



VOLUNTEER REVITALIZATION & SUSTAINABILITY PROJECT

CONSULTATION REPORT

JANUARY 2023

CONTENTS

1. PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH & APPROACH	2
2. CONSULTATION FINDINGS	2
2.1 VOLUNTEER SURVEY	2
2.2 VOLUNTEER FOCUS GROUPS & INTERVIEWS	11
3. BARRIERS TO VOLUNTEERING	14
4. EMERGING IDEAS AND THEMES	15
5. NEXT STEPS	16

1. PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH & APPROACH

This report outlines the findings of consultation undertaken with current volunteers as part of the Canadian Red Cross Community Services Recovery Fund grant supported Volunteer Revitalization and Sustainability Project.

The purpose of the consultation was to gain an understanding of:

- Current feedback from volunteers about their experience of volunteering with the Lake Charlotte Area Heritage Society (LCAHS). What do volunteers like? What do they think could be improved? (including orientation, training, facilities, communications etc.).
- The scope for developing new volunteering roles or redefining existing roles / formalizing current volunteering activities.
- Opportunities for expanding the ways in which volunteering is undertaken (remote volunteering, family volunteering etc.).
- The scope / interest amongst volunteers for increasing volunteer involvement with coordinating / mentoring other volunteers.
- Ways in which the volunteer program could support volunteer wellbeing (both for active and inactive volunteers) .
- What a youth volunteer program might look like and what support this would need.

Consultation was primarily conducted from late October through November 2023. Consultation with youth volunteers is planned for January/February 2024. Consultation activities included the following:

- Online survey for current volunteers

- 1-2-1 in-depth interviews with key volunteers (selected to cover a wide range of volunteer roles and varying lengths of involvement)
- Focus groups with volunteers (participants selected to cover a wide range of volunteer roles, varying lengths of involvement and to accommodate those likely to prefer a group environment)
- Discussions with staff members

2. CONSULTATION FINDINGS

2.1 VOLUNTEER SURVEY

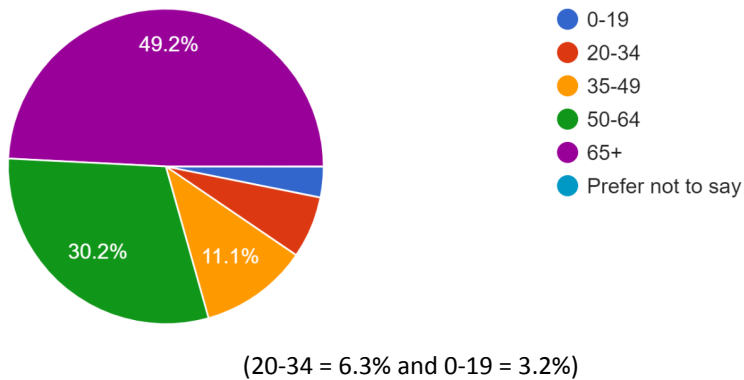
A survey of current volunteers - including members of the LCAHS Board of Directors - was undertaken to gather volunteers' views of their experience of volunteering, communications channels, recognition and other topics related to the volunteer program. The survey was delivered primarily online using Google Forms with hardcopies available for those who preferred this response method. The survey was live for just over two weeks from Oct 26 to Nov 12, 2023.

When reviewing the results included here please note some percentage totals will add up to more than 100% as, for some questions, respondents were able to select more than one answer. Where totals fall short of 100% this is because some respondents preferred not to answer certain questions.

Demographics

A total of 66 volunteers responded to the survey (63 online and 3 via hardcopy), roughly 50% of the active volunteer pool. Almost half of

respondents (49.2%) were over the age of 65, highlighting the predominance of volunteers who are older and retired. The full breakdown of respondent ages is as follows:



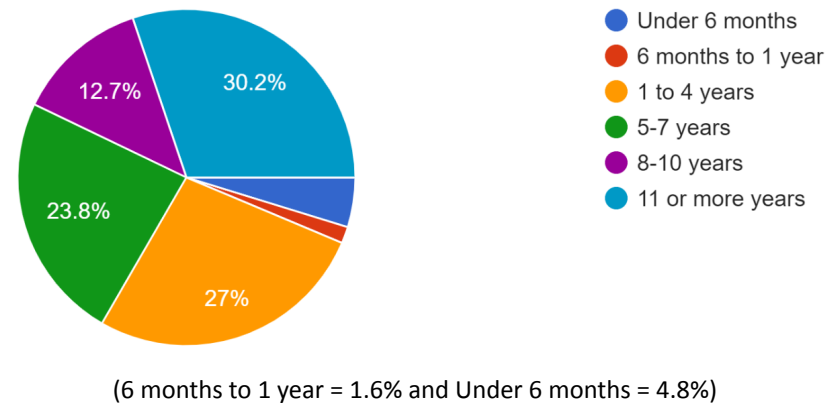
The ethnic group most respondents identified with was European at 83.3%. This is reflective of the ethnic makeup of the population on the Eastern Shore. Other ethnic backgrounds represented included First Nations or Indigenous (1.9%) and Middle Eastern (1.9%).

Out of the volunteers who responded to the survey, 6.5% considered themselves to have a disability. Disabilities identified included those that are physical, vision and hearing related. No respondent who identified as having a disability indicated there were any challenges related to their disability that impacted on their volunteering or that they felt unsupported in their volunteering.

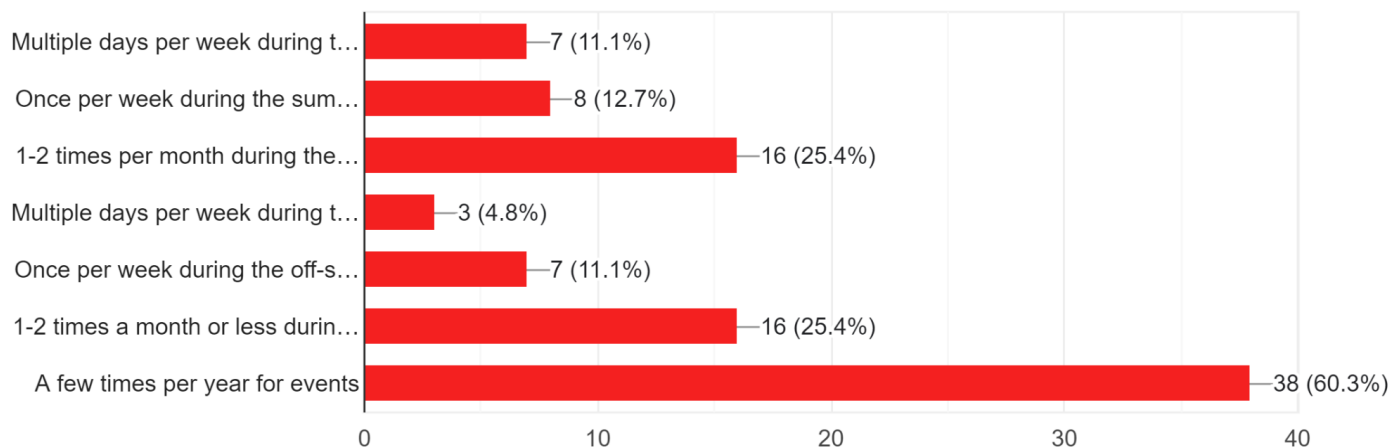
The majority of respondents (65.1%) live within a 20 minute or less drive time of Memory Lane Heritage Village. While most volunteers are from the very local area, there are volunteers who live an hour or more drive away.

Volunteering Roles & Service

Most respondents have volunteered for a minimum of five years with many (30.2%) volunteering for 11 years or more. However, there were also volunteers (6.4%) who have been volunteering for a year or less, ensuring that both the perspectives of long-time and newer volunteers are represented. The full breakdown of respondent length of volunteer service is as follows:



Respondents most commonly volunteer a few times per year for events (60.3%) followed by 1-2 times per month during the summer season (25.4%) and 1-2 times per month or less during the off-season (25.4%). This indicates that for most volunteers their volunteering is ad hoc - as and when they are needed and/or available - rather than regular. Unsurprisingly, given the seasonal nature of Memory Lane, for some volunteers their volunteering becomes more regular during this busier period. The full breakdown of patterns of volunteering is as follows:



Fully expanded options for the graph left (which the graph software has cut off) are:

- Multiple days per week during the summer season
- Once per week during the summer season
- 1-2 times per month during the summer season
- Multiple days per week during the off-season
- Once per week during the off season
- 1-2 times per month or less during the off season
- A few times per year for events

Respondents predominantly undertake the following volunteer roles:

- 66.7% - Events Volunteer
- 30.2% - Kitchen Helper
- 28.6% - Server
- 25.4% - Animator / Interpretive Guide
- 17.5% - Board Member
- 15.9% - Maintenance Volunteer
- 12.7% - Archives Volunteer
- 9.5% - Gift Shop / Office Volunteer
- 7.9% - Bar Service Volunteer
- 6.3% - Collections Volunteer
- 4.8% - Historical / Genealogical Researcher
- 4.8% - Fundraising Volunteer

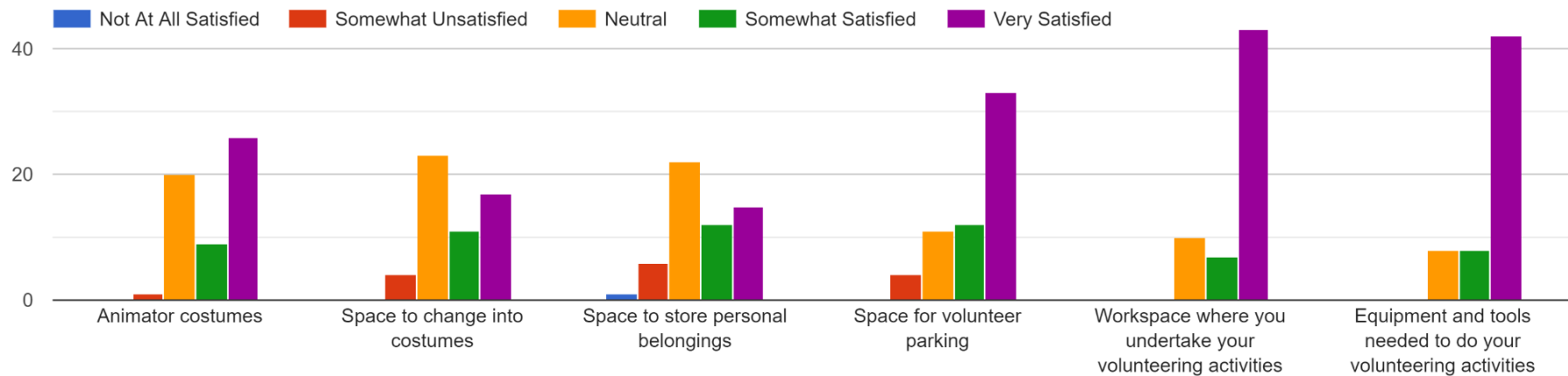
It is apparent that many volunteers take on multiple roles and a number of volunteers commented on the wide range of tasks they take on - from transporting items to taking tickets - and that they are happy to do whatever is needed and asked of them.

Most volunteers found out about volunteering via word of mouth (49.2%) or through being recommended by another volunteer (31.7%). Very few (less than 5%) learned about volunteering opportunities through traditional recruitment methods such as events, leaflets or posters. This reflects the approach to recruitment traditionally taken by the Society and while exploring wider public recruitment channels is recommended, leveraging current volunteer connections and relationships within local communities will be important in attracting new volunteers.

The most popular reason for starting to volunteer was an interest in giving back to the community (79.4%) with interest in learning more about the history of Eastern Shore (47.6%) and wanting to meet people from the community (47.6%) also being common motivators. Wanting to learn new skills was a less common motivator (17.5%) but this may be reflective of the general older age of respondents and potentially this would be a more popular option among younger volunteers. It is clear people often have multiple reasons for volunteering and that community is very likely part of their motivation.

Facilities & Training

Respondents were asked to indicate their satisfaction with various facilities and spaces they use as part of their volunteering. Full results are included in the chart below.



While there is generally overall satisfaction, an area that should be looked at is animation with 33.3% of respondents feeling either neutral or somewhat unsatisfied with costumes and 42.8% either neutral or somewhat unsatisfied with space to change into costumes. Space to store personal belongings, which also likely significantly impacts animation volunteers, is also of concern with 46% feeling neutral or expressing some level of dissatisfaction - notably the only area where the option Not At All Satisfied was selected. While space is at a premium in the Village, options for a volunteer coatroom and animator dressing room should be explored.

While half of respondents found their volunteer orientation either Extremely Useful or Useful a further 42% said they did not have an orientation or that they could not remember their orientation. This is very likely the product of the length of volunteer service of many of the

respondents but it does highlight that moving forward orientation and refreshers need to be prioritized.

When asked to comment on what could have improved their orientation, respondents indicated that they value in-person interactions with an orientation format that includes presentations and a tour of the Village. Satisfaction with the level of training volunteers receive is generally very high with 81.2% of respondents rating their satisfaction level at either a 4 or 5 out of 5. However, there were a small number of respondents (3.8%) who gave a rating of 1 or 2 out of 5, indicating there is some room for improvement.

Respondents commented that, going forward, the following training or skills development support would help them in their roles:

- More explanation of financial systems (for particular volunteer roles where this is needed, likely Board level)
- Resources with information about the costumes
- Resources with information on tasks that animators can do while in situ
- Resources with period appropriate terminology and phrases
- Resources with further information about the buildings and their history
- Eventbrite training (for those volunteers tasked with ticket admittance during events)
- Information on good governance for Board members

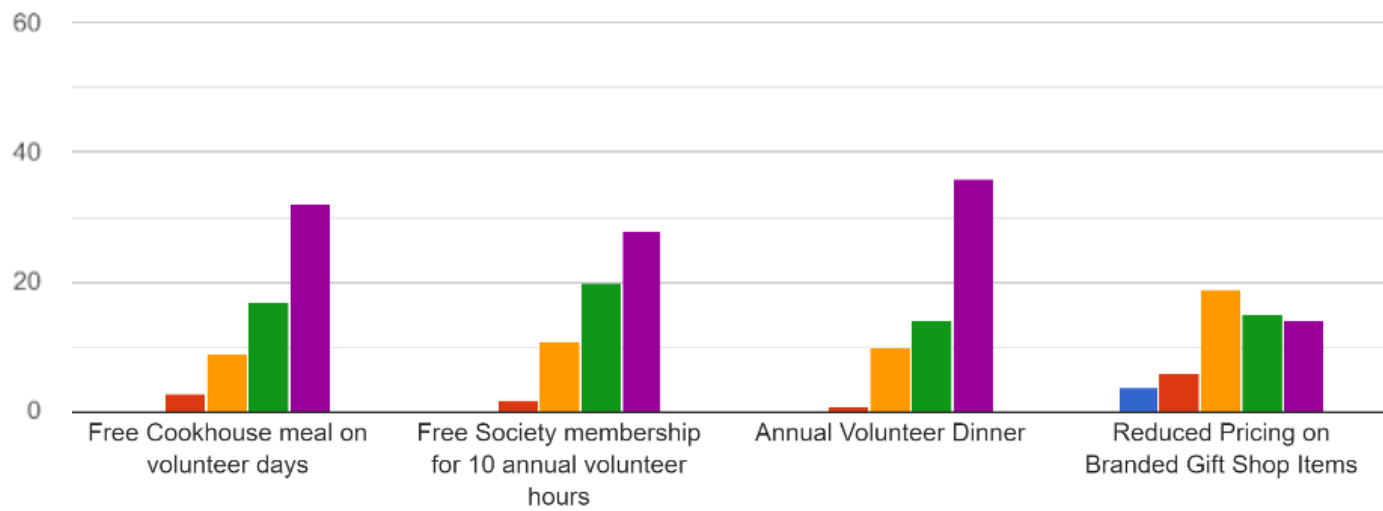
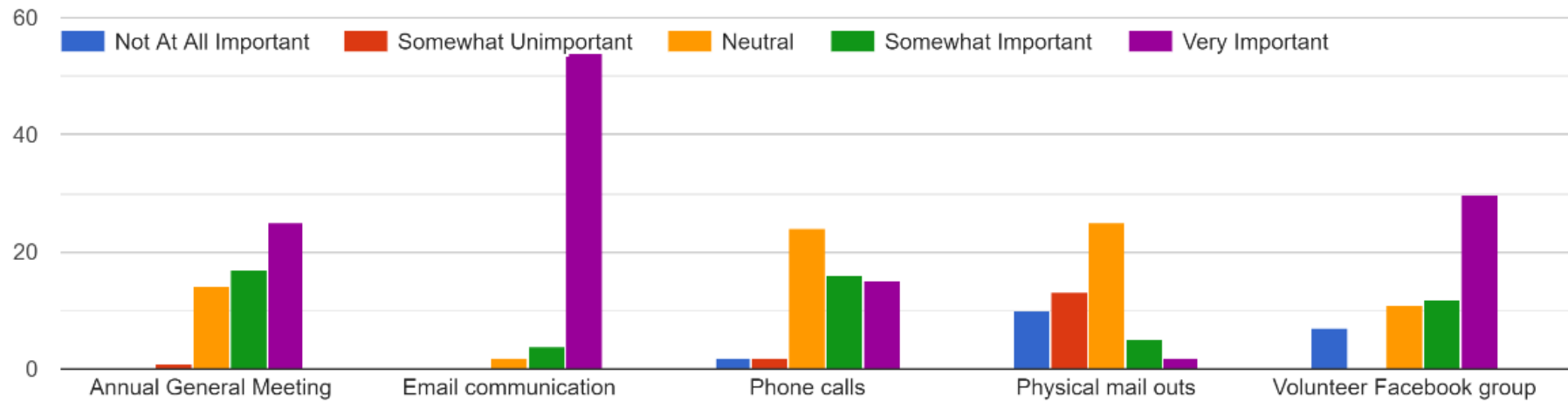
The most popular methods for accessing training were:

- 50% - Training videos made available via YouTube
- 48.1% - Training days onsite at the Village during the warmer months

There was interest in training slides/booklets being made available online or as printed copies to take home, however this was a significantly less popular option (23.1%).

Communication & Recognition

Respondents were asked to indicate how important various communications channels and recognition methods are to them. Full results are included in the graphs on the following page.



The most important communication channel with volunteers is by far email, with 85.7% of respondents rating it as Very Important. This direct person to person channel is clearly key in terms of information sharing and organizing. The annual general meeting and volunteer Facebook group were also significant with 66.6% rating both as either Very Important or Important indicating that volunteers value both as mechanisms for engaging with the Board, other members and volunteers around the strategic direction of the Society, operational communications as it relates to volunteering and the sense of community developed amongst volunteers.

Suggestions for improving communication mostly focused on more regular contact including more frequent Facebook updates. One respondent suggested the following:

“More frequent communication by email, at least twice a year, pro-actively checking with volunteers to see if there are other things they would like to do, things they don't like doing, other people they think might volunteer. Even if they are registered as a volunteer and never volunteer they should still be contacted.”

Other points included ensuring that older volunteers without email and not on social media are not excluded from communications, that texting and messaging is sometimes a faster way to contact volunteers and a better way to engage young volunteers and that communications should always be diplomatic rather than “bossy” or giving the impression of “ordering people to do something”.

In terms of volunteer recognition, respondents are most appreciative of the annual volunteer appreciation dinner (57% Very Important), free cookhouse meals on volunteer days (50.8% Very Important) and free

Society membership for 10+ annual volunteer hours (44.4% Very Important).

Respondents suggested the following as other ways volunteers could be recognised:

- A free branded item such as a t-shirt or personalized name badge
- Volunteer of the month award for whoever volunteers the most hours
- An off-season volunteer outing to keep volunteers engaged over the winter
- Regular feature on social media highlighting volunteers
- Volunteer profile/backstory in the newsletter
- Young volunteer of the year award
- Young volunteer get togethers

Experience of Volunteering

Respondents most value the following in terms of their volunteering:

- 93.7% - Being useful/helpful/having a purpose
- 87.3% - Friendship/community
- 77.8% - Being part of a team
- 71.4% - Meeting people
- 68.3% - Using existing skills and experience
- 54% - Learning
- 52.4% - Spending time in the Heritage Village/Archives

The top four options are all linked to community - giving back, being part of something and developing relationships. These themes should be central to both developing the volunteer program and volunteer recruitment.

Out of all volunteers who participated in the survey, 96.8% felt their volunteer contribution is valued.

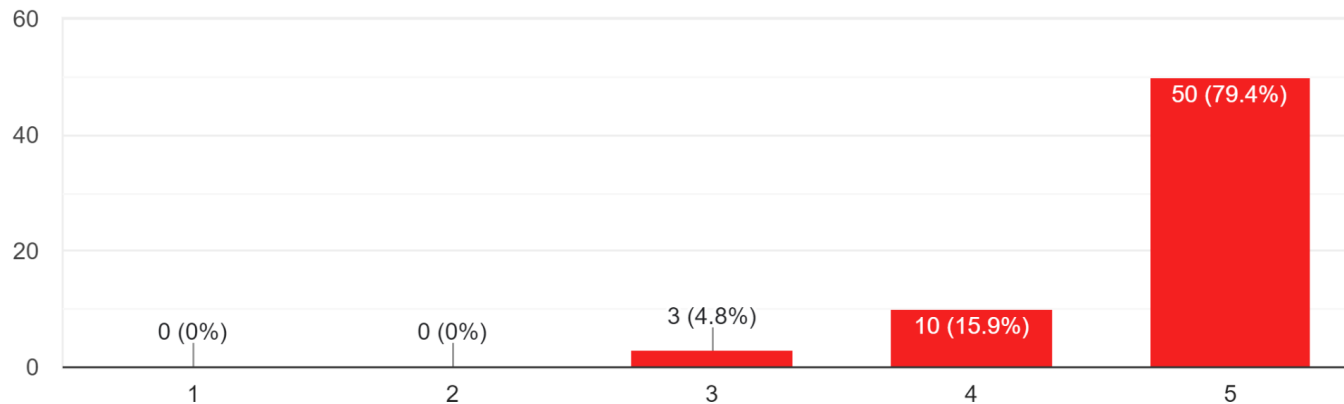
When asked to explain their answer to this question, volunteer responses focused on being thanked by staff, volunteer recognition mechanisms like the annual appreciation dinner and positive feelings associated with their volunteering.

"I have always felt that my contribution to the Village, however small, was appreciated."

"I always feel welcomed and I know that this Society needs its volunteers to be able to offer the services it has. I enjoy being part of my local community."

"We are valued, everyone is kind & all staff will stop and help us if we need directions or help finding something."

Volunteers expressed the following levels of satisfaction with their volunteering (with a rating of 5 being Extremely Satisfied):



When asked to comment on their rating, volunteer responses centered on the following themes:

- Helping and giving back
- Feeling appreciated and needed
- Contributing skills and experience
- Making new friends and meeting people
- Collaborative and no pressure approach to volunteering
- Feeling of alignment with Society's mission and values

"I feel helpful towards other people and like being able to help them."

"When I volunteer I am always made to feel appreciated."

"I feel needed in my community."

"I'm able to contribute my skills and experience to assist the organization in a meaningful way."

“Volunteering is fun, and I enjoy the interaction with the other volunteers. They are good people.”

“Love the people who volunteer: there is no sense of hierarchy, we are all in it for the same reason. There's always a funny story to hear and it's a great way to get to know the community and history that goes along with it.”

“It's very collaborative and I like that so much input is gathered from visitors, staff, and volunteers.”

“I have not been made to feel in any way obliged when requested to help.”

“I appreciate being able to choose what I'm interested in/good at and not feeling any pressure to volunteer for things that perhaps don't interest me.”

“I always feel welcome and am never made to feel guilty if I am unable to contribute.”

“The values of the organization are clear and community based.”

The main challenges respondents said they faced in terms of their volunteering were:

- Being busy/work or family commitments and having a lack of time to volunteer
- Advancing age and/or health issues
- Distance, both in terms of time and gas costs (one respondent asked about claiming back expenses or guidance on whether this can be claimed back on a tax return)

- Limited number of sizes in animator costumes

When asked if there was anything that would improve their volunteering experience most respondents replied there was not. Suggestions from those who did included:

- Finding further support for grant writing
- Getting more local people involved in volunteering
- Further resources for animators, particularly guidance for women on appropriate hairstyles, makeup, shoes and accessories
- Earlier notice of when volunteer support will be needed
- Take-home volunteer manual laying out expectations for volunteers, processes etc.

Volunteers were asked if there is anything about volunteering for the Society that works particularly well for them or that they particularly appreciate (potentially in comparison to other organizations they have experience of volunteering with). The following quotes summarize responses:

“The many, many options allow for a good fit.”

“Lots of options of what kind of role you want, i.e. working with the public or not.”

“Lots of different events to choose from.”

“High level of trust and allowing freedom to access all areas.”

“Being asked for feedback – what worked and what could work better. That sets Memory Lane apart from most organizations I've had experience with.”

"I've done a few weddings and really appreciate the 'no pressure to stay late' attitude that is communicated by management once the tables are cleared."

"They never ask you to do more than you can do."

"I love dressing up and also the tradition of every year doing the holiday decorating in the Village - it means a lot to me."

"Folks are all really nice and really pull together and go 'above and beyond'."

To close out the survey volunteers were given a final opportunity to share any comments or suggestions related to developing the volunteering program. Responses included the following:

"It would be helpful to see younger people."

"Continue trying to recruit youth who will grow with the Village."

"The more information that is out there the better, especially where younger busy volunteers are concerned."

"Needs to be self-sustainable and proactive, very few people will volunteer without being asked in some way so you have to ask and tell them what the opportunities are and why they are valued."

"Something around more community building, if possible. I'm aware of lots of lonely elderly community members who might benefit from more connection. Also aware that current staffing

levels can't support more volunteer outreach but perhaps creative programming can!"

"Be cautious about introducing too much bureaucracy."

2.2 VOLUNTEER FOCUS GROUPS & INTERVIEWS

Two focus groups for volunteers were held in November 2023 that were attended by 9 volunteers. Participants were a mixture of those who considered themselves to be active and inactive volunteers, had lengths of volunteer service ranging from more than 20 years to less than 6 months and covered roles including animation, archive and collections work, events support, former Board members, and kitchen help with many participants saying they have *"done it all"*.

Individual in-depth interviews with 13 volunteers were undertaken during November as well. Most of these interviews were with volunteers who have been volunteering with the Society 20 years or more - including 2 of the original founders - although there were also a few volunteers interviewed with shorter lengths of volunteer service of 1-2 years. In addition to roles outlined above in relation to focus group participants, interviewees also included those who support maintenance, serving, ice cutting, craft programming, grant writing, and heritage research.

Focus group participants and interviewees were asked the same set of questions. Their responses have been combined in the summary below.

Recruitment & Making Volunteering Appealing

Volunteers were asked for their thoughts on how the Society can grow recruitment and make volunteering appealing to people of all ages and from diverse backgrounds. The resulting discussion points included:

- Recruitment to date has been personal - friends of friends etc. - and feels as though it is slowing down rather than growing. There is a need for a focused recruitment campaign.
- Including more information about the variety of volunteering roles (incl. remote roles) on the Memory Lane website and including images of people doing volunteer work. Be clear that there are regular opportunities and also opportunities for those who can only commit to 1-2 events per year.
- Idea of contacting realtors and including material on volunteering at Memory Lane as part of 'new home' packs given out when people buy a house in the area.
- Highlighting the benefits of volunteering as part of recruitment, with a particular focus on the social component: meeting new people, the rewarding feeling of supporting the local community, recognition such as a free meal on volunteering days, membership, event discounts, and annual volunteer appreciation dinner.
- Potential new benefit of volunteers being able to bring guests as visitors a certain number of times per year.
- Holding a volunteer 'Open House' event where people can come and learn about volunteering with the Society and the different roles and opportunities.
- Having a volunteering booth at events - both at Memory Lane and local community events - to promote opportunities and encourage people to apply to volunteer.
- Opportunities related to family volunteering and youth volunteering. Family volunteering might appeal to the large home-schooling community on the Shore. In relation to youth

volunteering, approach schools and uniformed groups, leverage people with connections to youth organizations to make contact.

- For youth volunteering, highlight the benefits to young people such as gaining experience prior to being of employment age, future opportunities to work at Memory Lane, and the value of volunteering for university/college applications. Use current/previous youth volunteers as case studies and include youth voice as part of recruitment materials.
- Ensure any information/materials related to youth volunteering are mobile friendly.

Orientation, Training & Knowledge Transfer

Volunteers were asked what they felt new volunteers would need to feel confident in their volunteering role and what current volunteers might want in terms of a refresher before the start of a new season. Discussion points on orientation, training and knowledge transfer included the following:

- Making orientation and training sessions social events by including lunch or tea/coffee and highlighting the opportunity to meet new people or connect current volunteers who perhaps have not seen each other in a while.
- Including a tour of the Village with animators in every building as part of orientation. Effectively have the orientation group act as a school trip.
- Making sure orientation includes practical aspects of volunteering: signing in/out, recording hours, entitlement to a meal etc.

- Exploring the possibility of orientation being primarily led by experienced volunteers.
- Ensuring all volunteers know where first aid kits are located and who has first aid training on the day. Exploring the possibility of sending some regular volunteers on a first aid course.
- Prioritizing health and safety training as part of orientation and refresher training for current volunteers. Empowering volunteers to ask questions if they are unsure of something.
- Other areas of focus for training include: equity, diversity & inclusion, visitor welcome.
- During the season, having a more formalized volunteer section in the General Store (suggestion of using the post office area) where there is information for volunteers and a sign in/out book. Encouraging FOH staff to proactively engage with volunteers around ensuring they sign in/out, record their hours and making sure they receive a meal ticket.
- Volunteer tags with first names to help volunteers get to know each other was a popular suggestion. However, there were some volunteers who were not comfortable with this.
- Having an annual invitation to volunteers to have a 1-2-1 chat about their goals for volunteering, new roles/projects they might be interested in, new skills they have learned which could benefit the Society, training needs etc.
- Having manuals for the main volunteering roles and having event manuals that break down how each event is run, what the different event volunteer roles need to do.
- Promoting a bank of training resources to volunteers that includes printed materials, videos, access to materials in the archives including oral histories etc.
- Ahead of opening or large events, having a short volunteer rally to ensure everyone knows what they are doing, prioritize where people are needed etc.
- Additional resources for animators would be welcome, such as guides on appropriate hairstyles, makeup and accessories, historical backgrounds of the buildings, period accurate phrases to use in conversation with visitors, and activities animators can do during their shift.
- Buddy system pairing new volunteers and experienced volunteers to help them settle in and a mentorship program pairing volunteers with a particular skill with those volunteers interested in learning to encourage knowledge transfer.
- Creating a channel for volunteers to provide feedback anonymously (suggestion box as part of potential volunteer station in post office area).

Volunteer Coordination

Volunteers were asked to share their thoughts on how we can approach volunteer coordination going forward to ensure sustainability. Discussion points included:

- Importance of continuity in terms of the person coordinating volunteers to enable relationship building - personal connection is critical.
- Almost all volunteers felt very strongly that volunteer coordination needed to be a paid role (rather than relying on a

volunteer). Volunteers also thought that, if possible, the Board should fundraise for this position rather than relying on an external funder and uncertain grant cycles.

- Possibility of combining volunteer coordination and events management into a single role.
- Possibility of leveraging public sector support by pushing social involvement, senior support aspect to help fund a paid role.
- Exploring volunteer-led committees to coordinate volunteer work in certain role areas. Would need to make sure the reporting structure is well defined.
- Suggestion of having designated 'go to' experienced volunteers for volunteering areas who would be first point of contact for other volunteers should they have questions in order to move away from the current 'Let's call Thea' model.
- For each volunteering area, create a record of each volunteer's skills and the resources they are able to supply (e.g. tools for maintenance volunteers).

Volunteer Wellbeing

Volunteers were asked how they thought the Society could increase support for volunteer wellbeing, growing the level of care for volunteers and sense of volunteer community, particularly in relation to our older volunteers. The resulting discussion points included:

- Leveraging the experience and knowledge of older volunteers who have been volunteering for many years through an informal 'Village Elders' group, where they are asked to give feedback on ideas over a coffee.

- Supporting volunteer carpooling through inviting those interested in taking part to sign up and then putting volunteers that live in the same area in touch with each other.
- A volunteer alumni type group for those no longer actively volunteering but who have given a lot to the Society over the years. Delivering formal volunteer reunion coffee mornings a couple of times a year and ensuring that those no longer volunteering know they are always welcome to stop in for a coffee and a chat (would require volunteers to be given lifetime membership).
- For older volunteers, exploring reducing the length of animation shifts to enable them to continue volunteering. Pairing older volunteers with younger volunteers who are able to support them and give them breaks.
- Opportunities to expand volunteering roles to include volunteer alumni support through things like delivering dinner leftovers from events. Would need to be quite informal.

3. BARRIERS TO VOLUNTEERING

Volunteers were also asked to consider the different barriers that people might experience that would potentially stop them from volunteering. Identified barriers include the following along with ideas to reduce or eliminate the barriers:

- **Transportation:** Memory Lane is in a rural location and with the rising cost of gas, many people may not be able to justify the financial burden of volunteering.

Potential solutions: offering fuel vouchers to those coming from further away/ from low income households, volunteer carpooling scheme, partnering with MusGo Rider to offer volunteers free chits for rides to the Village to volunteer, looking into whether volunteer expenses can be put against tax.

- **Lack of time:** many people, particularly those of working age or with younger families, might feel they do not have time to volunteer.

Potential solutions: promote remote volunteering and family volunteering opportunities, highlight events volunteering where people can volunteer once or twice a year, strong messaging that adding your name to the volunteer pool does not mean people will be pressured to volunteer if they do not have availability.

- **Feeling like an outsider:** people new to the area might feel that because they do not have a personal connection to local history that heritage volunteering is not for them or that the current group of volunteers all know each other and as a new volunteer it would be hard to break in and not feel like the odd one out.

Potential solutions: highlight volunteering as an opportunity to embed in the local community. Encourage connections and familiarity between new volunteers and existing volunteers through mechanisms such as name badges, sign in/out book, buddy system and mentorship program.

4. EMERGING IDEAS AND THEMES

The consultation has brought out a series of themes and issues the project needs to address. The most significant of these are:

- **Recruitment:** develop recruitment campaigns and events for adults, families and young people with supporting materials, including roles descriptions and incentive packages.
- **Orientation & Training:** introduce a regular, structured program for new volunteers and refreshers for existing volunteers that include a Village tour, practical aspects of volunteering, general (health and safety, EDI, and visitor welcome), and role specific training.
- **Training Resources:** develop a resource bank for volunteers which includes manuals, videos, and suggestions for where they can find out further information (e.g. oral histories in archives).
- **Volunteer Area:** explore using the current post office area in the General Store as a one-stop volunteer space where volunteers can sign in/out, record their hours, access important information/ reminders and give anonymous feedback via a suggestion box.
- **Formalize Volunteer Life Cycle:** in addition to recruitment, develop milestones that will mark a volunteer's annual journey - annual check in on goals, interests, training needs etc. - and documents to support the conclusion of their journey (e.g. exit interview).
- **Volunteer Buddy System & Mentorship Program:** as part of orientation and training offer a buddy system pairing a new volunteer with an experienced volunteer to help the new

volunteer settle in. To promote knowledge exchange, develop a simple mentorship program where volunteers with a particular skill teach those interested in learning the skill.

- **Volunteer Coordinator Role:** explore with the Board the viability of a combined volunteer coordination and events management role, either core funded or grant supported.
- **Designated 'Go To' Volunteers:** scope the interest amongst volunteers for taking on responsibility of being a 'go to' volunteer able to answer other volunteers' questions to alleviate demands on Executive Director.
- **Volunteer Alumni Activities:** introduce coffee morning reunions, 'Village Elders' informal advice group, scope interest in informal support (e.g. leftovers delivery) and pilot.
- **Volunteer Carpooling Scheme:** develop lists of those willing to offer lifts and those needing lifts and match based on location.

5. NEXT STEPS

Volunteers will continue to be consulted throughout the project. For example, as part of reviewing and updating volunteer role descriptions volunteers with experience of particular roles will be asked to provide their feedback.

In January/February 2024, as part of developing a more formalized youth volunteering program, current youth volunteers will be consulted about what they like/dislike about volunteering at Memory Lane and what they would be interested in seeing as part of a focused program for young people.