

SUSTAINABILITY HIGHLIGHTS

Community engagement is a central part of a well-functioning, democratic society. The more involved people are in their communities, the more likely they are to value those communities. When people volunteer at a local school or community centre, participate in community events, join a business group, take the time to vote or help out at their local food bank or get to know their neighbours, they contribute towards better schools and community services, lower crime rates, racial tolerance, closer involvement in decision-making and better economic opportunities. Engagement in communities can also help citizens understand the importance of sustainability and the links between social, economic and environmental issues.

- 45% of BC residents volunteered in 2004 (the same as the Canadian average), volunteering an average of 199 hours (higher than the Canadian average).
- 77% of BC residents donated money in 2004 (lower than the Canadian average) donating an average of \$467 (higher than the Canadian average).

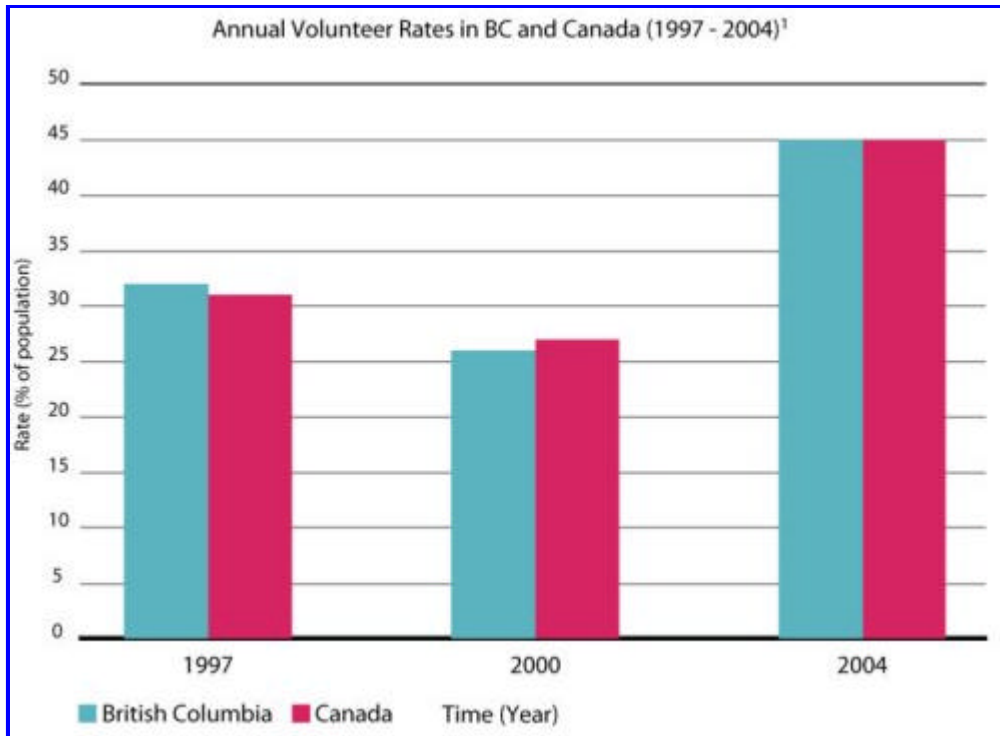
Volunteerism		GETTING BETTER for volunteerism rates and hours volunteered in BC.
Charitable Donations		GETTING BETTER for rates of giving and average monetary donation in BC.
Voter Turnout		GETTING WORSE for federal, provincial and local elections in BC.

ISSUES AND TRENDS

Volunteerism in BC (1997-2004) ¹

In BC, the rate of volunteering and the average number of hours volunteered have increased since 2000. In 2004 the British Columbian rate of volunteering was 45% of the total population aged over 15 years (1,580,000 people), which is a 19% increase since 2000. The average number of hours volunteered annually has increased 18% since 2000, from 169 hours to 199 hours. This is the highest number of volunteer hours in all of Canada, and considerably higher than the Canadian average of 169 hours.

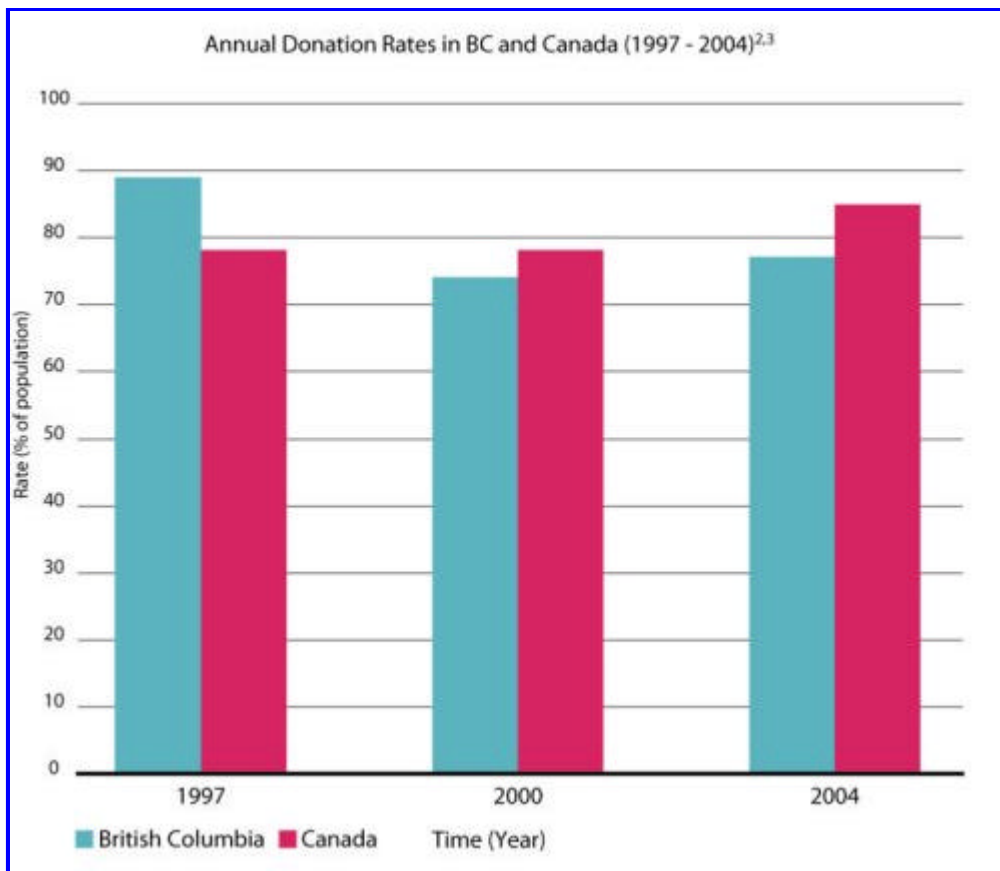
British Columbians aged 45-54 years were the most common volunteers, with 52% of the population in this age category volunteering in 2004. This was closely followed by British Columbians aged 15-24, with 50% volunteering in 2004. On average, fewer people over 65 volunteered, but those who did spent more time per person volunteering than all other age categories.



Charitable Donations in BC (1997-2004) ¹

77% of British Columbians 15 years and older made a monetary donation in 2004, which is less than the 2004 Canadian donation rate of 85% and less than the 1997 BC donation rate of 89%. In 2004, the average annual value of donations by British Columbians was \$467, considerably higher than the Canadian average of \$400, and an 83% increase in the BC average since 2000 (\$255).

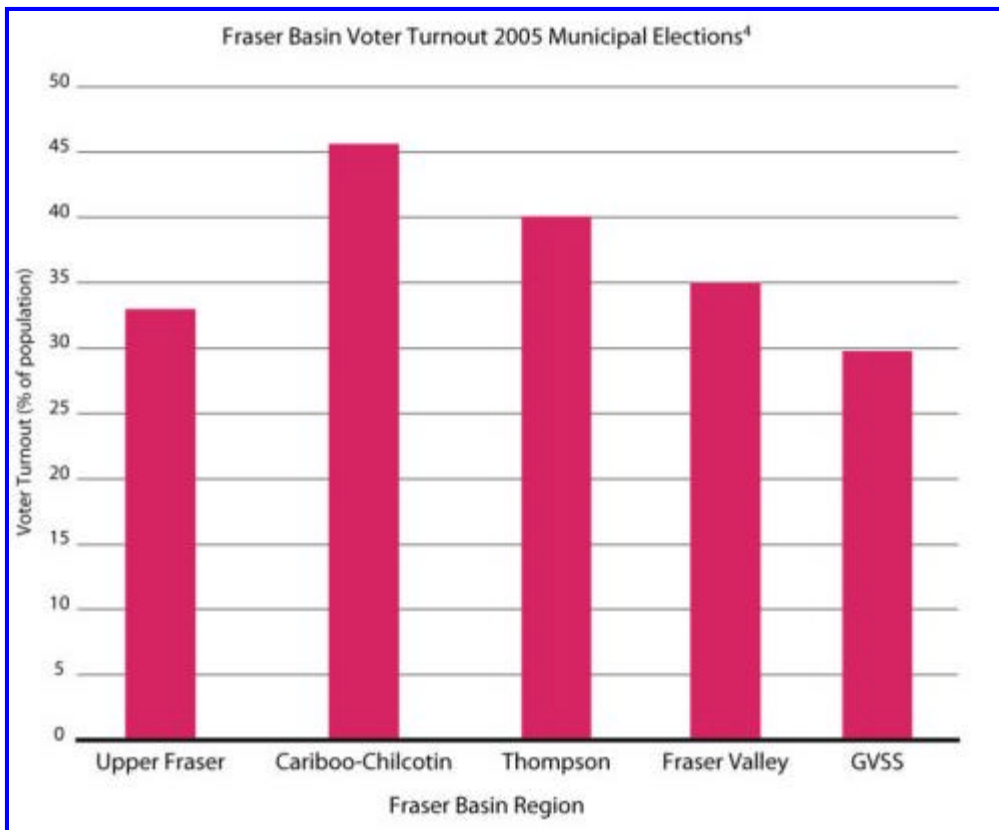
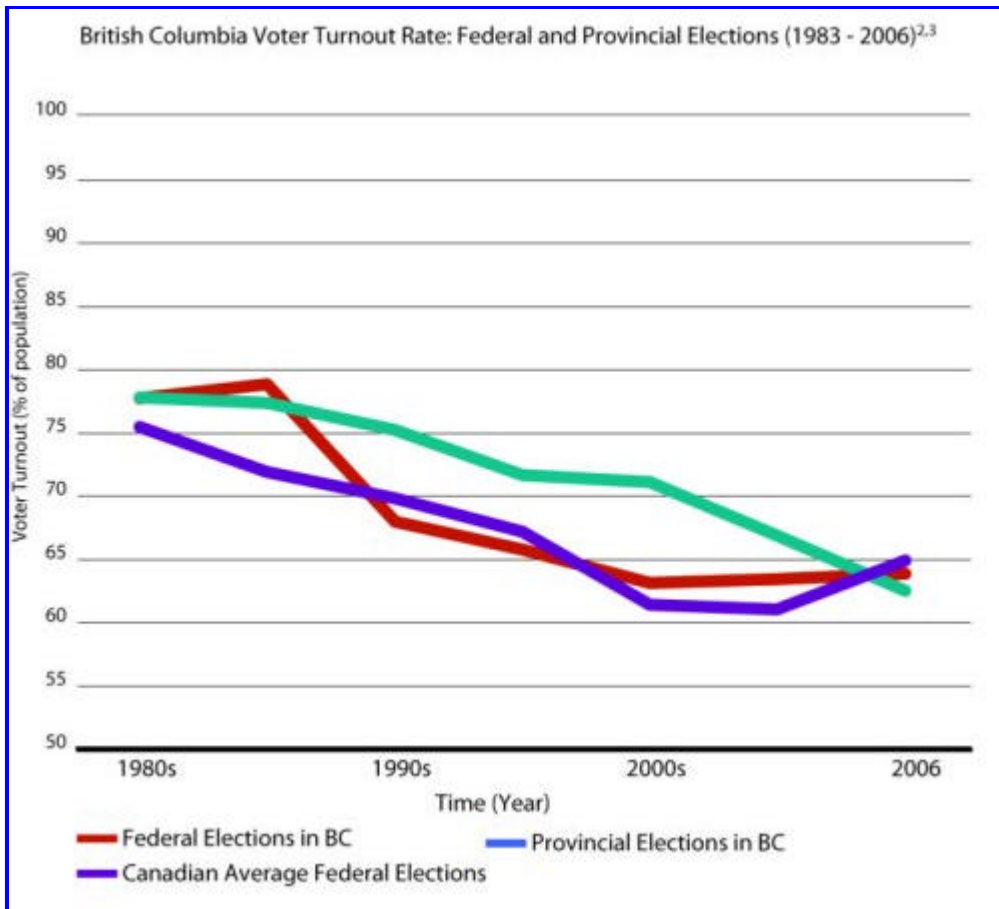
Not surprisingly, as household income increases, so too does the rate and value of charitable giving. In general, between 2000 and 2004, households with an annual income greater than \$20,000 show an increasing donation rate, except those with an income of \$40,000-\$59,999, which show a 3% decrease since 2000. Households with an income of less than \$20,000 have the lowest rate of giving, and the rate has declined since 2000.



Voter Turnout in BC and the Fraser Basin (1983-2006) [2.3.4](#)

Voter turnout is declining. The rate of voter turnout in both provincial and federal elections has dropped since the mid-1980s. The Canadian average voter turnout for federal elections has also declined since the 1980s.

Data on municipal election voter turnout rates were made available from the Union of BC Municipalities for some, but not all Fraser Basin communities. The 2005 municipal election voter turnout rate for the 38 reported Fraser Basin communities was 31%, which is considerably lower than BC voter turnout rates for provincial or federal elections. For municipal elections, it appears that, as the population of the community increases, voter turnout decreases. This is particularly true for communities with a voter population of less than 1,000, which had on average an 18% higher voter participation rate than larger communities.



INSPIRED ACTION

What is being done?

- Community stewardship groups provide an important means of engagement in many communities. The second Annual BC Interior Area Stewards Workshop was held on March 17-18, 2006 at the Cariboo Friendship Society Longhouse in Williams Lake and was attended by nearly 60 stewards from across the interior.
- The 2006 BC Rivers Day involved about 80,000 British Columbians at more than 125 events across the province. Some highlights from the Fraser Basin include Prince George Rivers Day Music Festival, the Allco Park celebration on the Alouette River in Maple Ridge, and the Salmon Festival and parade in Vancouver. ⁷
- In 2006, 2,105 British Columbians participated in the Weekend to End Breast Cancer, raising \$5.5 million in funds for breast cancer research. This is a 17% increase in participants from 2005. ⁸
- The Go for Green annual Commuter Challenge is a Canada-wide community-based program that aims to increase sustainable commuting by encouraging people to walk, cycle, take transit, carpool or tele-work instead of driving alone to get to work: www.commuterchallenge.ca. ⁹

What else can be done?

- Contact Volunteer BC, your local volunteer centre or community organizations for opportunities to participate and advance sustainability in your community.
- All levels of government, business and community organizations can provide ongoing opportunities and resources for people to be involved in planning and decision-making processes that affect sustainability.
- Individuals, organizations, businesses, governments and schools can participate, volunteer or sponsor community events.
- Businesses can provide employees paid time off to volunteer in the community and can match employee donations to community groups.

Stepping up to volunteer

Volunteerism is on the upswing. BC boasts 35 volunteer centres across the province, including 17 in the Fraser Basin, to assist local organizations with volunteer recruitment, referral and training services. Volunteer Kamloops offers adult and youth volunteer placement. A special program, Focus through Volunteering, helps people with mental health issues find volunteer positions that connect them to the community, while building their skills and confidence. The North Thompson Volunteer & Information Centre has coordinated volunteers for special events, such as an initiative to replant 10,000 trees, and supported Barriere Against Drugs to combat methamphetamine addiction through education, prevention strategies and facilitated community meetings.



REFERENCES

1. Statistics Canada: Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating (1997; 2000; 2004). Catalogue number: 71-542-XIE.
2. Elections BC website: www.elections.bc.ca/elections/elections-results.htm#D.
3. Elections Canada website: www.elections.ca/home.asp.
4. Union of British Columbian Municipalities, civic elections result search engine: www.ubcmsurveys.com/election2005.
5. Volunteer BC website: www.volunteerbc.bc.ca/index.html.
7. BC Rivers Day website and personal communication; www.riversday.bc.ca
8. Weekend to End Breast Cancer Website and personal communication; www.endcancer.ca.
9. Commuter Challenge website: www.commuterchallenge.com.