

Giving Back Together

by Tim Hennessy, GBA

For Ontario-area kids who lose access to after-school snacks when summer begins, a team of Bimbo Canada volunteers steps in to fill the gap, one snack kit at a time. Led by Food Banks Canada, the volunteers partner with other corporate sponsors to assemble snack kits that are then distributed to camps and schools across the country. According to Jordan Garner, senior advisor of social impact and diversity, equity and belonging for Bimbo Canada, “This is by far our most in-demand volunteer event. When I send the email asking for participants, I want to say that in 30 minutes, all the slots are filled, and I have to create a waitlist and routinely check in with people. That’s why we’re looking to replicate this opportunity in other regions—people clearly want to volunteer.”

This act of social responsibility is one of many projects that associates completed to address the specific needs of communities, with a clear purpose: improve lives, promote well-being and care for the environment. The Bimbo Give Good program encompasses Good Neighbour, Give Where You Live and Bimbo Cares—social programs demonstrating their commitment to serving the community and sustainable development.

One of their key initiatives is Good Neighbour, a global initiative that empowers workers to better their local communities. Through the use of site ambassadors, regular communication and set budgets, Bimbo Canada harnesses individual creativity and enthusiasm to promote volunteerism and reach full participation in its Good Neighbour efforts.

Beyond the workplace culture benefits of volunteer and team-building opportunities, this initiative allows the company to develop and empower its associates.



“Our purpose is to nourish a better world, and we help do this by giving back to the communities where we live and work,” said Garner. “Each bakery has to have at least one project throughout the year. We focus on certain lines of action, such as food insecurity, education, environmental issues, physical activity, as well as diversity, equity and inclusion, which help us focus on how we want to give back.”

Past projects in the Good Neighbour program have included making improvements to youth centres, donating to adult literacy programs, providing kitchen equipment for school breakfast programs, helping food banks, planting community gardens, participating in environmental cleanups and holding winter coat drives, among many others.

Gaining Full Participation

In May 2014, the Mexican company Grupo Bimbo acquired Canada Bread, a producer and distributor of packaged fresh

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Volunteers from Bimbo Canada’s St. Augustin, Québec bakery helped prepare the outdoor terrace at Laura Lémerveil, a residence for adults with disabilities, by raking, sweeping and cleaning garden furniture for summer.

bread and bakery products. Headquartered in Etobicoke, Ontario, they operate 15 bakeries and 183 sales centres across the country, employing more than 4,000 associates from coast to coast. The global office of Grupo Bimbo provided the idea for a volunteer initiative to Canada Bread, and in 2016, the program launched nationwide.

Garner noted that “the broader strategy reflects our commitment to giving back to the communities where associates live and work. Grupo Bimbo adopted the motto ‘Nourishing a Better World,’ which serves as a global philosophy for how our actions can contribute to improving the lives of everyone we reach, and this mindset is deeply woven into Bimbo Canada’s culture,” he said.

“Many of these partnerships go back years and have made volunteering part of the team’s identity. It’s a great opportunity to get people outside and connect as a team beyond the bakery.”

Strong enthusiasm for the program exists at every level, from hourly associates to Bimbo Canada’s president. The broad support demonstrates how much associates value the program. Garner said it helps hourly associates feel more connected to the organization and provides a meaningful, engaging experience. “That support is critical. People from every level, including hourly associates and even our president, participate. When leadership shows up, it encourages others to do the same.”

Each bakery must do at least one project, though many do two or three, and sometimes sites team up. “It’s really up to the ambassadors and the region to decide what their project looks like, which is part of the program’s success,” said Garner.

Finding Ambassadors

An important element in developing full participation is having an ambassador at each site to help create interest in the program.

“Each site appoints an ambassador, or sometimes a team of associates, who think through what kind of action they want to take. They might reach out to local community partners—often food banks we already work with through product donations—or organizations where associates already volunteer. The idea is to create a long-lasting impact in the community.”

Ambassadors are not alone in their efforts. Leadership at Bimbo Canada provides ideas and assistance to help them succeed, along with a toolkit that offers general guidelines for the program. The ambassadors are responsible for identifying a volunteer site and defining the partnership. They submit a form with the basics—when it’s happening, how they plan to use the budget and how many people they expect to involve.

“After I receive an outline of what they want to do and where, part of my role is to vet the organization and ensure it aligns with our values and objectives, said Garner. “If it doesn’t quite fit, I help the ambassador shape the project into something that works for both the associates and our global framework.”

Local teams choose organizations that matter to them. Supporting smaller, local nonprofits allows volunteers to see the direct impact, and some of Bimbo Canada’s groups have volunteered with the same organization for years, creating a connection that becomes a tradition.



Volunteers at Barrie Food Bank helped prestock the shelves, prepare food orders and sort donated food.

Checking in Regularly

Another component of the Good Neighbour program is regular communication between the head office and each location. Garner noted that this happens at multiple levels: The ambassadors hold regular meetings and maintain ongoing communication, while Garner stays in frequent contact with Bimbo Canada’s global team to refine processes, ensure alignment and provide support for the program. The volunteer opportunities are communicated internally, and for hourly associates, communication often needs to be in person or by word of mouth. Ambassadors also promote the activity, rally participants, lead on the day of the event and submit documentation afterward so Garner can report back to the Grupo global team.

“Of course, there are challenges—coverage, scheduling and allowing everyone to participate—but that’s where local ambassadors make a real difference. Having someone on site helps rally the team in a way only those day-to-day, personal connections on the floor can,” said Garner.

Progress That Adapts and Evolves

What started as a local enthusiasm evolved into a broader conversation about the program’s potential and the need to align local passions with global expectations. Garner explained that in 2025, the program was reassessed to channel this energy into sustainable, long-term impact rather than one-time donations.

“We didn’t want the program to be just a one-time donation—serve some food, say ‘see you next year’ and move on. We wanted it to have a lasting impact,” Garner said. That meant rethinking projects already embedded in the community but functioning as one-off efforts, then figuring out how to redesign them into something more sustainable and long-term.

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In the past, Bimbo Canada has supported food banks with donations to help provide meals. Now they're looking at ways to help renovate their spaces, add infrastructure or support programs that strengthen their services over time while still staying engaged as volunteers and community members.

Garner said the shift has been a challenge, but "It's about refocusing without losing the heart of the original intention." He suggests that organizations looking to foster a culture of volunteering but unsure where to start should focus on providing clear opportunities where volunteers can easily contribute.

To measure success, especially in the early stages, Garner recommends asking simple questions: Did people show up? Did the project deliver what was intended? "It's about impact, visibility and community connection," he emphasized. "If it feels meaningful and impactful, it's successful."

Beyond promoting it, Bimbo Canada focuses on giving associates concrete ideas and resources. Garner created a spreadsheet that outlines organizations by region, their focus areas, what they do and how to contact them. As a result, Garner said, "We've seen more teams volunteer because it's a simple, 'click and go' experience rather than, 'We support you, good luck, let us know how it goes.'"

Garner noted that over the past few years, participation has continued to grow. "We're volunteering longer hours, more sessions. That speaks for itself: The program continues to have greater success than it did at its inception."

Garner added that a growth in projects, collaborations and creativity would not only signal the Good Neighbour program's continued success but also create a true win-win for the associates who power these programs and the community partnerships that have grown alongside them. "I love when sites team up to



Montréal associates sponsored and participated in the TROIS, 2, 1, GO! race, the largest annual fundraising event for the Regroupement pour la Trisomie 21.

do something bigger. The breadth of what's possible with this program is what makes me proud." Through Bimbo Canada's commitment to empowering local communities and nonprofits, facilities across the country partnered with organizations to complete 27 impactful projects. Together, they donated more than \$230,000 and volunteered more than 2,000 hours.

Garner noted that Bimbo Canada is proud of the impact it has made and grateful for the opportunity to give back to the communities where its associates live and work. Everyone who participated in and supported the initiative helped strengthen communities, one project at a time.

You can find this article and more in the March/April 2026 issue of *Plans & Trusts*.

