



Why are we a membership-based organization?

Over the past few months, we have deliberated this question and responded to community questions and concerns. Why do we need to charge a membership fee to community agencies?

In response, here are three key reasons for our membership structure:

☆ Accountability

A membership structure and fee allows the Volunteer Centre to be held accountable to member agencies for the services we provide. In our membership package, we have outlined a number of services that we will provide to our member agencies – and members have every right to expect these to meet their needs.

Agencies sign a membership agreement that also holds them accountable – ensuring that there is a person responsible for volunteer coordination (paid or unpaid), that potential volunteers will be communicated with promptly and politely, and that agencies are responsible for informing us of their new volunteer requests and notifying us when volunteer requests have been filled.

A membership fee also contributes to our accountability – as an agency, you are more likely to be critical or praiseworthy of our services if you have a financial investment in ensuring that we meet your needs. The renewal of membership fees will be a bellweather sign for us – good renewal rates will mean we are hitting the mark in our service provision; fewer membership renewals mean we have work to do. Both scenarios keep us intrinsically connected to the needs of the non-profit community that we are here to serve.

☆ Sustainability

Membership is a financial investment in the Volunteer Centre. Membership fees offset the expenses of running our organization – staffing, resources, workshops, and more. We recognize that a fee of \$150/year does not go far and total revenue from memberships will never serve to sustain the organization as a whole. But there is value in the services we offer. And placing a fee on that value assists us – and you – in recognizing that there is a cost to what we do and that organizations will benefit from our services. We do not want to compete with the very organizations we are committed to serving for local, and limited, fundraising dollars. Our goal is to seek out innovative and creative funding possibilities, and by communicating to our funders that community organizations believe our service is worthwhile enough to pay for it, this becomes an important part of our overall sustainability plan.

☆ Community Partnerships

Membership defines the Volunteer Centre. It helps us focus our energies on those organizations who value our services and/or need assistance. We have estimated that there are hundreds of organizations, and an endless array of volunteer needs, in Guelph/Wellington. As a new organization, how can we develop services to serve that number and range of organizations? It is a process – and by using our growing membership to help us define and streamline our services, we will be better able to meet the needs of more and more agencies each year.

Membership allows us to create and celebrate community partnerships. We have many examples in our first year of how we have worked with our member agencies to promote volunteerism, and we will continue to focus our attention on such positive relationships. Our mission statement notes that we will work with “existing organizations” – our very premise is not to duplicate or replace what is currently in existence but to enhance it.

Do we cease to provide referrals to non-member agencies? While we will not list their volunteer requests, we will commit to providing contact information for non-members to potential volunteers so they can help themselves. We will be clear to volunteers accessing our services that we are a membership-based organization.

Is \$15 0 worth the service? We believe that it is a small price to pay for increasing the professionalism of volunteerism in our community - the value of unlimited volunteer requests, publicity for volunteer needs and volunteerism generally, access to resources, training, consultation, and more. We are currently exploring a policy and process for subsidizing membership fees to ensure that our fee is not a barrier to our services. If there are barriers to our membership structure, outside of the fee, we need to know about them.

Some things are worth paying for. It is up to us to prove our worth.
Thanks for your support.

Cathy Taylor
Executive Director