SPARKING VOLUNTEERISM IN ONTARIO: AN EVALUATION OF SPARK ONTARIO

A 2015 Pan/Parapan American Games Legacy Initiative

for **FINDHELP INFORMATION SERVICES**

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SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

IN ANTICIPATION OF THE 2015 PAN/PARAPAN AMERICAN GAMES ("THE GAMES"), Ontarians from across the province demonstrated great enthusiasm for volunteerism by applying to fill what was initially estimated as only 20 000 available volunteer positions. The Pan/Parapan American Games Secretariat (PPAGS) – the provincial secretariat responsible for oversight and funding of the games – along with Toronto 2015 (TO2015) – the municipal nonprofit who organized the Games – estimated that over a 100 000 Ontarians would apply to volunteer during this mega sporting event, an estimate that suggested a huge desire to contribute that the Games alone could not hope to satisfy[1].

The state of volunteering as it is traditionally conceptualized – altruistic, long-term, service-oriented commitments for the public good – has been subject to great debate both in Ontario as well as across the nation. Volunteer Canada, the national voice for volunteerism, has led the publication of three research reports documenting the changing landscape of volunteering in Canada. In 2010,

in partnership with Manulife Financial, the Centre for Voluntary Sector Research and Development, and Harris Decima, Volunteer Canada produced the seminal report, *Bridging the Gap: Enriching the Volunteer Experience to Build a Better Future for Our Communities* ("*Bridging the Gap*"). *Bridging the Gap* reported findings on the changes and challenges within Canada's volunteer sector. Specifically, this report had two findings with significant implications for Ontario's volunteer sector: 1) would-be volunteers in Canada are increasingly pro-active and self-directed in their interests and goals; and 2) volunteer-recruiting organizations, many of which are nonprofit organizations (NPOs), must adopt new and innovative ways of connecting with this new volunteer workforce[2]. Two years later, the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration (MCI) commissioned a supplementary report, *Bridging the Gap in Ontario: A Profile of Current Trends in Volunteering* ("*Bridging the Gap in Ontario*"). This report confirmed many of the national survey's broad conclusions, and further added

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[1] Fish, 2015

[2] Volunteer Canada [VC] et al., 2010

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recommendations that were specific to Ontario. Among such recommendations were calls to make better use of technology in matching volunteers with opportunities, and to support online resource hubs that would help volunteer-recruiting organizations innovate their recruitment, engagement, management, and retention of volunteers[3]. Finally, Volunteer Canada, in partnership with Manulife Financial and 27 Shift Consulting released the third report in 2013, *Building the Bridge for Volunteer Engagement: The Canadian Voluntary Sector's Perspective on the Trends and Issues Identified in Bridging the Gap* ("*Building the Bridge*"). *Building the Bridge* reported on the capacity of NPOs to respond to the gaps within the volunteer sector. A key recommendation coming out of the report was to shift the milieu of NPOs and the broader volunteer sector from one of volunteer management to an organizational culture of volunteer engagement.

Although *Bridging the Gap, Bridging the Gap in Ontario, and Building the Bridge* all emphasize a changing landscape in volunteering, these reports tacitly acknowledge that traditions of service and nationalism continue to underlie volunteerism in Canada. For instance, by citing Canada's upcoming 150th birthday in 2017 as an example, *Building the Bridge* urges the volunteer sector to tap into national events as a "focal point"[4] for volunteer engagement. Similarly, mega-sporting events, such as the Montreal 1976 Summer Olympics, the Calgary 1988 Winter Olympics, and most recently, the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics[5], also present as 'focal points' for volunteer engagement as they stimulate patriotism and nation-building. Given the nationalist underpinnings of volunteerism in Canada,[6] the surge of interest for volunteerism during mega-sporting events are opportunities to engage and mobilize a sizeable

volunteer labour force for years, and in some instances, decades, to come.[7] With this context, the anticipated overflow of volunteers for the Games presented an opportunity to actualize the recommendations made in the *Bridging the Gap, Bridging the Gap in Ontario*, and *Building the Bridge* reports, as well as build capacity into the volunteer sector.

In recognition of the widespread, but potentially, fleeting enthusiasm for volunteerism, SPARK Ontario (ÉLAN[8] Ontario in French), emerged as one of three Legacy Initiatives of the Games that were connected to supporting volunteerism in Ontario[9]. SPARK Ontario was funded by the MCI as the province's first-ever bilingual online gateway for volunteering. As a partner-driven Games Legacy Initiative led by FindHelp Information Services (FHIS), SPARK Ontario has the mission of bringing Ontario's potential volunteers and NPOs together to build capacity in the volunteer sector and to support volunteer recruitment.

OVERVIEW OF FINDHELP INFORMATION SERVICES

FHIS is an agency that was originally established in 1952 by the Social Planning Council of Toronto under the name of Community Information Centre of Metropolitan Toronto. FHIS was known for being the 'blue book' directory of community services in the city, but has over time evolved to offer phone (211 Central) and web (www.findhelp.ca) directories, both of which connect people with services and resources in the community. Although FHIS does not have a history of leadership in the volunteer sector, the agency believed that its relationships with information and referral services across Ontario and Canada, as well as its

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[3] VC, Manulife Financial, Harris Decima, 27 Shift Consulting, & Ontario Volunteer Centre Network, 2012

[4] VC et al., 2013, p. 23

[5] Cashman & Horne, 2013; Field & Kidd, 2016; Fish, 2015; Lee, Reisinger, Kim, & Yoon, 2014

[6] Glassford, 2014; Hartigan, 1999; Riegler, 1989

[7] Field & Kidd, 2016; Fish, 2015

[8] The French branding of the initiative, which translates into "momentum", is not a literal translation of the English brand; rather, as per the initiative's strategy, the French branding reflects the development of rancophone-specific content

[9] The other two Pan/Parapan American Games Legacy Initiatives connected to volunteerism include PREB-Ontario, a certificate p ogram that recognizes volunteer experience and was led by the Ontario Volunteer Centre Network, as well as an initiative to delay student loan repayments for those who had volunteered during the Games.

experiences in developing specialized and technical referral channels, positioned it as an ideal candidate for the Games Legacy funding to deliver the Ontario Volunteer Gateway (OVG) initiative. In spite of tight deadlines, FHIS emerged as the successful applicant for the OVG, which, in collaboration with the initiative's partners, was eventually branded as SPARK Ontario/ÉLAN Ontario.

OVERVIEW OF SPARK ONTARIO'S STRATEGIC PLAN AND PROGRAM

The key deliverable of SPARK Ontario is an accessible website designed to support volunteerism in Ontario. The vision statement of SPARK Ontario reads: "To create a dynamic online volunteering platform that will motivate, inspire and celebrate volunteering in Ontario." The website, which was built as www.findmyspark.ca, is intended to support volunteer recruitment and capacity building in the volunteer sector.

Drawing on the heightened interest in volunteering for the Games as well as the recommendations from the Bridging the Gap, Bridging the Gap in Ontario, and Building the Bridge reports, SPARK Ontario's overall intended outcome was to increase the civic engagement of Ontarians by connecting them with traditional and non-traditional volunteer opportunities in the nonprofit sector. Specific outcomes, which are presented as SPARK Ontario's strategic priorities, include:

- **Objective #1:** Build the capacity of the nonprofit sector to help SPARK Ontario create a positive and inviting experience for the end-user, showcase volunteering more creatively, and market opportunities more effectively

- **Objective #2:** Engage current and potential volunteers as well as NPOs to tell stories that demonstrate the value of volunteers and volunteering

According to the initiative's website, SPARK Ontario's goals include: reaching 1 million site users by April 2016; spreading the word about volunteering; and enabling Ontarians to get involved with volunteering in ways that meet their needs.[10] To achieve its intended outcomes and goals, SPARK Ontario includes the following outputs:

1. Creating an aggregator-style web application that will build and enhance the capacity of the volunteer sector through knowledge mobilization and partnership brokering

2. Providing training opportunities for service providers, volunteer centres, and other relevant groups on how to access and utilize the portal, optimize opportunity postings, maintain web sites, social media, marketing, and other topics as determined through consultations

3. Conducting applied research and evaluation that extends their knowledge of how to effectively engage diverse and under-represented volunteers

Key elements of SPARK Ontario's strategy include reaching out to embrace less-served and non-traditional areas of the volunteer sector. This effort included full bilingualism for the aggregator website, which involves a commitment to develop and maintain content that will speak to Ontario's Francophone communities, rather than relying on translated content. Additionally, to illustrate the ways in which the gap between potential volunteers and NPOs may be bridged, SPARK Ontario's website aims to showcase diverse volunteer opportunities and experiences, including non-traditional volunteering, such as employer-supported and skilled volunteering, through the publication of stories, both in textual and video formats.

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[10] SPARK Ontario, n.d

SPARK Ontario's Partners and Stakeholders

While FHIS took the lead on developing SPARK Ontario, in order to maximize reach and impact, the initiative was launched as a partnership between several agencies and networks. The following partners signed on at the beginning of the initiative in April of 2014:[11]

- **FHIS** – The lead agency of the SPARK Ontario initiative.

- **Collège Boréal** – A Francophone college of applied arts and technology serving Northern and Central Southwestern Ontario. Collège Boréal has seven campuses in Northern Ontario and Toronto, as well as 35 satellite centres across the province.

- **Ontario 211 Services** – Ontario 211 Services provides both an information and referral helpline and a website, which serve as gateways to community, social, non-clinical health, and related government services. Ontario 211's network is made up of over 30 partners across the province with a database of almost 60 000 human and social services. Partnering 211 provincial providers include: Community Connection, Community Information Niagara, Community Information of Ottawa, and Lakehead Social Planning Council.

- **Ontario Coalition of Agencies Service Immigrants (OCASI)** – A network of immigrantserving agencies that aims to coordinate responses to shared concerns. OCASI represents over 200 immigrant-serving organizations from across Ontario.

- **Ontario Volunteer Centre Network (OVCN)** – An unincorporated network of Volunteer Centres in Ontario that provides a provincial voice to strengthen the abilities of volunteer centres to promote volunteerism. The OVCN consists of 24 Volunteer Centres and is guided by a steering committee.

- **Sport4Ontario** – A NPO dedicated to promotion of sport and physical activity in Ontario. Sport4Ontario builds capacity and drives leadership excellence in Ontario's sport community through education, advocacy, interaction, research, and innovation. Sport4Ontario represents over 60 sport networks and organizations and is connected to over 6 500 sports groups in Ontario.

- **Ryerson University's John C. Eaton Chair in Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship (SIE)** – Ryerson University is a public university that is located in downtown Toronto. Hosted by Ryerson University's School of Child and Youth Care, the SIE Chair aims to embed innovation and entrepreneurship into social, cultural, and political systems to effect positive change in the lives of at-risk youth, their families, and their communities.

- **York University's Applied Social Welfare Research and Evaluation Group (ASWREG)** – York University public university that is located in North York. ASWREG, housed in York University's School of Social Work, conducts community engagement research and evaluation that informs policies, programs, and practices that advance social justice, equity, and access. This partner served as the lead of the evaluation team for SPARK Ontario. The activities of ASWREG were folded into YouthREX in 2014.

SPARK Ontario also included three, high profile stakeholders:

- **Toronto 2015 (TO2015)** – The municipal NPO that was responsible for planning, organizing, promoting, and staging the Games. As SPARK Ontario was intended to be a Games Legacy Initiative, TO2015 was an important stakeholder for marketing the initiative before and during the Games.

- **The Pan/Parapan American Games Secretariat (PPAGS) - Ontario Government** – PPAGS was the provincial oversight body for the Games, and provided provincial funding, coordination, and communications for the Games. PPAGS facilitated the relationship between

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[11] "Ontario's Pan/Parapan American Games Volunteer Legacy Gateway Initiative", 2014

TO2015 and the Games' Legacy Initiatives to ensure that provincial obligations and accountabilities were met.

- **Ontario Ministry of Citizenship Immigration and International Trade (MCIIT), formerly known as the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, and Immigration (MCI) - Ontario Government** – MCIIT is the funder that supports SPARK Ontario. In response to growing calls from Canada's volunteer sector for an online repository for volunteering, as well as its own estimation that 100, 000 Ontarians would apply to volunteer for the Games' volunteer positions, the Government of Ontario put out a request for proposals (RFP) for the OVG. The MCIIT was the specific Ministry designated to liaise with SPARK Ontario.

  * For the purposes of this report, we refer to MCIIT as MCI, to reflect the original name of the Ministry in April 2014, when SPARK Ontario launched

A Brief Narrative of the SPARK Ontario Initiative

- **Year One: April 2014 – April 2015**
  With barely a year to plan, develop, and launch the website, the first year of SPARK Ontario was extremely busy. Work during year one included: developing and managing partnerships; branding the initiative; designing and building the website; developing marketing and communications strategies; and finally, publicly launching the website.

  As a partner-driven initiative, partner engagement was ongoing work that involved monthly electronic updates and quarterly meetings. A focus of this work included supporting the relationships between FHIS and the OVCN through in-person meetings. Partners were also involved in branding the initiative as well as in designing and building the website in both technical and usability respects.

  Beginning in the winter of 2015, as part of the run-up to the website's public launch, SPARK Ontario hosted 12 Story Labs with volunteer-recruiting agencies in different cities in Ontario. These workshops, coordinated through members of the OVCN and other partners, aimed to build capacity in the volunteer sector through the use of

narrative to engage volunteers. The workshops doubled as a means of awareness building for SPARK Ontario prior to its launch.

- The actual launch of the initiative's website occurred in April 2015, just in time for the beginning of the Games in July 2015. However, while SPARK Ontario was intended as a Games' Legacy Initiative, challenges arising from stakeholder relations with the PPAGS and TO2015 compromised the promotion of SPARK Ontario during the summer of 2015 and the initiative's ability to leverage the excitement of the Games. These challenges will be later discussed in this report.

- **Year Two: May 2015 – September 2016**
  SPARK Ontario saw a slower pace of work in year two. Although the website successfully launched in April 2015, SPARK Ontario's marketing and awareness-raising campaign, which was planned for Year 1 in anticipation of the Games, was delayed. SPARK Ontario did launch a Community Champions campaign in Year 2. However, the timing of this campaign after the Games in September 2015, alongside uneasy dynamics with partners and stakeholders, compromised the momentum of the Community Champions campaign. Year two also saw the evolution of and plans for the sustainability for SPARK Ontario's website. The initiative focused on engaging with online users and maintaining the website by answering inquiries, curating content, writing blog posts, and continuing to reach out to the community.

  As of September 2016, SPARK Ontario's website has been active for over a year. FHIS has been the lead agency that is active in the website's upkeep and promotion. As part of the final year of initial project funding, this report reviews SPARK Ontario's successes and challenges. This evaluation report reviews the SPARK Ontario Legacy Initiative with a primary focus on the www.findmyspark.ca website.

SPARK Ontario Evaluation – Objectives and Framework

FHIS partnered with York University to conduct an evaluation of SPARK Ontario. Given the breadth of the objectives set out by the initiative, a mixed-methods evaluation approach including both quantitative and qualitative methods was chosen as the most appropriate approach for assessing progress and identifying areas for improvement. The evaluation strategy, approved alongside the initial timeline for the initiative, involved both a process and outcome evaluation, which is further detailed in the third section of this report.

ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

This report is organized into eight sections. The current section has provided an overview of both FHIS as well as the SPARK Ontario initiative. The second section provides a literature review on volunteering, which expands on the background of SPARK Ontario, and sets the initiative in the context of changes to the volunteer landscape. The third section details the methodology employed in evaluating SPARK Ontario. The fourth, fifth, and sixth sections detail the results of SPARK Ontario's process evaluation, including descriptions of the dynamics of negotiating partner and stakeholder relationships, the implementation of the Story Lab activities, as well as the implementation and utilization of the initiative's web and social media platforms. The seventh and the eight sections of the report review the results of the outcome evaluation. The former details the outcomes of SPARK Ontario's website for a small sample of organizational and individual online users; the latter explores how SPARK Ontario's website is showcasing volunteerism across the province by providing a narrative analysis of the curated stories. Finally, the ninth section concludes the report by summarizing the key findings and provides a series of recommendations to support SPARK Ontario.

VOLUNTEERISM IN ONTARIO A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

INTRODUCTION

Volunteerism in Ontario is changing, as it is elsewhere. Though volunteering draws on strong and consistent traditions of service,[12] new trends are affecting both sides of the volunteering equation.[13] On one side, the demographics, skills, and motivations of those who volunteer are being transformed by changes in society and the labour market.[14] On the other, NPOs – the organizations that make the most use of volunteer labour – are facing a new reality of increased demands and stretched resources[15], while attempting to take advantage of novel opportunities for volunteer engagement.[16]

In light of these challenges, SPARK Ontario aims to support both the recruitment of volunteers and build the capacity of NPOs to engage their volunteers. This section is a literature review that establishes the context of the SPARK Ontario Legacy Initiative. To detail the changing landscapes of volunteering in Ontario, this review draws from the ideas presented in the research reports, *Bridging the Gap*, *Bridging the Gap in Ontario*, and *Building the Bridge*, as well as from other scholarly and grey literature on volunteering. To ground the literature in the context of SPARK Ontario, this review is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the social, political, economic, policy, and cultural landscapes of volunteering in Ontario and Canada?

2. What are the current trends and emerging gaps concerning volunteering in Ontario and Canada?

3. What are some promising frameworks for volunteer engagement? What might need to be re-considered?

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[12] Glassford, 2014; Hartigan, 1999; Lee et al., 2014; Riegler, 1989

[13] VC et al., 2010; VC et al., 2012; VC et al., 2013

[14] Dean, 2015; Tannous & Smith, 2012

[15] Baines, 2004ab; Cunningham, Baines, Shields, & Lewchuk, 2016

[16] Knepper, D'Agostino, & Levine, 2015; VC et al., 2013

4. What can we learn from the volunteer sector to support volunteer recruitment and capacity building– both from current and potential volunteers, as well as from NPOs?

With these guiding research questions, this literature review begins by providing a description of the cultural values that underlie volunteerism as a tradition in Ontario, which emerged during the World Wars. Second, by providing an analysis of the political economy of volunteering, the review illustrates how current economic pressures are transforming societal values towards volunteering during times of public welfare decline. Third, the review describes the changing profile of volunteers, as well as the gaps in NPOs' volunteer recruitment strategies. In light of the shifts in society, new models and approaches of volunteering are examined.

VOLUNTEERING IN ONTARIO: AN EVOLVING TRADITION

Volunteering is a longstanding tradition in Ontario, as in Canada as a whole. In Canada, volunteerism is culturally associated with a sense of duty or service to the nation. During the First and Second World Wars, volunteerism, as it was recognized by the state, had a strong affiliation with militarism, patriotism, and nation building.[17] After the Second World War, these values continued to be realized through citizens' engagement with NPOs, which emerged during this period with the support of government in the golden age of welfare state expansion.[18] Although volunteerism today is understood in terms of community service, the values that underlay volunteering in the previous era – such as dedication, long-term commitment, service, and duty – continue to characterize how volunteerism is predominantly conceptualized by NPOs in Ontario and beyond.[19]

Research suggests that volunteerism continues to be significant in Ontario. Turcotte (2015) reports that in 2013, Ontario matched the national average of 44% of people 15 and older volunteering. Further, as of 2013, volunteers in Ontario contributed an average of 166 hours per year to the nonprofit sector of the economy – a figure that is higher than the national average of 154 hours per year.[20] In 2010, five million Ontarians volunteered in the nonprofit sector, a sector that in that same year, contributed 7.1% of the province's gross domestic product (GDP). This figure is comparable to the combined size of GDP contributions from both the auto and manufacturing sectors.[21]

However, cultural values are in flux, and those that relate to volunteering are certainly no exception. In spite of Ontarians' longstanding traditions of volunteering, the province's changing economy and demographics have both impacted the motivations and needs of volunteers and volunteer-recruiting NPOs.[22] In these changing times, relying on the assumption of volunteers' altruism is no longer sufficient for meaningful and sustained volunteer recruitment.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF VOLUNTEERING

While traditional values, such as dedication, commitment, service, and duty, continue to play a role in shaping how volunteerism is idealized in the nonprofit sector, emerging research suggests that the political economy – that is, the relationship between economics and the state – has a strong role in mediating the cultural values and material realities of volunteers and volunteering. In the context of a declining welfare state, where fiscally-restrained policies have resulted in state-withdrawal from services, widespread restructuring and downsizing of public resources, and the deterioration of the social safety net,[23] NPOs' demand

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[17] Glassford, 2014; Hartigan, 1999; Riegler, 1989

[18] Narushima, 2005

[19] VC et al., 2010; VC et al., 2012; VC et al., 2013

[20] Turcotte, 2015

[21] VC et al., 2012

[22] Dean, 2015; Sinha, 2015; Tannous & Smith, 2012; Turcotte, 2015; VC et al., 2010; VC et al., 2012; VC et al., 2013

[23] Baines, 2011

for volunteers has intensified in order to meet the basic needs of communities.[24] For instance, services that were previously provided by paid and credentialed staff ave been increasingly downloaded to volunteers.[25] Further, it is not uncommon for employees within NPOs to be compelled to 'volunteer' their unpaid labour in order to sustain residually-funded services.[26] NPOs' need for volunteers as a result of cutbacks also manifest in what Cunningham et al. (2016) describe as an organizational "reliance on a regular stream of unpaid students,"[27] whose skilled labour sustains under-resourced programs. Finally, the volunteer sector plays a significant role in retaining basic social supports in rural settings, where the centralization of services have resulted in the out-migration of resources from rural areas to regional and urban centres.[28] The widespread intensification of NPOs' demand for volunteers speaks to the significance of the volunteer sector, as it is volunteers who fill in many of the gaps that arise from fiscally-constrained funding schemes.

The changing economy has also impoverished much of society, including current and potential volunteers.[29] In turn, the motivations that individuals have towards volunteering are also shifting. High rates of unemployment that have been brought about by an unstable economy, manifested most recently as the 2008 global financial recession, have left those who make up the volunteer sector with limited incomes. Furthermore, strict approaches to public spending, including cuts to health care, education, social assistance, and social services, have exacerbated the material needs of those who have been left jobless by the changing economy. In turn, the cultural values that underlie volunteerism are being transformed from an altruistic ethic of service and duty

to one that is increasingly tied to employment.[30] Research from Western nation-states, such as Canada, Australia, and the United States of America, suggest that instead of 'purely' wanting to help the community, volunteers today often have more instrumental reasons for volunteering – hoping to keep employable skills sharp, fill in gaps in their résumés, and network their way back into a paid employment.[31]

Although fiscally-restrained policies and economic recessions may suggest strong conditions for the expansion of volunteering through the increased demand for volunteers (as a result of NPOs' limited resources) as well as an increased supply of volunteers (through widespread un- and under-employment),[32] the *Bridging the Gap*, *Bridging the Gap in Ontario*, and *Building the Bridge* reports illustrate that there are gaps between the needs and motivations of NPOs and volunteers. NPOs have found that as a result of diminishing resources and widespread reductions in paid staff, including the elimination and/or restructuring of volunteer coordinator positions, NPOs are unable to properly orient and supervise new volunteers. Further, while NPOs desire long-term commitments, many volunteers are strongly motivated to return to the workforce, and are therefore less willing to commit to long-term relationships with NPOs.[33] Those who have the capacity to volunteer express a desire for new and innovative opportunities.[34] We can no longer assume that the values that underlay volunteerism in the past persist today; rather, as an analysis of the political economy of volunteering suggests, the values concerning volunteering as well as the material conditions in society are not only interdependent, but are in constant flux.

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[24] Baines, Cunningham, Campey, & Shields, 2014; Knepper et al., 2015

[25] Abramovitz & Zelnick, 2015

[26] Baines, 2004ab; Baines & Daly, 2015

[27] Cunningham et al., 2016, p. 465

[28] Hanlon, Rosenberg, & Clasby, 2007; Ryser & Halseth, 2014

[29] Baines, 2011

[30] Dean, 2015; Destefanis & Maietta, 2009; Tannous & Smith, 2012; VC et al., 2010; VC et al., 2012

[31] Dean, 2015; Destefanis & Maietta, 2009; Fish, 2014; Levine & D'Agostino, 2010; Salamon & Spence, 2009; Tannous & Smith, 2012

[32] Destefanis & Maietta, 2009

[33] Fish, 2014; Levine & D'Agostino, 2010; Salamon & Spence, 2009; Tannous & Smith, 2012; VC et al., 2010; VC et al., 2012; VC et al., 2013

[34] Sinha, 2015; Turcotte, 2015

A NEW PROFILE OF VOLUNTEERS

The changing political economy has resulted in deep impacts on the volunteer sector; however, the gap between society's changing demographics and the ways in which NPOs target volunteer recruitment also presents as an important variable.[35] NPOs expected the historical trends in the demographic profile of volunteers to persist and have, for the most part, continued to target their recruitment strategies by "catering to the mainstream."[36] However, in targeting the mainstream, volunteer recruitment practices exclude certain segments of society such as youth, disabled people, individuals with low incomes, immigrants, Indigenous peoples, and Francophone communities.[37] Additionally, corporate and employer-supported volunteering also presents as an emerging supply of volunteers that may be missed by current volunteer recruitment strategies.[38]

NPOs have expected retiring baby boomers to mirror the behavior of the previous generation of retirees, who consistently volunteered large numbers of hours and made long-term commitments to supporting organizations in their community.[39] This trend, however, has not continued as retiring baby boomers have elected to spend their time on other activities. The boomers' choice not to increase their volunteer hours in retirement has meant that a hoped-for base for recruitment has not appeared.[40]

While retiree volunteers are in decline, youth in Ontario are volunteering at a very high rate, partly due to the mandatory accumulation of volunteer hours in order to graduate from high school.[41] Younger people, however, have complex motives for volunteering. Although young Ontarians care about making a difference in their community,[42] they also see, in volunteering, an opportunity to enhance employability and build networks that will lead to a career. Hence, the emerging category of youth volunteers is contributing to the rise of volunteers who bring their own goals and outcomes to the table.[43]

Researchers, nonprofit industry groups, and policy-makers have also been concerned with the ways in which volunteering can become an activity exclusive to people who already possess significant human and social capital,

and thereby aggravate existing forms of social exclusion.[44] Groups who face barriers to volunteering under traditional models of recruitment and management include people with disabilities, Indigenous peoples, older adults, immigrants, racialized groups, and those living with low incomes.[45] While excluded from formal volunteering opportunities, research suggests that these communities engage extensively in informal volunteering and unpaid work in their communities.[46]

Finally, corporate and employee-supported volunteers represent an emerging group of volunteers that result from the collaboration between the private and nonprofi sectors. In 2013, 55% of people who were employed while volunteering in Canada reported that their employer supported their volunteering in some way.[47] As will be discussed in the proceeding subsection, tensions exist within this particular cross sector collaboration.[48] Nonetheless, corporate and employee-supported volunteers are part of today's profile of volunteers.[49]

[35] VC et al., 2010; VC et al., 2012

[36] Wang, Mook, & Handy, 2016, p. 5

[37] Guo, 2016; VC et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2016

[38] Sinha, 2015

[39] Narushima, 2005

[40] Fish, 2014; VC et al., 2012

[41] Sinha, 2015; Vézina & Crompton, 2012

[42] Fish, 2014; VC et al., 2012

[43] Cunningham et al. 2015; Dean, 2015; Sinha, 2015; Tannous & Smith, 2012

[44] Davis Smith, Ellis, Howlett, & O'Brien, 2004

[45] Haski-Leventhal, 2009; Lifelong Learning Programme, 2015; VC, 2001

[46] Guo, 2016; VC et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2016

[47] Sinha, 2015

[48] Samuel, Roza, & Meijs, 2016; Samuel, Wolf, & Schilling, 2013

[49] Sinha, 2015

NEW MODELS OF VOLUNTEERING

In response to the previously-described challenges in the volunteer and nonprofit sectors, new models of volunteering have been proposed, developed, and, in some areas, achieved significant success. Such models include: non-traditional means of recruitment, such as corporate and employer-supported volunteering as well as socially inclusive volunteering; non-traditional offerings, such as shorter-term, group-based, and virtual volunteer positions; and cultural shifts within the nonprofit sector from one of volunteer management to volunteer engagement.

Corporate and Employer-Supported Volunteering

Corporate and employee volunteering refers to situations where a person's commitment to volunteer work is enabled or supported in some way by that person's employer.[50] Employer supported volunteering encompasses a range of policies and activities such as accommodating employees' volunteering commitments, allowing work-schedule rearrangements, and in some instances, pay employees to volunteer.[51] The logic behind corporate and employee volunteering emerges from the twin trends of increased difficulty in volunteer management, and the public pressure for increased corporate social responsibility. Facing this reputational pressure, companies look to volunteering to leverage their assets to achieve social goals.[52]

Although employee and corporate volunteering provides NPOs with a much-needed volunteer labour force, from the vantage point of NPOs, this cross-sector collaboration is not without controversy. For instance, NPOs may face power imbalances as well as reputational risks in collaborating with companies. Further, there may be irreconcilable differences between NPOs' cultures, visions, missions, and values, and those of private companies.[53] Empirical studies have also found that accommodating employee and corporate volunteers is often unsustainable and labour-intensive for NPOs.[54]

Socially Inclusive Volunteering

NPOs have begun to search for volunteers who may otherwise face barriers in participating in formal volunteer opportunities, including youth, disabled people, individuals with low incomes, immigrants, Indigenous peoples, and people from Francophone communities.[55] Such a strategy requires a re-thinking of how NPOs communicate their values and message to new groups of people.[56] This strategy also means adjusting volunteer positions to be more inclusive to groups who have traditionally faced barriers in volunteering.[57] Overcoming these barriers can offer significant benefits to the volunteer sector, allowing NPOs to gain access to diverse skills and perspectives as well as tapping into a non-traditional source of new volunteers.[58]

In many places, NPOs have struggled to translate an intentional commitment to recruiting historically excluded volunteers into effective action.[59] The picture in Canada may be more positive, with some evidence suggesting that the base of volunteers is broadening over time.[60] In particular, research has identified a powerful inertia arising from service models, which cast socially-excluded groups as the recipients of services rather than as service providers;[61] assume that people from socially-excluded groups as only interested in working on 'their' issue;[62] and claim that an open-door, 'welcoming to all' recruitment policy is sufficient for accessing diverse volunteer applicants.[63]

In fact, consciously considered and adopted models of socially inclusive volunteering are required to overcome attitudinal and physical barriers to volunteering. For those

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[50] Sinha, 2015

[51] Basil, Runte, Easwaramoorthy, & Barr, 2009

[52] Samuel et al., 2016

[53] Samuel et al., 2016

[54] Samuel et al., 2016; Samuel et al., 2013; VC et al., 2013

[55] Guo, 2016; VC et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2016

[56] VC, 2001; VC et al., 2010; Fish, 2014

[57] Haski-Leventhal, 2009; Lifelong Learning Program, 2015; Trembath, Balandin, & Togher, 2009; VC, 2001

[58] Miller, Schleien, & Scoglio, 2010; Speevak-Sladowski, Hientz, & MacKenzie, 2013;

[59] Trembath et al., 2009

[60] Lifelong Learning Programme (2015) provides a recent overview of socially inclusive volunteering European countries.

[61] Sladowski et al., 2013

[62] Miller, Schleien, Rider, & Hall, 2002; VC, 2001

[63] Haski-Leventhal, 2009; National Seniors Council, 2010

living with a disability or other mobility barriers, socially inclusive volunteering can incorporate the rearrangement of space and equipment (the costs of which are often overestimated), the adoption of more flexible work schedules, and more and more commonly, the use of accessibility-enhancing technology.[64] For those coming from backgrounds of recent migration, organizational commitments to anti-racism and language facilitation are central.[65] Several toolkits have been published for organizations seeking to develop a socially inclusive recruitment and management strategy.[66]

Virtual, Micro, and Technologically Assisted Volunteering Opportunities

The Internet has allowed the volunteer sector to significantly broaden the base of potential volunteers, not only by overcoming barriers of social exclusion, but also by addressing barriers caused by conflicting demands on the time of would-be volunteers. Virtual volunteering refers to the practice of contributing volunteer labour without being physically present – sometimes to the extent of being based in another country. While interest in virtual volunteering has existed for some time,[67] Dhebar and Stoke (2008) report that as of 2001, only 3% of American NPOs with Internet access offered virtual volunteering opportunities. The spread of mobile devices and the pressures of volunteer recruitment have also made technology-based volunteering a steadily more appealing prospect.

Virtual volunteering tasks can include: website design and maintenance, document editing and translation, grant writing and research, and the facilitation and moderation of online communities.[68] These opportunities are generally time-limited and product-based, addressing and reflecting some of the changes in volunteer motivation that have accompanied changes in demographic makeup and in the labour market. This can be carried to an extreme as a practice known as 'micro-volunteering,' a more recent innovation affiliated with the 'sharing economy' and reliant on highly mobile and reliable Internet technology.[69]

Micro volunteering refers to short tasks, often of a bulk or repetitive nature, sourced out to a 'crowd' of online volunteers who contribute time but may not form any enduring relationship with a NPO. Examples of micro-volunteering tasks include the captioning of photos for a museum or art gallery, or translating short documents such as emails.

Finally, in a time when would-be volunteers are seeking shorter-term commitments with minimal delay before starting, Internet technology can also be transformative of more traditional, volunteer work that requires volunteers to be physically present. Social media enables the organization of 'serva-a-thons' and 'volunteer days'- coordinated, one-day volunteering events in which large numbers of people contribute a burst of hours to a wide variety of participating organizations.[70] Boston Cares, a city-based organization that promotes volunteering, operates an innovative 'volunteering calendar' that posts and facilitates one-time opportunities for volunteering, such as for festivals or other scheduled events, a month in advance.[71]

Internet-based volunteering is not necessarily exclusive of face-to-face contact, and can form an effective basis for socially inclusive volunteering, particularly when the

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[64] Davis Smith et al., 2004; Lifelong Learning Programme, 2015; Schmiedl, 2005

[65] Haski-Leventhal, 2009

[66] See Haski-Leventhal (2009), Lifelong Learning Programme (2015) and Sladowski and Hientz (2012) as examples of toolkits for socially inclusive volunteering

[67] Murray & Harrison, 2002

[68] Cravens, 2006

[69] Ilten, 2015

[70] "'Serve-a-thon' draws thousands for community service", 2014; UCLA, 2016

[71] Boston Cares, 2016

two are combined. Older adults, for example, or others facing mobility issues, commonly benefi both from virtual volunteering hours and periodic face-to-face meetings with their chosen NPOs.[72]

In all of these cases, the power of technology can create an illusion that Internet-assisted volunteer management is as simple as a web posting and a few emails.[73] While such models can expand what you can do with volunteers and with whom you can engage in volunteering, the how of volunteer engagement remains challenging, with distant volunteering relationships presenting their own unique challenges. Guides to managing online volunteers stress the need for up-front clarity in defining volunteer tasks, routine and regular communication with volunteers (even during low-activity periods), and a model for evaluating and gaining insight from results (both for the organization and the volunteer).[74] In the past, organizations, including those in Canada, have struggled to move from an openness to online volunteering to a sustainable, efficient system for integration.[75]

A Shift from Volunteer Management to Volunteer Engagement

As cited in the introductory section, a key recommendation that emerged from the *Building the Bridge* report was to shift the culture within the nonprofit sector from one of volunteer management to volunteer engagement. According to *Building the Bridge*, existing volunteer management strategies are based on the professionalization of volunteerism. In a volunteer management approach, human resource practices, such as having clearly defined positions, interview and reference check processes, orientation, training, and performance evaluation, are prevalent and may deter potential volunteers. Rather, the report advocates an engagement approach, which emphasizes a focus on the impact of volunteering as opposed to years of service. In incorporating elements of socially inclusive volunteering, volunteer engagement also entails partnering with community organizations to engage excluded groups such as Indigenous peoples, newcomers, disabled people, and racialized peoples. Volunteer engagement also makes use of technology, social media, and virtual volunteering models to meet the needs and interests of current and

potential volunteers. Finally, rather than confining volunteer management to one coordinator's role, this model advocates for incorporating volunteer engagement into all positions within an NPO.[76]

CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR SPARK ONTARIO

How does the SPARK Ontario initiative fit into this changing landscape of volunteering models, challenges, and opportunities? As part of its mandate to enrich the volunteering experience of Ontarians and expand non-traditional opportunities, SPARK Ontario has built its website to encourage volunteer connections and host stories. If successful, this platform can lower the informational barrier to participation in volunteering, and emphasize innovative practices within the sector. In the following sections, we will explore a number of strands of evidence to determine the degree to which the SPARK Ontario initiative has accomplished this so far.

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[72] Mukherjee, 2010

[73] Dhebar & Stokes, 2008

[74] Cravens, 2006; Dhebar & Stokes, 2008

[75] Murray & Harrison, 2002

[76] VC et al., 2013

SECTION 3

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

THE EVALUATION METHODOLOGY OF THE SPARK ONTARIO INITIATIVE used a non-experimental design with a multi-method approach that included both quantitative and qualitative methods. This approach allowed us to fully understand and document SPARK Ontario's processes and outcomes – both the intended ones and the surprises. The integration of a multi-method approach allowed us to build on the limits of individual modes of inquiry, and tell richer and more nuanced stories on what outcomes are achieved, how these outcomes have been achieved, and why. This approach is also most suitable for identifying project areas for improvement.

PROCESS EVALUATION STRATEGY

A process evaluation was conducted to document, identify, and analyze the key factors that influenced the implementation and operation of SPARK Ontario. Process evaluations examine the culture, implementation, reach, and resource use of a particular program.[77] This type of evaluation is an exploration of how a project carries out its operations. SPARK Ontario's process evaluation allows for a careful description of the actual implementation and the identification of critical elements such as user satisfaction and online experience. The process evaluation includes the following questions:

1. What were the characteristics and dynamics of SPARK Ontario's relationships with partners and stakeholders?

2. What were the characteristics of SPARK Ontario's Story Lab workshops? Were participants satisfied with these workshops?

3. What are the characteristics of SPARK Ontario's website?

4. How were SPARK Ontario's website and social media platforms used?

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[77] James Bell Associates [JBA] 2008a

The process evaluation draws from interviews with SPARK Ontario's staff, a review of documents, evaluations from Story Lab activities, as well as an analysis of the initiative's website and Twitter analytics. The analytical intention of SPARK Ontario's process evaluation is to illustrate how SPARK Ontario was implemented as a partner-driven Legacy Initiative – specifically, the process evaluation describes the implementation, user experiences, the use of SPARK Ontario's Story Labs, and the initiative's web and social media platforms.

OUTCOME EVALUATION STRATEGY

An outcome evaluation was also conducted to understand SPARK Ontario's ability to meet its five outcomes. An outcome evaluation assesses the extent to which a program does what it has intended to do. Outcomes are the benefits or changes for individuals or populations during or after participating in program activities. Outcomes may relate to behavior, skills, knowledge, attitudes, values, condition, or other attributes. They are what participants know, think, or can do, or what their condition is, that is different following the program.[78] Specifically, SPARK Ontario's outcome evaluation assessed the benefi s or changes for volunteers and other stakeholders during and after participating in on-line activities – from posting a volunteer opportunity to accessing volunteer resources. SPARK Ontario's outcome evaluation draws from two surveys as well as a review of collected volunteer stories. The analytical intention of SPARK Ontario's outcome evaluation is twofold: first, the outcome evaluation will describe how the initiative is reaching its objectives from the vantage points of SPARK Ontario's online users (both organizational providers of volunteer opportunities and individual potential volunteers); and second, the outcome evaluation will provide a narrative analysis on SPARK Ontario's curated stories to describe the nature of the impact that SPARK Ontario is having in terms of engaging volunteers and NPOs in telling stories that demonstrate the impact of volunteering. The outcome evaluation questions are summarized in Table 1.

TABLE 1 Objectives and Outcome Evaluation Questions	
SPARK Ontario's Objectives	**Evaluation Questions**
Build capacity of the nonprofi sector to help SPARK Ontario create a positive and inviting experience for the end-user, to showcase volunteering more creatively and market opportunities effectivel	Is SPARK Ontario's website meeting the needs and interests of its users, both NPOs as well as current and potential volunteers?
	Are NPOs able to use SPARK Ontario to recruit volunteers?
	Are current and potential volunteers able to find volunteering opportunitie ?
Engage current and potential volunteers as well as NPOs to tell stories that demonstrate the value of volunteers and volunteering	Are NPOs and volunteers posting stories on SPARK Ontario's website?
	Do the stories showcase both traditional and new models of volunteering?
	Are NPOs able to illustrate the impact of volunteering on SPARK Ontario's website?
	What benefits do stories posted on S ARK Ontario's convey for volunteers?

[78] JBA, 2008b

METHODS AND DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES

In employing mixed-methods, SPARK Ontario's evaluation draws from six different sources of data: 1) interviews with project staff; 2) document review; 3) story lab feedback surveys; 4) review of website and Twitter analytics; 5) surveys with SPARK Ontario's online users; and finally, 6) curated stories on SPARK. The following details both the methods and respective data analysis techniques.

1) Interviews with Project Staff

Three in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key members of the SPARK Ontario project staff in order to gain a deeper understanding of the context and process involved in the initiative. The interviews were conducted with an interview guide (Appendix A). The interviews were audio recorded with the permission of the interviewees and partially transcribed where the discussion provided a particular depth of insight. The results were synthesized according to the themes established by the discussion guide, which in turn were driven by the evaluation strategy.

2) Document Review

The evaluation team was provided with access to several documents relating to SPARK Ontario, including the initiative's partnership agreement, blog posts, and project backgrounders. As SPARK Ontario is a Games Legacy Initiative with multiple partners and stakeholders, additional texts, such as newspaper and community articles and stakeholders' websites, were retrieved from the Internet and reviewed. To generate a description of the implementation of SPARK Ontario, the collected documents were analyzed and then compared to the analyses of the interviews.

3) Story Lab Feedback Surveys

SPARK Ontario hosted Story Labs with volunteer-recruiting agencies to build capacity in the volunteer sector's use of narrative as well as to build awareness of SPARK Ontario's website. In conducting these workshops, SPARK Ontario administered an evaluation form with participants to collect

feedback (Appendix B). The evaluation team entered all feedback survey data into Excel and took descriptive statistics of scalar/quantitative questions. Qualitative or open-ended questions were analyzed in NVivo using a word-count query as the responses were very short and focused. No in-depth formal coding was undertaken; however, prominent themes were assessed by close reading and described alongside representative quotations.

4) Review of Website and Twitter Analytics

Google and Twitter collect usage statistics for SPARK Ontario's website and Twitter feed, respectively. We downloaded and examined both data sets to learn about the reach and impact of the SPARK Ontario initiative, especially the patterns of use and engagement of the website. Google webpage analytics for SPARK Ontario's website were downloaded in two formats: first, monthly statistics for all individual webpages on the site and second, dialing visits and unique visits for the website as a whole. Both sets were acquired for the first full year of the website's operation, from June 2015 to May 2016.

The individual webpage statistics offer a variety of metrics describing user interactions. For simplicity, we chose to use "unique visits" as the indicator of interest. This term refers to the number of unique cookies logged during the month, where a cookie is an identifiable tag attached to a specific computer's browser and stored over time. The exact numbers of unique visits should be regarded with some caution as different individuals may appear as the same cookie, and cookies can be cleared from browsers, thus creating a new unique visit for an existing individual visitor. However, there is no reason to suspect that these over- and under-counts are biased across time or across the different kinds of webpages on the site; they can therefore provide a good accounting for trends and preferences.

The text of webpage URLs was used to sort pages on SPARK Ontario's website into functional categories by creating dummy variables. Not all of the functional categories were of analytical interest; categories, such as error pages and redirects, were not interpreted as part of this evaluation. Because volunteer postings on SPARK Ontario's website

contain no unique URL subdirectory or pre/suf-fix, they were analyzed as a null category left over once all other types of webpages on the site were excluded, a process that took some manual confirmation in addition to coding. The sorted functional groups included in the analysis are as follows:

- **Contact**: Pages which represented users contacting posting organizations for more information

- **Explore**: Pages which represented users searching for volunteer postings according to area of interest

- **French**: Pages which were in French; this category was non-exclusive with other categories

- **Posting**: Pages which featured volunteer opportunities

- **Related Opportunities**: Pages accessed by users looking for more opportunities similar to a viewed posting

- **Story**: Pages representing a user viewing one of the volunteering stories curated on the site

- **User**: Pages representing user profile activity (visiting and editing a home or profile page)

Each functional group was treated as a population that was sampled once a month for 12 months, with time as the independent variable and the descriptive statistics of the functional group as dependent variables. We specifically analyzed the number of visits to the most-visited page within the group; the average number of visits to members of the group; and the total number of visits to all members of the group.

Twitter analytics were downloaded for all tweets sent out from @SparkOntario from the opening of the account through to August 30th, 2016. As with the webpage statistics, the tweets were treated as a population with samples from every month made up of all tweets sent out in that month. We then examined the two summary statistical terms provided by Twitter: impressions, which measure the number of different people who saw the tweet in any form, and engagements, which measure all interactions people had with the tweet – whether liking, sharing, or otherwise.

5) Surveys with Online Users

To gain a robust knowledge of how the SPARK Ontario's website (www.findmyspark.ca) was being used, how satisfactory it was for users, and what the outcomes were of engaging with the website, two surveys were designed: one survey for organizations looking to recruit volunteers (Appendix C), and one survey for individual users coming to the website in search of volunteering opportunities (Appendix D). The survey instruments were created and hosted on the FluidSurveys platform. The organizational survey contained 27 questions, though, due to skip logic, any given respondant answered between 20-25 questions. The survey contained the following sections:

- About your organization (5 questions)

- The role of volunteers in your organization (6 questions)

- Posting volunteer positions on the www.findmyspark.ca website – your experience (7 questions)

- Posting volunteer positions on the www.findmyspark.ca website – your results (4 questions)

- Using other areas of the www.findmyspark.ca website (3 questions)

- Improvements to the website – your feedback (2 questions)

- The individual website user survey contained 29 questions. Respondents answered between 21 and 26 questions. This survey contained the following sections:

- About you (7 questions)

- The role of volunteering in your life (4 questions)

- Finding volunteer positions on the www.findmyspark.ca website – your experience (10 questions)

- Finding volunteer positions on the www.findmyspark.ca website – your results (4 questions)

- Feedback on other areas of the www.findmyspark.ca website (2 questions)

- Improvements to the website – your feedback (2 questions)

The questions were divided between multiple-choice responses and open-ended responses.

Potential respondents were invited by email to complete the survey; emails were sent out to a list of addresses provided by FHIS. This contact list represented all those who had engaged with the SPARK Ontario initiative at some point, whether as organizations or individuals, along with those who had registered profiles on the website. The list included 1 938 individuals and 2 854 contacts for organizations.

The survey was open for 11 days between September 12th and September 23rd 2016, during which 80 people responded to the individual survey (53 completed the survey, for an overall response rate of 2.7%) and 71 organizations responded to the organization survey (46 completed the survey, for an overall response rate of 1.6%). These response rates are likely low because the extensive mailing lists did not filter out those individuals and organizations with very low engagement with the SPARK Ontario initiative, nor were they restricted to only persons who had logged onto the initiative's website. The response rate of those who had engaged with the website before being invited to complete the survey is difficult to calculate from the information available.

Results from the survey were divided into quantitative (scale- and multiple-choice questions) and qualitative (open-ended) data and analyzed separately. Quantifiable responses were loaded into SPSS and analyzed as frequencies and, where appropriate and sample-size permitting, cross-tabulations. Qualitative responses were loaded into NVivo and coded according to a frame established by the evaluation questions in the evaluation strategy, along with supplementary themes added on a post hoc basis if their repeated expression in the data denoted an unexpected area of concern or interest for respondents.

6) Curated Stories on SPARK Ontario's Website

Stories submitted by individuals and organizations and curated on SPARK Ontario's website, www.findmyspark.ca, are used to showcase different aspects of the volunteering experience. The evaluation team made use of the content of these stories to provide some qualitative evidence of positive outcomes of volunteer matching and volunteer role-development. The stories were downloaded from the website and imported to NVivo. YouTube-hosted videos linked to story pages were imported using NCapture. The stories were then coded according to the narrative themes derived from the evaluation questions and others developed informally through the review of the text.

SECTION 4

WORKING WITH PARTNERS AND STAKEHOLDERS

WHILE SPARK ONTARIO was intended to be a partner-driven Games Legacy Initiative that built capacity into the volunteer sector, relationships with partners and stakeholders were characterized by competing priorities and agendas. The dynamics in the relationships between FHIS, partners (community-based organizations and provincial networks), and stakeholders (TO2015 and the Government of Ontario,

including PPAGS and MCI) impacted how SPARK Ontario was implemented. This section draws from interviews with key members of the SPARK Ontario project staff – ll of whom worked for the Lead Agency FHIS – to describe the experience of working in a partner-driven Legacy Initiative. As a review, Table 2 outlines the key players in the SPARK Ontario initiative.

TABLE 2		
Key Players in the Spark Ontario Initiative		
Lead Agency	**Partners**	**Stakeholders**
FindHelp Information Services	Ontario 211 Services Ontario Volunteer Centre Network Collège Boréal Ontario Coalition of Agencies Service Immigrants Sport4Ontario Ryerson University York University	Toronto 2015 Government of Ontario - Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration - Pan/Parapan American Games Secretariat

Although the interviewees expressed diffe ent perspectives about the source of partnership-related challenges and successes, rather than focusing upon individuals or groups, this section attempts to reveal how the larger institutional arrangements that produce uneasy alliances in the nonprofit sector impacted partner and stakeholder relations in implementing the SPARK Ontario initiative.[79] Readers should note that a significant limitation is that no partners and stakeholders were interviewed, and so their perspectives are largely unknown.

WORKING WITH PARTNERS

Although SPARK Ontario was intended to be a partner-driven collaboration, FHIS recognized early on that collective decision-making concerning the build of the website would be limited due to the tight timelines that needed to be met as a Games Legacy Initiative. During the initial meetings with partners, FHIS communicated this anticipated reality and encouraged partners, who were typically represented in the meetings by Executive Directors, to participate in the initiative as permitted by their individual and organizational capacities. All of the partners were part of an advisory committee for SPARK Ontario; however, individuals signed up for additional project committees and teams based on their unique skillsets and interests.[80] To support partners' participation in SPARK Ontario, FHIS included in its proposal for the initiative a budget for funding partners to engage in activities such as the initiative's marketing and awareness-raising campaigns. These were all built into SPARK Ontario's Partnership Agreement, which detailed partners' roles and responsibilities as well as the project's principles and processes of effective communication[81]

In spite of clearly communicated expectations through meetings and the Partnership Agreement, from the vantage of FHIS, partner relations were experienced as a "tug of war" (Interviewee 2). To make sense of how these dynamics impacted the implementation of SPARK Ontario, the

following subsections detail FHIS' experiences of working with four particular partners: Collège Boréal, OCASI, Volunteer Centres, and the OVCN. These partners were selected for review because they were the most frequently cited by the interviewees.

Collège Boréal

The interviewees generally discussed Collège Boréal as an example of a positive partnership in the SPARK Ontario initiative. Although Collège Boréal, as a Francophone-focused college, had not previously worked with FHIS, the interviewees all expressed that this partner was engaged in the initiative. For instance, the interviewees attributed the French branding of SPARK Ontario as ÉLAN Ontario to Collège Boréal. This stakeholder was also key during the building stage of the initiative's website. Specificall , Collège Boréal was critical for SPARK Ontario's success as a bilingual initiative with content developed specifically for the Francophone community.

> They were heavily engaged through the development phase and through, you know, the communication phase and our Community Champions campaigns. In really helping to build and design the site, the French part of SPARK. And, actually, you know, you can attribute their engagement even in the naming of the site…They really set the course around it not being translated site … It is not meant to be a translated version of English because that really waters down the look and feel for a Francophone audience. They really helped to build a site that would speak to the Francophone community (**Interview 3**).

Ontario Coalition of Agencies Service Immigrants

The interviewees all referenced OCASI as an example of an outstanding partnership in the SPARK Ontario initiative. The interviewees noted that FHIS and OCASI have a longstanding, collegial relationship, and that the particular

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[79] Baines, 2004c; 2011; Eikenberry, 2009; Woolford & Curran, 2012

[80] See Appendix E for Spark Ontario's list of project committees and teams, as articulated in the initiative's partnership agreement

[81] Appendix E

individual that represented OCASI in SPARK Ontario was heavily engaged throughout the initiative. This individual had the necessary skills for an Internet-based initiative such as SPARK Ontario, and furthermore was familiar with the lead agency's infrastructure.

> I think we engaged OCASI more than we did the other partners. We had a lot of technology issues that came up and they have ... been really, really great, and really supportive of the project and eager to, you know, to answer any questions we might have and provide advice. They have been phenomenal and that's really kept the partnership strong I think. But, it also meant that we engaged that person much more than we did the other partnerships (**Interview 2**).

> The representative from OCASI has a highly technical role with OCASI and has worked with FindHelp before so is very familiar with their structures and their staff and what they're all about. And so, they were a valuable asset in sort of helping us to look at plans, strategic plans, and ask some critical question which we were always very grateful... that was the individuals' particular interests, so their particular skillset (**Interview 1**).

Although the personal and relationship-based nature of the partnership with OCASI was highlighted as a strength, one interviewee acknowledged that in other partnerships where SPARK Ontario successfully engaged a representative, FHIS' relationship was with the individual and not the organization. For example, the interviewee reflected that while the individual who represented another partner was highly engaged in the initiative, this was not the case for the larger organization, which may have been out of SPARK Ontario's purview.

> We had personal relationships with one person in an organization as opposed to the entire organization's commitment. So, that person then will say, 'well, I'll send it out' ...The marketing company would report back to us and say, 'well, they haven't really done anything and we're gonna check in with them.' And so, when they did, this person said, 'well, I did send it out to my personal network.' And then we said, 'but that wasn't the ask. The ask was that your organization promote this site' ... The personal one was like, that's great, but we're hoping for your provincial reach [laughs] (**Interview 1**).

Volunteer Centres

While Volunteer Centres were invited to SPARK Ontario as part of the OVCN, the interviewees specifically diffe entiated this cluster of partners from their larger provincial network, the OVCN. From the vantage point of FHIS staff, olunteer Centres were not actively engaged in the SPARK Ontario initiative. For instance, the interviewees described that Volunteer Centres did not participate in SPARK Ontario's Community Champions awareness-raising campaign. Further, the interviewees shared that there were some difficulties in egards to getting Volunteer Centres to actually post volunteer opportunities onto the SPARK Ontario's website, which was an issue as these were targets issued by the Government of Ontario.

The interviewees offe ed various reasons for what they perceived as Volunteer Centres' lack of engagement. Namely, the interviewees all acknowledged how FHIS, the lead agency of SPARK Ontario, did not have a history in the volunteer sector.

> FindHelp, firstl , was not, sort of, an organic part of the network of volunteer centres. FindHelp isn't a volunteer centre – they are an information provider. So, although there was some cross sector knowledge, they [FindHelp] were not part of this network of volunteer centres (**Interview 1**).

> We're a new player in the field and the e have been organizations that have been doing this work for a very long time (**Interview 2**).

FHIS' lack of history in the volunteer sector had several implications for working with Volunteer Centres. Although the idea for SPARK Ontario came from the recommendations of Volunteer Centres[82], the interviewees suggested that SPARK Ontario may have been perceived by Volunteer Centres as competition.

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[82] VC et al., 2010; VC et al., 2012

We're a new player in the field and the e have been organizations that have been doing this work for a very long time. They [Volunteer Centres] are very, very good at it to have a new organization come in and do a project that sort of could be perceived to take funding and resources and, you know, clientele away from those groups – I think is probably pretty scary and frustrating (**Interview 2**).

There is that component of innovation and meaning to and wanting to move the sector along…. There was also probably that piece of wanting information. Wanting to know, what we're doing…I think that's why they probably agreed to be partners. The feeling of competition (**Interview 3**).

The interviewees speculated that there may have been mistrust on the part of Volunteer Centres due to unclear distinctions between their work and that of SPARK Ontario. FHIS staff members discussed that S ARK Ontario did not tread onto the work of Volunteer Centres. For instance, interviewees described that as a volunteer engagement initiative, SPARK Ontario did not provide in-person service or volunteer management directed support to NPOs. The interviewees shared that such roles fell strictly within the domain of Volunteer Centres. In spite of the distinctions between SPARK Ontario and Volunteer Centres, the interviewees acknowledged that these diffe ences may not have been perceived by Volunteer Centres nor was the topic explicitly addressed.

Volunteer Centres, were a little more, maybe, conflicted about, 'do I support – do I promote SPARK? Is that in conflict with me p omoting my own identity in the community as a volunteer centre?' I think there was some challenge around that that perhaps was never fully addressed (**Interview 1**).

I think there's probably a worry for them, that we are sort of treading into their area of expertise. And, I don't think that's the case. I think we want to be a support to volunteer centres, but that's a message that I'm not sure we've put out all that clearly (**Interview 2**).

The interviewees also postulated that Volunteer Centres' lack of engagement might be related to their limited capacity. For instance, interviewees articulated that engaging with SPARK Ontario is a heavy burden for small organizations that have limited funding and resources. The interviewees also described that Volunteer Centres expressed dissatisfaction with SPARK Ontario's website due to a lack of representation and credit for Volunteer Centres.

Although FHIS was aware of these challenges, the conditions of partner relations prevented honest and open dialogue. The interviewees identified that olunteer Centres had little power in the matter because they were compelled to partner with SPARK Ontario as a Games Legacy Initiative. One interviewee identified that, as the olunteer Centres were represented by the OVCN, FHIS did not have the opportunity to build individual relationships and have open dialogue with Volunteer Centres.

Did we have a Volunteer Centres /FindHelp/ SPARK conversation about it, as a group? No. But, we're never really encouraged to have that conversation, so. The OVCN certainly always, strongly preferred that we go through them. That we don't have a lot of individual contact with Volunteer Centres. I am not sure why (**Interview 1**).

This interviewee went on to describe the importance of relationship-building for successful partnerships in the SPARK Ontario initiative. The interviewee's account highlights the benefits of having elationships with individual Volunteer Centres (as well as other partners) in multi-partner initiatives such as SPARK Ontario.

I would define the success as you now, showing up to the governance meetings, showing up to that quick, sort of, overview. Coming to Toronto to be part of the branding exercises. Participating in all of the opportunities that we offe ed. And then, you know, at their campaign, their abilities, I think they supported us in as much as they could support us during community champions… To me, that's really, you know, really, the small example. A small community, not a huge community. So, I think they did what they could and they managed. It felt mutual (**Interviewee 1**).

Ontario Volunteer Centre Network

In stark contrast to the Volunteer Centres, the interviewees referenced the OVCN, the provincial representative for the Volunteer Centres, as an example of a partnership that worked well in the SPARK Ontario initiative. During Interview 2, the OVCN was described as "good partners" that have "done what they can" for the initiative. Most notably, the interviewees identified that the OVCN was helpful during a problem situation where, in violating the initiative's contract with the government, TO2015 refused to divulge the list of names of the 23 000 individuals who had volunteered for the Games.[83] The OVCN, as the agency lead for the PREB Ontario Legacy Initiative, supported SPARK Ontario in overcoming this problem.

> We were really, really lucky because our partnership with, PREB, the other Legacy Initiative that we worked with. They were kind enough to let us send our materials in with their, with their stuff that they had to send out. Ah, certificates of recognition, and so we sent out our postcards with them. Which was great, but we would have been in even worse shape if they'd not allowed us to do that (**Interview 2**).

While the interviewees all described the OVCN as a strong partner, it is notable that, as revealed by the previous subsection, there was significant strain in the relationships between FHIS and the OVCN's constituent Volunteer Centres. Further, it is interesting to note that, as expressed in Interview 1, the OVCN did not encourage FHIS to develop relationships with individual Volunteer Centres. While the partnership with the OVCN appeared to be positive, FHIS' conflicting experience with the Volunteer Centres may speak to the fact that their provincial representative, the OVCN, was not a "lead" in this volunteerism initiative in spite of the OVCN being, according to Interview 1, the "subject matter expert" and "voice of volunteerism in Ontario."[84]

> So, FindHelp, not a Volunteer Centre. And so, having an organization that was not steeped in the work of the voluntary sector LEADING a project that was to be ABOUT the voluntary sector – I think the OVCN definitely has a vested interest in informing the process of the site is evolving, also, how Volunteer Centres are represented and portrayed on the site (**Interview 1**).

The Government of Ontario, who is the funder of SPARK Ontario, similarly recognized the OVCN as the 'expert' in volunteering and therefore consulted with the OVCN to develop the volunteering Legacy Initiatives.[85] However, in spite of recognizing the OVCN's expertise in volunteerism, the OVCN was rejected in the first round of applications for the very initiative that they had proposed to the Government.

> Originally, our partnership for submission did not include Ontario Volunteer Centre Network because they were competing with us on the application and we knew that they were competing ... What ended up happening is that we were moved to the second round of the applications and they [the OVCN] were not. And, we reached out to them and asked them to join us in partnership, which they did (**Interview 3**).

The development of the Legacy Initiatives and the funding process reflects larger trends in the nonprofit sector in which NPOs must compete with one another to obtain funding. In competing with one another, NPOs must demonstrate to funders that they are the most competent providers. As evidenced in SPARK Ontario's work with Volunteer Centres and the OVCN, this can manifest in strains and conflicts during subsequent collaborations.[86]

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[83] This incident is further described in this section under the heading, "Toronto 2015 and the Government of Ontario (The Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration and the Pan/Parapan American Games Secretariat)"

[84] Ontario Volunteer Centre Network, 2017

[85] Fish, 2015

[86] Woolford & Curran, 2012

KEY FINDING #1: PARTNERSHIP IN THE NONPROFIT SECTOR IS AN UNEASY ALLIANCE

While partnerships, such as what was intended by SPARK Ontario as a partner-driven Legacy Initiative, may suggest increased cooperation, reach, and impact for a given project, such relationships are also situated in a context of heightened competition for limited public resources.[87] Given this funding context, partnerships among NPOs with shared goals are experienced as uneasy alliances. Personal relationships with individuals from partnering organizations may foster increased conditions for project engagement; however, such engagement is to the discretion of the individual and therefore, does not necessarily equate to the larger organization's commitment to a given partner-driven initiative.

What dynamics played out for SPARK Ontario in terms of the initiative's work with funders on public platforms? The next subsection will detail SPARK Ontario's experiences with higher profile sta eholders such as the TO2015, PPAGS, and MCI.

Working with Stakeholders

SPARK Ontario's stakeholders, which included TO2015, PPAGS, and MCI, all had an investment in maximizing the long-term impacts of the Games through Legacy Initiatives. According to Ian Troop, the Chief Executive Officer o TO2015, it was extremely important that the Games be branded as a sporting event that was socially inclusive:

> [These Games] have been conceived as an event that will bring our community together like never before (**Ian Troop**).[88]

Steve Harlow, then Deputy Minister of the Partner Engagement and Legacy Division of Ontario's PPAGS, also describes of extending the social impacts of the Games:

> My division at the secretariat is focused on maximizing the impact of the province's investment on the Games. One of my responsibilities in this role is to plan, design and coordinate the delivery of Ontario's promotion, celebration and legacy strategy…The strategy is designed to celebrate and showcase Ontario talent and to create a legacy across the province that extends beyond the games' time. It aims to expand the impact, and opportunities for participation in the games, beyond athletes and spectators, for Ontarians and visitors alike (**Steve Harlow**).[89]

Michael Chan, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration, and International Trade,[90] describes the importance of the secondary impacts of the Games for volunteerism.

> The legacy initiatives will give not-for-profit o ganizations access to qualified volunteers, and will give volunteers an opportunity to use their skills and experience to be competitive in the workplace (**Michael Chan**).[91]

SPARK Ontario supports the goals of its stakeholders in terms of branding the Games as having a lasting and positive impact for Ontario. However, the interviewees expressed that although SPARK Ontario was planned as a legacy initiative, dynamics within the initiative's relationships with its stakeholders, particularly with TO2015 and PPAGS, resulted in some constraints in implementing SPARK Ontario.

The data concerning SPARK Ontario's experience in engaging with TO2015 and government stakeholders was elusive. Interviewees were careful in speaking about such high profile sta eholders, often making vague attributions to the difficulties in wo ing with these groups. For instance, during Interview 3, the challenges in working with high profile stakeholders were simply described as "just politics". Given that stakeholders were not interviewed, this subsection draws

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[87] Baines, 2004c; 2011; Eikenberry, 2009; Woolford & Curran, 2012

[88] Goar, 2012

[89] Legislative Assembly of Ontario, 2013, p. 454

[90] The Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration underwent a name change and is now known as the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, Immigration, and International Trade

[91] Government of Ontario, 2015

from interviews with SPARK Ontario staff to illustrate the dynamics of working with high profile sta eholders.

Toronto 2015 and the Government of Ontario (The Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration and the Pan/ Parapan American Games Secretariat)

The interviewees described that, as per the SPARK Ontario's contract, FHIS expected that TO2015 would provide FHIS with the names of all those who had applied for volunteering with the Games, which was initially projected by the Government of Ontario to be 100,000. SPARK Ontario planned an extensive marketing campaign based on this figu e; however, this simply did not occur. The number of people who applied to volunteer was much lower than expected and at the final hou , TO2015 refused to supply the names of both applicants and volunteers to FHIS.

> We had expected to get a list of volunteers, volunteers for the Pan Am Games. And, we didn't get them. It was supposed to be a list of over a hundred thousand people and we didn't get a single name and that was the basis of our marketing strategy. So, it was a big surprise and a big problem. We'd actually had a contract with government to say that we would have that list and that we would be able to send out information on SPARK to that list as soon as the Games were over. And we never – we didn't get it (**Interview 2**).

The interviewees also described that while SPARK Ontario had intended an extensive marketing and communications plan for the Games, the PPAGS' communication delayed the implementation of said campaign. As such, opportunities to leverage government communications about the Legacy Initiatives during the Games did not come to fruition. The interviewees described that an extensive budget was built for SPARK Ontario's marketing campaign, which could have had maximum impact had the initiative been attached to the Games, as was the intention. However, as these promises were left unfulfilled, S ARK Ontario's marketing campaign was rather disappointing.

> What we were lead to believe by government [PPAGS] and the Games' organizer [TO2015] was that there would be this hype and, and a big blast of marketing, and communication and promotion as part of the games. So, we had to hold off on big campaigns until after the ames related to SPARK, because, again, there was control over how much we could do during that period. And they fell, like completely flat. Li e, almost nothing happened (**Interview 3**).

> To not be able to have any materials or, you know, postcards or anything at the Toronto 2015 events was a surprise and it was a big, big issue for us (**Interview 2**).

As previously discussed, part of SPARK Ontario's marketing campaign was only salvaged through the assistance of the OVCN who, as the lead of another volunteer Legacy Initiative – PREB Ontario – had access to the names of the TO2015 volunteers.[92] In sum, the interviewees were unclear about the reason for the stakeholders' unfulfilled p omises; however, the interviewees acknowledged that both the lack of buy in from TO2015 as well as PPAGS' directions constrained the initiative.

The interviewees described that while they experienced some constraints in their relationships with TO2015 and PPAGS, they had a positive experience with MCI as a stakeholder, particularly in the website's second year. For instance, in the summer of 2016, MCI supported SPARK Ontario in making connections with diverse government agencies in the areas of education and supports for seniors. Further, although beyond the scope of this evaluation, the interviewees described that the MCI was a strong partner in SPARK Ontario's marketing campaign in the fall of 2016.

Key Finding #1, which suggests that partnerships in the nonprofit sector a e an uneasy alliance, extends to SPARK Ontario's relationships with high profile sta eholders – the uneven outcomes of working with such organizations, from unfulfilled p omises, to communication embargoes, to experiences of positive and supportive relationships, reflect unclear priorities.[93]

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[92] Toronto 2015, 2015

[93] Cashman & Horne, 2013

SUMMARY

Drawing from interviews and the document review, this section has reviewed how SPARK Ontario, as a partner-driven Games Legacy Initiative was implemented in the context of partner and stakeholder relations. By tracing interviewees' accounts of various relationships, this section highlights how funding schemes in the nonprofit sector shape uneasy alliances as well as conflicting p ocesses.

SECTION 5

THE STORY LABS

OVERVIEW OF THE STORY LABS

Between February 2015 and June 2015, SPARK Ontario hosted 12 training workshops for volunteer-recruiting organizations in 9 cities in Ontario. Leading up to the launch of the SPARK Ontario's website in June 2015, Story Labs helped lay the groundwork for organizations' participation in the SPARK Ontario initiative – and more significantly, in sharing stories regarding volunteering experiences that could be published on the site. The intention behind the Story Labs was to build capacity within the volunteer sector' to use narrative to engage volunteers as well as to increase awareness of SPARK Ontario's website. This section draws from the evaluations of 10 Story Labs to describe both how they were implemented as well as participants' satisfaction. Each Story Lab was a one-day, in-person session; sessions were held in communities across Ontario. Additional Story Labs were also held as per the request of partners and stakeholders. The Story Labs were facilitated by SPARK Ontario and FindHelp staff.

Story Lab Content

The workshops consisted of presentations, facilitated group discussions, small group activities, and individual reflections. The central learning objective of Story Labs was to build skills and competency in using stories to engage, recruit, and manage volunteers. The core principle of the workshop was to bring out the importance of using narratives to more engagingly market volunteer opportunities as well as to better communicate the impact existing volunteers are having through and upon organizations.

Story Labs began with an engagement exercise in which participants were asked to reflect upon and share the feelings that they had the last time they 'got lost' in work or play, experiencing a state of 'flow.' The facilitators then created a discussion around the individual reflections to link these feelings to volunteering experiences.

Following this exercise, the facilitators presented an 'Introduction to Story-Telling' activity, reviewing concepts

and principles and relating them to volunteering. During this presentation, participants were shown two sets of YouTube videos and were asked to engage with this content in dialogue with the presenter. The first set of videos examined how emotion was used to tell stories in both the corporate and not-for-profit sectors. The second set of videos showed causes and initiatives communicating their impacts. The participants were invited to comment on the relative effectiveness of the strategies they had seen. This exercise was titled 'Why Stories Matter for Volunteering.'

The facilitators also offered participants a review of the SPARK Ontario initiative itself, including their plans for the website and the role that impact and story concepts play in the initiative's strategic plan ("Introduction to the Volunteer Gateway"). This was followed by a group exercise in which participants discussed three different volunteer opportunity descriptions in order to explore how story-telling competence could help recruit the right volunteers for the right positions ("Stories in Marketing Volunteer Opportunities").

Next, an exercise called 'So What?' asked participants to, in groups of two, create impact statements about volunteering opportunities they have or are hoping to fill. Each partner was encouraged to challenge the other by using 'so what?' questions in response to draft impact statements, provoking more-compelling revisions until they agreed that the impact statement created a strong emotional engagement with the listener. Facilitators actively supported this group exercise, intervening to help participants push the boundaries of how they usually thought and spoke about the impact volunteers make on their organization's mission.

In the 'Crafting your Story' segment of the Story Lab, individual participants were given time to expand upon the impact statement that they had refined in the partnered 'so what?' activity. Finally, the workshop concluded with a wrap-up discussion in which participants were asked to share ideas about 'who, what, and where?' would help them put their story-telling competence into practice.

Story Labs Evaluation

The Story Labs were evaluated by means of a feedback survey completed by participants immediately after the end of the session. The feedback survey tool contained both scalar and open-ended questions regarding the value that participants had gained from the Story Lab, focusing on participants' self-reported enthusiasm and comfort with applying story-telling to their work as volunteer recruiters and managers. The feedback survey form can be found as Appendix B.

Story Lab Evaluation Results – Usefulness Scale Questions

Participants were first asked to evaluate the usefulness of the seven components of the Story Lab as well as provide one rating for their overall experience of the workshop. In these scaling questions, a score of 1 indicated that the participant found a component as 'not useful' and a score of 5 indicated they found the component 'very useful.' Higher scores therefore indicate greater satisfaction. The eight usefulness scale components were as follows:

- The opening engagement exercise
- 'Introduction to Storytelling' presentation
- 'Why Stories Matter in Volunteering' presentation
- 'Introduction to Volunteer Gateway/SPARK Ontario' presentation
- 'Use of Story in Marketing Volunteer Opportunities' presentation
- The 'So What?' exercise for creating impact statements
- The discussion of story crafting
- The Story Lab workshop overall

The answers to these usefulness scale questions are summarized in Table 3:

TABLE 3
Usefulness of Story Lab Components[94]

Question: "How useful was the…"	Average Score [95,96]	Sample Standard Deviation	Range of Averages between workshops[97]
Engagement Exercise	4.3	0.9	4.1-4.8
Introduction to Storytelling	4.3	0.9	4.0-4.6
Why Stories Matter for Volunteering	4.6	0.7	4.3-4.8
Introduction to the Volunteer Gateway	4.2	0.9	3.9-4.5
Stories in Marketing Volunteer Opportunities	4.5	0.8	4.3-4.9
"So What?" Exercise	4.4	1.0	4.0-5.0
Crafting your Story Discussion	4.2	1.0	3.8-4.8
Story Lab Overall	4.6	0.7	4.5-4.8

Generally, the scores aggregated between all workshops are high, with none averaging below 4.2 out of 5. Given that the standard deviation for responses is larger than the differences between the responses, interpretation of these differences should be approached cautiously. However, it is reasonable to conclude that the great majority of participants felt that the workshops were worthwhile and satisfactory; the modal, or most-often selected, response to each question was 5.

Story Lab Evaluation Results – Open-Ended Questions

There were 5 open-ended questions on the feedback survey that allowed participants to share their impressions of the Story Lab workshops in a more qualitative and individual way. These questions read as follows (with the response rate noted after each one):

- What did you find most helpful about the Story Lab? (115 answers, 97% response rate)

- What could have been better about the Story Lab? (75 answers, 63% response rate)

- Do you feel you will be able to market your volunteering opportunities more effectively? If yes, please tell us how, and if no, please share why not. (97 answers, 82% response rate)

- What action will you take right away to implement your learning from the Story Lab? (114 answers, 96% response rate)

- Additional comments and recommendations (72 answers, 61% response rate).

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[94] In this scale, 1 indicated that the participant found the activity to be "not useful", 3 indicated that the participant found the activity to be "useful", and 5 indicated that a participant found the activity "very useful"

[95] N for average scores = 119 participants for all 11 workshops.

[96] Exact response rates cannot be calculated because attendance at the workshops appears to have exceeded formal registration in most cases, with the response rate "exceeding" 100% of the registration numbers in several cases.

[97] The N for individual workshops varied from 6 (Toronto) to 17 (Timmins, Alliston), with the average being 13.

The tenor of the responses to these open-ended questions was overwhelmingly positive. For example, the gap in response rate between those who could identify the 'highlight' of the workshop, and those who could identify the least-satisfactory element, reinforces the conclusion that the participants were, in general, happy with the events. This finding is further strengthened by the fact that, of the 75 responses to the 'what could have been better?' question, 19 indicated that there was nothing to improve (25%), and a further 6 (8%) indicated that only the location (heat/cold/acoustics) needed review. Among those who left additional comments, 60 (83%) responses expressed compliments and gratitude for the success of the workshop, including personal kudos to the workshop facilitators.

Within the open-ended section of the feedback survey was one yes-or-no question: 'Do you feel you will be able to market your volunteering opportunities more effectively?' Of 119 respondents, 113 (97%) provided an answer with 111 stating yes, they would be able to market more effectively, and only 2 respondents stating that they would not.

Among the substantive answers to the five questions, two major themes predominated. The first, unsurprisingly given the subject matter, revolved around the power of stories and the reaction of workshop participants to the story-building elements of the workshops. The second strong theme was that of advocacy and organizational change, whereby many participants shared their thoughts on the implications of the Story Lab workshops. The following subsection details the key findings.

KEY FINDING # 2: THE POWER OF STORIES

A) Creating an Emotional Connection

A significant number of participants identified that the impact statement or 'so what?' writing exercise as the most helpful aspect of the Story Lab [37 of 115 respondents (32%) mentioned one or both]. Other related answers focused on how the Story Lab brought attention to the importance of emotions and emotion-words in speaking and writing about volunteering. The central message of the workshop clearly resonated with participants: volunteer applicants are looking for a personal motivation in volunteer work and stories can create a positive emotional connection between described volunteer positions and the impact that volunteers can have on the world.

> Getting to the emotional reasons why people want to volunteer and opening my mind about how to connect with potential volunteers (**Burlington**).

Making impactful stories was an activity that participants found both rewarding and inspiring. Discounting any mention of the Story Lab as an event, 43 respondents affirmed specifically that learning about the power of stories was a highlight of the day. Taken together, the prominent answers to these questions suggest that the workshops were successful in achieving a focused learning experience regarding the practical use of storytelling.

> I found looking at story telling on how volunteering impacts the emotions of the volunteer [an] interesting approach (**London**).

When asked how they would apply the knowledge gained during the workshop, many participants indicated that they felt that they could revise role descriptions and recruitment efforts by employing storytelling techniques by using terms such as "painting a picture," "using my heart," "looking for an emotional connect[ion]." Of those who left answers, 53 respondents mentioned either storytelling or the use of language to create emotional connections (55%).

B) Crafting Narratives takes Time and Energy

Although participants expressed that the story-building exercises were a success of the Story Labs, responses indicated that such activities required more time and energy. For instance, several participants wanted more time, more detailed tools, and more in-depth facilitation to enrich the practical exercise; a few participants requested that less time be given to the "lecture" components in order to spend more time crafting stories; and finally, two participants more specifically suggested that story composition should come earlier in the day, when energy is higher.

I almost wish I could've had more time to "re-craft" my impact statement after the so what? Exercise (**Kitchener**).

Other individual suggestions included: making the workshop a two-day event; holding the workshops more often in smaller communities; and giving more concrete examples of concepts addressed in the lecture materials (although no comments further specified which concepts were unclear).

The impact statement and crafting a story are difficult. Maybe more time to do those more if possible (**London**).

Other respondents requested a follow-up, either in the form of a second workshop or through further communication with the participants.

This would be great as a 2-day lab. Maybe first [have people] work apart, to give time to practice [and] put thing[s] into action (**Kitchener**).

C) Learning from the Stories of Others

Participants were not only inspired to write better stories; collecting and writing up the stories of others was another strong theme in their responses. Respondents stated that they would solicit stories from their co-workers, volunteers, and clients.

[I'll] make a poster to put on my cubicle. DATA + STORY = EVIDENCE! Create a story-sharing session opp[ortunity] for staff nd vol[unteers,] (separate of course!) (**Guelph**).

The act of collecting stories was a significant response to the question about the actions that participants would take after leaving the workshop. Places from which such stories could be collected included meetings as well as sessions that were specifically created for current and past volunteers. For at least 10 participants, this story collecting activity would be connected with updates to their organizations' webpages; 4 responses also mentioned test-driving collected stories on social media.

I would like to implement storytelling in our weekly staff meeting (**Kitchener**).

A few respondents could already see how collecting stories would potentially become a virtuous circle. In these answers, one collection activity is expressly linked to future activities; namely, for these participants, presenting good stories will inspire others to share their own.

[I will] share these ideas with volunteer coordinators who work directly with volunteers – [and] ask them to share their stories too! (**Burlington**)

KEY FINDING #3: ADVOCACY AND ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

A) Moving away from 'Corporate' Language

Respondents used several different terms to indicate that they wanted to change the language used by their home organizations in engaging and working with volunteers. Respondents referred to existing forms of communication as being "corporate," "agency-speak," or "technical jargon" and recognized that this might be alienating to current and potential volunteers (16 out of 115, 14%).

Review current methods & apply new learning. Needs to be cleared with corporate/head office (**Alliston**).

However, several respondents brought up the complexity of changing organizational language. While a large number of participants said that they looked forward to reworking job descriptions and engagement materials, others explicitly stated that their authority to do so was limited by organizational hierarchies and mandates such as internal or government policies. While only a minority of the participants recognized this explicitly, such responses raise an interesting point regarding the challenges of championing attitudinal change within organizations; it would be interesting to follow-up with participants to assess how successful they have been at sharing story-telling skills with their relevant colleagues.

Yes - verbally in the orientation + interview process. But [I] am limited in the ability to change official wording (**Guelph**).

Another way in which respondents touched on the

complexity of changing organizational language was indirectly, by contrasting the type of language that they thought would engage volunteers with the type of language that was explicitly favoured – or even required – in other venues such as in communications with government oversight bodies or funders.

> Keeping it simple - asking REAL questions with REAL answers - not just answers we use to show the gov't our relevance for funding approval (**Orillia**).

Finally, a small but significant number of responses spelled out the ways in which participants would apply their story-telling knowledge to new and existing media channels for their organization, including their website (10; 9%), social media including Twitter (4; 4%), volunteer recruitment ads generally (15; 13%), or to "digital editing resources" (1,; <1%).

B) Connecting with Coworkers to Disseminate Knowledge

A significant number of responses to open-ended questions regarding what actions participants intended to take mentioned convening or connecting with co-workers in their organizations. This represents a promising recognition of the need to further disseminate the Story Lab workshop learnings for them to have organization-wide impacts.

> I would rewrite + take a look at our current opportunities, share this info with colleagues especially our communication staff **London**).

Responses on this theme included the use of language such as approaching, sharing with, or discussing with staff, including volunteer coordinators, co-workers, managers, "my team," or "my ED." In total, 23 answers to the question regarding participants' next steps responded to this theme of becoming a champion for telling stronger stories about volunteering (20%).

> I will work with other coordinators to share the importance of story telling to get buy in for our overall program (**Guelph**).

Here again, mentions of new or revitalized media channels were significant, with co-worker connections, including website teams and communications staff, who might be using and monitoring social media accounts.

> We are re-vamping our website so I will feel more excited and motivated to get the rest of my staff n board with the storytelling angle of marketing and public engagement (**Burlington**).

C) Learning from the Experiences of other Organizations

Thirteen (13) participants identified the videos viewed during the workshop as a highlight (11%). Of greater significance, perhaps, is what it was about the videos that struck workshop attendees as so appealing. Comments indicated that participants responded strongly to the fact that the videos featured relatable experiences from other organizations.

> Learning about the experience of other agencies [and the] Value of stories - the videos were interesting (**Alliston**).

> Seeing the videos, learning other people's experiences and learning from them. (**Trenton**).

Just as with the theme of creating more time and space to reinforce the learnings from the workshops, here, too, participants felt follow-up was important. Having been inspired by the experiences depicted in the videos and then having learned from one another in the workshops, some participants stressed that the Story Labs did not have to be the end of this particular educational journey.

> Follow-up. Planted many seeds - now we will need nurture - can be done through SPARK - online webinars, etc (learning opportunities quarterly) keep it going (**Orillia**).

> Maybe creating a platform to share our stories to receive comments, feedback and resources (**Burlington**).

Figure 1: Word Cloud of Story Lab Evaluation Open-Ended Responses

SUMMARY

SPARK Ontario undertook a series of workshops to discuss the importance of stories and storytelling in the recruitment, management, and validation of volunteers. Over 132 participants registered for the workshops and 119 returned feedback surveys from 9 of the 10 completed Story Labs. Of those, 72 or 61% of respondents completed the entire feedback survey and all respondents completed all of the usefulness-scale questions. The Story Labs were generally rated very highly by participants, who affirmed the focus of the lectures and exercises as being useful to them in their volunteer work. Coming from a variety of roles within their volunteer-recruiting organizations, participants left the workshops with positive attitudes towards applying new knowledge in their role and championing the uptake of this knowledge elsewhere in their organizations. The practical exercises were particularly well received and valued by participants.

SECTION 6

WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA ANALYTICS

IN THIS SECTION, WE REVIEW VARIOUS STATISTICS RELATING TO USAGE OF THE SPARK ONTARIO'S WEBSITE AS WELL AS SPARK ONTARIO'S ENGAGEMENT WITH SOCIAL MEDIA (i.e. Twitter). This section draws from interviews facilitated with project staff o provide contextual information to the website and social media analytics. Website usage statistics were recorded by Google and retained by SPARK Ontario. These statistics include variables such the number of times every individual page is loaded on the website and the number of unique visitors a page received. For the purposes of this analysis, we concentrate on the number of unique visitors, both to individual web pages and to the site as a whole. Twitter records how many people see a tweet and the number of people who engage with it in any way, which may include replying to it, re-broadcasting it to their own social network, or 'liking' it to show agreement or approval.

SPARK ONTARIO'S WEBSITE – WEBSITE USAGE, IMPACT, AND TRENDS OVER TIME

A strikingly consistent pattern emerges from all the lines of data: five periods of significant change over the life of the SPARK Ontario's website. These periods can be summarized as follows:

- June 2015 – August 2015: A period of slow, sustained growth following the launch of the website, from June 2015 through August of 2015

- Autumn 2015: A period of gradual decline in use of the website. Although SPARK Ontario launched a Community Champions campaign to raise awareness during this period, a lack of partner and stakeholder engagement resulted in a disappointing outcome

- November 2015 – December 2015: A strong surge of use and interest in SPARK Ontario's website, corresponding with a promotion of the site in connection with SPARK Ontario's response to the resettlement of Syrian refugees in Ontario

- January 2016 – March 2016: A gradual but substantial fall-off f usage from a peak at the beginning of 2016, through the rest of that winter

- March 2016 – August 2015: A period of stability as the spring of 2016 continues, corresponding with a revisiting of the initiative's organizational and communications strategy

The following subsections present several individual analyses that support and add nuance to the described trends.

VISITORS TO THE WEBSITE

The web analytics for SPARK Ontario's website provide a daily recap of total, unique visitors to the website, no matter how many (or how few) individual pages they load during their visit. The daily visit results are shown in Figure 2.

The results show four distinctive spikes of user activity: at the end of July 2015; in the middles of August and December of the same year; and on the 12th of January of 2016, before settling into a slightly higher equilibrium than previously observed. Also of interest is the recurrent, regular pattern of website usage over the week. The regular maxima seen in Figure 2 generally correspond to Mondays and Tuesdays of a given week, with usage dropping to a minimum over the weekend.
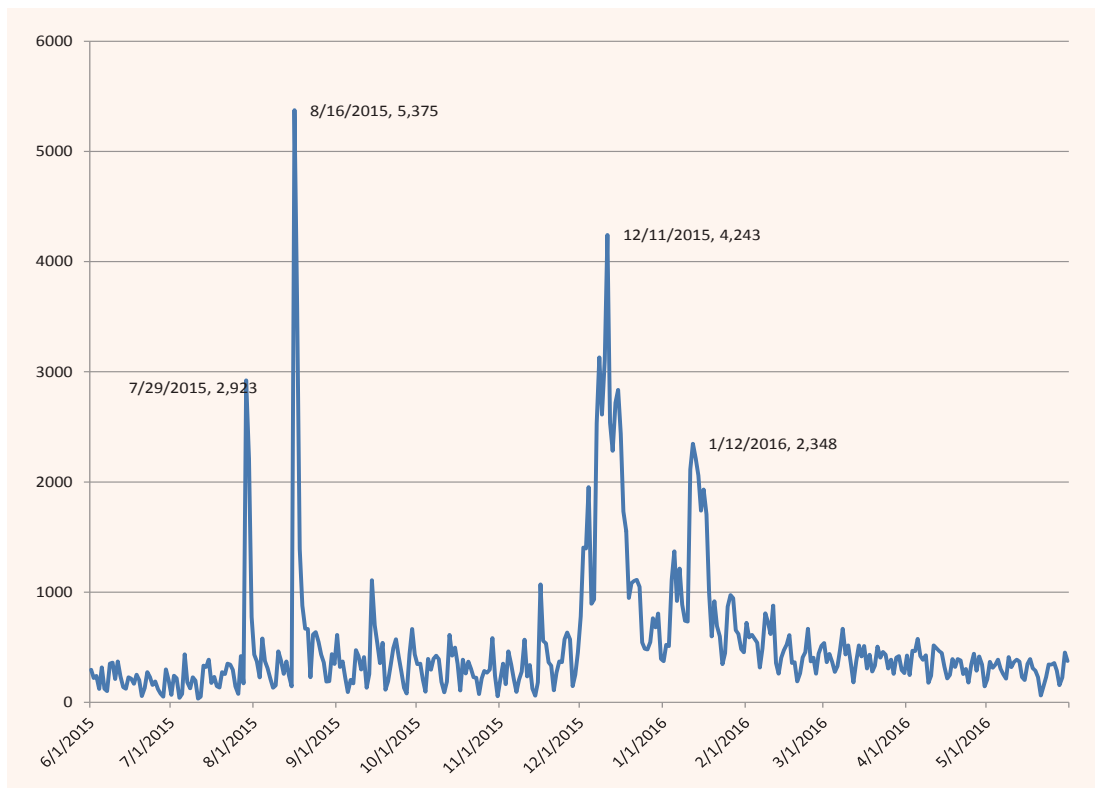
Figure 2:
Daily Visits to SPARK Ontario's Website

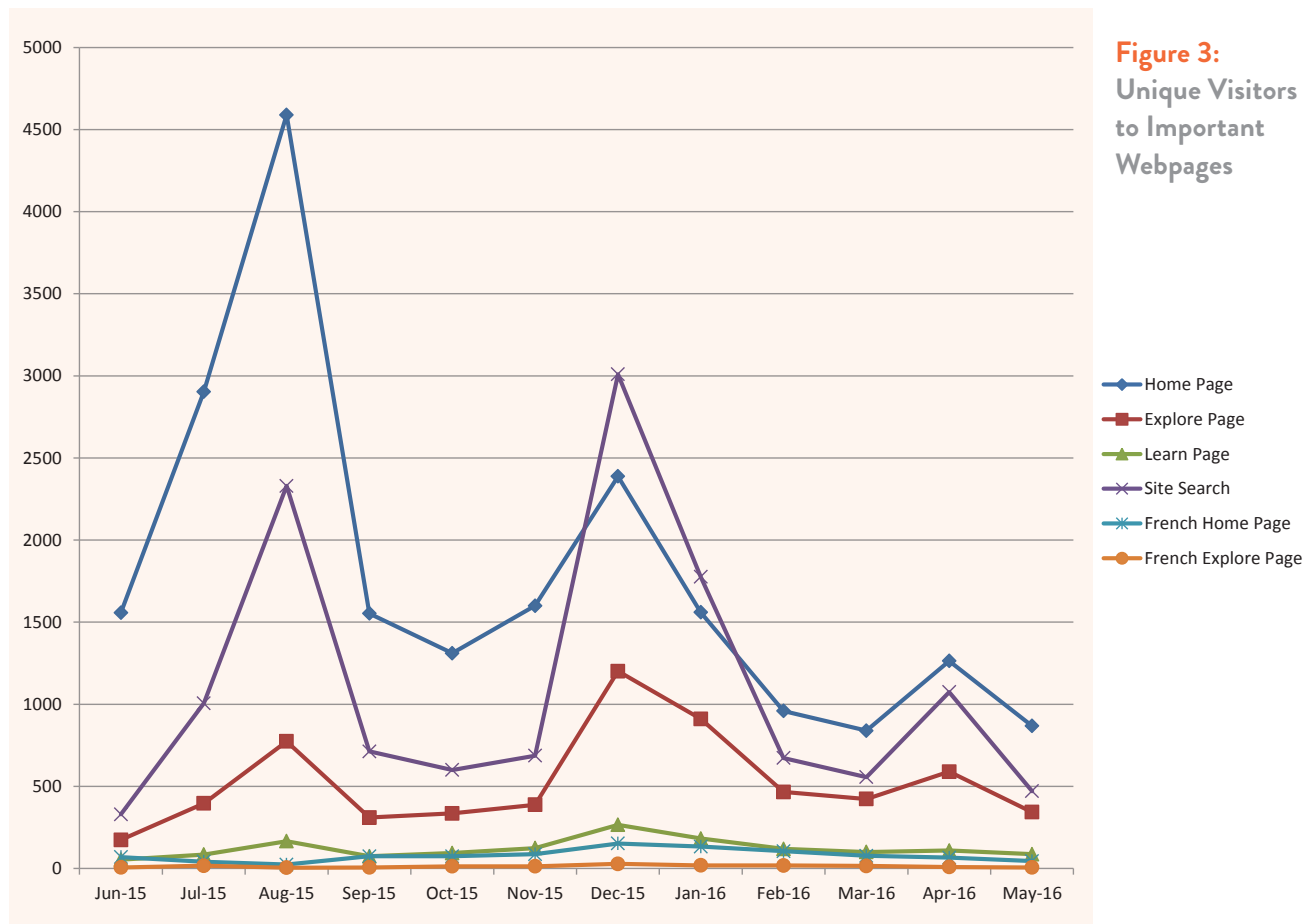98 In June 2015 and December 2015, respectively.

Figure 3:
Unique Visitors to Important Webpages

HOW VISITORS NAVIGATE SPARK ONTARIO'S WEBSITE

Analytics provide monthly statistics for every individual webpage accessed within SPARK Ontario's website, a figure that has ranged from 954 to 2 829[98] pages over the first year of the website's operation. Some of these webpages are important on their own such as the home or landing page, the introduction pages for 'Exploring' (finding volunteer opportunities) and 'Learning' (reading stories and resources about volunteering), and the search page. All of these pages additionally exist in both French and English. The monthly visit data for these unique pages can be seen in Figure 3.

A special example of a webpage that stands on its own is the 'Warm Welcome' page (Figure 4). Introduced in December 2015 as part of a promotion of volunteering for the resettlement of Syrian refugees, the 'Warm Welcome' page became an alternative landing page for SPARK Ontario's website and eclipsed all other pages in its popularity for a period of two months. This is a key element to the 'surge' in usage seen in almost all charts at the end of 2015. The 'Warm Welcome' webpage links to the 'Explore' and 'Learn' parts of the site and may deserve some credit for raising activity broadly across all areas.
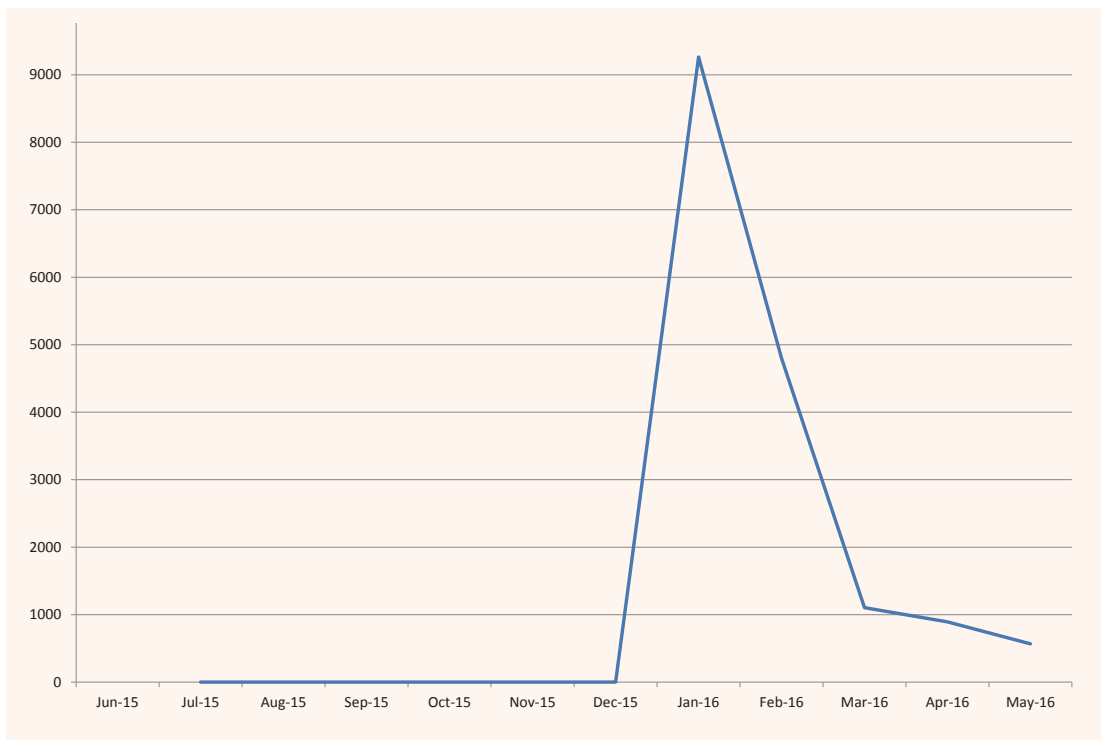
Other webpages are more usefully analyzed in groups. Pages, such as volunteer opportunity postings, volunteering stories, user homepages, and search results, are treated in this analysis as aggregates that tell us something about what functions visitors make the most use of on the website. The monthly breakdown of visit data for these groups of pages can be seen in Figure 5.

The groups of webpages analyzed in this way are defined as follows:

- All Positions: This refers to every individual volunteering opportunity posting, in English and French, that was viewed at least once during the month

- French Positions: This captures only the subset of the above that are in French

- Explore Pages: The explore pages are search results returned when a visitor searches for volunteering opportunities in a particular area of interest. They are tagged according to that interest, allowing us to track what

people are interested in.

- Story Pages: These contain text and video that tell success stories about individual volunteers and organizations and are meant to inspire and educate visitors about the broad possibilities of volunteering

- Contact Pages: These webpages represent a choice by visitors to contact posting organizations for more information regarding volunteer opportunities. They are the last step in the process of successful volunteer-matching that is directly reflected in the analytics

- Related Opportunity Pages: These pages represent search results returned when a visitor indicates they want to see more volunteering postings like one they just viewed. These pages are therefore related to 'Explore' pages in terms of the activity and interest they indicate.

- User Activity Pages: These pages represent the profile pages of visitors who register on the site. Activity in this area is a rough proxy for visitors choosing to have a deeper involvement with the website's features, creating a 'presence' for themselves on SPARK Ontario's website
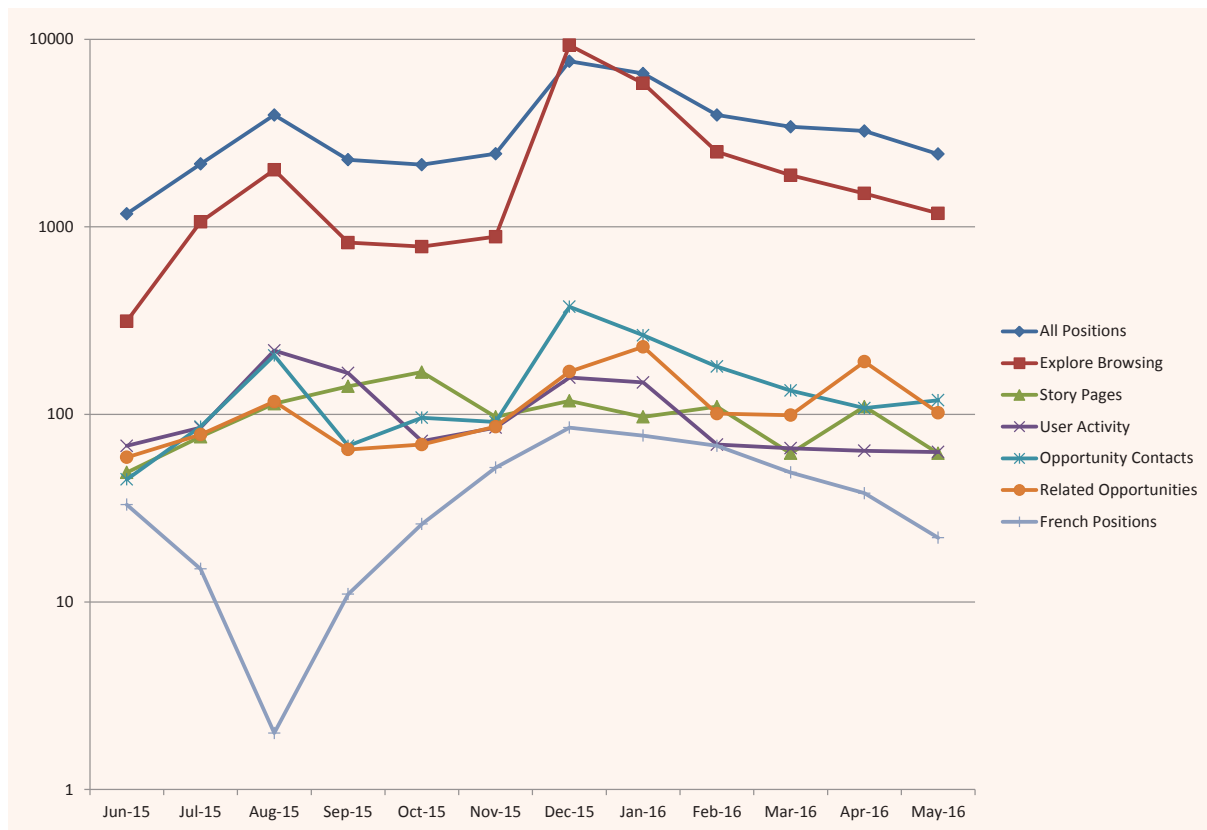
Figure 5:
Unique Visitors to Selected Groups of Webpages

The total monthly visits to these diffe ent types of pages are plotted in Figure 5 on a logarithmic scale, one that allows for the comparison of rhythms of activity occurring at very diffe ent levels – with some groups of pages visited thousands of times per month, others hundreds, and still others – particularly the French volunteer postings – measured in tens or ones.

The graph (Figure 5) has three important features. The first is the familiar pattern of inc easing activity through August, then decline in the fall, then the "surge" of interest during the Syrian resettlement, followed by a decline to the current equilibrium. The second is that there is a clear separation between the (English) pages devoted to exploring volunteering postings and the other functions of the website such as reading stories, watching videos, and maintaining one's user profile. inally, the French pages' initial plummet in August 2015 reflects how S ARK Ontario had incorrectly

assumed that Eastern Volunteer Centres would have access to bilingual opportunities and that the initiative would be promoted by Francophone partners. The subsequent increase in French page views corresponds to FHIS' hiring of an outreach coordinator, who reached out to the Francophone community in Toronto between September 2015 and February 2016.

What are would-be Volunteers Interested in?

The organization of the SPARK Ontario's website allows us to use analytics to gain insight into the relative level of interest, on the part of visitors, in various types of volunteering experiences. In Figure 6, we chart the relative popularity of these subject tags over time. Only the first page of sea ch results was used to calculate the number of visitors who searched for that topic in any given month. The top 10 tags, out of a total of 34, were chosen by looking only at those who were one of the three most popular searches in at least one of the twelve months of the analysis.
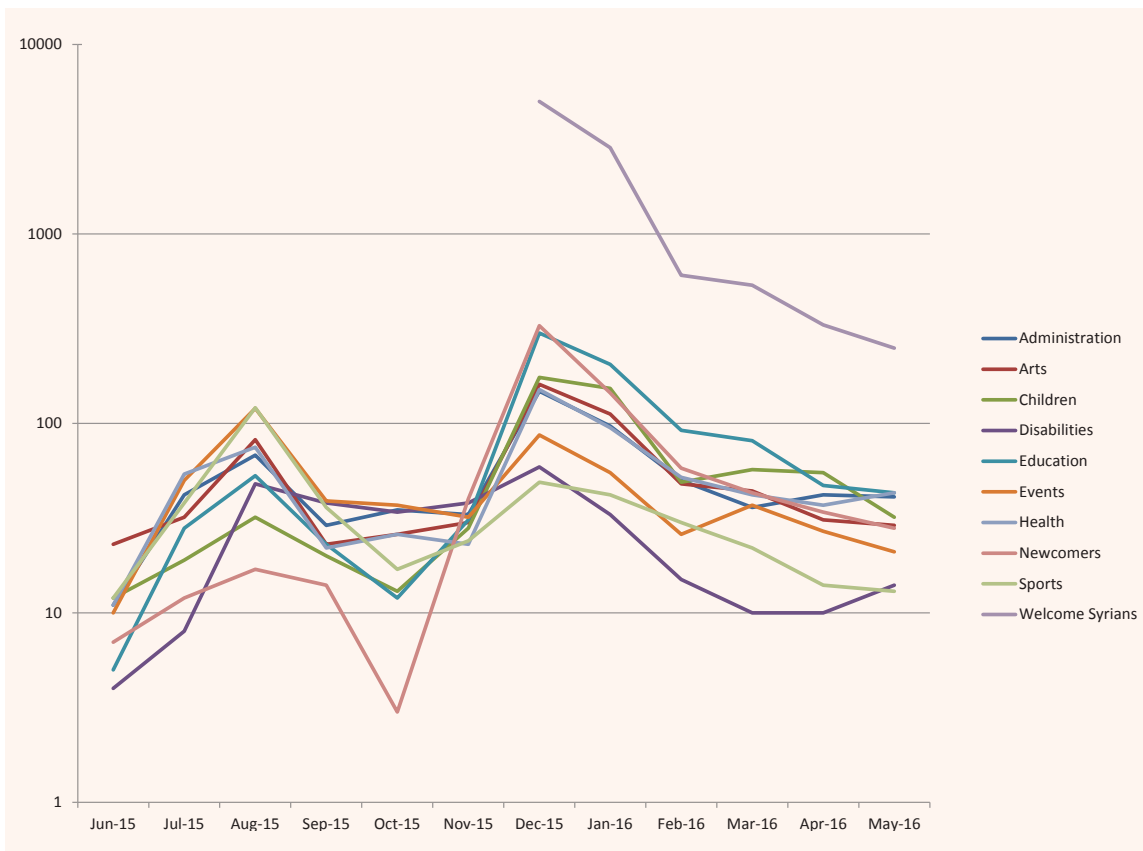
Figure 6:
Popular Search Terms for Volunteering

As in Figure 5, the plot of trends in explore tags over time is on a logarithmic scale, showing most of the popular tags moving in a band between 10 and 500 hits per month and following the same general pattern of initial growth, subsidence, surge at the end of 2015, and a more gradual fall-off the eafter. Almost all are dwarfed in importance by the tag, added only in December 2015 and consistently the most-popular tag by far since then, relating to volunteers who help welcome Syrian families to Ontario (Figure 6).

Another way of looking at this subject is to ask whether the posting of opportunities tracks well with the expressions of interest on the part of would-be volunteers. Unfortunately, time and technical difficulties limited our ability to ca y this out as a time-series analysis; however, we present here a single month's example of this comparison in Figure 7.

The chart shows that there is potentially a significant gap between what volunteers are looking for and the postings provided on SPARK Ontario's website. This chart, however, should be interpreted with caution given the limited time-scale. Newcomer support and specificall , helping with the resettlement of Syrian refugees, were the 30th and 34th (last-place) most common tag on posted opportunities in May 2016, while the resettlement effort emained extremely dominant among the motivations of visitors to the site.

SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT - TWITTER USAGE, IMPACT, AND TRENDS OVER TIME

SPARK Ontario has put significant, though uneven, efforts i engaging with social media to promote the SPARK Ontario's website and other events. The following four figu es, labeled 8 to 11, examine various elements of the initiative's Twitter presence as an example of social media engagement. All

Figure 7
Opportunities and Interests, May 2016

figu es are on a per-month basis, from one month before the launch of the site (April 2015), to over a year after launch, ending in August 30th, 2016.

Figure 8 shows both the total number of tweets sent out by month and the total number of what Twitter calls 'impressions,' which is the number of unique accounts who saw the tweet in some form. Impressions are a basic measure of the tweet's reach through the Twitter network. The number of tweets sent track the following organizational timeline:

- April 2015 – September of 2015: During the launch of the website, social media postings were handled internally and were minimal

- September 2015 – November of 2015: SPARK Ontario

contracted the services of a marketing company as part of the Community Champions promotion campaign, which increased the initiative's social media activity

- December 2015 – February 2016: Social media was once again handled internally by a social media coordinator and shows a lower, but still substantial, level of activity

- February 2016 – June 2016: social media presence returned to a relatively ad hoc basis and tapered off

- June of 2016 – Present: SPARK Ontario hired a social media coordinator and saw that social media activity levels begin to rise

Interestingly, the average number of views per tweet over the same period does not follow the same pattern nor does it match closely with any of the other measures of
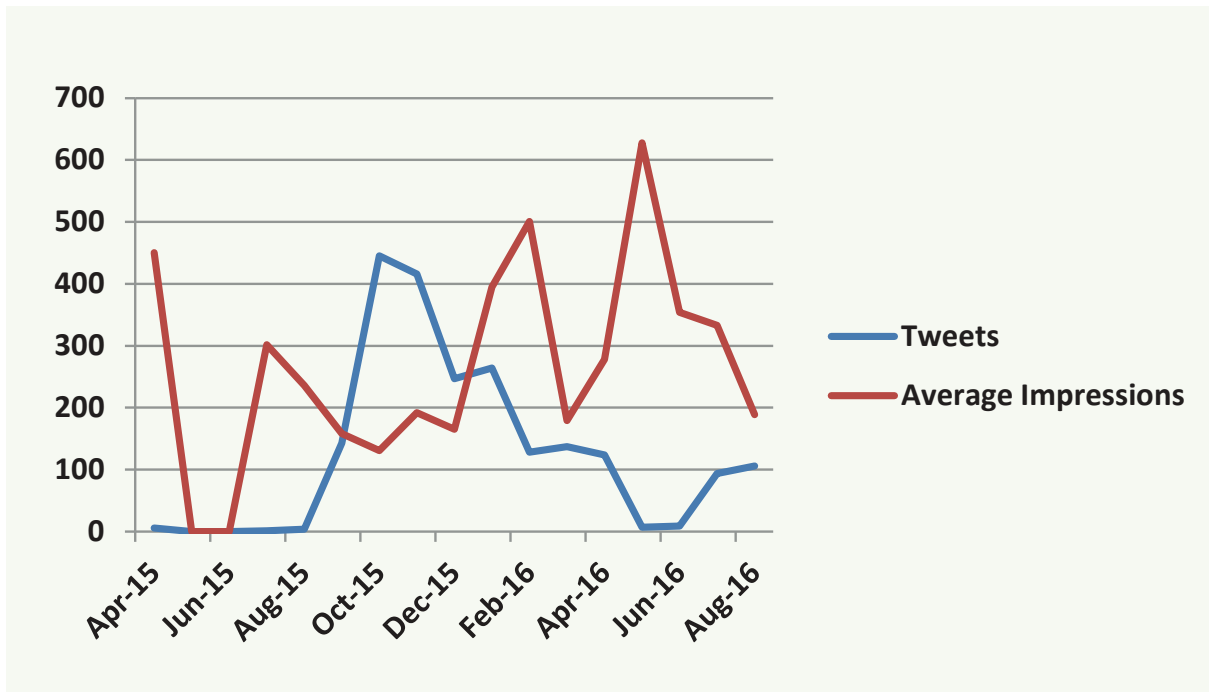
Figure 8
Basic Twitter Statistics by Month

reach or impact recorded in this session. Although there are significant peaks and t oughs throughout the life of the initiative, the broad trend is upwards. This trend implies that in spite of setbacks, SPARK Ontario is successful in retaining outside interest and sustaining engagement. This trend informed an additional communication strategy that was commissioned from Scratch Media.

Figure 9 shows the average number of 'engagements' per tweet over the same time period. Engagements refer to the sum of all interactions that Twitter users have with a tweet, whether it is a tweet that users like or a tweet that users feel is provocative. Engagements encompass 're-tweeting', which is sharing the text of a tweet, indicating approval by liking the tweet, replying to it, or linking to it. The pattern in the figu e is not easily interpreted but indicates that SPARK Ontario's tweets have relatively low rates of engagement, usually between 2 and 5 average engagement per tweet in a given

month (for the months May and June of 2015, where the figu e is 0, almost no tweets were sent out, as seen in Figure 9, due to PPAGS' hold on communications concerning SPARK Ontario).

Figure 10 records the total rather than average per-tweet impressions achieved by SPARK Ontario's tweets over the same time periods. Figure 11 shows the same total by month for engagement activities. In both cases, the pattern is consistent with the timeline outlined above as well as with the surge of interest at the beginning of 2016 in the Syrian resettlement project. In both cases, signs of gradual re-growth are apparent at the end of the time period.
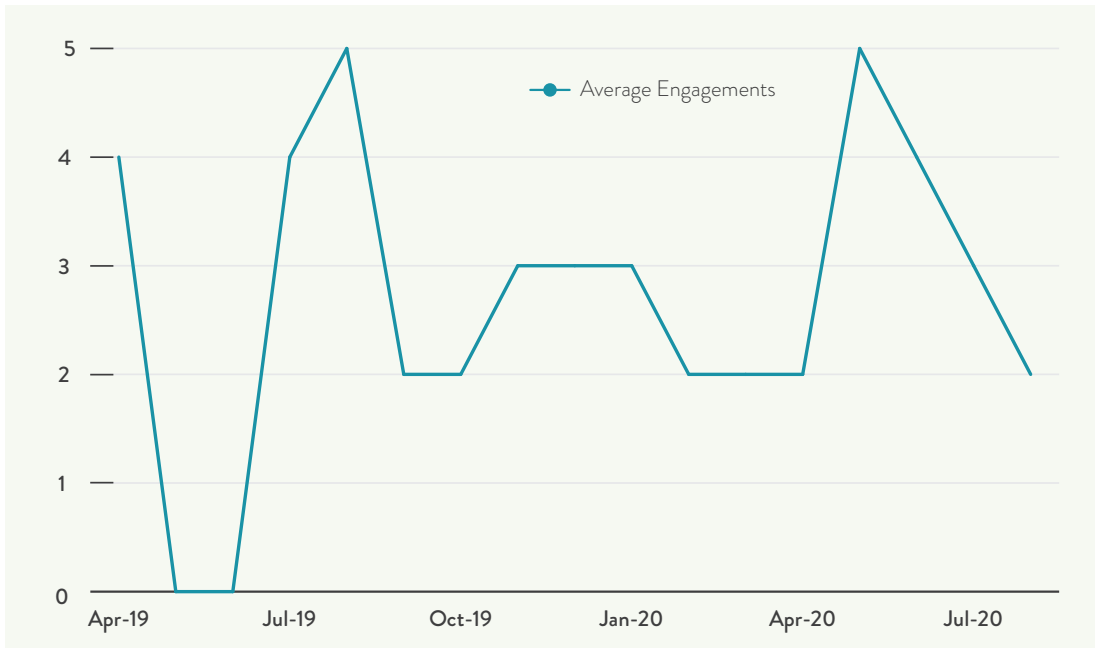
Figure 9:
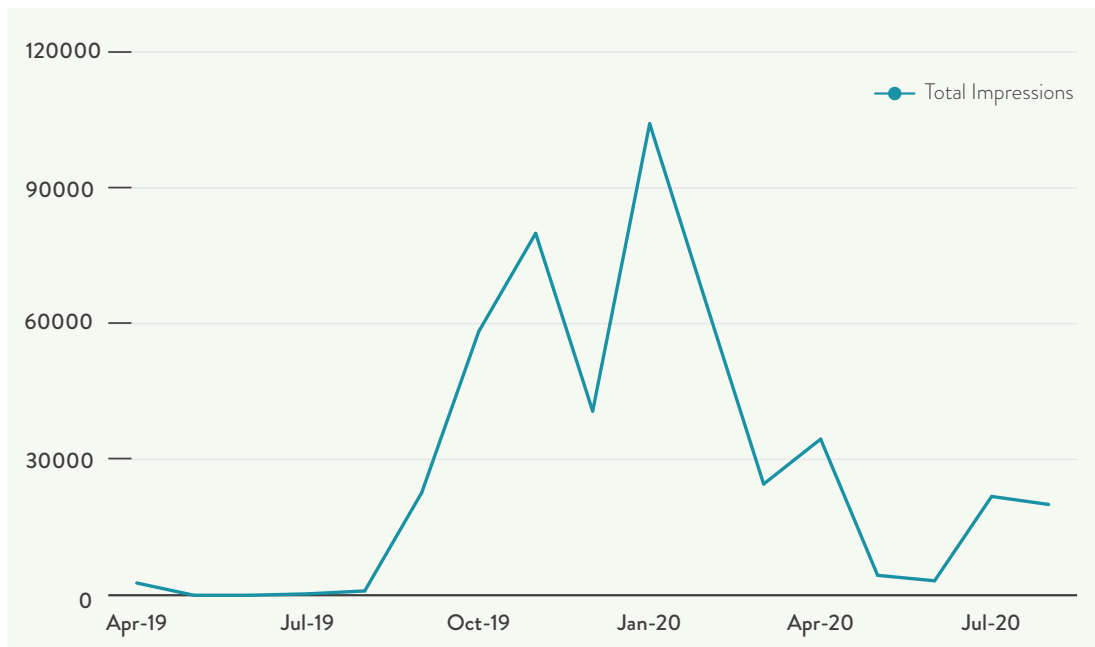**Average Level of Engagement with Tweets**

Figure 10a:
Summed Views of Tweets by Month

Figure 10b:
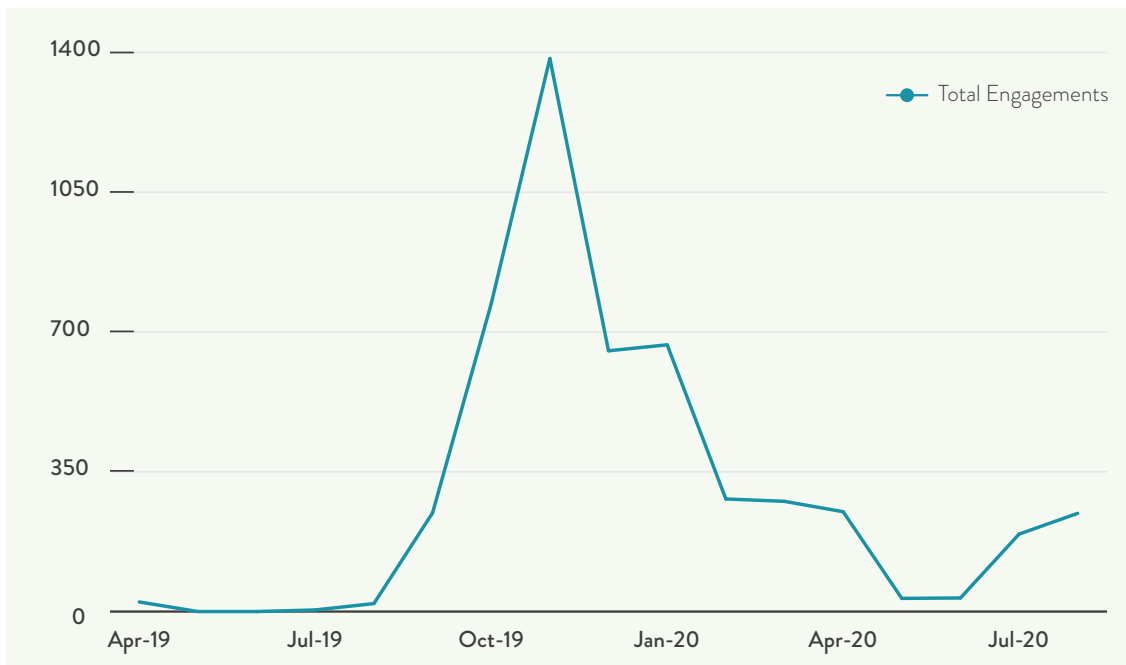**Summed Engagement with Tweets by Month**

KEY FINDING #4 – IMPORTANCE OF FOCUSED WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA PROMOTION

There is a consistent pattern over time between most of the analytics presented here regarding SPARK Ontario's website and social-media activity. Broadly speaking, the evidence shows the extreme importance of the focused, pro-active period of promotion leading up to and immediately following the Syrian resettlement policy in Ontario as well as the paid support from SPARK Ontario's marketing company during this period. These activities did not merely affect the level of activity on the website, but pushed it to an entirely diffe ent scale of intensity.

SUMMARY

This section drew from website and social media analytics as well as interviews with project staff to describe the usage, trends, and impacts of the SPARK Ontario's website and social media. The analysis reveals that focused promotion as well as external events, such as the Syrians' resettlement in Ontario, increased SPARK Ontario's online reach and activity. The effects of the cur ent period of readjustment in communications and promotion at SPARK Ontario have yet to fully develop; however, there are signs of re-growth.

SECTION 7

THE ONLINE USER EXPERIENCE

THIS SECTION REPORTS ON THE FINDINGS OF THE OUTCOME EVALUATION for SPARK Ontario's first objective:

Objective #1: Build capacity of the nonprofit sector to help SPARK Ontario create a positive and inviting experience for the end-user, to showcase volunteering more creatively, and market opportunities more effectively

To assess how SPARK Ontario is meeting this objective from the vantage point of online users, this section draws from the findings of two online surveys to discuss both organizational and individual feedback regarding SPARK Ontario's website features as well as the outcomes of using the portal.

Both surveys were open for 12 days, from September 12th to 23rd, 2016. The survey for volunteer-recruiting organizations (Appendix B) garnered 72 responses, of which 47 completed the entire survey (completion rate of 65%). The survey for individuals seeking volunteer opportunities (and who, at one time, provided their email to SPARK Ontario) (Appendix C) garnered 81 responses, of which 53 completed the survey (65% completion rate).

PROFILE OF ORGANIZATIONAL SURVEY RESPONDENTS[99]

The 45 organizations that recorded their date of founding ranged from being 3 to 154 years in age, with a median of 32 years and an average of 43 years. This average age is roughly comparable to the population studied by the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration in its 2013 survey of nonprofit organizations, herein referred to as 'the 2013 MCI survey.' That survey found that Ontario's nonprofits have been operating on average between 34 and 50 years, depending upon their incorporation status.

Forty-six organizations reported on their complement of paid staff embers (Figures 11 and 12). For full-time positions,

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[99] For most of the statistics regarding organizations, we report the median as well as the mean. The median is the value which evenly divides the lower and higher values of responses – that is, it is at the half-way point between the lowest response and the highest response. We use both because the responses by organizations were heavily skewed by a few very large numbers (from very old, very large organizations, or those making extraordinarily heavy use of volunteers). These large numbers are reported alongside the median as the maximum value reported. The mean, or average, is included because it allows comparison to the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration's 2013 State of the Sector study of non-profi organizations.

the most common response was "1-5," with "51 or more" being the second most common – suggesting a bimodal population split between large and small respondents. Part-time positions followed a similar pattern, though even more strongly weighted towards the "1-5" category and with a greater number of "0" responses. Compared with the 2013 MCI survey, this sample is much less likely to report having no paid employees (40% of MCI respondents answered "0" to the combined question) and much more likely to report having over 50 paid employees (only 4% of MCI respondents indicated this was the case for full- and part-time combined).
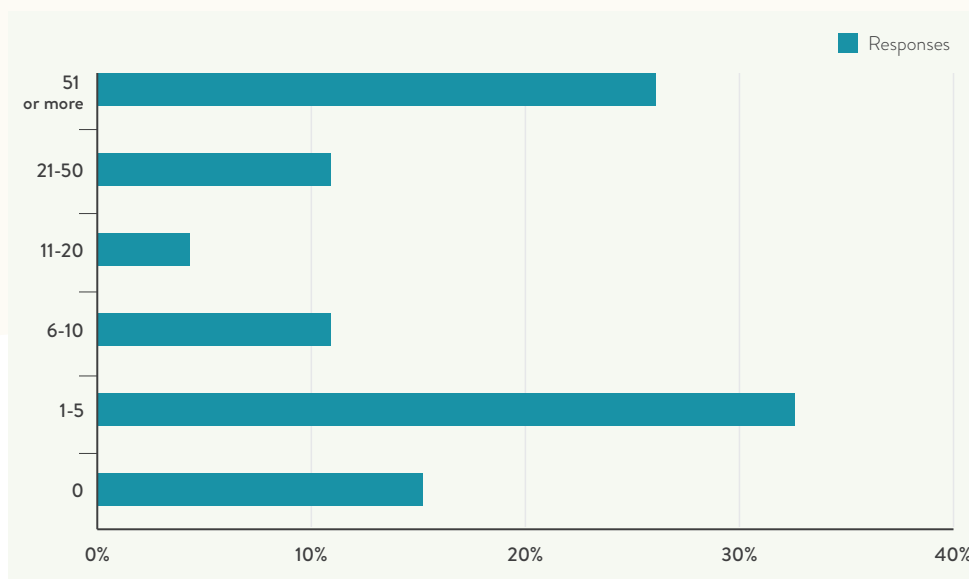

Figure 11:
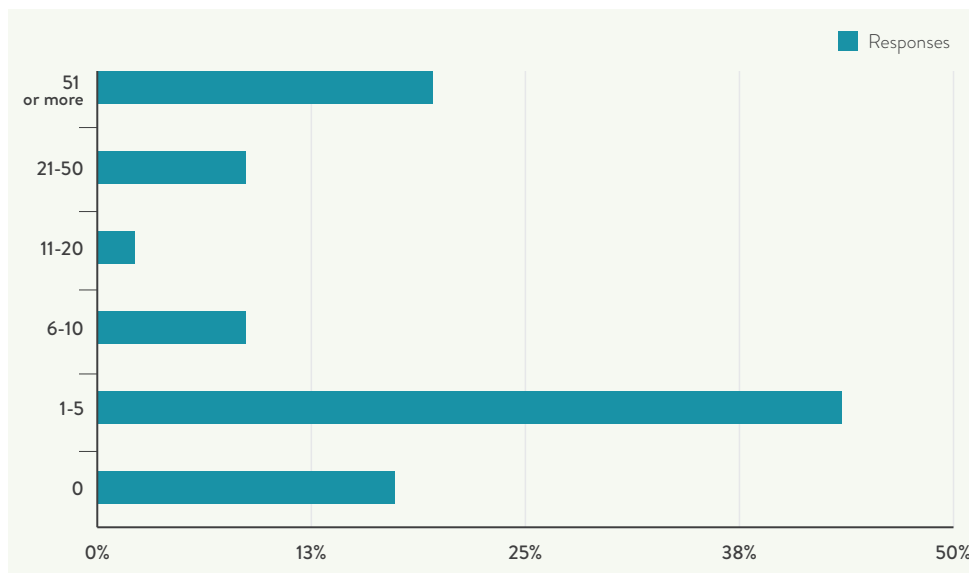**Full-time paid positions**

Figure 12:
Part-time paid positions

Responding organizations represented a wide variety of areas of interest with the most common being Health (17.8%), Social Services (15.6%), and Fundraising or Volu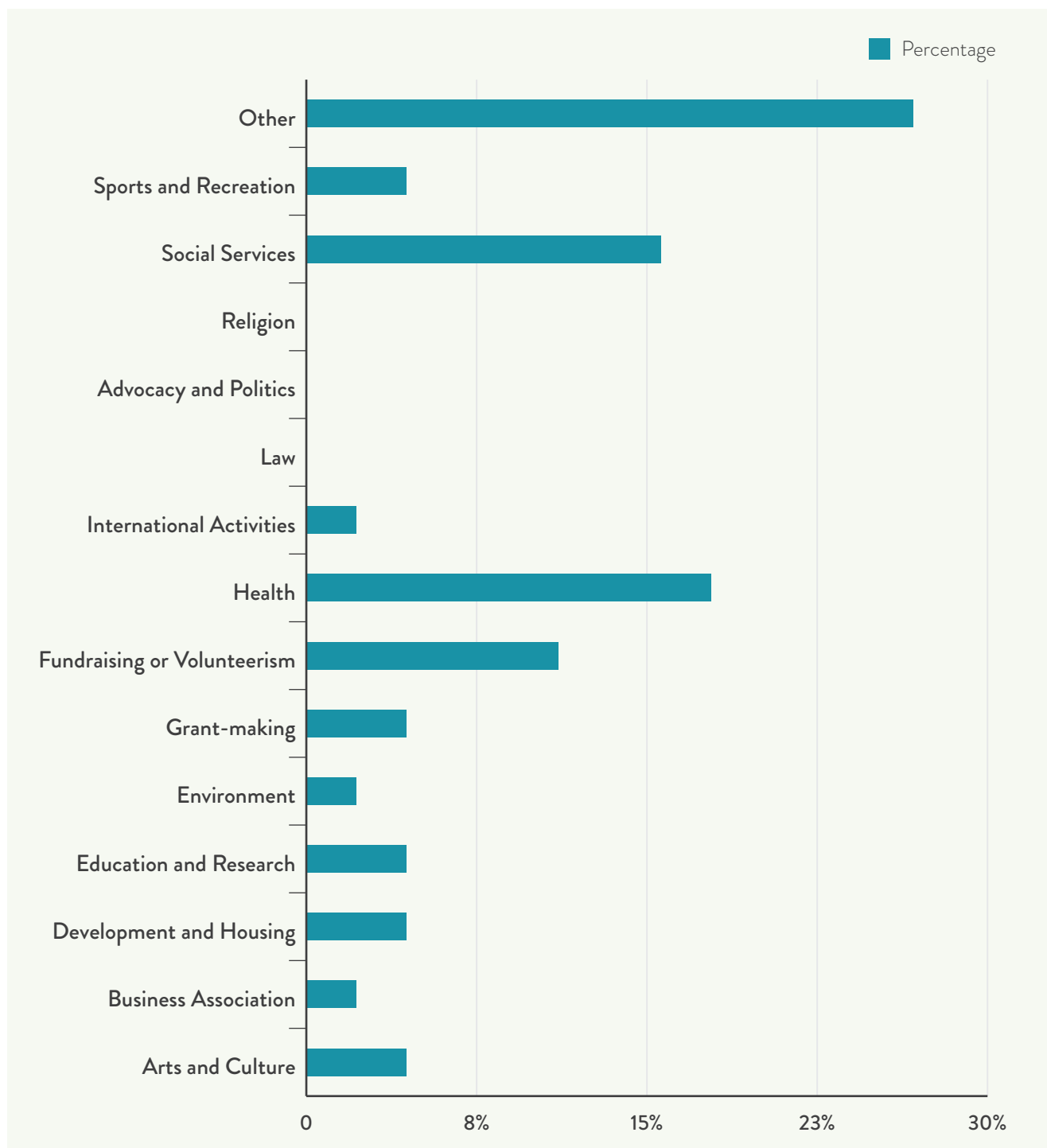nteerism (11.1%) (Figure 13). Compared with the MCI 2013 survey, Health is far more represented (5% in their sample) and Social Services is almost equally popular (18% in their sample). However, Arts and Culture and Sports and Recreation are greatly underrepresented in the SPARK

Ontario sample (4.4% each, compared with 13% each in MCI). Religion, Law, and Advocacy and Politics are entirely absent in our sample, nor are they included in any of the "Other" responses (which made up 26.7% of all responses).

In MCI's 2013 survey, religion-based nonprofits constituted 20% of their sample. See Figure 14 for a breakdown of the "other" responses offered by the SPARK sample.

Figure 13: Areas of Interest

Children

Positive youth development

Library

Beautify the community waterfront

Community support emergency response prevention and safety

Multi-service

Festivals and events

Feeding the community

Student nutrition

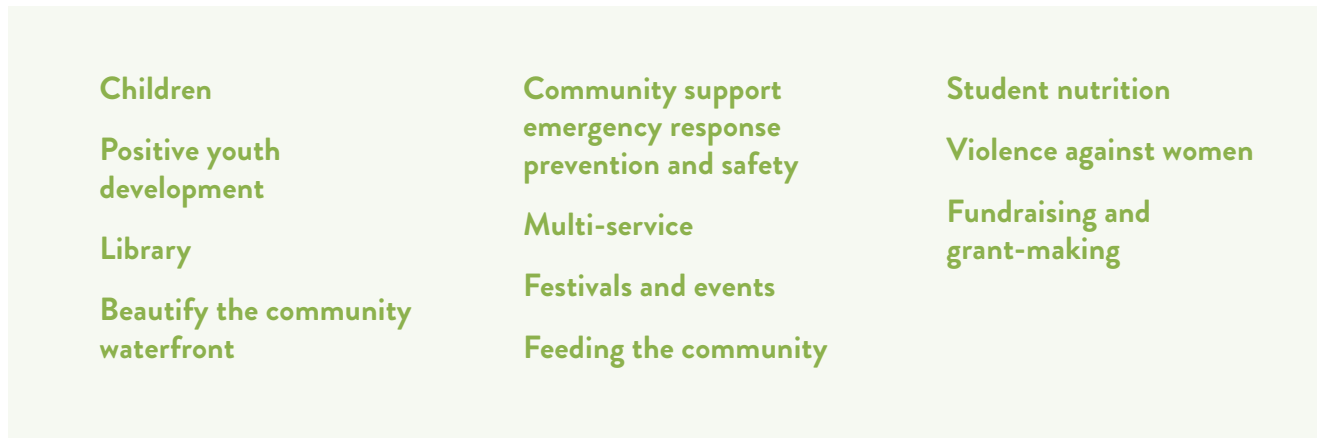Violence against women

Fundraising and grant-making

Figure 14: Other Areas of Interest

The survey asked organizations to answer a few questions regarding the role of volunteers in their work. Excluding board members, 91.5% of respondents indicated that they involved volunteers in their activities, a similar figure to MCI 2013's 87%. The number of volunteers that respondents involved in the past year ranged from 0 to 20 000, with an average of 684 (though this figure is very heavily influenced by the single extremely high value) and a median of 150. This is much higher than MCI 2013's average of 111.

Organizations were also asked to estimate the average contribution of volunteer hours per volunteer over the past year. Here, too, the SPARK sample is considerably skewed towards a few high values, which range from 2 to 1000, with an average of 111 and a median of 39.

Interestingly, this diverges from the MCI 2013 survey sample in the opposite direction from the previous question: there, the MCI 2013 survey found an average contribution of 345 hours in a year by volunteers. One interesting speculation is that the "missing" Sports and Recreation, Arts and Culture and Religion segments of the volunteer sector might involve considerable hourly contributions from volunteers – perhaps related to the evidence that middle-aged volunteers are heavily involved in activities involving their children such as sports leagues.

The survey asked volunteer-sector organizations whether their use of volunteers had increased, decreased, or stayed about the same over the last 3 years. Here, nearly half (48.9%) reported that their use of volunteers had increased while only 8.9% reported that it had decreased. This is a higher rate of volunteering growth than in the MCI sample, where only 32% reported an increase.

Lastly, organizations were asked to share the reasons why they involve volunteers as well as the activities for which volunteers were employed (Figures 15 and 16). These questions allowed organizations to select multiple answers. Among the reasons to involve volunteers, a strong majority of respondents indicated "a desire to engage with the community" (86.4%) and "a desire to benefit from the skills that volunteers can offer" (72.7%), while the other responses garnered substantial, relatively even proportions. For activities, volunteer involvement was most commonly reported for "organizing, supervising or coordinating activities or events" and "doing office work, bookkeeping, administrative duties or library work" (both 77.3%). "Canvassing or fundraising" (56.5%) and "teaching, educating or mentoring" (54.5%) were also strong categories.
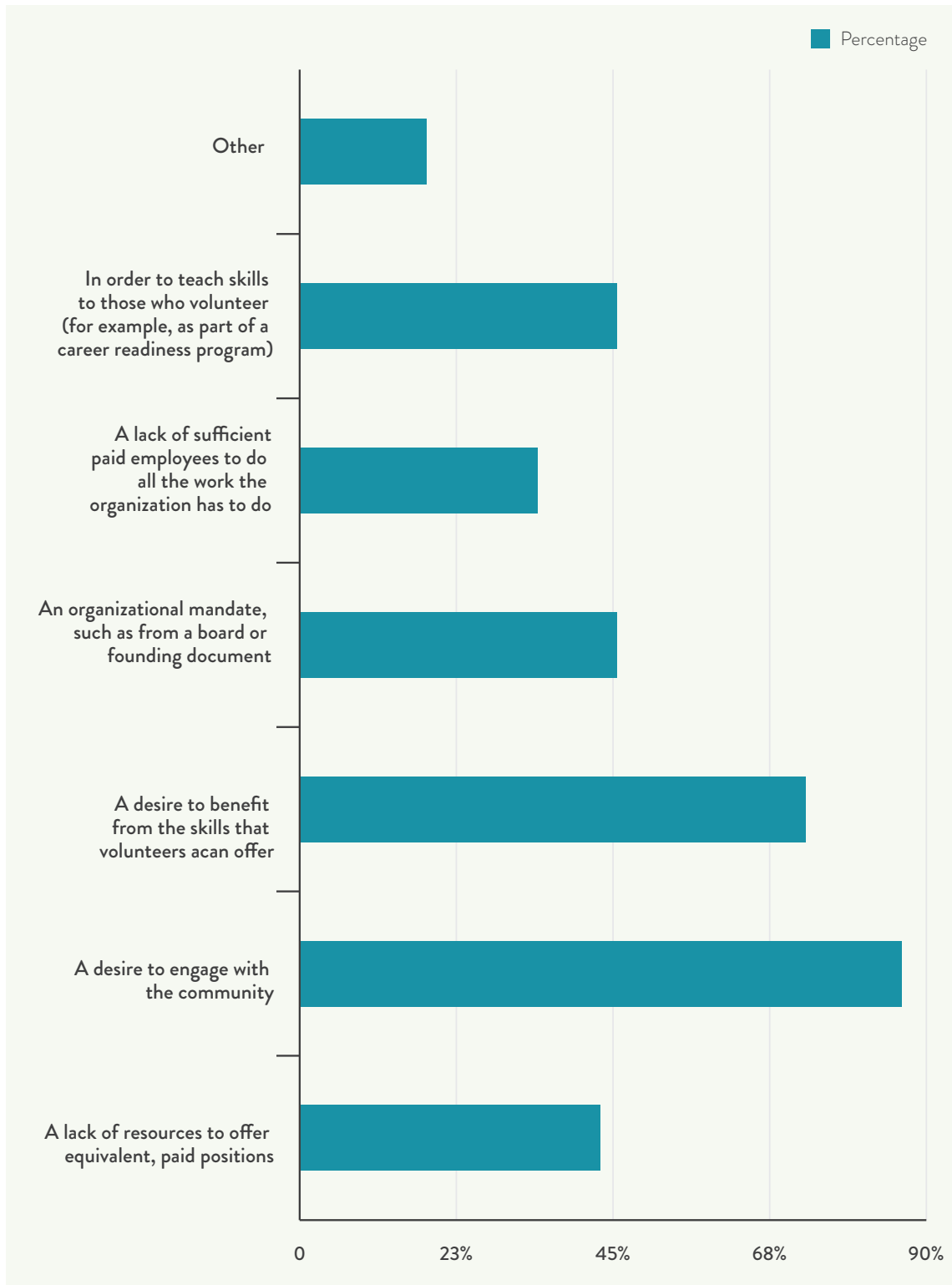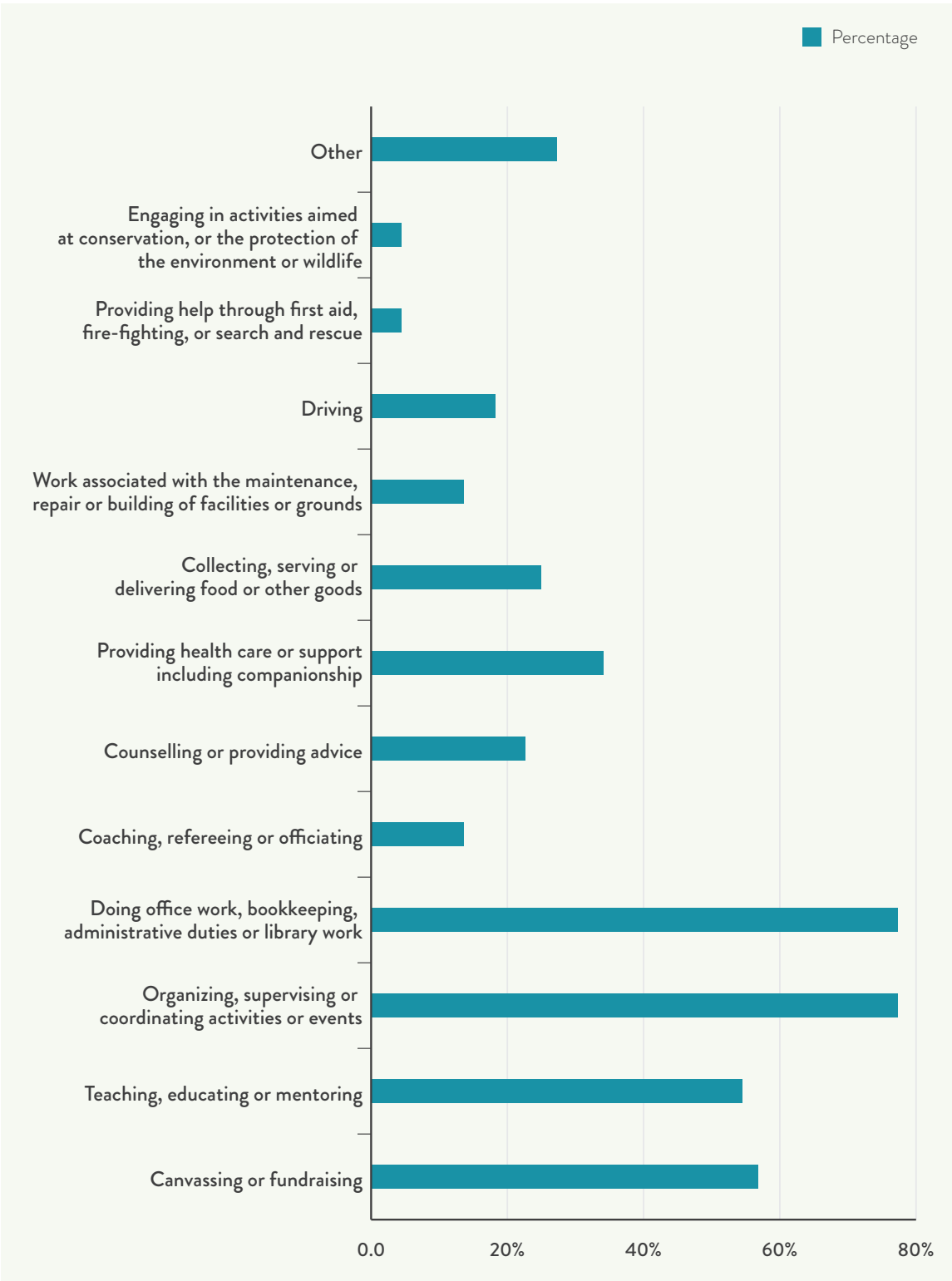
Figure 15: Purpose of Involving Volunteers

Figure 16: Nature of Volunteering

PROFILE OF INDIVIDUAL SURVEY RESPONDENTS

The age of individual respondents to the SPARK Ontario survey ranged from 17 to 99, with an average age of 50. Of the 56 respondents who provided their gender, 32 (57%) identified as female while 24 (43%) respondents identified as male – no other gender identities were represented to the open-format question. On a question asking respondents to select any of a list of categories that reflected their race or ethnicity, 68% of respondents indicated "White" and none indicated "African or Black" or "Arab" background. Among those who selected at least one non-white category, South Asian was the most common at 16% of responses, followed by East Asian at 9%. In response to a question that asked respondents to identify their country of birth, 17 (31%) indicated they had been born outside of Canada.

SPARK Ontario's survey sample of individuals reported being very highly educated. When asked to describe their highest level of schooling, 31 (54%) respondents indicated they had a college or university degree; an additional 13 (23%) respondents indicated that they had a professional or graduate degree. People with post-secondary qualifications thus made up over three-quarters of the sample. According to Statistics Canada, in 2011, the equivalent figure for the whole Ontario population, 25-64, was 58%.[100]

Individual respondents were asked to give their employment status at the time they created their SPARK Ontario's website profile (Figure 17). 25 (45%) respondents indicated they were employed and 13 (23%) stated that they were retired.

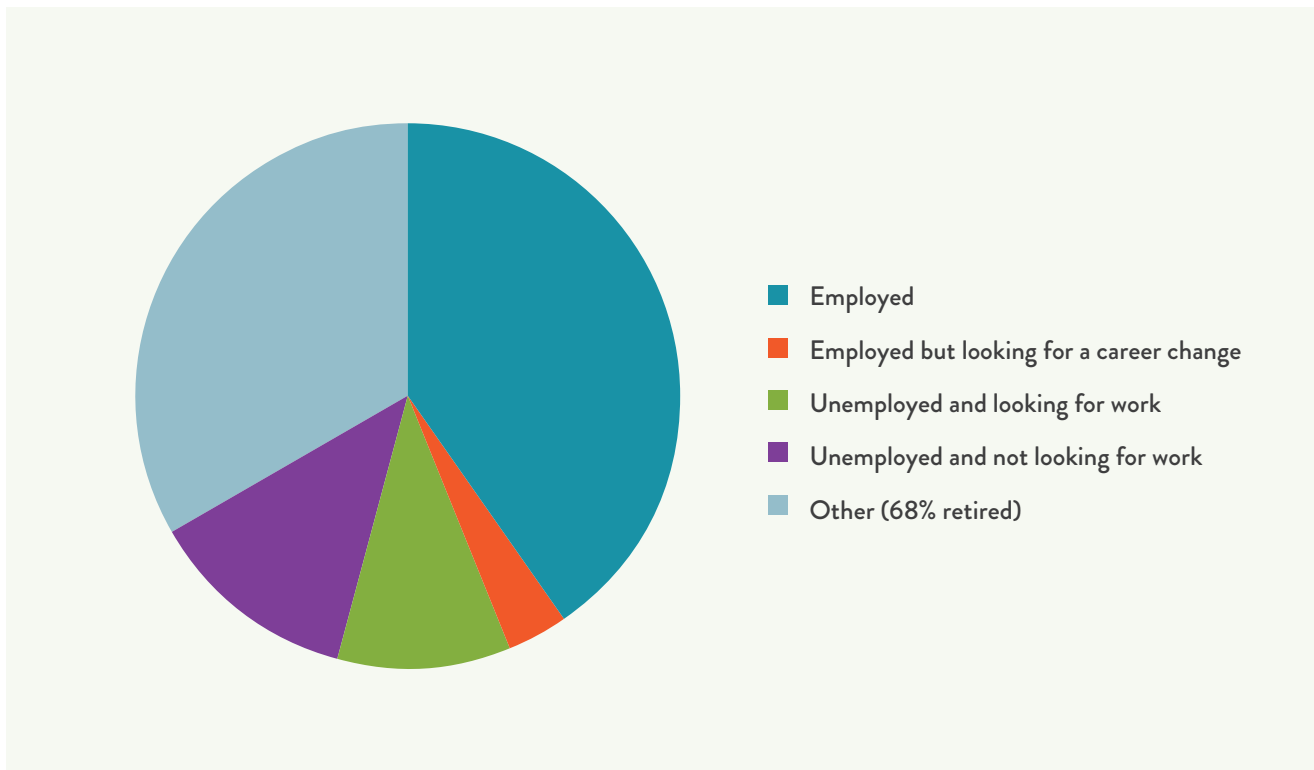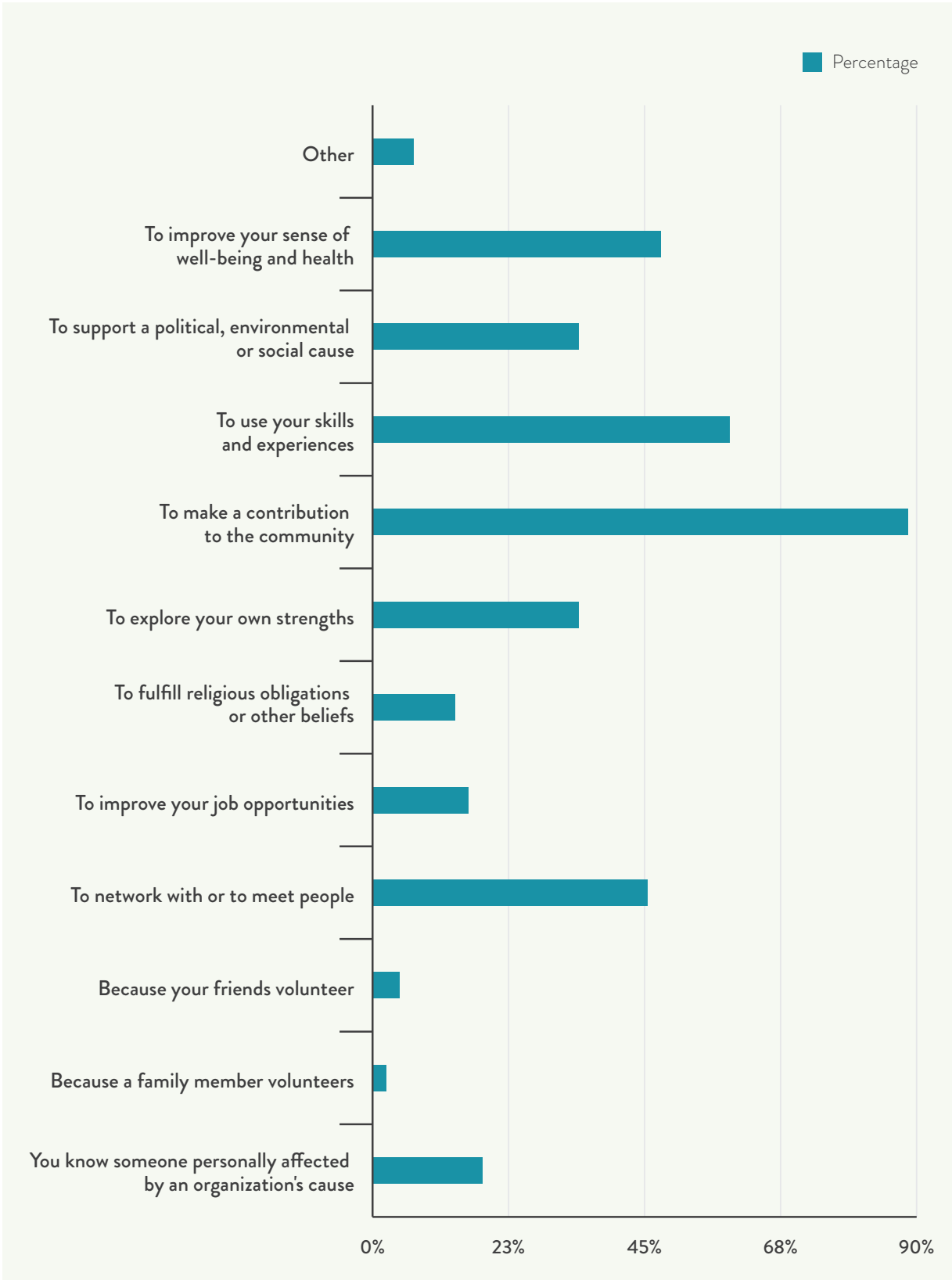**Figure 17: Employment Status of Individual Respondents**

- Employed
- Employed but looking for a career change
- Unemployed and looking for work
- Unemployed and not looking for work
- Other (68% retired)

Figure 18: Reasons Cited for Volunteering

A series of survey questions asked individual respondents about the role of volunteering in their lives. Nearly three-quarters (74%) of respondents indicated that they have done at least some volunteering since creating their profile on SPARK Ontario's website. Those who had done volunteering were asked to describe their motivations: 89% of respondents agreed that they wanted "to make a contribution to the community" and 59% wanted "to use [their] skills and experiences" (Figure 18). In this sample, very few people indicated they volunteered because a family member or friend does so. The respondents then estimated the average number of hours they had contributed in volunteer work per month: this figure ranged from 0 to 500 hours, with an average of 29, and a median of 10. Those who had not done any volunteering were asked to describe the reasons why not (Figure 19); half of those respondents indicated that they "did not have the time" (7 responses, 50%).

In providing a profile of o ganizational and individual respondents, the following subsections review the key findings of the two su veys concerning the online user experience of SPARK Ontario's website.

KEY FINDING #5: SHARP DIVIDE BETWEEN OFFERINGS AND INTERESTS

The results of the two surveys suggest that, so far, SPARK Ontario's website has enjoyed limited success in 'bridging the gap' between what would-be volunteers are looking for and what volunteer sector organizations are prepared to offe . The survey samples are, not surprisingly, heavily involved in volunteering activities. Among individual respondents, 74% reported recently having done volunteering work, while 91% of organizations reported involving volunteers. We know that, somehow, connections are being made for those who responded.

However, those connections may not have been facilitated through SPARK Ontario. If this is the case, it is not necessarily because the website is not used: 68% of individuals have searched for opportunities on SPARK Ontario's website at least once and 56% of organizations

have posted at least one opportunity (the mean number of those opportunities was 4, the median, 1.5). However, when it comes to reaching out to apply for those opportunities, the results drop sharply: only 17% of individuals in the sample have ever applied for an opportunity on SPARK. Of those who have not, 61% indicated that they were unable to find opportunities that matched their interests.

The survey samples do not show good user retention; this may be as a result of this gap. 57% of individual users have logged back onto the website no more than once or twice since registering. For organizations, the equivalent statistic is 71%. Among those organizations that have never posted a volunteer opportunity on SPARK Ontario's website, 50% indicated they had not visited the site in a long time or since registering and 56% felt that their other volunteer-recruitment efforts we e adequate.

In the open-ended question that invited organizations to share in their own words what their experience of using SPARK Ontario's website had been like, several organizations noted they had never filled a position th ough SPARK Ontario (14 of 28 responses; 50%), and several noted they had never received a single application for a position (8 of 28 responses; 29%). However, it is worth noting that a few organizations also commented that they did not have any way of knowing whether a referral was from SPARK Ontario or from another source.

The disappointing recruitment experience, though significant, was not universal, and a significant minority of esponding organizations indicated that SPARK Ontario had made a positive diffe ence for them in finding volunteers 4 of 28 responses; 14%), including student volunteers (an additional 4 of 28 responses; 14%). Only one respondent taking the survey for volunteering applicants indicated they were a student and the lowest age of any survey participant was 17. It is possible that these surveys missed out on a key population of recruitable high-school age volunteers.

The questions that asked respondents to reflect upon the outcomes of their use of the website produced somewhat ambiguous results, consistent with the above (Figures 20 and

Figure 19: Reasons Cited for Not Volunteering
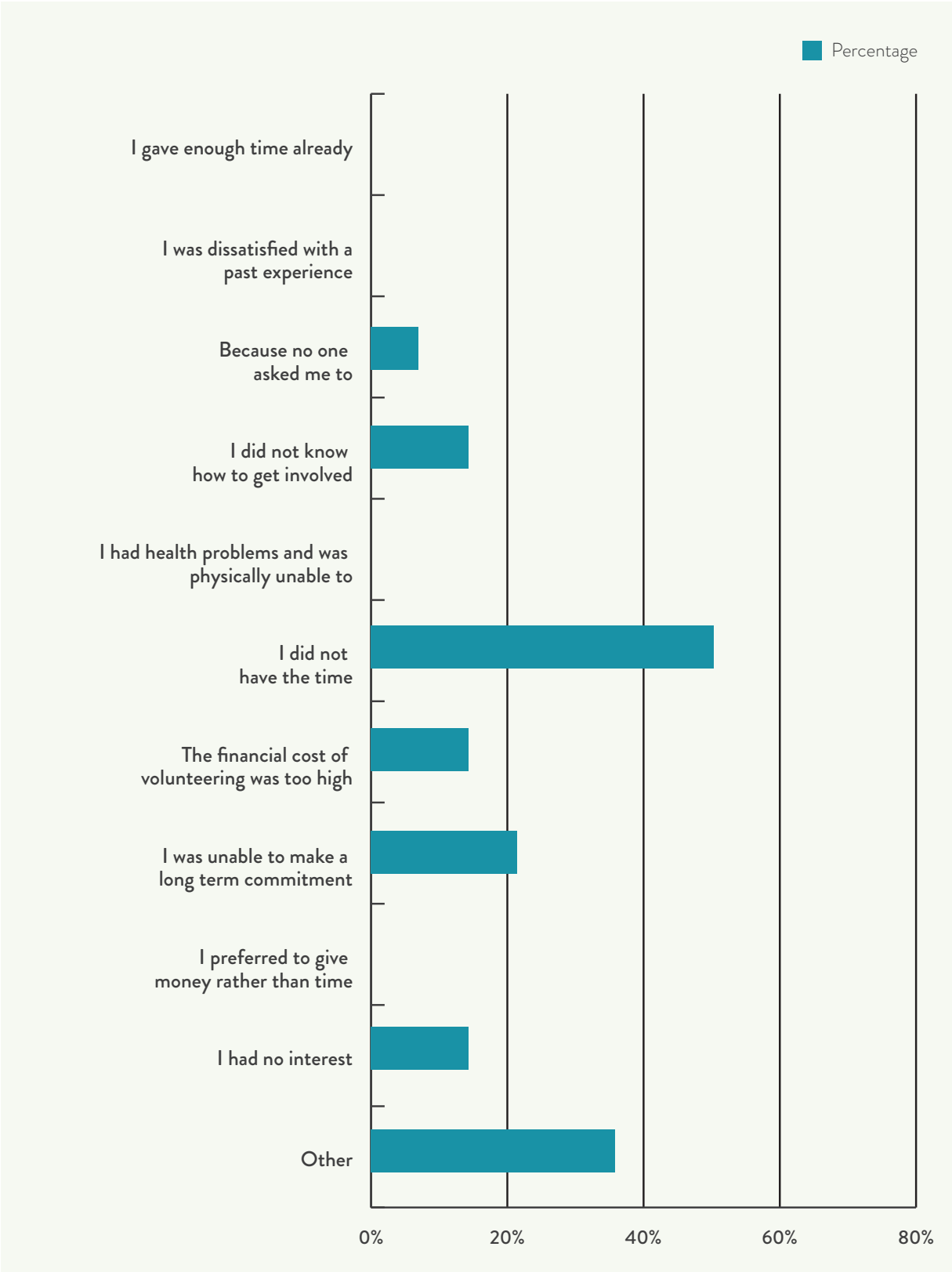
Figure 20: Organizational Outcomes of Using SPARK Ontario's Website
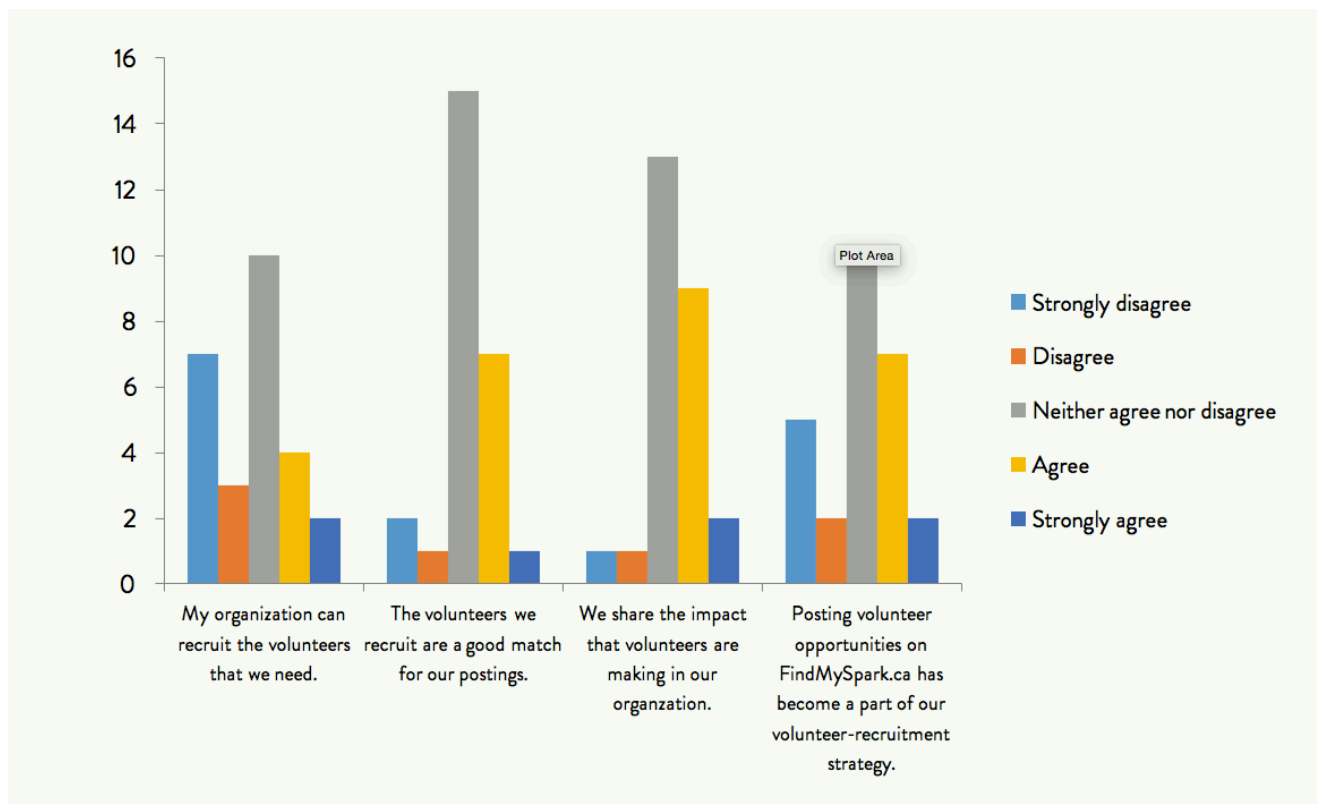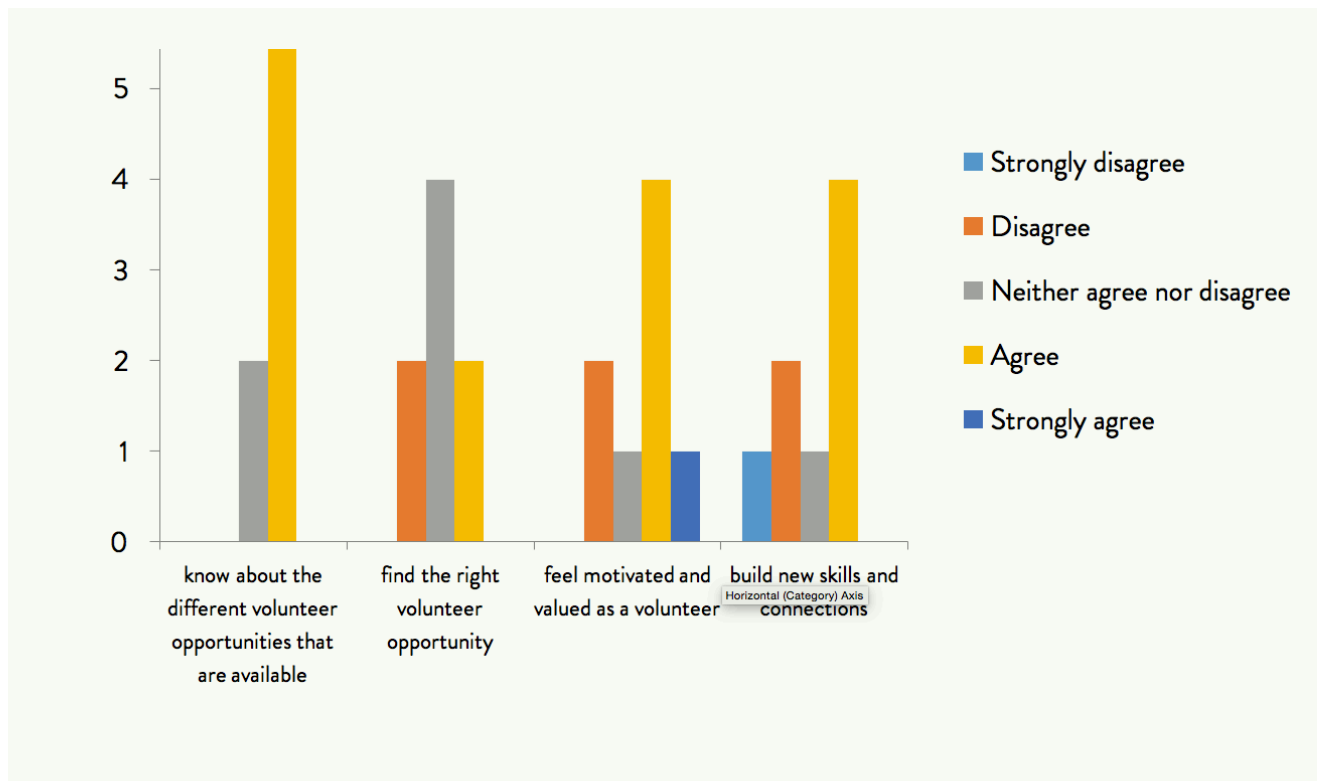

Figure 21: Individual Outcomes of Using SPARK Ontario's Website

21). Most of the organizations that had posted opportunities did not disagree with the statements of positive outcomes, but did not agree with them either. Few organizations' responses suggested the outcomes of using SPARK Ontario's website were particularly good or bad for them. The individuals who applied for opportunities were a small minority of survey respondents, but reported somewhat more positive outcomes, mostly agreeing with the statements.

KEY FINDING #6: WELL-RECEIVED DESIGN AND NAVIGATION FEATURES

The surveys asked a series of level-of-agreement questions regarding online users' general experience of using the website. Both organizational and individual users generally agreed that SPARK Ontario's website was easy to navigate and that navigation functions and features were accessible and appropriate (Figures 22 and 23).

Several comments in the open-ended questions referenced the pleasing design and usability of the site.

> I have found [SPARK] to be an easy website to get around; it is interesting and colorful [sic] and has lots of helpful information (**Survey Respondent**).

> I have recommended [SPARK] to an agency hoping to recruit volunteers, shared articles and stories on social media, [and] looked at it to gage [sic] what is going on in the province as far as volunteering [goes] (**Survey Respondent**).

> "findmyspark helped me brainstorm ideas for the type of volunteer activities and projects that I like to engage in. I was able to focus on doing what I am most passionate about, and that made every volunteer experience enjoyable and fulfilling **Survey Respondent**).

Further, open-ended questions asked organizations and individuals to offer ecommendations for changes and additions to the site's features. Many of the comments referred to geographical concerns, which are addressed fully in the following Key Finding #7. Other suggestions included: free webinars to assist potential volunteers with searching for and applying for opportunities; more resources for volunteer management and development; and making analytics available to organizations regarding the "hits" to their postings. Suggestions from individual users focused on improvements to the search engine, many of which are the subject of the following findin .

KEY FINDING #7: SPARK ONTARIO MAY BE PROVINCE-WIDE, BUT INTERESTS CONTINUE TO BE LOCAL

A common critical comment left by survey respondents concerned the inability to find geographically-app opriate opportunities. This was mostly a problem encountered by individuals seeking volunteering opportunities, who reported being unable to narrow their search to an appropriate local area, or receiving e-mail alerts for opportunities located far from their homes. However, a few organizations also noticed that they sometimes had received applications from potential volunteers who had a mistaken understanding of where the opportunity was located. Speaking to SPARK Ontario as a provincial platform, one organization also shared that they believed that volunteers still prefer locally-based volunteer supports.

> Volunteers shop local and are not interested in searching a provincial site (**Survey Respondent**).

Of the 46 (82%) individual respondents who indicated that they did not apply to any volunteer opportunities they had seen on SPARK Ontario's website, 10 (23%) wrote that opportunities being too far away as their primary reason in the open-ended "Other" category. It was second only to "I have not seen any opportunities that matched my interests" at 61% and tied with "I haven't visited FindMySpark.ca in some time, or since visiting." Three more comments on the geographic-relevance theme appeared in the question asking individuals to describe their experience with the site in their own words; two more appear in the question on general feedback.

When asked what changes might make respondents more likely to apply to opportunities in the future, there were a

Figure 22: Organizations' Satisfaction with SPARK Ontario's website
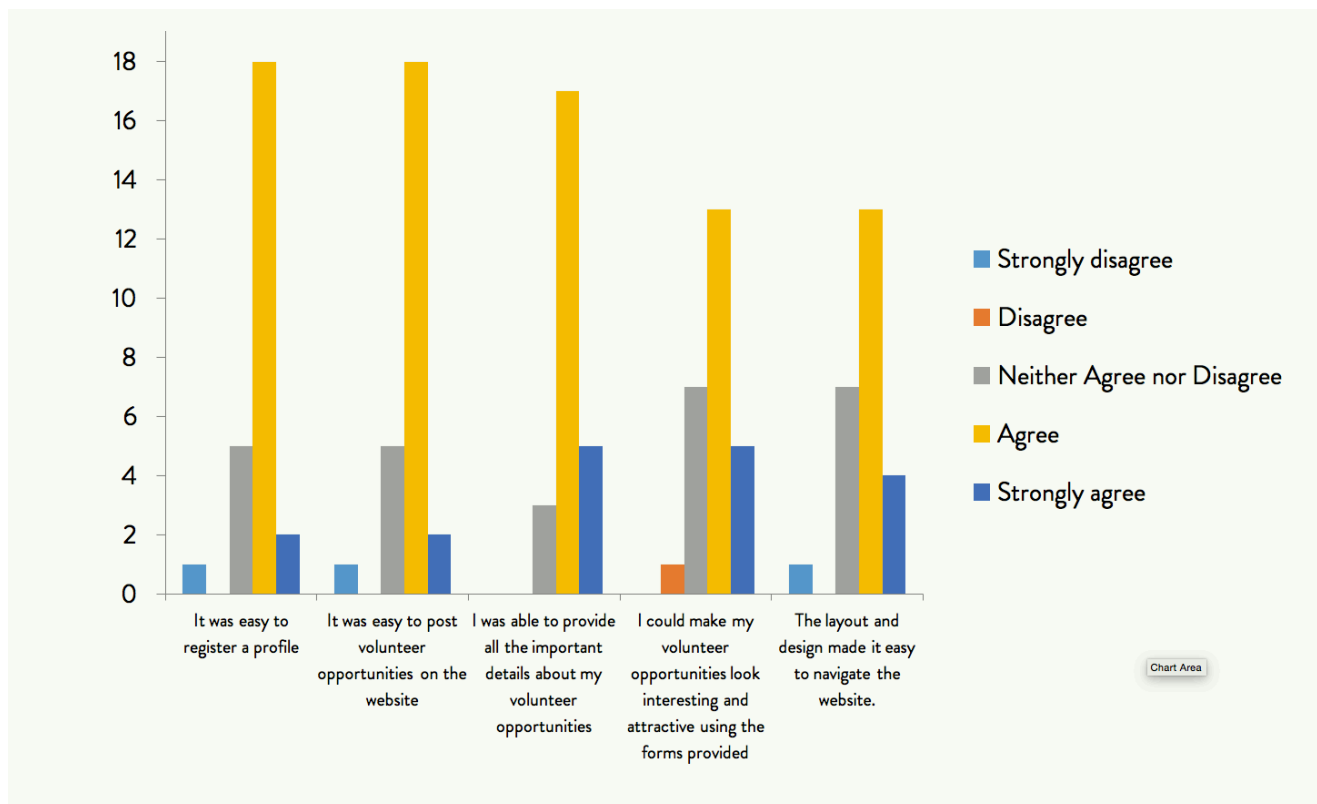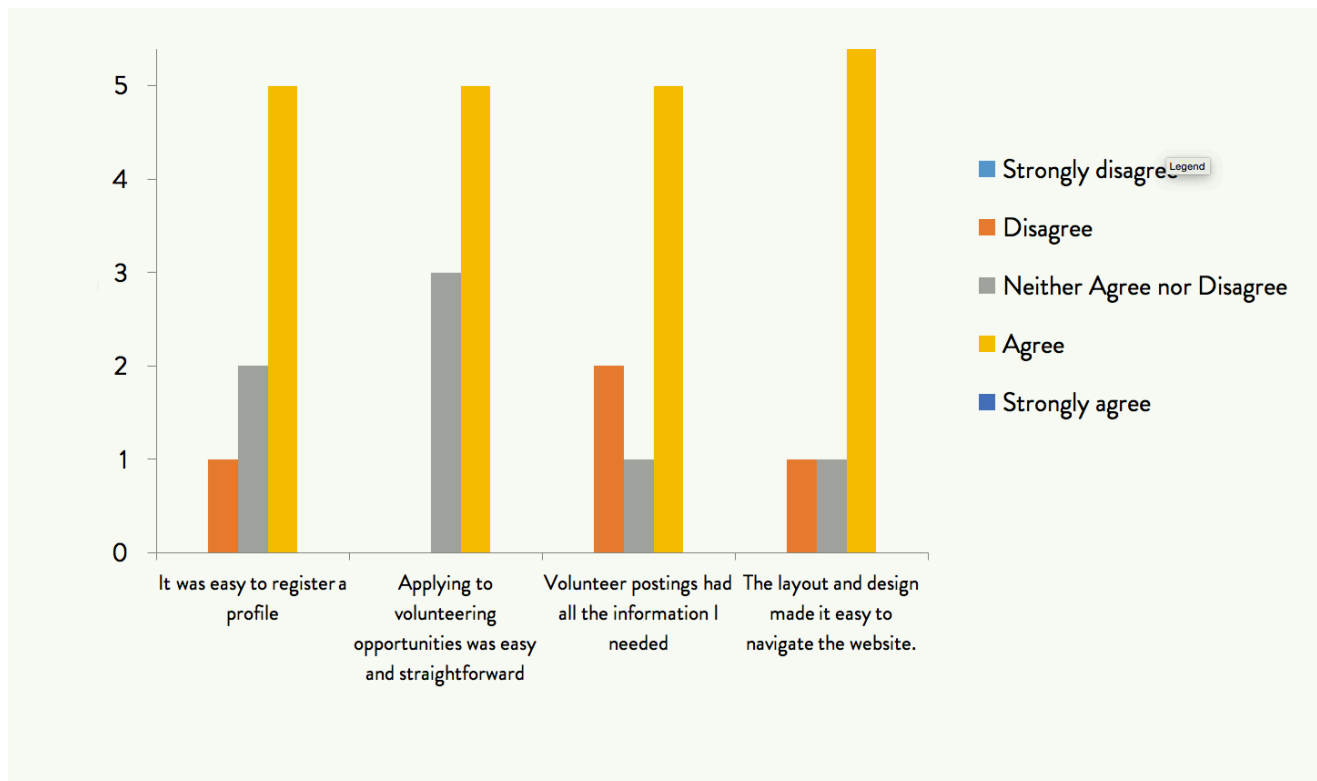

Figure 23: Individuals' Satisfaction with SPARK Ontario's Website

number of responses that corresponded with this theme: of 28 written responses, 10 (36%) said that the ability to find opportunities close to their home was key. Some responses suggest this might be a technical issue with the website, which allows users to set a distance limitation on their search results, but still returns results located very far from their location.

SUMMARY

This section has reviewed the results of the online surveys administered with both organizations and individuals who use SPARK Ontario's website. The surveys revealed that there is a disjuncture between what volunteer opportunities are offe ed and what opportunities individuals have interest. The survey results also indicate that SPARK Ontario's website has a design and features are positively experienced by online users. Finally, the survey revealed that both individuals and organizations require increased consideration of geography when providing matches. It should be noted that all of these conclusions must be taken with caution due to the low response rate. It is not clear why so few of the organizations and individuals contacted accepted the invitation to take the survey; however, those who did respond may or may not be representative of the total user base of the website.

SECTION 8

'SPARKING' VOLUNTEERISM THROUGH STORY TELLING

ONE OF THE MAJOR FEATURES OF THE SPARK ONTARIO'S WEBSITE is the presentation of curated volunteering stories which include text, photographs, and video along with a brief description of the organization for which the relevant volunteering work is done. The role of these stories in the overall objectives of the SPARK Ontario initiative is to showcase the 'spark' from which the initiative takes its name: the feelings of satisfaction and inspiration that come from impactful, rewarding volunteer work. This section hence reports on SPARK Ontario's second objective:

Objective #2: Engage current and potential volunteers as well as NPOs to tell stories that demonstrate the value of volunteers and volunteering.

This concept of the 'spark' can be further broken down in terms of the initiative's concrete objectives. SPARK Ontario wants to 'bridge the gap' between potential volunteers and NPOs in a few ways: encouraging more inspiring use of language in the presentation of volunteering opportunities; recognizing the legitimacy of volunteers' expectations of benefiting from their volunteer work; and raising the profile

of innovative and non-traditional forms of volunteering which may prove more inclusive and unlock potential. To assess SPARK Ontario's progress in meeting its objectives in regards to engaging volunteers and NPOs to tell stories that demonstrate the value of volunteers and volunteering, this section provides narrative analysis of curated stories to uncover how the initiative is impacting how sector stakeholders engage with volunteering. Namely, this section reports on the outcome evaluation findings with respect to the stories curated on the SPARK Ontario's website as of June 7th, 2016.

GENERAL PROFILE OF CURATED STORIES

The practice of welcoming invited and spontaneous story submissions and giving them a prominent place on the website is intended to advance SPARK Ontario's objectives. The best stories among those curated are intended as templates for writing about volunteering in a more impactful style, one that highlights the benefits of volunteering. There is also some inclusion of non-traditional volunteering stories

such as corporate volunteering, "micro-volunteering," and group volunteering. Significantly, a few stories also highlight the Ontario-specific context of 'community involvement hours,' which are mandatory for high school students before graduation – this inclusion may support students to ensure that their volunteering careers do not end once students are no longer compelled to pursue them.

At the time of data analysis, SPARK Ontario had published 69 volunteering stories, of which 62 were in English and 7 in French. Most of the stories were submitted by organizations, including all of the French stories (62 submissions, 90%) – though many of the stories were submitted on behalf of the individuals who wrote them. Finally, 59 stories were submitted "spontaneously" to a general call for stories on SPARK Ontario's website (86%); 10 of the English stories were submissions invited by SPARK Ontario.

There is considerable diversity in the form and depth of the published stories. The stories range in length, from 63 to 1 403 words, and from simple one-sentence statements of pride in an individual's volunteering efforts, to complex life narratives. This range of published stories is approached from three frameworks: for their use of story-telling and impact language; for their coverage of the benefits of volunteering; and for their presentation of non-traditional opportunities.

KEY FINDING #8: LEADING LANGUAGE CHANGE – EVIDENCE OF STORYTELLING AND IMPACT STATEMENTS

SPARK Ontario wants to encourage more volunteer-recruiting organizations to consider story-telling as an effective way of showcasing volunteering opportunities, particularly in contrast with technical or corporate language derived from job descriptions for paid positions or documents such as grant proposals. To determine the degree to which the current collection of stories showed evidence of this shift, the stories were scanned for a few key features.

One basic, easily identified element of narrative language is the use of phrases that indicate a sequence of events and causation through time. Examples would include the use of language like "one day, I was…", "on the morning of…", or "ever since then…." When these phrases appear, they may indicate that the writer is inviting readers to follow the writer through a recollection, and thus experience some of what the author felt as those events unfolded. Sometimes, the scope of this chain of events can be quite broad:

> My journey begins when I was born in Kowloon, Hong Kong. As a young boy, my parents have told me that I had quite a rough time growing up and adapting to life ("**Harnoor's World**").

Though, even the longer collected tales, such as "Harnoor's World", come around to the topic of volunteering in time:

> Back home, both my parents lived in the countryside of Northern India and they decided to look for a nice countryside home here in Canada. Georgetown, Ontario had become our new home and the start of a new school area … until the end of high school. … I had the exciting but hard task of getting to know my classmates better, making new friends, and expanding my horizons in helping the community ("Harnoor's World").

The use of emotional language that conveys authors' feelings directly was also taken as evidence for narrative thinking. Sometimes, this language could be used to evoke the seriousness of a social issue, as it did in one story where the writer steps outside of themselves to imagine the shame felt by a functionally-illiterate friend:

> When he sent text messages that made no sense he blamed it on the autocorrect feature. After all, this is not uncommon. No one can ever know ("**More than Reading**").

At other times, writers describe their own emotions in a way that creates both dramatic tension and humour:

> To me, it seemed all volunteering entailed was an endless shuffling of papers and filing away at cabinets – an utter waste of time. When volunteering is mandatory, it becomes boring. I was in tenth grade. The weight of my future sat heavy upon my shoulders, and now I had to do community service, too? ("**It's About Them**")

Two other distinctions seem significant within the body of more narratively rich postings. The first is between stories that focus on the path taken to a volunteering career from a pre-volunteering life, and the second are stories that focus on what resulted from volunteering.

> 'As an adult, I suffered from depression,' he explains. 'Out one night, I came very close to leaping off he Bloor/Edward Viaduct bridge. But, something caught my eye: a pay phone, and a sign with the number for Distress Centres of Toronto. They got me turned around.' … Amplifying his [volunteer] efforts, he joined United Way Speakers Bureau in 2011, inspiring even more people to become committed to their communities. … It was a while before he incorporated his 'whole' story, including his interaction with Distress Centres. But what happened to him, he eventually realized, was not something to be ashamed about… Telling his story wouldn't be easy, but the path was clear ("**A Man with a Message**").

> Ms. Gilchrest adds to Mrs. Dunnigan's praise [of a volunteer]. 'Mr. Nesbitt taught my daughter when she was in grade 1, and even now in grade 6 she still talks about him. Each year he and his wife go on a trip abroad and return to give a slide show and bring small gifts to each student' ("**Bob Nesbitt is the Conductor of Human Energy...**").

The second distinction is between those stories that foreground the presence of the volunteer as a named character or narrator in the story and those that refer to volunteers collectively, using the organizational voice or point-of-view:

> Twenty years ago… North Bay's waterfront gardens were infested with weeds and overgrown from lack of care. Since then, over 900 participants have taken part in the Heritage Gardeners program… In the spirit of caring, sharing and learning, our volunteers have served to beautify our waterfront, helping to preserve our heritage and build community spirit ("**Volunteers to the Rescue**").

The former, more personal voice is likely closer to what SPARK Ontario is hoping to encourage and does not necessarily imply treating volunteering stories as tales of lone protagonists – the same story quoted above for its delightful 'weight of the world' beginning goes on to regularly invoke the names of other volunteers around the narrator during her experience:

> My eyes were heavy from lack of sleep, but the others wore wide smiles. Grace and Melvin, a couple, came earlier that morning, five bags of groceries in tow… As the hands reached down the clock, the food slowly dispersed from their containers [sic] and disappeared. I remember looking back in shock as a member, Merlyn, rushed back to the fryer, a new batch of spring rolls at her side ("**It's About Them**").

One reason the personal or first-person voice may be worth encouraging is that, in some of the stories, this voice allows the narrator to make a passionate plea to the reader for them to learn from the related experience and take action:

> I have decided to share my volunteer story with you all, and I hope it will have the power to inspire somebody to volunteer ("**A Short, but Sweet Experience**").

> Bob ends the interview by reflecting, 'If you are not volunteering for something, you are definitely missing out. Volunteering with kids is so rewarding. It's beyond me why more retirees are not volunteering in school' ("**Bob Nesbitt is the Conductor of Human Energy...**").

Overall, 28 of the 69 stories (41%) showed at least some of these narrative features. The other area of language use that is commensurate with SPARK Ontario's objectives for the sector was the language of impact. In the Story Lab training curriculum (see Section 4), volunteer sector organizations were encouraged to practice writing single sentence statements that presented the impact of volunteers in a persuasive way. By the same standard, such impact statements can be found in 25 of the 69 stories (36%).

> Learners who participate in The Literacy Group programs are helped to reach their full potential and shed that cloak of shame. Through their and their tutors' hard work they are able to achieve their goals, be they reading to their grandchildren or going on to higher education ("**More than Reading**").

Clyde purchased his own 'times table maker' game and students love to test their skills. Maria and Evelyn, two students Clyde was tutoring during our interview, enthused, 'I like that Clyde makes learning math fun. It's fun! He makes math easy. He teaches us math tricks.' They proudly proceeded to show me a math phenomenon with the nine times table – very impressive and beyond my capabilities ("**What Do Basketball and Math Have in Common...**").

KEY FINDING # 9: EVIDENCE OF BENEFITS FOR VOLUNTEERS – MEETING VOLUNTEERS' NEEDS FOR GROWTH AND CHANGE

The curated narratives also depict narrative themes that demonstrate the benefi s of volunteering to volunteers. Namely, through the themes of rewarding experiences, growth, and appreciation, several stories curated on SPARK Ontario's website illustrate how volunteering has benefits for potential volunteers. For instance, some stories exemplify how volunteering may be experienced by volunteers on an emotional level as an intrinsically rewarding or enriching experience.

A gentleman from the group stood up. He talked about his battle with alcohol addiction... I told him that he was so strong to share his story. He then told me that I was the strong one, 'you just inspired me so much that I was willing to talk about my issues, without you, I wouldn't have told my story.' I was moved to tears that night thinking of how I was able to make such a difference in someone's life ("**Turning a Volunteering Passion into a Career**").

Needless to say that this was my very first volunteer experience, and it was an enriching experience. I would not trade that for anything else – and can't wait to see what my next volunteer experience has in story! ("**A Man with a Message**")

Reflecting the findings of *Bridging the Gap* as well as *Bridging the Gap in Ontario* that, in engaging in volunteering,

volunteers aim to develop their skills and increase their employability, several narratives describe how volunteering facilitates growth.

In addition to helping others, I have also personally learned a great deal about vision health and have gained many valuable and transferable skills, such as how to effectively provide sighted guide [sic], that I otherwise never [would] have been exposed to if I hadn't been provided an opportunity to volunteer with CNIB ("**Being a Volunteer with CNIB is Such a Rewarding Experience!**").

My favourite thing about the workshops was learning how to become a leader. I was surprised that I liked it, normally I don't like presenting or sharing with people. They got me to do it and I even got my nephew to come out to some of the workshops and got other people at my table involved – cuz [sic] if I could do it, so could they. Turns out, I make a good leader and now that I know more about Waterloo Region, I'll be able to find more volunteer opportunities that work for me ("**Developing Your Inner Leader**").

Finally, to illustrate the benefit to volunteers of volunteering, several curated stories demonstrate the theme of volunteer appreciation.

We're very pleased to share this great story. We have so many amazing volunteers who give so much to make a difference in the lives of GTA kids. Kathy Bodnar is one of our best. Kathy's been volunteering with the Peer Project for 12 years! ("**Peer Project Super Volunteer Kathy Bodnar Honoured...**")

Fellow Fringe volunteers are friendly and the event managers are super organized. Not to mention the awesome perk of seeing some of the shows for free! You definitely feel appreciated as a volunteer. This is my third year helping out at the Fringe Festival and I'm really looking forward to it! ("**Why I Love Volunteering for the Ottawa Fringe Festival**")

KEY FINDING #10 – EVIDENCE OF NON-TRADITIONAL OPPORTUNITIES: FEATURING NEW MODELS OF VOLUNTEERING

Although few in number, several stories curated on SPARK Ontario's website also demonstrated the non-traditional models of volunteering that is called for by *Bridging the Gap in Ontario*. For example, the following two excerpts are from narratives that tell stories about employee volunteering. The second excerpt further demonstrates how skilled volunteers can volunteer their specialized services to the sector.

As an Ambassador for his workplace campaign at Canada Post (his employer of 35 years), he helped to raise awareness for United Way. From there, he was selected as a Sponsored Employee, using his employment experience to connect with the labour sector—offering support, guidance and inspiration to United Way workplace campaigns across the city. And he went above and beyond ("**A Man with a Message**").

In the first year I was with Deloitte, I joined my new colleagues on an Impact Day event planting trees and cleaning up parks. It was a lot of fun. I got to meet a lot of really cool new people, it was a day outside and offsite and just a great, feel good excursion. Although I enjoyed that first Impact Day, I do not have a green thumb. While fun and rewarding, I was looking for a volunteering experience that I could add more value to and contribute to in a more meaningful way. I also wanted to do something that I genuinely have an interest in so when the volunteering opportunity to help Findhelp create a sustainability plan for SPARK Ontario came up, I jumped at it ("**Jay's Story – Deloitte Impact Day at FindHelp**").

Curated stories also demonstrate the non-traditional model of group volunteering, which presents volunteering as an opportunity for social connection as well as quality time with loved ones.

'This is my favourite event I've volunteered with', said Rob. 'I showed up with my mom. She loves to garden, so I thought this was a volunteer event we could share...' This story is a constant reminder to me of how powerful volunteering can be. It's a way to give back but it's also a wonderful opportunity to spend time with your family and your friends. To share in what it means to truly support your community and have fun doing it ("**Volunteering can be a Family Event**").

Curated stories also touched up on the requirement of students to complete 40 hours of volunteering in order to receive the Ontario Secondary School Diploma. In these narratives, volunteering is presented as more than a mandated aspect of secondary education; rather, volunteering is narrated as experiences with intrinsic worth and value that extend beyond the 40 hour requirement.

Rob, a young man, called Information Orillia at the start of the ChangeTheWorld: Ontario Youth Volunteer Challenge (CTW) campaign in need of community involvement hours. The staff ent over the various events planned for the CTW campaign hoping something would resonate with him ("**Volunteering can be a Family Event**").

It was an eyeopener. At first, the reason we rushed to complete the forty hours requirement was to be able to graduate from high school. But as we continued volunteering for very amazing and unique organizations, we started realizing the positive impact we were doing on ourselves through personal growth and on our community. Even now, when we have completed our hours, we have no desire to stop volunteering at all ("**Earning More than Their 40 Hours**").

Finally, by contrasting a short time commitment with impactful rewards, some narratives capitalize on stories to narrate the innovation of micro-volunteering.

While many of you have written stories about long-term volunteer positions, I have decided to change things up a bit. Believe it or not, this story is about a 2hour volunteer experience!... The striking part of this experience was getting to meet and engage with clients of KW Habilitation. They had big hearts and a positive attitude towards life. It stirred emotions in me, not of pity or sadness, but admiration and respect for all these inspirational individuals who power through their disabilities. Furthermore, the fact that in just two hours, crowds of people showed up in support of this great cause was extremely heartwarming ("**A Short, but Sweet, Experience**").

SUMMARY

The analysis of curated stories on the SPARK Ontario's website illustrates that the initiative is on its way to reach its vision of creating a dynamic online volunteering platform that motivates, inspires, and celebrates volunteering in Ontario. The narrative analysis of stories curated on SPARK Ontario's website reveals that stories are effective in communicating various aspects of volunteering in today's changing context. Moving forward, the focus on SPARK Ontario should be on refining the quality of curated stories, especially with regard to the initiative's objectives. SPARK Ontario's call for stories was highly successful in recruiting narratives for the website.

SECTION 9

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

THIS REPORT DOCUMENTS THE FINDINGS OF BOTH THE PROCESS AND OUTCOME EVALUATION of the Pan/Parapan American Games Legacy Initiative, SPARK Ontario. The purpose and primary goal of SPARK Ontario was to increase the civic engagement of Ontarians by connecting volunteers with traditional and non-traditional volunteer opportunities in the nonprofit sector. By creating an aggregator-style web application, providing training opportunities for service providers on engaging potential volunteers through the use of narrative as well as by digitally-curating stories of volunteering, the ultimate intended impact of SPARK Ontario is to create a dynamic online volunteering platform that will motivate, inspire, and celebrate volunteering in Ontario. This concluding section summarizes SPARK Ontario's key process and outcome evaluation findings and then provides an overview of recommendations to support and enhance the initiative in meeting its objectives and goals.

KEY PROCESS EVALUATION FINDINGS

Key Finding #1: Partnership in the Nonprofit Sector is an Uneasy Alliance

Partnerships are situated in a funding context of heightened competition for resources and are therefore uneasy, particularly between NPOs with shared or overlapping expertise and goals. While personal relationships with individuals from NPOs may enhance partnerships, these relationships are to the discretion of individuals and therefore, may not equate to organizational commitment. This key finding extends to SPARK Ontario's relationships with high profile organizations – although this evaluation did not foray into the perspectives of high profile stakeholders, the uneven outcomes of working with such organizations, from unfulfilled promises, to communication embargoes, to experiences of positive and supportive relationships, reflect the unclear priorities of these stakeholders.

Key Finding #2: The Power of Stories

The process evaluation revealed that the SPARK Ontario initiative is engaging and building the capacity of the

volunteer sector to re-conceptualize traditional models of volunteering. Specifically, Story Labs highlight the power of stories to the volunteer sector. The majority of the participants in the Story Labs reported that they saw the utility of narrative in creating emotional connections to volunteering. Although honing in on the craft of stories requires significant investments in time and energy, participants envision how stories can be collected within NPOs to be mobilized as response to the changing landscapes of volunteering.

Key Finding #3: Advocacy and Organizational Change

In addition to underscoring of the power of stories, the evaluation findings also indicate that SPARK Ontario is building capacity within the volunteer sector by inspiring advocacy and organizational change within the nonprofit and volunteer sectors. Namely, the Story Lab evaluations indicate that participants from the volunteer sector are inspired to re-work volunteer opportunities such that they are more than job descriptions; while realistically recognizing organizational and policy constraints, participants report seeing the value of demonstrating impact and moving away from corporate and technical language. Participants from the volunteer sector also reported seeing the importance of connecting with coworkers as well as other organizations to disseminate and share knowledge in regards to building capacity within the volunteer sector.

Key Finding #4 – Importance of Focused Website and Social Media Promotion

The analysis of SPARK Ontario's website as well as social media analytics reveals that the initiative's engagement with the Internet was highly influenced by broader policies and events; specifically, Ontario's Syrian resettlement policy increased SPARK Ontario's online activity. Although SPARK Ontario has experienced periods of low online activity, the process evaluation suggests that community engagement through focused online promotion efforts and hiring a social media coordinator increases both SPARK Ontario's online activities and profile.

KEY OUTCOME EVALUATION FINDINGS

The outcome evaluation findings also indicate that SPARK Ontario is on its way to reaching its goals and objectives. Below is a summary of the key findings as they relate to SPARK Ontario's program objectives.

Objective #1: Build capacity of the nonprofit sector to help SPARK Ontario create a positive and inviting experience for the end-user, to showcase volunteering more creatively, and market opportunities more effectively

Key Finding #5: Sharp Divide between Offerings and Interests

Key Finding #6: Well-Received Design and Navigation Features

Key Finding #7: SPARK Ontario may be Province-Wide, but Interests Continue to be Local

SPARK Ontario's outcome evaluation demonstrates that the initiative is on its way to realizing its objectives of enhancing the volunteer experience. Generally, the initiative's website is well received in its design and navigation features by its users – both organizations and individuals reported satisfaction in navigating volunteering postings. Users experience the SPARK Ontario' website as a unique way to showcase volunteering and market opportunities by illustrating the impact of opportunities as well as using images to engage potential volunteers. Reflecting the trends identified by Bridging the Gap and Bridging the Gap in Ontario reports, there continues to be a gap between what volunteer opportunities are offered by NPOs and what is desired by current and potential volunteers. This gap is beyond the immediate control of SPARK Ontario; however, further capacity building, such as hosting resources on volunteers' needs on the initiative's website, can help bridge this gap. Finally, although SPARK Ontario showcases novel opportunities that are not restricted by geography, the evaluation found that both volunteers and NPOs continue to maintain interest in local opportunities.

Objective #2: Engage current and potential volunteers as well as NPOs to tell stories that demonstrate the value of volunteers and volunteering

Key Finding #8: Leading Language Change – Evidence of Storytelling and Impact Statements

Key Finding #9: Evidence of Benefits for Volunteers – Meeting Volunteers' Needs for Growth and Change

Key Finding #10: Evidence of Non-traditional Opportunities – Featuring Non-Traditional Models of Volunteering

SPARK Ontario's website features a number of stories from both NPOs as well as volunteers, indicating that the initiative is meeting its objective of engaging the volunteer sector in narrative. A narrative analysis of curated stories on SPARK Ontario's website indicates that NPOs narrate the positive impacts of volunteering for organizations as well as the communities and individuals that the volunteer sector serves. Organizations and volunteers who responded to the online survey agreed that the use of narrative on SPARK, including textual, video, and visual formats, is impactful. The stories demonstrate new models of volunteering such as corporate, skills-based, and micro volunteering. Further, rather than reifying traditional values surrounding volunteerism, such as commitment, duty, and service, the stories convey the benefits of volunteering to the volunteers such as personal growth and skills development. Although more systematic research and evaluations on the actual experiences of NPOs as well as current and potential volunteers are required to further assess the full organizational impact of SPARK Ontario, the outcome evaluation suggests that SPARK Ontario is contributing to conceptual shifts in the volunteer sector.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report presents the final findings of the process and outcome evaluation of the SPARK Ontario initiative. As per the changes listed in the Bridging the Gap and the Bridging the Gap in Ontario reports, this evaluation found that SPARK Ontario is beginning to build capacity and promote conceptual shifts within the volunteer sector to better respond to the changes within the volunteering landscape from a strategy of management to one of engagement. Specifically, in showcasing diverse opportunities and stories, SPARK Ontario's website is building the sector's capacity in using technology and narrative to engage a diverse profile of volunteers through new models of volunteering. Furthermore, SPARK Ontario is on its way to reaching its objectives and is bridging the gap between the needs and strengths of Ontario's volunteer sector and its potential volunteers. More research and evaluation, however, is required to further assess how the initiative's outcomes are being reached. To support SPARK Ontario in meetings its objectives, this report makes the following recommendations:

1. **Employ relationships with both Individuals and Organizations in working with Partners and Stakeholders.** SPARK Ontario had diverse experiences with its partners and stakeholders and had relationships with either individuals or organizations. Both types of relationships have their benefi s and challenges. For instance, while relationships with individuals from an organization may enhance engagement and minimize conflict during a project, such relationships can be limited by that individual's reach and their organization's more limited engagement. Alternatively, while organizational relationships may bring increased reach, they may hinder open and honest dialogue over problems faced by the individuals and subgroups that make up an organization. Processes that prioritize a balance would enhance SPARK Ontario as a partner-driven initiative.

2. **Continue to provide Story Labs to build capacity within the Volunteer and Nonprofit sectors.** It is clear that the conceptual shifts presented by SPARK Ontario in the Story Labs resonated with participants from the volunteer sector. Participants, however, require increased time and resources to build their capacity in using narrative as well as non-traditional models of volunteering. Hence, this report recommends that SPARK Ontario continues to invest in their Story Labs, increasing both the length of the labs as well as their reach.

3. **Build technological infrastructure to showcase relevant and appropriate opportunities, and continue to provide ongoing monitoring and troubleshooting.** While the SPARK Ontario's website presents as an accessible tool for both organizations and potential volunteers, the evaluation revealed that many showcased opportunities were not geographically relevant to users of the website. Better infrastructure as well as ongoing monitoring and troubleshooting assistance on the website will increase the efficiency of the website and enhance the experience for both volunteers as well as NPOs.

4. **Engage in ongoing research and evaluation and disseminate knowledge.** The evaluation revealed that there continues to be a gap between the available volunteering opportunities and the interests held by potential volunteers. To enhance the website experience, SPARK Ontario may engage in ongoing research and evaluation on the trends of both parties' needs and disseminate this knowledge to bridge this gap.

5. **Refine the quality of curated narratives.** Throughout the course of the initiative, SPARK Ontario has developed a diverse repertoire of curated stories on the initiative's website. Moving forward, SPARK Ontario may consider refining the quality of its content and continue to strive towards reflecting emerging trends in volunteering.

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