

# FROM IDEA TO IMPACT

## CARMAN WELLNESS CONNECTIONS

### An Innovative Volunteer Strategy

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#### IMPACT SUMMARY

- Current volunteers are actively engaged and understand the impact of their work.
- New volunteers are recruited and engaged effectively.

#### Outcome:

Carman wellness connections designed a unique way to challenge their thinking about volunteer recruitment.

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#### THE BIG IDEA

Many collaborative and community processes begin with great energy and engagement. People are excited about what might be possible and are eager to make progress. But over time, as processes become more formal and structured, the initial energy seems to dissipate. This was the problem facing the leadership team of Carman Wellness Connections (CWC). They were seeking ways to rebuild the initial energy, renew excitement, deepen the engagement of community members and volunteers, and build sustainable engagement. Many collaborations face

#### Carman Wellness Connections Vision:

Creating a community where everyone has the opportunity and support to flourish where they live, work

this challenge. **Carman Wellness Connections designed a unique way to challenge their thinking about volunteer recruitment.** This is their story.

Carman, Manitoba, is a rural community of just over 3,000 residents located in southern Manitoba, Canada, on land which, prior to colonization, was originally inhabited by various Indigenous nations, including the Anishinaabe Cree, and Dakota peoples. The community has a rich tradition of agriculture, the arts, volunteerism and community engagement. In 2020, a group of local leaders formed Carman Wellness Connections (CWC) with the vision of *creating a community where everyone has the opportunity and support to flourish where they live, learn, work and play.*

Core to the design of Carman Wellness Connections is a community-centered approach. The CWC recognized that the community had many assets. They also realized, through a process of consulting with community members, that there were community gaps, and some people were feeling left out or left behind. Together, the community identified the following priorities. Working groups were established.

- Affordable housing
- Affordable recreation and leisure
- Education and employment
- Food security
- Supporting emotional health
- Transportation



The CWC also built a board of directors and small team to manage this growing process of connecting community members together. The CWC Board sought to provide multiple ways for community members to engage.

They believed that a thriving community was one where residents felt connected, were invited to contribute to their community and were involved in shaping solutions.

## **THE PROGRESS MADE TOGETHER**

Maintaining an engaged volunteer base is challenging, particularly in smaller communities, where many individuals are often tapped on the shoulder to participate in multiple activities. Volunteering can become a burden if the same group of individuals is called to lead all the committees and working groups.

Carman Wellness Connections had created a structure which was inclusive of community members and the different perspectives that they might bring. The structure also needed individuals who were community minded but brought different experiences and perspectives. CWC was looking to involve community members who might not always participate in the traditional groups or organizations in the community. They were intentionally reaching out to individuals who might not be invited to tables because they were new to the community or might have fewer financial resources or community connections. By widening the circle, the CWC was looking toward recruiting a diverse network of community volunteers.

## **THE PROCESS – DESIGNING FOR FUN AND IMPACT**

Over the course of four design sessions, the leadership team for Carman Wellness Connections, with the facilitated support of the Tamarack Institute, built a comprehensive volunteer recruitment strategy. Below is a description of each of the design sessions.

### **Design Session 1: Clarifying roles and recruitment requirements**

The first design session focused on clarifying the current state and structure of Carman Wellness Connections. This included a conversation which identified four core volunteer groups including the Board of Directors, leadership team, working groups and community at large. For each of these core groups the team clarified:

- Current number of members
- Optimal or desired number of members
- Description of the current roles and responsibilities
- Future recruitment needs
  - Who might be leaving their role

- How many positions might need to be filled
- Recruitment timelines

### **Design Session 2: Describing fun and engaging volunteer roles**

Volunteering can be fun and engaging. During the second design session, the leadership team was invited to share how each of the four volunteer groups were having fun together. In some cases, there were jokes shared at each meeting. In other cases, sharing food became a connection moment. Effective volunteer experiences engage on multiple levels: we join for purpose, for connection, for outcomes and friendship. Consider how your volunteer roles are both fun and engaging. When we connect and laugh together, we are energized and encouraged.

#### **Volunteer Recruitment: A Four-Step Strategy**

##### *Design Session 1:*

Clarifying roles and recruitment requirements

##### *Design Session 2:*

Describing fun and engaging volunteer roles

##### *Design Session 3:*

Reflecting and communicating impact

### **Design Session 3: Reflecting and communicating impact**

The third design session focused on the impact that volunteer groups had on Carman Wellness Connections and the community over the past year. Identifying impact is important. Volunteer groups often just do the work without reflecting on the impact they are having on each other and the community. As the leadership team reflected on the key achievements and impact of each group, interesting conversations and insights were generated.

- Awareness – increased externally and internally by focusing on elevator pitch, work of the visual structure, the roles and responsibilities were clarified.
- The Communications Committee has quite an extensive distribution list to ensure that communication is getting out to the broader community and partners. We need to recognize the individual who has chaired this committee.

- Have prototyped some new projects and have agreed that it's okay not to move everything forward at the same time or wait for things that can't be done.
- Working group members are relationship building within the working groups, there is more bonding and special events are useful for getting to know the community.

#### **Design Session 4: Consolidating the volunteer recruitment strategy**

The final design session was focused on bringing all the elements for creating an effective and engaging volunteer experience together. The group designed a volunteer recruitment form that was built on their creative conversations during the three previous design sessions. The leadership team were able to collectively design a thoughtful and practical approach to volunteer engagement with the CWC.

### **THE IMPACT – SHARING RESULTS**

Attached to this story is the volunteer recruitment planning canvas which was used by the CWC to design their volunteer process. The planning canvas has been adapted so that any organization or collaborative can use it as a template to plan your volunteer recruitment process.

Considerations when using the [volunteer recruitment planning canvas](#):

- Capture the thoughts of the group directly on the canvas
- Think about what your group is currently doing or what it might do to enhance the volunteer experience
- Be creative and have fun when completing the canvas
- Give the group time to reflect and improve

Developing a Volunteer Strategic Plan with Tamarack highlighted the invaluable contributions of CWC volunteers and reaffirmed the importance of celebrating their dedication and commitment. Having a well-thought-out strategy **resulted in quick wins and impact.**

- CWC developed a comprehensive orientation package.
- Five new people have inquired, and CWC has been able to have sit-downs with 4 of them.

- CWC's recognition has grown; organizations and local governments seek their support and content expertise.
- At the CWC Appreciation Night, they mixed business with laughter and celebrated the spirit of volunteerism that drives its vision forward.

CWC's impact on recruiting volunteers has been substantial. On a scale of 1-5, they self-identified as 3. This signifies that their efforts have been instrumental in attracting new volunteers and instilling a sense of hope and optimism for our organization's future.

## **TAMARACK: A CONSULTING AND LEARNING PARTNER**

The Tamarack Institute played an important role as a consulting and learning partner with the leadership team of Carman Wellness Connections. While CWC identified volunteer recruitment and retention as a core challenge, they also identified that they would benefit from a facilitated process to develop a comprehensive volunteer recruitment and retention strategy. Tamarack was able to bring its knowledge about community engagement, volunteerism and effective process design to support this work.

With CWC partners, Tamarack co-designed the volunteer recruitment canvas. Over the course of four sessions, which were an hour each, the team were able to complete all elements of the volunteer recruitment canvas. During the design sessions, Tamarack would add notes into the planning canvas and keep the group on track. In between each design session, Tamarack would consolidate notes and share back results with the group. Collectively, the group would review content at the beginning of each design session and then move forward.



It is important for us to always have capacity within the board, including diversity, experience, and passion. Creating a strategic plan for volunteer recruitment and retainment has helped us look at what we are doing well and what we can do better. CWC has grown significantly in community recognition, and this awareness brings a greater sense of responsibility.

This year, our community experienced an unspeakable tragedy. Local government and organizations looked to CWC for coordination of needed support. Of course, we did not do it alone. Still, we played a part in ensuring family, friends, and the community had emotional support, had the opportunity to grieve in different ways, worked to find ways to gather and ensure everyone had food, and considered long-term support and ways to commemorate the family lost.

CWC has become an important part of our community, a valued resource of knowledge and capacity when considering the wellness of our citizens. Tamarack has been a wonderful support, a sounding board at times and we truly appreciate it.

*– The Carman Wellness Connections Team*

## **SHARING LESSONS LEARNED**

Engaging community members effectively should be more than an afterthought. Successful volunteer strategies create energy, connection, and commitment. They are also fun, engaging and impactful experiences. Too often, community collaborations just get on with the work without considering that the volunteer experience is an important community asset. Volunteers and community members who enjoy their experience are often positive and vocal advocates for the cause.

Considering the aspects which make the volunteer role fun and exciting builds directly into the vision of Carmen Wellness Connections by instilling a wellness practice into the volunteer experience. Also, considering and articulating the impact being made by the volunteers and the collaborative can give everyone involved a renewed sense of purpose and connection.

The process of developing the CWC volunteer recruitment strategy boosted the energy of the leadership team and has had a ripple effect on the work and focus of Carman Wellness Connections.

## TO LEARN MORE

- Visit [Carman Wellness Connections](#) to learn more about their work
- Visit [Volunteer Canada](#) to learn more about volunteering and volunteer engagement
- Build your skills through the [Foundations of Community Engagement](#) course
- Access the [Community Engagement Planning Canvas](#)
- Access the [Volunteer Recruitment and Retention Planning Canvas](#)



Turtle Island (North America) is the ancestral home of Indigenous peoples of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit descent. Manitoba, Canada was originally inhabited was originally inhabited by various Indigenous nations, including the Anishinaabe Cree, and Dakota peoples. We recognize that across this land Indigenous rights holders have endured historical oppression and continue to experience inequities that have resulted from the widespread colonialist systems and ideologies that perpetuate harm to Indigenous peoples to this day.