

# **A Review of the 1997 and 2000 National Surveys of Giving, Volunteering, and Participating**

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## **1. Introduction: The Context of this Review of the NSGVP**

For many decades, Statistics Canada has produced detailed and systematic information on the three domains believed to constitute Canadian society: the market economy, the state or public sector, and the domain of individuals and households. The large, integrated array of statistical information produced for each of these domains comprises a formal knowledge base that has been developed, tested, and refined over time: the System of National Accounts, the Public Accounts and Financial Management System, and the Census in concert with major social surveys and programs such as the Labour Force Survey, Survey of Household Spending, Vital Statistics, etc.

In the 1990s, awareness of a fourth, previously unrecognized domain, the nonprofit and voluntary sector, emerged. Believed to be a valuable but non-visible element in the functioning of Canada's communities, this emerging awareness resulted in calls for reliable public information on giving and volunteering behaviours and on nonprofit and charitable organizations. The process of building a formal knowledge base for this newly-identified component of Canadian society got under way. The national statistical agency, Statistics Canada, has now accumulated considerable experience in generating statistical information on the nonprofit and voluntary sector: For volunteering, there has been the 1980 Labour Force Survey supplement on volunteer work, the 1987 Survey of Volunteer Activity, two iterations of the National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, and questions in several iterations of the General Social Survey. For charitable giving, there has been a suite of questions in the ten iterations of the FAMEX/SHS survey since 1969, two iterations of the NSGVP, and production of charitable giving statistics from Revenue Canada/CCRA individuals' income tax data.

Except for the time series on giving from the FAMEX and Revenue Canada data, this experience has been acquired under conditions where each initiative was presumed to be a one-shot, self-standing event. There has been a sea-change in the past year, however, with the NSGVP being given permanent funding on a triennial basis, the initiation of a multi-year project to construct a Satellite Account of Nonprofit Institutions and

Volunteering, and preparation of a National Survey of Voluntary Organizations. There has been a clear shift toward on-going statistical programs on the nonprofit and voluntary domain, accompanied by both broadening coverage and systematization. This is evidently a significant step toward construction of a coherent and ongoing knowledge base for the voluntary sector.

An integral process in building such a knowledge base is the repeating cycle of refining statistical measurement: data being generated and analyzed, then the design, procedures and content being revised in light of achieved versus desired results, followed by further data generation, and so on. This is the context of this review of the National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating. This survey has had the two iterations of 1997 and 2000 in which design and content remained unchanged, and the authors have used the survey's data intensively in twenty completed studies and ten others that are in train. This provides a basis for reviewing the survey in terms of how well it serves its several purposes: (i) to provide a descriptive profile of the incidence, magnitude and distribution of individuals' giving, volunteering and participating activity; (ii) providing detailed information about selected aspects of these behaviours, such as how and why people volunteer and make charitable donations; and (iii) providing a corpus of ancillary information that would facilitate a wide range of analyses of these behaviours and the social dynamics associated with them.

This review focuses on content and consists of three parts: general observations about the survey, an extended section of commentary on specific questions in the questionnaire, and a concluding discussion of considerations for future design and content of the survey. The review is intended to be used in concert with findings from consultations with government and voluntary organizations across Canada to determine how the survey may be further optimized.

## 2. Approach and General Observations

The NSGVP is, to our knowledge, the largest survey of its kind anywhere, in terms of both its sample size (14,700-18,300) and the large number of questions and diversity of data elements. Its size, in combination with response rates of 78% in 1977 and 63% in 2000, have produced low levels of sampling error and estimates of high reliability. The survey's data are distinctively rich because:

- (i) volunteering and giving are probed together for each respondent
- (ii) other important co-related behaviours are also included: direct helping, direct giving, social and civic participation, antecedent youth experiences, detailed LFS information and skills gained.

Taken together, these features provide a set of strengths that have permitted a range of analyses far greater than is the case in any other country.

There are nonetheless a number of areas where the NSGVP can be fine-tuned and strengthened further. These are due in part to the embryonic state of knowledge in the social science community regarding surveying contributory behaviours, and in part to the low level of experience and baseline information at Statistics Canada in this type of social survey. Four lacunae merit mention:

- (i) the absence of event history information for volunteering and giving
- (ii) the focus on skills gained from volunteering, to the exclusion of coverage of other types of benefits and consequences
- (iii) the absence of information on respondents' knowledge of voluntary organizations, such as their activities
- (iv) a large number of questions which permit only yes/no or agree/disagree nominal scale responses, when ordinal-level answers in the form of Likert scales (e.g., strongly agree, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, disagree strongly) are possible.

Addressing these features will be discussed in later sections of this review.

In sum, the high calibre of the survey in its existing form means that there are no quantum changes needing to be made in its architecture for reasons of quality or relevance, although such changes could be contemplated in response to either requests from users for major new content, or to operational considerations such as a change in funding (whether upward or downward), unacceptable response rates, a change in sample size, etc. Thus, much of our review will take the form of fine-tuning the questionnaire — in the following section, commenting on selected questions that our analyses have identified as being of little analytical value or statistical significance and therefore candidates for deletion, or as needing modification or elaboration in order to become more meaningful or useful.

The identification of questions for commentary is based in part on substantive or interpretive considerations and in part on statistical measurement considerations. In the course of completing several thousand regression analyses using the NSGVP data file, we found that some variables were strongly and consistently influential while many others were not. We have summarized in the following list the relative influence, in descending order, of the NSGVP's variables used in an examination of the distinguishing characteristics of active volunteers. Because the pattern of ordering in this list generally held true in different contexts and also for charitable donors as well, it provides a reasonably reliable measure of the relative usefulness and importance of these variables.

Variables Correlated with Volunteering in Approximate Descending Order of Influence\*

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Civic participation  
 Informal helping  
 Giving decile  
 Youth student govt  
 Social participation  
 Religion  
 Impure giving  
 Household size  
 Planned giving  
 Occupation  
 Children 6-12  
 Marital Status  
 Education  
 Children 13-17  
 Ethnicity  
 Hrs worked/week  
 Religious donations  
 Satisfaction  
 Owe community  
 Youth religious org  
 Secular donations  
 Class of Worker  
 Youth volunteer  
 Youth rolemodel  
 Health  
 Pct religious giving  
 Giver  
 Yrs resident  
 Personal interest  
 Youth teams  
 Age  
 Children 18+  
 Control  
 Gender  
 Immigrant  
 Pure giving  
 Youth group  
 Language  
 TV hours  
 Income  
 News  
 Children 0-5  
 Voted

\* See Reed and Selbee, 2000, for a detailed explanation of how the relative position of each of these 43 variables was determined

### 3. Commentary on Specific Questions

This section is organized in terms of the format of the NSGVP Questionnaire Table of Contents, which contains 22 separate Sections concerned with a specific issue or topic. Each set of comments is preceded by the identification number and wording of the question commented on.

#### Section 2: Formal Volunteering Tasks (FV)

Questions FVQ02 to FVQ16

**In the past 12 months, as an unpaid volunteer for an organization: ... did you do any canvassing, campaigning, or fundraising? (etc.)**

These questions serve as prompts to help respondents identify the full span of their formal volunteering activities. From the information supplied in this section, it is possible to produce estimates of the proportion of volunteers involved in each type of work over the previous twelve months. Beyond this, however, the value of these questions is limited by the fact there is no information about how much of each volunteer's time was spent on each type of task. Since 75 percent of volunteers reported engaging in two or more tasks, and 30 percent in five or more, it is impossible to determine whether any given volunteer was mainly involved in one or two types of work and only peripherally involved in others, or if their time was evenly distributed across a number of tasks. This is important because some of the fourteen tasks clearly involve the work of running or managing the organization itself (board or committee member, managing and administrative work) while others are involved directly in helping the organization's clientele (teaching, coaching, delivering food), others in providing support services (telephoning, stuffing envelopes), and still others probably involve several functions (fundraising, managing events). Smith (1997) suggests that there are important differences in who volunteers and why between individuals involved mainly in the first type of work — those involved in maintaining the organization itself — and those

involved in the second type — volunteers who provide a service directly to a clientele. At a minimum, knowing the distribution of each volunteer's time across various tasks may shed light on the difference between high- and low-commitment volunteers in terms of the main tasks they undertake and the levels of responsibility associated with those tasks.

Ideally, volunteers would be asked not only how much of their time is spent on each task in general, but would be asked how their time was distributed across these tasks for each organization on which they report in detail (up to three). It would then be possible to determine whether or not individuals who volunteer for more than one organization are involved in similar or very different tasks across organizations, and to connect the type of work they do to the type of organization they work for.

For these questions to be of use beyond simply identifying the proportion who do each task, some effort to have volunteers identify where most of their time was spent is needed. At a minimum, this would involve having respondents identify their “main activity” as a volunteer, but ideally would involve asking them to distribute their time across these tasks for each detailed organizational report. In this regard, it may also be useful to ask whether or not the individual's position in the organization has a formal “job title”. This would add to our ability to distinguish between those involved in running the organization and those who are the “foot soldiers” or who deal with the organization's clientele.

In this section of the questionnaire it is also important to ask non-volunteers (those who have done no volunteering over the past twelve months) whether or not they have ever been a formal volunteer, and if so, how long it has been since they last volunteered and an estimate of how many hours per month they worked as volunteers. This information is very important because it is conceptually inaccurate to treat those who did not volunteer in the past twelve months but were volunteers previously, in the same way as those who have never been volunteers, or whose connection to volunteering in the past involved a very low commitment of time.



Finally, for all respondents, a single question should be asked about whether or not anyone else in their household (where appropriate) is currently a volunteer. Since contextual factors influence behaviour, information about others in the household would be useful in distinguishing between non-volunteers with at least some potential connection to the voluntary sector and those without.

#### Section 4: Volunteer Details (Organizations) (VD)

Questions VSQ01, VDQ01 to VDQ11

**In the past 12 months, for how many organizations did you volunteer? (etc.)**

These questions determine the number of organizations volunteered for, total hours volunteered, how the respondent became a volunteer, and how long they have been a volunteer. All of this is vitally important information for understanding volunteering in Canada.

The main difficulty with this section involves the identification of the organization and what it does. At present the information about the organization is used to assign the two, three and five digit codes of the International Classification of Non-Profit Organizations (ICNPO). In practice it has proven very difficult to reliably assign these codes to the wide range of organizations volunteers work for, particularly at the three and five digit levels of detail. If an organization is not among the few well-known, nationally-based organizations whose area of activity is self-evident, insufficient information is collected to clearly identify the appropriate area of activity.

Detailed information about the organization who volunteers work for is desirable, but collecting enough information about each organization in order to reliably assign detailed ICNPO codes may be impractical. Instead, it may be more useful to simply collect specific information about each organization and make this information available in the data file. One of the main issues in research on volunteer organizations is whether they act mainly in the interests of their members, provide a service to a specific non-member clientele, or provide services to the public in general. These distinctions are represented in research in this area as the difference between expressive and instrumental organizations (Gordon and Babchuck, 1959; Caputo, 1997), or mutual-benefit (members are the main beneficiaries of services) and external-benefit (non-members are main beneficiaries) organizations (Smith, 1997). There are also organizations that formally are mutual-benefit or expressive organizations that are also involved in more broadly defined charitable work through fundraising or similar activities — social clubs or labour unions that raise funds for specific charitable projects, for example. A set of questions that identify the service provided and the main clientele of the organization would be of value. In addition, knowing whether or not the volunteers and members of their family made use of the organization's services would further clarify the basis of the individual's role as a volunteer.

Further information about each organization that individuals volunteer for would include the size of the organization and whether or not it is affiliated with a larger national or international organization. The first question would ask: "How large is this organization in your community? Fewer than 25 people, 25 to 100 people, or more than 100 people?". The second question would ask: "Is this only a local organization or is it affiliated with a larger organization? Is it entirely local, a provincial or national affiliate, or an international affiliate?". This information would help clarify the nature of the organization, particularly those that are only local organizations and thus have a limited presence and are likely to have a different *modus operandi* from those affiliated with larger entities.

This section of the questionnaire also ascertains the total hours the individuals have volunteered. The data in the 2000 NSGVP show that just over 2 percent of volunteers (accounting for 22% of all hours volunteered) put in at least 1000 hours during previous 12 months. These “high-time” volunteers represent small but important segment of the volunteer population — assuming a 50-week work year, these individuals are volunteering 20 or more hours per week. It is desirable to know whether or not volunteering can be considered to be a full-time job equivalent for these people; if they are members of a religious organization, for example, they may not be remunerated directly but all their living costs and requirements may be provided by the organization (e.g., living in a convent), making their volunteering incomparable with that of most other volunteers.

#### Section 5: Formal Volunteering Continued (FVA)

Questions FVAQ02 and FVAQ03

#### **Over the past year, when did you do most of your volunteering?**

These questions ascertain the time of day and day of the week that respondents do most of their volunteering. While these may be of value to the nonprofit sector in identifying when most people volunteer, from an analytical point of view they are not particularly useful. On one hand, when people actually volunteer tells us nothing about when they would like to volunteer, and on the other, there is no supporting information on how much control or choice the volunteers actually have over when they work. Unless we can separate the demands of the organization from the preferences of the volunteers, this information is of limited use. Certainly, as it is, these questions do not need to be asked in every iteration of the survey. Instead, these and other questions relating to how volunteers apportion their time and how organizations deal with volunteer availability might form a useful module treated as a special topic and administered just once, or

intermittently. If the more detailed information in such a module proved useful to either the nonprofit sector or researchers in general.

## Section 6: Reasons for Volunteering (RV)

Questions RVQ01 to RVQ09

**People have a number of reasons for volunteering for a group or organization. In the following statements, I would like you to agree or disagree whether each is a reason for your volunteering. (etc.)**

This section on motives for volunteering presents both problems and opportunities. The first problem is that the first question, RVQ02 — “the reason you volunteer is to help a cause in which you personally believe” — does not discriminate among volunteers; almost 95 percent of volunteers accept this as a motive. As well, the meaning of “helping a cause in which you personally believe” is less than fully clear. There is effectively no point to asking this question. Among the remaining six questions, four are relatively understandable and mutually distinguishable motives: “volunteering because you have been personally affected”, “because friends do”, “to improve job opportunities”, or “to use skills and experience”. The other two questions, “volunteering to fulfil religious obligations or beliefs”, or “to explore your own strength”, would benefit from more specific phrasing. The second of these two, “to explore one’s own strengths”, is sufficiently vague as to make its interpretation questionable. If the intent of this question is to determine whether or not the respondent volunteers because of its psychological benefits (e.g., self-esteem), a more direct question of this form would be more useful: for example “Volunteering for others enables me to feel better about myself”.

The question about volunteering for religious reasons is less than satisfactory because it does not go far enough in characterizing the religious motivation for volunteering. Religious beliefs and the individual’s level of participation in their religious community

are among the most powerful predictors or correlates of volunteering (Reed and Selbee, 2000; Smith, 1994). Given the importance of religion factors, it would be useful to distinguish two components of this motivation; volunteering in relation to religious beliefs in general, and volunteering in relation to the practice of religion specifically in the individual's religious community. In the first case, the question would stress the centrality of volunteering as an expression of religious beliefs, while in the second, the stress would be more on volunteering as a normal and/or expected part of the conventions and practices of the individual's religious community.

The question of what motivates individuals to volunteer is evidently important, both for the nonprofit sector and for researchers who study volunteering. As a group, however, the six useful questions currently in the NSGVP represent only a small subset of the kinds of motives that have been examined in the literature and have been identified as important to understanding why people volunteer. Cnaan and Goldberg-Glen (1991; Table 1: 271-273), in an extensive review of the research literature, identify 28 separate motives for volunteering. Some of these are similar to those already asked in the NSGVP, while others represent motives that are not currently addressed. Selective adoption of some of these might be one way to expand the range of motives this section covers.

Another approach to improving these questions grows out of a follow-up study of a random sub-sample of the 1997 NSGVP respondents that we conducted in the winter of 2001. Using extensive, open-ended interviews with 350 individuals who were volunteers or non-volunteers in 1997, we explored in depth the detailed accounts they gave for why they did or did not volunteer. Among volunteers we found, not surprisingly, that most people give a number of reasons for being a volunteer with some being more important or more central to their behaviour than others. We also found that the reasons offered, from a set of 14, could be grouped into a six-category set that captured the principal dimensions of the reasoning or motivation of nearly all the respondents. Somewhat

prosaically, these were volunteers whose central motivations were: (1) fulfilling an interest, (2) helping others, (3) social issue- and change-oriented volunteers, (4) supporting children's activities, (5) social volunteers (being with other people), and (6) improving one's community. By asking two or three questions that relate to each of these broad areas, and by asking respondents to rate the importance of each question on a five-point Likert scale, it would be possible to capture more effectively the central reasons involved in people's volunteering.

### Section 7: Employer Support (ES)

Questions ESQ01 to ESQ06

**In the past 12 months .... Did your employer give you .... approach the use of facilities or equipment for your volunteer activities. (etc.)**

These questions were designed to ascertain the level of support for their volunteer activities that individuals receive from their employers. Overall, about 38% of employed volunteers report receiving some form of support from their employer and this information in itself is of interest. However, this number probably underestimates the actual level of employer support simply because we do not know what proportion of employed volunteers actually asked their employers for some form of support. To understand the extent to which employers facilitate the activities of volunteers, we need to know both the number of employers who explicitly and formally provide support to their volunteers as well as the number of employers who have been asked to provide this support. Once it has been determined that an employer has been approached for support, asking about the type of support is appropriate. Asking respondents who report receiving "any other formal support" to specify the nature of that support is probably unnecessary since fewer than 2% of employed volunteers report any one of the four specified types; these numbers are too low to produce reliable estimates.

While employer support for volunteers is important, this is probably not information that needs to be collected every iteration of the survey. Instead it could become a module, perhaps in an expanded format, that is asked in every second or third cycle.

### Section 8: Skills Gained From Volunteering (SK)

Questions SKQ01 to SKQ11

**Have your activities as a volunteer given you any new skills that you can apply directly to your job (or business)? (etc.)**

These questions cover the range of new skills individuals might acquire through their volunteer activities. Again, this information changed little between 1997 and 2000 and is not likely to change very much over a three-year span, so these could be placed in a module that is asked every second or third iteration of the survey.

The skills these questions serve to identify are important aspects of how volunteers may benefit from their activities, but they do not exhaust the important ways individuals benefit from being volunteers. In particular, the research literature suggests that volunteers receive social and psychic rewards that are less specific than the practical skills covered by the questions in this section. Although developing an adequate set of questions to assess the extent of these rewards would be challenging, the information they could provide would be very valuable. Types of psychic rewards include being valued, making a contribution, responding to social need, satisfaction with one's life, a sense of particular achievement, and so on. The types of social rewards include prestige, approval, notoriety, making valuable social or business contacts, new friends, and even some forms of material benefit. As one would expect, the difficulty of measuring these types of benefits has limited research in this area, but that may be sufficient reason to explore this possibility as a special topic module or a micro-study.

Section 9: Reasons for Not Volunteering (More) (RNV)

Questions RNVQ02 to RNVQ12

**People may not spend (more) time volunteering for organizations for a number of reasons. I am going to list some of these reasons and I would like you to agree or disagree whether each is a reason that you do not volunteer (more).**

This set of questions is asked of both non-volunteers and volunteers. For non-volunteers, these questions appear to work well in identifying the diverse set of factors that affect their decision not to volunteer: for nine of the eleven questions at least one-fifth of non-volunteers agreed with the statement. For volunteers, in contrast, these questions do not work very well in identifying why they do not volunteer more hours; on only four of the eleven questions do more than one quarter of volunteers agree that the factor is an issue in how much they volunteer, and on none of the other seven questions do more than 17% of volunteers agree with the statement. What is important about this pattern is that the four questions with which volunteers tend to agree can be interpreted as relating to the issue of time constraints in their lives. The four questions, along with the percentage of volunteers who agree with the statement are: the reason you do not volunteer more is: ... RNVQ02: because you feel you have already made your contribution to volunteering (29%); RNVQ03: because you do not have any extra time (76%); RNVQ10: because you give money instead of time (24%); and RNVQ11: because you are unwilling to make a year-round commitment (34%). Three-quarters of volunteers gave the time issue as one reason they do not give more time to volunteering. Clearly the issue of available time is important to most volunteers when deciding whether or not they can give more time to volunteer activity. But the numbers actually suggest that for volunteers the time constraint is basically the main issue these eleven questions identify. For 30% of volunteers, the time constraint identified in question RNVQ02 is the only one of the eleven questions they agreed with, and for a further 29%, who agreed with the direct question on the time factor (RNVQ02), the only other question they selected was one of the other three that imply the time constraint (RNVQ02, RNVQ10 or RNVQ11). In total about 60% of all volunteers identify the time constraint as the only factor that limits their



volunteering. Given the singular importance of this issue, it would be more useful to opt for a single question about time constraints, or replace this entire set of questions, for volunteers only, with a set that detailed the nature of the time constraint in the volunteer's life.

There are a number of ways to explore the ways those who volunteer allocate their available time and their perceptions of how busy their lives are. As regards the latter, for example, the General Social Survey, Cycle 12 on Time Use contains 5 questions designed to determine how "pressed for time" individuals feel in their daily lives. Four of these are used by GSS to create a "time-crunch" scale. A similar approach might be used in the NSVGP to better understand how the amount of time individuals volunteer is related to their perceptions of how busy their lives are. Questions about a time-crunch would be useful if asked of non-volunteers also.

Another issue surrounding the amount of time individuals volunteer, and one that bears directly on their potential willingness to give more hours, is how they determine the amount of time they currently volunteer. For some individuals, when and how much they volunteer is entirely at their own discretion; for others the amount of time may be at their choosing while the times when they volunteer are set by others, particularly the organizations they volunteer for. For still others, both the amount of time and its scheduling are largely controlled by the organization. Questions on how and when their volunteer hours are set, and how much control they have over the decisions would shed light on how each volunteer's level of participation is determined.

In addition, if part of the reason for asking volunteers why they don't volunteer more is to identify those who might give more hours if asked or encouraged to do so, then direct questions of this nature would be more useful than trying to determine indirectly why they do not volunteer more. Possible questions in this regard would be: Are you volunteering as much, more or less than you would like?; Would you volunteer more if

asked?; and Would you volunteer more if that meant only a few more hours every few months?. It might also be useful to ask questions about how volunteering “fits” into the rest of their lives: do they feel it ever interferes with time spent on their family, their career, or other pursuits?

Examining the time constraints in volunteers lives, their perception of such constraints, the way their existing participation is structured, their interest and desire to do more, and how volunteering fits into other parts of their lives would produce a clearer picture of the factors that influence their levels of participation.

#### Section 10: Informal Volunteering Activity (IV)

Questions IVQ02 to IVQ15

**Now I have some questions about helping people on your own, not through an organization ..... (etc.)**

These questions as they stand are useful as memory prompts for respondents, but they provide little useful information about direct helping because they do not ascertain the frequency of each activity, and they include helping relatives with helping non-family members.

Since these questions in their present format provide no information about how often, even in broad terms, these activities are undertaken, they really tell us nothing about how extensive is direct helping. For practical purposes, an individual who does five of the types of direct helping during a year appears more active than a person who does one type twenty times. Understandably, with such an extemporaneous behaviour, asking respondents to recall how often they engage in the various types of direct helping raises the issue of the reliability of the data. However, given the inherent inaccuracy of

quantifying these behaviours, the intent need not be to produce some numerical estimate of the specific frequency of direct helping — instead, at a minimum, a simple continuum of incidence, ranging from “never”, through “once in a while”, “fairly often” and “quite often” would suffice to identify the relative frequency with which respondents undertake each of these activities.

The questions on direct personal helping are also limited by the fact that they explicitly include non-household family members as potential recipients of assistance. Since aid to relatives depends on the number and proximity of relatives, and the strength of familial ties and obligations, it is quantitatively different from aid to non-relatives where these factors are much less important. Moreover, assistance given to friends, neighbours, acquaintances and even strangers is in itself indicative of the respondents’ involvement in their immediate community in ways that familial assistance is not. This may be an important indication of the social capital available to respondents because direct helping generates the reciprocal obligations and bounded solidarity that form the core of this resource (Coleman, 1988; Portes, 1998). Ideally, for each type of direct helping, two questions would be asked; first, how often has this type of help been given to relatives who are not household members, and second, how often is it given to friends, neighbours, acquaintances or strangers?

Finally, the last two questions in this section, IVQ14 and IVQ15, simply ask whether or not direct help had been given to relatives and to non-relatives respectively. Lacking any information about the proximity of relatives, these questions are of very little use and could be deleted. If the frequency of each type of helping was determined for relatives and non-relatives separately, these questions would be superfluous.

Section 11: Financial Giving to Charitable Organizations (FG)

Questions FGQ02 to FGQ21

**How are decisions made about financial giving in your household — do you or your spouse or partner each make your own decisions about the charitable organizations to which you will donate, make joint decisions, or is it a mixture of both?**

While the intent of this key question is to ascertain whether charitable giving decisions, and particularly the amount given, are by individuals or by the household, it refers only to decisions about the charitable organizations selected. Reworking is suggested as follows:

How are decisions made about financial giving in your household — do you and your spouse or partner each decide on your own about when to make charitable donations and about the amount and the organizations to which you will donate, or do you make decisions jointly, or is it a mixture of both?

Question FGQ04

**I would like to know if you and your spouse or partner have made any contributions to a charitable or non-profit organization in any of the following ways in the past 12 months.**

Suggested wording change: I would like to know if you, or you and your spouse or partner, have ....

Question FGQ06

**In the past 12 months, have you made a charitable donation: ..... by responding to a request through the mail?**

Donor fatigue and excessive solicitation are reputed to be factors in Canadians' attitudes toward voluntary sector organizations. To address this possibility, this question and

FGQ12-Q15 could each be followed by a supplementary query, “How many times over the past 12 months have you been asked for a donation [through the mail; by someone at work; by door-to-door canvassers, etc.]?”

#### Question FGQ19

Re: donating stocks. This question was relevant (answer: yes) to only 0.16 percent of respondents (a weighted total of 18!) and has no statistical value; it should be deleted.

#### Question FGQ20

Re: donating via the internet. This question was relevant to only 0.22% of respondents and should be deleted.

### Section 12: Giving Specifics (GS)

#### Questions GSQ01 to GSQ05

#### **What is the full name of the organization to which you made this donation? (etc.)**

One of the most important aspects of charitable organizations is their span of benefit or the range of beneficiaries: do the organizations provide assistance to a limited number of people or to a large and/or widely dispersed clientele? Existing questions about charitable organizations that respondents donated to do not capture information pertaining to this. The following question is suggested for each of the organizations mentioned by respondents:

To whom does this organization provide assistance or benefits?:

- (i) mainly its own members (e.g., a church; a club)
  - (ii) a specific, defined clientele (e.g., homeless people; newly-arrived immigrants)
  - (iii) the general public in your immediate area (e.g., the Humane Society)
  - (iv) the general public everywhere (i.e., whether in your region, across Canada, or around the world)
  - (v) no answer
- etc.

### Section 13: Financial Giving Continued (FGA)

Questions FGAQ02 to FGAQ05

#### **Would you contribute more if the government gave you a better tax credit for your donations?**

This question currently applies only to charitable donors; it would be less biased and more efficient if replaced with the following and asked of all respondents:

When deciding about making charitable donations, how significant for you is the government's tax deduction for receipted charitable contributions?

with response categories in Likert-scale form.

Section 15: Reasons for Not Giving More (RNG)

Questions RNGQ01-RNGQ10

**People may not contribute (more) to charitable causes for a number of reasons. I am going to list some of these reasons and I would like you to agree or disagree whether each is a reason that you do not donate (more). (etc.)**

This set of questions could be framed in a less pejorative and more efficient manner.

This would be done by

- (a) posing this set of questions to non-givers, as reasons for not giving, and
  - (b) posing a related but somewhat different set of questions to givers about what factors would facilitate their giving more. Potential response categories could include:
    - organizations spending fewer funds on administration and overhead
    - becoming aware of a significant need in your community
    - an increase in your income
    - if charitable organizations better communicated their mission and their effectiveness to the public
    - if you knew more clearly what organizations were doing with their funds
    - if requests for donations were made in a more appealing way
- and
- (c) framing responses in a Likert-scaled manner such as “Could you tell me whether each one of the following items would influence you to give more, by rating each as very important, somewhat important, unimportant, or very unimportant?”.

Respondents could also be asked to identify the most important reason for giving or not giving in Questions RGQ02-07 and RNGQ02-09.

Section 16: Other Giving (OG)

Questions OGQ01-OGQ13

**Now I have a series of questions about other ways of making charitable contributions. In the past 12 months, did you .....? (etc.)**

Some in this series of questions about “other ways of making charitable donations” assume that people buy charity raffle tickets, go to charity bingos or casinos, etc., in some measure because they intend their activity to provide support for the sponsoring charitable organization. This assumption bears testing by following each question with the supplementary query: “To what extent were your decisions (to buy raffle tickets, to attend charity-sponsored bingos or casinos, etc.) influenced by the fact that there was charity sponsorship? and Likert-scale the responses: a great deal, somewhat, very little, not at all.

In addition, each of the direct personal giving questions should ask for the total number and possibly frequency of those events.

Question )GQ14

**(In the past 12 months) did you give any money, excluding loans, to the homeless or street people?**

Add to this:

- (i) How many times during the past 3 months have you been asked for money by a street person? and
- (ii) How many times in these three months have you given money to a street person?



## Question OGQ15

**(In the past 12 months,) did you give any money excluding loans, to relatives, including children and parents who do not live with you?**

This question in its existing form does not differentiate between (financial) gifts, brief assistance, or ongoing financial support, and does not recognize either reciprocal exchanges among family members nor gifts of non-financial kinds. The question should be deleted, or developed more fully to capture these dimensions. (Some of this information is generated in the Survey of Household Spending.)

## Question OGQ16

Comments for Q15 apply to Q16 as well.

In addition, we suggest the addition of three further questions:

- (i) Have you given a blood donation in the past 12 months?
- (ii) How many blood donations have you given during the past 10 years?
- (iii) Have you signed a card authorizing donation of your organs?

Section 17: Participating (PA)

## Questions PAQ01 to PAQ20

**Next I have some questions on your social activities and organizations to which you may belong.**

This set of questions covers three distinct aspects of social participation: social networks, organization memberships, and civic or community participation. Each entails unique issues for question construction and will be discussed separately.

The central role of social participation and social networks in promoting volunteering has become established fact of late (Wilson, 2000). While this type of information may be of little direct use to organizations and individuals in the nonprofit sector, it is of great importance for researchers seeking to understand volunteering and other contributory behaviours and their links to forms of social engagement and embeddedness. For this reason, this section (and the sections on organization and civic participation below) need to be expanded substantially in order to provide more comprehensive information about these activities.

(i) Social Participation, Questions PAQ02 to PAQ05

This section is designed to provide information on the nature of a respondent's social network and the frequency with which they interact with individuals in that network.

As measures of social contact, the four questions in this section are inadequate to this task. Two of the questions, PAQ02: How frequently do you socialize with parents or other relatives? and PAQ05: How frequently do you spend time watching family members participate in sports or recreation activities? are problematic because responses depend not only on the frequency of the behaviour but also on the geographical proximity and number of family members. Without this information, frequency of contact data are not meaningful. Question PAQ05 should be dropped entirely because watching family members participate in sports or recreation is a far too limiting social situation. (About 70% of those who do this weekly are parents with children under 17, while 66% of those who never do this have no young children, so this question is heavily biased towards parents watching their children's sports or recreational activities.)

This section should be restructured in such a way that it measures the availability and frequency of contact (both in person and via mail, e-mail, etc.) with people who stand at increasing social distance from the respondent. Thus for contact with family members the set of questions would be:

How many living parents and grandparents do you have?

- a) how many live within half an hour's travelling time?
- b) how often do you socialize personally with these people?
- c) how often do you socialize, in person or by phone, mail, etc., with those who live more than a half-hour away?

This same set could be repeated for brothers and sisters, and for children and grandchildren.

A similar set of questions would be asked about close friends, friends, and acquaintances. For close friends:

How many close friends do you have?

How many live within half an hour's travelling time?

- a) how often do you socialize personally with these people?
- b) how often do you socialize, in person, or by phone, mail, etc., with those who live more than one-half hour's travel away?

Finally, two further equivalent questions would deal with contact with other friends, and acquaintances.

Questions such as these would provide information that would allow examination of the connection between the nature of an individual's social network and their contributory behaviour.

(ii) Organizational Memberships, Questions PAQ07 to PAQ15

These questions identify the types of organizations in which individuals can participate. But as measures of the level of participation in formal organizations, these questions present a problem — they do not indicate the number of each type individuals are involved in. This information is vital because the propensity to contributory behaviour (giving and volunteering) has been strongly linked to the number of organizations in which an individual participates, not the number of types they participate in. Simply by rephrasing each question so that it asks for the number of organizations of each type would improve the data generated by this section of the survey. For example: PAQ07 would become: In how many service clubs or fraternal organizations are you a member or participant?

A final question in this section would ascertain how often the respondent attends meetings of any or all these organizations, such as:

Taking all these organizations together, how often do you attend meetings, social functions or other organization activities?

1. Weekly
2. Once or twice each month
3. Monthly
4. Every few months
5. Once or twice a year
6. Rarely or never

(iii) Civic Participation, Questions PAQ16 to PAQ18

**Did you vote in the last federal/provincial/local election? (etc.)**

As indicators of how involved individuals are in their local and national community, these questions are useful. However, there are other civic activities that might generate

equally valuable information on levels of civic engagement. For example: In the past 12 months, have you:

1. Expressed your views on an issue by contacting a newspaper, radio or T.V. call-in show, or politician
2. Signed a petition
3. Joined a boycott
4. Attended a public meeting
5. Spoke out at a public meeting
6. Attended a demonstration or march
7. Taken part in a neighbourhood clean-up, yard-sale or other event
8. Taken part in a fun-run, ski-a-thon or other individual fundraising effort

Whether or not enough people will have taken part in these activities to produce useful data from the NSGVP is uncertain. However, some of these (numbers 1-6) are questions being discussed for the social capital module of cycle 17 of the General Social Survey, and will have been field-tested before the next cycle of NSGVP in 2003.

Question PAQ20

**About how many hours do you spend watching TV during a typical week?**

Because this variable has such a low correlation with contributory behaviours and because it is not meaningful in the absence of information about what was being watched, it should be deleted.

Section 18: Youth Experience and Attitudes (EA)

(i) Youth Experience

Questions EAQ02 to EAQ10

**Now I have a few questions about your experiences when you were young. Did you do any of the following things when you were in grade school or high school? (etc.)**

These questions about various types of youth experience are fine and produce valuable information about youth experiences that are important precursors to volunteering as an adult.

This section might be an appropriate place to add several questions that probe the respondent's connections to others who might also be involved as volunteers. In particular, two questions could be added to determine whether or not any other relatives outside the household, or any friends, are active volunteers.

(ii) Attitudes

Questions EAQ12 to EAQ19

**Generally, charitable and voluntary organizations play a major role in making our communities better places to live. (Agree/Disagree) (etc.)**

With one exception, these are valuable questions that probe the respondent's attitudes. It is hard to conceive of a situation where someone would disagree with the above statement, and most respondents in the NSGVP felt the same: over 90% agreed with this question, so it is of little value in determining Canadians' attitudes towards nonprofit sector organizations. Additionally, it takes no account of how knowledgeable respondents are about such organizations and thus whether it is an informed judgement. The question should be dropped.

### Section 19: Socio-demographics (SD)

In general, the socio-demographic information in NSGVP is adequate. There are modifications that should be made to four existing variables, and several new questions to be added.

#### (i) Modifications to Socio-demographic Information

##### **SDQ03: Do you consider yourself to be very religious, somewhat religious, not very, or not all religious?**

Our research has shown that this question and the previous one on how often the respondent attends religious services tap the same dimension of religiosity (Reed and Selbee, 2000). In fact, when used together to predict contributory behaviour, frequency of religious service attendance is a strong predictor, while the religiosity variable is often non-significant. In light of this, it would be useful to rephrase question SDQ03 so that it measures more broadly the individual's attachment to a community of religious belief. The rephrased question might be:

Do you feel yourself to be: strongly attached to a faith or belief community, moderately attached, minimally attached, or not attached at all.

Education: This information is taken directly from the Labour Force Survey Questionnaire and should remain in the NSGVP. However, the NSGVP should ask an additional question of those respondents who have completed a post-secondary degree. Research has consistently shown that having a university education strongly affects an individual's level of contributory behaviour, yet it is unclear if this is due simply to having a university education, or is due to the type of education received (the area of study and its concomitant social ethos). To this end, respondents with degrees could be asked to identify their general area of accreditation. The categories would be: 1) Arts and Humanities, 2) Economics and Business, 3) Physical Sciences, Mathematics and Engineering, 4) Social Sciences and Social Work, 5) a profession such as Law, Medicine,

or Architecture, 6) Occupational programs such as physiotherapy, computer programming.

**Community Size.** This information is taken from the Labour Force Survey Questionnaire and is present in NSGVP only as the distinction between Census metropolitan areas and Non-CMAs. This breakdown, where mid-size, small and rural communities are lumped together, is inadequate for the analysis of contributory behaviour in communities of different size. Research has shown not only that contributory behaviour is negatively correlated with size of community, but also that trends over time in the level and pattern of formal and informal types of contributory behaviour vary according to community size (Reed and Selbee, 2001).

**SDQ09: How long have you resided in your community?**

A second question: How long have you resided in this neighbourhood? should also be asked. A respondent's level of attachment to friends and neighbours, and to their community may depend not only on how long they have lived in a particular city or town, but also on how long they have lived in a particular neighbourhood.

(ii) Additional Socio-demographic Information

To an important extent, an individual's pattern of contributory behaviour as an adult depends on both their upbringing and on others in their household. To better understand the character of their family of origin and, for respondents with partners, it would be useful to know the education, occupation and religious affiliation of partners, and of the respondent's parents when the respondent was 16 years old.

Although it is not a socio-demographic variable, we flag here an important aspect of volunteering: it varies greatly across the seasons (some types more than others), and



from month to month where significant holiday periods occur. It is essential that the NSGVP be conducted for most iterations at the same time of the year (for comparability) but occasionally within a different season (for a measure of variability in incidence, magnitude, and type of volunteer activity). This variability could also be probed in a separate micro-study.

#### **4. Considerations for the NSGVP in the Future**

Successful survey design and management entails both art and science. Some of the art pertains to achieving an optimal combination, within the resource envelope, of survey design, sample size, question topics chosen, level of detail for each, periodicity, *et al.* In its present form, the survey is largely successful in meeting its three objectives (p. 2). Circumstances, resources, and information preferences eventually change, though, and may compel changes in the survey's structure and content. The NSGVP may even now be at a decision point — shifting from being a Labour Force Survey supplement to being a stand-alone survey — that could involve reconsideration of an ensemble of factors. In this section, we flag several considerations for future decision-making.

##### **(a) Re: Streamlining the Survey**

The NSGVP has a large sample, a long, detailed, and complex questionnaire, and a 3-year cycle, accompanied by a million-dollar-plus budget. We noted in several places earlier that the rate of change, in virtually all the survey's data elements, is not rapid; we also noted that small but key parts of this survey are also generated by other Statistics Canada surveys. This set of factors could permit streamlining the survey — reducing costs, respondent burden, and operational load without compromising the volume, quality and usefulness of the data. The simplest form of streamlining the survey would be to shift its periodicity from 3 years to 5. The primary measures of volunteering and giving — their incidence and magnitude — could be generated during the intervening years with add-on questions in one of the at-least-annual surveys such as the General Social Survey or Labour Force Survey. We believe that once the NSGVP has gone through three or

four iterations, the accumulated data and findings on detailed aspects and correlates of contributory behaviours may well obviate the need for a three-year cycle for the entire set of questions.

There are two other ways to streamline the NSGVP, regardless of its periodicity: adopt a “core plus varying module” design, or move to an alternating long version and short version. We believe there are more advantages to be found in the first, and we identified several of the topics earlier in this review that would be prime candidates for placement in a module. The alternating long and short version option could, of course, follow one or both of the long-short designs used in the national census: a long and short version alternating in the survey cycle, and/or long and short versions of the questionnaire being administered to different portions of the overall respondent sample.

(b) Re: Reducing the Survey’s Cost or Size

Usually driven by resource reductions, the requirement to lower the costs of individual national surveys and therefore their size and/or content is not an infrequent occurrence in Canada. In its present form, we were able to identify only a small number of questions that should be deleted from the questionnaire because of their low information efficacy. We suggest four principles be followed should this occur for the NSGVP: (i) that the existing sample size not be reduced by any significant amount — while it need not be larger, it cannot be reduced without negative consequences; (ii) that pruning of the questionnaire be done more by excising full topic-sections than by across-the-board deletion of single questions (i.e., maintain the integrity of topic-sections that are retained); and (iii) reduce costs via any of the several modes of streamlining described above. The fourth principle is arguably the most important of all, yet the easiest to overlook: that all decisions be taken with explicit consideration of their consequences — for continuity and integrity of the survey’s data series over time, and for other related statistical programs such as the satellite account; that is, with concern for the long-term building of a knowledge base rather than for limited, short-term benefits.

(c) Re: Expanding the Survey

It is not inconceivable that there could be reason to enlarge some aspect of the survey. While we know of no reason to increase the size of the sample (in none of our thirty different studies to date did sample size constrain the analysis to any significant degree), there are both weaknesses to be remedied (noted on p. 3) and desirable additional topics that could be considered for inclusion.

We, and many others, believe that the area of greatest need is the longitudinal dimension, especially for volunteering and desirably but less crucially for giving and civic participating.

The NSGVP would not only benefit from the addition of a longitudinal component to its ongoing iterations of the survey, it requires one. Being able to describe and explain the direction and rate of change in contributory behaviours would add substantially to a formal knowledge base on the voluntary sector. Longitudinal data also provide the most appropriate foundation on which to develop and test causal models and formal models of change processes in contributory behaviour. But as with all forms of data collection, the intended application affects the nature of the information collected from a longitudinal sub-sample.

Longitudinal data, for practical purposes, come in two very different forms — panel data and event-history data. In their simplest form, panel data measure the characteristics, behaviours and attitudes of the same group of respondents at two or more points in time. Change processes are measured by comparing “state at time 1” with “state at time 2” and so on. For example, the exit rate from volunteering can be estimated as the number of volunteers at  $t_1$  who are non-volunteers at  $t_2$ , divided by the number of volunteers at  $t_1$ . Similar estimates can be made for socio-demographic characteristics: the change in state from “not employed” to “employed”, for example, can be calculated from panel data in the same way. The degree of association between different rates of change can also be measured in panel data; we can assess whether or not individuals who change state from

not employed to employed are more or less likely to also change state from volunteer to non-volunteer than are those who do not change their employment state. But beyond these aggregate descriptive statistics of the process of change, panel data cannot effectively be used to analyse and understand the detailed dynamics that constitute the change process itself. In fact, even in calculating the descriptive change statistics, panel data are deficient. Because the panel data would be collected every three years, changes of state that recur between panels are not recorded. An individual who is a volunteer at  $t_1$  may quit volunteering and restart volunteering one or more times before being recorded as a volunteer at  $t_2$ . Calculating change parameters such as transition rates or waiting times is fraught with methodological and substantive difficulties (Tuma and Hannan, 1984:27) unless the process under examination is in fact one in which changes in state can occur only at the time of each panel. For most characteristics (e.g., marital or employment status), and certainly for volunteer status, such an assumption is clearly untenable — individuals can and do change state on these characteristics at any time. Volunteering in particular is a process where change of state (into or out of volunteering) occurs extensively and continuously in the population and thus the appropriate model of the dynamic process is that of a continuous-time, discrete-state stochastic process (Tuma and Hannan, 1984:21). This is also true of the other forms of contributory behaviour. Civic participation in the form of organization membership most likely follows this pattern as well. Charitable giving may be more problematic to model this way, but in the form of regular giving, it too is a continuous-time process. Panel data, as such, are inadequate for estimating the parameters of these kinds of dynamics. Event-history data, on the other hand, are entirely appropriate for analysing virtually all classes of dynamic models. Instead of inferring change of state by comparing information from two panels, event-history data record the actual start and end date of each spell in a given state — an event (typically, recording the start and end months is sufficient for these data). In the initial panel, this requires a fairly extensive set of questions that ascertain the event-history of various characteristics prior to the initial panel. In subsequent panels, the longitudinal sub-sample would only need to be asked about events (changes in state) that have occurred since the previous panel iteration.

Although collecting complete life-histories is complex and places substantial demands on the respondents, the potential gains from being able to analyse the dynamic processes underlying contributory behaviour cannot be understated. Event-history data are arguably the best way to develop and test causal models of behaviour, and in some respects are the only way to incorporate time and all its implications into these models.

Some of the other topics for possible inclusion (optimally, as occasional modules rather than as permanent blocks of questions) are: (i) types of benefits and consequences of volunteering; (ii) the mode of donation solicitation (or “being asked”); (iii) the span of benefit/beneficiaries of organizations; (iv) respondents’ knowledge and judgement of volunteer and charitable organizations/activities in their community; (v) whether respondents have been recipients of or experienced the impact of activities by voluntary organizations; (vi) finer-grained examination of pure (no personal benefit) and mixed donative behaviours; (vii) probing the nature of direct personal helping and its links to formal volunteering; and (viii) selected attitudes, values and beliefs of respondents pertaining to the place and functioning of giving and volunteering in our society that conceivably influence whether and how much Canadians volunteer, give, and participate in their communities.

Whether or not a longitudinal component is added to the NSGVP, a partial event-history of volunteering for all respondents, not just volunteers, would be valuable. Our research has revealed clearly that the pattern of volunteering is strongly connected to stages in the life cycle (Selbee and Reed, 2000). Being able, even in an approximate way, to connect spells of volunteering to stages in the respondent’s life would improve our understanding of how these affect the likelihood of individuals being a volunteer.

This need not involve collecting extensive information about each spell of volunteering, but would ask the year or the age of the respondent when each spell of volunteering started and stopped, from age 15 to the present.

#### (d) Desirable Microstudies

Surveying contributory behaviours such as charitable giving and volunteering is relatively new and has not yet formed a fully developed skill set or body of knowledge at Statistics Canada. The quality of data from the National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating would be confirmed or improved with several small-scale probes, or microstudies, on a number of topics concerned with method. Among them would be (i) examining the accuracy of respondent recall of volunteer activities over a preceding 12-month period; (ii) examining the accuracy of respondent recall of charitable giving over the preceding 12 months; (iii) testing the accuracy and consequences of the survey decision rule that charitable giving done jointly be divided in two to provide the magnitude of individual-level giving; (such a study could also profitably examine just how decision-making occurs in contexts where it is done jointly); and (iv) assessing the seasonal variability of giving and volunteering (their incidence, magnitude, and mode). Finally, there is a need for (v) systematic comparison of the various estimates concerning volunteering and giving produced by different Statistics Canada surveys and programs: NSGVVP, GSS, SHS, and CCRA tax file data.

## **5. In Conclusion**

The design and content of the National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating requires only a small amount of tinkering (but in some strategically important areas, however) to be made fully optimal. It is also sufficiently flexible yet robust to be capable of modification upward or downward in size should circumstances compel it, with few deleterious consequences. Given the evident maturation of Statistics Canada's capability to generate extensive statistical information on contributory behaviours and voluntary organizations, it will soon be appropriate to begin considering explicit coordination — both a consolidation of information and a division of labour among a number of relevant

surveys. This will be a next step toward building a formal knowledge base for the nonprofit and voluntary domain.

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