



EXTRAORDINARY
OFFICIAL GAZETTE
THE BAHAMAS
PUBLISHED BY AUTHORITY

NASSAU

11th August, 2023

(A)

GOVERNOR-GENERAL'S VOLUNTEER SOCIETY ACT, 2023

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No. 41 of 2023

GOVERNOR-GENERAL'S VOLUNTEER SOCIETY ACT, 2023

AN ACT TO INSPIRE, PROMOTE AND SUSTAIN A CULTURE OF VOLUNTEERISM THROUGHOUT THE BAHAMAS

[Date of Assent - 11th August, 2023]

Enacted by the Parliament of The Bahamas

1. Short title.

This Act may be cited as the Governor-General's Volunteer Society Act, 2023.

2. Interpretation.

In this Act —

“voluntary activity” means any activity undertaken —

- (a) by free choice and without expectation of financial reward;
- (b) individually, or within the framework of informal, or officially registered non-governmental, non-profit organisation, or a national or international public entity;
- (c) for —
 - (i) the public benefit;
 - (ii) support or service to others in the areas of community development and addressing human needs;
 - (iii) promoting civic engagement in the country's democratic process;
 - (iv) advocating for and raising consciousness about human rights and equality, the environment, gender equality;
 - (v) any other charitable purpose;

“volunteer” means any person engaged in voluntary activity;

“volunteerism” means the act of helping others by free choice for the common good, and which —

- (a) influences the history, politics, religion, socio-economic and cultural characteristics, wealth distribution, labour, beliefs, values and traditions of a community;
- (b) enables persons to participate in the social life, human needs and development of the community.

3. Objective of Act.

The objective of this Act is to promote volunteerism throughout The Bahamas.

4. Principles of volunteerism.

- (1) For the purposes of this Act, the principles of volunteerism are that volunteers —
 - (a) participate on the basis of one's own free will without expectation for financial gain;
 - (b) act for the common good and on the basis of a social commitment;
 - (c) are recruited based on equal opportunity and non discrimination;
 - (d) participate actively in the development of community and social life and to address human needs;
 - (e) promote human rights and equality;
 - (f) respect the rights, dignity and culture of the communities involved.
- (2) Subsection (1)(a) does not prohibit a volunteer from receiving reimbursement of reasonable expenses and the provision of any subsistence allowance necessary to accomplish an assignment.

5. Governor-General's Volunteer Society.

- (1) The non-profit organisation known and existing as “The Governor General's Volunteer Bahamas” immediately before the coming into operation of this Act shall continue in existence and be the Society for the purposes of this Act.
- (2) The Society shall be —
 - (a) a body corporate with perpetual succession and a seal;
 - (b) capable of suing and of being sued; and
 - (c) subject to this Act, of doing and suffering all such acts as a body corporate may lawfully do and suffer.

6. Role of Society.

The role of the Society is —

- (a) to inspire, promote and sustain a culture of volunteerism in The Bahamas;
- (b) to serve as an advocate for volunteers' interest and activities and to establish national standards for volunteerism programmes;
- (c) to aid in the co-ordination and networking of volunteer organisations and volunteerism opportunities;
- (d) to offer advisory services to civil society groups throughout The Bahamas; and
- (e) to bring awareness to personal volunteer experiences.

7. Constitution and functions of Council.

- (1) The Society shall be governed by a Council which shall comprise of —
 - (a) the Secretary to the Governor-General;
 - (b) the Chairman or Co-Chair of the Advisory Committee;
 - (c) one representative of the Ministry of Education;
 - (d) one representative of the Ministry of Social Development,
 - (e) one representative of the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture;
 - (f) one member of The Bahamas Christian Council;
 - (g) one member of The Bahamas Chamber of Commerce;
 - (h) two representatives from the private sector; and
 - (i) one member of the Advisory Committee.
- (2) The duties of the Council shall be to promote volunteerism through publicity campaigns, social media and other volunteer incentives and recognition efforts.
- (3) The Council shall regulate its own procedure.

8. Advisory Committee of Society.

- (1) There shall be an Advisory Committee, which shall serve as a consultative body to the Council and shall assist the Council in planning, organizing, and implementing a national volunteerism programme.
- (2) The Advisory Committee shall be appointed by the Governor-General and shall constitute —
 - (a) a Counsel and attorney-at-law of at least five years' standing;
 - (b) a member of the Bahamas Christian Council;

- (c) a representative of the ministry responsible for social services.

9. Secretariat of Society.

- (1) There is hereby established, a Secretariat for the Society, which shall be the administrative and coordinating agency of the Society and shall consist mainly of the staff of the Governor-General and other technical and clerical staff as the Governor-General shall appoint.
- (2) The functions of the Secretariat are —
 - (a) to administer the daily tasks necessary for the functioning of the Society;
 - (b) to promote and organize publicity and information campaigns for all national volunteer programmes;
 - (c) to recommend technical assistance opportunities to civil society and voluntary organizations; and
 - (d) to recommend volunteers to groups based on skill set, location and interests.