



STUDY



RÉSEAU DE
L'ACTION BÉNÉVOLE
DU QUÉBEC

NEW VOLUNTEERS, NEW APPROACHES

HIGHLIGHTS
FROM THE STUDY ON
VOLUNTEERING IN QUEBEC

Production team

Commissioned by the Réseau de l'action bénévole du Québec,
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Laboratoire en loisir et vie communautaire of Université du
Québec à Trois-Rivières (UQTR)
with the support and supervision of a steering committee.

Research team

at the Laboratoire en loisir et vie communautaire

Julie Fortier, Ph.D.

Project Director

Laboratory Director and Professor in the
Department of Leisure, Culture and Tourism at
Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières

André Thibault, Ph.D.

Senior Researcher, Associate Professor in the
Department of Leisure, Culture and Tourism at
Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières and
Director of the Observatoire québécois du loisir

David Leclerc, M.A.

Researcher

Steering committee

Andrée Gignac

Conseil québécois du loisir (CQL) — Clubs 4-H

Bernard Cyr

Retiree from the health and social services sector

Carole Deschamps

Representative from the Secrétariat aux aînés,
Ministère de la Famille et des aînés

Denis Nantel

President of the Réseau de l'action bénévole du Québec
and community development agent,
Fondation Berthiaume-Du Tremblay

Esther Sanschagrin

Secrétariat à l'action communautaire autonome
et aux initiatives sociales
Ministère de l'emploi et de la Solidarité sociale

Louise Lebrun

Fédération des centres d'action bénévole du Québec
Centre d'action bénévole de Beauharnois

Marie-Josée Ouellet

Secrétariat à l'action communautaire autonome
et aux initiatives sociales
Ministère de l'emploi et de la Solidarité sociale

Maurice Pleau

Secrétariat au loisir et au sport en bénévolat
Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport

Nicole René

Executive Director
Réseau de l'action bénévole du Québec

An initiative of :



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Secrétariat à l'action
communautaire
autonome
et aux initiatives
sociales

Québec 

Éducation,
Loisir et Sport

Québec 

Writing

André Thibault

Laboratoire en loisir et vie communautaire, UQTR

Noémie Delisle

Project leader
Réseau de l'action bénévole du Québec

Translation

Eve Krakow

Graphic design

Réseau de l'action bénévole du Québec





1. Introduction

1.1 Context

On the initiative of the Réseau de l’action bénévole du Québec (RABQ), this study was carried out by the Laboratoire en loisir et vie communautaire of Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières. The starting point for this research was the findings of several previous studies, in particular the report by Thibault, Fortier and Albertus (2007), *Rendre compte du mouvement bénévole au Québec*. In this last study, the authors analyzed the diversification of settings and structures in which volunteer work is performed. They showed that new practices in volunteering are creating major challenges for organizations and managers of volunteers.

This has a daily impact on the voluntary sector. On the one hand, organizations say they are having difficulty recruiting and retaining their volunteers, and many volunteers who are heavily involved are questioning the erosion of volunteerism. On the other, results from the 2007 Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating (CSGVP) show that several groups, including young people and baby-boomers, volunteer in a significant way (for example, 58% of young people volunteer, the highest participation level of all age groups). How can this gap be explained?

Table 1 — Aspects to examine to identify the changes

Nature of volunteering	Management of organizations	Management of volunteering
Time donated	Places and networks of involment	Recognition and supervision
Causes served		
Values and benefits sought	Functioning of organizations	

1.2 Research mandate

In light of these findings, the mandate of the current study was to:

- I. Understand the new trends in volunteering;
- II. Identify the adjustments required with respect to managing volunteer involvement

1.3 Starting point: definitions of volunteering and management

In order to report on the changes taking place, this study sought to identify and measure the movements and trends within all aspects of volunteering. The notion of volunteering as defined by Thibault, Fortier and Albertus (2007) served as the basis for this reflection. According to these authors, all volunteers offer their time on a voluntary basis, without financial reward, to people, groups or communities. Moreover, volunteering is based on a series of variable aspects (table 1) from which it is possible to measure the scope of the changes taking place: time donated, causes served, values and benefits sought, and where volunteers come from. In order to identify the changes needed to manage volunteering, the study refers to a broad definition of management, considering all actions required to create an environment conducive to the achievement of the organization’s objectives and to gaining the commitment and satisfaction of volunteers. More specifically, three fields have been identified: organizational management, people management, and the relationship with the community.



2. Methodology

The research methodology included three stages:

- 2.1 Review of the literature — Out of some 900 works pre-selected from data bases, more than 60 were chosen

for analysis. The objective was to provide an overview of the scientific literature that has addressed the subject of transformations underway in the voluntary sector.

2.2 Focus groups — 25 focus groups were held, totalling 187 individuals (101 volunteers, 86 managers) from all the sectors associated with the RABQ and from groups outside this network (museums, business circles, Internet, environment, events and the education community). Data collection was carried out using a discussion template, a summary questionnaire and audio recording of the discussions.

2.3 Survey — The firm Léger Marketing conducted a survey of 1,000 Quebecers (margin of error of $\pm 2.5\%$, 19 times out of 20). This survey aimed to find out about the practices of the population as a whole, in order to complement the results collected in the focus groups.



3. Literature review

The survey of the literature highlighted the fact that volunteering is undergoing a radical change as a result of the transformations of values and time available in society. This change is radical because it affects the very roots of volunteerism, that is:

- time available/donated
- values and expectations motivating volunteers
- communities of belonging

In addition, the literature also addresses the impacts that can be expected from these changes on organizations and on those responsible for managing volunteers.

3.1 Changes in the allocation of time available/donated

Two models emerge with respect to time available: 1) the “ATSO” model (always the same ones)¹, that is, those who devote a lot of time to volunteering and who are responsible for the majority of hours volunteered; and 2) the “PT” model (part-time), notably people who are active in

the workforce (such as parents), who see their availability diminishing and who have only “capsules” of time to give.

A longitudinal reading of CSGVP results from 1997 to 2007 shows that the ATSO phenomenon persists. For example, in 2006, one quarter of volunteers accounted for 77% of all hours volunteered. According to the most recent CSGVP (2007), 25% of volunteers gave 78% of all hours volunteered.

3.2 Changes in values and motivations

The idea that the values connected with volunteer involvement have changed is raised by several authors. Various designations and concepts are used to account for this phenomenon. Hustinx (2001) speaks of the emergence of “modern” volunteering as opposed to “traditional” volunteering. Eckstein (2001) raises the idea that the “collectivistic” basis underlying volunteer engagement is slowly giving way to a more “individualistic” basis. The primary motivation for deciding to volunteer comes from people feeling that they are affected by a need, a cause. From this perspective, willingness to participate in volunteering seems to be more dependent on personal interests and needs than on service ethic and a sense of obligation to the community. Other authors (Anheier and Salamon, 1999; Hacket and Mutz, 2002) note that the individualization of the decision to volunteer or to get involved is a modern and determining factor in the transformations taking place. This phenomenon is also addressed in terms of a shift from “membership-based” to “program-based” (Meijs and Hoogstad, 2001), or from “institutionalized” to “self-organized” types of volunteer participation (Beck, 2001; Brömme and Strasser, 2001).

« Today’s volunteers describe the main benefits and motivations for staying involved in terms of their enjoyment working with others, success and recognition. »

¹ Translation of the French term commonly used in the field, TLM (“toujours les mêmes”)



Apart from values, motivations for volunteering have also changed. Today's volunteers describe the main benefits and motivations for staying involved in terms of their enjoyment working with others, success and recognition. Thibault, Fortier and Albertus (2007) highlighted the fact that volunteer work implies an exchange: the volunteer both gives to and receives from another individual or group.

3.3 Changes in communities of belonging

The concept of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Putnam, 2000) allows us to shed new light on the importance of social connections in volunteering. Social capital is defined as an individual's (or a community's) network of social relationships, or as all the "socially useful" relationships that can be mobilized within their social trajectory. In a sense, it is the "social baggage" of individuals and groups.

When explaining or defining what motivates volunteers, social capital (individual and collective) is starting to take the place of moral standards, religion or community in the traditional sense. As well, the "quality" of a person's or a community's social capital is a factor that fosters volunteer involvement. Increasingly, people are made aware of causes and invited to become involved through their social networks.

This being the case, social networks — the results of social capital — become indicators and instruments for modern volunteer involvement. In addition, knowing that today, an individual can belong to several different networks, recourse to this concept increases our ability to identify a greater number of potential volunteers. By being aware of people's or their community's social networks, we can draw up a map of their communities of belonging and solidarity.

3.4 Predictable impacts on the duties related to managing volunteer work

Since the International Year of Volunteers in 2001, numerous studies on managing volunteer work have shown that this field is based on relations between organizations, volunteers and the community. Managing volunteer work therefore draws from three fields of knowledge and skills: organizational management, volunteer resources management, and communication with the community and networks.

In terms of organizational management, it is important to have participatory governance and to designate a person

who will be in charge of volunteers. Volunteers want to be partners rather than assistants.

In terms of volunteer resources management, it is generally agreed that the same duties recognized in human resources management apply to managing volunteers, although the specific nature of volunteering must still be taken into account. The function of recognition becomes particularly important in this context since it is, for the most part, volunteers' chief reward.

In terms of the community and networks, two requirements stand out: social networks and communities must believe in the value of volunteering, and they must be aware of the various causes or needs for which volunteers are required. Therefore, those in charge of managing volunteers must be able to recognize these social networks — which are sometimes more difficult to identify than the geographic area — and to interact with them.



Conclusion

All the literature reviewed confirms that major changes are taking place in the voluntary sector. These new practices, frequently qualified as "new" or "modern" (Hustinx, 2001), involve major transformations in the underpinnings of volunteering (time, motivation, community) and in its management.

New volunteering is characterized by the following attitudes and values:

- the decision to become involved is more individual, less collective: "I" decide
- secularization of motives for becoming involved; less of a moral obligation
- benefits replace the sense of a "duty fulfilled"
- time donated sporadically rather than on a regular basis
- the task to accomplish replaces membership
- there is a greater diversity of potential causes; choices and motivations are more personal (causes must be seen as being in fashion)
- surge in informal volunteering practices outside of institutions and incorporated groups



- social networks replace geographic areas as communities of belonging

The voluntary sector must meet these daunting strategic challenges: it must adapt the management of volunteering to these new realities and take steps to maintain the development of a sector where the needs are far from being filled.



4. Results²

This section presents the main results from the field survey (focus groups and survey). The order in which the results are presented offers an answer to the two objectives of the research study, that is: (4.1) to understand the changes that have taken place in the voluntary sector, and (4.2) to identify the adjustments needed with respect to managing volunteering.

4.1 Volunteering

The transformations in volunteering have been divided into three categories: time available, motivations and values, and the consequences of these changes for causes and organizations. Generally speaking, results from the focus groups reveal that the main changes that have taken place in the voluntary sector concern, in order of importance: time available (49%), motivations (42%), and the causes in which people become involved (39%). Also according to the focus groups, these changes apply mostly to two groups: young people (55%) and newly retired “boomers” (42%).

4.1.1 *Time available* is the aspect of volunteering that has changed the most.

In the survey, 72% of respondents stated that they are available only “from time to time.” A similar proportion from the focus groups (70%) corroborated this evaluation of time available. This explains why just a few people, referred to as “ATSOs” (always the same ones), account for the major part

² Results given as percentages (%) and which total more than 100% mean that the respondents (focus groups or survey) were allowed to choose more than one answer. Results given “in order of importance” are presented in decreasing order (from the most important to the least important).

of volunteer hours, while the others, who have less time to give, give it intermittently, in “capsules.”

4.1.2 The motivations and values underlying volunteer involvement are evolving. An informal kind of volunteer work is growing outside of institutions and organizations.

According to the focus groups, the principal motives that govern volunteer involvement are (in order of importance): meeting people (56%), helping others (48%), having fun with friends (47%) and learning something new (41%). The same motives were given in the survey responses.

Participants in the focus groups stated that the organization’s atmosphere (85.6%), its flexibility toward them (83.6%), the means made available to volunteers (78.4%) and success of the actions undertaken (76.8%) were the primary criteria for a satisfying volunteering experience. In other words, volunteers want to serve, but they are also looking for an enjoyable and quality experience. This confirms that donating and personal satisfaction go hand in hand.

« Organizations must understand the needs of these ‘new’ volunteers and adapt accordingly. »

In the survey of the Quebec population, 79% of respondents said they had given time to others for free and without being obliged to within the last year. Of this number, 41% said they had done so in a structured way in a formal organization, while



48% acted informally with a group of friends, neighbours or colleagues. In a later question, 44% said that “what I accomplished was the result of my own initiative.”

There is therefore an informal kind of volunteering in Quebec that several researchers call self-organized volunteering. It is practiced outside of institutions and organizations. Thus, these results confirm that “new” volunteering gives priority to action over belonging to an organization (the idea of membership).

4.1.3 The changes in time and in the motivations and values of volunteer work mean that we have to reconsider what makes a cause attractive to volunteers and, by extension, what makes an organization attractive.

The results show that the decision to volunteer is more individual than collective. It is therefore not surprising that a large proportion (nearly 60%) of study participants (focus groups and survey) stated that they must feel affected by a cause before becoming involved. In this respect, a cause is attractive if it affects someone in their immediate surroundings. As well, the cause must correspond to the interests of the group to which a person belongs (56% in the focus groups, 35% in the survey). In a world where volunteers are solicited by many causes, talking about the impact of a cause on the people and the groups close to volunteers is a worthwhile exercise.

In so far as volunteers seek a quality, action-oriented experience, it is not surprising that the most attractive organizations are those offering a friendly, trustworthy environment.

The survey reveals that the top three reasons for choosing an organization are, in order: its trustworthiness (28%), its proximity to one’s immediate environment (26%), and knowing someone in the organization (22%). In the focus groups, participants ranked the presence of someone they knew as the most important factor (57%), followed by an affinity of interests (48%) and third, trust (43%). In short, organizations soliciting volunteers must gain their trust and clearly demonstrate their affinities with them (table 2).

Table 2 – What makes a cause attractive (by ranking)

	Survey	Focus groups
It affects someone in their immediate circle	1	1
It matches the interests of the group to which they belong	2	2
Invitation from an acquaintance who is involved	3	4
It corresponds to new needs of the community	4	5
It looks fun / interesting	5	6
It is popular in the media	6	3
Chance	7	8
It’s new	8	7

Some sectors of volunteer activity are perceived as more attractive than others. Table 3 presents, in order of importance, the sectors of volunteer activity perceived as the most attractive according to the focus groups.

Table 3 – Sectors of activity that are the most attractive

Sector	Ranking
The environment	1
Sports and leisure	1
International organizations	2
Arts and culture	3
Education	4
Community organizations	5
Business and professional associations, unions	6
Civil security	7
Rights, social advocacy and politics	8
Health and social services	9
Philanthropy (fund-raising)	10
Religion	11



In light of all these changes, the term “volunteer” no longer seems to always be the most appropriate way to refer to a person who is involved on a free and voluntary basis. The focus groups were divided on this issue: for 50% of participants, the word is appropriate in only a few cases, while 47% felt the word is appropriate in all cases. The word “volunteer” seems to apply more to helping people in need, with young people preferring to talk about “citizen engagement.” The survey also shows that, among the general population, the word “friend” and the word “volunteer” are the most meaningful. It seems that “friend” is increasingly applied in informal settings and is meant to express the warm nature of the relationship between the volunteer and the person they are helping. Use of the word “friend” also demonstrates a break with the typical client-server relationship.

In short, the data collected from the focus groups and the survey are comparable except for a few subtleties and confirm the points raised in the scientific literature. The results regarding changes in volunteering show the presence of several types of engagement. In terms of time donated and availability, two volunteer profiles emerge: those who are always available and those who participate intermittently.

With respect to the values and motivations of volunteers, an emerging “new” or “modern” model joins the “classic” model. This can be seen, for example, in the fact that a significant number of Quebecers engage in volunteer work outside organizations and institutions.

In this context, organizations seeking to mobilize volunteers must increasingly demonstrate the impacts of their actions on networks of people and communities, rather than on territories.

4.2 Managing volunteering

The results concerning the management of volunteering — whether it be managing an organization, managing volunteers, or social communication — are closely linked to the changes that have taken place in the voluntary sector in general. Already, based on the results on changes in volunteering, we know that managers must take into account the diversity of volunteering practices. They must adapt the tasks and schedules and

demonstrate flexibility with “intermittent” volunteers. They must create, within their organization, conditions to ensure a satisfying and quality experience for all volunteers (new and traditional). Finally, they must demonstrate their affinity with networks, communities and individuals and show how their cause affects them.

Consequently, several management duties would benefit from being adapted and improved to include the needs of “new” volunteers. The main duties to adapt are, in order of importance: recruitment (82%), welcoming new volunteers (74%), networking and showing recognition for volunteers (67.6%), task definitions (66.9%), and mentoring (66.2%).

In terms of organizational management, the primary recommendations concern the following actions: using the Internet on a regular basis (85.6%), showing greater clarity toward volunteers (85.4%), giving more importance to internal communication (84.6%), and considering volunteers less like workers and more like partners (83.2%). On this last point, there was a significant difference between permanent staff and volunteers in the focus groups: volunteers appeared much more sensitive than managers to the need to be perceived as partners.

« The voluntary sector is facing some major challenges; those managing volunteers are particularly affected. »

One major conclusion is clear: it is becoming increasingly vital to adopt a comprehensive vision of volunteer management. This confirms and supports the notion of “ecological” management, as defined in the literature review, and already promoted by some organizations (see the Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement).

Table 4 illustrates the main areas of intervention tied to the management of volunteering as well as the various goals and duties involved. The term “ecological” management is used because it addresses the volunteering environment as a whole.



Table 4 : Areas of intervention tied to managing volunteering

Fields and missions		
Governance of the organization	Support and supervision of volunteers	Social and community communication
Goals and duties		
1. Ensure the organization's political and organizational capacity to welcome volunteers 2. Ensure governance that integrates volunteers 3. Develop management resources and competencies	1. Define tasks 2. Recruit 3. Welcome and train 4. Supervise and evaluate 5. Recognize	1. Highlight the value of volunteering 2. Promote causes 3. Invest in social networks

ment efforts. Yet the results of the study are clear: since, in a large proportion, volunteers become involved according to the “new” model, their expectations require that organizations adapt in ways that go beyond recruitment. In other words, there is no sense in recruiting these volunteers if the organization is not ready to review some of its practices. The voluntary sector is facing some major challenges, and those managing volunteers are particularly affected.

These challenges can be defined as follows:



CHALLENGE: How can organizations meet the needs of volunteers whose involvement does not fit the traditional model of volunteering?

The survey revealed that 48% of Quebec volunteers are involved on an informal basis. The significant emergence of this new type of volunteer involvement, often called “self-organized volunteering,” is also a signal to the formal sector to announce new causes, new needs or new awareness. The volume of services provided by the informal sector cannot be neglected. It is important to recognize that informal volunteering is justified, that it contributes to social solidarity and that it meets many people's needs. At the same time, however, we must not lose sight of the fact that a large proportion of volunteers still engage in more “traditional” forms of volunteering.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

The results of this study are indisputable: we are witnessing a multiplication of models of volunteer involvement. Alongside the traditional forms of volunteering (i.e. regular donation of time, classical motivations and formal settings), a whole series of new practices is taking shape, including the sporadic donation of time, new motivations, and spontaneous and informal involvement.

Parallel to this, the analysis of the quantified results and of the qualitative data collected in focus groups allows us to draw a certain number of conclusions regarding the will of the volunteer community to make the changes identified in this study. Generally speaking, the first reflex of managers confronted with the current situation is to intensify recruit-

RECOMMENDATION: Organizations must understand the needs of these “new” volunteers and adapt accordingly

- Solicit, welcome and support volunteers' initiatives
- Practice participatory governance
- Develop short-term projects or projects that require specialized knowledge
- Demonstrate flexibility in carrying out projects
- Avoid making value judgments

Examples of good practices (ideas that emerged from focus groups):

- Regularly make use of the Internet



- Clarify what is expected of volunteers and improve communication with them
- Take into account limited availability by rearranging tasks and activities
- Recruit according to the ecological vision of management as defined by research



CHALLENGE: How can we make sure the Quebec volunteer community will meet these challenges?

- The results obtained show that openness to change has not yet reached the level where there is a sense of urgency and a strong will to act. Because the changes in volunteering affect the components that form the very roots of volunteering, adjustments in organizations will have to be just as radical.



CHALLENGE: How can recruitment be adapted to reach out to “new” volunteers?

Throughout the study, especially in the focus groups, recruitment emerged as the chief need, the priority for organizations. At the same time, throughout the study, the characteristics of volunteering today shed light on the conditions conducive to an individual’s commitment to an organization or to a cause. We can see, therefore, that before carrying out recruitment efforts, certain basic conditions must be met. In other words, there are prerequisites to recruitment; recruitment is possible only after having fulfilled these prerequisites.

RECOMMENDATION: Rally the Quebec volunteer community around the new reality in volunteering by inviting it to:

- Become aware of the issues and the imminent impacts of the changes taking place
- Express its leadership on this issue with strength and determination
- Carry out a regular watch over the changes taking place

* * *

RECOMMENDATION: Establish a management process that is consistent with and adapted to all models of volunteering

- Arrange the organization’s recruitment in a way that ensures:
 - openness to diversity and to people’s availabilities
 - an atmosphere conducive to satisfying volunteers’ expectations
 - clearly defined tasks
 - a clear definition of the organization’s mission and of the cause it is defending (or serving) in the community and in the social networks
- Recruit through networks as well as personally
- Formally welcome new volunteers and make sure they can get started (“take action”) quickly
- Make sure that involvement remains attractive by ensuring the support, enjoyment, success and recognition of volunteers

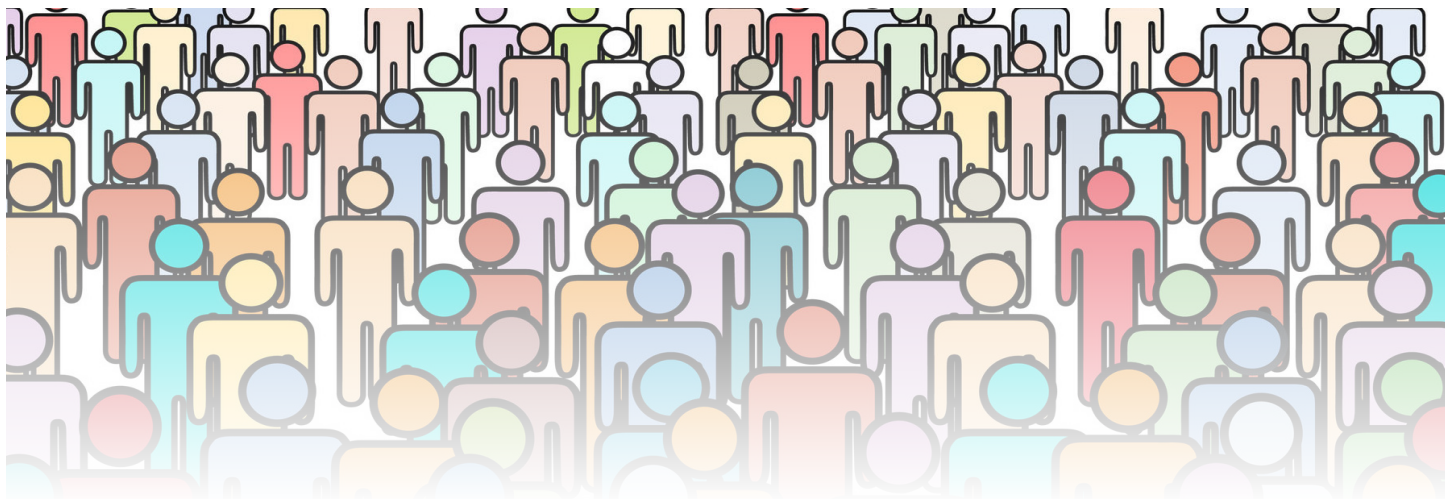


General recommendations

With a goal to pursuing the in-depth reflection on the means to put in place to ensure that the volunteer community adapts to the new realities of volunteering, here are three general recommendations:

- Analyze and assess the impacts of this study’s conclusions
- Broaden awareness of the issues to the greatest number
- Offer training so as to equip managers with the tools to engage in new practices





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RÉSEAU DE
L'ACTION BÉNÉVOLE
DU QUÉBEC

6955 Christophe-Colomb, Suite 103
Montréal, Québec H2S 2H4
www.rabq.ca - info@rabq.ca