

London Vision for Volunteering

Summary Report



A blueprint for developing volunteering in London

Written and prepared by Dominic Pinkney

March 2025

A message from Sir Stephen Fry

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

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



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Foreword

Why I'm proud to champion volunteering in London

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

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

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

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

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

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



Dwayne Fields
Chief Scout

Foreword (continued)



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

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

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

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

Dwayne Fields
Chief Scout



A Blueprint to Develop Volunteering

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

It is a blueprint to develop volunteering in London.

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

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

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

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



Dominic Pinkney

London Vision for Volunteering
Programme Lead



Why this plan is needed

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

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

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

Decline in Volunteering

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

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

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

Methodology

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

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

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

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



London Volunteering Strategy Group

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

LVSG members include:

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

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

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



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

London Vision for Volunteering

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

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

Recommendations



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

Dr Debbie Weekes-Bernard

Deputy Mayor for Communities and Social Justice

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

Andy Haldane

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



Recommendations

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

DBS/Safeguarding

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

Funding & Investment

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

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



Recommendations (2)

Value and Impact of Volunteering

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Recommendations (3)

Raising the Profile of Volunteering

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

Flexible Volunteering

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

Volunteer Management

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

Volunteer Infrastructure

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



Recommendations (4)

Employee Volunteering

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

Trustees

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



Recommendations (5)

Health Volunteering

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

Student Volunteering, Technology, Community Resilience, Language

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

London Volunteering Strategy Group

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



Priority Recommendations

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



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

Priority Recommendations

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

DBS/Safeguarding

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

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

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

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

Funding & Investment

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

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

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

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

Priority Recommendations (2)

Value and Impact of Volunteering

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

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

Flexible Volunteering

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

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

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

Priority Recommendations (3)

Employee Volunteering

20 - Produce and promote best practice guidance for employee volunteering

23 - Create an infrastructure for employee volunteering

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

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

Trustees

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

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

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

27 - More promotion of the trustee role

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

Priority Recommendations (4)

Health Volunteering

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

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

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

London Volunteer Involving Organisations

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

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

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

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

Priority Recommendations (5)

Implementation

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

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

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

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



Fekky

Lewisham rapper and founder of charity
CC Foundation

Photo © Greg Barnes/RedBull.com

Conclusion

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

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

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



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



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

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

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



Works4U is a not-for-profit social enterprise specialising in employee volunteering



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