as emotional, untethered, and decidedly nonlinear. However:

“Designing policy or strategy without an imaginative sense of where you are going means your best efforts will land you toward the front of the status quo, but not ahead of it. Imagination enlightens strategy, policy and programming and helps you break free of institutional thinking that leads you to piecemeal reform.” - Al Etmanski

Inspired by dreamers close to home and around the world, in 2023, Volunteer Alberta travelled a Strategic Dreaming journey. The routes we traversed included engaging in meaningful and moving conversations with VA members and the people and communities our organization serves, as well as deep reflection amongst the team’s staff and board members to dream about “what might be.” The result of this work is this Strategic Dreaming Compass, 2024 - 2026. This compass is the guide by which Volunteer Alberta will navigate the future as it emerges to meet us so that we can make good decisions to bring our dreams to reality...strategically.

“Without leaps of imagination, or dreaming, we lose the excitement of possibilities. Dreaming, after all, is a form of planning.”
- Gloria Steinem

“I think imagination should be built into how organizations do their work each year...What are we dreaming into the world? How do we imagine our work will be of service to the future? What’s the wildest success we can imagine for it?”
- adrienne maree brown

Our Vision

Thriving communities nurtured by caring humans across Alberta.

Our Mission

To nourish wellbeing and healthy communities of belonging by cultivating conditions for volunteerism and civic engagement.



Our Values & Ways of Being

At Volunteer Alberta, our work and how we do it are guided by our values and ways of being.

Curiosity

With intention and humility, we inquire into the needs and perspectives of the different people and communities we serve. We question and unlearn our conditioning in dominant worldviews and unpack the language we use to name and frame key aspects of our work. We experiment with different structures, practices, and programs -- curious to explore the history of "what worked well here?" and to live into the future of "what's possible here?"

Care

We do our work bringing care, kindness, and spaciousness to every interaction. We are dedicated to promoting community and individual wellbeing where every person feels cared for and that they matter. Care means we work preventively to reduce barriers and intervene if necessary. Care calls us to extend ourselves and to bring sensitivity and awareness to the many dimensions of our work. Care requires us to tend to people and the planet and to consider what the impacts of the decisions we make today will have on generations to come.



Collaboration

We partner for greater impact because we are stronger together. Co-creation with others leverages our different perspectives and strengths and enhances creativity. Collaboration strengthens relationships, weaves stronger networks, and grows mutuality.

Authenticity

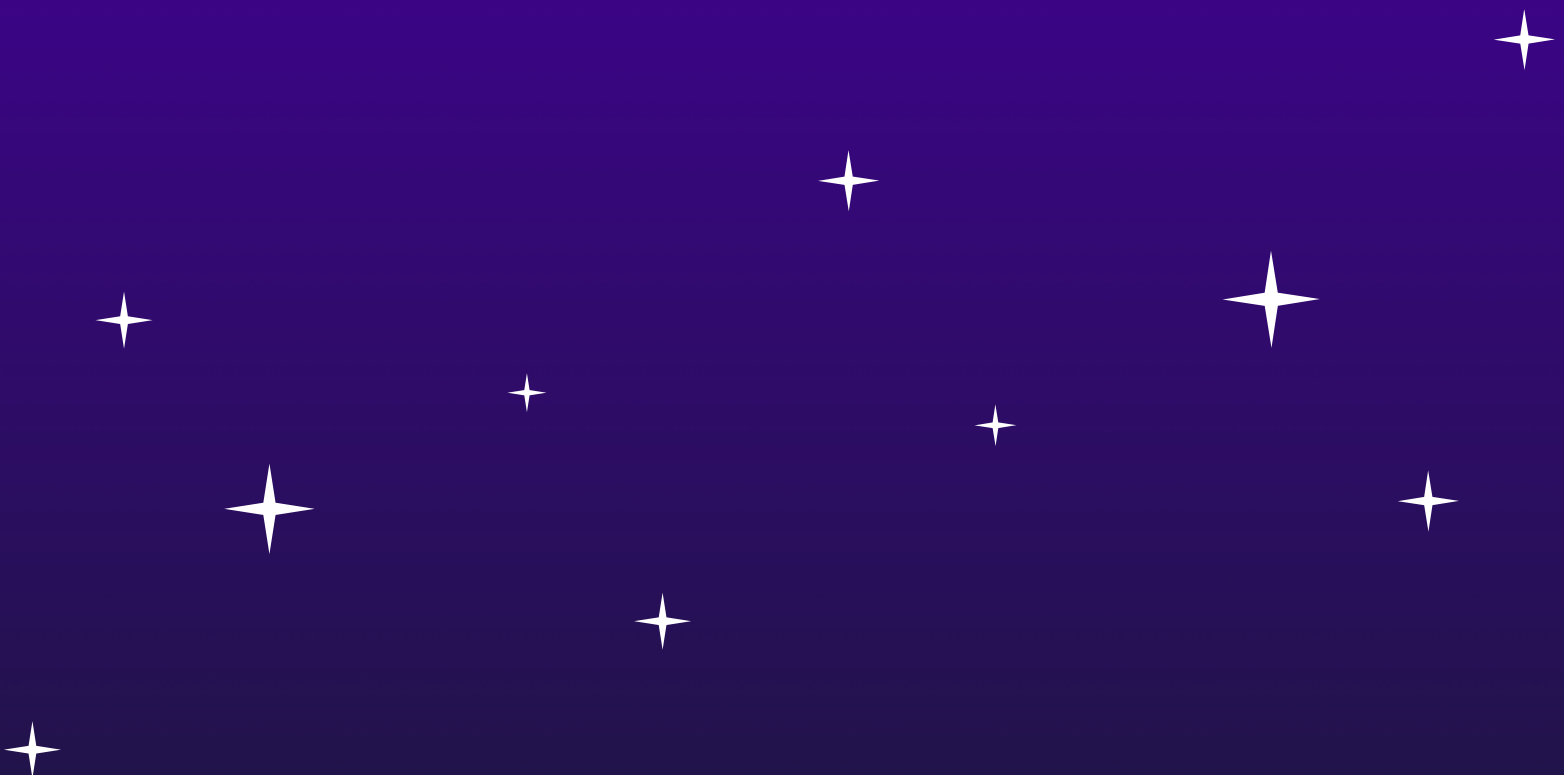
We show up in our humanness since only when we are authentic can we meaningfully connect with others. We strive to consistently bring an asset-based perspective to ourselves and all those we engage with, walking the talk of living our best selves.

Courage

We take risks. We act boldly. We take the first step, and then the next. We leave our comfort zones to head into the unknown. We lean into difference of opinion, conflict and uncertainty, taking action to stay true to our values.



***We do our best to live true to our values
and ways of being and stay accountable
to our commitments.***



Our Strategic Priorities

To guide our work through 2026, Volunteer Alberta has identified two key strategic priorities, along with supporting concepts to bring our work to life.

1. Cultivator

From regenerative agriculture, we are learning “It’s all about the soil!” Increasingly, we see our work as cultivating the conditions for Albertans to thrive, individually and collectively. Three key guiding elements help us discern where we can have the most impact.

We are connectors

Volunteer Alberta convenes networks and collaborates across sectors to nourish relationships and advance collective work. We do this by:

- Bridging relationships and linking people, organizations and institutions that should know about each other to uplift their work.
- Facilitating partnerships that advance volunteerism and civic engagement.
- Convening conversations that cross silos and organizational boundaries to support strategic dreaming and imagining what’s possible in the sector.
- In the spirit of connection and relationshiping, reaching out with intention to include diverse perspectives and connect them into key conversations.
- Listening deeply to our members to help us discern what new or renewed conversations will help with their challenges and opportunities.

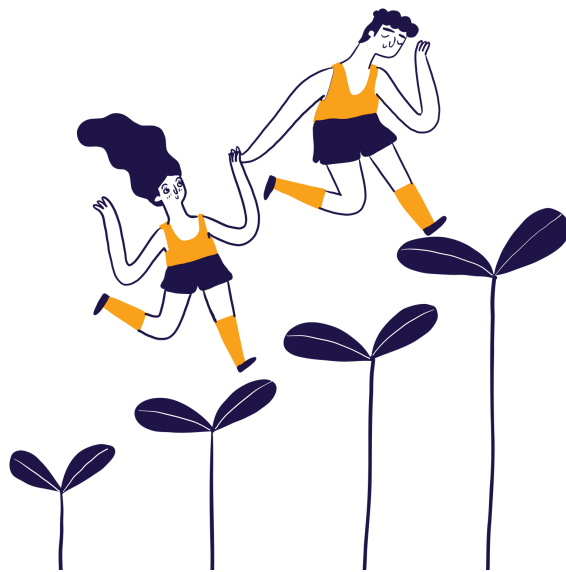
“To create a healthier system, connect it to more of itself.” -Margaret Wheatley



We are collaborators

Volunteer Alberta works alongside member organizations and other partners to unleash collective insight, capability, and agency. We accomplish this by:

- Convening conversations that matter and offering programs to nourish capabilities—supporting organizations to navigate the here and now, and also what’s emerging and next.
- Co-designing and co-generating initiatives that further volunteering and civic engagement with members and partners.
- Contributing our networks, systems support, and communications capability to the initiatives of partners and members that align with our mission.
- Collaborating with and leveraging existing civic engagement initiatives.



We are change makers

Volunteer Alberta upholds and uplifts the value of volunteering and civic engagement in the structures and systems of the wider society to enable thriving communities. We accomplish this by:

- Collaborating with our members and partners to support research, pilots and experiments that can inform future shifts in policy and systems.
- Working with our partners and members to identify high-leverage initiatives for growing conditions for volunteering and civic engagement.
- Conducting experiments in governance, systems, routines and roles and widely sharing what we are (un)learning.
- Advocating both for public policy shifts and also small tweaks that cultivate conditions for volunteering and civic engagement to enable positive change to happen at both the macro and micro levels.
- Building awareness and shared understanding of the value and impact of volunteering and civic engagement.

2. Illuminator

Volunteer Alberta endeavours to shine light on promising ways forward for initiatives, organizations and institutions supporting volunteers and civic engagement. Three key concepts help us to be bold and brave:



We are Dream Hosts

- Inspired by our own experiences of Strategic Dreaming, we support our members and partners to envision positive futures that galvanize and focus work for positive change. We seek to contribute to the “futures literacy” of the sector, helping us lift our gaze to what is possible, to dream big and to honour our collective agency.

We are Seekers

- Through social research and design, decolonization of our practices, tracking developments in other jurisdictions, and other forays into the unknown, we listen for ways of doing and being that are seeking to emerge in support of communities of belonging and wellbeing through volunteering and civic engagement.

We are Incubators

- We support the prototypes, pilots, experiments and novel initiatives, and new ways of convening that are so important for finding positive ways forward in our rapidly changing contexts. “The path is made by walking,” and we welcome members and partners sharing ideas we might help incubate.

Tensions We're Holding

As we embark on our journey through 2026, we know there will be tensions inherent within the work ahead. In naming these tensions, we do not necessarily seek to resolve them but rather to hold them with intention and attention.

- Long-term **systems change** and short-term **responses** to crisis and current needs.
- **Optimism** and **cynicism** about what the future holds.
- Working simultaneously in the **"here and now"** and **"emerging and next"**
- A **provincial** scope and **hyper-local** context of engagement in communities.
- **Supporting movements and causes** that are important to our members and team and remaining **true to our organizational focus** on civic engagement and volunteerism.



Shifts we're embracing

Several key shifts will underpin Volunteer Alberta's ways of thinking, doing, and being as we work to realize our larger vision.



From “capacity building” to “capability nourishing”

As we work to serve communities in the dual time frames of the *here and now* and *emerging and next*, we are interested in taking steps that move us away from the concept of “capacity building,” and towards the notion of capability nourishing. This is a subtle – yet important – distinction. We are beginning to understand that traditional notions of capacity building can stem from the premise of “we know best, let us teach you our ways,” while capability nourishing stems from the premise of “we honour the gifts you have and hold, let’s find ways to bring out the best in each other.” As an organization, we are moving away from the position of “experts” towards the perspective of “collaborative explorers,” so that everyone can contribute in meaningful ways.

From acts of charity to acts of belonging

Volunteer Alberta views civic engagement and volunteering as important mechanisms for fostering meaning, purpose, agency, respect, and connection. Like so many, we are on an (un)learning journey of questioning the ways in which we conceptualize the role of volunteers and many of the policies, protocols, and systems for recruiting, training, and supporting them. Our work is guided by love and the prospect of expanding what volunteerism means, honouring different ways of engaging to support community. We believe that by doing so, we can re-imagine how we both frame and structure caring to create communities of belonging and engage in intersectional healing through volunteering. As examples, we ask how might we challenge professionalized norms and undo unhelpful power divides between the ‘helper’ and the ‘helpee.’

From working systematically to working systemically

Volunteer Alberta is shifting our gaze from being systematic (wherein the goal is to do things in a process-driven way to achieve a uniform result), to one that is systemic (wherein the goal is to approach what we do in a holistic way, with attunement to the system as a whole). VA believes this shift will enable us to fulsomely embrace complexity, provide more attention to environmental sustainability, and meaningfully support reconciliation.

From hierarchical direction to collective decision making

Volunteer Alberta will continue to shift the way we work as a team away from practices that place decision-making authority with a single person or small group of leaders, towards routines that are based within collective decision making and group self-management.



Onward from here: using the compass

This Compass will be used to inform Volunteer Alberta's work in various ways through 2026. This will include - but not be limited to:

- Integrating the strategic priorities into our operational planning practices and documents;
- Continued reflection and practice of our values through team rituals and routines;
- Intentional incorporation of the shifts we are embracing into organizational policies and practices;
- Creating and implementing a new evaluation framework for Volunteer Alberta to be reflective of the larger outcomes we are working to achieve;
- Reporting on our successes and our (un)learnings about where we might have fallen short on achieving our dreams;
- Using the compass to help us understand where and what types of experiments we should run.



In Appreciation

This compass has come to be thanks to the wisdom of the members, communities, and people VA serves. We extend our thanks to everyone who participated in the Strategic Dreaming Community Conversations. Summaries of what we heard during those engagements are available on the VA website.

Volunteer Alberta sincerely thanks the dreamers, writers, and see-ers who provided us with much to consider and sit with throughout our journey. A recommended reading and resource list can be found halfway down this page.

Volunteer Alberta pays tribute to the insights and imaginations of Jacquelyn Cardinal, Annand Ollivierre, and Cassie Robinson who helped us dream of the possible through their participation as panelists for the *Radically Hopeful Futures: Cultivating Imagination for Civic Engagement* panel and community conversation.

Volunteer Alberta extends its gratitude to Kate Sutherland who held the space for the board and staff team to awaken to the dream of the possible.

And finally, VA most sincerely thanks you – the reader – for taking time to engage with this compass. If you have any questions, reflections, or suggestions, we would love to hear from you! Please reach out to any of us on the team you might know already, or send us a note at info@volunteeralberta.ab.ca. We are excited to navigate by this compass alongside you.



Made with love by the Volunteer Alberta Team ♥

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