

Nurturing Growth:

Volunteer Alberta's 2023 Annual Report



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Words of Welcome

The Volunteer Alberta (VA) team spent much of our time throughout 2023 listening and dreaming. We convened and held space for the people, communities, and organizations we serve to better understand their hopes, aspirations, and dreams for the future. Through communities of practice, communities of practitioners, and community conversations, we were able to attune to the joyful, hopeful futures that hold so much promise for the social impact sector and all of the people, movements, and causes it serves.

Throughout 2023 we travelled a Strategic Dreaming Journey, working to calibrate our organizational compass in a good way so that we can be of most use and best service to those we serve. We share more about our journey on page 9 of this report. We hold excitement and anticipation for the work ahead as we will work alongside our members and networks to bring the compass to life through action.

At the same time, as we gaze forward, it is important for us to also take time to look back on the paths VA has traversed over the decades. As we do so, we notice that many of the seeds that were planted in years past at VA are now—in their right season—starting to take root and grow. We are indebted to the many board members, staff and volunteers who came before us, providing us with good soil and a large assortment of seeds to grow from.

And one final note of thanks: we extend our sincere appreciation to VA's staff, board, volunteers, and members for your remarkable work in 2023. Our organization only exists because of you.

Thank you for being a part of our community.

Warmly,

Lisa Gilchrist (she/her), President, Board of Directors
Miki Stricker-Talbot (she/her), Executive Director



Seeds Planted

In 2022, VA prioritized curiosity and compassion, understanding that our mission to serve necessitated a holistic approach. We explored new ideas and pursued our curiosities about fostering an inclusive culture of care, prioritizing the wellbeing of the communities and individuals we serve at the forefront of our efforts. By 2023, some of the seeds we had planted took root, sprouted, and even bloomed.



Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Social Justice (IDEAS)

In 2023, we continued our ongoing journey to nurture a culture of Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Social Justice (IDEAS) within Alberta’s social impact, nonprofit, and volunteer sector through a variety of impactful initiatives. We collaborated with Immigrant Services Calgary to conduct a survey aimed at understanding the experiences and needs of newcomer volunteers. Additionally, our Volunteer Screening Program team laid the groundwork for a new Equity and Inclusion Webinar Series for 2024, offering foundational education and resources. We also launched the inaugural post for the Constellations Intersectionality Blog, amplifying voices and practices promoting inclusivity across different sectors. VA reviewed its internal practices and policies to ensure alignment with our IDEAS principles. We were thrilled that through his efforts and this work, VA’s Research & Knowledge Mobilization Lead, Darryl De Dios, was nominated for CharityVillage’s Best Nonprofit Employer – DEI (Individual) award for advancing IDEAS at VA and beyond.



VA's IDEAS Advisory Group sharing a meal at Filistix



Micheal McQuat, VA's Operations Coordinator, toasting the future of IDEAS

Reconciliation

In 2023, we continued on our organizational journey to become better allies in Reconciliation and Indigenous Resurgence. To foster better transparency and share knowledge, we documented and shared a report of the evolution of VA’s land acknowledgements and affirmations, highlighting insights and experiences that have shaped our approach. We invite you to explore what we’ve learned in the document linked below. Our staff and board also participated in an enriching (un)learning opportunity facilitated by Naheyawin, which deepened our understanding of our individual and collective responsibilities as Treaty peoples. This experience expanded our knowledge and inspired us in our journey towards Reconciliation and Indigenous Resurgence.

[Read the document](#) >

Focus on Relationships



In 2023, VA's staff team prioritized relationship-building in our programming and partnerships, nurturing new collaborations. Notably, we partnered with Alberta Blue Cross to celebrate International Volunteer Manager Day. Together, we honoured 100 Volunteer Managers, nominated by their volunteers or supervisors, with complimentary coffee gift cards as a token of thanks and recognition for their invaluable contributions to their communities. Through initiatives and partnerships like this, we are also able to encourage others to center relationships and celebrate one another.

"How lovely to open my email today and see that I'd been gifted a [gift] card, accompanied with the lovely message from my boss! These acts of kindness and acknowledgement go a long way."
— Testimonial from a nominee

Flowing Fridays

In 2023, we continued the Flowing Fridays experiment from 2022 to encourage healthy workplace practices and culture. The experiment explored the question: "what if Volunteer Alberta created time and space for people on our team to experience wellbeing and connections in ways that were meaningful for them?" In this second iteration of Flowing Fridays, every other Friday was a designated day off (Free Fridays), while remaining Fridays were reserved for independent work (Focus Fridays). Despite initial challenges, such as managing workload and shifting our mindsets about urgency culture, staff reported improved wellbeing and work/life balance, as well as a positive perception of VA. Following a second round of testing, we officially adopted Flowing Fridays as a permanent workplace practice. We will continue exploring ways to enhance staff wellbeing and will share more (un)learnings with our network as they arise. We hope that experiments like these will help to challenge white supremacy culture in the workplace and start to address unhealthy conditions such as workaholicism, unrealistic expectations, perfectionism, and exclusion.

[Read the report](#) >

VA Staff Reflections on Flowing Fridays

"Free Fridays have been my day to reconnect with activities that bring me joy. My grandfather recently moved into a long-term care home, and I've spent several Free Fridays visiting him without rushing out to complete weekly chores and errands. Free Fridays have been rejuvenating for me when I spend them tracking down secondhand books at the multiple used bookstores and book fairs around Calgary. As we move into hiking season, I also spend my Fridays hiking in Kananaskis (the traffic is better on Fridays!)."

— Erin Navarro (Senior Coordinator, Learning and Resources)

"Having an extra day in my week allows me to dedicate time to things that are important to me like volunteering. Volunteering helps me stay connected to my community, and it feels rewarding to support organizations that are contributing to meaningful causes."

— Francine Wong Zentner (Marketing and Communications Specialist)



ON THE BLOG

FLOWING FRIDAYS
STAFF REFLECTION BY
GRAEME DEARDEN

[Read the blog](#) >

Cultivating

Throughout 2023 we tended to VA's core programs to ensure they continued to support the evolving needs of our members and the broader nonprofit/voluntary/social impact sector sustainably. These initiatives have grown in a good way and have borne some exciting new developments. We are committed to ensuring that these programs bloom and continue to provide ongoing support and nourishment for our community.



Volunteer Screening Program

Supported by the Government of Alberta, and following the completion of extensive research in 2022, the Volunteer Screening Program (VSP) team focused on implementing the recommendations outlined in the community report "Changing the Conversation" in 2023. In addition to continuing in-person volunteer workshops, a highlight for the VSP team was preparing for the launch of the 2024 Equity and Inclusion in Volunteer Screening Webinar Series that was created in collaboration with learning partners from IntegralOrg and Immigrant Services Calgary.



[Read the report](#) >

In 2023, the VSP provided services to over 450 organizations across its Vulnerable Sector Check Fee Waiver, Screening Development Grants, and educational offerings. VSP also distributed 11 Screening Development Grants to the following organizations, who used the grant to develop new and improved volunteer screening practices, policies, and procedures:

- Aspire Hub · Edmonton Aboriginal Seniors Centre · Indian Society of Calgary · Paralympic Sports · Agriculture for Life · Dollar Detectives · Fort Saskatchewan Boys & Girls Club · Independent Living Resource Centre · Institute of African Advancement · Punjabi Community Health Services · Westlock Victim Services

Webinets: VSP Offered Accessible and 'Quick' Education Opportunities

As one of the flagship programs at Volunteer Alberta, the VSP continues to innovate and serve the community in diverse ways. While VSP has traditionally offered numerous learning opportunities for both members and the public, in 2023, the program adapted to address some of the challenges people face when engaging online. To better accommodate these needs, we developed our first concise and accessible "webinette" to make it easier for participants to engage with the content in their busy schedules.



[Recordings & sides](#) >



National Volunteer Week

Through the support of the Government of Alberta, and for the first time since 2019, VA team members resumed attending National Volunteer Week (NVW) events in person. In 2023, we visited 11 sites and met with long-standing member organizations and NVW Enhancement Grant recipients. We were particularly excited to visit communities VA had not yet had the opportunity to recently visit in person, including Hanna, Kneehill, and Drumheller. Throughout 2023, our "Around Alberta" blog series highlighted several exemplary organizations in eight posts, showcasing their outstanding efforts in celebrating volunteers. Communities, especially smaller ones, reported appreciating the presence of VA staff members at their NVW events.



Francine and Eunice with David Maffitt of Volunteer Airdrie at their NVW celebration



ON THE BLOG
AROUND ALBERTA

[Read the blogs](#) >

Alberta Civil Society Emerging Leaders Program (ACSEL)

Volunteer Alberta continued to embrace innovative approaches to youth engagement in 2023. Through the financial support of Canada Service Corps, VA launched the Alberta Civil Society Emerging Leaders (ACSEL) Microgrant Program and enabled 16 youth to initiate community-based projects across the province and nation. Participants received 21 hours of project management training to support their efforts. Collectively, the 16 projects reached over 1,500 individuals as participants and volunteers, with an even broader reach through social media engagement and promotions.

"I think simply having the opportunity to change something in my community is what I liked most about ACSEL. Its not often that we have the chance to develop these kinds of skills and experiences while actually making a difference in our communities." — ACSEL Year 1 Participant

[View ACSEL projects](#) >

Community Nonprofit Internship Program (CNIIP) Pilot

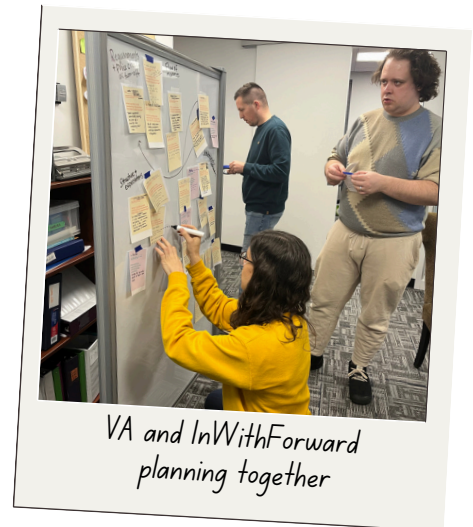
Additionally, through the financial support of the Government of Canada we piloted the Community Nonprofit Internship Program (CNIIP). Funded by the Government of Canada under the Community Services Recovery Fund, this new program built upon the former Serving Communities Internship Program (SCiP), which welcomed over 1,000 interns annually and distributed bursaries to each participant until the program ended in 2019. The CNIIP Pilot evolved SCiP's legacy by experimenting with a new bursary funding model through partnerships with organizations and institutions across the province, including Big Brothers Big Sisters Edmonton and EverActive Schools. VA secured funding for a 12-month experiment in 2023 and 2024, and based on what we learn during the pilot, we will work to secure ongoing funding.

"I really enjoy getting to work with the kids that were assigned to me, which is amazing. I feel like I'm making a difference in their lives, which makes me very happy." — Renee Hart, CNIIP Intern

"For us as an organization, we have not seen the kind of uptake on volunteerism and applications and interest in all of COVID since March 2020...We have not seen this kind of interest from volunteers until we did this [pilot]."
— Kim Collister, BGCBigs

Branching Out

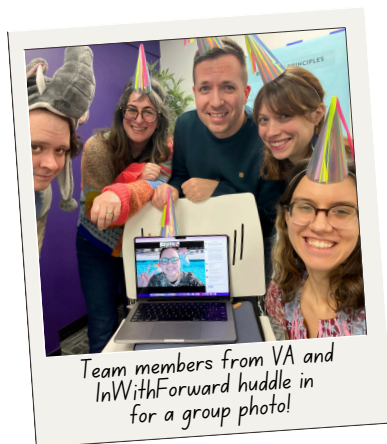
We were proud to reflect on our efforts to both broaden and deepen our relationships. We embarked on a journey of discovery and experimentation to enhance our engagement and meaningfully support a diverse range of communities. Just as a tree reaches out to touch the sky, we reached out to create positive change and foster inclusivity in the communities we serve.



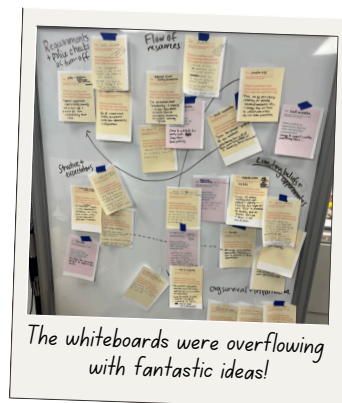
VA and InWithForward planning together

(Re) Engaging Volunteerism from the Ground Up

In 2023, Volunteer Alberta set out to better understand and re-imagine the dynamics of volunteerism in Alberta from a ground-up perspective. We were curious to learn about the motivations, desires, experiences, values, enablers and obstacles of people who are and aren't engaged in both formal and informal volunteerism, including those whose voices are excluded or contributions discounted. To do so, we launched the research project (Re) Engaged: Volunteerism from the Ground Up. In collaboration with InWithForward and BGCBigs Edmonton, (Re) Engaged is a project that hopes to understand and reshape volunteerism in Alberta from a grassroots perspective. In 2024, we will be diving deep into why people volunteer, what gets in the way, and how we can make it better for everyone. Engaging in a community-based research approach, we'll listen closely to community members and create new ideas and solutions together. We want to make volunteering more meaningful and inclusive, building stronger communities along the way. In 2023, we did the groundwork that will enable us to officially kick off the community-based research in June 2024. We're excited for the work ahead!



Team members from VA and InWithForward huddle in for a group photo!



The whiteboards were overflowing with fantastic ideas!

Reimagining Learning and Coming Together

Community of Practices: CONNECT Call for Volunteer Coordinators, and Research and Knowledge Mobilization

Our Community of Practices (CoP) initiatives were effective spaces for bringing people across Alberta together to engage in dialogue, build networks, and share learnings on various topics.

The initial CONNECT Call CoP brought together volunteer specialists from across the province, where they collaboratively identified topics and conversations for the upcoming year. This space was designed with a community-based approach, ensuring inclusive and relevant discussions. Throughout 2023, the CoP welcomed subject matter experts to share promising practices with participants.

Supported by an Anonymous Donor, the Research and Knowledge Mobilization CoP was established to gather a diverse group, including professors, graduate students, nonprofit workers, and community-based researchers. This CoP focuses on making data, research, and knowledge more accessible to the sector. Regular meetings provided a platform to discuss crucial topics and support one another in overcoming challenges related to knowledge mobilization in the nonprofit and community sectors.

(Un)Learning Workshops

In an exciting experiment, we kicked off with something truly special: our (Un)learning workshop series. Developed in collaboration with Sidekicks, these workshops focused on unlearning associated with thinking, doing, and being. By helping participants unpack current mindsets and habits, we made space for fresh perspectives and actions. These sessions weren't just another workshop; they were about evolving together, embodying our commitment to growth and change within our organization and beyond.

Re-vitalizing Alberta Nonprofit Network (ABNN) Gatherings

In 2023, the Alberta Nonprofit Network (ABNN) convened organizations and interested parties around provincial sector issues. Network Stewards for 2023 included: Calgary Chamber of Voluntary Organizations, Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations, FuseSocial, IntegralOrg, Volunteer Alberta, and Volunteer Lethbridge. With funding from the Suncor Energy Foundation, ABNN shared information and opportunities for and by the sector, hosted online events and discussions, and planned Sector Gatherings for 2024. Volunteer Alberta facilitated ABNN Monthly Gatherings, provided administrative support, and fiscal agency.



Strategic Dreaming

In 2023, we concluded the 2021–2023 strategic cycle, a period marked by collective collaboration between our dedicated staff, board members, and the vibrant communities we serve. Together, we envisioned a guiding compass to steer our path forward for the next three years. This work was made possible through the support of the Government of Alberta's Enhanced Capacity Advancement Program.

2023

Our Vision

Engaged, connected, and empowered communities building a flourishing Alberta.

Our Mission

To strengthen and create pathways for volunteerism and civic engagement in Alberta.



2024

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.



Strategic Priorities

2023

Connectors

that convene and collaborate across networks to advance collective work and nourish relationships.

Champions

that amplify diverse voices to elevate the power of volunteerism and civic engagement.

Catalysts

that strengthen nonprofits and community capacity to engage Albertans.

Together with our members and partners, we strive to create engaged, connected, and empowered communities for a flourishing Alberta.



[VA's Strategic Priorities](#) >



2024

Cultivators

of conditions for Albertans to thrive, individually and collectively.

Connectors

We bridge relationships, facilitate partnerships, and convene cross-sector conversations to include diverse perspectives, address challenges, and imagine possibilities for our sector.

Collaborators

We co-design initiatives with members and partners, convene meaningful conversations, and contribute resources to support mission-aligned initiatives.

Change-Makers

We support research, policy shifts, pilots, and experiments to enhance volunteering and civic engagement, advocating for macro- and micro-level changes to build thriving communities.

Illuminators

that endeavour to shine a light on promising ways forward for initiatives, organizations and institutions supporting volunteers and civic engagement.

Dream Hosts

We help members and partners to envision positive futures that galvanize and focus work for positive change and contribute to the "futures literacy" of our sector.

Seekers

We engage in social research, aim to decolonize our practices, and explore developments in adjacent jurisdictions that support communities of belonging and wellbeing.

Incubators

We support prototypes, pilots, and novel initiatives, welcoming ideas from our community to navigate our rapidly changing contexts and find positive ways forward.

Calibrating the Compass



What We Heard in Our Strategic Dreaming Process that Guided Our Compass



VA's Evolving Approach to Communications

VA's Communications Plan from 2021-2023 focused on enhancing reach and engagement by aligning communications goals with strategic priorities. In 2023, as we engaged in strategic dreaming, we began to shift to a warmer and more conversational tone in our communications. We prioritized clarity and concision in our communications to effectively convey the benefits of VA programs and services to empower our members and enhance their capabilities. We focused on promoting VA-developed content, introduced new visual branding to distinguish new initiatives, and remained responsive to key performance indicators for data-driven improvements. As sector champions, we promoted members' events and initiatives for National Volunteer Week (NVW) and throughout the year on social media. As catalysts, we shared internal and external resources and events that built capacity with our network. To enhance brand recognition with our audiences, we introduced refreshed visual branding for projects such as ACSEL, CNiP, VSP Webinars, NVW campaign, and the Strategic Dreaming Community Conversations, ensuring cohesive messaging and appealing visuals that aligned with the VA brand. These strategies increased follower counts on social media and our average post engagement by 29%. Looking to 2024, our new 2024-2026 strategic priorities, alongside member feedback, will guide the creation of a new communications plan focused on delivering more VA-developed content and more of what our members value.

11 Screening Development Grant Recipients

359 members

39 learning events
1200 attendees



100 Volunteer Managers recognized across the province International Volunteer Manager Day

69 new members

Participated in
25 networks

\$80K in accelerator grants distributed to youth-led projects

400+



Organizations who can access the Vulnerable Sector Check Fee Waiver

14 Communities of Practice held

120 CoP participants

76 post-secondary interns students through CNiP Pilot

16 youth-led community projects launched through ACSEL

1500+ community members impacted by the ACSEL projects

474 Customer Service Inquiries completed



73

Recipients of National Volunteer Week Enhancement Funding

VA IN 2023 BY THE NUMBERS

Social Media and Digital Presence

20
Newsletters
Delivered

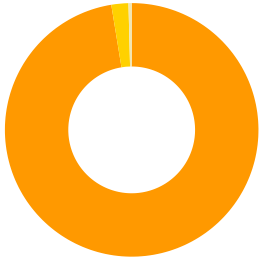


VA Website
111,933 website impressions

94 posts
100 posts
15 posts
354 New Followers
449 Post shares on social media

LinkedIn Followers **2,629**
 Facebook Followers **3,637**
 Facebook Page Likes **2,726**

Financials



\$1,748,153 REVENUE

- \$1,703,145 Contracts/Grants/Contributions
- \$37,915 Memberships/Workshops/Donations
- \$7,093 Interest



\$1,737,170 EXPENSES

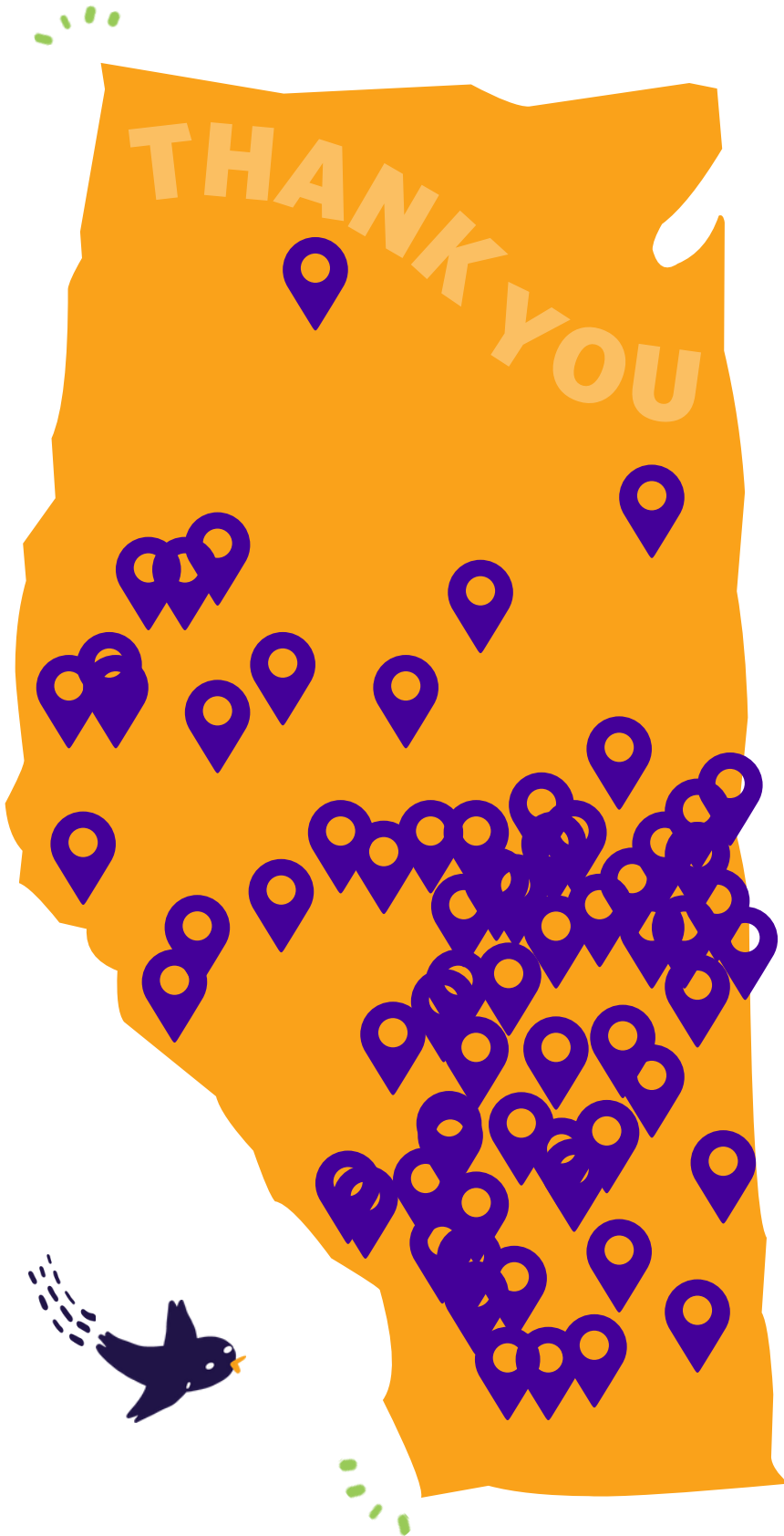
- \$1,540,094 Programs/Services/Resources
- \$197,076 Management/Admin



Enrichers

We extend our deepest gratitude to the enrichers at Volunteer Alberta. In the vibrant garden of our organization, our enrichers were the nourishing roots and radiant sunbeams that helped us grow and flourish. From our generous funders, donors, and dedicated members to our passionate board, staff and volunteers, each of whom played a vital role in cultivating thriving and inclusive communities. Together, we planted seeds of change and continued to nurture a garden where everyone can blossom. Thank you for being the enrichers of our mission and for helping us sow a brighter future!





To our members: thank you.

Reflecting on the past year, we offer our sincerest gratitude to our members, both longstanding and new. We are grateful for the opportunity to work alongside you, learn from you, and co-design initiatives that generate collective insight, capability, and agency.

The ongoing support of our members inspires us and brings us closer to our vision of thriving communities nurtured by caring humans across Alberta.

Member Benefit Partners

We would also like to recognize our Member Benefit Partners, who helped us enhance the work of our members. These partner collaborations helped us ensure our membership offerings stay relevant and helped organizations to adapt to the ever-evolving sector landscape.



[Learn more about membership](#)



A Special Thank You to Our Funders and Collaborators

We would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to our funders and collaborators for their support. We are grateful for the continued partnerships that help us achieve our vision of engaged, connected, and empowered communities for a flourishing Alberta.



Funded by the Government of Canada under the Canada Service Corps program |

Community Services Recovery Fund



Funded by the Government of Canada's Community Services Recovery Fund



Boys & Girls Clubs



Big Brothers Big Sisters

Boys & Girls Clubs Big Brothers Big Sisters of Edmonton & Area (BGCBigs)



ANONYMOUS DONOR

In-kind supporters



VA's 2023 Board, Staff, and Volunteers

Board of Directors

- Aedon Janes**
- Bonnie Chiu**
- Corinne Ethier**
- Dave Maffitt**
Vice President
- Hero Laird**
Past President
- Ken Kirk**
Treasurer
- Lisa Gilchrist**
President
- Naomi Mahaffy**
Secretary

Volunteers

- Ella Romanchych**
Community Service-Learning Volunteer
- Kenzie Hopp**
Content Contributor
- Simone Michalski**
Community Service-Learning Volunteer
- Vanee Kachroo**
Research Volunteer

Staff

- Alison Besecker**
*Senior Coordinator
Networks & Engagement*
 - Andy Alvarez**
*Project Manager
Community Internship Program*
 - Cindy Walter**
Manager, Operations & Board Relations
 - Darryl De Dios**
Research & Knowledge Mobilization Lead
 - David Marallag**
*Youth Engagement Specialist
(Marketing & Outreach)*
 - Erin Navarro**
*Senior Coordinator
Learning & Resources*
 - Eunice Droni**
Manager, Engagement & Relationships
 - Francine Wong Zentner**
Marketing & Communications Specialist
 - Graeme Dearden**
Manager, Learning & Resources
 - Golam Sorour**
Manager, Finance (Contractor)
 - Kyara Reynoso**
*Youth Engagement Specialist
(Logistics & Operations)*
 - Micheal McOuat**
Coordinator, Operations
 - Miki Stricker-Talbot**
Executive Director
 - Violet Poon**
HR Consultant (Contractor)
- *Staff List reflects the VA team as of June 1, 2024*

Learning Partners & Collaborators



Boys & Girls Clubs Big Brothers Big Sisters of Edmonton & Area (BGCBig)





VolunteerAB



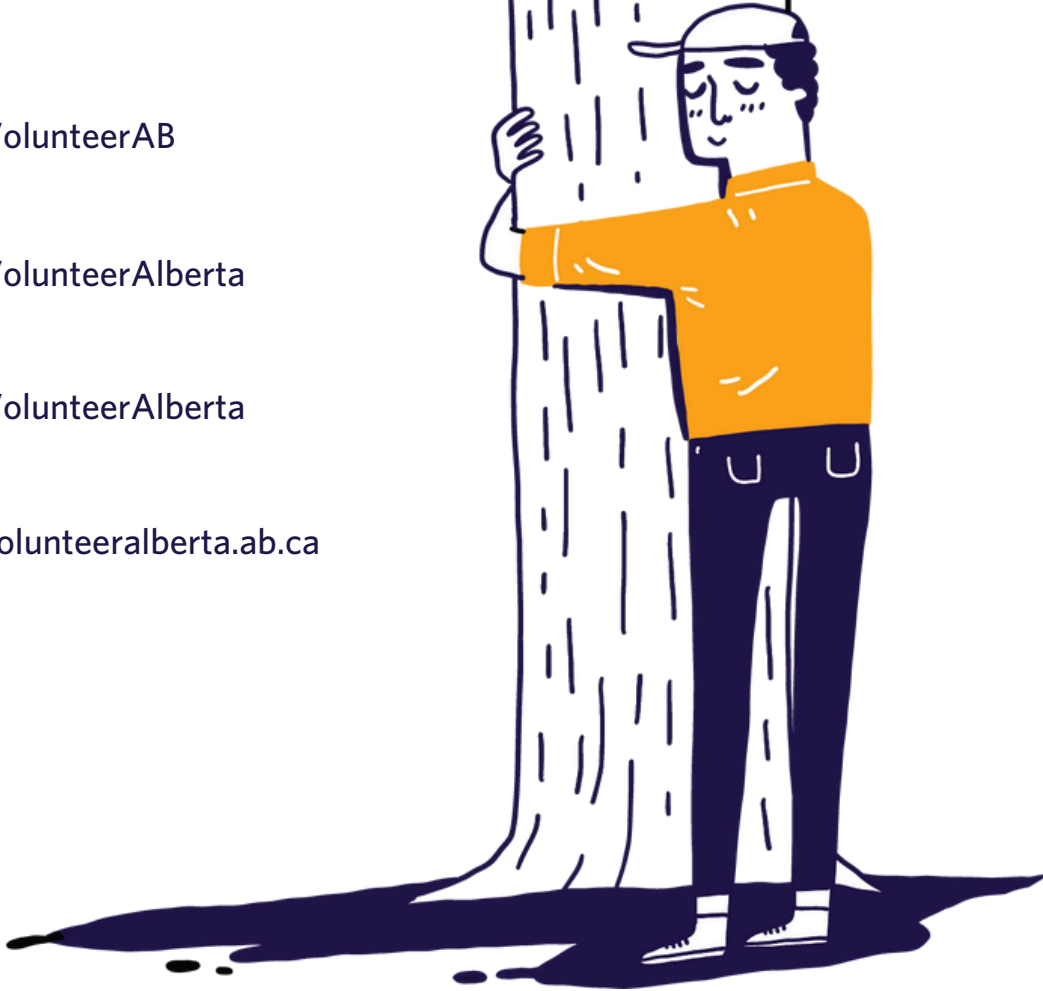
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