

London Vision for Volunteering



A blueprint for developing volunteering in London

Written and prepared by Dominic Pinkney

March 2025

A message from Sir Stephen Fry

“It has long been a holy grail to find a way to tap the wisdom, experience, knowledge and willingness of millions of people out there who would like to volunteer in a sector in which they are confident to offer help, while making sure that this is achieved with safety, appropriate vetting, oversight and so on.

This report is an important step to keep the conversation alive and move towards structures and processes that can square that circle and really make a difference.”



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Foreword

Why I'm proud to champion volunteering in London

As a shy boy growing up in London, I needed someone who believed in me.

I found that in a volunteer at my local Cub Scout Pack. They saw and listened to me, encouraged me; helped me get on the right path.

Across our communities, volunteers are making an incredible difference. But we don't have enough of them.

That's why I so strongly welcome the London Vision for Volunteering.

Volunteering is kindness in action. Kindness costs nothing, but we need to make volunteers in London welcomed, valued and supported. We need to make it much easier for them, such as helping them have time off work to volunteer, and help them see the impact they're making.

Also I strongly endorse the vision to create a society where everyone feels they can own and contribute to their community.



Dwayne Fields
Chief Scout

Foreword (continued)



We need to work together and think smart about how we pool our resources across London, connecting networks, forming partnerships. We also need to work across our communities, drawing on each others' talents, backgrounds and lived experiences.

We need to inspire the next generation of volunteers too, which is why I welcome recommendations to support free travel for students who are volunteering, for example.

Volunteering brings out the best in us. It helps us shine brighter – and we feel better when we help others too.

I'm proud to champion volunteering in London, and thank you to everyone who has contributed to this valuable work.

Dwayne Fields
Chief Scout



A Blueprint to Develop Volunteering

The aim of this report is not to be a definitive plan with all-knowing recommendations but a plan that will deliver a significant, comprehensive and confident step change.

It is a blueprint to develop volunteering in London.

The report's 36 recommendations will make significant progress but recognise there are many areas where further work and research is needed and others that will take time to achieve. Therefore, this report contains a full list of recommendations as well as a priority list of those to tackle first.

This report is ambitious in wanting to significantly move the needle of volunteering but is grounded in reality and acknowledges and embraces that a lot of this change will only occur by influencing outside the voluntary and community sector. It has important, practical and reasoned recommendations that will make a difference to volunteering London.

I am pleased and proud to boast that this report has been a truly collaborative effort and has had the input of volunteering stakeholders in each and every London borough.

Huge thanks goes to all the individuals, organisations and businesses who took the time to engage with this work and share their knowledge, experience and suggestions. We look forward to moving to the next stage of implementing these recommendations.



Dominic Pinkney

London Vision for Volunteering
Programme Lead



Why this plan is needed

It may be obvious to say, but it is often forgotten that there is no voluntary sector without volunteers. This leads to the work and contribution of volunteers being significantly undervalued and under-appreciated. Volunteering is sometimes seen as a “nice to have”, as something extra, like the icing on the cake of society. You take away the icing and it is still a good cake. This perception is wrong. Volunteering is not the icing of society; it is a key ingredient of the cake itself.

Volunteers are the lifeblood of not just the voluntary and community sector but play a key part in how London and British society functions. If all people who volunteer, in whatever way, formally or informally, stopped giving their time, London’s society would very quickly grind to a halt:

- Health and care
- Education
- Faith/religion
- Housing
- Emergency response/Community resilience
- Defence/military
- Sports
- Law and justice
- Politics
- Arts and culture
- Community groups, clubs & events
- Charities

Decline in Volunteering

With volunteering being a key ingredient of London society we therefore need to have a plan to support and develop it, particularly at a time when rates of formal volunteering are dropping. National, regional and local research as well as an abundance of anecdotal evidence shows that rates of formal volunteering are on the decline across the UK, including London.

NCVO’s [UK Civil Society Almanac 2024](#) reports that formal volunteering has declined since the pandemic from 2020 to 2022. Very recent research analysis using Scottish Household Survey 2023 data, shows that formal volunteering in Scotland has [dropped by more than a third since the pandemic](#).

From national charities and public sector organisations through to small charities and community groups, recruiting and retaining volunteers has become a big issue. For example, around 50% of the volunteer managers we engaged said it was harder to recruit volunteers compared to before the pandemic.

Methodology

The production of this report has been a fully collaborative process and its recommendations are based on the views and feedback of stakeholders across London, with contributions from every single borough. The aim was not to produce all encompassing research on every aspect of volunteering but to engage and gather stakeholders and practitioners together to form recommendations to enable the development of volunteering based on the intelligence and experience of people who are involved in volunteering.

The project began in May 2024 with Dominic Pinkney from Works4U (with support from Hammersmith & Fulham Volunteer Centre and Volunteer Centre Camden) as the programme lead with the London Volunteering Strategy Group (LVSG) acting as the Steering Group. The LVSG Steering Group of volunteering stakeholders met monthly to review and contribute to the programme's development and help inform final recommendations.

We designed a process that allowed us to proceed at pace but also allowed input from stakeholders across all three sectors. We engaged and carried out one-to-one interviews, group sessions and workshops as well as tailored surveys to various stakeholders: Volunteer Managers, Trustees, Londoners and Employee Volunteering. Our work was promoted through social media, including a dedicated LinkedIn group and PR with two articles in the voluntary sector press.

In carrying out this work we were very aware that people and organisations will have an interest in and want to contribute to the plan and recommendations but do not have a lot of time to do so. To give further opportunity for input and feedback, we published a draft report with recommendations for consultation between 5th December and 24th January. With the responses to this draft report we have produced the recommendations in this final report.



London Volunteering Strategy Group

The London Volunteering Strategy Group (LVSG) was formed in 2021 and is a group of volunteering stakeholders who have been working together to look at how volunteering can be strategically developed across London. In carrying out the work of this report, this group has grown and represents a very engaged, expert and diverse collaboration of volunteer stakeholders who have given their time to oversee the work of this programme and report. LVSG met to oversee and support this project on a monthly basis between June 2024 and February 2025.

LVSG members include:

Association of Volunteer Managers
 Bexley Voluntary Service Council
 Big Local
 Black Cultural Archives
 Canal & River Trust
 Caritas Westminster
 City St George's, University of London
 Disability Action in Islington
 Dr Kush Kanodia
 Family Volunteering Club
 Greater London Authority
 Groundwork London
 H4All
 Hammersmith & Fulham Volunteer Centre
 Haringey Community Collaborative
 Havering Volunteer Centre
 Heritage Volunteering Group
 Home-Start London
 Imperial Health Charity

The Ismaili Council for the UK
 Isolation Help Bexley
 Jewish Volunteering Network
 Kings College London
 Lewisham Local
 LGBT Consortium
 London Boroughs Faiths Network
 London Councils
 London Plus
 Mind in Enfield and Barnet
 NCVO
 One Westminster
 Providence Row
 Public Voice
 Roman Catholic Diocese of Westminster
 RNLI
 Royal Voluntary Service
 Scope
 UKHarvest-Nourish Hub

Victim Support
 Volunteer Centre Greenwich
 Volunteering Matters
 West London NHS Trust
 YOU London



9th September 2024 LVSG Session (room kindly provided by Camden Council)

London Vision for Volunteering

For this programme we have used the **vision statement** for volunteering in London created by the London Volunteering Strategy Group (LVSG) in 2022:

‘To create a society where everyone feels they own and can contribute to their community’

Recommendations



“I am delighted to see the launch of the London Vision for Volunteering report which highlights the opportunities ahead and makes recommendations on how to improve the way volunteering is delivered and prioritised across London. The GLA will continue to work with partners on removing barriers and expanding volunteering opportunities as we build a better, more connected and fairer London for everyone.”

Dr Debbie Weekes-Bernard

Deputy Mayor for Communities and Social Justice

"Although the volunteer army is large, and its benefits enormous, it has been shrinking since Covid and has been systematically under-invested in over many years. This excellent report makes some ambitious but practical recommendations for unlocking more of the deep untapped lake of potential in volunteering."

Andy Haldane

**CEO of Royal Society of Arts and former
Chief Economist at Bank of England**



Recommendations

The following 36 recommendations together form a blueprint to develop volunteering across the capital. They have been divided into thematic sections and the priority list of recommendations to tackle first can found on page 17 and the detailed rationale for the recommendations begins on page 24.

DBS/Safeguarding

- 1 - Detailed and clear online DBS guidance for eligibility for volunteers**
- 2 - Greater promotion of and user guidance for DBS Update Service**
2(b) A more proactive DBS Update Service
- 3 - Consistent safeguarding messaging/guidance from DBS, CQC and Ofsted regarding involving volunteers**
- 4 - Free DBS checking for volunteer-involving organisations**

Funding & Investment

- 5 - Funders to reevaluate their support for volunteering costs, from volunteer expenses to salaries of volunteer management, recognising it as a proper profession**
- 6 - More research into the impact and benefits of volunteering to society**
- 7 - Dedicated funding to involve Londoners who need more support to carry out volunteering**

See further recommendations below regarding funding for specific areas such as raising the profile of volunteering and infrastructure.



Recommendations (2)

Value and Impact of Volunteering

8 - Create a quick and easy to use best practice tool to calculate the monetary/economic value of volunteering

8(b) The voluntary and community sector embrace the need for monetary/economic calculations but only for the purpose of influencing those outside the sector

9 - London and/or Central Government adopt some of the recommendations in the Pro Bono Economics civil society satellite account report, in particular we have highlighted the following:

- 1A - Establish a satellite account for civil society in the UK so that its contribution to the economy can be measured and recognised
- 1B - Include a measure of volunteering in the satellite account, to ensure more of the economic contribution of the civil society sector is accurately reflected
- 2 - Produce the civil society satellite account annually, with a short lag after the end of the reference year, so that data remains up-to-date
- 3D - Include volunteer time in the 'Do now' iteration of the civil society satellite account, using data from the Community Life Survey and shadow wages to estimate the value of volunteer time

10 - Central government considers the new analysis on the value and impact of volunteering and implements changes to monitor and support it, as it already does for other areas that bring a similar impact, e.g. manufacturing or health.

Volunteer stakeholders suggest central government implements some or all of the following:

- (i) Create a dedicated government department to volunteering or the voluntary and community sector with a Minister of Volunteering
- (ii) Appoint an independent volunteer expert advisor to support the government (UK and/or London)
- (iii) Fund activities to monitor and research into volunteering and its impact
- (iv) Give support to an independent body to promote volunteering in London/UK
- (vi) Appoint a Chief Volunteer or similar Volunteer Ambassador role to promote volunteering



Recommendations (3)

Raising the Profile of Volunteering

- 11 - Creation of independent body or initiative whose focus is to raise the profile of volunteering
- 12 - Funding to support large scale marketing of volunteering

Flexible Volunteering

- 13 - London volunteer involving organisations to continue to adapt to be able to involve more flexible volunteer roles
- 14 - Focus and funding to enable volunteer infrastructure organisations to help volunteer involving organisations adapt to flexible volunteering

Volunteer Management

- 15 - More free tailored best practice support for Volunteer Managers
- 16 - Volunteer involving organisations to look at their recruitment processes to ensure timely responses with accessible and flexible application processes
- 17 - Support and guidance for organisations with a surplus or waiting list of volunteers to encourage and connect with other volunteering

Volunteer Infrastructure

- 18 - Volunteering infrastructure requires sustained investment
 - 18(b) Local authorities to look to other departments to support infrastructure investment, e.g. community resilience/emergency response
- 19 - Funders to consider core infrastructure services as part of their grant making



Recommendations (4)

Employee Volunteering

- 20 - Produce and promote best practice guidance for employee volunteering
- 21 - Research into whether government incentives would make a positive difference to employee volunteering
- 22 - Large marketing campaigns to promote employee volunteering and its benefits for businesses and the community
- 23 - Create an infrastructure for employee volunteering

Trustees

- 24 - Charities to recruit trustees through formal and open methods to help create more diverse and representative boards
- 25 - More free to low cost training for trustee boards, creating a framework of trustee training
- 26 - More support networks for trustees (local and London-wide)
- 27 - More promotion of the trustee role
- 28 - Increase support from the Charities Commission, including reducing regulatory burden for charities



Recommendations (5)

Health Volunteering

- 29 - NHS England to work with London volunteer infrastructure to see how their new national brokerage platform can connect with established brokerage platforms and websites
- 30 - North Central London and South East London NHS systems supported by Volunteering for Health funded programme (2024-27) to share learning with rest of London
- 31 - London's Integrated Care Boards to look at investing in volunteer infrastructure to support the development of volunteering to support their priorities and objectives

Student Volunteering, Technology, Community Resilience, Language

- 32 - Subsidies or free travel for students whilst volunteering
- 33 - Further investigation if a standardised volunteer portal for London is possible through providing local volunteer infrastructure organisations a system for free
- 34 - Funders to look at how longer-term support can be provided to the voluntary and community sector to establish integration of local communities into emergency response
- 35 - Volunteer involving organisations to be aware of use of terminology and language when referring to and promoting volunteering opportunities and within the recruitment process

London Volunteering Strategy Group

- 36 - Continue funding for the London Volunteering Strategy Group to oversee and support the implementation of these recommendations



Priority Recommendations

The London Vision for Volunteering
**‘contains so much that I have
advocated for many years. The
recommendations are really
positive and are sensibly
directed to encourage, promote
and support volunteering.’**



Margaret Casely-Hayford CBE
Lawyer, business person & Patron of
Girls Brigade Ministries

Priority Recommendations

Of the 36 recommendations the following have been identified to tackle first.

DBS/Safeguarding

1 - Detailed and clear online DBS guidance for eligibility for volunteers

2 - Greater promotion of and user guidance for DBS Update Service

Having similar DBS guidance for volunteers as exists for employees will make a massive difference, reduce confusion and help speed up the onboarding process. We are certain voluntary and community sector organisations will be able to help DBS, if needed, to produce this guidance.

Many volunteer managers were unaware of the DBS Update Service and greater promotion of it will lead to efficiencies in volunteer management.

Funding & Investment

5 - Funders to reevaluate their support for volunteering costs, from volunteer expenses to salaries of volunteer management, recognising it as a proper profession

19 - Funders to consider core infrastructure services as part of their grant making

This will help volunteer involving organisations to have properly resourced volunteer programmes and for volunteer managers to be remunerated in a way that recognises their role as a profession.

As core volunteer infrastructure services are only currently funded by local authorities and City Bridge Foundation this puts them permanently at risk and less able to be more financially independent and sustainable. Through funders enabling core infrastructure services to be eligible to apply for it would help make volunteer infrastructure organisations more financially secure.

Priority Recommendations (2)

Value and Impact of Volunteering

8 - Create a quick and easy to use best practice tool to calculate the monetary/economic value of volunteering

This relatively simple and quick action could make one of the biggest differences of all the recommendations in this report. The key for this to be successful is to get endorsements from funders and local/regional authorities that the tool created is an acceptable way of calculating the monetary/economic value of volunteering. With an accepted tool, this will quickly lead to a huge growth of this data across London/UK which will help enable other recommendations to move forward.

Flexible Volunteering

13 - London volunteer involving organisations to continue to adapt to be able to involve more flexible volunteer roles

14 - Focus and funding to enable volunteer infrastructure organisations to help volunteer involving organisations adapt to flexible volunteering

There is not a one-size-fits all approach for flexible volunteering, with different organisations having to adapt on their own to meet their requirements. Therefore, due to the individual nature of adapting to flexible volunteering, volunteer infrastructure organisations will continue to need to play a key support role for charities and groups.

Priority Recommendations (3)

Employee Volunteering

20 - Produce and promote best practice guidance for employee volunteering

23 - Create an infrastructure for employee volunteering

For both charities/groups and businesses, best practice guidance for carrying out employee volunteering will help increase the impact of this activity.

Creating an infrastructure for employee volunteering would need to be planned and thought through carefully to ensure it enhances and brings together current provision. If done right, this has the potential to create a massive step change in the levels and impact of employee volunteering in London.

Trustees

24 - Charities to recruit trustees through formal and open methods to help create more diverse and representative boards

25 - More free to low cost training for trustee boards, creating a framework of trustee training

26 - More support networks for trustees (local and London-wide)

27 - More promotion of the trustee role

Stakeholders recognised that charities can do more to have open recruitment methods to find new trustees. More free/low cost training will help London trustees to be more effective and impactful in their role which leads to more effective charities that better help Londoners. Creating support networks for trustees needs to be increased to at least the level of support for volunteer managers. Peer networking for example, at a local and/or London level will enable trustees to share knowledge and experience to help them run charities better. Stakeholders across London stated very strongly that much more needs to be done to raise the profile of the trustee role and helping people to understand what it actually is and entails will make a dramatic difference in the level and diversity of trustees in London.

Priority Recommendations (4)

Health Volunteering

29 - NHS England to work with London volunteer infrastructure to see how their new national brokerage platform can connect with established brokerage platforms and websites

30 - North Central London and South East London NHS systems supported by Volunteering for Health funded programme (2024-27) to share learning with rest of London

Joining up volunteer brokerage platforms and related work makes it easier for Londoners to find volunteer roles but will also be a win:win for both NHS and volunteer infrastructure organisations to work together and cross promote volunteering. London Plus are committed to supporting the sharing of learning through their networks.

London Volunteer Involving Organisations

16 - Volunteer involving organisations to look at their recruitment processes to ensure timely responses with accessible and flexible application processes

17 - Support and guidance for organisations with a surplus or waiting list of volunteers to encourage and connect with other volunteering

35 - Volunteer involving organisations to be aware of use of terminology and language when referring to and promoting volunteering opportunities and within the recruitment process

Londoners reported that slow responses by volunteer involving organisations was a real turn off and that quick responses, even if to just say 'we are busy but thank you for your interest and we will get back to you soon' were appreciated. Having standardised and best practice messages for organisations with a surplus or waiting list of volunteers will help direct them to other opportunities that may be of interest. The message is clear from Londoners that volunteer involving organisations need to pay more attention to language and terminology when recruiting.

Priority Recommendations (5)

Implementation

36 - Continue funding for the London Volunteering Strategy Group to oversee and support the implementation of these recommendations

Implementing the plan of recommendations contained in this report will be a long process and is not the responsibility of any single person or organisation. It is going to require a coordinated and collaborative effort to achieve many of the recommendations.

The London Volunteering Strategy Group acted as the steering group for this programme of work and has built great momentum as well as grown in number of members since the start until the production of this report. It is an expert, engaged and diverse group of London volunteer stakeholders who have not just steered this work but have played a crucial role in promoting and connecting it with their wide networks across the capital. It would clearly be advantageous to draw on this fantastic group to carry on its brilliant work to help oversee and support the implementation of the recommendations.

‘Volunteers are the backbone of any charity. Their time, energy, and dedication are invaluable in driving our mission forward. At CC Foundation, we’ve seen firsthand how volunteers help us reach more people and create a bigger impact. Without them, achieving our goals simply wouldn’t be possible.’



Fekky

**Lewisham rapper and founder
of charity CC Foundation**

Photo © Greg Barnes/RedBull.com

Cross Cutting Themes

Through the engagement work with stakeholders, key issues and themes were identified that cut across many areas related to volunteering. Through making development in these cross-cutting themes, it will make a big impact in all aspects of volunteering in London:

- **DBS/Safeguarding**
- **Funding and investment**
- **Value and impact of volunteering**
- **Raising the profile of volunteering**
- **Flexible Volunteering**



DBS/Safeguarding (Cross-cutting theme)

Involving volunteers into your organisation or group will require safeguarding considerations and, in many instances, some level of Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check will be needed. The feedback from Volunteer Managers in London is that the guidance and process of DBS checking acts as an unnecessarily confusing barrier that delays or prevents volunteers being involved.

London Volunteer Managers have made it clear that changes to DBS guidelines and processes will make it easier for more volunteers to be involved in the capital.

There is a lack of awareness of the DBS Update Service, which is free for volunteers and applies for Standard and Enhanced DBS checking. It allows volunteers to give volunteer involving organisations' permission to check if anything's changed on their certificates. It allows a volunteer to see who has checked their certificate and they can take it on to their next volunteer involving organisation unless that organisation requires a different level of certificate.

Recommendations

1 - Detailed and clear online DBS guidance for eligibility for volunteers

The government's online DBS guidance only relates to employees and so this creates confusion for volunteer involving organisations (of all sizes) of whether and what level of DBS a volunteer may need. Having similar DBS guidance for volunteers will make a massive difference, reduce confusion and help speed up the onboarding process. We are certain voluntary and community sector organisations will be able to help DBS, if needed, to produce this guidance.

DBS/Safeguarding (2)

2 - Greater promotion of and user guidance for DBS Update Service

2(b) A more proactive DBS Update Service

59% of volunteer managers engaged as part of this process suggested creating a DBS checking service similar to the Driving Licence check where approved organisations could check a single DBS. The current DBS Update Service works similar to this but is reliant on volunteers to set this up so creating greater awareness and support for volunteer managers to encourage their volunteers to sign up to this free service would make a difference. The current Update Service is passive, but if it were to be made proactive it would be a big help to volunteer managers, for example any changes to a volunteer's DBS certificate, with their consent, could be immediately notified to the relevant volunteering involving organisation.

3 - Consistent safeguarding messaging/guidance from DBS, CQC and Ofsted regarding involving volunteers

Many volunteer managers reported that they had been given or seen inconsistent safeguarding messaging from DBS, Care Quality Commission (CQC) and Ofsted about involving volunteers. Others said the messaging was also inconsistent from central government and local government.

4 - Free DBS checking for volunteer-involving organisations

Any cost acts as a barrier for organisations wanting to involve volunteers and so by making it completely free for volunteering it will likely increase the number of volunteers being involved or would reduce the potential safeguarding issues where organisations or groups do not request a DBS check.



Funding & Investment (Cross-cutting theme)

A repeated comment through engaging volunteer stakeholders for this programme and report was that more funding was needed for volunteering:

- Volunteer expenses
- Volunteer management
- Supported volunteering – helping those who need more support to volunteer
- DBS checks
- Volunteer brokerage and management technology
- Best practice support
- Volunteer infrastructure
- Promoting and recognising volunteering

More funding in each of the above would enable more volunteering to take place, meaning charities and groups have increased capacity and more Londoners will benefit. It is also recognised that to achieve more funding in any of these areas, strong data on the value and impact of volunteering is needed to justify the increased level of expenditure which is addressed in the value and impact of volunteering section below.

Volunteer Managers engaged through this programme stated ‘funding to support volunteering’ as the number one area for improvement and development of volunteering in London

“I think there should be a national fund to help people with the expenses of being a volunteer, travel, food for the time you give, or even a stipend especially to encourage DEI diversity, equality and inclusion into our charities.”



Funding & Investment (2)

Recommendations

5 - Funders to reevaluate their support for volunteering costs, from volunteer expenses to salaries of volunteer management, recognising it as a proper profession

This will help volunteer involving organisations to have properly resourced volunteer programmes and for volunteer managers to be remunerated in a way that recognises their role as a profession.

6 - More research into the impact and benefits of volunteering to society

This is an under-researched area and having more independent analysis of the real contribution of volunteering to society can only help decision-makers as well as encouraging more people to volunteer.

7 - Dedicated funding to involve Londoners who need more support to carry out volunteering

Reduced funding and resources for more than ten years has led to the near exclusion of involving volunteers who need more support to carry out their volunteering. Some stakeholders have suggested introducing an 'Access to Volunteering' fund to ensure volunteering is accessible to all.

See further recommendations below regarding funding for specific areas such as raising the profile of volunteering and infrastructure.



Value and Impact of Volunteering (Cross-cutting theme)

Not being able to clearly and easily demonstrate the impact and value of volunteering holds back the development and investment in many aspects of volunteering, perhaps in all areas.

Establishing the value of volunteering has not only the barrier of no clear accepted calculation formula(s) but also has resistance from volunteer managers and other practitioners who find it unpleasant and contra to the intention behind volunteering to put a monetary value on it. One volunteer manager in an engagement session for this project described doing such calculations “feels dirty”. Others expressed concern that doing this could undervalue volunteering.

'Volunteers don't get paid, not because they're worthless, but because they're priceless'

Sherry Anderson

The intention behind this oft-used quote by Sherry Anderson is powerful, but is useless to, for example, a local authority commissioner having to make very difficult decisions about what can be funded from a limited budget.

Although volunteering is people giving the gift of their time for free, volunteering almost always has a cost to enable that volunteering to take place. Where there are costs, there is also the need to justify the need and return on investment of such expenditure. Volunteering has very little of this data and information and so those in power deciding on whether expenditure should be made on volunteering (e.g. local authorities, funders etc.) are often doing so based on their subjective understanding of the importance of volunteering rather than strong evidence. Whether this understanding is strong or weak can have a huge impact on the level of investment that takes place in volunteering.

Therefore, if clear data can be produced that shows the value of volunteering brings and its impact, decision-makers can use this to make informed choices about financially supporting and investing in volunteering.

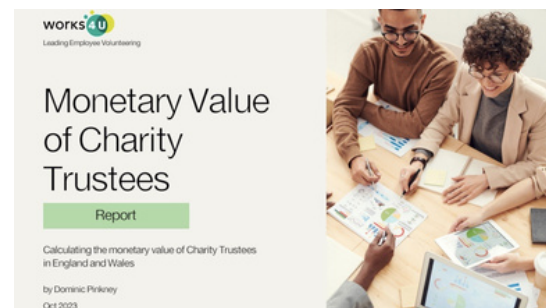


Value and Impact of Volunteering (2)

Although some volunteer managers are concerned that performing these type of calculations may undervalue the true impact of volunteering, the current situation of not having this data is already leading to undervaluing of volunteering by decision-makers. Many gave feedback that volunteering is '**woefully undervalued**' in our society.

There is, of course, a difference between value and impact. The term 'monetary value' is used to show what would be the value of the volunteering if it was paid for and 'economic value' is the benefits to the person carrying out the volunteering as well as the benefits created through carrying out the volunteering, i.e. impact, in addition to the monetary value. Therefore, the economic value is a figure that gives a truer contribution of volunteering but is also more difficult to calculate.

Works4U's 'Monetary Value of Trustees' report published in 2023 makes the case for the monetary value of the role of trustees and uses this data to extrapolate to estimate the value of all volunteering. For London the report argues that the monetary value of all volunteering is £35.9 billion per year and for England and Wales it is £324 billion, equivalent to 14.7% of UK GDP.



More than 70% of volunteer managers engaged with this programme said a quick and easy to use best practice tool created to calculate the monetary or economic value of volunteering would be helpful to them. One commented, '**For reporting and understanding volunteer impact - this is greatly needed. We've had to try and work out what the impact and value is from various sources, not all giving the same data.**'

Value and Impact of Volunteering (3)

Various tools and calculations have been created already but none have been formally adopted or promoted as an accepted solution. Many simply adopt the London Living Wage for a monetary value calculation but doing this will significantly undervalue the contribution of volunteering.

One Volunteer Manager commented that they need
'a tool that allows you to know the value nationally and locally, that goes beyond living wage value, as we have very highly skilled volunteers and that number doesn't allow us to reflect actual cost.'

Some volunteer stakeholders we engaged stated that if the government realised the true contribution to society of volunteering was as important as the NHS or Manufacturing, it would do more to monitor and support it. These comments are not meant as a criticism of the government as they have not had the data to fully understand the contribution of volunteering.

Pro Bono Economics recent research has some helpful recommendations, '***A Feasibility Study and Preliminary Framework for a Civil Society Satellite Account***' as they correctly point out that the economic contribution by civil society and volunteering is invisible in national accounts.



Value and Impact of Volunteering (4)

Recommendations

8 - Create a quick and easy to use best practice tool to calculate the monetary/economic value of volunteering

8(b) The voluntary and community sector embrace the need for monetary/economic calculations but only for the purpose of influencing those outside the sector

This relatively simple and quick action could make one of the biggest differences of all the recommendations in this report. The key for this to be successful is to get endorsements from funders and local/regional authorities that the tool created is an acceptable way of calculating the monetary/economic value of volunteering. With an accepted tool, this will quickly lead to a huge growth of this data across London/UK which will help enable other recommendations to move forward.

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- 1A - Establish a satellite account for civil society in the UK so that its contribution to the economy can be measured and recognised
- 1B - Include a measure of volunteering in the satellite account, to ensure more of the economic contribution of the civil society sector is accurately reflected
- 2 - Produce the civil society satellite account annually, with a short lag after the end of the reference year, so that data remains up-to-date
- 3D - Include volunteer time in the 'Do now' iteration of the civil society satellite account, using data from the Community Life Survey and shadow wages to estimate the value of volunteer time

This report makes excellent recommendations which all encourage government to calculate and monitor the contribution civil society makes to our economy.



Value and Impact of Volunteering (5)

Recommendations

10 - Central government considers the new analysis on the value and impact of volunteering and implements changes to monitor and support it, as it already does for other areas that bring a similar impact, e.g. manufacturing or health.

Volunteer stakeholders suggest central government implements some or all of the following:

- (i) Create a dedicated government department to volunteering or the voluntary and community sector with a Minister of Volunteering
- (ii) Appoint an independent volunteer expert advisor to support the government (UK and/or London)
- (iii) Fund activities to monitor and research into volunteering and its impact
- (iv) Give support to an independent body to promote volunteering in London/UK
- (vi) Appoint a Chief Volunteer or similar Volunteer Ambassador role to promote volunteering

Stakeholders believe any and all of the above recommendations would make a significant step change to volunteering in London/UK. Their implementation would signify a big step change in recognition of the importance volunteering has in our society and economy.



Raising the Profile of Volunteering (Cross-cutting theme)

In nearly all areas and themes covered in the work of this report, volunteer stakeholders made comments about the need for raising the profile of volunteering in London (and the rest of the UK), whether this was for volunteering generally or for specific roles and areas such as trustees and employee volunteering. Through the engagement work carried out as part of this report, **72% of Londoners described the level of volunteering promotion as either low or very low.**

Currently, volunteering is promoted very locally, typically by volunteer infrastructure organisations on a borough basis and by individual charities or groups who promote their specific roles. Across London there are organisations promoting specific types of volunteering. *London's Lifelines* is gaining momentum with some great messaging and the Greater London Authority, in 2024, launched Simply Volunteer London to help Londoners find a suitable volunteering role across the capital.

The long-running national campaign Volunteers' Week helps raise the profile of volunteering which was confirmed in our engagement work where 9% of respondents said this campaign caused them to start volunteering. The newer campaign Big Help Out also raises the profile of volunteering, but these are all one-off moments in the year and not supported by large marketing campaigns, but through PR and promotion via local organisations described above.



The challenging truth the sector needs to acknowledge is that to raise the profile of volunteering it needs to compete with all other marketing messages. Londoners are bombarded with marketing messages wherever they go, travelling to work, socialising, on their phones and in their living rooms. Even if we combine all the marketing and promotion work of volunteering currently being carried out, it is still only a barely heard voice compared to all other marketing messages Londoners are confronted with. Therefore, to make a step change we need to have much larger marketing campaigns which require budgets and expertise the sector does not currently have.

Raising the Profile of Volunteering (2)

Justifying National Marketing Expenditure

In 2023 the monetary value of volunteering was calculated for England and Wales to be £324 billion. If we take a hypothetical national year-long campaign to promote volunteering and its various aspects that has a notional budget of £3 million and the impact of this campaign raises volunteering by a single percent, this will generate an additional £3.24 billion of further volunteering, i.e. the return on investment is 1,080 times larger than the expenditure.

Marketing Expertise

Although a large budget would be needed for such activity, utilising the spirit of the campaign any such work should, as a requirement, involve to some level volunteering/pro bono support from the marketing/PR agencies or similar involved. Likewise, businesses could support financially, perhaps through sponsorship, to advertising expenditure for campaigns. These would not be handouts or donations, but an effective mechanism for their business/brand to be associated to the powerful values and spirit of volunteering.



Raising the Profile of Volunteering (3)

As well as promoting, highlighting and celebrating the work of volunteers through large marketing campaigns, volunteer stakeholders identified areas of particular focus and attention:

Volunteering – *‘Make it visible - celebrate the unglamorous roles (not just the abseiling for charity type activities) and show a wide range of people participating’*

Trustee – an essential volunteer role for the charity sector to function and promoting would enable charities to have robust and diverse boards to achieve their objectives (see ‘Trustee’ section below)

Employee Volunteering - although employee volunteering is growing, this is an area nowhere near reaching its maximum potential and promoting this could bring huge, needed resource to London’s civil society as well as many other benefits. See section below for more information.

Volunteer Managers – this is such an important but undervalued and under-appreciated role that enables volunteering to take place and campaigns to promote this very challenging and professional role will have a big impact. See ‘Volunteer Management’ section below for more information.

Young people – through promoting and encouraging young people to volunteer establishes volunteering as a behavioural norm that will be continued as a lifelong activity. See section below for more information.

Infrastructure - volunteer stakeholders and experts noted that as much as raising the profile of volunteering would be very helpful, it is only part of the solution. The practical execution of brokering and processing volunteering needs also to be prepared and resourced. It was noted that when national campaigns in the past had not involved or coordinated with local volunteer infrastructure and delivery, they were far less effective. With under-funding of infrastructure and volunteer management, it will also be difficult for these services to cope with large increases in the number of volunteers. Therefore, any increase in promotion needs some alignment in support for the execution and delivery of volunteering.

Raising the Profile of Volunteering (4)

We do not need a new word for volunteering

Those who have worked in the world of volunteering for a long time will know that in the discussion of how to promote volunteering that someone will, at some point, suggest that perhaps we need a new word for volunteering? The rationale behind this idea is that some people do not like the term 'volunteer' or do not see themselves as a volunteer, even though technically they are. They suggest perhaps if there was a different word, then maybe more people would like it and want to do it?

Volunteer stakeholders and experts engaged as part of this programme categorically refuted this notion, stating we do not need a new word for volunteering and that efforts would be better served to promote what volunteering is and its benefits. Very experienced volunteer stakeholders also noted that although this idea had been put forward for several decades, no one had yet come up with a good alternative to 'volunteer'.

Government Support for Promotion

It is unlikely that delivering the high level of promotion for volunteering can be achieved without some government support whether financial and/or other resources. However, volunteer experts engaged commented that it is important that the government, whether national, regional or local is not the lead on this promotion, but an enabler and a supporter.

Volunteering is an activity that should be carried out through free will and choice, not something that is compulsory or an obligation. When a government agency promotes volunteering, no matter how honourable, no matter how well considered the intentions and expert the execution, there will be negative connotations by some who will think there is a goal to replace paid workers. Even in carrying out the engagement work for this report a few have had concerns that perhaps there is even an agenda behind this programme to do such a thing. We hope that the recommendations show this is a plan about developing the volunteering that currently takes place, not anything else.



Raising the Profile of Volunteering (5)

Recommendations

11 - Creation of independent body or initiative whose focus is to raise the profile of volunteering

Having an independent organisation or body whose sole focus is to raise the profile of volunteering will support all volunteering across London/UK. It helps make the work of local volunteer infrastructure easier and more efficient as they can focus on more targeted and local messaging. A single body with larger resources can achieve much more than lots of smaller ones with very little resources.

12 - Funding to support large scale marketing of volunteering

Large scale marketing campaigns all year round will achieve a significant step change in the level of volunteering, bringing returns far greater than the marketing expenditure.



Flexible Volunteering (Cross-cutting theme)

In many aspects of volunteering in London it has been identified that there is a need for more flexible volunteering to enable more people to volunteer.

The 'Volunteering Challenges' section below describes in more detail the behavioural shift in how Londoners want to volunteer. This change has been likened to the change in how we watch television. If we look at the number of people watching traditional broadcast television it has dropped significantly compared to 10 years ago as more people use on-demand streaming services. The interest in television has not declined, it is just how people want to watch it has changed. This is similar for volunteering. There is not a declining interest in volunteering but how people want to volunteer has changed.

We received so many comments from Londoners and volunteer stakeholders about the need for flexibility of volunteering.

"More conversations about how flexible volunteering can be around worklife - for example mine is a hour a week and can be at my choice when (as I'm a mentor) so it's extremely flexible. Also a shift away from the traditional idea of volunteering in charity shops and food banks."

'People find it difficult to find time due to work commitments and cost of living crisis'

'Individuals doing more than one job, the pressure to find work, retiring much later, and becoming more isolated due to home working have all impacted the number of people available for regular volunteering.'

"Perhaps by allowing more casual opportunities we will enable more young people and others to volunteer."



Flexible Volunteering (2)

Recommendations

13 - London volunteer involving organisations to continue to adapt to be able to involve more flexible volunteer roles

This a recommendation that will take time as there is not a one-size-fits all approach, with different organisations having to adapt on their own to meet their individual requirements.

14 - Focus and funding to enable volunteer infrastructure organisations to help volunteer involving organisations adapt to flexible volunteering

Due to the individual nature of adapting to flexible volunteering, volunteer infrastructure organisations will continue to need to play a key support role.





Volunteering Challenges

As described above, there are challenges to volunteering in London (and the rest of the UK) with a significant drop in formal volunteering. An important part of our work in this London Vision for Volunteering programme was to better understand the challenges and what volunteer stakeholders and experts suggest to do to develop volunteering.

Behavioural Shift in Volunteering

Half of London volunteer managers engaged with this programme stated that they found it harder to recruit volunteers compared to before the pandemic, but it is positive that 23% said that it was not harder and a further 13% said they had a surplus or waiting list of volunteers.

Research and evidence from volunteer stakeholders shows that London volunteer involving organisations (VIOs) have been adapting to a large behavioural shift in the way people want to volunteer. This behavioural shift started before Covid-19 but was accelerated by the pandemic and then masked under the impact of the cost-of-living crisis. Londoners want to volunteer in more flexible ways that suits them. This causes issues for VIOs which is then further compounded as these organisations, in general, are moving in the opposite direction as they are increasingly safeguarding conscious with longer onboarding processes for volunteers, so want or need volunteers to commit for the longer-term.

The NCVO 2024 Almanac reports, based on Time Well Spent data, that the very top barrier to volunteering is 'I don't want to make an ongoing commitment'.

'flexibility is key to everything' said a Londoner.

London VIOs have and will continue to adapt to this behavioural shift, but it is not a one-size-fits-all approach and not all volunteer roles or programmes can be easily adapted to include flexible volunteering.



Volunteering Challenges (2)

Slow Responses to Potential Volunteers

One of the biggest complaints about VIOs and barriers to a potential volunteer starting to volunteer is a slow response from the organisation looking to recruit volunteers. It can be a big deal for someone to contact an organisation looking to volunteer as you are *'putting yourself out there and when there is no response from them when you know they are looking feels like a rejection.'* This lack of or delayed response can lead to not just the potential volunteer losing interest in volunteering with the organisation but can make them reluctant to contact other organisations to volunteer as well.

A huge number of VIOs are struggling with resources and often the volunteer manager responsibility is just one of many other responsibilities and so this is difficult to manage. Volunteer managers recommended that just having a quick response saying thank you and that you will be back in touch later is a quick way to help negate this.

Some volunteer managers also commented on a successful process of inviting potential volunteers to come along to see and join current volunteers in action, sometimes referred to as a 'taster' which helped them to get engaged early even if the process of them becoming an official volunteer would take a long time.

"we lose volunteers though in the process who switch off from long processes. getting applications is no issue"
London Volunteer Manager

Application Processes

Engaging volunteer stakeholders throughout this programme brought up a lot of discussion about the application process for potential volunteers. Although good practice is to have clear information about a volunteer role, its responsibilities and requirements, this was off-putting for some. There was feedback that some neurodivergent individuals would prefer to visit an organisation first and find out more rather than making an application from a distance.

Volunteering Challenges (3)

There were lots of comments from Londoners and stakeholders that volunteer application processes were arduous and as difficult as applying for a paid job.



'Recruitment of volunteers to be accessible to those with disabilities. A lot of recruitment processes are not open to people with disabilities.'

"Simpler forms to fill for volunteering."

'Make it easy to apply and for people to meet other volunteers in the same or similar organisations'

Volunteer Passport

There were several suggestions for a volunteer passport in London, but not real detail on what this means in practice. The 'Language/Terminology' section below highlights volunteer passport as one of those terms that can have different meanings, but normally refers to mechanisms that make it easier for a volunteer to move from a role in one organisation to a role in a different organisation. Although technology is likely to play an important role in a volunteer passport it is not as key as having shared understanding and agreements with participating organisations. Some also suggested that the need or benefit of a volunteer passport may not be worth the effort and investment to create it.

Volunteering Challenges (4)

Volunteer Diversity

A lot of feedback from volunteer stakeholders is that the worsening economic environment for volunteer involving organisations in the last ten or more years has reduced the resources for volunteer management which has led to less diverse volunteering across the capital.



'Volunteer recruitment lacks flexibility or simplicity'

'Actively recruit volunteers from underrepresented groups and also maybe buddy volunteer system for those who need additional support.'

'Recruitment of volunteers to be accessible to those with disabilities. A lot of recruitment processes are not open to people with disabilities.'

"There are barriers to volunteering – cost of living, roles such as Trustees not so do-able for those struggling financially"

"The volunteers I see around me (including myself!) are white and middle class. They also tend to be older - I tend to be the youngest person in the space (I'm in my 30s). I want people of all ages, races, ethnicities, communities to see volunteering as something that matters for and is open to them."

'Making volunteering accessible for everyone, especially young people.'

'Volunteer programmes not representative of society or of communities they serve'



Volunteering Challenges (5)

EDI

Volunteer stakeholders communicated strongly that EDI is a real issue with volunteering. The following were highlighted by practitioners and stakeholders as important:

- People/organisations are not talking about the point of EDI and why it matters? Not enough is said about the benefits of EDI to the volunteer and to society?
- EDI focus on volunteers should be the same as it is for employees
- Funding/capacity – Volunteer involving organisations want to be more flexible and enable more EDI but need resources to do it
- The lower perception of volunteers/volunteering and not being listened to if a volunteer

Stakeholders made a number of suggestions to help improve EDI within volunteering:

- Access to Volunteering fund - similar to Access to Work fund but focused on volunteering
- Ring-fenced volunteer roles – like for employment, some roles targeted at some protected characteristics, same for volunteering
- Recruit to a very generic role and then work with volunteer to find most ideal role (requires resources but a good approach)
- Sustainable funding rather than project based for volunteering as economic climate means it is much harder for projects to continue regardless of how successful they are
- Connect more with faith and community groups/organisations to support EDI of volunteer programmes
- National Insurance increase exemption for volunteer involving organisations
- More unrestricted funding

Volunteer Management

Volunteer Manager Role

The Volunteer Manager or Coordinator role is an essential element in volunteering across London and without them the majority of volunteering would never take place. Research into the volunteer manager role shows that it can be one of the hardest management roles to perform as you need to understand, motivate and support a wide range of individuals who ‘do not have to be there’.

In contrast to the importance of this critical role, the volunteer manager position is arguably one of the most undervalued and under-appreciated in the voluntary and community sector. A search on job websites in November 2024 for Volunteer Manager and Coordinator roles in London ranged from £24k-£42k per year (FTE), with the few higher salary roles being offered within large organisations. This compares to a full-time London Living Wage job which will earn £27,007.50 per annum, at the time of report publication.

Through the volunteer manager engagement work of this project a staggering 51% said the volunteer manager was not valued as a profession and more than 23% were not sure if the role was valued. Often the responsibility of volunteer management in organisations is not a dedicated role, but one of several responsibilities by a single individual.

Areas of Improvement/Development

The number one area that volunteer managers identified as an area for improvement and development is ‘**funding to support volunteering**’. Following that ‘**volunteer retention**’ and ‘**volunteering for those who need more support**’ and then ‘**demonstrating value of volunteering to decision-makers**’ were identified as most important areas.



Volunteer Management (2)

London volunteer managers said about their role:

'I think it's valued by volunteers but often organisations don't realise how crucial it is.'

'Just look at the pay given to volunteer managers. Even comparatively to other roles in the sector it's low, despite huge levels of responsibility'

'Without a clear career path or equivalent roles in the corporate sector, it remains an underpaid role and unlikely to be seen as an area of work requiring strategic input into an organisation'

'it should be a single role and not an addition to other roles. they need to be able to recruit train, induct, look after the welfare of volunteers, have a training budget and a yearly celebration - this has been eroded away over time and the role depleting and withering away.'

'It is an add on for me in an already busy role! After 20 years I have it added to my job description, but managing volunteers is always seen as something that just happens...'

'the Volunteer Manager role is often seen as non-essential and a more nice to have feature in organisations. This feeds from the misconception that volunteering is free, which is sadly perceived as putting no or little value on volunteer contributions. The role is also paid a lot less than it's counterparts in other areas of the organisations eg. Communications/Social Media/Fundraising/Digital Experience/Community Engagement Manager which solidifies it's image as fluffy and less valuable profession.'

'It is a lowly paid sector that does not reflect its social impact nor the skills and experience required to do the job well. Difficult to retain young people coming into the sector because of this.'



Volunteer Management (3)

Recommendations

15 - More free tailored best practice support for Volunteer Managers

90% of London volunteer managers reported having access to free best practice support, but this was focused mainly on peer networking and workshops/training sessions. The need for one-to-one tailored advice came through strongly from volunteer managers, with more than 70% not having access to this support.

16 - Volunteer involving organisations to look at their recruitment processes to ensure timely responses with accessible and flexible application processes

Londoners reported that slow responses by volunteer involving organisations was a real turn off and that quick responses, even if to say 'we are busy but thank you for your interest and we will get back to you soon' were appreciated. The traditional application form approach was also a barrier for some potential volunteers who would prefer to get to know an organisation first before wanting to put themselves forward. Some organisations have simplified their process and invited people to come along and then after match them to a suitable role.

17 - Support and guidance for organisations with a surplus or waiting list of volunteers to encourage and connect with other volunteering

Having standardised and best practice messages for organisations with a surplus or waiting list of volunteers will help direct them to other opportunities that may be of interest. This will help support the many organisations in London who are struggling to recruit volunteers.



Volunteer Infrastructure

This area of volunteering has been flagged as high priority as some believe London could be potentially sleepwalking into a crisis as local authorities under financial pressures are making cuts without realising the importance of volunteer infrastructure to the sector.

It may not be widely known or clear that volunteer infrastructure is intrinsically linked to local authorities as no other funders fund infrastructure services. City Bridge Foundation is a very positive exception but their funding is time-limited and cannot be re-applied for until several years have passed and in 2024 announced they are not accepting any new applications until autumn 2025. Although other funders will fund infrastructure organisations for projects they do not fund for core infrastructure services.

With reductions in staff at local authorities and lack of clear data regarding the importance and impact of volunteer infrastructure, this creates a very real threat that funding for this important element of London volunteering diminishes further or disappears. In addition, like other voluntary and community sector organisations across London, reduced funding coupled with significant increases in local authority rents and cost of living wage increases are pushing some volunteer infrastructure organisations to breaking point.

The picture of volunteer infrastructure is quite varied across the capital with at least one borough committed to 7 years support for volunteer infrastructure but with many others where it is year to year or sometimes less. For some the near future is looking perilous with a possibility of several boroughs having no volunteer infrastructure, but not due to a deliberate strategic change, rather an accidental byproduct of decisions being made without a full understanding of the impact of this important function.



Map of London volunteer infrastructure organisations
Made with Google My Maps by London Plus

Volunteer Infrastructure (2)

There has been a significant decline in funding in the last 10 years for volunteer infrastructure organisations, around 60% for independent Volunteer Centres, as illustrated by the 'Impact of London's Volunteering Infrastructure 2022/23: A report from the London Volunteer Centre Network' published in 2024 by London Plus and produced by Superhighways. The report demonstrates the critical role Volunteer Centres play to help ensure a diverse sector, strategically develop volunteering, encourage and mobilising volunteering and enable good practice in volunteer management for sustained volunteering.

Volunteer infrastructure organisations play both a direct and indirect role in enabling volunteering to take place across the capital. We do not have exact data on its full contribution but if we were to conservatively hypothesise that its contribution was 15% of all volunteering then we could estimate that volunteer infrastructure provides £5.4 billion of volunteering in London at cost of 0.09% of the return it achieves. Therefore, it makes economic sense not just to stop reducing volunteer infrastructure investment but to increase this to develop volunteering across London. Can London afford to lose £5.4 billion worth of volunteering that supports London communities?

As the section below states, the focus on community resilience and emergency volunteering within the voluntary and community sector is growing as it is understood it can have a big impact on emergency response in the short, medium and long term for communities affected. It has been suggested that funding for volunteer infrastructure could be supported by community resilience budgets.

The logo for London Plus, featuring the words "london plus" in a lowercase, sans-serif font. The letters are colored: 'l' is blue, 'o' is orange, 'n' is green, 'd' is red, 'o' is purple, 'n' is yellow, 'p' is blue, 'l' is orange, 'u' is green, 's' is red.

**Impact of London's
Volunteering
Infrastructure 2022/23**



Volunteer Infrastructure (3)

Recommendations

18 - Volunteering infrastructure requires sustained investment

18(b) Local authorities to look to other departments to support infrastructure investment, e.g. community resilience/emergency response

Short-term funding hurts volunteer infrastructure organisations whereas longer-term funding enables them to be pro-active, more efficient and effective. As just one example given by stakeholders, short-term funding makes what should be a simple straight-forward operational decision to purchase a software licence, e.g. for a brokerage platform, or take out a lease on a photocopier, a risky decision.

Further research into volunteer infrastructure funding and its impact, with best practice recommendations for local authorities such as minimum percentage of all funding to the voluntary and community sector which should be for volunteer infrastructure to ensure a well resourced local provision.

As local authorities are financially challenged they could look to support infrastructure investment through other departments that could be supported, such as community resilience/emergency response and events.

19 - Funders to consider core infrastructure services as part of their grant making

Stakeholders pointed out that core volunteer infrastructure services are only funded by local authorities and City Bridge Foundation. This puts them permanently at risk and less able to be more financially independent and sustainable. Through funders enabling core infrastructure services to be eligible to apply for it would help make volunteer infrastructure organisations more financially secure.



Employee Volunteering

Recent reports by Benevity and Works4U show that levels of employee volunteering are growing and higher than they were before the pandemic. Nevertheless, London (and the rest of the UK) is nowhere near reaching the maximum potential of harnessing employee volunteering and bringing it together with London's communities.

Through the engagement work of this programme and through the National Employer Supported Volunteering (ESV) Network it is clear employee volunteering in London is mainly reactionary rather than pro-active and is not joined up or coordinated. A large majority of employee volunteering is initiated by a business contacting a charity or broker saying they have a certain number of volunteers on a certain day and asking what they can do? We need to develop employee volunteering so the conversation is reversed and businesses are informed of the social priorities for a particular area as well as the ways they can get involved to support that will have an impact.

There has been a growth in technology platforms used internally within businesses so that employees can find and sign themselves up for volunteering projects and initiatives. Platforms help increase the levels of employee volunteering but there are question marks about the impact some of the platform projects undertaken have as many will be activities that would still take place with no employee volunteers present. Also, we must not dismiss the growth and development in skills-based volunteering within employee volunteering and the great work that many VCS organisations are doing in this area, but this is still a small or minority part of employee volunteering.



Employee Volunteering (2)

100% of people and organisations we engaged with as part of this project said that employee volunteering should be promoted more.

90% said that employee volunteering is not joined up or coordinated in London, *'it is not joined up or coordinated at all, it is reactionary and ad hoc'*. One stakeholder said, *'I am a part of the corporate volunteering network and it is looking for leadership & guidance.'*

The top three suggestions from employee volunteering stakeholders to develop this activity across London:

- (i) Create an infrastructure for employee volunteering to promote, support and develop it
- (ii) Government incentives or legislation to encourage employee volunteering
- (iii) Best practice employee volunteering tools; better understanding of impact; more research & analysis



Terminology

In the voluntary and community sector the generally accepted term for this activity is 'Employer Supported Volunteering' or usually shortened to 'ESV' but this is not used and often not recognised by businesses. Businesses will mostly use the term 'employee volunteering' or 'corporate volunteering'. As this report and its recommendations are for all sectors, we are using the term 'employee volunteering' and suggest this is the most appropriate term to use as this activity should not just be applicable just to 'corporates' but to all organisations, regardless of sector, who employ people.



Employee Volunteering (3)

Carrying out Employee Volunteering

Through our engagement work, there was a glowing response from those who had received employee volunteering support from businesses, with 100% saying they were happy and 67% saying it was a very positive experience. There was a mix of organisations organising the employee volunteering themselves and many where it was a mix of a broker or themselves who organised it.

Charging for Employee Volunteering

Two-thirds of the charities we engaged reported they charged to cover their costs for carrying out employee volunteering activities and one-third did not. The National ESV Network has produced a [one-pager statement](#) explaining to businesses why a budget is often necessary to carry out employee volunteering and that this is to enable the organisation delivering it to cover their costs.

Employee Volunteering within Charities

The [2023 UK Employee Volunteering Report](#) provided analysis of employee volunteering across all employees in the private, public and voluntary and community sectors. For the latter, despite being strong advocates for businesses and public sector organisations to carry out employee volunteering, they do not do so much of it themselves and even when they do many do not have a formal employee volunteering policy or provision within employment contracts. The report included the following comment which suggests why this could be:

‘This could be a reflection of a resource-strapped sector where many smaller charities struggle to keep up to date with all their policies but also some feedback suggests there could be additional reasons. One survey respondent wrote, ‘I already work in the non-profit sector ... When volunteering and “going the extra mile” is already part of the day job I think the organisations are hesitant to suggest people do even more.’

Employee Volunteering (4)

Recommendations

20 - Produce and promote best practice guidance for employee volunteering

For both charities/groups and businesses, best practice guidance for carrying out employee volunteering will help increase the impact of this activity.

21 - Research into whether government incentives would make a positive difference to employee volunteering

Some sort of government incentive to promote employee volunteering was a common suggestion from volunteer stakeholders but several people raised some concerns and skepticism about how this would work in practice. Through some more detailed research and analysis we can better determine if this would be beneficial and if so, how it would need to be implemented for it to have the positive effect desired.

22 - Large marketing campaigns to promote employee volunteering and its benefits for businesses and the community

Many stakeholders suggested raising the profile of employee volunteering would make a big difference to the level of take up. In particular, stressing how it has benefits for both businesses, volunteers and the community.

Employee Volunteering (5)

Recommendations

23 - Create an infrastructure for employee volunteering

How this would be done would need to be planned and thought through carefully to ensure it enhances and brings together current provision. If done right, this has the potential to create a massive step change in the levels and impact of employee volunteering in London.



Trustees

The volunteer role of trustee is an essential position for the charity sector to function, yet this is often an undervalued and hidden part of London's civil society. In London in June 2023 there were an estimated 121,652 trustees (not far off the entire population of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea) in 20,619 charities according to the 2023 Monetary Value of Trustees report which also calculated the value of trustees in London to be £4.1 billion.

NCVO reported in November 2024 that there is a “trustee crisis” in England and Wales with four out of five charities having at least one vacancy on their board. The impact of this prevents charities from developing as an organisation, limits ability to follow good governance and make effective decisions.

Perception

The word ‘trustee’ sounds old-fashioned to many Londoners and can conjure up a mental image of *‘a nineteenth century group of old white men sitting around a board table smoking cigars and drinking brandy’*. This is in stark contrast with what can be one of the most dynamic, rewarding and challenging of volunteer roles. Some organisations promote this role as ‘volunteer charity director’ to help better explain the trustee role to a 21st century population.



There is a misconception by many Londoners that you need to have many decades of life and work experience to be a trustee with one Londoner engaged, in her mid-20s, who said she was “too young to be a trustee” but actually had lots of lived experience in her borough that would be an asset to many charity boards. There is great work being carried out in this area by the Young Trustees Movement.

Trustees (2)

Through our engagement work with volunteer stakeholders the following feedback and analysis was gathered.

Recruitment

Through our engagement work it was reported that the recruitment of trustees was predominantly through networks of the charity (64%) and those of the trustees (64%) and less than 45% through wider advertising on free websites and social media.

Biggest Challenges for Trustees

Biggest challenges reported by trustees were unsurprisingly related to finance with 79% stating income generation and sustainability as the biggest challenge and 65% the challenging economic environment for charities. Just under half said recruiting and onboarding trustees as well as having or maintaining diversity of trustees was a big challenge. One interesting comment from a trustee highlighted the challenges of the trustee role, *'developing and maintaining collective decision-making is, I think, even harder than financial sustainability and forward planning (which are HARD)'*.

Recognition

48% stated charity trustees are not valued enough by wider society and over half said there should be more recognition and celebration of the work of trustees.

Promotion

76% stated that raising the profile of trustees would encourage more people to become trustees. A similar proportion suggested that London employers should offer trusteeship as part of their employee volunteering offer.





Trustees (3)

There was a large consensus from volunteer stakeholders that much more should be done to support trustees and promote the trustee role. Comments from trustees included:

'With the closure of Getting on Board it seems funders (including government) are not prioritising trustees which is very short sighted. Helping charities to have strong boards enables them to deliver well and the reverse means they don't so well.'

'If there was a program for young people to learn about trusteeship in school, the benefit to society and the benefit to the trustee, I think it would help. Also, a program by the government whereby people are given some incentive to become trustee (e.g. a tax rebate, discounts, etc) then perhaps more people would be interested.'

'More outreach to communities who are not engaged enough to feel it's for them and apply to roles'

'I don't think there is enough knowledge of the role. Also, many people would not think they can be a trustee if they don't hold a position of responsibility professionally.'

'I would bet that the vast majority of Londoners don't even know what a trustee is and does. People are busy with their day to day life, working, taking care of families... it's almost a privilege to be able to be a trustee that isn't available to everyone.'

'Trustee roles are quite behind-the-scenes, so they don't get noticed as much as they should.'

'Charity trustees is a volunteer role that is seriously undervalued and unappreciated. This is surprising given it's an essential role for the charity sector to function.'

Trustees (4)

Recommendations

24 - Charities to recruit trustees through formal and open methods to help create more diverse and representative boards

Stakeholders recognised that charities can do more to have open recruitment methods to find new trustees, but also pointed out that greater promotion of the role more generally would help this be more effective.

25 - More free to low cost training for trustee boards, creating a framework of trustee training

This will help London trustees to be more effective and impactful in their role which leads to more effective charities that better help Londoners.

26 - More support networks for trustees (local and London-wide)

Creating support networks for trustees needs to be increased to at least the level of support for volunteer managers. Peer networking, for example, at a local and/or London level will enable trustees to share knowledge and experience to help them run charities better.





Trustees (5)

Recommendations

27 - More promotion of the trustee role

Being a trustee is, arguably, one of the best volunteer roles you can do and stakeholders across London said very strongly that much more needs to be done to promote it. By raising the profile of the trustee role and helping people to understand what it actually is and entails will make a dramatic difference in the level and diversity of trustees in London.

28 - Increase support from the Charities Commission, including reducing regulatory burden for charities

Many stakeholders suggested that making life a bit easier for charities, in terms of what they are required to do legally would help trustees. Many wanted to see more support from the Charities Commission.

Health Volunteering

Volunteering plays a huge and important role in supporting the health of Londoners, from prevention work to primary care to unpaid carers, the level and range of activity that takes place is enormous.

Although a great deal of NHS volunteering takes place within different institutions it is not currently joined up and coordinated with established volunteer infrastructure or standardisation of good practice volunteer management. Promotion of volunteer roles is fragmented with different approaches or systems for each separate NHS organisation. In June 2023 '[NHS Volunteering Taskforce – report and recommendations](#)' was published to help take volunteering in health and care services to a new level.

NHS England has recently launched a [volunteer portal](#) to enable NHS volunteer roles to be found in one place. At the time of writing, this is in beta phase of development. If this can link or integrate with local and London-wide volunteer platforms it will make it even easier for Londoners to find a suitable volunteer role.

A national fund, [Volunteering for Health](#), was launched in 2024 and is currently supporting two of the five Integrated Care Systems in London: North Central London and South East London. It provides three years' tailored funding for partnerships of the NHS and voluntary and community sector working together. The programme aims to 'speed up change by helping to break down barriers to volunteering, test new volunteering infrastructure models, and develop guidance and best practice for all systems. It aims to influence the policy environment and increase our understanding of the impact of volunteers and volunteering across the NHS, alongside the potential role of NHS charities in helping the NHS to deliver the best care.'

Volunteer stakeholders commented that in this area ***“things seem to be moving in the right direction”*** but there is a lot of work still to be done to join up volunteering in health and make it as accessible and diverse to reflect the communities it supports.



Health Volunteering (2)

Those working within the new Volunteering for Health funded programmes report that there is a lot of willingness and enthusiasm to develop volunteering at both Integrated Care Board (ICB) and NHS charities/trusts levels. The following areas have been initially identified to develop an infrastructure for health volunteering:

- Connectivity - work to join up volunteering for both volunteers and volunteer managers
- Best practice standards
- Developing pathways from volunteering into employment
- Building diversity of volunteers and improving access to volunteering



Health Volunteering (3)

Recommendations

29 - NHS England to work with London volunteer infrastructure to see how their new national brokerage platform can connect with established brokerage platforms and websites

Joining up volunteer brokerage platforms and work makes it easier for Londoners to find volunteer roles but will also be a win:win for both NHS and volunteer infrastructure organisations to work together and cross promote volunteering. Since this recommendation was published in our draft report in December 2024 we are pleased to say that some research is, at the time of writing, being carried out in this area by the NHS Business Services Authority. The recommendations of this report have been made to them.

30 - North Central London and South East London NHS systems supported by Volunteering for Health funded programme (2024-27) to share learning with rest of London

There is a strong willing from the participants to do this and London Plus are committed to support through their Volunteer Centre network and other work.

31 - London's Integrated Care Boards to look at investing in volunteer infrastructure to support the development of volunteering to support their priorities and objectives

There are both strategic and operational wins for the NHS to work more closely with volunteer infrastructure organisations to help achieve current and future objectives.





Young people and lifelong volunteering

The need to encourage and make it easier for young people to volunteer was put forward by many volunteer stakeholders across London. Lots of research has shown that volunteering is a habitual activity and if people start volunteering at a young age, they are likely to continue throughout their life. As the [Family Volunteering Club](#) explains, it helps every child and young person growing up to feel connected to their local community, and understands the positive role they can play in helping change issues that matter to them.

'Get more young people involved, either through targeted promotion, more appealing opportunities, or more incorporation into schools.'

'It would be good to emphasize the role of volunteering in educational universities, colleges, schools 5-6 times a year about the role of volunteering (what will give in the future for each student, to list the advantages of volunteering...).'

'work together with schools more to allow young people to volunteer more'.

Despite the almost universal view we need to do more to help young people to volunteer, it is actually hard for someone under the age of 16 to be able to do so due to lack of flexible volunteer roles that will suit many young people and safeguarding considerations that lead to many volunteer involving organisations simply to rule out people of this age.

Charities and volunteer involving organisations take the safeguarding of all volunteers seriously but are particularly concerned about young people under the age of 16. There is real fear and anxiety not just of something bad happening to a volunteer but also concern that this would be so serious it could be the end of the charity and/or people losing their jobs. One person engaged said, *"I do not want to have to stand in front of a judge and explain why I let something happen or did not get a high enough DBS"*.

Young people and lifelong volunteering (2)

Family Volunteering

Some great work is being carried out in London but there is a huge potential to grow this area of volunteering. Just on a practical level, enabling families to volunteer together makes it a lot easier to involve volunteers who are under 16 as parents can take responsibility for supervising their children.

Intergenerational Volunteering



'Intergenerational practice aims to bring people together in purposeful, mutually beneficial activities which promote greater understanding and respect between generations and contributes to building more cohesive communities. Intergenerational practice is inclusive, building on the positive resources that the young and old have to offer each other and those around them.'

A Guide to Intergenerational Practice, Beth Johnson Foundation, 2011

There is a strong consensus from London's volunteer stakeholders that more intergenerational volunteering would be very positive and should be encouraged, but there is an acknowledgement that resources and funding are required to enable this.

Student Volunteering

The level and impact of student volunteering has been growing in London with universities having well developed and supportive volunteering programmes as well as a collaborative and knowledge sharing between the universities. The barriers to developing this further include unclear guidance about volunteering by international students, 'clunky' DBS checking and travel expenses to carry out volunteering.

Young people and lifelong volunteering (3)

Recommendations

32 - Subsidies or free travel for students whilst volunteering

Stakeholders suggested that with available technology it should be possible for students to have free travel whilst volunteering. This would help increase the number and diversity of students who can volunteer.



Technology

The role of technology plays an important and increasing role in how volunteering is carried out and managed in London. Overall, this makes things easier but there are many areas where there are barriers that prevent technology from being more effective.

Brokerage

For Londoners to find a volunteer role online there are a plethora of websites and apps but these are not joined up and so makes it very confusing. Many Londoners engaged said they wished there was one website for all volunteer roles in the capital.

'Website for London volunteer roles should be easily searchable e.g. by distance from home postcode, type of role, time commitment involved, etc.'

'Unification of volunteering roles in one website'

On the face of it having one website or platform for Londoners to find volunteering roles makes sense but can only be achieved if it aligns with how volunteering works across the capital, i.e. locally focused. Most London boroughs have a locally operated and managed online volunteer brokerage platform which allows them to support volunteer involving organisations and promote opportunities. Therefore, any London-wide solution needs to take into account and integrate with the different local solutions that volunteer infrastructure organisations pay for. The only way to get all boroughs to use the same system, assuming it works well, is to provide it for free for local volunteer infrastructure organisations or provide free integration to whatever system is used locally.

The Mayor of London has supported the launch in 2024 of [Simply Volunteer London](#) which brings together on one platform the many boroughs that currently use the Simply Connect platform.





Technology (2)

Volunteer stakeholders noted that how a London-wide platform operates also has an impact on organisations recruiting volunteers. If it is 'too easy' for a potential volunteer to indicate an interest in the role then this leads to them showing interest in lots of roles which increases the burden on resource-strapped organisations to respond to more enquiries that may be less likely to convert to a volunteer joining them.

The health volunteering section above also explains about the recent launch of a NHS volunteering platform, currently in beta development. If this can link up and integrate with local platforms and any London-wide portals then it will make it easier for people to find volunteer roles without having to go to many different separate places.

Volunteer Management

The last 10 years has seen a growth and sophistication in volunteer management systems and platforms but volunteer involving organisations are increasingly looking for solutions that work with other systems the organisation uses.

“No solution helps both the front end and back end as well as being affordable”

‘I would welcome a larger offer of comprehensive and easy to use CMS (Client Management Systems) to help managing the safe recruitment and other volunteering related processes and programmes.’

Technology (3)

Recommendations

33 - Further investigation if a standardised volunteer portal for London is possible through providing local volunteer infrastructure organisations a system for free

This is more complex area than most people realise and so more research into what can be done and the funding/resources needed would be helpful.





Community Resilience/Emergency Volunteering

There has been an increase in focus on the role of the London voluntary and community sector and its communities has in community resilience and emergency response. The Covid-19 pandemic demonstrated what an important role it can play.

For the past few years the Greater London Authority has been supporting local authority emergency response teams to work closer with the voluntary and community sector through its Community Resilience Fund.

Through the engagement work we carried out as part of this project, volunteer stakeholders were very positive about progress that has been made but stated this is just a beginning step and that if further and longer-term investment was provided, they could achieve real collaboration and integration between emergency response and the voluntary and community sector. There was consensus that this area has a lot of potential for development but will require funding and investment.

Volunteer stakeholders suggested that work to develop and maintain local/borough emergency response volunteers would make it easier and quicker to respond in an emergency. Another strong suggestion was to recruit and train local emergency volunteer champions who were connected in the community who could mobilise others in an emergency response.

‘Shared training opportunities to the community designed especially for response to emergencies - for more people to become first responders and mutual aid assistance’

‘People often forget that when charity staff respond in an emergency, they are technically doing so in a volunteer capacity, it is not part of their job. Charities and community groups are not funded to respond to in an emergency.’

Community Response/Emergency Volunteering (2)

Recommendations

34 - Funders to look at how longer-term support can be provided to the voluntary and community sector to establish integration of local communities into emergency response

Integrating voluntary and community sector support into emergency response and community resilience cannot be achieved in a short-term project, it will need time. For it to be successful local authority emergency response teams need to be certain they can rely on the support of the voluntary and community sector for the long-term.



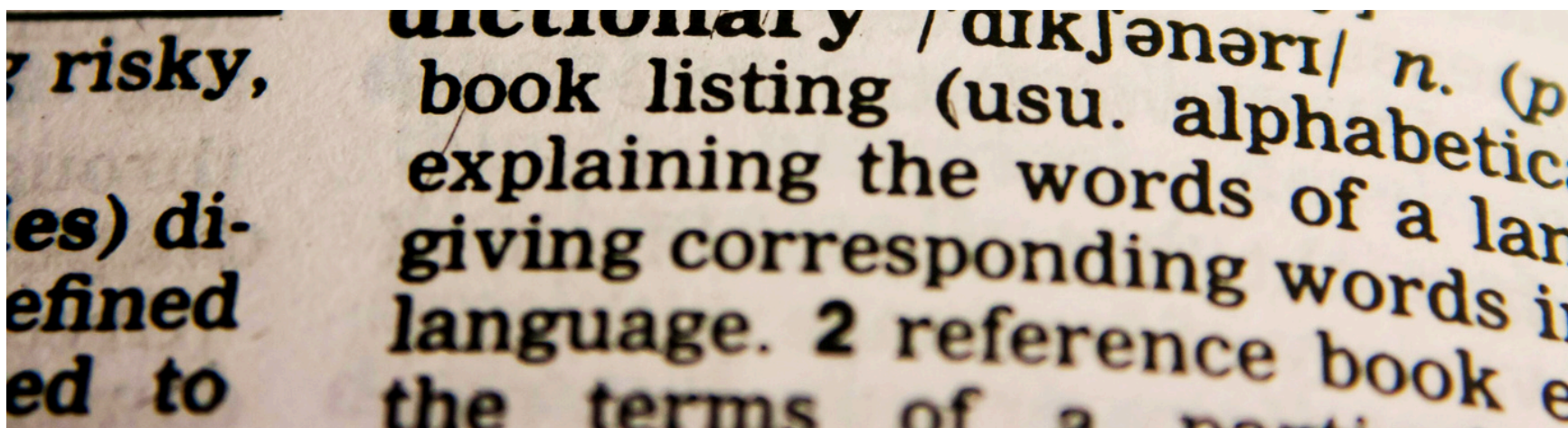
Language/Terminology

Working with volunteer stakeholders in carrying out this programme we realised that we need to be aware of the issue of terminology used within the voluntary and community sector regarding volunteering which may not be understood or does not match with other sectors. Some notable examples raised:

Employer Supported Volunteering (ESV) – this is a recognised term and acronym within the voluntary and community sector but is not used by businesses.

Formal and informal volunteering – although formal volunteering is a term that is likely to be understood outside the voluntary and community sector, informal volunteering may be less clear as to what it is or what would be included as informal volunteering. Even the term formal volunteering has different definitions and uses but usually is meant as unpaid help through a group, club or organisation where the role is defined with set hours and a role description.

Flexible volunteering – this is a term increasingly being used as volunteer involving organisations (VIOs) adapt to behavioural changes of volunteering, and is reasonably self-explanatory but other terms that fit within this umbrella term can cause confusion such as ‘micro-volunteering’ and ‘ad hoc volunteering’.





Language/Terminology (2)

Volunteer Passport – this term is used a lot within the voluntary and community sector but with different meanings. In essence, a volunteer passport is a mechanism or initiative that helps volunteers move more quickly and easily between different volunteer involving organisations, but the term can be used to mean specific ways that do some or part of this, for example, standardised induction training, technology/platform or agreements and guidelines between participating volunteer involving organisations.

Disclosure & Barring System (DBS) – The term DBS is now much more understood with its old term, Criminal Records Bureau (CRB), much less frequently used. However, DBS is complicated and when a volunteer involving organisation says a volunteer “needs a DBS” there is often confusion about whether this should be basic, standard and enhanced. Because the eligibility criteria for volunteers who need a DBS is not clear organisations will often, out of caution, push for a higher level of DBS than is needed.

Trustee – There is no getting away from the fact that ‘trustee’ is a very old term and that it does not portray, to many and, in particular, those who are not familiar with it, the truly dynamic and varied nature the role entails. Some parts of London have chosen to use alternative terms, e.g. ‘volunteer charity director’, to promote the role as it has a clearer meaning.

Volunteer – Even the term ‘volunteer’ is not as clear and straight-forward as it could be. Many Londoners will assume or have the perception that volunteering is only formal volunteering and will not think of including all the informal and ad hoc ways that people give their time which is still volunteering. Indeed, there are many people who give their time who do not think of themselves as volunteers. In academia, the term ‘civic engagement’ is often used instead of volunteering. London is an international city and so we must recognise that the term volunteer has different meanings and connotations in different countries. For example, people who grew up in communist countries can have a negative view of volunteering as it was not something that was done out of free choice.



Language/Terminology (3)

Language

As well as the use of terminology, the need for plain and simple language came across very strongly from volunteer stakeholders as being very important to involve Londoners in volunteering. This includes both advertising of volunteer roles and the recruitment process. For the latter, there was a lot of feedback about use of language in volunteering and that it could be improved to engage and interest more communities in the capital.

'More promotion, more information, including in other languages.'

'Simpler forms to fill in for volunteering.'

'Think about language - use broader terms, think about and include informal volunteering, flexibility is key to everything, stop making volunteering sound like a posh thing for middle class people and promote the benefits of volunteering to everyone and focus on being inclusive.'

There were a lot of comments and criticisms of volunteer involving organisations who have application forms that are as detailed and complex as for paid job roles.

Language/Terminology (4)

Recommendations

35 - Volunteer involving organisations to be aware of use of terminology and language when referring to and promoting volunteering opportunities and within the recruitment process

The message is clear from Londoners that volunteer involving organisations need to pay more attention to language and terminology when recruiting.



Implementation

The response and feedback to the draft report of recommendations was overwhelmingly positive.

'It's brilliant. So comprehensive and well put together. If only even a fraction of these recommendations could be taken on.'

Lauren Tobias, CEO VC Hackney

However, coming up with a plan is only half of the battle, perhaps a lot less. Implementing the plan of recommendations contained in this report will be a long process and is not the responsibility of any single person or organisation. It is going to require a coordinated and collaborative effort to achieve many of the recommendations.

The London Volunteering Strategy Group acted as the steering group for this programme of work and has built great momentum as well as grown in number of members since the start until the production of this report. It is an expert, engaged and diverse group of London volunteer stakeholders who have not just steered this work but have played a crucial role in promoting and connecting it with the wide networks across the capital. It would clearly be advantageous to draw upon this fantastic group to carry on its brilliant work to help oversee and support the implementation of the recommendations.

36 - Continue funding for the London Volunteering Strategy Group to continue to oversee and support the implementation of these recommendations

Conclusion

When implemented the 36 recommendations above will significantly develop volunteering across London and, indeed, will impact the rest of the UK as well. It is hoped that relevant agencies will embrace these recommendations and work together with the voluntary and community sector to implement them.

"Volunteering is a vital yet often undervalued pillar of our society. It contributes immeasurable social benefits, fosters community cohesion, and improves our individual wellbeing. To unlock its full potential, we must account for volunteering and civil society contributions in public accounts by establishing a satellite account for civil society.

Collaboration between government, businesses, and charities is also essential to support and expand volunteering. By creating supportive frameworks and partnerships, we can make it easier for people to contribute their time and skills. Such efforts not only address societal challenges but also inspire a culture of civic responsibility, amplifying the collective impact of volunteering across sectors."



Lord Gus O'Donnell
Honorary President,
Pro Bono Economics (PBE)

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London Vision for Volunteering programme lead and report author Dominic Pinkney.

Dominic is the CEO of Works4U as well as the volunteer infrastructure charities Hammersmith & Fulham Volunteer Centre and Volunteer Centre Camden. He co-chairs the London Volunteer Centre Network and has set up and chairs the [national employer supported volunteering network](#).

He has authored national reports on volunteering such as 'Monetary Value of Trustees 2023' and 'UK Employee Volunteering Report 2022-23'.



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