

# The Volunteering Fund: Guide to Inclusive Volunteer Engagement

## Contents

1. Introduction.....	2
About this guide.....	2
The Volunteering Fund .....	2
The evaluation.....	3
2. Design phase.....	4
Establish clear overarching aims.....	4
Have an appropriate team in place .....	5
Understand your target volunteers .....	5
Undertake research and engage other stakeholders .....	6
Build relationships with partner organisations .....	6
Co-design your opportunities with target volunteers .....	8
Embrace inclusivity and alleviate barriers to volunteering.....	9
3. Delivery phase .....	16
Volunteer recruitment .....	16
Maintaining volunteer engagement.....	19
Volunteer exit process.....	23
4. Legacy planning.....	25
Consider the sustainability of your opportunities.....	25
5. Find out more.....	26

# 1. Introduction

## About this guide

This guide has been developed by CFE Research and is designed for organisations who work with, or plan to work with, volunteers. It contains tips and good practice to support the successful engagement of volunteers and the development of inclusive volunteering opportunities.

It follows the volunteering journey and includes tips to help you each step of the way; from designing volunteering opportunities, removing barriers to engagement, recruiting volunteers, maintaining engagement, supporting volunteers' transition when opportunities finish, and project sustainability.

The content is informed by CFE Research's evaluation of Sport England's Volunteering Fund, which projects helped to design and was conducted via extensive consultation with project delivery staff and volunteers. The good practice in this guide is based on that described by projects through the evaluation. Although the Volunteering Fund projects delivered volunteering opportunities involving sport and physical activity, the learning can be applied to other settings and contexts.

The guide is designed to be used flexibly and organisations are encouraged to think about their own aims and target audiences and use the guidance as they see fit.

## The Volunteering Fund

From November 2017 to 2021, Sport England invested in 37 projects through a new Volunteering Fund to learn more about how to increase the diversity of people volunteering in sport and physical activity, find new ways to reach underrepresented groups, and create happier and healthier communities by engaging them in physical activity and volunteering. The Fund aimed to learn more about the relationship between volunteering and the outcomes; to understand what types of volunteering may be more beneficial.

The fund itself was split into two strands, each focusing on a different target audience:

- Opportunity Fund projects were focused on engaging people aged 20 and over, from economically disadvantaged communities, to get into volunteering.
- Potentials Fund projects were designed to help 10 to 20-year-olds get involved in volunteering. This was match funded by the #iwill Fund, set up by the National Lottery Community Fund and the Department of Culture, Media and Sport to increase the number of young people engaging in youth social action. They sought

to embed the six quality principles of youth social action<sup>1</sup> by ensuring opportunities are: reflective, challenging, embedded, youth-led, progressive and socially impactful.

Sport England adopted a 'test and learn' approach and invited applications from partners who could offer innovative ways to bring the benefits of volunteering in sport and physical activity to new audiences, including women and girls and people from lower socio-economic groups. The projects awarded the funding were diverse, both in terms of the range of models and approaches they were testing and the types of organisations and partnerships delivering them.

Sport England also had an objective to understand the impact of volunteering on individuals and communities, measuring the impact on a number of key areas including mental wellbeing, individual development and social and community impacts.

By the end of the investment period, over 8,900 volunteers had been recruited across the 37 projects, undertaking over 213,139 hours of volunteering.

## The evaluation

CFE Research, with their associate Dr Carolynne Mason and the ongoing support of the projects, undertook a four-year evaluation of Sport England's Volunteering Fund. This comprised a series of surveys with volunteers, administered by projects; depth interviews with project leads; and case studies which engaged project leads, volunteers and community members. The content of this guide is based on the evaluation findings, which can be seen in full in the two interim reports<sup>2&3</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.iwill.org.uk/about-us/youth-social-action>

<sup>2</sup> [https://sportengland-production-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2020-02/Volunteering%20Funds%20-%20Interim%20Evaluation%20Report.pdf?VersionId=aRf8BrzC1hJt0jUJ6\\_C93qHpKWMAsNiX](https://sportengland-production-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2020-02/Volunteering%20Funds%20-%20Interim%20Evaluation%20Report.pdf?VersionId=aRf8BrzC1hJt0jUJ6_C93qHpKWMAsNiX)

<sup>3</sup> <https://sportengland-production-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2021-05/Volunteering%20funds%20-%20second%20interim%20evaluation%20report.pdf?VersionId=ITvKDIBDVxri3yWILXQeVrIK64Akaer>

## 2. Design phase

**This section provides tips about designing and setting up volunteering opportunities.**

### Establish clear overarching aims

At the outset of the design phase, consider what you are aiming to achieve, both as a project and for your volunteers. You may already have a clear idea of this, but it is worth taking the time to clarify:

- **Why do you intend to engage volunteers?** What is the benefit of their engagement?
- **What volunteering opportunities** do you envisage running and why?
- **Who are your target volunteers and why do you want to recruit specific groups of volunteers?** E.g. you may hope to engage under-represented groups including those with disabilities; females; or those from culturally diverse communities or groups.
- **What are the intended outcomes and impacts of the volunteering opportunities?** For example, improving your services or those in your local community e.g. helping them to get active, improving social cohesion, improving volunteers' skills or confidence, or tidying up local spaces.
- **Who benefits from the intended outcomes and impacts?** E.g. volunteers, community members, other organisations.

The answers to these questions will help you to **clarify your aims and establish who your stakeholders are** so you can engage them when designing your opportunities.

This activity will also be helpful to develop a theory of change which will be useful for any evaluation activity you might undertake once delivery has started. Further information about evaluating volunteering programmes can be found in the Volunteering Evaluation Toolkit<sup>4</sup>.

If you do not have the answers to these questions, you may want to explore these in more detail before moving forward.

---

<sup>4</sup> <https://sportengland-production-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/volunteering-evaluation-guidance.pdf?VersionId=K.iF6GiOGFCT8KBlk8rGXnaQlACrNqJC>

## Have an appropriate team in place

### **Skilled volunteer coordinators and managers**

will make all the difference to the success of your volunteering programme. These individuals will need to be personable so that they can influence your volunteers, build trusting relationships with them and provide them with ongoing support. In addition they will need to have the skills to coordinate the delivery of your programme; and build partnerships with other organisations. Try to recruit people with these skills and/or support those in your team to develop them.

*"Having the right person in place... It's the quality of the person that looks after it that's going to make that big change."*

Project lead

## Understand your target volunteers

It is important to understand your target volunteers in the design phase **to ensure that the opportunities are inclusive, relevant and of interest to your target audience**. What works for one group of volunteers may not work for another. You may decide to review existing research or to consult individuals directly. You can undertake direct consultation in a group setting or through individual conversations. These activities will allow you to explore:

- Their **understanding of being a volunteer**. Some people may not have volunteered before or know anyone else who has; therefore, they may be less familiar with the concept and may not have a role model to inspire them to take part.
- What would **motivate** them to take part. By understanding what is important to your volunteers, you can design activities that capitalise on this e.g. young people may be keen to engage in social justice issues, so in this instance you would find a way to link these issues to your opportunities.
- Any **barriers** they may experience and the **support** needed to overcome these.
- **What they enjoy** doing to help you establish volunteering opportunities of interest.

### **Engaging with target volunteers was critical during the design**

of one project aiming to increase physical activity levels, and improve wellbeing, skills and confidence amongst Bangladeshi and Pakistani females. Consultation with this group established a range of barriers to undertaking physical activity and volunteering and identified support to help alleviate them. The barriers included lack of confidence, time due to family and childcare commitments, IT skills, and existing opportunities which take cultural sensitivities into account, as well as language barriers.

The consultation also explored what sorts of activities these women would be interested in.

**As a result of the consultation, the project was able to develop a programme which overcame barriers and successfully engaged the target audience** in volunteering opportunities.

*“The ideas and the programmes need to come from the people we’re working with.... Women from those communities told us what was missing, what was needed and how they would want it to be accessed and we worked with that to develop the programme.... It’s been quite successful.”*

Project Lead

## Undertake research and engage other stakeholders

In addition to understanding your target volunteers, it is wise to undertake further research to further inform the design of your opportunities. You may wish to do the following:

- **Explore if similar volunteering opportunities exist**, either locally or elsewhere. **Learn about what has worked well and what has not worked well** from these examples and try and create a unique local offer.
- **Reach out to organisations who engage with your target volunteers** to see if they have any **hints and tips** for successful engagement and any common barriers they have experienced. These organisations could be useful partners later down the line, to help with volunteer recruitment for example, so these interactions are important.
- **If the volunteering opportunities will provide a service to the community**, such as delivering exercise classes or activities, litter picking, or offering a befriending service, **investigate what is already on offer**. This will help you to establish how unique your offer is and if there will be demand for the service locally.
- **Engage with potential beneficiaries** of the volunteering opportunities to understand their needs. This will help you to shape your volunteering opportunities to **ensure you are meeting local needs**.

## Build relationships with partner organisations

You may have already formed relationships with organisations to support the design and delivery of your volunteering opportunities. If not, consider if these will be valuable to you. They can be formal relationships, where you contract partners to deliver certain aspects of delivery, or they can be informal.

The organisations you approach will depend on what you want to get out of the partnership, but this might include community centres, service providers, faith groups, charities or schools. Consider what benefits the partnership will have on any prospective partners – they are more likely to engage with you if they see the benefit to them.

Partnerships can have a range of mutual benefits, including:

- Partners' understanding of your target audiences may result in **further ideas** and ultimately **improve the design** of opportunities so that they **meet the needs of your target audience**. This may also help to promote joined up provision of services for your target audiences.
- **Referrals to other relevant organisations** who may be able to support the design or delivery.
- **Two-way volunteer referrals and benefits for partners**. Partners may have existing relationships with your target volunteers, so this could be an important recruitment stream for you. Such referrals may also help partners to meet their aims. Equally, you can refer your volunteers to partner organisations when they leave your programme, if appropriate.
- Providing a **broad range of volunteering opportunities, activities or training** for your volunteers. This increases the number and variety of opportunities available, which will help to recruit and retain volunteers.

**Partnerships have been vital to the success of one volunteering project and the benefits were mutual for their partner organisations.** The project aimed to recruit volunteers from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with disabilities. During the design phase, they built partnerships with job centres, housing associations, local councils and charities to support their recruitment. Not only did this **support volunteer recruitment**, but it **gave partners referral avenues for their clients**. In addition, because the project collaborated with partners and volunteers to devise tailored volunteering opportunities, **volunteers' skills and confidence improved, which helped to support partners' aims**.

The project also worked with local councils to find green spaces where their volunteers could undertake conservation work. This **provided the project with additional activities and improved the councils' green spaces**.

*"The links that we've created with the referral partners have been fantastic because they've enabled us to grow. Then it's about the beneficiaries [volunteers], getting them into*

*employment, into long-term volunteering, and feeling happier and healthier."*

Project Lead.

- **Shared use of facilities or equipment**, which saves money.
- You may also be able to **influence partners' practice**. For example, if you are designing inclusive opportunities, you may be able to influence partners' attitudes and approach towards inclusivity.

When building these relationships, it is important to **highlight the benefits to the partner organisations**. Also, take the time to **identify the relevant person to engage with**. Ideally, find someone who understands what you are trying to achieve and appreciates the mutual benefit of working together. Your contact also needs to have the appropriate level of seniority so that they can make decisions. If you find the right person, this will help to ensure that they enthusiastically drive forward any arrangements you agree on.

Be mindful that partnership work can be time intensive, so **set aside adequate time to build and maintain partnerships**.

## Co-design your opportunities with target volunteers

Once you have a clearer idea of what you think you want to deliver, it is a good idea to engage target volunteers to co-design the opportunities. This will allow you to:

- **Get feedback** on volunteering opportunities and support mechanisms, **and refine** these accordingly. This will maximise your chances of success and prevent you wasting resource.
- Improve the **authenticity** of your opportunities, as they will be designed by your target audience for your target audience.
- Ensure that your opportunities are **culturally relevant** to your target audience.
- Give volunteers a sense of **ownership**. Improve **buy-in** from your target volunteers.
- **Create evaluation methods** that are relevant, valuable and inclusive.

*"We started talking to them about what they would like, what ideas they've got, and obviously there were lots of ideas. It turned out that there were kind of common themes that people wanted to do."*

Project lead

Co-design continues to be a useful engagement tool throughout delivery, which is covered in more detail in the next section.



## Embrace inclusivity and alleviate barriers to volunteering

Ensuring that your opportunities are inclusive will help you to recruit people from different backgrounds, which has a range of benefits. Firstly, it **helps to encourage diversity of thought**, by having people with different views and life experiences working together. It also supports the development of a more representative workforce and volunteering community, **allowing people to see others 'like them' in volunteering positions**, contributing to a positive experience.

To ensure that your volunteering opportunities are accessible, **it is important that inclusivity is at the heart of your design. Flexibility is key** here and **overcoming any potential barriers** to participation will help to ensure that your opportunities are as inclusive as possible. Through careful planning, you will have a good idea about what steps you can take to alleviate these barriers.

To improve the inclusivity of your volunteering programme, you can map your volunteering opportunities to the **'ADAPT' inclusion framework**. Following these steps will help you to engage underrepresented groups.



Figure 1: ADAPT inclusion framework<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> This was designed with Dr Carolynne Mason.

To support you to design inclusive volunteering opportunities, the table below details common barriers to volunteering, including examples of who experiences these, alongside real life solutions to help overcome these barriers. This is informed by Volunteering Fund projects' experiences.

Barriers	Solutions
<p><b>Poor accessibility, or a lack of tailored equipment and/or support.</b> People with disabilities and older people may not engage if the premises are not accessible or if the equipment needed for activities is not tailored to meet their needs. Communication issues might also present a barrier for those with vision or hearing impairments, or for those with special educational needs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Engage with specialist organisations and charities for support.</b> They may also be able to promote your volunteering opportunities to target volunteers or refer you to other relevant organisations for support.</li> <li>• Ensure that <b>venues and volunteering settings are accessible</b> before you schedule activities. Consider visiting or calling any venues to check they meet accessibility requirements.</li> <li>• <b>Adapt equipment or provide alternative equipment,</b> where necessary, to ensure volunteering activities are possible.</li> <li>• <b>Tailor volunteering activities</b> to meet your volunteers' needs.</li> <li>• <b>Provide appropriate communications for your volunteers</b> – this might include braille, sign language or developing 'easy read' materials.</li> <li>• <b>Raise awareness amongst partner organisations</b> so they can improve their inclusivity. This might include delivering sessions and creating materials for their use, such as sign language 'cheat sheets'.</li> </ul>



Barriers	Solutions
<p><b>Stigma attached to mental health and low motivations</b> amongst those with mental health problems may cause barriers to volunteering.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Consider partnering with local authorities and organisations such as Mind<sup>6</sup> or Crisis<sup>7</sup> to recruit volunteers.</b> Target volunteers will have already disclosed their mental health problems to the trusted organisation, so they will not need to do this again, which could be a barrier to their engagement.</li> <li>• Provide a <b>buddy system</b> for volunteers to provide them with on-going support.</li> <li>• <b>Work with partner organisations to address the stigma</b> attached to mental health.</li> </ul>
<p><b>A lack of confidence, self-esteem or trust</b> to volunteer, use local services or engage in physical activity. This can be more prevalent amongst females.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Recruit volunteers through trusted partners.</b></li> <li>• <b>Provide taster sessions</b> for volunteers.</li> <li>• <b>Provide pre-volunteering support</b> before engaging in volunteering. This could involve mentoring from an existing volunteer to help build their confidence.</li> <li>• <b>Support your volunteers</b> on an on-going basis – you could do this through a buddy system.</li> <li>• <b>Provide female only sessions</b>, where relevant.</li> <li>• <b>Engage with volunteers' parents, where you plan to recruit young people.</b> This is particularly important if you are working with communities who typically have less experience of engaging with people outside of their own community</li> </ul>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.mind.org.uk/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.crisis.org.uk/>

Barriers	Solutions
<p><b>Language barriers</b> may prevent people from enquiring about, applying for and undertaking volunteering.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Translate</b> key documents into languages used by your target volunteers.</li> <li>• <b>Communicate with volunteers in their own language</b>, where possible. You could <b>use other volunteers to help with this</b>.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Lack of IT skills/access to equipment or the internet</b> to complete online applications or log volunteering activity. Older people, those from lower socio-economic groups and some culturally diverse communities or groups might be more likely to face these barriers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide <b>paper copies</b> of key documentation.</li> <li>• <b>Provide IT and internet access</b> at your premises or via mobile technology, <b>or signpost volunteers to access this via other local services</b> e.g. libraries.</li> <li>• <b>Support volunteers with online applications</b>. You might consider buddying them up with an existing volunteer who can support them.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Volunteering opportunities being too rigid</b> and requiring volunteers to commit for specific amounts of time or at set intervals. This is more problematic for people who are short of time, such as those who work, or those who have family, childcare or caring responsibilities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide <b>flexible opportunities</b> that <b>do not require</b> volunteers to commit to being available at <b>set intervals and frequencies</b> or offer one-off opportunities.</li> <li>• <b>Consider offering volunteering opportunities with differing levels of engagement</b>. This can allow your volunteers to engage as little or as much as they are able and can move between these as it suits them.</li> <li>• Provide opportunities on <b>days and at times that are convenient for your volunteers</b>. You might consider offering opportunities at the weekend.</li> <li>• Consider offering <b>remote or online volunteering opportunities</b> e.g. litter picking in each volunteers' local park as part of a collective activity or putting on physical activity sessions using online platforms.</li> </ul>

Barriers	Solutions
<p><b>Lack of time and money.</b> These barriers can be more prevalent amongst those on low incomes, and females with family or childcare responsibilities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce <b>family-based volunteering opportunities</b> to remove childcare as a barrier.</li> <li>• Alternatively, <b>provide childcare facilities</b> that run alongside your volunteering opportunities.</li> <li>• Create <b>local, easily accessible</b> opportunities to remove cost as a barrier. Alternatively, <b>arrange for travel</b> for your volunteers, where opportunities are not easily accessible.</li> <li>• In addition to covering travel and expenses for volunteers, <b>provide lunch</b> as an incentive to remove cost as a barrier.</li> </ul>

Barriers	Solutions
<p><b>Cultural sensitivities.</b> For example, some females in culturally diverse communities or groups might not have easy access to money or their personal identification which prevents them from covering travel costs or applying for DBS clearance. There might also be a perception that their responsibilities lie in the home and volunteering takes them away from this.</p> <p>Equally, some people might also have limited experience of engaging with people outside of their own communities, which can act as a barrier to engagement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Be sensitive to cultural differences.</b> Understand your target volunteers' cultural needs and preferences, and adapt and respond to these.</li> <li>• <b>Design activities that take these barriers into account</b>, for example those that do not require access to money or DBS clearance, so they can still take part.</li> <li>• <b>Find something that will engage your target volunteers</b>, which might not be volunteering in the first instance. Instead, build trust by engaging them in a social activity or in something that they value (which will differ dependent on your target audience). Once you have gained their trust, <b>then see if they are interested in volunteering.</b></li> <li>• <b>Provide female only sessions</b>, where this may help to overcome any apprehension to engaging in voluntary activities.</li> <li>• Consider the merit of <b>recruiting staff or training outreach volunteers who are from the community you are trying to engage.</b> This will help to break down any cultural barriers and you will be able to build trust within the community quicker.</li> </ul>

Barriers	Solutions
<p><b>Disengagement from school or employment.</b> Those who have disengaged from these activities might not think they have the right skills or experience to volunteer, they might not think that volunteering is for them, or they may lack the motivation volunteer.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Let your target audience know that all support is appreciated</b> regardless of existing skills and experience.</li> <li>• <b>Introduce the volunteering opportunities</b> to your target audience <b>in an exciting way</b>. Highlight what you have already achieved, <b>link any achievements to organisations, activities, celebrities, or other role models they may identify with</b>. You could do this through a school assembly if working with young people in schools.</li> <li>• <b>Use tailored incentives</b> to attract your target volunteers.</li> <li>• <b>Let your target volunteers know that they can decide to undertake activities that are important to them</b> – this will give them a sense of ownership, so they are motivated to take part.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Lack of volunteer role models within local community.</b> It is sometimes difficult for people to see themselves as someone who could volunteer if they do not have a role model within their own community..</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Encourage existing volunteers to act as role models</b> by telling their friends and families about what they have been doing and the positive impact that volunteering has had on them and others. This will <b>help your target audience to understand the benefits of volunteering and that it is something that people like them engage in</b>.</li> </ul>

# 3. Delivery phase

**This part of the guide provides tips to aid the successful delivery of your volunteering opportunities, from volunteer recruitment right through to when your volunteers stop taking part.**

## Volunteer recruitment

If you are reaching out to specific target volunteers, it is important to **consider what recruitment methods are likely to be successful** with these groups.

Underrepresented groups, for example, are less likely to have volunteered before and they may face multiple barriers to taking part. To overcome this, it is important to **reach out to and appeal to your target volunteers, providing clear solutions or support to overcome any potential barriers**. There are various methods that can help you to do this.

### Build trust amongst your target volunteers

In the absence of a pre-existing relationship with your target audience, it can be difficult to recruit volunteers by undertaking outreach work. **Underrepresented groups**, who may not have volunteered before **are less likely to engage with organisations they are not familiar with**; therefore, it is important to build trusting relationships, you can do this in a variety of ways:

- Identify and **develop partnerships with local organisations who have already gained their trust and respect**. Your target groups are more likely to be receptive to your opportunities if they hear about them from a trusted source. This will save you time and may be of mutual benefit to the partner organisation. You can then either visit these local organisations to promote your opportunities to target volunteers (such as through talks) or ask the partner organisations to refer volunteers directly to you.
- Once initial contact has been made, **nurture this relationship** so that the volunteer feels safe and begins to trust you.



## Build recruitment networks through word of mouth and recommendations.

Your **existing volunteers are a powerful recruitment tool** as they are a trusted source to their friends and family. Capitalise on this to help engage your target audience.

- **Encourage them to become role models** for volunteering by spreading the word amongst their communities and allowing them to bring friends and family to sessions.
- This can help your target audience to transition from being participants to taking on volunteering roles.

*"You might get one person volunteer and then all of a sudden, you'll get two or three others, and you'll find that they're all connected somehow... I think it's that safety of knowing that's it's not going to be too much for them, and again, it's that 'someone like me.'"*

## Use existing social media networks and groups

Social media provides another useful way of reaching some target groups. It also provides those who lack confidence some anonymity when enquiring about opportunities.

- **Assess if your target volunteers use social media** – if they do not, it is unlikely to be a useful recruitment mechanism.
- **Advertise** your opportunities in **groups that your target audience are already part of and trust.**

## Advertise appealing volunteering activities

People volunteer for various reasons, some do it to help other people, but others want to learn a new skill, 'have fun' or socialise. Capitalise on this when promoting your opportunities.

- **Knowing what motivates volunteers** and what barriers they face to volunteering will help you to design and promote volunteering opportunities that **appeal to your target group**. For example, opportunities that relate to sport and physical activity might be a good recruitment incentive for those who are already physically active, but they might be a deterrent amongst those who are not and have low confidence and self-esteem.
- Be mindful that the term 'volunteering' may elicit negative connotations amongst your target volunteers; instead, focus on how engaging your opportunity is and **consider referring to it as 'social action'** instead if you think this may deter engagement.

*"We've focussed on the body image, and the self-esteem and the confidence bit first, and then once they're confident, they don't care about the rest... We've done things in alternative ways... trying to find really subtle, fun ways, without calling it sport, or physical activity, because if you give it that label, the interest seems to be lost."*

Project lead

## Provide taster sessions

Target **volunteers might be apprehensive about signing up** to a volunteering opportunity – particularly if it is an ongoing commitment, regardless of the flexibility you offer. To alleviate these concerns, you may consider offering one-off taster sessions, which **you could deliver in a face-to-face setting or online**. These will:

- Give prospective volunteers **a sense of what the opportunity will entail** before they commit. This is particularly valuable to those who have never volunteered before and might not be sure what volunteering means.
- Provide you with an opportunity to **start to build trust with prospective volunteers**.

During the COVID-19 lockdowns, one project found that they reached new audiences through online delivery of their volunteering opportunities. **Individuals with anxiety and those with physical disabilities were more readily engaging with the online opportunities** than they had done previously with face-to-face activities. Their involvement in online activities then helped to **increase their confidence to undertake volunteering on a face-to-face basis moving forward**.

*"Many people were in a lockdown way before COVID-19, and many people feel like the virtual programme is a steppingstone to getting back into regular activity."*

Project Lead

## Maintaining volunteer engagement

If you have got to this stage, congratulations on successfully recruiting volunteers! It is now important to **maintain their engagement so that they continue to take part**. There are various strategies that you can use to support this.

### Provide adequate training and support

Training in its most basic form enables your volunteers to engage in activities safely and effectively, and it gives them confidence in what they are doing. There are various forms of training and support that are useful to incentivise volunteers' ongoing participation.

- **Pre-volunteering support** is particularly useful to **build confidence amongst those who are not ready to volunteer upon initial engagement**. This may take the form of mentoring from an existing volunteer so that they build the confidence to undertake activities in a supportive, friendly and non-judgemental environment.
- **Health and safety training** is essential during volunteer induction to ensure that volunteers can support delivery safely, minimising risk to themselves and others. This might include safeguarding and manual handling training and must be tailored to the role.
- **Specific training related to the volunteering activities** is useful to ensure that volunteers are prepared and have the confidence to undertake the activities they have been allocated. You can achieve this through training or shadowing.
- **Ongoing development opportunities** for long standing volunteers is important. Nurturing their development and teaching them new skills will help to maintain their interest in volunteering.
- **Accredited provision** (where cost is not prohibitive) will help to develop your volunteers' knowledge and skills, and provide them with qualifications they can add to their CV. E.g. qualifications linked to trade skills, coaching qualifications to lead physical activities or leadership qualifications. **For some, this is an incentive** to maintain their engagement in volunteering, but check if this is something that your volunteers would value before you make any assumptions.
- **Provide on-going support**. Your volunteers may have experienced a range of complex issues, so you may need to nurture their development and build trust over time. Once you have established volunteers, this is something they could support.

Whilst training and induction is important to ensure that your volunteers have the relevant knowledge and skills for their roles, try to **think about what training your volunteers need and when they need it so that it is not too onerous** – particularly before they have done any activities to hook them in. You should consider inclusivity and flexibility when thinking about volunteer training to ensure that all volunteers can engage.

## Maintain regular contact with your volunteers

Maintaining regular communication with your volunteers has numerous benefits to encourage continued engagement, including:

- **Developing trust** between you and your volunteers.
- Ensuring they **feel valued**.
- **Providing them with updates** about available opportunities.
- **Reinforcing the flexibility and inclusivity** of opportunities.
- **Re-engaging volunteers** whose engagement has lapsed.

*“Communication is the essence of belonging, you want to feel part of something, you want to feel appreciated. That’s what gives you your confidence, that’s what builds your self-esteem, that’s what gives you that ability to move forward in life, knowing that there is somebody out there that you can get that support from. It’s really important.”*

Project lead

Be careful to get the balance of communication right, as too much engagement could damage relationships with volunteers or erode trust. Ask your volunteers how they would prefer to be contacted and how often they would like this to happen.

## Let volunteers know they are appreciated and share what impact they have had

Letting your volunteers know that their contributions are valued and sharing the impact of their efforts can motivate them to continue volunteering. Remember to consider the following:

- **Thank volunteers for their contributions.** This sounds simple, but a ‘thank you’ goes a long way. Personalising these messages will also help and you may consider giving thank you cards to your volunteers – this could be done at Christmas or on volunteers’ birthdays.
- **Share any impacts on beneficiaries** with your volunteers so they understand the difference they are making.
- **Celebrate volunteers’ successes** by holding events or award evenings.

- **Encourage volunteers to promote their experiences** at events or when engaging with partners so that others can also celebrate their successes.

## **Consider the use of online technology to aid delivery**

The COVID-19 pandemic has taught us the value of using online technology. Volunteering is almost always more successful when done in a face-to-face environment, but online provision can **help to engage volunteers with low confidence and self-esteem** and provide a steppingstone to face-to-face activities.

**Online platforms and mobile apps are also valuable in supporting communication** with volunteers. They allow you to bring groups of people together remotely, which can be difficult to do otherwise.

It is important to consider access to the internet and digital equipment amongst your target audience before deciding to move all activities and communication online. This will ensure that you are not excluding people from opportunities.

## **Keep your opportunities fresh and relevant**

Providing volunteering opportunities that are of interest to your volunteers will encourage their continued engagement. The following tips will further help to ensure that you keep them engaged.

- **Provide meaningful volunteering activities.** Volunteers frequently engage in volunteering because they want to help people, so clearly link how the voluntary activity will benefit others.
- Try to **ensure that activities are enjoyable** as having fun is another key motivator for volunteers to engage in volunteering. Menial tasks are unlikely to encourage volunteers to continue.
- Provide **opportunities for volunteers to socialise or connect with each other.** This will enable volunteers to make new friends, which is a key reason why volunteers engage in opportunities. Some volunteers may not have time to socialise outside of the volunteering activity, so consider building this into the activity itself.

**Enjoyable activities were key in encouraging volunteers to keep taking part** for one project. Many of the volunteers were socially isolated or had very small social circles, so the project also ensured that they gave them **opportunities to socialise, which was a key motivator for them engaging in the volunteering opportunities in the first place**. They found success in arranging volunteer breakfasts or outings for coffee and cake.

*“The fact that it reduces that social isolation, and they get to make friends and just chat about life seems to be a main motivator for volunteering.”*

Project Lead

- Where possible and appropriate for your volunteers, **include activities that have immediately visible impacts**, as these are particularly satisfying for volunteers, which helps to keep them engaged. This might include renovating or cleaning a space.
- **Provide an array of volunteering activities** to maintain engagement. Engaging with partners can help you to provide a diverse range of opportunities – but ensure they share the same values as you and offer enjoyable activities.
- Linked to the above, **allow volunteers to change roles** to help to maintain their interest and **nurture the development of volunteer roles**. For example, experienced volunteers could go on to mentor new volunteers – this helps to develop their own skills and allows them to empower others which will help to keep these valuable volunteers engaged.

## Use incentives and rewards

Incentives and rewards can encourage some people to continue volunteering (especially younger people), but it is important that you ensure that the volunteer values the incentive or reward. These do not need to be monetary to be valued.

- **Link incentives back to their motivations** for engaging in volunteering. For example, if they wanted to help others, celebrate the impact of their support; if they wanted to develop skills, a certificate of engagement, award or qualifications may maintain their engagement; or if they wanted to volunteer to make friends, think of ways to bring your volunteers together.
- Listen to your volunteers and **tailor incentives and rewards** to them. This may involve **nuancing incentives and rewards for specific volunteers** (for example a branded hoodie may make someone feel part of a team, but another volunteer may want something different).

## Continue to embrace co-design and engagement

It is a good idea to continually engage your volunteers about the direction of your volunteering opportunities throughout delivery, as co-design has multiple benefits.

- Volunteers are **more likely to take ownership** of voluntary activities and **see a project through** if their ideas are listened to. Using this during the design phase is a good start to foster a sense of ownership and including it throughout delivery further promotes this.
- Co-design gives volunteers a sense of **autonomy**, which also helps to maintain their interest.

Volunteers, in one project, had greater control in the delivery and branding of their volunteering opportunity. **They designed their own logo which was used on T-shirts, jumpers and hats.** The organisation's previous volunteering projects used the organisation's national branding, but this project was different. This led to an **increased sense of ownership amongst the volunteers and promoted their continued engagement.**

*"What's it's done is, it's made it a very distinct project that is theirs, and people are proud of."*

Project Lead

- **Listening to your volunteers and obtaining their feedback allows you to continually improve.** Volunteers' views and needs could change over the course of their engagement, so invite their feedback at regular intervals – something they used to enjoy doing they may not like now. **It is also useful to have the flexibility to refine your project delivery in response to feedback.**
- Ongoing engagement also allows you to **identify any new barriers that prevent them from volunteering** or those that prevent beneficiaries from engaging e.g. what prevents women and girls from engaging in physical activity. As a result, you have the opportunity to alleviate these barriers.

## Volunteer exit process

Even if you plan to engage your volunteers on an ongoing basis, it is likely that that they will decide to stop volunteering at some point. Alternatively, your volunteering opportunities may run for a set length of time. In either case, **it is important to prepare a process to support this stage of your delivery to benefit you and your volunteers.** This will **ensure that the experience ends in a positive way to encourage them to volunteer in the future.** There are numerous steps you may want to consider.

- **Capture any final feedback** from your volunteers so that you can **continually improve** your opportunities e.g. through informal conversations, exit interviews or short surveys.
- **Encourage your volunteers to share their experiences with friends and family.** You may even consider the benefit of developing a **case study** that you could use for marketing purposes if they have had a particularly good experience.
- **Signpost them to other provision and support**, dependent on their needs. This might include other volunteering opportunities, employment support services or educational opportunities.
- Where appropriate, **stay in touch** with your volunteers, as they may be able to return to volunteering in the future.

## 4. Legacy planning

**This section helps you to consider the sustainability of your volunteering opportunities so that you can continue to offer them to new volunteers in the future.**

### Consider the sustainability of your opportunities

Dependent on how your volunteering opportunities are funded, you may want to consider their sustainability. Sustainability is likely to fall into one of two camps:

#### Continued delivery via your organisation.

If your organisation plans to continue offering the volunteering opportunities itself, it might be necessary to establish how you will fund the running costs associated with their delivery. Consider a range of different sources here to ensure that you are not reliant on one. You could do this by:

- **Undertaking fundraising activities to secure donations** e.g. crowd funding, running charity coffee mornings, organising table top sales or events.
- **Securing grant funding or sponsorship.** This might include contracts from public sector organisations or National Lottery Funding.
- **If the voluntary activity forms part of a service**, you may consider **selling the service to beneficiary organisations** to cover your running costs.

#### Continued delivery via volunteers

Alternatively, you may decide that it is not sustainable for your organisation to continue offering the volunteering opportunities. Instead, you may consider the possibility of your volunteers continuing to run these themselves. If this is the approach that is right for you, you might want to think about how you can support them. There are a couple of tips to follow here:

- **Develop a volunteering toolkit** that your volunteers can use once your organisation is no longer available to support them. This can include acquired learning from your delivery, hints and tips, and signposts to other available support.
- **Encourage your volunteers to develop social networks** within the community they are volunteering in to support them with future delivery.

*"We developed a social action toolkit, because that seemed to be a real driver for a lot of the parents, 'if you want to carry on volunteering in your community, this is how you can go about it.'"*

## 5. Find out more

Thank you for reading! This guide is part of a suite of resources that share what we have learned from the Sport England Volunteering Fund evaluation. All of the resources are available on Sport England's Evaluation and Learning Hub:

<https://www.sportengland.org/how-we-can-help/evaluation-and-learning>

You can find evaluation guidance and tools that can be applied to other volunteering projects in the Volunteering Evaluation Toolkit: <https://sportengland-production-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/volunteering-evaluation-guidance.pdf?VersionId=K.iF6GiOGFCT8KBlk8rGXnaQlACrNqJC>

Information on Sport England's work to date on volunteering is available on the Sport England website: <https://www.sportengland.org/campaigns-and-our-work/workforce?section=volunteering>

The new strategy 'Uniting the Movement' outlines Sport England's strategic priorities for 2021-2031: <https://www.sportengland.org/why-were-here/uniting-the-movement>

Contact us: [volunteering@sportengland.org](mailto:volunteering@sportengland.org)