# Background

IABC British Columbia (IABC/BC) is a completely volunteer-run organization. While the Executive Board coaches and mentors the leaders on the board, the Volunteer Services portfolio connects anyone interested in becoming involved with IABC to meaningful volunteer opportunities. This portfolio also works with the IABC/BC board to learn what their immediate and upcoming volunteer needs are and, based on those discussions, recruits volunteers to support them. The Volunteer Services team is also responsible for promoting the value of volunteering through our chapter’s internal communication channels.

In the 2019-2020 year, the Volunteer Services team was focused on rebuilding the portfolio by recruiting volunteers, as well as developing and implementing comprehensive processes to guide their efforts. This rebuilding effort was necessary, coming on the heels of a year with high volunteer turnover. In this year, there was also an emphasis on setting expectations with directors and volunteers early on, in order to build a valuable volunteer experience for both them and their volunteers.

On the executive side, the most important focus, moving into this year, was to stabilize a board that had seen high turnover. In recent years, recruiting chapter presidents, and retaining directors, had become increasingly hard work. As such, it was important to foster a professional, stimulating environment where board directors would want to volunteer and stay. Part of this meant recruiting directors who were slightly more experienced and, therefore, capable of operating at the strategic level while implementing a ‘lazy leadership’ model.

## Portfolio SWOT Analysis

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| **Strengths** | **Weaknesses** |
| * Friendly, welcoming members * When well executed, volunteering experience can be rewarding * Large member base to draw upon with many long-time senior members * Clear process to support continuity between board years * COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the value of communications professionals, which in turn helped to increased the number of volunteer applications received | * Recruiting experienced or specialized volunteers can be slow and difficult * Lack of resources and templates for portfolios to use for volunteer retention may contribute to missed opportunities and lost volunteers * Slow follow up can contribute to volunteers losing interest/choosing to volunteer their time elsewhere * Board members often do not know who is volunteering with other portfolios. This lack of awareness between portfolios of each others’ needs contributes to missed opportunities |
| **Opportunities** | **Threats** |
| * Standardized portfolio and job descriptions accessible to all board members and promoted regularly internally * Alignment of job roles with GCCC certification levels * Volunteer Services team checking in with new volunteers and directors after one month to ensure all is well | * Volunteers may choose to take on other volunteer roles not with IABC/BC * Volunteer experience may not live up to expectations |

# Goals and Objectives

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| **Associated Chapter Goal** | **Portfolio Objective** | **Benchmark** | **Target** | **Outcome or Output** |
| **Engage.** Increase engagement by providing valuable member experiences. | Attract at least 20 new volunteers by increasing awareness of opportunities | 2018-2019 member survey: 23% of members were volunteers  2019: 55 volunteers  2018: 65 volunteers  2017: 60 volunteers | Engage at least 25% of chapter members as volunteers.  Note: keeping this % modest as the membership grew significantly since world conference | Outcome |
| Increase volunteer retention to 75% by fostering and maintaining trust through effective communication. | 2018-2019 member survey: majority of members said their volunteer experience met their expectations (67%) or exceeded their expectations (27%) | 75% of Board members are satisfied or very satisfied with the support provided by the portfolio.  95% of volunteers agree that the volunteer experience met or exceeded expectations. | Outcome |

# Budget

Volunteer Services is not a high-budget portfolio. It does a lot for a little. More budget goes to developing the board of directors and supporting in-person meetings.

1. $1000 was originally budgeted for an end of year volunteer recognition event. Due to COVID-19, to respect health regulations, this event was canceled. To protect our finances during economic uncertainty, we decreased our spend to $500 and applied it to the following:
2. $500 was allotted for National Volunteer Week. We used this money to offer $15 e-gift cards to all volunteers for the vendor of their choice. (33 volunteers took advantage of this)
3. Portfolios were granted $75–$150 for a team building meal, depending on the size of the portfolio
4. $5,500 was budgeted for board of directors meals over 10 board meetings, two strat planning sessions and three team building sessions (Full amount was not used due to COVID-19 (final three board meetings were virtual)
5. $8,000 was budgeted to leadership development (International Leadership Institute and regional Dare to Lead conferences)

# Implementation

## Highlights

* Successful volunteer recruitment efforts showed 35 new volunteers onboarded through various sources including direct asks from board members, new member connections and intake emails. Five volunteers left shortly after being onboarded and are not included in overall current volunteer count
* Recognized volunteers during National Volunteer Week in newsletter, social media and direct email, with 80% of volunteers responding to and receiving a small token of appreciation
* Updated volunteer onboarding form and volunteer database
* New one-month check-in completed for all incoming volunteers
* Created org chart of volunteers for board directors
* Implemented two-day summer strat planning sessions for board, covering everything from lazy leadership to our respective values and how we work together, resulting in portfolio work plans, and a board team charter

## Attracting New Volunteers

We started by creating a new volunteer recruitment process that formed the foundation of how we’d work for the year. We created new volunteer role description templates and made them available to the board. Then, we updated our volunteers website section to show the range of opportunities available. We focused on recruiting at the coordinator / generalist level, so volunteers could executive a variety of tasks.

We also updated all role descriptions to clarify the time commitment involved, to be as transparent as possible. We then increased direct asks to select IABC/BC members to volunteer (or to return to volunteering). And finally, we updated our master volunteer tracking list so the whole board would always know who was involved.

At the board level, we developed enticing director recruiting materials using a simple-to-use infographic tool that helped us present the fun side of getting involved in a very visual way. We approached board recruitment using the following workflow:

1. Review chapter membership database to identify diverse and experienced potential board members
2. Shortlist and email hopefuls
3. Conduct 20-minute phone calls explaining the leadership philosophy for the year (more strategic, less hands-on)
4. Invite hopefuls to apply
5. Hopefuls apply through board intake form
6. Board selection committee chooses board
7. Board sworn in at AGM

## Encouraging Retention

This year, retaining volunteers was high priority. As such, we implemented a volunteer intake process to provide a consistent onboarding experience for potential volunteers. We also implemented one-month checkins with all new volunteers to assess how their experience was going.

We further developed communication materials to support the volunteer intake process including, but not limited to, an online intake form, email template for volunteer email responses and an interview template that the Volunteer Services team used to pre-screen all volunteers. And, of course, we supported the board in recognizing their volunteers during Volunteer Recognition Week in April.

At the board level, we started by getting the team invested in a shared rallying cry: to become *Large Chapter of the Year*. Our chapter has always been so proud of our contributions to IABC and the Communications profession overall; however, we’d never received this honour. So we felt that, whether or not we won, this rallying cry would focus us all on aiming for best practices in board management. Then, we engaged in ample team building activity including personal storytelling (*“tell me your life story in six minutes”*), and our monthly *getting to know you* activity where two board members would share their career stories.

Finally, our executive board paired up with 3–4 board buddies and coached and mentored them every month. When a board member was having difficulty with their responsibilities, we rallied as an executive to support them. We showed as much empathy as possible and listened to their difficulties, and offered lots of support and encouragement. More often than not, this was just what was needed.

## COVID-19 and its Impact

Numerous things had to change due to COVID-19. We pivoted from our annual volunteer recognition and networking event to online gift card thank you gifts and notes from directors.

However, this also gave us the opportunity to engage volunteers from outside the lower mainland more than ever, including our first board member from Vancouver island–a huge deal for our chapter and in terms of representation for that area. This director took the torch from our Finance Director, who transitioned out of their role due to a career change. Unlike previous instances where board members left vacant seats, this director supported their replacement through the transition and for months afterward.

Our board meetings went virtual, naturally. And since our board members were among those whose jobs were most affected by the pandemic (everyone was busier than ever responding through internal and external communication) we chose empathy first and gave them the space they needed. We understood that while some volunteers could jump in and cover where needed, others need a month off (especially on such a senior board).

## Challenges

With only one volunteer supporting Volunteer Services for much of the year, finding a balance between recruiting and retention aas tough. As such, we recruited slowly and took the time to get to know, then onboard, volunteers, which contributed positively to retention.

Being a board composed of communication professionals was hugely challenging in the early days of COVID-19. We found our way through it by being extra flexible. Some roles were decreased in scope, and others were expanded to lessen the load on fellow board members. It was a real moment of rallying together.

## Volunteer Team

**Roles:**

* Director, Volunteer Services (board member)
* Manager, Volunteer Services (potential future board member)
* Content Coordinator (Short term role - expressed interest in sponsorship or marketing/communications portfolio)

# Measurement

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| Portfolio Objective | Target | Result |
| Attract at least 20 new volunteers | Engage at least 25% of chapter members as volunteers | Success: 30 new volunteers onboarded |
| Increase volunteer retention to 75% | 75% of Board members are satisfied or very satisfied with the support provided by the portfolio.  95% of volunteers agree that the volunteer experience met or exceeded expectations.\* | Due to COVID-19, our capacity to run a volunteer survey was decreased. However, compared to the previous year, where 40% of board roles saw vacancies during the year, this year **only 7% saw vacancies**. |

# Results

In a year where process was a priority, we managed to ensure all volunteers received an onboarding form, confidentiality form, checkin and a clear role description. We developed our volunteer resources to such an extent that we’re now building a resource library for our board of directors.

As mentioned previously, diversity was also a focus. We went from 37% of our board members at the director level being from ethnic minorities to 75%. And we were better for it. Our ideas were better positioned to serve the broader needs of our membership.

Board retention was also a win. Of course, there were directors who, for valid life reasons, had to transition out, but only 7% of roles saw vacancies, compared to 40% previously. In all cases but one, directors helped find replacements and supported them in the transition.