

Activity Check-In

Sport and physical
activity volunteering



The Activity Check-In tracks behaviours and attitudes from both adults, children and young people towards sport and physical activity, revealing the impacts of a rapidly changing world.

Each wave captures views on a specific topic of current relevance – in this publication we focus on the experience of volunteers in sport and physical activity.

Full data sets are available on our website.

This document is for partners and organisations who work or volunteer to help deliver sport and physical activity. Here we explore the latest insight from the Activity Check-in on the volunteering experience. We also share some ideas on how to help retain current volunteers, re-engage lapsed and attract new volunteers. We hope this will help to address some of the challenges in volunteering highlighted by this insight.

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Wave 2 of the Activity Check-In was conducted by Savanta ComRes via an online survey completed by n=2552 adults (aged 16+) and n=459 children and young people (CYP) in school years 1 to 11. It included boosts to bring the totals up to n=526 of adults (16+) who currently volunteer in sport and physical activity and n=534 adults who have lapsed from volunteering in sport and physical activity, who are included in the n=2552 total adult sample (aged 16+).

All participants were from England and data has been weighted to be representative of the English population by age, gender, region and socio-economic status. Data was collected between 15th and 18th July 2022.



Ideas to retain current volunteers

The experience for most volunteers is a positive one and there are many who give a significant amount of time to the cause and find it rewarding. But it's important to not overload volunteers and ensure you can keep the commitment and level of responsibility manageable.

Check-in regularly

Having regular conversations can identify when the demands of the role might be becoming too much. Ensure demands feel reasonable. Discuss support that volunteers may need, or solutions to make it more manageable, e.g. breaking roles into tasks that could be shared across groups.

Recognise the contributions they make

Volunteer recognition can come in different forms and for some, a simple thank you after the session is enough to feel valued. Let them know that you can see the difference they are making.

Improve their experience

A better volunteering experience is not only important for retention, but can also help with recruitment too. Happy, passionate volunteers encourage others to join.



Ideas to engage lapsed volunteers

Lapsed (and current) volunteers identified flexibility as being important, so consider how opportunities could be adapted to fit better into people's lives.

Try to be flexible

Adapting volunteer opportunities could lead to more sustainable commitments, even if this means allowing people to reduce their commitment for a period of time, rather than volunteers leaving completely.

Reflect the motivations of your audience

Promote the benefits of volunteering, bearing in mind the specific motivations of your volunteers, e.g. giving back to their community, making friends, bonding with their children, etc. Identify the real barriers and motivations for volunteers.

Make them feel safe

Reach out to those that stopped volunteering due to Covid-19. Discuss what could be done to ensure they can take part, in a way that feels safe for them. Consider alternative roles e.g. roles with less face-to-face contact or online opportunities, to help alleviate concerns.



Ideas to attract non volunteers

With 13% of non-volunteers saying they would be interested, it is worth exploring the potential ways they could be engaged.

Raise awareness

Non-volunteers reported a lack of knowledge and awareness about volunteering in sport and physical activity. There is a role for clubs and organisations to consider how they can increase awareness of opportunities, especially at a local level.

Run taster sessions

Allow people to experience volunteering first-hand and make it easier to get started with volunteering in their local area could be an effective way of engaging non-volunteers.

Keep it simple

Reduce bureaucracy and paperwork. Excessive and confusing form filling is hugely off putting for those that may be feeling tentative. Successful volunteer programmes, clubs and organisations do everything possible to make getting involved as pain free as possible.



Resources

Volunteering Insight Guide

Research guide to help think strategically about your approach to developing volunteering.

Club Matters: Volunteer experience workshop

Recorded workshop to ensure that volunteers feel recognised, rewarded and part of the team.

Club Matters: Volunteer development

Resources to determine the skills you need to identify and engage new and existing volunteers.

Volunteering Innovation Research – during the pandemic

Identify the challenges and opportunities for volunteers during the pandemic and analyse innovative responses.

Volunteering Fund Learning Report

A guide to inclusive volunteer engagement.



Context

For most volunteers in sport and physical activity the experience is a positive one, and there are many volunteers who give a significant amount of time to the cause.

However, we have seen rates of volunteering in sport and physical activity decline in recent years, with an increase in demand for both time and responsibility having a negative impact on their experience.

There is also a risk of burnout for those who are currently giving a lot of their time, many of whom already spend two hours per week or more volunteering.

The Covid-19 pandemic restrictions, unsurprisingly, had a negative impact on volunteering, and was identified as the reason for stopping by 47% of lapsed volunteers.



What this means for the sector

Some volunteers are willing to commit to a considerable amount of support to the clubs, organisations and groups they help and find it rewarding. However, there is a risk that the sport and physical activity sector relies too heavily on this group of more regular volunteers.

The amount of time required and the responsibility being placed on them is having a negative impact on their experience. There is a danger that their passion and motivation for the cause will turn to despondency, with some already feeling they are simply fulfilling a duty and the sense of enjoyment from volunteering is lost.

50% of current volunteers could be classified as 'at risk' of dropping out owing to a combination of factors around pressure, enjoyment (or lack thereof), and motivation.

But by focusing on positive experiences, taking practical steps to ensure roles are manageable and that all volunteers feel that their contribution is recognised, the passion volunteers have for the cause and the difference they make is likely to lead to an experience where everyone benefits.



Key findings

Current volunteers

- Largely motivated by the difference they make, with 36% saying that this is what keeps them volunteering
- 29% have close ties to the club/group/organisation they volunteer and the cause it stands for
- 80% say that they enjoy their volunteering experience
- 75% agree that they find it rewarding
- However, 58% say that the demands of their roles have changed in the past couple of years, and usually for the worse
- 71% of those who reported an increased demand for their time said that they were looking to increase the frequency of their volunteering, however, there is a risk of burnout
- 46% agreeing that they are continuing to volunteer out of a sense of duty, rather than for enjoyment.



Lapsed volunteers

- The Covid-19 pandemic had a particularly significant impact, with 47% citing it as a reason for stopping their volunteering
- However, 56% of this group are interested in returning
- 28% said that they stopped because they were not enjoying their volunteering, due to reasons such as volunteering causing them too much stress, the demands being made of them were too much, or simply no longer enjoying the role/tasks they were doing.

Non volunteers

- 11% who do not volunteer in sport and physical activity give their time to causes elsewhere, motivated by the cause of the organisation, the difference they are making, and the organisation itself
- The biggest barrier for non-volunteers is the fact that they have never considered volunteering in sport and physical activity in the first place
- 13% non-volunteers said that they would be interested in volunteering in the future.



Next steps

The findings in this report resonate with the challenges seen in volunteering across sectors that have shaped the 2022-2032 Vision for Volunteering – in which we encourage the sector to join us, to understand and champion your volunteers and revolutionise their experience for the future.

Our commitment is to bring partners together to explore and discuss the challenges highlighted in this report and identify what role we can play to connect learning across the sector, identify solutions and support leaders of volunteers.

We will support more innovative practice to improve the volunteer experience and make opportunities to volunteer more inclusive.

Through our Club Matters website and broader club development work we will continue to provide practical guidance, tools and support to clubs and groups across England on volunteer development.

We are currently evaluating the support available to understand what clubs need in the future to support them, and will work with partners across sectors to shape a better future for volunteering and inspire our partners to join us.

If you would like to get in touch with the Volunteering and Clubs team please email: volunteering@sportengland.org