

TIME WELL SPENT

A NATIONAL SURVEY ON THE VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

Summary Report
January 2019



NCO100

INTRODUCTION

This report summarises the key findings from the report *Time Well Spent: A national survey on the volunteer experience*, undertaken by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO).

Background

Discussions about volunteering often focus on the perspective of organisations that involve volunteers, considering questions such as ‘How can we recruit people to volunteer?’ and ‘What resources are needed for good management?’. Whilst recognising the importance of organisational context, this survey puts the focus on the individuals who volunteer.

In view of the ever-growing interest in getting more people to volunteer, including in public services, it seems more important than ever for practitioners and policy makers to understand what makes a quality experience in the eyes of people who give their time as volunteers.

We know that not everyone will call their involvement ‘volunteering’; in this survey we have tried to capture the range of activities that people undertake when giving time through groups, clubs and organisations, which is often referred to as ‘formal volunteering’ in the literature.

The survey explores how the people of Britain participate in this kind of volunteering, recently and over their lifetime. It does not examine the more informal ways of giving time and helping others that are nevertheless a key part of people’s lives.

This research builds on the existing knowledge available through other data sources on volunteering, principally the Community Life Survey.¹ It also builds upon a large body of volunteering research, including the qualitative research project Pathways through Participation.² It aims to fill gaps by focusing on the volunteer experience, volunteer management and the impact of volunteering – topics last included in a national survey over 10 years ago (Helping Out, 2006/07³).

¹DCMS (2018) *Community Life Survey* www.gov.uk/government/statistics/community-life-survey-2017-18 (accessed January 2019).

²Brodie, E. et al. (2011) *Pathways through Participation: What creates and sustains active citizenship?* London: NCVO/IVR/Involve. www.involve.org.uk/resources/publications/project-reports/pathways-through-participation (accessed January 2019).

³Low, N., Butt, S., Ellis, P. and Davis Smith, J. (2007). *Helping Out: A national survey of volunteering and charitable giving*. London: Cabinet Office. openaccess.city.ac.uk/2547/1/Helping%20Out.pdf (accessed January 2019).

Our aims and objectives

The overall objectives of this research are to understand the experience of volunteering among people who volunteer and provide rich and practical insights to inform practice and policy. Specifically, it aims to:

- gain a rounder view of the different ways people get involved
- understand how volunteering fits into people’s lives, including whether opportunities are meeting needs and expectations and what drives or prevents a meaningful experience
- understand people’s experiences across the volunteer journey and explore what a quality experience and quality management look like from the volunteer’s perspective
- explore the impact of volunteering, primarily on volunteers themselves
- understand how to better engage potential volunteers, including barriers and enablers to volunteering.

Our approach

This survey was completed by adults aged 18+ in Great Britain through YouGov’s panel, via an online self-completion questionnaire, between 4 and 15 May 2018. The total sample achieved was 10,103 respondents. The data was weighted to reflect the national population by key demographics: age, gender, education level and social grade.

Questionnaire development was informed by an extensive scoping phase, which included a review of existing literature and stakeholder interviews. Further engagement with stakeholders continued throughout the project, including through workshops to inform the implications for practice and policy outlined at the end of this report.

WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH TELL US?

In this section, we summarise some of our key learnings from the research: first, about who volunteers and how they give their time; second, about the experience of volunteering; third, about engaging volunteers for the future. Finally, we take all the findings together to consider what makes a good quality volunteer experience.



WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED ABOUT WHO VOLUNTEERS AND HOW THEY GIVE THEIR TIME?

Most people have volunteered through groups, clubs and organisations during their lifetime

The findings highlight a spectrum of engagement with volunteering. Of the people surveyed, most have formally volunteered through a group, club or organisation at some point in their lives. More often than not, this involvement is light touch and involves dipping in and out of opportunities over time, shaped by what is happening in their lives.

Those who sustain their involvement consistently and intensely over their lifetime are a minority, but these are the volunteers that organisations and groups are likely to depend on the most.

Diversity continues to be an issue

Our research confirms that recent volunteers (those volunteering in the last 12 months), who participate in formal volunteering at least once a month are more likely to be older, well-educated and from higher socio-economic groups.

Those from lower socio-economic groups are more likely to say they have never been involved in volunteering, and those who have are less likely to be in certain leadership or representative roles, like being a trustee. Research on volunteering, and on participation more broadly, consistently indicates that inequalities of resources and power means that some people are more likely to be excluded from certain activities.

There are different degrees of formality

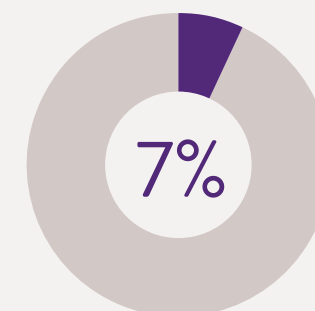
Whilst this survey focuses on 'formal' volunteering through groups, clubs or organisations, this picture of volunteering only tells part of the story. Some groups that are under-represented in formal volunteering participate more in informal ways, for example through acts of neighbourliness.

The findings also highlight that there is a range of formality within volunteering through groups, clubs or organisations, from large organisations with paid staff and more formal policies and procedures to more informal grassroots community groups.

Formal volunteering processes, such as having an interview before starting to volunteer or role-specific training, are more common in certain settings and activities, for example where there are safeguarding risks. For many, the journey into and through volunteering is characterised by informal processes or ad-hoc organising.



A minority of those surveyed say they have been both consistently and heavily involved in volunteering over their lifetime.



People aged 65 and over are the age group most likely to have volunteered recently

45%

and 25-34-year-olds are least likely

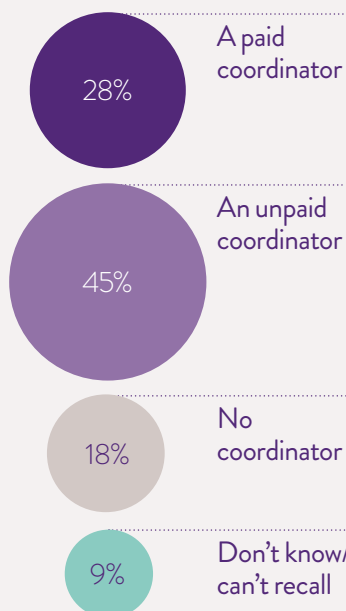
31%

Those from higher socio-economic groups (ABC1) are more likely to have volunteered recently than those from lower socio-economic groups (C2DE).

44%
of ABC1s

30%
of C2DEs

Recent volunteers are organised by:



Recent volunteers are more likely to go through informal processes than formal processes before starting to volunteer.*

43% had an informal chat

vs

12% had an interview



*Respondents could select more than one process

There is no one volunteer journey

This research delved into the context of volunteering – what activities volunteers do, where they volunteer, when they volunteer, who they give time to and how they do it. The findings highlight some common features: those who volunteer are likely to give time in their own neighbourhood, for local organisations and groups, and alongside others. They are much more likely to give time to civil society organisations, but some volunteer for public sector organisations, such as the police or the NHS.

Those who volunteered recently usually took part in volunteering activities regularly. A significant proportion also volunteered as part of a one-off activity or event, or they were dipping in and out of activities.

Whilst these common features provide an overview of how people volunteer, the reality is more complex – volunteers combine different types of activity, cause, organisation, frequency and intensity of involvement, which reflect their own lifestyle and life stage, values and interests. People's lives and priorities change and, consequently, the ways they get involved may also change.

The role of digital in volunteering provides a mixed picture

How much people are online as part of their volunteering varies widely – though more say that their activities involve some kind of online interaction than none at all. This is likely to reflect different types of involvement, with some people carrying out their volunteering activities online (eg webchat online) and others mainly using digital tools and devices to facilitate their volunteering (eg emailing other volunteers to set up a meeting).

Nevertheless, over a third of people who volunteer say they are never online. This is currently more common than people saying they volunteer exclusively online. However, the latter group are more likely to have started volunteering with their organisation recently, which suggests that volunteering exclusively online may be attracting new volunteers to organisations and could become a bigger trend.

Disabled volunteers were more likely to be online (exclusively or often) than non-disabled volunteers, suggesting that digital platforms may provide opportunities for people who might otherwise find it difficult to participate.

Volunteering through employers remains low on people's radar

Of the volunteers who were working for an employer, the majority said the volunteering they do for their main organisation takes place outside of their work hours and is not organised by their employer.

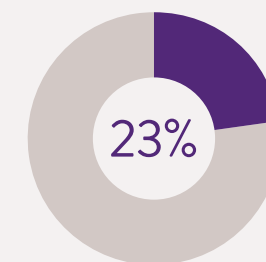
The low levels of participation in employer-supported volunteering reflects a wider lack of awareness of this kind of volunteering. As well as scope to increase awareness, the fact that around a third of volunteers who participated in employer-supported volunteering in the last year felt their employers did not actively encourage it suggests there is more that could be done to promote it.



Around **8 in 10**

volunteers give time locally, within their own neighbourhoods.

Nearly a quarter of volunteers exclusively volunteer as part of a one-off activity or dip in and out of activities.



67%

of volunteers give time to civil society organisations

17%

for public sector organisations.

Volunteers combine different ways of getting involved to reflect their individual lives and their priorities.



10%

of volunteers give time via employer-supported volunteering.



Volunteers are more likely to carry out their activities through a mix of online and offline.



6%
Exclusively online



57%
Mix of online and offline



35%
Never online

The figures on this page are based on recent volunteers ie those who volunteered in the last 12 months

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED ABOUT THE EXPERIENCE OF VOLUNTEERING?

Volunteering is a positive experience, for almost all volunteers

Satisfaction levels are very high – this is in spite of frustrations that some people report experiencing. Volunteers also cite a range of benefits they get from volunteering.

This is a huge testament to the work of volunteer-involving organisations, which the majority of volunteers perceive to be supporting them well and recognising them for their contribution. It also sets a high benchmark for these organisations to continue to meet.

Whilst overall perceptions are very positive, some volunteers tend to have less positive views about certain aspects of their volunteering, including younger volunteers, disabled volunteers, occasional volunteers and public sector volunteers.

There are also indications that those from BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) backgrounds are less likely to be satisfied than white volunteers, however further research would be needed to support this.

Although it is not clear whether these variations are due to differing expectations, experiences or both, the findings highlight that there is no room for complacency, particularly if we want to widen participation to a broader range of people.

Meeting expectations is a balancing act

With such variation in volunteer journeys, a challenge for volunteer-involving organisations is meeting the range of expectations that come with them. These are shaped by both personal and societal factors, as well as previous experiences of volunteering and other forms of participation.

Meeting the expectations volunteers have about the level and nature of organisation and management is a particular challenge for volunteer-involving organisations. Over a third of people who volunteer agree that ‘things could be much better organised’, indicating that there is still scope for organisations to improve the volunteer experience. However, organisations need to balance this with the risk of becoming overly bureaucratic or formalised.

As noted previously, there is a spectrum of formality. This highlights the challenge for volunteer-involving organisations to understand and respond to the needs of their current and future volunteers, whilst delivering services and activities effectively and safely.



96%

of volunteers say they are very or fairly satisfied with their volunteering.

Almost

7 in 10

volunteers had already or would recommend their volunteering to a friend or family member.



83%

of volunteers feel well supported in the organisation they volunteer for.



Over 1/3

of volunteers agree things could be much better organised and

20%

10%

VS

Public sector volunteers are twice as likely to agree that their volunteering was ‘too structured or formalised’ than civil society volunteers.



Around 1/4

feel there is too much bureaucracy.

Disabled volunteers are more likely to disagree that there is a culture of respect and trust than non-disabled volunteers (11% vs 6%).



23% of 18–34 year-olds agree that they expected the process of getting involved to be quicker compared with 9% of those aged 55 and over.

The figures on this page are based on recent volunteers ie those who volunteered in the last 12 months

There are some aspects of the volunteer experience that seem to matter most to those who volunteer

People want to give time on their own terms.

Most people are happy with the way their time is managed when volunteering. However, there is a risk that too much pressure to do more or to continue, is placed on some volunteers, especially those who are giving their time on a frequent basis.

These frequent volunteers are more likely to feel the positive benefits of volunteering but also more likely to report negative experiences, including feeling like too much of their time is taken up. Generally, volunteers who feel this way are less likely to continue with their volunteering.

Volunteering isn't paid work.

Part of the risk in overburdening volunteers is that their volunteering starts to feel 'work like'. The findings show that the more frequently people volunteered, the more they felt this to be true. Public sector volunteers and those volunteering in more formal settings were also more likely to feel this way.

Volunteering often overlaps with the world of paid work, where, for example, paid staff manage and work alongside volunteers. However, it isn't paid work and the distinction is reinforced by the ways people get involved and say that they want to be involved.

As seen from the low levels of participation via employers, most people actively separate it from their own employment. Those who volunteer to improve their career prospects are also a minority (except among 18-24 year-olds). Additionally, those working full time are more likely to say they prefer using skills and experience that are different from their day-to-day work.

This suggests that volunteer-involving organisations should consider not just how much time people can give, but also how that time feels to volunteers. Whilst volunteering will coincide with the world of paid work, it should be distinct.

Making a difference matters.

Helping people or improving things is the key reason people started volunteering, and those who felt they had a positive impact on others were much more likely both to be satisfied with their volunteering and to continue with it. Those who volunteer also report a wide range of personal benefits from volunteering, including enjoyment and improved well-being.

Organisations are sharing the impact of volunteers' contributions by communicating with them about the difference being made, though our findings highlight that this could be done more.

The fact that most people (whether they have volunteered or not) say they have not used or accessed services provided by volunteers might indicate that the contribution of volunteers is not recognised in wider society. There may be more scope to showcase and celebrate the contribution of volunteers more widely.



Feeling connected lies at the core of the volunteer experience.

Among the different benefits people feel they gain from volunteering is a sense of connection. Volunteering, for most, involves being with others – very few report doing it alone. The majority of those who volunteer say they meet new people and have contact with people from different backgrounds. Many also say their volunteering has helped them feel less isolated, especially younger volunteers.

People’s sense of a connection to the organisation they volunteer with and the cause it supports is also a key aspect of the volunteer experience. Most report that they feel a sense of belonging to an organisation and a culture of respect and trust – factors that are strongly associated with their likelihood to continue. Ensuring volunteers feel part of something – an organisation, a common endeavour – is key to the volunteer experience.

Enjoyment shouldn’t be undervalued.

When volunteers were asked what they got out of their involvement, ‘I enjoy it’ was the most chosen statement. Enjoyment can mean different things to different people; it could be about having fun, but this won’t be the case for all who volunteer, especially those whose volunteering activities are, by nature, challenging and difficult. It is likely to be the result of many things – the activities undertaken, the conviviality of interacting with others, a personal sense of achievement or fulfilment, people’s emotions, etc.

Our findings indicate that enjoyment is associated with both satisfied volunteers and those who continue with volunteering. Opportunities that look fun and enjoyable to be part of appeal to those interested in future volunteering opportunities, especially among those who haven’t volunteered before.

The importance of enjoyment to volunteers suggests that it is not only about helping others or achieving something; enjoying the experience itself whilst taking part also really matters.

2 in 3

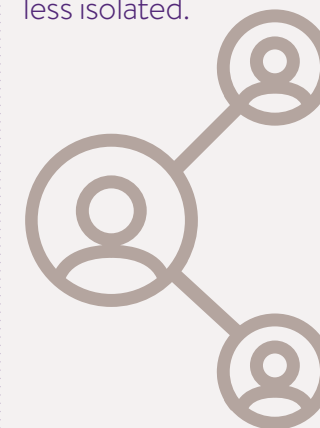
recent volunteers say they are always or often with others when they volunteer.



The majority of recent volunteers (85%) agree that they feel they belong to the organisation.

68%

of recent volunteers agree their volunteering helps them feel less isolated.



89%

of recent volunteers meet new people through their volunteering.



This is highest among younger volunteers

77% of 18–24s

and

76% of 25–34s

Key reasons for recent volunteers continuing to give time in the next 12 months are the organisation itself (52%) and the cause it stands for (50%).



93% of recent volunteers say they enjoy their volunteering.

Among people who had never volunteered but were interested in future volunteering opportunities, **42%** were interested in opportunities that looked fun and enjoyable to be part of.



WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED ABOUT ENGAGING VOLUNTEERS FOR THE FUTURE?

Positive experiences are likely to lead to continued participation

People are most likely to leave volunteering because of changes in circumstances, such as moving away or changing job. However, it is how people experience the different elements of the volunteering journey that is important for both their overall satisfaction and the likelihood that they will continue. This is true for all who have volunteered, regardless of who they are. Experience matters for future involvement.

Given that people tend to dip in and out of volunteering, the findings suggest a good quality volunteering experience will impact their likelihood to keep coming back over their lifetime.

There is potential for future engagement across all groups, with some transitions more challenging than others

The more recently people have volunteered, the more likely they are to say they will volunteer again. Given that there is a risk of overburdening the most involved volunteers, the research indicates that the most potential for shifting engagement levels are among those who have recently volunteered but not very frequently, and those who have volunteered in the past. However, if we are to tackle the issue of diversity in volunteering, we will need to explore how best to reach those who have never volunteered and invest in these efforts too.

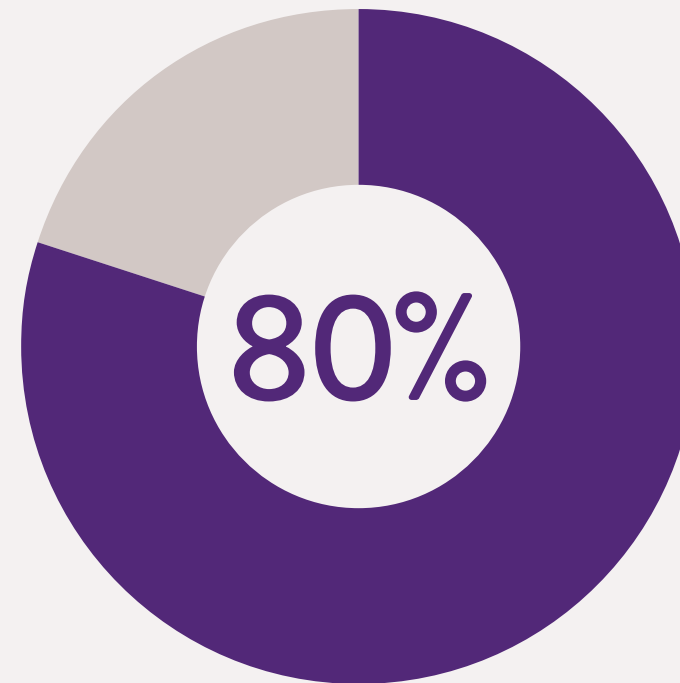
A significant proportion of those who have never volunteered through a group, club or organisation say that they are not interested in future opportunities to do so. However, some are – this highlights that there is potential to widen engagement regardless of their past involvement, even if this may be a more challenging task.

Some people have never thought about volunteering – taking a ‘first step’ is key

Wherever people are at now, tackling existing barriers is likely to be a step-by-step process. For those who are not currently volunteering, a key part of this is encouraging them to take a first step – either back into volunteering or for the first time. It is the latter that is the most challenging.

As one of the main barriers for those who have never volunteered is that they have never thought about it, raising awareness of volunteering may encourage them to start volunteering for the first time. But providing opportunities that resonate with people’s own lives and aspirations, and ensuring they can shape the way they get involved are as important as raising awareness.

Most recent volunteers say they are likely to continue volunteering with their main organisation in the next 12 months.



Among those who have never volunteered, one of the most frequently cited reasons for not getting involved is that they have never thought about it (19%).



48%

Almost half of those who had never been involved say ‘nothing in particular would encourage me to get involved’.

1/3

of recent volunteers unlikely to continue giving time say it’s because of changing circumstances



Around

1 in 5

lapsed volunteers (who volunteered 1-3 years ago) looked into volunteering opportunities in the last year.

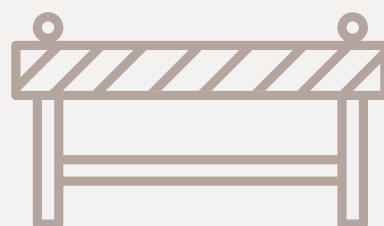


People are protective of their time, but opportunities that are meaningful to volunteers are likely to help overcome this initial barrier

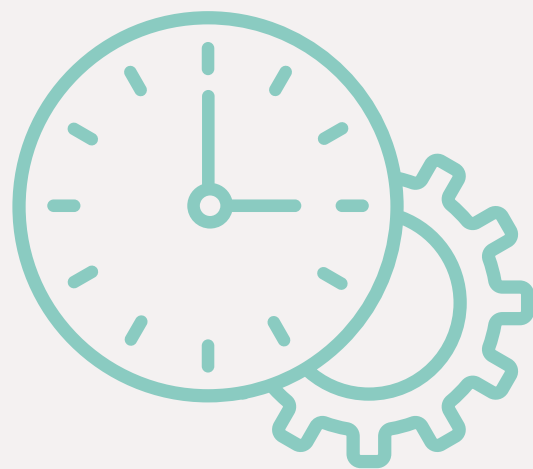
The issue of time is hard to ignore. The survey confirms well-known challenges around the perceived barrier of time and commitment. However, it is not simply a matter of 'not enough' time – a key barrier for those not volunteering is 'I do other things with my spare time.' Concerns about time and commitment seem to be most relevant before starting to volunteer, as once people are involved, most say they are happy with the flexibility they have and the expectations placed on them.

Potential volunteers want their volunteering to fit in with their lives and for their time to be worthwhile and purposeful. From a range of opportunities, those that attracted most interest include: ones where people can dip in and out of activities, make use of their existing skills and experience, combine with hobbies and interests, and which look fun and enjoyable to be part of. Opportunities to meet new people were also appealing. These are the types of opportunities that might help people reconsider how they prioritise their time.

The biggest barriers to volunteering (among those who have not volunteered in the last three years or ever) are:



Flexibility with the time committed is most likely (26%) to encourage people who have not volunteered recently or ever.



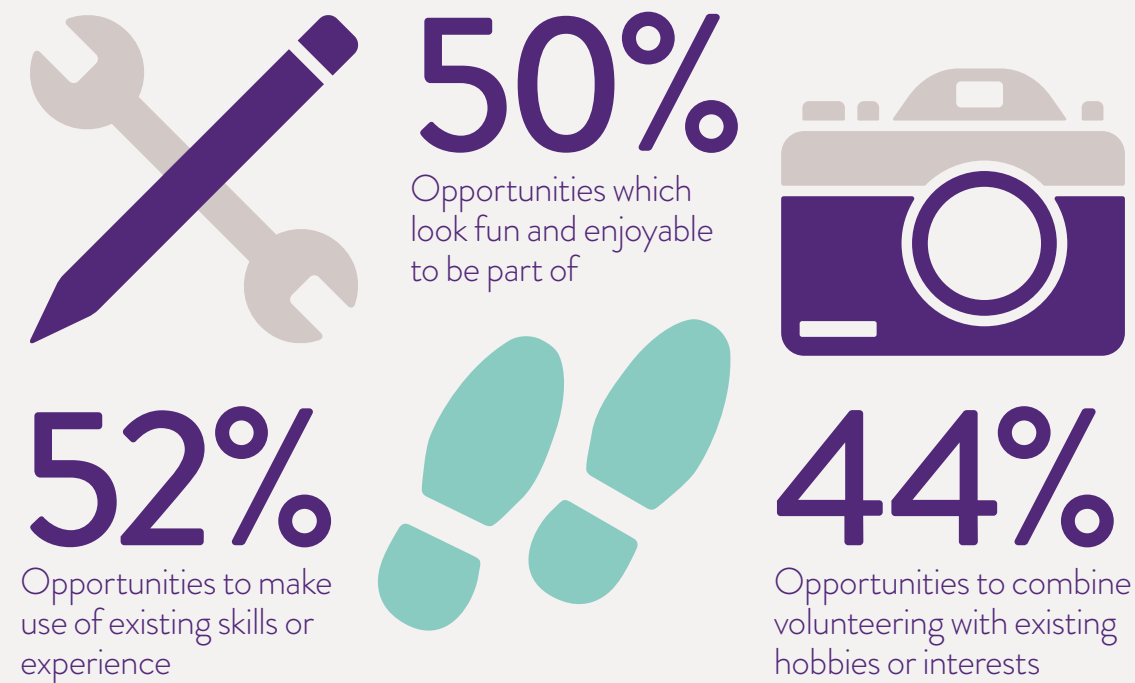
85% of recent volunteers agree the organisation they volunteered for is flexible about the time they give.

Among those interested in giving time over the next 12 months, a higher proportion are interested in dipping in and out of activities or getting involved in one-off events than giving time on a regular basis.

(Note, respondents could choose more than one)



Among those interested in future ways of getting involved, those which appeal most are:



WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED ABOUT WHAT A QUALITY VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE LOOKS LIKE?

The research suggests a number of key features that make up a quality experience for volunteers. Different journeys and context mean that some of these elements will be more relevant than others.



Inclusive

It is welcoming and accessible to all



Connected

It gives people a sense of connection to others, a cause and/or an organisation



Voluntary

It is the volunteer who has freely chosen to do it



Flexible

It takes into account how people who volunteer can give their time and fits around their circumstances



Balanced

It doesn't overburden those who volunteer with unnecessary processes



Meaningful

It resonates with people's lives, interests and priorities



Impactful

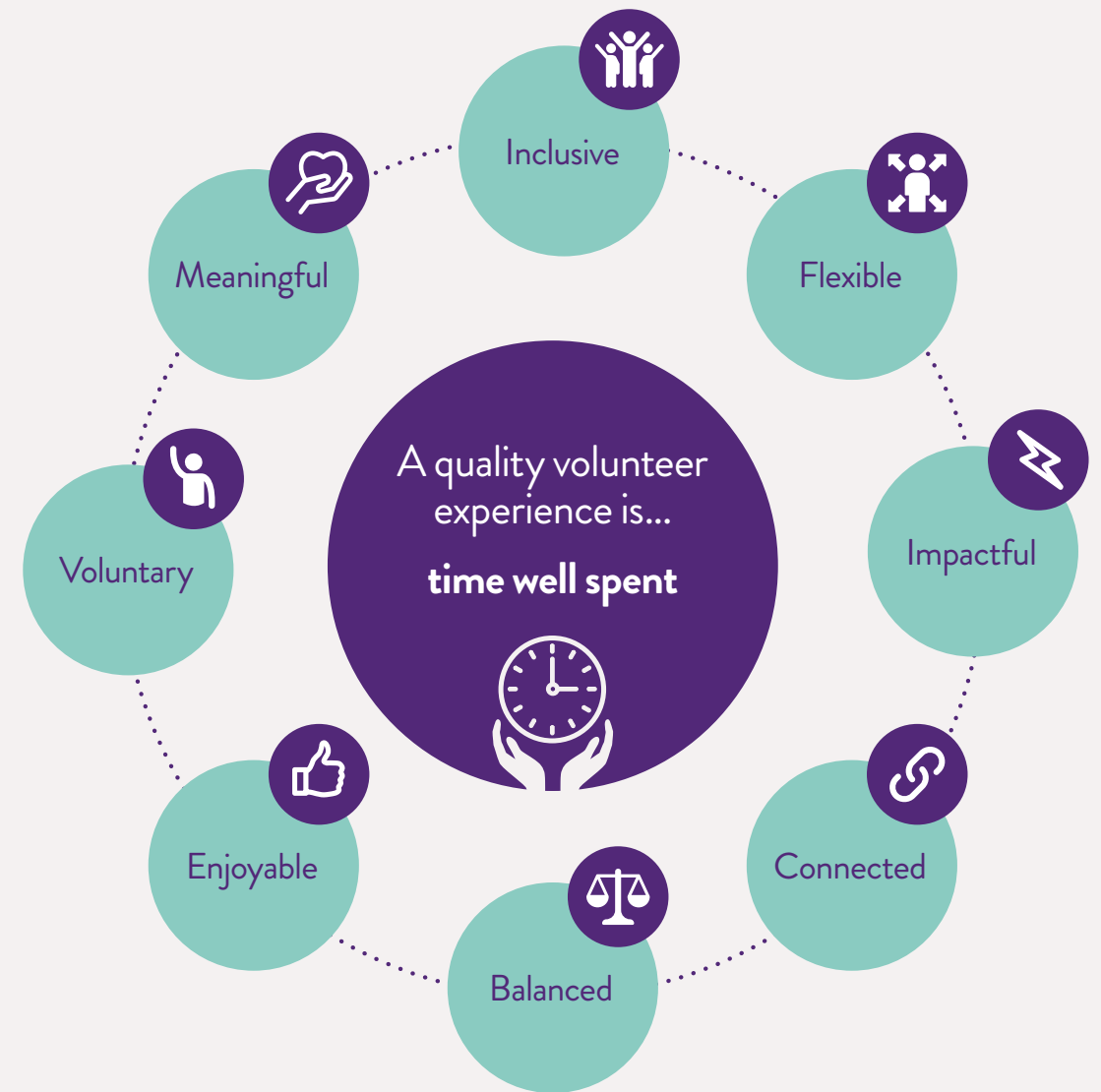
It makes a positive difference



Enjoyable

It provides enjoyment and people feel good about what they are doing

Across these different features, our overall conclusion is that, at its best, volunteering is time well spent. It is positive that most people who volunteer seem to agree, and more can be done to reassure potential volunteers that their time will be well spent.



WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR PRACTICE AND POLICY?

In this section, we have identified a number of areas for organisations to think about if they want to support people in having a quality volunteer experience. We have also looked at what the findings might mean for policy, in the context of current societal trends.

We focus first on practice, because the way organisations engage with current and potential volunteers can make a real difference to people's experience and whether they sustain their involvement. However, there is a role for policy makers in ensuring that the wider environment is conducive to people wanting to get involved and in thinking how structural barriers to participation might be addressed.




WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR PRACTICE?

The complex and dynamic nature of participation highlighted in this research strongly suggests that volunteering is shaped by a multitude of factors and that there is no single lever that will result in more and better participation.

However, we suggest volunteer-involving organisations should consider what we think are the eight key features of a quality experience and what they might mean for the way organisations engage with current and potential volunteers.

We also consider how these organisational responses might impact on the volunteer experience. These are based on our research findings and have been developed through workshops with different stakeholders.

This was important in grounding the research in practice and the daily experience of organisations.

	Volunteer-involving organisations could consider...	Impact on volunteer experience
Inclusive 	Offering inclusive volunteering opportunities and experience <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making it easy to get involved (eg taster sessions) • Reaching out to different people using a range of recruitment methods (eg supporting beneficiaries to volunteer, peer recruitment, working with community and faith organisations) • Creating a culture that actively encourages equality, diversity and inclusion • Talking about volunteering and volunteers in a way that people can engage with • Encouraging volunteers to bring their lived experience to their role • Ensuring online and offline volunteering opportunities are accessible and well-supported 	Potential volunteers feel they can give volunteering a go to see if it's for them, have a range of accessible opportunities open to them and feel welcomed whoever they are.
Flexible 	Creating volunteer journeys that can adapt to the variety of volunteers and their life circumstances <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening to what existing and potential volunteers are looking for and want to offer, not just thinking about what the organisation needs • Recognising the common values volunteers share as well as their differences • Managing volunteers' expectations, signposting volunteers to other organisations so that their willingness to give time is not wasted • Giving volunteers the opportunities to shape their journeys with flexibility to change or leave their role • Providing a 'good exit' for any volunteers who leave, and keeping the door open for them to come back again 	Volunteers feel that they are listened to and that the organisation is trying to fit their needs and offering different options. If they stop, they are left feeling they have had a good experience and could come back.

	Volunteer-involving organisations could consider...	Impact on volunteer experience
Impactful 	Maximising the impact volunteering has on volunteers and on those they help <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Valuing and recognising volunteers in a variety of ways, and communicating this to volunteers and others • Assessing the impact of volunteers' contributions, with something concrete to demonstrate this • Contributing to changing the culture around the value of volunteering • Investing in supporting volunteers to do the best they can in their role • Valuing the role of volunteer coordinators or managers (where applicable) in supporting volunteers 	Volunteers feel they are making a difference, and the organisation supports them in this.
Connected 	Strengthening the connections that are at the heart of volunteering <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitating opportunities for volunteers to meet and socialise with others • Creating structures that are designed to enable volunteers' voices to be heard, and volunteers be part of the organisation • Thinking about different ways to connect people to the organisation, to others and to the activities they participate in • Thinking about how to help connect those who might otherwise feel excluded 	Volunteers feel connected and a part of the organisation, with opportunities to meet people and have a voice.
Balanced 	Ensuring an appropriate level of formalisation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thinking about how to be proportionate in what the organisation does and how it's done • Explaining why any processes are in place (where necessary) • Promoting ways of making volunteering roles rewarding • Distinguishing volunteering roles from paid roles and focusing on what makes volunteering different 	Volunteers feel valued and not overburdened by the demands of the organisation – and understand why processes are in place.
Enjoyable 	Trying to make the experience enjoyable for volunteers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting volunteer opportunities in a way that means potential volunteers will look forward to being part of the organisation • Taking an interest in volunteers and what they want to get from volunteering • Supporting volunteers and ensuring they know how to raise an issue if needed 	Volunteers enjoy taking part and feel supported in their contributions.
Voluntary 	Ensuring volunteering feels truly voluntary at all times <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Checking in on volunteers, especially the most involved, to avoid burnout • Not putting pressure on volunteers and ensuring they feel free to leave • Regularly discussing volunteers' roles with them to see if their expectations are being met 	Volunteers feel they give time on their own terms and can choose to change or stop giving their time.
Meaningful 	Supporting volunteers to give time in ways that are meaningful to them <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trying to engage with volunteers to understand what is important to them • Supporting them to find a way to give time in a fulfilling way • Matching roles with what people want to give and their offer of time • Being transparent about volunteer roles • Giving feedback on how people make a difference • Managing people's expectations to avoid disappointment 	Volunteers feel their volunteering is fulfilling and resonates with what matters to them, and the organisation supports them in this.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR POLICY?

Our research raises a number of broader questions and issues that we believe are of wider public interest. Below, we focus on some key topical issues and identify questions to stimulate discussion about the challenges and opportunities for volunteer-involving organisations, government and civil society more broadly.

Diversity

Our findings suggest that access to volunteering opportunities is unequal. People from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and people with a lower level of educational attainment, are less likely to get involved as volunteers, which we conclude is to their disadvantage. Moreover, disabled people and those from a BAME community seem to have a less positive experience for some aspects of their volunteering than non-disabled and white volunteers.

- Diversity is a much-discussed topic in society, including in charities, but discussions frequently focus on paid staff. Is there more that we can do to raise the debate about volunteering and diversity, particularly if we think that unequal access to opportunities is entrenching disadvantage or harming social mobility?

- It is widely recognised that creating good quality volunteering opportunities requires investment. However, organisations that might be best placed to support greater involvement in communities where volunteering rates are relatively low rarely have the capacity to invest. How can we provide support to build capacity in areas where fewer people are getting involved, such as BAME organisations?
- Where disabled people are less positive about their experience, is this related to the attitudes of others or a lack of reasonable adjustments? Are there variations by different impairments or conditions? And would an 'Access to Volunteering' fund – as NCVO has previously called for – provide a mechanism for improving the volunteering experience for disabled people?

Youth social action

Different age groups have different expectations over what good volunteering looks like. Much attention has been given to encouraging young people to volunteer. Yet, it is those in the 18–24 age bracket who are more likely to stop volunteering.

- Are schemes aimed at young people too focused on employment prospects and opportunity, when other motivations might be more enduring over time?
- When considering new initiatives and funding, how can we ensure that young people are able to shape opportunities?

Loneliness

While loneliness and isolation are two separate concepts, the link between them helps us to see how volunteering can create connectedness and potentially reduce loneliness. Feeling connected is a key part of the volunteer experience; making new connections is both a motivator and an impact of volunteering.

- Certain groups are more likely to feel lonely than others, including younger people, older people and disabled people. How can we ensure that volunteering opportunities that connect them to others are accessible and inclusive?
- Is enough weight placed on this aspect of volunteering when organisations are considered for funding? Are these outcomes given less importance than other easier-to-measure or 'higher-order' outcomes?

Localism

Volunteering is often embedded in local communities. Whilst there are many instances of collective action around communities of interest, people say they get involved primarily at a local level and in their own neighbourhoods.

- The shift to digital platforms for volunteer brokerage and support has occurred at a time when investment in local brokerage and support, particularly via volunteer centres, appears to be in decline. Does the evidence in this report suggest it is time to rethink the role of volunteer centres?

- Local initiatives such as Cities of Service and Tempo Time Credits have been successful in encouraging local participation. What can we learn from their development, particularly if we want to strengthen participation in places where engagement is relatively low?

Public services

Investment in programmes such as Q-Volunteering and Helpforce illustrate significant interest amongst funders and policy makers in widening the role of volunteers in public services. Although the majority of volunteers in the public sector have a positive experience, they are less likely to be satisfied and to continue volunteering than those volunteering for civil society. They are also more inclined to say their volunteering feels like paid work and that there is too much bureaucracy.

- As public services are subject to greater scrutiny over outcomes, processes and standards than other services, how can they balance this need in a proportionate way?
- What roles and tasks in public services are suitable for volunteers, considering that many value the flexibility to dip in and out of volunteering and want to volunteer on their own terms?
- Is there potential to encourage and support volunteering that is beneficial for public services and their users, but sits outside or between traditional and formal services?

Skills

Much emphasis has been placed on skills-based volunteering through employer-supported volunteering. Whilst a proportion of volunteers (particularly younger volunteers) want to gain skills through volunteering, the majority of people want to use the skills they have to give back to the community.

- With large employers committed to supporting employees' health and wellbeing as a part of the Civil Society Strategy, is there more scope to encourage time off for volunteering?
- How can employers support volunteering in a light-touch way that fits with what motivates volunteers?

Authors:

Amy McGarvey, Véronique Jochum,
John Davies, Joy Dobbs and Lisa Hornung

To read the full report visit:

www.ncvo.org.uk/timewellspent

NCVO

Society Building
8 All Saints Street
London N1 9RL

020 7713 6161

ncvo@ncvo.org.uk

ncvo.org.uk



NCVO100