

A taxing situation

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What is the economic value of volunteering?

That's one of the many questions being raised in a recently-released report commissioned by Volunteer Alberta.

The report, titled *The Potential Impact of Canadian Federal and/or Provincial Tax Credit Incentives for Volunteer Participating*, explores the impact of providing individuals who spend personal time

volunteering at a registered charity with a non-refundable tax credit.

While the assumption is that volunteer tax credits could help combat declining rates of volunteerism and encourage more individuals to volunteer, Volunteer Alberta cautions that more research needs to be done to prove that tax credits do indeed affect the rate of volunteerism.

"There isn't any rationale or research that links increased volunteerism with the implementation of a tax credit program," explains Karen Lynch, director of Volunteer Alberta.

NEED MORE FACTS

With no other government offering such a program, according to Lynch, it would be difficult to proceed without additional facts or evidence to prove the effectiveness of volunteer tax credits.

The report reveals one of the many concerns associated with volunteer tax credits – assigning a dollar value to volunteer time.

For many organizations, the challenge is determining a dollar value for volunteer services, especially when there appears to be no consensus on the method for valuing the donation of time.

In fact, there is a lot of disagreement in the sector about assigning dollar amounts to something as intangible and difficult to measure as volunteering.

How does the value of one volunteer who prepares meals for seniors compare to a volunteer lawyer who donates their legal services to an organization?

Is one more valuable than the other? Who decides that?

Ruth Kelly, executive director of Volunteer Canada, shared her concern about the impact of tax credits and attaching a monetary value to volunteerism in a statement to the standing committee on finance last June.

"The fact that someone has been there because they want to be there and not because



VOLUNTEER
TAX CREDIT
RAISES
QUESTIONS,
CONCERNS

they are paid to be there is what volunteering is all about," Kelly says.

"You just can't measure that, and I worry that at times considering volunteering through an economic lens might lead to volunteering always being considered through that lens.

"The fundamental values of volunteer involvement need to be protected."

These challenges, along with ensuring compliance across the sector, add an additional administrative burden that would prove to be difficult for many organizations that are already strapped for time.

'CRITICAL EYE'

"We should be looking at this with a critical eye and exploring all our options before implementing a program that could actually be detrimental to organizations that don't have the time or means to do additional paperwork associated with volunteer tax credits," says Janice Bell, director of Volunteer Edmonton.

While the report does not offer a definitive solution or recommendations, Lynch hopes it will contribute to a larger discussion of a complex issue that has widespread implications for non-profit organizations and government.

To learn more about this issue, visit www.volunteeralberta.ab.ca.

To find volunteer opportunities, visit www.volunteeredmonton.com.



If you don't get it,
they will.

THINK... CRIME PREVENTION

Protecting Your Home – Last year, the Edmonton Police Service investigated approximately 5,200 residential break-and-enter reports.
Your home is your most valuable asset – protect it!

Tips for Protecting Your Home

When at Home

- When working in your yard or garage, keep all doors locked.
- When in your house, keep your doors locked.
- Keep your blinds and/or curtains closed at night so people cannot see in.

In Your Yard

- Trim trees and bushes that could conceal burglars, specifically around windows and doors.
- Keep your yard maintained to give your house a lived-in appearance: keep grass cut, rake leaves, and remove dead branches and debris.
- Install additional exterior lights to brighten dark areas around doors, windows, and vehicles.

When on Vacation

- Arrange to have your mail picked up and stop delivery of newspapers/flyers.
- Remember to have your grass cut, and your leaves and snow removed.
- Use timers on a few lamps in rooms where the light will be noticed from outside your house.

- Have a neighbour check both inside and outside your house every few days. Ask them to pick up items delivered while you are away.
- If you have an assigned parking space or driveway, ask a neighbour to park their car in your space.
- Set televisions or radios to play to give the impression that people are home.

In Your Community

- Get to know your neighbours and your neighbourhood.
- Be aware of strangers and suspicious vehicles, and look out for neighbours and their property.
- Leave keys and emergency phone numbers with a trusted neighbour.
- Keep up appearances – a well-tended neighbourhood is less attractive to criminals and vandals.
- Get involved in crime prevention programs.

Contact the Edmonton Police Service
9-1-1 for a life-threatening emergency or a crime in progress
780-423-4567 to request police (non-emergency)

For more crime prevention information, visit: www.edmontonpolice.ca/crimeprevention