

Vision for volunteering aims to enable inclusive, accessible and valuable volunteering in England, by:

- Improving understanding of the needs of the volunteer-involving sector as a whole, and highlighting the support and resources required to enable volunteering activities to thrive
- Producing an achievable, actionable vision with practical short, medium and long-term activities that can be implemented over the next 10 years
- Providing a platform for a broad cross-section of people and organisations to contribute to achieving the vision

Themes there are seven themed strands to the vision;

1. Healthy ageing
2. Climate emergency
3. Resilient communities
4. Employment and skills
5. Young people leading change
6. Sport and physical activity
7. Health and wellbeing

Volunteering within the different strands has been considered against each of the following types of volunteering;

- Formal
- Informal
- Micro
- Digital
- Family / Cross-Generational
- Pro-Bono / Skills
- Trusteeship
- Mutual Aid

The Six Enablers are the parts of the volunteering system that need to be targeted to address the issues or opportunities identified;

1. Addressing barriers in volunteering and reducing bureaucracy
2. Raising awareness of volunteering
3. Tapping into corporate responsibility and employee volunteering
4. Volunteer management and good practice
5. Quality Assurance
6. Service design and commissioning

Initial findings and recommendations

In autumn 2021 a number of workshops covering each of the different themes were held with different groups, to find out what the current barriers and challenges are within each theme and to begin to look at ideas for addressing these barriers.

Healthy aging

People in England are living longer than ever before, with the number of older people in England consistently growing. This creates resource challenges, with increased pressure on the NHS, demand for services is likely to surpass availability.

Participation rates in volunteering are highest amongst those aged 65-74; 28% volunteer at least once a month in their communities. Need to create a shared understanding of how to best manage, engage and utilise older volunteers, making effective use of their lifetime of skills and experience for the benefit of wider society.

The Healthy Ageing workshops explored:

- How do we enable older people to volunteer, contribute on their terms and stay well
- How to attract and retain volunteers and remove barriers to participation
- If pools of ‘young retirees’ as active volunteers can be increased
- Cross-generational initiatives, to bring younger and older volunteers together
- Resources needed to meet ageing population challenges through volunteering
- How volunteering improves quality of life for those with long-term health conditions, high and complex needs, tackling loneliness, and palliative and/or end of life care

Key Challenges/ Barriers	Emerging Opportunities/ Ideas
Lack of role flexibility Restricted infrastructure Digital exclusion Health concerns and unclear language. Added to this, there is no one clear place to look for opportunities	Develop a kitemark/ quality standard for organisations who fulfil set criteria for working with older volunteers Partner with existing digital inclusion programmes to enable digitally excluded volunteers to access digital volunteering roles
More needs to be done to disseminate the benefits of volunteering as a tool to sustain health & wellbeing in later life	Promote life-long volunteering, by developing volunteering programmes with schools, universities, employers and pension providers Create active retirement materials that highlight the benefits of volunteering and work with employers to promote these Showcase the broad range of skills and abilities older volunteers can offer, to combat myths - i.e. a marketing campaign
Existing assumptions about older volunteers unnecessarily limit their potential. This includes the fact that awards exist for younger volunteers, but not for older ones. Myths that older people don't want to learn new skills or try something different	Make volunteering accessible and fulfilling for older people: Provide free transportation and parking to volunteers Recognise older people's volunteering achievements Offer a scheme in which people could be part-employed and part-volunteering as they approach retirement

Climate Emergency

Volunteers and voluntary organisations have an important role to play, working to raise awareness, driving change through campaigns, advocacy and implementation of adaptation measures. With the climate impacting almost every aspect of our lives, it’s crucial to act now. Volunteering around climate has grown rapidly in recent years.

The climate workshops explored

- The key global climate challenges over the next 10 years (SDG’s)
- Current (and future) opportunities and challenges for climate-focused volunteering
- Tools, resources and investment considerations required for volunteering activities
- Identify what level of responsibility and ownership volunteers and wider VCSEs need
- Understanding of the capacity and willingness of volunteers to play an active role
- Ambitious but realistic climate-specific, actions-focused interventions

Key Challenges/ Barriers	Emerging Opportunities/ Ideas
No defined national strategy around climate activities, impact management and measurement, both for individuals and volunteer-involving organisations	A consistent, national strategy around VCS aspirations, strategy and communications for climate-considered volunteering Inclusion of climate criteria in funding/tenders, factoring in strategy around carbon offset, long term sustainability and impact reporting
Need for better understanding, transparency and engagement with volunteers as to how their role supports climate-focused initiatives, whether this be practical roles or an influencing/campaigning role	Awareness of opportunities for climate-focused volunteering, and contribution to climate impact Educating volunteers around how ALL volunteering activities have climate considerations Grassroots up approach, engaging audience from younger age
VCS infrastructure and operations don’t mirror the impact they aspire to achieve, and need to create a more accountable, managed strategy for enabling volunteering activities that are climate-considered and sustainable	Impact assessments built into policy and procedures for recruiting / managing volunteers Net Zero agenda for VCS infrastructure Centralised league table to benchmark how VCS organisations are measuring climate impact, with practical suggestions for ‘levelling up’ their activities and resources to support Assess how to better work in partnership, tackling climate considerations with joined-up approach rather than seeing other orgs as competition Impact measuring for sustainability goals to be built into DNA of VCS organisations (culture, strategy, operations, reporting)

Resilient communities

Being part of and contributing to a resilient community is what makes places and locations better - to live, work, rest, and play. Resilient communities foster a greater sense of belonging and purpose; they are at the heart of deliberative democracy; they enable us to function, and people to have the support they need and seek. Some of this is the unseen: kindness, neighbourliness, active citizenship. It speaks to the roles of volunteers as trustees and in governance, and democratic engagement.

The Resilient Communities workshops explored

- What are the characteristics of a resilient community? What does it look and feel like?
- Conditions that facilitate people to act, influence and participate
- Identify what makes it easier for people to volunteer in their community
- Explore best practice and what works as enablers of local participation
- How do resilient communities volunteer in crisis and peacetime scenarios
- and what infrastructure needs to be in place to support both types of volunteering?

Key Challenges/ Barriers	Emerging Opportunities/ Ideas
<p>There are challenges in sourcing volunteers to fulfil opportunities. At a basic level, it can be difficult to build and maintain local networks to advertise opportunities to. Beyond this, there is the deep-rooted challenge of building accessible and diverse opportunities that meet volunteers' interest and needs</p>	<p>Build understanding of the role/ benefits of volunteering Utilise accessible language to attract those who feel alienated by 'volunteering' Share case studies of volunteers' experiences Carry out research to understand volunteering activities and their impact</p>
<p>Planning for the longer term is important to sustaining resilience, but this can be difficult when there are issues accessing resources and funding. This, in turn, prevents the development of social infrastructure, inhibits individual organisations from adapting to change and further embeds inequalities</p>	<p>Adopt a community development/ place-based approach to work collaboratively with communities across the country to build their assets and attract funding Pool services for ease of use and offer training to speed up the onboarding process</p>
<p>Building community resilience is restricted by a lack of ability to easily share knowledge, resources and ideas. This makes it difficult to coordinate efforts in local areas, and to ensure that local organisations are pulling in the same direction. The role/ relationship between local and national organisations is a complicating factor</p>	<p>Enable information sharing by creating different ways for groups to come together. Map local infrastructure to create connected networks that meet regularly to discuss resilient community objectives and partnership opportunities. Create a national forum for CVS and VCs to share learnings and resources with one another.</p>

Employment & Skills

By 2030, without an increase in qualification levels it is projected that England potentially faces a deficit of 2.5 million high-skilled workers. Volunteering, already recognised as a vehicle for skills development and links to employability - presents part of the potential solution, bringing forward a pool of committed, talented, and skill-aligned people to address labour shortages and help bridge the gaps. Addressing ‘out of work’ audiences, those in employment and those in retirement years, this strand starts to identify opportunities and enablers for volunteering to bridge gaps.

The Employment and Skills workshops explored

- How volunteers can support and complement, not replace paid employment
- the benefits of volunteering in supporting people into employability
- The role of national and local infrastructure/investment to bridge skills gap
- The role and accountabilities of corporate volunteering
- Increasing levels of volunteering in non-typical volunteering communities

Key Challenges/ Barriers	Emerging Opportunities/ Ideas
Understanding and aligning the role of volunteers/volunteer-involving organisations in tackling identified skills gaps at a local and national level	Identifying the forecasted ‘skills-shortages’ in the UK and the potential roles that could be filled by volunteers Develop strategy to recognise and advertise the skills and capabilities of volunteers Creating shared ‘talent pool’ that can be accessed by range of organisations, initial training and clearances undertaken centrally Embedding funding criteria to ensure that volunteering activities also support employment/skills gaps in England
Attracting, managing and retaining trustees/treasurers within VCS infrastructure	Annual intake/development programme for trusteeship/treasurer opportunities, targeting the 25-34 year olds from corporate audience with an interest in these opportunities Supporting employees in their later stages of working career to engage with trusteeship/treasurer opportunities, retaining skills and transitioning them from paid employment to trustee-level volunteering A portal for matching people
Capacity, funding and resource within VCS and wider doesn’t allow for sufficient investment in skills training of volunteers, particularly within smaller organisations	Exploring longer-term funding that offers room for proactive planning rather than quickfire, reactive delivery A central employability and skills training/modules portal specifically for VCS Resource sharing between organisations Opportunities to engage corporate CSR in skills development/training of volunteers

Younger People leading change

Volunteering gives young people the opportunity to share their ideas, experiences, energy, and determination to overcome challenges, support others and make a positive contribution to society. It also provides young people with opportunities that can lead to education, employment, or training as well as personal development of soft skills, increased confidence, wellbeing, and opportunity to participate in experiences that may otherwise be closed to them. Young people are already contributing to society through volunteering and social action. At the same time, many young people lack the support or infrastructure to inspire them due to their background, current social or economic circumstances, or a combination of factors. This is an important strand of the Vision for Volunteering with huge potential for intersectionality with other strands.

The Younger People Leading Change workshops explored

- Volunteering as a vehicle for empowerment of young people
- Structural and investment required to enable young people to participate / achieve
- The perceived current (and projected) barriers to volunteering for young people
- The routes by which young people identify and participate in volunteering activities
- What planned interventions and resources must exist to fully realise the benefits
- definition of volunteering / wider language its relatability to younger people

Key Challenges/ Barriers	Emerging Opportunities/ Ideas
<p>Roles are often not flexible enough to fit around the young people’s lives and other responsibilities</p> <p>Often not communicated in a way that attracts younger people.</p> <p>Routes to volunteering aren’t open to young people of all backgrounds.</p> <p>red tape when it comes to younger volunteers</p>	<p>Speak younger people’s language to engage those who wouldn’t think volunteering was ‘for them’</p> <p>Target recruitment around those who have the least access. Go to where they are</p> <p>Provide coaching and support</p> <p>Listen to them to find out what they’d like to achieve and what they’d need in order to consider volunteering</p>
<p>Myths held about younger people can mean that engagement with younger volunteers does not start off well.</p> <p>Volunteering and social action is often based on what organisations think they need rather than harnessing the interests and passions of the young people themselves.</p>	<p>Co-produce volunteering opportunities and tailor them to individual</p> <p>Once young people are contributing their time voluntarily, they should be encouraged to give voice and help change the systems they are in</p> <p>This process needs to be formalised and attached to the volunteering role</p>
<p>Workshop participants discussed the difficulties that exist with supporting younger people in their roles. Those supporting younger people can feel unsupported themselves, and unsure of how to provide meaningful support.</p>	<p>Create a simple checklist to empower organisations to involve, engage and recruit young people as volunteers</p> <p>Develop a ‘standardised’ policy or ‘dos and don’ts’ for engaging young people in volunteering and clarity on needs for certain ages</p> <p>Recognise and celebrate young people’s volunteering and social action</p>

Sport & Physical Activity (managed by Sport England)

Volunteers are integral to the delivery of sport and physical activity. There’s also a strong correlation between those that volunteer and those that participate in sport, further underlining the vital role that volunteers play in enabling participation. However overall numbers of volunteers already appeared to be in decline pre-Covid. The sport sector may not traditionally see itself as part of the wider voluntary and volunteer-involving sector, but it does share many of its challenges including a need to overturn some persistent inequalities and open up greater diversity, in volunteering participation. Sport England’s new strategy, uniting the Movement, recognises this and encourages collaboration across sectors to address it.

The workshops focused on developing a vision for volunteering in the context of Uniting the Movement and common challenges and opportunities

Key Challenges/ Barriers	Emerging Opportunities/ Ideas
There is a lack of diversity within sport settings, and a struggle to engage underrepresented communities in volunteering activities. Despite a desire to be inclusive, often language and the set-up of recruitment processes alienate those from underrepresented groups	<p>Networks of sports clubs actively collaborating on and through volunteering to deliver inclusive activity at scale across an area</p> <p>Established, long term partnerships with schools and public health bodies</p> <p>Overhaul recruitment culture - more monitoring at senior levels, more focus in diversity in visible and leadership role</p>
Perceptions of sport and sports clubs as unfriendly/ unwelcoming, or not for people like me, further embed assumptions	<p>Develop new roles focusing on buddying and peer support (during activity) and targeting family groups</p> <p>Re-organise marketing around the cause not the role, piggybacking on community spirit</p> <p>Tackling perceptual issues through greater collaboration and partnership working and more ‘people like me’ in visible volunteering and wider leadership roles</p>
There aren’t enough resources available to work on improving recruitment and retention of volunteers, or to develop more flexible, inclusive and diverse opportunities	<p>Sustaining online activity started during Covid, transitioning to the increasing engagement of volunteers (who could live anywhere, but deliver online).</p> <p>Championing and resourcing models of local partnership working between sport and wider VCSE sectors - asset based (e.g. sports provision/facilities and community reach and insight). Social prescribing an early opportunity</p>

Health & Wellbeing

Giving is promoted as one of the five ways to wellbeing. Whether playing a significant, complementary role to paid professions or volunteering in a local community, volunteering generates an improved sense of wellbeing for both the volunteer and those they support. There is evidence that people’s wellbeing is suffering in the aftermath of the pandemic and there is a risk of inequity in the offer of volunteering opportunities when those who would most benefit are least likely to take them up.

The Health and Wellbeing workshops explored

- Volunteering as a route to wellbeing for individuals
- The scale of volunteering across this sector specifically, and its diversity of volunteers
- The reciprocal health and wellbeing benefits of giving time
- The impact to health, social care, and wider wellbeing from volunteering
- The role of both national and local/community interventions
- Interventions to prevent volunteer burnout
- Highlighting the challenges within the health, wellbeing, sport, and activity sectors
- Identifying what tools, resources and investment considerations are required

Key Challenges/ Barriers	Emerging Opportunities/ Ideas
There are barriers to taking part in volunteering and a need to make volunteering opportunities more inclusive and flexible, yet limited resources to do so. In health and care settings, there are often additional barriers, such as red tape.	Make volunteering more inclusive, such as by tackling reasonable adjustments costs for organisations and recruiting young volunteers as digital buddies. Make learning on inclusion widely available. Reduce red tape by increasing portability of training and police checks
Staff don’t have enough time, headspace or resources to support volunteers, especially on top of their main role, causing reluctance on their part. As well as leaving volunteers feeling unsupported in some circumstances, this is also causing concern with regards to staff wellbeing. These challenges are seen to be linked to a lack of funding and capacity	Volunteer Leader Network to offer peer support between informal and formal volunteer leaders. Network to be developed as experts in lived experience to inform health and care programmes. Offer a wellbeing development plan to any volunteer that wants one. In the longer-term, resource and cost Volunteer Management into grants and contracts, and incorporate volunteers into management and leadership structures of volunteering organisations, to support inclusivity
Measuring and evaluating volunteering projects is a challenge, not just because of a lack of time to do so meaningfully, but also because the focus of this measurement can be flawed.	Develop a national framework that provides guidance on evaluating volunteering, focusing on measuring the full impact of volunteering across health and wellbeing

The final vision for volunteering across England for the next 10 years will be released in May 2022.