Policy Direction – Volunteer Engagement

Rationale and Relationship to Mission, Principles and Values

The MS Society of Canada Board of Directors, leadership volunteers and staff acknowledge and support the vital role of volunteers in achieving the organization’s purpose and mission. The mission of the MS Society of Canada is to be a leader in finding a cure for multiple sclerosis and enabling people affected by MS to enhance their quality of life. This mission has always been driven by volunteers, from the founding to the present day.

The MS Society of Canada was founded by volunteers and they are critical to the success of the organization, and are essential to the day-to-day operations. Volunteers and staff are considered partners in implementing the mission and programs of the organization, each with complementary roles to play. Designated staff and volunteers will be expected to recruit, orient, train, supervise, recognize and provide feedback to volunteers.

A volunteer is anyone who, without compensation or the expectation of compensation, performs a task at the direction of and on behalf of the organization. Reasonable out of pocket costs however can be reimbursed. This applies to board members, event volunteers, client services volunteers, knowledge philanthropists, and many more.

Policy Objective

This policy provides a framework for the recruitment, engagement and retention of volunteers. The policy is designed to:

- Encourage the adoption of a volunteer engagement policy, practices and procedures that will manage risk, enhance program delivery and accountability and protect volunteers, staff and the general public from harm.
- Ensure volunteers are effectively recruited, engaged and supported.
- Provide guidance to staff for the facilitation of positive volunteer experiences.

The related procedures are an integral part of the MS Society’s approach to volunteers; both the policy direction and the procedures shall be followed in any function which involves volunteers.
Policy Application

This policy applies to staff and volunteers at all levels of the MS Society.

Authorization

The policy was first approved by the MS Society of Canada board of directors on February 26, 2015.

Policy Details

The Executive Team is authorized to develop detailed procedures for this policy direction following its approval.

The MS Society is committed to building a strong volunteer engagement culture. A volunteer-centred culture recognizes the fundamental interests and wishes of volunteers to support the mission of the organization. To develop and support a strong volunteer engagement culture, all levels of the MS Society of Canada shall:

- Build relationships with volunteers, identify volunteer interests and relate those interests to the overall needs of the MS Society as a whole;
- Leverage volunteer potential across all programs at all levels of the organization;
- Communicate and cross promote volunteering opportunities within the MS Society to volunteers;
- Utilize MS Society volunteer records at all levels of the organization to maximize volunteer potential and opportunities; and
- Maintain a clearly communicated screening process that is adopted and consistently applied throughout the organization.
- Provide volunteers with an orientation to the organization, its policies and practices including the rights and responsibilities of volunteers and staff. Furthermore, volunteers will receive training customized to the volunteer assignment and needs of the volunteer.
- Supervise and support volunteers at a level appropriate to the task and are provided with regular opportunities to give and receive feedback.
- Acknowledge the contributions of volunteers with consistent, formal and informal methods of recognition.
- Evaluate the impact and contribution of volunteers and the volunteer engagement program to ensure the needs of the organization are being met in fulfilling its mandate.
1.0 Guiding Principles

1.1 Volunteers are included in the important work of the MS Society’s, from event participation to client services delivery to board membership in accordance with this policy direction and any related procedures.

1.2 Volunteers are considered partners along with staff, members and other stakeholders in achieving the MS Society’s mission. Volunteers have designated rights and responsibilities, as described in this policy direction.

1.3 The MS Society at all levels should seek volunteers to expand the capacity of staff to fulfill the organization’s work towards achieving its mission. Staff will follow established best practices and procedures in engaging volunteers effectively.

1.4 The MS Society of Canada maintains a strong policy of equal volunteer opportunity. Our core values include treating everyone with respect and dignity, and protecting their privacy. This applies to both staff and volunteers. We recruit, accept, train, promote and dismiss volunteers on the basis of individual competence and position performance, without regard to race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, marital status, family status, disability, or socioeconomic status.

2.0 Volunteer Rights and Responsibilities

Volunteers are viewed as a valuable resource to the MS Society, its staff, and its clients. Volunteers shall be extended the right to be given meaningful assignments, the right to be treated with respect and dignity, work in a welcoming and safe environment free from harassment of any kind and the right to effective supervision, the right to full involvement and participation, and the right to recognition for work done. Volunteers are free to move between different areas and departments of the organization, and to take on any role for which they are deemed eligible. Volunteers will have access to training and development opportunities as appropriate.

Volunteers shall agree to actively perform their duties to the best of their abilities and to act in keeping with the goals, policies and procedures of the organization.
**Executive Champion**

The MS Society’s Vice-President (VP), Talent is the executive champion for this policy direction.

The Executive Team is authorized to develop detailed procedures for the application of the Volunteer Engagement Policy Direction and related procedures.

**Monitoring and Compliance**

The MS Society’s VP, Talent is responsible for leading the monitoring of the application and compliance of this policy direction in conjunction with other members of the Executive Team. The VP of Talent will work with appropriate staff to ensure compliance.

**Related Policies, Legislation**

MS Society Workplace Relationship Policy

**Policy Review**

The policy is to be reviewed at least once every five years following its approval on February 26, 2015.

**Definitions:**

**Executive Team** – The most senior level of staff leadership within the MS Society comprised of the president and chief executive officer, division presidents, chief financial officer, chief development officer, national vice-presidents of talent, research, programs and services, government relations, and information technology. One person may hold more than one position. The president & chief executive officer may alter the composition of the Executive Team as required from time-to-time.

**Volunteer** – A volunteer is anyone who, without compensation or the expectation of compensation, performs a task at the direction of and on behalf of the organization. This can include board members, event volunteers, client services volunteers, knowledge philanthropists, and much more.
**Knowledge philanthropist** – a skilled volunteer motivated to stay engaged with the community and make a meaningful difference by contributing what they *know*, sharing the knowledge they’ve gained.

**Member** - a person who formally applies and obtains a membership with the MS Society of Canada, a membership-based organization. Members have rights, privileges, and responsibilities as detailed in the MS Society by-law.