



Research Report:

Getting Started as a Sport Organizer

February 2021



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Introduction

One in two Torontonians are immigrants, yet newcomers face disproportionate barriers to securing leadership opportunities (Volunteer Toronto 2018, TRIEC 2019). To increase the quality of programming and infrastructure to support physical activity in the City of Toronto, Volunteer Toronto is developing a training pilot for newcomers struggling to access sport as coaches, organizers, and volunteers.

Through the research phase of the project, a training intervention, and follow-up evaluations with participants (newcomers to Canada > 10 years), Volunteer Toronto will test the hypothesis that there is a knowledge gap preventing eager, athletic individuals from driving community sport. Volunteer Toronto completed the research phase of this project from November 2020 to January 2021. This report details our findings on the challenges newcomers face starting leagues, teams and sport clubs, and will directly inform the "Getting Started as a Sport Organizer" training pilot.

The "Getting Started as a Sport Organizer" training pilot will launch in 2021, providing accessible information on the Canadian sport volunteer context, grassroots leadership, and volunteer management. Newcomer participants will receive a certificate of completion, elevating their professionalism and effectiveness in organizing community sport.

About Volunteer Toronto

Volunteer Toronto is Canada's largest volunteer centre with over 40 years of experience connecting volunteers to the organizations that need them. Our services empower local volunteers to find opportunities that make a positive difference in their community. Through training initiatives, we also educate and help non-profit organizations and community groups run successful volunteer programs. We also strive to work with community partners to conduct research, share information and identify opportunities in the voluntary sector.



Our Mission

Volunteer Toronto increases the positive impact that volunteering has on the City of Toronto through innovative initiatives that inspire, inform, and connect volunteers and the organizations that need them.



Our Vision

We envision a Toronto that is caring, inclusive, and engaged where volunteering is an important avenue through which everyone has the opportunity to participate and contribute meaningfully.



Research Questions

In developing the research phase of the "Getting Started as a Sport Organizer" training program, three focus areas arose to form our initial research questions.



Focus Area: Identifying Barriers

- How are newcomers disadvantaged when accessing sport as leaders?
- What are the barriers that newcomers face when accessing sport as leaders?
- What are the barriers that newcomers face when becoming volunteer leaders?



Focus Area: Knowledge Gaps

- What types of knowledge gaps exist for newcomers accessing sport as a coach, organizer or volunteer?
- What do newcomers need to know about accessing sport as a coach, volunteer or organizer?
- What do newcomers need to know about accessing volunteering in general, and as a leader?



Focus Area: Training Styles

- What type of training best equips newcomers to become volunteer leaders and organizers of community sport?
- What online training styles work well for newcomers in general?
- What online training styles work well for effective leaders and organizers of community sport?

Key Findings

Through focus groups with newcomers, interviews with sport leaders, and desk research, a number of trends arose in our findings. Answers to the initial research questions revealed the motivations, challenges, knowledge gaps, and opportunities to inform a meaningful training intervention to enable newcomers as sport leaders.



Motivations

Focus group participants shared why they stepped up to become sport organizers or volunteer leaders:

- Newcomers weren't aware of what was available in their community, so they filled the perceived gap
- Sport proved a great way to build a network, work toward employment opportunities and become personally fulfilled
- Sport is a pathway to integrating with Canadian culture



Barriers

Research across all formats identified barriers for newcomers participating in and leading sport:

- ► Hard to find participation and leadership opportunities
- ► Culturally-specific sports are missing or inaccessible
- Language creates barriers between participants, leaders and coaches
- ► Financial barriers range from booking and permit fees to equipment rental/purchase and volunteer recruitment and training costs
- Lack of understanding around finding and using facilities, obtaining insurance, and legal issues
- ► Time is a precious commodity for newcomers, especially those with numerous other commitments, from getting settled and finding work to family care



Knowledge Gaps

Focus group participants, interview participants and research sources all indicated the same thing: understanding and implementing sport leagues, teams and clubs in Toronto is nuanced and complex. These are the key areas of learning:

- ► Toronto, Ontario and Canada sport culture, values, ethics and the importance of inclusion
- ► Infrastructure of organized sport programs
- Administration, from regulations and permits to budgets and booking facilities
- Interpersonal relationship management, including volunteer engagement, recruitment, screening, expectations and commitment
- Empathy, leadership and conflict resolution

Sport expertise was also identified as a major knowledge gap, especially ensuring newcomers who participate in the "Getting Started as a Sport Organizer" program know about the next steps for coaching and organizing, such as the National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP).



Do I need a permit? Is there a fee? Do I need insurance?

Focus group participant



You have to meet newcomers where they are.

- Interview participant

Key Findings



Training Styles

The necessity for online training, brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, has resulted in a variety of suggestions for training formats:

- ► Live online webinars with breakout rooms, allowing for participants to network
- Pre-recorded video
- ► Hands-on learning (case studies, problem solving)
- ▶ Learning from peers and other participants
- Social learning
- Individualized guidance and cultural support from instructors

Inclusive Sport

A common theme throughout the research phase pointed to the need for an inclusive approach to sport. This includes a need for inclusive and accessible language throughout the training program, along with avoiding a binary categorization system (such as "men's and women's leagues").

Find the gatekeepers in every neighbourhood and make those connections to support newcomer volunteers and leaders.

- Interview participant

Sport in Canada has a colonial past - they were organized by men for men and business. Colonialism has shaped sports spaces and what is offered.

- Interview participant



Research Methodology

Focus Groups

Two focus groups were held on November 24th and 26th, 2020. Participants were individuals new to Canada within the last 10 years. Some were existing sport leaders while others were sport participants and leaders in other volunteer capacities. They varied in ages, backgrounds and interests, providing a diverse range of feedback about their experiences, challenges and opportunities.

There were 52 applicants, however only 12 participants were selected based on responses to an application about their experiences, interests and what they could offer in the research phase of the project. The selected applicants stood out with a range of interests and backgrounds from around the world and in Toronto. One participant was unavailable, resulting in 11 total participants providing their feedback that helps to inform the lived experience barriers and knowledge gaps.

Interviews

Interviews with established volunteer leaders, inclusive sport experts and sport group organizers took place between November 23^{rd} and December 11^{th} , 2020. Five interviews were held, exploring personal experiences and recommendations for the training program based on many years working with newcomers and other populations in sport.

Interview participants, with our thanks:

- ► Moezine Hasham, Executive Director and Founder, Hockey 4 Youth
- ▶ Javier Diaz, Director, NUTMEG Soccer
- Dennis Quesnel, Sports Inclusion Officer, Egale Canada
- ► Lauren Wolman, Social Innovation Research Manager, Centennial College, and organizer of Toronto Values-Based Sports Coalition
- ► April Shin, Youth Worker, St. Stephen's Community House - North York Youth Drop-In
- Anna Geng, Program Facilitator, St. Stephen's Community House - North York Youth Drop-In
- Amanda Neale-Robinson, Executive Director, Toronto Inner-City Rugby Foundation (TIRF)
- Vanessa Wallace, Programs Coordinator, Canadian Women & Sport

I'd like to know how to introduce sports into multicultural groups so that it tailors to their interests and culture.

- Focus Group participant

Be very clear and enthusiastic that involvement in sports will mobilize their families, in wellness, career, and sense of belonging. Volunteerism is the key to open the door to other opportunities.

- Interview participant

Self-Directed Research

To support the focus groups and interviews, a team of dedicated research volunteers worked with Volunteer Toronto's Training Team to conduct a self-directed research around the research questions. This research took the form of literature reviews, environmental scans, and extensive searching for relevant sources.

With thanks to our research volunteer team:

Erin Lloyd, B.Sc Hons, Laura Ramos, Max Dibu-Caiole, and Michelle Green.

1 - Motivations

According to Statistics Canada (Thomas 2012 and Ockenden & Hutin 2008), newcomers are more likely to commit and be motivated by incentives associated with a volunteer opportunity, primarily as a way to gain skills and experiences, explore one's own strengths, and improve future job opportunities. In terms of newcomers getting started with volunteer leadership: commitment, drive, and passion are generally much more pronounced in established volunteer leaders and are lacking in individuals who are new to volunteering.

"Sport for Life for All Newcomers to Canada" (2018) identifies the important role of sport leaders in improving access to sport and to help develop physical literacy for newcomers. The resource highlights the opportunity for leaders to create inclusive sport programs, which tie into the motivations of existing leaders.

In focus groups and interviews, many existing leaders shared what inspires them to get involved:

1. Existing leaders noticed a need for community sport that wasn't being met

- They were unaware of anything currently available in their immediate community
- ► There was a lack of culturally-specific sport options
- ▶ Wanted to promote health and wellness in their community

2. Existing leaders hoped that sport leadership would lead to employment

- ► They saw an opportunity to gain resume experience, transferable skills
- Created an avenue to build both social and professional locals networks

3. Existing leaders see sport as a way to learn about and integrate with Canadian culture

- They experienced a multi-level approach to sport in Toronto: recreational, to amateur, to professional and more
- Opportunity is increased in Toronto, whether through starting a league or finding one to join

4. Existing leaders sought personal fulfilment

- They saw an opportunity to get to know their neighbours and give back in a unique way
- Many were parents looking to increase physical activity amongst theirs and their peers' children



When I immigrated here, being able to play netball, a sport I played back home, was rewarding as I could connect with others.

Interview participant

2 - Barriers

Research explored barriers impacting newcomers both as **sport participants** and in becoming **sport leaders**. The barriers below were the most common and pronounced between interviews, focus groups and the research literature.

Barrier	Details and Manifestations
Discrimination	 Language barriers, experiences and/or perceived experiences leading to exclusion and discrimination
	Intersectionality (background, identity, experience, etc.) in discrimination and lack of access to sport
Facility access	► Lack of nearby usable facilities (community centres, outdoor spaces)
	 Logistics of using these facilities, lack of knowledge about rules/regulations/ permits for facilities
	 Competing for space with other groups, difficulty booking the same space for the same time each week
	 Transportation to and from facilities is a challenge (limited or no private transportation)
	Youth newcomers have noted they are much more likely to take part in sport if it's close to home, or longer trips if transit fare is covered (<u>Social Planning</u> <u>Toronto</u> , 2016)
Financial barriers	► Fees to join a group/league, purchasing equipment, using a space
	 Costs associated with volunteer engagement, including vulnerable sector screening and/or first aid training
	 Costs associated with leadership, including insurance, permits, coach/referee training
Finding opportunities to get involved	Not sure where to look to join existing sport club/group/league
	Unsure of where to find volunteer opportunities
	Promotion is not accessible or targeted to newcomers
	Prefer paper/physical promotion methods
	Research into community sport and newcomer experience in North Bay, Ontario found that newcomers had a lack of awareness of community sport organization and desired "up to date, information dense, interactive and reliable websites" (Nadeau, O'Reilly and Scott, 2016)
Group insurance & legalities	Lack of access to group insurance, lack of knowledge about which activities require insurance
	 Structures for privacy, confidentiality and other policies
	► Lack of information or network on the right legal resources to get started

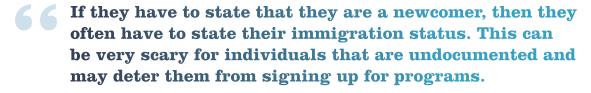
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2 - Barriers

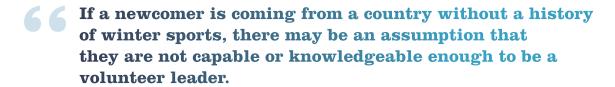
Barrier	Details and Manifestations
Lack of culturally specific sports	 Sports that newcomers could be familiar with may not be easy to find Offering different sports could increase participation options Newcomers may default to locally available sports as a means to integrate
Lack of network	 Newcomers have difficulty obtaining volunteer reference checks and verifying credentials for leadership roles Groups have systemic preferences toward Canadian-born volunteers or those with Canadian experience; this can create challenges in getting started or getting involved
Language barriers	 Coaches, referees and leaders may not all speak the same language, especially the same language as participants Communications about opportunities may not be easily accessible or understandable for all A study done by the Journal of Leadership Education found that interactions with other volunteers and how well they communicate with the general population are two of the five most important volunteer leadership assessment measures. (Morrison, & Greenhaw 2018)
Seasonal opportunities	 Many sports are season- and space-dependent (i.e. warm-weather sports only continue if indoor space is available) Uncertainty around post-pandemic opportunities, availability Coach/leader training is most successful when playing area can be accessed (such as outdoor field)
Structural	 Programs need funding and volunteers to operate, knowledge to set this up is lacking Lack of systems specifically for community sport groups to succeed
Time	 Fitting in time to continually be involved, unclear commitments for volunteers and leaders Other time commitments and duties, such as jobs and families Takes time to get something started
Volunteer recruitment & engagement	 Lack of knowledge and understanding of volunteer recruitment processes Expectations about how long recruitment takes, procedures for screening (interviews, applications), required documents (police checks) Lack of incentives for volunteers to get involved (i.e. what would motivate parents?)

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2 - Barriers



- Interview participant



- Interview participant



- Interview participant



- Interview participant

<u>Sport for Life</u> (2018) and the <u>Institute for Canadian Citizenship</u> (2014) identified the following barriers for newcomers participating in sport, many of which overlap with barriers for sport leadership:

- Financial
- ► Transportation
- ▶ Time commitment
- Organizational policies & procedures
- Unfamiliarity with sport
- Lack of information

- Language and communication
- Competing interests
- Political and cultural
- ► Integration into mainstream leagues
- Perception of certain sports
- Racism

3 - Knowledge Gaps

Alongside the identified barriers, a number of knowledge gaps exist for newcomers looking to become sport leaders and organizers. A key goal of "Getting Started as a Sport Organizer" is to fill in these gaps and suggest pathways to additional sport expertise, enabling participants to overcome barriers and create their own community sport groups.

The research questions explored knowledge gaps specific to accessing sport as a leader as well as accessing volunteering and volunteer leadership in general. The findings focused mostly on the sport leadership gaps, while integrating competencies from other areas as well (<u>Milistetd, et al.</u> 2017 and <u>NCCP Competencies</u>).

1. Infrastructure & Sport Volunteer Concepts

- Language relevant to sport in Toronto, Ontario & Canada, and inclusive terminology
- Informal and formal sports leagues, levels of play
- Core values, ethics of sports groups
- Creating and maintaining inclusive sport environments, supporting diversity in teams,
- Valuing diversity intentional inclusion and participation focus, building intersectional relationships
- Assessing needs, understanding what's already available, environmental scans

2. Administrative structures & supports

- ► Liability, insurance, rights & regulations
- Financial support, budgeting, sponsorship, funding sources, remuneration of coaches, covering volunteer engagement costs
- ▶ Booking facilities, including permits, rules and processes
- Legal guidelines, including privacy, confidentiality, working with minors (when applicable)
- Using technology to improve leadership



Leaders should think about the athletes as humans first, beyond just coming to play sports:
Value the differences that different people bring to the table, whether its body size, ability to participate and/or other factors; Value each person and see their strengths.

- Focus Group participant



Small organizations don't have capacity, leadership, or time to deal with administrative needs.

Focus Group participant

3. Interpersonal relationships

- Benefits of volunteering to grow social capital, build networks, ease settlement processes, personal fulfilment
- Volunteer engagement and leadership
- Motivating and inspiring others, being a role model
- Communicating expectations and commitments of volunteers, including time commitment
- Volunteer recruitment processes & timelines (resume, references, orientation) and screening practices (interviews, applications, police checks, etc.)
- Conflict management (parents, referees, etc.)
- Confidence-building



3 - Knowledge Gaps

4. Sport Expertise

- Coaching, planning and implementing successful coaching activities
- Managing a program, planning practices
- Sport-specific resources, policies, procedures and rules
- Connecting with existing/former athletes for support as coaches and leaders
- ► Understanding the National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP) (registering for a NCCP number, training opportunities evaluation process



Having to get these certifications and being available to attend different games is challenging.

- Focus Group participant

Identified Resources

- ► How to start a club, sports league <u>Athletics Ontario</u>, <u>Ontario Business Central</u>
- ▶ Details about National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP) Coaching Association of Canada
- ▶ NCCP Competition Introduction & Development Modules Coaches Association of Ontario
- ► Sports Inclusion & Inclusive Language from Egale Canada <u>LGBTQI2S Sports Inclusion Toolkit</u>, <u>LGBTQI2S Glossary of Terms</u>, <u>Pronoun Usage Guide</u>, <u>The Genderbread Person</u>, <u>Practicing LGBTQI2S Allyship</u>, Inclusive & Affirming Language
- Sport Leadership Programs City of Toronto

4 - Training Styles

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic prevents the "Getting Started as a Sport Organizer" training program from being delivered in-person. Research focuses on training styles that would work best for newcomers in an entirely online format. Kaslon, Lodle, and Greve (2005) demonstrate that newcomer volunteers are more accepting of online training and appreciate the convenience of online training. In addition, online training for sport organizers benefit from being self-administered and working well around other time commitments and pressures of sport leaders (Camire, Kendellen, Rathwell, and Turgeon 2020). Findings for preferred training styles are listed below:

Live webinars with breakout rooms for networking

If training takes place during a live webinar, providing breakout rooms affords an opportunity for participants to get to know each and build networks.

Pre-recorded video

Pre-recorded video and audio modules offer versatility in learning types along with in that they promote asynchronous (self-directed) learning. Newcomers facing language barriers can learn at their own pace in a quick and easily digestible format. Subtitles on videos can also help with English language skills.

Provide hands-on learning: case scenarios, problem solving

When possible, training should be hands-on, using activities, case studies, problem solving and other interactive components. Existing sports leaders can help inform real-life scenarios, enabling learners to better understand what to expect.



The more opportunities for hands-on experience with volunteer leadership, the better.

- Focus Group participant

Participants and peers as leaders

Giving participants the opportunity to lead gives them a chance to feel what it's like to be a sport and community leader. Using a mentorship, or relying on peers who are already sport leaders, can help participants better understand the environment and their expectations. Interviews and focus groups also showed the value of direct mentorship to help newcomers overcome barriers.



In doing the training virtually, one of the main components would be giving participants the opportunity to lead [a sport] program - it helps them to begin to form their thoughts about how to run it, and gives them the opportunity to explore.

- Focus Group participant

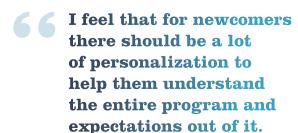
4 - Training Styles

Social learning

Social collaboration platforms can be used to discuss problems and experiences, and encourage learners to help one another. A social media group can also be made for alumni from the training program, which can help them match up with and provide answers to learners.

Individualized support

One-to-one support, consultation and guidance is especially useful to the newcomer audience to guide them through the process. Training should be personalized to the newcomer experience to help participants relate and stay engaged. In addition, past athletes and/or existing coaches can provide information to help alleviate newcomer concerns and provide better direct support to learners (Benson 2016). The right people, with the right training, can help provide effective instruction and leadership and role model for the program participants to become leaders of their own (Sport for Life, page 42).



- Focus Group participant

Cultural support & languages

Translating learning materials into more languages can increase reach. In addition, connecting with other agencies (language-based, culture-based, settlement organizations) can help participants stay connected and ensure program is relevant to the audience (<u>Sport for Life</u>, pages 19, 22, 25).



Recommendations

Based on the findings from this research phase, a series of training topics have been identified for the "Getting Started as a Sport Organizer" program. In addition, research has revealed specific format(s), sport expertise next-steps and other program inclusions that would be useful to delivering a successful training offering.

1 - Training Topics

The knowledge gap areas are a summary of the training topics to be addressed in "Getting Started as a Sport Organizer." Each area will ideally also impact barriers that newcomers face by increasing knowledge and access to participants.

1. Infrastructure & Sport Volunteer Concepts

Exploring local and inclusive language relevant to sport, structures and levels of play, values and ethics, practices for creating inclusive and diverse sport environments, and assessing needs.

Barriers: Discrimination, language barriers, lack of culturally specific sports, structural

2. Administrative structures & supports

Understanding the role of liability, insurance, rights and regulations, financial planning, funding and support, booking and using facilities, and using technology.

Barriers: Facility access, financial barriers, group insurance & legalities, structural

3. Interpersonal relationships

Discussing the benefits and expectations of volunteering, structures of volunteer engagement, leadership and motivation, volunteer recruitment and screening, and conflict management.

Barriers: Discrimination, finding opportunities to get involved, lack of network, time, volunteer recruitment & engagement

4. Sport Expertise

Exploring coaching, planning and implementing successful sport activities, managing programs and practices, where to find sport-specific resources and policies, building networks and understanding the National Coaching Certification Program.

Barriers: Lack of culturally specific sports, lack of network, seasonal opportunities, structural

In addition to these topics, the training program can point participants interested in becoming coaches to the National Coaching Certification Program by laying the groundwork for the core coaching competencies: problem-solving, valuing, critical thinking, leading and interacting.

Recommendations

2 – Training Format

Based on findings for training styles, the following training structure is recommended for the "Getting Started as a Sport Organizer" program:

- Online, self-directed modules, animated explainer videos, case scenarios, and social learning
 - ▶ Module 1 Program Introduction, Language and Inclusive Sport Environments
 - ► Module 2 Sport Landscape, Structure and Values
 - ▶ Module 3 Volunteer Engagement: Roles, Recruitment and Leadership
 - ► Module 4 Planning and Funding/Finances
 - ▶ Module 5 Sport Expertise, Coaching and Working with Others
- Recorded webinars, detailed facilitator-led instruction
 - ▶ Program introduction and network 20 minutes
 - ► Conflict Management Basics 45 minutes
 - ► Sport Organizing Logistics 45 minutes
- ▶ Live question & answer and networking sessions featuring sport leaders
- Downloadable workbook, translated into three languages, aligned with module and live session content
- Additional online course functions
 - Forum to enable participants to communicate with each other and existing leaders
 - ▶ "Alumni" function for completed participants to share experiences
 - Resources, including those listed in this report
 - Next Steps section with coaching pathways

3 - Coaching Pathway

For participants looking to become coaches, in addition to sport organizers and leaders, continuing on to the formal training of the NCCP provides additional credibility. This training is offered, for a fee, by the Ontario Coaches Association. However, partnerships with other sport organizations should be explored to create opportunity for "Getting Started as a Sport Organizer" participants to partake in NCCP training at a reduced rate. For instance, the City of Toronto offers NCCP training, and existing leagues and teams offer support for upcoming coaches and leaders. The "Next Steps" section of the "Getting Started as a Sport Organizer" program will explore and elaborate on coaching development opportunities available to participants.

Thank You!

Volunteer Toronto would like to thank the research volunteers, interview participants, focus group participants and aforementioned partners for their contribution to the research phase of "Getting Started as a Sport Organizer."

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