

TIME WELL SPENT: VOLUNTEERING IN PUBLIC SERVICES RESEARCH OVERVIEW

June 2019

Introduction

This research will be published as the second in a series of reports focused on key themes from [Time Well Spent](#), NCVO research based on a national survey of over 10,000 people across Great Britain, looking at the volunteer experience. The aim of producing these thematic reports is to look at specific areas in more detail, building on the findings from *Time Well Spent* and drawing on both new and existing research.

This research on volunteering in public services is led by the NCVO research team, working with colleagues in the policy and volunteering development teams. The overall aim of the research is to inform practice and policy, and help support and improve the experience of public services volunteering and its impact. We are keen to hear from those working and volunteering in public services to help shape our research.

Defining the scope of the research

We recognise that volunteering in public services opens up a number of different avenues for exploration. However, because this research will take place over a time-limited period, it will *not* look to cover all aspects of this complex area. A summary of what is in and out of scope of the research is outlined below:

- As this report builds on *Time Well Spent*, the focus will be on exploring the **volunteer perspective**. Analysis of the *Time Well Spent* data so far has raised some interesting questions already. This additional research will allow us to dig deeper into some of these issues.
- This research will focus solely on where volunteers are involved directly by public sector organisations that are funded by government to provide services. To ensure a manageable scope, this research will not include volunteering through charities where it intersects with public services, whether it be where charities which are commissioned by public bodies to deliver services or where charities are organising for volunteers to go into services and supporting them (eg Friends of hospitals). We would, however, at the start of the report, detail the wider context and map out different types of volunteering in public services and situate our focus within this.

- This research will aim to look at a **range of sectors within public services**, for example - health, police, libraries, education and heritage, by recruiting volunteers for the qualitative research that reflect these varied settings and by drawing on literature relating to these sectors. It will not necessarily go into every sector in great depth, but will aim to draw out key similarities and differences.
- Within the broad subject of the volunteer experience, **particular areas will be explored**, which reflect gaps in evidence:
 - Motivations of public services volunteers
 - Relationship of volunteers with paid staff (and perceptions of some of the issues / debates relating to this relationship)
 - Boundaries between volunteering and paid work.

Research objectives

The primary objective of the research is to gain a better understanding of the experience of volunteers in public sector organisations, in particular their motivations, relationship with paid staff and boundaries with paid work.

Specifically, the research aims:

- To understand the **context and landscape of volunteering in public services**, including different sectors and settings, and activities undertaken
- To explore the **motivations among volunteers in public sector organisations**, including differences by demographics, type of organisation and impact of wider environment
- To look at the **experience of volunteers in public sector organisations, including the following**:
 - Their overall satisfaction and perceptions of different aspects of the volunteer journey
 - Perceptions of their role and boundaries between paid work and volunteering
 - How they perceive the benefit they bring to service users and citizens, to staff, and to the wider service or organisation
 - Relationship with paid staff and their views on issues relating to job substitution / displacement
- To **inform practice and policy** in this area.

Research approach and timings

There will be a number of stages for the research – we are aiming to publish the report in November.

Key stages of the research	Aim of each stage	Ongoing activities	Timings
1. Review existing evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To draw on what we already have to feed into the report To pull out more detail on specific sectors within public services 	7. Stakeholder engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inform and engage about the research Think about implications Support communications 	June-July
2. Further analysis of Time Well Spent data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To gain further insights from Time Well Spent on the volunteer perspective 		August-September
3. 3-4 focus groups with volunteers + analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To gather more in-depth understanding, based on areas of focus for this report 		September-October
4. Round table	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To think about implications based on emerging findings 		October-November
5. Writing report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To draw together findings in a report to be published 		November
6. Publishing and communicating report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To ensure it reaches and engage our key stakeholders 		

Next steps

We welcome any questions, comments and contributions to this research – in particular:

- Any suggestions of literature for our review of existing evidence
- Any key priorities or questions for us to include in our research with volunteers
- Any work your organisation is currently doing that relates to this research.

For all of the above, or if you would like us to keep you updated on the research as it progresses, please email our Senior Research Officer, Amy McGarvey at

amy.mcgarvey@ncvo.org.uk