



Strengthening Communities Through Volunteer Program Development

Volunteering to Support Advocacy - Manual for Volunteers

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Advocacy Manual for Volunteers

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Who is this manual for?

This document has been written for people who would like to learn how to advocate in support of causes that matter to them. While it has been written for CNIB volunteers, it can be used by anyone who simply wants to understand how advocacy works and how to apply advocacy best practices in support of any cause of their choosing.

We have created this manual using Microsoft WORD in order to make it accessible to as many people as possible – and to allow people from different organizations to be able to adapt and tailor the manual for their needs. If you do so, please provide an acknowledgement that CNIB created the original document.

Acknowledgements

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Advocacy and CNIB

CNIB Advocates work to challenge discrimination and break down societal barriers so that people with vision loss can participate fully and equally in society. CNIB was born out of advocacy. In 1918, right after World War One, a group of about 200 Canadian veterans, blinded in the war, realized there was a need in the community – to improve the lives of Canadians with vision loss – and that they could best meet that need by working together. We have been doing it ever since.

What is advocacy?

Advocacy is persuading a person with influence, the public, businesses, organizations or government to change attitudes, policies and/or practices about an issue. Education or awareness building is part of advocacy because it is informing others of issues – or a side to an issue – they may not be

aware of. However, change in attitudes, policies or practices may not automatically happen with just education.

There are various types of advocacy:

- **Self-Advocacy** is speaking up for yourself. It could be as simple as stating that you need to sit at the front of the class or you need materials in an accessible format. It could be a volunteer or employee explaining that they need a speech output program or screen reader. Or it could be a person pointing out it is their right to have access to a treatment or a medication or telling someone not to touch their guide dog. When people with vision loss advocate for themselves, they draw on their own experiences. They might not be thinking of other people with vision loss, although their advocacy actions could result in helping others.
- **Individual Advocacy** is when a person or group concentrates solely on advocating for one or two vulnerable people. The advocate could be a staff member of an organization, a caregiver, family member, friend or volunteer. This type of advocacy is often focused on the specific needs or situation surrounding an individual with a disability.
- **Third-party advocacy** is when a person or organization not directly involved in the issue represents a person or group in advocating for change, such as through unions, elected representatives, an ombudsman, disability organizations or a municipal Accessibility Advisory Committee.
- **Systemic Advocacy** is primarily concerned with influencing and changing the 'system' in general (such as legislation, policy, and practices) in ways that will benefit people with a disability as a group. Systemic advocates will encourage overall changes to the law, service policies, government and community attitudes.
- **Public Awareness Programs** raise the public's level of understanding about an issue. They are an attempt to enact change through raising awareness of an issue (for example, educating the public about not distracting a guide dog when it is working in the harness). Public awareness is also often required as a component of an advocacy campaign when the objective is a change in public policy. By building awareness, you help to create the kind of environment that governments often need to take action on an issue. They need to know that the public wants the changes they are considering.

Why advocate?

- To realize your individual rights as a citizen, as a customer or as a member of a community
- To raise awareness and ensure people who are blind and partially sighted have a voice and that their concerns and issues are heard by elected officials, businesses, organizations, decision makers and the general public
- To develop or use experience and skills in communications and advocacy
- To make a positive difference for people in your community who are blind or partially sighted
- To be part of a dedicated and passionate staff and volunteer team working towards a more inclusive society and improved quality of life for people living with vision loss

"With the support of CNIB I have accepted my vision loss so, this is not just about me, it's about the people I have met who are in similar situations and future generations. To ensure they have the opportunity to live the lives they choose." – George Sweeney – Self Advocate

Role of CNIB Advocates and Champions

As part of our Advocacy program, there are two different ways to get involved:

- as a CNIB Self Advocate
- or as a CNIB Ambassador

Advocates and Champions are just two of many different volunteer opportunities that are available at CNIB. Because there are no set hours or times for these roles, you can often advocate alongside other volunteer opportunities like fundraising or running a peer support group (for other opportunities, please visit our [Get Involved page](#)). But if your passion just lies with advocacy, then that is fine too!

We hope that by reading this manual, you will be able to decide what degree of involvement you would like. The decision is yours. If you prefer to simply use our advocacy resources for your own needs, we are glad to have been of support. Or you can become involved as a CNIB Advocate or Champion any time you wish.

What is a CNIB Advocate?

We are people with sight loss, their friends and family members, and people who have a passion for social justice. Our Advocate network consists of people with all sorts of backgrounds, interests and reasons for wanting to be involved.

There is no regular time or length-of-service requirement to become an advocate. All we require is that you have a passion to change what it is to be blind today and believe in an inclusive and barrier-free society for people with vision loss. We will provide you with the tools and resources, key messages and training to put that passion into action in your community.

There is no formal application process to become a CNIB Advocate.

1. The second step is to visit the advocacy pages of the CNIB website to see:
 - The resources available to help you prepare for self-advocating on the issues that matter to you, and
 - The advocacy initiatives that are happening in your region

We are continually looking for feedback on what resources we need to develop to help you advocate in your community. Please keep in touch with us at advocacynl@cnib.ca to let us know.

What is a CNIB Champion?

CNIB Champions are CNIB Advocates who want to take their advocacy to the next level. They are empowered and trained to advocate as a partner with CNIB on issues that are important to people with vision loss. In many cases, they are living life with sight loss, have a story to tell and a message that needs to be heard. If you think you might like to be a CNIB Champion, you likely have a lot in common with other Champions:

- You want to make a difference – to **do** something to improve the quality of life of people living with vision loss.
- You have a burning need to apply your experience, knowledge and passion to the cause.
- You want to develop advocacy skills to increase your effectiveness as you advocate for an inclusive and barrier-free society, in which people with vision loss can participate fully and are seen as equal in every respect.
- You believe in CNIB's mission and with the right training can become a CNIB spokesperson in your community to break down societal barriers and bring about change.

Champions are trained by CNIB as an official spokesperson to speak out on issues that CNIB has identified as important, in effect, representing CNIB, using our materials and delivering our messages.

If you decide you want to be a CNIB Champion, you will be joining a determined and strong advocacy team made up of people with different backgrounds who have a shared purpose to work for a better world for people with vision loss. Thank you for your interest in advocating for equality and accessibility. Together, we can change what it is to be blind today.

"We have a great team of self-advocates whose volunteer participation on the City of St John's Inclusion Advisory Board resulted in the city of St John's retrofitting intersections to include accessible pedestrian signals. (APS) This year (2018) the city will install an additional 7 APS's at strategically selected intersections. Big shout out to Jason Blair and Philip Strong. Your leadership will ensure those of us living with vision loss feel secure crossing these intersections independently and safely!"

Debbie Ryan
Program Lead Advocacy & Public Engagement, CNIB

CNIB Champion Application Process

In most cases, it is simply a matter of filling out an application and having a conversation with one of the advocacy team members.

- It begins with an **application form**. Most volunteers fill these out. You can do it online here: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/3KKTKMK> or you can fill out a form in person if you come to one of our community locations.
- You may be asked to **meet** with us so we can get to know you and learn about your skills and interests. That way, we will be more likely to line you up for advocating on an issue that you are passionate about and you will have a better idea of what we have to offer. This meeting can be done over the phone or in person.
- **You can attend an orientation session.** We hold orientation sessions for potential volunteers regularly in our offices and in the community. They allow you to learn more about the cause, meet some people who use our services (as well as people who share your values and also want to volunteer) and hear about the various volunteer roles available. Orientation sessions are usually held in the early evening.

Your partnership with us as a CNIB Champion

Your Commitment to Us

The [CNIB Volunteer Code of Conduct](#) outlines the values, rights, responsibilities and expectations of volunteers. All volunteers must read and sign the Code of Conduct to indicate they have read and understand these policies and agree to follow them. Below we have highlighted a couple that are important to CNIB Champions:

- You will not enter into a conflict of interest by using the authority or knowledge of your position for personal benefit or for the benefit of another. An example of this could be presenting yourself as a CNIB Champion and going 'off script' or presenting a personal advocacy issue as a CNIB official issue.
- Volunteers with political or religious affiliations must keep these activities separate from their CNIB responsibilities. Having a good relationship with legislators is really important. We want to engage all political parties on sight loss issues and must remain politically neutral to do so. Parties in power can often change, so our focus must be on maintaining good relationships with all parties at all times.
- You must maintain client confidentiality. Everything about a client is confidential, including the fact they are a client. Your story is your own; others' stories need to be used with great caution for the person's confidentiality (you never know when one of the people in the meeting, or sitting behind you in the bus, might be able to figure out who you are speaking about).
- You must maintain organizational confidentiality, including (but not limited to) information about employees, donors, volunteers, finances, statistics, customers and suppliers, production and cost information, board policy and fundraising strategy. As a CNIB Champion, your role is to share CNIB's position with decision makers and community leaders. In the course of your duties, you are likely to come to know information that CNIB is not sharing with the general public.

Our partnership with you as a CNIB Champion

Our commitment to you

We will work together with you, as a CNIB Champion, on important advocacy initiatives, and provide supporting information to you, including:

- Advocacy **tools** for Advocates and Champions. Check out our advocacy toolkit containing sample letters, speaking notes, fact sheets, etc. You

will receive other supporting materials as you get involved in different campaigns.

- **Subscription to Equalize**, our quarterly advocacy e-newsletter informing you about the progress of advocacy campaigns, outlining actions that need to be taken, and celebrating the successes of our Advocates and Champions.
- Training in advocacy. You will need to attend a specialized and tailored advocacy **training** workshop. As well, we will provide you with information about opportunities to attend additional training workshops (such as media training, public speaking, social media training any many more) to develop your skills.
- **CNIB Position Statements** on advocacy issues so you have the key facts and statistics at hand when meeting with officials and decision makers to support your personal experiences.
- **Support** from CNIB Volunteer Coordinators and Advocacy staff to answer your questions and provide additional materials.

CNIB Advocacy Successes

CNIB advocacy volunteers have already helped us achieve so much through their hard work and dedication. Here are a couple of highlights below. Who knows? Soon we could be celebrating your campaign success!

Marrakesh Treaty

On June 30, 2016, Canada became the 20th country to ratify the Marrakesh Treaty, bringing the legislation into force. The treaty allows for the exchange across borders of alternate format copyrighted materials for people with print disabilities. Countries that have ratified the treaty can create an exception to their domestic copyright laws, which allows for the import and export of these copyrighted materials. The ratification of this treaty will allow the three million blind and partially sighted Canadians and people with print disabilities to have access to a wider range of literature and increased literacy.

The Marrakesh Treaty was adopted on June 27, 2013 in Marrakesh, Morocco, and has been ratified by other nations including Australia, Peru, Brazil and Mexico. This long-fought campaign would not have been successful without global partnerships of sight loss organizations and Canadians with vision loss working together over many years towards this common goal.

The Centre for Equitable Library Access

On May 29, 2014, the [Centre for Equitable Library Access](#) (CELA) was launched. CELA is a national non-profit organization established through collaboration between Canadian public libraries and CNIB. CELA is designed

to supply Canadians with print disabilities access to accessible format materials through the public library system. CNIB Library services are now available to the public library system through CELA (www.celalibrary.ca) in Newfoundland and Labrador and other provinces across Canada.

CELA and this partnership with the Canadian public library community is the outcome of many years of national studies, recommendations and advocacy by volunteers in Newfoundland and Labrador and across Canada. It is a great step toward equitable library services for all Canadians with different reading needs.

Government commitment to fully funded rehabilitation

CNIB and the Eastern Health have reached an agreement about CNIB's funding for post-vision loss rehabilitation therapy. Starting in 2017, CNIB post-vision loss rehabilitation services will be fully funded by the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.

CNIB will now focus on working with the government and healthcare professionals to better integrate post-vision loss rehabilitation into the continuum of eye health care within the publicly funded healthcare system. This would not have been possible without the work of our Advocates.

Neighborhood Accessibility (Will provide local testimonials) Newfoundland and Labrador

Newfoundland and Labrador Appendix #1 - Spirit of partnership

Partnership. Nothing defines CNIB's culture more accurately. In 1918, after the end of World War One, a group of about 200 Canadian veterans, blinded in the war, realized there was a need in the community to improve the lives of Canadians with vision loss, and that they could best meet that need by working together. They created CNIB in the spirit of partnership.

We still strive to operate that way now, a 100 years later. At this point in time, millions of Canadians have been touched by CNIB – and it isn't only people with vision loss. Over the years, CNIB has partnered with countless volunteers, donors, community organizations, health and medical groups, and governments to support our **mission: to ensure all Canadians who are blind or partially sighted have the confidence, skills and opportunity to fully participate in life.**

We have come to understand that we can achieve our mission only by working together. The mission is the **cause** that we have in common with

our partners. Partnering is a **strategy** – it is a key part of **how** we will achieve the mission. The programs we provide to people with vision loss are the **tools** we will use to make it happen.

With our 100th anniversary celebrations behind us, we know that there is still much to be done to achieve our mission and to perfect our approach to partnership. Our commitment to partnership is an acknowledgement that we are all interdependent and our power lies in our ability to be good partners, to partner with people whose values and ambitions align with ours, and to maintain our partnerships over the long term as they shift and develop.

Appendix #2 - CNIB's philosophy on volunteerism

“Alone we can do so little. Together we can do so much.” Helen Keller

No matter how skilled and dedicated our paid employees are, CNIB recognizes that the people we serve require and deserve a wide variety of service options, resources and approaches that cannot be offered by the staff alone. We see volunteers as a huge community talent pool – with diverse backgrounds and limitless potential to contribute varied talents to expand opportunities for people who are blind and partially sighted. Volunteers are time donors (and often financial donors, too) who serve side-by-side with paid staff, and who can connect with people in a unique way. In many cases, it is the fact that they are not paid that resonates so profoundly with community members.

To be successful, we must treat every volunteer as a valued partner. Because volunteers choose to partner with us, we are able to serve larger numbers of people. But more than that, the generous natures of volunteers and their gifts are deeply appreciated by the people we serve, as well as by our staff and other partners. We know that volunteers bring their unique points of view that have resulted from their personal experiences, relationships and values. Many of our time volunteers have been recipients of our services. Others have been money donors and want to find an additional way to give. They bring scope, depth, knowledge, connections and more. In other words, they enrich and expand our thinking, not just our reach.

Our philosophy of volunteerism is also very much influenced by our dedication to breaking down barriers and building inclusive communities – both within CNIB, as well as in the towns and cities where we live. It is important to us to provide an accessible workplace and to include people with vision loss and other disabilities on our staff and among our volunteers and other partners.

We know that being a good partner requires attention and care. Our first priority is to be welcoming, to listen to each potential volunteer, honour their level of commitment and ensure they have the training and support they require once they have been accepted.

We respect that volunteers need to do their research to be sure we are the right fit for them – that our values (passion, empowerment, respect, innovation, professionalism and dedication) align with theirs and the environment and culture we have created allows them to achieve their personal goals. And once they make the choice to join us, we do our best to find the volunteer roles that suit them. We endeavour to present them with many opportunities and ways to make their precious gifts.

We understand that after a volunteer has joined us, they need to feel their time spent with us is worthwhile. Volunteer engagement is a core competency for our staff, ensuring volunteers feel comfortable and respected at CNIB. Evaluation is built into every program and role description because we know how important it is to regularly tell time volunteers (and staff and financial donors, too) how their investment has had an impact. We all need to see the link from our contribution to the achievement of our mission. And we all have a need to know we have been heard. Volunteers must also have the opportunity to provide us with feedback on their experience during their time with the organization. That feedback, whether positive or negative, is another valuable gift that helps us continually improve.

We need volunteers who understand our mission and are willing to make a firm commitment. Our first priority is to provide excellent service. We need volunteers who share that view.

The years have taught us to accept that even though a person may be volunteering with us now, that might change. In the future, they might want to take on more responsibility or be less involved or give in a different way. What matters to us is that their experience with us is one they will remember proudly and fondly – that they will feel they were valued and they made a positive difference in people's lives.

Every volunteer is an ambassador for CNIB, whether formal or not. We hope our volunteers will share their impressions with the people in their lives. Who knows? Maybe someone they talk to about their experience will decide to partner with us as well, as a volunteer, or a donor, or a client or a member of our staff. And our work will continue.