

PLEASE READ BEFORE REVIEWING

This is a draft version of a report to enable stakeholders to comment and make suggestions before a final version is produced. The statistics reported from engagement work are to date and could change as this work continues until the end of the consultation period (24th Jan 2025).

We want to hear from you - Share your feedback here

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London Vision and Action Plan for Volunteering

DRAFT REPORT for Consultation

Consultation period: 5 Dec 2024 - 24 Jan 2025

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Report purpose

The aim of this report is not to be a definitive and comprehensive plan with all-knowing recommendations, rather a big, confident step forward, a blueprint to develop volunteering in London. It is a plan to make significant progress while recognising there are many areas where further work and research is needed and others that will take time to achieve.

This report is ambitious in wanting to significantly move the needle of volunteering but is grounded in reality. It 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 in London.

The work of this report has been a collaborative effort and has had the input of volunteering stakeholders across London.

This report is not about how volunteering can replace paid work; it is about developing volunteering that is currently needed and taking place.

Introduction

For the final Vision for Volunteering, we would like to invite someone high profile to write the introduction. Do you have any suggestions? Who can we ask that is high profile, not political and has gravitas that will help raise the profile of the report to help it achieve its objectives?

We are also looking for high-profile contributors in terms of quotes and comments to help raise the profile of the report and its recommendations. If you have any suggestions or corrections, please let us know.

Executive summary

The 36 recommendations of this report have come from volunteer stakeholders and experts across London. Together they provide a starting blueprint to help develop volunteering in the capital. Some will be easier and quicker to achieve; others will require more research and assessment to take them to the next level.

List of recommendations

Here is the list of recommendations of this plan following engagement with volunteer stakeholders and experts across London. For each recommendation, you can find the rationale and more detail in the appropriate section further below in the report.

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

5 – Funders re-evaluate their support for volunteering costs, from volunteer expenses to salaries of volunteer management

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

7 – Sustained investment for volunteering infrastructure

7(b) – Local authority departments working collaboratively to support infrastructure investment, e.g. community resilience/emergency response

8 – Dedicated funding to involve Londoners who need more support to volunteer

9 - Funding to support large-scale marketing of volunteering

10 – Development of a quick and easy-to-use best practice tool to calculate the monetary/economic value of volunteering

11 – The voluntary and community sector to embrace the need for such calculations, for the purpose of influencing those outside the sector

12 - London and/or Central Government adopts recommendations in the [Pro Bono Economics report](#). In particular, we have highlighted the following:

- (i) 1A - Establish a satellite account for civil society in the UK so that its contribution to the economy can be measured and recognised**
- (ii) 1B - Include a measure of the value of volunteering in the satellite account, to ensure more of the economic contribution of the civil society sector is accurately reflected**
- (iii) 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**
- (iv) 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**

13 - Central Government considers the new analysis on the value and impact of volunteering and implements changes to monitor and support it, as it would for other areas that bring a similar impact, e.g. manufacturing or health. Volunteer stakeholders suggested central government implements some or all of the following:

- (i) Create a dedicated government department for volunteering or the voluntary and community sector with a Minister for Volunteering**
- (ii) Appoint an independent volunteer expert advisor(s) to support the government (UK and/or London)**
- (iii) Fund activities to monitor and research into volunteering and its impact**
- (iv) Gives support to an independent body to promote volunteering in London/UK**

14 – Creation of independent body or initiative whose focus is to raise the profile of volunteering

- 15 – London volunteer-involving organisations continue to adapt to be able to involve more flexible volunteer roles**
- 16 – Focus and funding to enable volunteer infrastructure organisations to help volunteer- involving organisations adapt to flexible volunteering**
- 17 – More free, tailored best practice support for Volunteer Managers**
- 18 – London volunteer-involving organisations to look at their recruitment processes to ensure quick responses, accessible and flexible application processes**
- 19 – Support and guidance for those with a surplus or waiting list of volunteers to encourage and connect with other volunteering**
- 20 – Other funders to consider core infrastructure services as part of their grant-making**
- 21 – Production and promotion of best practice guidance for employee volunteering**
- 22 – Research into whether government incentives would make a positive difference to employee volunteering**
- 23 – Large marketing campaigns to promote employee volunteering and its benefits for businesses and the community**
- 24 – Development of infrastructure for employee volunteering**
- 25 – Recruitment of charity trustees through formal and open methods to help create more diverse and representative boards**
- 26 – More free or low cost training for trustee boards, creating a framework of trustee training**
- 27 – More support networks for trustees (local and London-wide)**
- 28 – More promotion of the trustee role**

29 – Increase support from the Charities Commission, including reducing the regulatory burden for charities

30 – Subsidies or free travel for students who are volunteering

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

32 - NHS England to work with London volunteer infrastructure to see how their new portal can connect with already established brokerage platforms and websites

33 – 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

34 – North Central London and South East London systems supported by Volunteering for Health to share their learning across London

35 – London’s Integrated Care Boards to look at investing in volunteer infrastructure to support the development of volunteering to support their priorities and objectives

36 – 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 need for volunteering development in London

National, regional and local research, as well as an abundance of anecdotal evidence, shows that rates of formal volunteering are declining across the UK, including London.

[NCVO's UK Civil Society Almanac 2024](#) shows 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](#) (335,340) since the pandemic and over 138,000 from 2022 to 2023.

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, over 50% of the volunteer managers we engaged said it was harder to recruit volunteers compared to before the Covid-19 pandemic.

There is no voluntary sector without volunteers. They are the lifeblood of the entire sector and a key part of how London's society functions. However, the work and contribution of volunteers is often undervalued and underappreciated. Volunteering can often be seen as "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; it is a key ingredient of the cake itself.

If all people who volunteer formally or informally stopped tomorrow, London's society would quickly grind to a halt. As well as the tens of thousands of charities and community groups across the capital, volunteering plays a key role in:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Health and care• Education• Housing• Sports• Arts and culture• Community centres/groups/clubs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Emergency response/Community resilience• Community events• Law and justice• Defence/military• Faith and religion• Politics
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Because volunteering is such a key part of the fabric of London society, we must take action when we see it in decline. The report aims to be a firm and positive first step to develop volunteering across the capital, ensuring thriving communities and a strong voluntary and community sector.

Methodology

The production of this report has been a fully collaborative process and the recommendations within are based on the views and feedback of stakeholders across London. The aim was not to produce a definitive report on all aspects, but to put together recommendations to enable the development of volunteering based on the intelligence and experience of people who are involved in volunteering.

The project began in Spring 2024 with Dominic Pinkney from Works4U (with support from Hammersmith & Fulham Volunteer Centre and Volunteer Centre Camden) as the programme lead. The London Volunteering Strategy Group (LVSG) acts as the Steering Group for this work, reviewing and contributing to the programme's development.

In planning 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. We designed a process that allowed us to proceed at pace but also enabled input from stakeholders across all three sectors.

A key part of the engagement process were 4 surveys targeted at particular stakeholders:

Londoners: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/BY3P3VN>
Volunteer Managers: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/FVM3MQF>
Trustees: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/BD3GTZR>
Employee Volunteering: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/6H775T9>

These surveys will remain live until 24 January 2025. We encourage people and organisations to complete these if they want to contribute on these specific areas.

As well as surveys, interviews and group sessions, social media promotion and media releases, we have published this draft plan and will encourage further stakeholder engagement. The 'consultation phase' until Friday 24 January 2025 will allow for feedback from those who have not yet had time or opportunity to provide suggestions. Following the consultation phase, we will update the report based on the feedback, suggestions and further data provided.

We believe that this process has enabled Londoners and organisations to participate in this programme and give their views and ideas.

London Volunteering Strategy Group (Steering Group for this Project)

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.

Association of Volunteer Managers
Bexley Voluntary Service Council
Big Local
Black Cultural Archives
Canal & River Trust
City St George's, University of London
Disability Action in Islington
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
Natural History Museum
NCVO
One Westminster
Providence Row
Public Voice
Caritas Westminster
RNLI
Royal Voluntary Service
The Stroke Association
Victim Support
Volunteer Centre Greenwich
Volunteering Matters
West London NHS Trust
YOU London

London Vision for Volunteering

For this project we are using the London Vision for Volunteering 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

Cross-cutting themes

Through the engagement work with stakeholders, key issues and themes were identified that cut across many topics related to volunteering. Development in these areas will have a significant 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

Involving volunteers into your organisation and 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.

Volunteer Managers in London 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](#). This is a free service for volunteers and allows volunteers to give volunteer-involving organisations permission to check if anything has changed on their certificates. It allows a volunteer to see who has checked their certificate, and they can take it on to the next volunteer-involving organisation (unless a different level of certificate is required).

Recommendations:

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

The governments online [DBS guidance](#) only relates to employees. This creates confusion for volunteer-involving organisations as to whether and what level of DBS a volunteer may need.

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

58% of Volunteer Managers suggested creating a DBS checking service similar to the Driving Licence check, where approved organisations can check a single DBS. The DBS Update Service works like this but is reliant on volunteers to set it up. Building greater awareness and support for Volunteer Managers to encourage their volunteers to sign up to this free service would make a significant difference.

2(b) - A more proactive DBS Update Service

By adding a more proactive element, any changes to a volunteer's certificate, with consent, could be immediately sent to the volunteer involving organisation.

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

Many Volunteer Managers reported inconsistent safeguarding messaging from DBS, Care Quality Commission (CQC), and Ofsted about involving volunteers. Others said the messaging was inconsistent from central and local government.

4 – Free DBS checking for volunteer-involving organisations

Any cost acts as a barrier for organisations wanting to involve volunteers. Making it free for volunteering would likely increase the number of volunteers or reduce potential safeguarding issues where organisations or groups do not request a DBS check.

Funding and investment

A common theme across all our stakeholder engagement was that more funding was needed for volunteering, especially for the following:

- 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 for the above would enable more volunteering to take place, meaning charities and groups have increased capacity and more Londoners will benefit.

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

To achieve more funding in any of these areas, we recognise the need for strong data on the value and impact of volunteering to justify the increased level of expenditure, addressed in the section below.

'I think there should be a national fund to help people with the expenses of being a volunteer; travel and food for the time you give, or even a stipend, especially to encourage Diversity, Equality and Inclusion in our charities.'

Recommendations:

5 – Funders to re-evaluate their support for volunteering costs, from volunteer expenses to salaries of volunteer management

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

7 – Sustained investment for volunteering infrastructure

Local authorities should commit to volunteer infrastructure, particularly through longer-term grants/contracts that will make organisations more effective and impactful. See the volunteer infrastructure section below for more detail.

7(b) – Local authority departments to work collaboratively to support infrastructure investment, e.g. community resilience/emergency response

8 – Dedicated funding to involve Londoners who need more support to volunteer

9 - Funding to support large-scale marketing of volunteering

See 'raising profile of volunteering' section below.

4 – Make DBS checking for Volunteer-Involving Organisations free

See DBS section above for more detail.

The value and impact of volunteering

Not being able to clearly and easily demonstrate the impact and value of volunteering holds back the development and investment in many (if not all) aspects of volunteering.

There are barriers to establishing the value of volunteering. Not only is there no accepted calculation or formula(s); there is also resistance from Volunteer Managers and other practitioners. Many find it uncomfortable and contra to the intention behind volunteering to put it a monetary value on it. One Volunteer Manager described making such calculations as “feeling dirty”. Others expressed concern that it 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 is powerful, but is useless to, for example, a local authority commissioner making difficult decisions about what can be funded from a limited budget.

Volunteering is giving the gift of their time for free, but volunteering almost always has a cost to enable it 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. Therefore, those in power deciding on whether expenditure should be made on volunteering (e.g. local authorities, funders etc.) are doing so based on their understanding of the importance of volunteering, rather than strong evidence. The level and strength of this understanding can have a huge impact on the level of investment that takes place in volunteering.

Therefore, if we can produce data showing the value and impact of volunteering, decision-makers can make informed choices about financially supporting and investing in volunteering. Although some Volunteer Managers are concerned that performing these calculations may undervalue the true impact of volunteering, not having this data is already causing decision-makers to undervalue volunteering. 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 indicate the value of the volunteering if it was paid for. ‘Economic value’ refers to 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 the figure that truly reflects the contribution made by the volunteering, but it 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. It uses this data 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. 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 an easy-to-use best practice tool calculating the monetary or economic value of volunteering would be helpful. 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.'

Various tools and calculations have been created already, but none have been formally adopted as a solution. Many will adopt the London Living Wage for a monetary value calculation, but this under-values 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 stakeholders suggested that if the government realised volunteering's true contribution to society, that it is 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.

Recent research from Pro Bono Economics has some helpful recommendations, '[A Feasibility Study and Preliminary Framework for a Civil Society Satellite Account](#)'. They point out that the economic contribution by civil society and volunteering is invisible in national accounts.

Recommendations:

10 – Development of a quick and easy to use best practice tool to calculate the monetary/economic value of volunteering

For this to have any use it must be endorsed and promoted to be an accepted as a tool. This will require funders to publicly state they support whichever tool is created or adopted. It must also be accepted that whatever tool is chosen will be imperfect and could evolve / be updated as time passes.

11 – The voluntary and community sector to embrace the need for such calculations, for the purpose of influencing those outside the sector

There is a recognition that it might be uncomfortable to try to place a value on volunteering, but also that it is an important part of building awareness and recognition of volunteering. It would encourage investment and support from other sectors. This would be made more palatable with a calculation or tool that was widely used, accepted and understood.

12 - London and/or Central Government adoption of recommendations in the [Pro Bono Economics report](#). In particular, we have highlighted the following:

- (v) 1A - Establish a satellite account for civil society in the UK so that its contribution to the economy can be measured and recognised**
- (vi) 1B - Include a measure of the value of volunteering in the satellite account, to ensure more of the economic contribution of the civil society sector is accurately reflected**
- (vii) 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**
- (viii) 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**

13 - Central Government considers the new analysis on the value and impact of volunteering and implements changes to monitor and support it, as it would for other areas that bring a similar impact, e.g. manufacturing or health. Volunteer stakeholders suggested central government implements the following:

- (i) Create a dedicated government department for volunteering or the voluntary and community sector with a Minister for Volunteering**
- (ii) Appoint an independent volunteer expert advisor(s) to support the government (UK and/or London)**
- (iii) Fund activities to monitor and research volunteering and its impact**
- (iv) Give support to an independent body to promote volunteering in London/UK**
See section ‘Raising the profile of volunteering’ section below.

These recommendations assume that if a government recognises how important volunteering is to its society and economy, it will want to act to protect and support it. Any of the above would make a significant difference to volunteering in London and the rest of the UK, but it would need to be carried out carefully.

Raising the profile of volunteering

In nearly all areas and themes covered in this report, volunteer stakeholders discussed 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, 67% 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 launched [Simply Volunteer London](#) in 2024 to help Londoners find a suitable volunteering role across the capital.

The long-running national campaign '[Volunteers' Week](#)' helps raise the profile of volunteering. This was confirmed in our engagement work, where 11% of respondents said this campaign caused them to start volunteering. The newer campaign [Big Help Out](#) also raises the profile of volunteering. However, these are one-off events that are not supported by large marketing campaigns, but through PR and promotion via local organisations described above.

The simple 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 tiny 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.

Justifying national marketing expenditure

In 2023 the monetary value of volunteering was calculated at £324 billion for England and Wales. Let's take a hypothetical national year-long campaign to promote volunteering with a notional budget of £3 million. If the impact of this campaign raises volunteering by a single percent, this will generate an additional £3.24 billion of further volunteering. The return on investment is 1,080 times greater than the expenditure.

Marketing expertise

Although a large budget would be needed for such an activity, by utilising the spirit of the campaign, any such activity should involve some level volunteering support from marketing/PR agencies or similar. Likewise, businesses could contribute 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.

Area of focus

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 – This is an essential volunteer role for a charity to function. Promoting this would enable charities to develop 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. Promoting this could bring huge, much-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 underappreciated role that enables volunteering to take place. Campaigns to promote this very challenging and professional role would be an important element of promoting volunteering. See Volunteer Manager section below for more information.
- Young people – 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.

Aligning promotion to delivery

Volunteer stakeholders and experts noted that while raising the profile of volunteering would be very helpful, it is only part of the solution, if the practical execution of brokering and processing volunteering is not adequately resourced. Contributors commented that when widely promoted national campaigns in the past had not involved or coordinated with local volunteer infrastructure, they were far less effective. With the under-funding of infrastructure and volunteer management, it will be difficult for these services to cope with large increases in volunteer numbers. Therefore, any increase in promotion needs support for delivery and execution.

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, someone will at some point suggest that 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. 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 volunteering and its benefits. Very experienced volunteer stakeholders also noted that, although this idea had been put forward for several decades, no one has come up with a good alternative to 'volunteer'.

Government support for promotion

It is unlikely that delivering this high level of promotion for volunteering can be achieved without some government support, whether financial and/or through resources. However, volunteer experts commented that it is important that the government, whether national, regional or local, is not the lead on this promotion, but an enabler and 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 created by citizens who 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 an agenda behind this plan to do such a thing. We hope that the recommendations show this is a plan to develop the volunteering that currently takes place, not anything else.

Recommendations:

9 – Funding to support large scale marketing of volunteering

This must be aligned with local delivery of volunteering, as increasing interest in volunteering that cannot be processed will be counterproductive. Costs could be supported by pro bono expertise and sponsorship.

14 – Creation of independent body or initiative whose focus is to raise the profile of volunteering

This would include both raising profile of volunteering to encourage people to volunteer and also decision-makers ensuring the impact and importance of volunteering is considered, to help ensure that volunteering is properly supported and funded.

Flexible volunteering

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 in the last 10 years, as more people use on-demand streaming services. The interest in television has not declined, it is just how people watch it has changed. This is the same 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 work/life - for example mine is an hour a week and can be at my choice when (as I'm a mentor) so it's extremely flexible.'

'A shift away from the traditional idea of volunteering in charity shops and food banks.'

Recommendations

15 – London's volunteer-involving organisations continue to adapt to be able to involve more flexible volunteer roles

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

Volunteer management

The Volunteer Manager or Coordinator role is essential to volunteering across London. Without them, a significant amount 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 because 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 Management role is arguably one of the most undervalued and underappreciated 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. A full-time London Living Wage job will earn [£27,007.50 per annum](#).

The number one area that Volunteer Managers identified as an area for improvement and development is funding to support volunteering. Following that were 'volunteer retention', 'volunteering for those who need more support' and then 'demonstrating value of volunteering to decision-makers'.

Through the Volunteer Manager engagement work of this project a staggering 50% said the volunteer manager was not valued as a profession and more than 20% 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.

'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...'

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

'Better pay and recognition of professional volunteer coordinators.'

'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 its counterparts in other areas of organisations e.g. Communications/Social Media/Fundraising/Digital Experience/Community Engagement Manager which solidifies its image as fluffy and a 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.’

‘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’.

‘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.’

‘Low pay. Not recognised by other staff/managers as having a difficult role as volunteers are voluntary not employed staff.’

‘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.’

‘Usually in charity it is under-resourced and under-paid.’

‘There needs to be stronger spotlight shone on the role and volunteering in general so that people understand the value and importance of volunteering and the impact it can have on individuals’ lives.’

There is a perception by Volunteer Managers that local, regional and central government do not have a strong understanding of the impact of volunteers. One Volunteer Manager stated, ‘sometimes I feel that it is about gaining a workforce without the council recognising the impact the volunteers have.’

Recommendations:

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

2 – Greater promotion of the DBS Update Service and user guidance

2(b) – Adding a pro-active element to DBS Update Service

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

5 – Funders to reevaluate their support for volunteering costs, from volunteer expenses to salaries of volunteer management

Recognising and valuing volunteer management as a proper profession.

17 – More free, tailored best practice support for Volunteer Managers

11% of Volunteer Managers said they had no access to best practice support and only 32% to free 1-2-1 support.

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 programme was to understand this more and what volunteer stakeholders and experts suggest, to develop volunteering.

Behavioural shift in volunteering

At least half of London Volunteer Managers engaged with this programme stated that they found it harder to recruit volunteers compared to before the pandemic. However, it is positive that 31% said that this was not the case, and a further 16% said they had a surplus or waiting list of volunteers.

Research and evidence from volunteer stakeholders shows that London's volunteer-involving organisations (VIOs) have been adapting to a significant behavioural shift in the way people want to volunteer. This 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 suit them. This causes issues for VIOs which is compounded even further by these organisations, in general, moving in the opposite direction as they are increasingly safeguarding-conscious, they have longer onboarding for volunteers and want or need volunteers to commit for the long-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 volunteer involving organisations 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. Volunteer Managers we engaged gave feedback such as:

'Fewer people want to do in person regular longer-term volunteering. More wanting to do remote or short-term volunteering which does not suit our organisational needs'.

Slow responses to potential volunteers

One of the biggest complaints about VIOs and barriers to a potential volunteer starting 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, so this is difficult to manage. Volunteer Managers recommended even a quick response saying thank you and that you will be back in touch later is an easy 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.'

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.

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

'Simpler forms to fill for volunteering.'

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

‘Make it easy to apply and for people to meet other volunteers in the same or similar organisation/s’

Volunteer passport

There were several suggestions for a volunteer passport in London, but not real detail on what this means in practice. The ‘Language and 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.

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 a less diverse volunteering across the capital.

‘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.’

‘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 disabled people.’

Recommendations:

15 – London volunteer involving organisations to continue to adapt to be able to involve more flexible volunteer roles

16 – Focus and funding to enable volunteer infrastructure organisations to help volunteer involving organisations adapt to flexible volunteering

18 – London volunteer involving organisations to look at their recruitment processes to ensure quick responses, accessible and flexible application processes

19 – Support and guidance for those with a surplus or waiting list of volunteers to encourage and connect with other volunteering

Volunteer infrastructure

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

It may not be 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. City Bridge recently announced they are not accepting any new applications [until autumn next year](#). 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, there is a very real threat that funding for this important element of London volunteering diminishes 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 varied across the capital with at least one borough committed to 7 years support for volunteer infrastructure. Many others are year to year, so 2025 is looking perilous with a possibility of several boroughs having no volunteer infrastructure.

There has been a significant decline in funding in the last 10 years for volunteer infrastructure organisations. Around a 60% decline 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 earlier this year by London Plus and produced by Superhighways. The report demonstrates the critical role Volunteer Centres play to diversify the sector, strategically develop volunteering, encourage and mobilise volunteering, and enable good practice in volunteer management.

Volunteer infrastructure organisations play both a direct and indirect role in enabling volunteering to take place across the capital. A conservative hypothesis is that its contribution is 15% of all volunteering. If this is the case, we could estimate that volunteer infrastructure provides £5.4 billion of volunteering at cost of 0.09% of the return it achieves. Therefore, it makes sense to increase volunteer infrastructure investment to develop volunteering across London. Can London afford to lose £5.4 billion worth of volunteering?

As the section below states, the focus on community resilience and emergency volunteering within the voluntary and community sector is growing. It is understood that 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.

Recommendations:

1 – 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

7 – Volunteering infrastructure requires sustained investment

Local authorities should commit to volunteer infrastructure and longer-term grants/contracts. This will make organisations commissioned more effective and impactful. One or two-year grants make it difficult for the organisations to plan or to commit to technological solutions, e.g. brokerage platforms that often have minimum two-year contracts.

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

Volunteering is not just about the voluntary and community sector, so local authorities could look to funding from other departments to support this.

20 – Other funders to consider core infrastructure services as part of their grant making

The environment for funders in London is extremely challenging. Adding to the demands of their limited funds is not desirable, but this is the reality London faces at present. The reduction or loss of volunteer infrastructure services will reduce levels of volunteering, which reduces the capacity of the entire civil society, creating more problems and issues.

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 for London's communities.

Through the engagement work of this programme, and through the [National Employer Supported Volunteering \(ESV\) Network](#), employee volunteering in London is mainly reactionary. In other words, it is not pro-active, joined up or coordinated. A significant portion of employee volunteering is driven by businesses reaching out to charities or brokers, offering a number of volunteers on a specific day, and inquiring about the opportunities where they can contribute. We need to develop employee volunteering so the conversation is reversed. Businesses should be informed of the social priorities for the area, and told the ways they can get involved to support.

There has been a growth in technology platforms used within businesses so employees can find and sign themselves up for volunteering projects and initiatives. This helps increase the levels of employee volunteering, but there are questions about the impact some of these projects have for the employee volunteers. Many projects will be activities that still take place with no employee volunteers present.

Also, we must not dismiss the growth and development in skills-based volunteering and the great work that many voluntary organisations are doing in this area, but this is only a small part of employee volunteering.

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

90% said that employee volunteering is 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 current 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 ‘ESV’. This term is not used and the acronym often not recognised by businesses. Businesses will mostly use the term ‘employee volunteering’ or ‘corporate volunteering’. As this report is for all sectors, we are using the term ‘employee volunteering’ and suggest this is the most appropriate term to use. This activity should not just be applicable just to ‘corporates’ but to all organisations, regardless of sector.

Carrying out Employee Volunteering

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

Charging for Employee Volunteering

Two-thirds of respondents, to date, reported they charged to cover their costs for carrying out employee volunteering activities. The National ESV Network has produced a [one-pager statement](#) explaining to businesses why a budget is often necessary to carry out employee volunteering.

Employee Volunteering within charities

The [2023 UK Employee Volunteering Report](#) provided analysis of employee volunteering across the private, public and voluntary 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. Even when they do, many do not have a formal employee volunteering policy or provision within employment contracts. The report states:

‘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’.’

Recommendations:

21 – Produce and promote best practice guidance for employee volunteering

22 – Research into whether government incentives would make a positive difference to employee volunteering

23 – Large marketing campaigns to promote employee volunteering and its benefits for businesses and the community

24 – Create an infrastructure for employee volunteering

This has the potential to be a game-changer for employee volunteering in the capital. It needs to be carried out in a way that does not duplicate current activity but significantly enhances it, giving support and guidance to businesses and the voluntary and community sector. If created, this infrastructure could carry out recommendations 21 to 23.

Trustees

The role of trustee is an essential volunteer role that enables the charity sector to function. Yet, these roles are often undervalued and hidden. In June 2023, there were an estimated 121,652 trustees in London (not far off the entire population of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea) in 20,619 charities. This is according to the 2023 Monetary Value of Trustees report, which also calculated the value of trustees in London to be £4.1 billion.

The following feedback and analysis was gathered through engagement work with volunteer stakeholders.

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. This is at odds with what can be one of the most dynamic, rewarding and challenging 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. One Londoner in her mid-20s 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](#).

Recruitment

Trustees are predominantly recruited through charity networks (80%) and networks of the trustees (67%). Less than 50% are recruited through wider advertising on free websites and social media.

Biggest challenges for trustees

The biggest challenges for trustees were unsurprisingly related to finance. 79% said that income generation and sustainability are the biggest challenges, with 68% pointing to the challenging economic environment for charities. Just under half said recruiting and onboarding trustees, as well as having or maintaining diversity of trustees, were a big challenge. One interesting comment from a trustee, ‘developing and maintaining collective decision-making is, I think, even harder than financial sustainability and forward planning (which are HARD)’.

Recognition

50% 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

79% 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.

One London trustee said, '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.'

Recommendations:

25 – Charities to recruit trustees through formal and open methods to help create more diverse and representative boards

26 – More free or low cost training for trustee boards, creating a framework of trustee training

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

28 – More promotion of the trustee role

Including myth-busting and promotion of the benefits

29 – Increased support from the Charity Commission, including reducing the regulatory burden for charities

Young people & lifelong volunteering

The need to encourage and make it easier for young people to volunteer was put forward by many volunteer stakeholders across London. Research shows 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. Volunteering helps them to understand the positive role they can play in changing 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 that we need to do more to help young people to volunteer, it is hard for someone under the age of 16 to be able to volunteer. This is due to lack of flexible volunteer roles that suit young people, as well as safeguarding considerations that lead many volunteer-involving organisations 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 of something bad happening to a volunteer. There is also concern that this would be so serious it could close a charity and/or cause job loss. One person 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”.

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 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 of the resources and funding requirements 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 collaboration and knowledge sharing between 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.

Recommendations:

1 – Detailed and clear online DBS guidance for volunteers

Improvements to government DBS guidance will give volunteer-involving organisations more confidence to involving younger volunteers

15 – London volunteer-involving organisations to continue to adapt to be able to offer more flexible volunteer roles

30 – Subsidies or free travel for students who are volunteering

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 therefore very confusing. Many Londoners said they wished there was one website for all volunteer roles in the capital.

‘Unification of volunteering roles in one website.’

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

On the face of it, having one website or platform for Londoners to find volunteering roles makes sense. But this can only be achieved if it aligns with how volunteering works across the capital, which is 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 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.

In 2024, the Mayor of London supported the launch of [Simply Volunteer London](#), which brings together the many boroughs that currently use the Simply Connect platform.

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, this leads to them showing interest in lots of roles. This then increases the burden on resource-strapped organisations, who must respond to more enquiries that may be less likely to convert to a volunteer joining them.

The health volunteering section below also explains the launch of a new NHS volunteering platform, currently in beta development. If this can link up and integrate with local platforms and any London-wide portals, it will make it easier for people to find volunteer roles without having to go to many 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 looking for solutions that work with other systems.

‘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.’

Recommendations:

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

To provide it for free would require funding or sponsorship. Perhaps a global technology company could provide it as part of their social responsibility goals.

32 - NHS England to work with London volunteer infrastructure to see how their new portal can connect with already established brokerage platforms and websites

Community Resilience/Emergency Response

There has been an increased focus on the role 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 couple of 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. If further and longer-term investment was made, we 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 developing and maintaining 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 are connected in the community and could mobilise others in an emergency response.

‘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.’

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

Recommendations:

33 – 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

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

Health Volunteering

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

Within the NHS, volunteering is not currently coordinated with volunteer infrastructure and there is no 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. At the time of writing, this is in the beta phase, but it is live. 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 new national fund [Volunteering for Health](#) was launched this year 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'. However, 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.

Recommendations:

34 – North Central London and South-East London systems supported by Volunteering for Health to share their learning across London

32 - NHS England to work with London's volunteer infrastructure to see how their new portal can connect with established brokerage platforms and websites

35 – London’s Integrated Care Boards to look at investing in volunteer infrastructure to support the development of volunteering in support of their priorities and objectives

Language/terminology

When working with volunteer stakeholders to carry out this programme we realised that we need to be aware of terminology used within the voluntary and community sector. Some of this terminology 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, it may be less clear what ‘informal volunteering’ is or what would be included. Even the term ‘formal volunteering’ has different definitions but usually means 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 being used as volunteer-involving organisations (VIOs) adapt to behavioural changes around volunteering. It is reasonably self-explanatory, but other terms that fit within this umbrella terms can cause confusion, such as **micro-volunteering** and **ad hoc volunteering**.

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 easily between different volunteer involving organisations. The term can also be used to mean standardised induction training technology, or agreements / guidelines between volunteer-involving organisations.

Disclosure & Barring System (DBS) – The term DBS is now much more understood. The old term, Criminal Records Bureau (CRB), is used less frequently. However, DBS is complicated. When a volunteer-involving organisations says a volunteer “needs a DBS” there is often confusion about whether this should be basic, standard or enhanced. Because the eligibility criteria for volunteers who need a DBS is not clear, organisations will often 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 the dynamic and varied nature of the role. 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 have the perception that volunteering is only formal volunteering and will not think of include all the informal ways people give their time. 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, so we must recognise that the term volunteer has different meanings and connotations in different countries. For example, people who grew up in former communist countries can have a negative view of ‘volunteer’ as it was not something that was done out of choice.

Language

As well as the use of terminology, the need for plain and simple language came across 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 how it could be improved to engage and interest more communities in the capital.

‘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.’

‘More promotion, more information, including in other languages.’

‘Simpler forms to fill in for volunteering.’

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

Recommendations:

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

Potential research areas

Volunteer stakeholders across London identified the following as potential areas for future research:

- Reasons people are volunteering less, so volunteer-involving organisations can adapt accordingly, provide relevant support and use more appropriate volunteer recruitment tools.
- How orgs have to change to be fit for volunteers/volunteering now and be future ready.
- Return on investment – e.g. the value of a volunteer management role(s) to an organisation.
- Showing the value of volunteering in terms of employment.
- Corporate volunteering: models, agreements, funding, language, expectations.
- How many companies promote/encourage/allow individuals to volunteer in work time?
- Business case that Team volunteering needs to be coordinated and therefore employers need to support and contribute to these corporate volunteering programmes for volunteering activities to actually be meaningful and actually make a difference.
- How to increase the number of people volunteering from diverse backgrounds.
- Identifying the needs of different types of volunteers, and the effectiveness of remote vs on-site programmes.
- Wellbeing surveys for volunteers comparing wellbeing at the start of volunteering and 6 months on, measurement of how many volunteers' employment opportunities have grown since volunteering.
- Research on skills and funding shortfalls.
- How volunteering can support people in learning and development, and into employment.

- There is research from NCVO highlighting the differences in volunteer engagement pre and post pandemic and well as emerging trends in volunteering. However, there is a gap in researching the impact these differences and trends are having on charities with particular volunteer managing practices and traditional volunteering roles e.g. impact on face-to-face, regular volunteering.

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 plan and implement them.

Thank you

This plan could not have been possible without the input and support of a huge number of people and organisations across London. A big thank you to all have contributed.