



Volunteering in Sport Insight Guide

December 2020

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Introduction

Six million adults volunteer every year to help sport and physical activity happen¹, with 1.7 million children and young people doing so at least twice in 2018-19⁴ – making sport one of the largest volunteer sectors in the UK²¹.



6 million

people volunteered to support activity **at least twice** in the last year

Whether it be giving back to their community, developing new skills or making new friends – people's reasons to volunteer are often numerous.

But despite the benefits of volunteering, for both the volunteer and those they're supporting, there's been a decrease in sport and physical activity volunteering in recent years.

We know there are barriers to volunteering for under-represented groups such as women, disabled people or people from disadvantaged communities, but formal volunteering is also changing.

People from all backgrounds are seeking more flexible ways to give their time and the sport and physical activity sector needs to understand how to accommodate this.

This guide aims to equip organisations with research allowing them to think strategically about their approach to developing volunteering in this sector.

The evidence used here was compiled pre-coronavirus (Covid-19) and the subsequent government restrictions put in place.

Coronavirus' impact is already being felt and will continue to do so for some time to come, leading to significant changes in sports volunteering and people's attitudes towards it.

While recognising there's further work to be done to fully understand the impact of the pandemic, the validity of this research remains and the learnings here will be important as community sport recovers.



What's in this guide?

At the end of each section you'll find links to case studies of this insight being put into practice, as well as examples of additional reading should you wish to explore the insight further.

And the final section collates everything we've learned so far and presents it in helpful tables, separating the insight into project teams, partners, your audience and the places in which you work.

This is followed by a comprehensive list of all the sources and further reading suggested in the document.

We know this isn't a definitive guide, though, and no theme or section stands alone, with each being dependent on another and we hope this can just be a starting point for those wishing to know more.

There are significant challenges ahead for volunteering in sport, many of these have been exacerbated by the impact of the coronavirus (Covid-19).

Whilst many current volunteering practices may feel new, we believe that **the principles of great volunteering are more relevant now than ever**. And with these challenges, there are also huge opportunities to support our communities to come together and create positive change for their future.

This guide covers four key areas where insight and learnings can support immediate recovery and long-term vitality of volunteer programmes.

Turn to section three on page 25 to see these lessons in action with practical suggestions from our Volunteering Fund investments.

1 The dual benefit of volunteering

Volunteering is a powerful force for good. Great volunteering is where both partners benefit, those whom the volunteer supports and the volunteer themselves. There is now evidence that **volunteering is positively associated with personal development, mental wellbeing and the developing of social trust**⁸.

2 Diversity

Without increasing the diversity of our volunteers, we cannot tackle underrepresentation and inequality amongst participants. Currently, significant proportions of our population are underrepresented in sport and physical activity volunteering, particularly those from lower socio-economic communities, women, those with a disability and some ethnic groups. **Building trust and understanding with potential volunteers is key.** Lessons from successful programmes shows that to do this, engaging diverse audiences must be a priority throughout.

3 Experience

Volunteer experience is essential to your programme. **Evidence shows that how successful the programme is to recruit and retain volunteers and the extent of its impact, is reliant on the experience of their volunteers.** There is also growing understanding of how volunteer experience impacts on the experience, enjoyment and behaviour change of participants too.

4 Volunteering in a modern world

How people give their time is changing rapidly and sports volunteering opportunities need to change too.

Understanding societal trends, adapting volunteering opportunities and sharing these new skills will enable programmes to engage new audiences on their terms.





Section 1: Dual benefit

Section 1: Dual benefit

Element 1: Outcomes for volunteers

Volunteering can benefit both the volunteer and those they support – a dual benefit.

The evidence base supporting this continues to grow, and our research shows that, for both adults and children giving their time to support sport and physical activity, there's a positive association between volunteering and the outcome measures for mental wellbeing, individual development and social and community development – with volunteers having higher scores than non-volunteers⁴.

Taking our understanding a step further, the interim evaluation report for our Potentials and Opportunity Volunteering Fund¹⁵ have captured this improvement in outcomes over time, measuring the outcome score for a volunteer at the start, then after six months or at the completion of their programme. The data shows that volunteers reported improvements across a range of wellbeing measures, including their satisfaction with life and happiness. They also experienced benefits to their individual development, particularly a positive impact on their confidence, resilience and sense of community trust. Not only did volunteers report improvement in these areas, many agreed it was volunteering through the project that had positively impacted on them.

The outcomes for volunteers is also looked at in JUMP's report Happy Days²⁴, parkrun's volunteer survey results³⁶ and Riding for the Disabled Association's Volunteering Impact report³². Beyond sport, there's a growing evidence base focussing on specific outcomes, such as the Wildlife Trusts' report on volunteering and mental health²⁶ – which showed that 95% of participants with low mental wellbeing at the start of volunteering reported an improvement in six weeks.



Formal volunteering with an organisation (such as a sports club) and volunteering more regularly, increase the likelihood for higher wellbeing outcomes

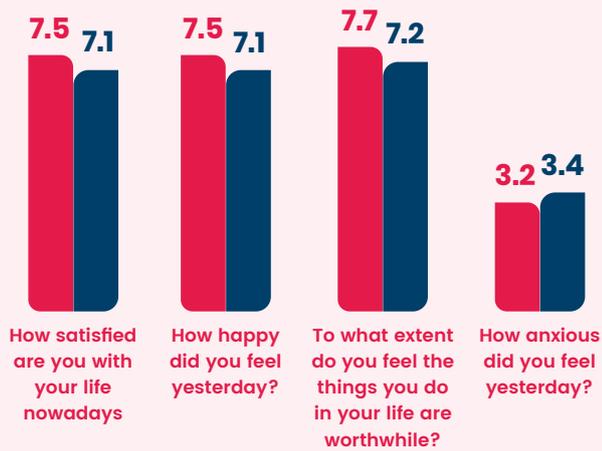
JUMP, Lifecycle of Volunteering in Sport 2019



Mental Wellbeing

Adults who volunteer have higher mental wellbeing scores than those who don't.

- Volunteered at least twice in the last year
- Not volunteered at least twice in the last year

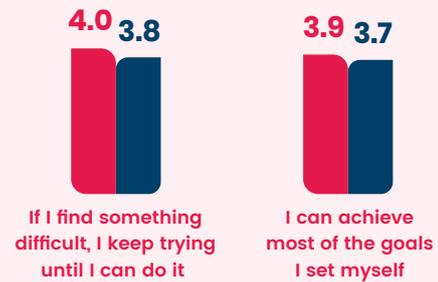


Active Lives Adult Survey, Nov 2018/19

Individual development

Adults who volunteer have higher individual development scores than those who don't.

- Volunteered at least twice in the last year
- Not volunteered at least twice in the last year



Active Lives Adult Survey, Nov 2018/19

Social & community development

Adults who volunteer have higher social and community development scores than those who don't.

- Volunteered at least twice in the last year
- Not volunteered at least twice in the last year



Active Lives Adult Survey, Nov 2018/19





Case study:

“It’s like chocolate for the soul,” is how Cath, a She’s Ready volunteer, described her experience supporting activity sessions for women in her home of Southend, Essex.

“I’ve been a She’s Ready volunteer since the beginning two years ago. Whenever I leave here, or whenever I leave an event, I am so uplifted by the whole thing.”

She’s Ready is a woman-only movement, supporting women to volunteer in a range of ways that help other women to get and stay active. The programme allows people to give their time, connect with likeminded people, develop their skills and experience to train as an instructor and go on to lead their own sessions.



Explore further

For those wishing to understand more about the impact of your volunteer programmes, we’ve produced a Volunteer Survey Guide¹⁸ and shared our Measurement and Evaluation Framework¹⁷. These are to support organisations and community groups to understand their volunteers better – their motivations, their experience and their outcomes. By using the volunteer survey and/or embedding evaluation, organisations can ensure volunteers have the best possible experience, stay for longer and improve recruitment of future volunteers. This’ll help organisations think and plan strategically for their volunteer workforce.



Section 1: Dual benefit

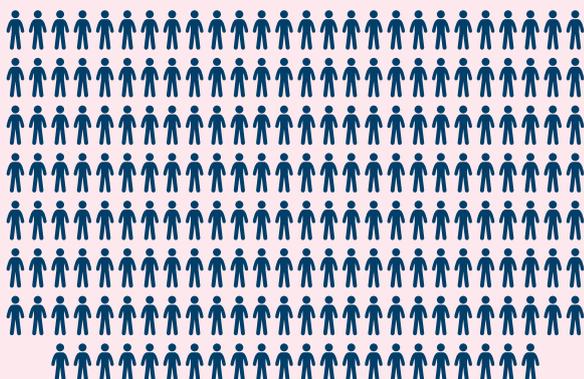
Element 2: Impact on participation in sport and physical activity

Volunteers are an integral part of the community infrastructure that help people get active.

On average, a club depends on **24 volunteers** to support **204 members**

204

Members supported



SIRC Clubs Survey 2018

With a typical community sports club depending on 24 volunteers to support on average 204 members¹², it's clear that without them, most community sport and physical activity simply wouldn't happen. However, sustaining this capacity can be a challenge. Volunteer growth, succession planning and developing a sustainable volunteer model can remain the preserve of larger clubs, which often enables further club growth. With the majority of volunteers recruited by word of mouth through the club network, greater club membership increases the opportunity to engage more volunteers. This reciprocal relationship between volunteers and participants can also work in reverse, with clubs and groups at risk of perpetuating falling numbers among their volunteers and participants.

Further information about the relationship between the growth in playing membership and increasing a clubs' volunteer network is explored in detail in the SIRC Clubs Survey report⁵.

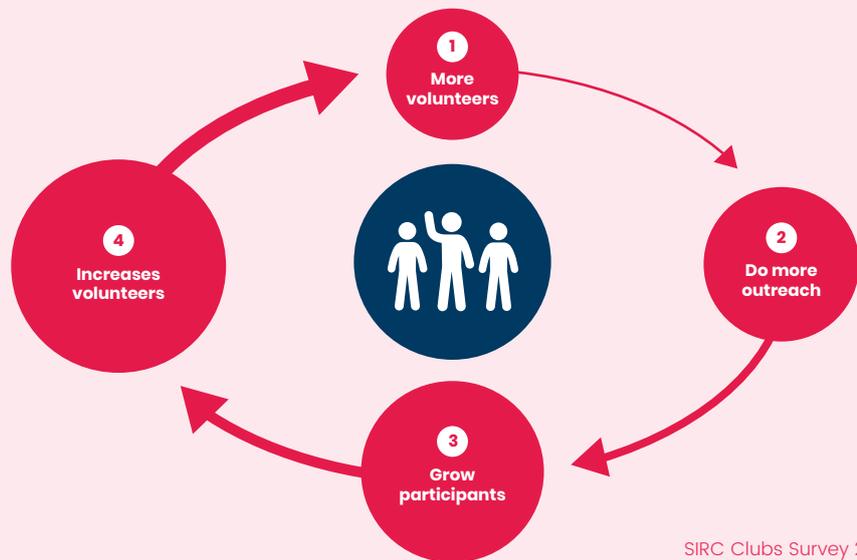


70%

of clubs reported they **need more volunteers**

SIRC Clubs survey, 2018

Evidence suggests that those **clubs with more volunteers** are able to do outreach work, which grows participation, and in turn, **increases volunteer numbers**



SIRC Clubs Survey 2018

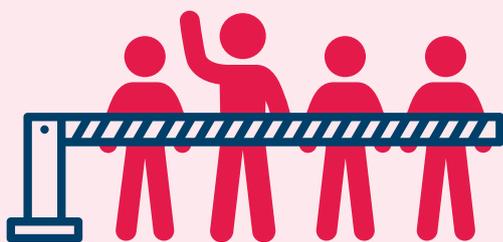
Insight⁵ consistently suggests that there's a shortage of volunteers in the sector, with around 70% of clubs reporting a need for more volunteers.

The consequence of this shortage means a third of clubs feel they're less effective in the support they provide to their participants.

Nearly 40% of clubs report volunteer shortages restricts their ability to increase the numbers of participants, with one in four unable to provide coaches.

While recent research has highlighted the capacity that volunteers provide, there's also growing understanding of the impact of volunteers on a participant's experience and outcomes. Insight shows a strong association between the skills and behaviours of those delivering or enabling sport or physical activity and the quality of the experience for the participant. There's also a growing understanding of the unique added value volunteers can bring to a participant's experience.

Whether this is through peer-to-peer support or sharing experience, such as the research by MIND in their Side by Side study³⁵ following their successful mental health peer mentoring programme. Or as a support or 'bridge' into activity for those who are less active - with learnings from London Sport's Building a Workforce for the Future report²⁷ suggesting a more diverse volunteering workforce could help the sport and physical activity sector attract participants from parts of the community that are currently underrepresented. This may include groups that are less likely to be physically active, or who have the most to gain from getting involved in sport and physical activity.

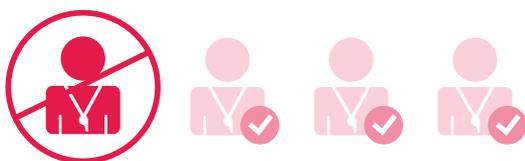


40%

of clubs report that **volunteer capacity shortages** restrict their ability to increase the number of participants

1 in 4

unable to provide coaches



SIRC Club survey report 2018



CASE STUDY:

Street Games' Doorstep Sportclub Programme was established in 2013 to support 100,000 disadvantaged young people to participate in sport in 1,000 new-style youth sports clubs. Having the 'right' leaders delivering the sessions was a key ingredient to the success of the programme.

“ Successful Doorstep Sportclub sessions are fun, friendly and engaging. This atmosphere is largely determined by the right coaches. Participants tell us that having the right coach or leader is the most important factor in determining whether a sports session is 'good' ”

Participants also value leaders who are knowledgeable about sport and good at supporting young people to improve their skills. Young people respect leaders and coaches who show them a strong commitment. Many of the best coaches and leaders themselves grew up in the neighbourhood where they work, or grew up nearby or in a similar place³⁸.”

Just one example is Michelle's story – volunteering played a pivotal role in Michelle's life and she now relishes the opportunity to have a similar impact on the young people who attend her own sessions, inspiring them to go on and make changes in their own lives.

Find out more in [Lessons of StreetGames Young Volunteers report³³](#).

Explore further

As much of existing sports volunteering happens in local community group or club settings, to explore the relationship between volunteers and sports clubs in particular, you may wish to look at SIRC's Club survey (2018)⁵, the SRA's Sports Club Survey report 2017/18¹², as well as Join In's Hidden Diamonds report (2016)³¹.

Understanding the relationship between a volunteer's experience and a participant's experience is an area we're keen to draw together and explore further with others. As such we've published some 'key questions' in our [Workforce Evaluation Guide¹⁹](#), which we'd encourage partners to look at.



Section 2 Opportunities and challenges

Section 2: Opportunities and challenges

Element 3: Diversity

Our 2016 Volunteering Strategy identified diversity as one of the biggest opportunities and greatest challenges for the sports sector.

Diversity is important so that everyone is able to benefit from volunteering, so that participants see themselves represented among their role models and the workforce, and so that both participants and organisations benefit from the diversity of ideas and experiences.

Sport and physical activity differ from other parts of the UK's voluntary sector, with more men giving their time (58%) than women, and a greater spread across age groups.

Profiles of sports volunteers

Gender

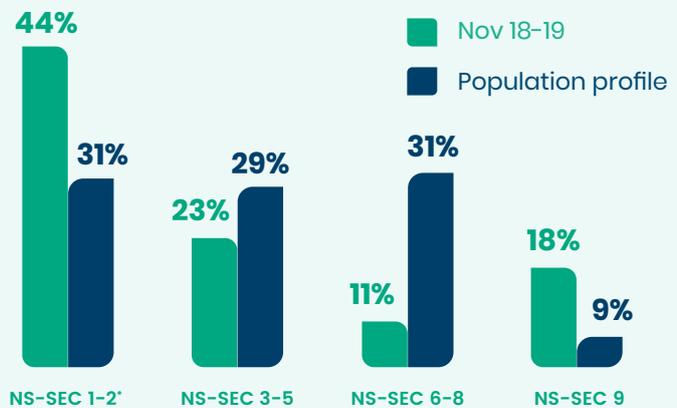


58%
Male

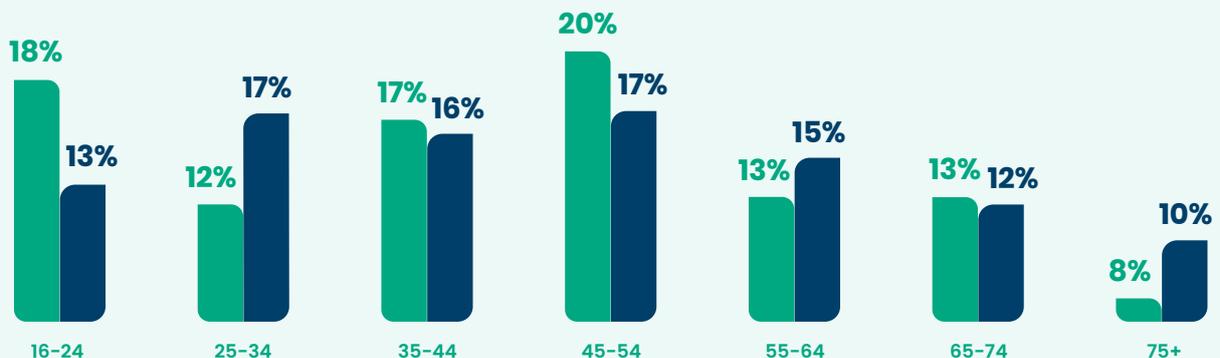


42%
Female

Socio-economic groups



Age



* NS-SEC = National Statistics Socio-economic classification

Active Lives Adult Survey, Nov 2019/20

While at population level it would seem that sports volunteers broadly mirror the ethnic make-up of England, they're still more likely to be white, middle class, middle age and male. In particular, we continue to see stubborn disparities among some audiences, with disabled people or people with a long-term health condition accounting for 13% of volunteers, despite accounting for 21% of the population.

Lower socio-economic communities remain the most under-represented group, making up only 11% of sports volunteers but 31% of the English population.

Ethnicity

White British people make up the majority of those volunteering in sport



84%
White
British

Active Lives Adult Survey, Nov 2019/20

Disability

The number of disabled volunteers is **disproportionate** to the number of disabled people in the UK.



13%
Number of
volunteers with
a disability



21%
UK population
that have a
disability

Active Lives Adult Survey, Nov 2019/20

Socio-economic

People from lower socio-economic communities remain **the most under-represented group**.

% of volunteers...



11%
of volunteers
are from lower
socio-economic
communities

% of the UK population...



31%
of the UK
population
are from lower
socio-economic
communities

Active Lives Adult Survey, Nov 2019/20

We've produced two Active Lives Spotlight reports reviewing the data on volunteering in relation to gender and socio-economic backgrounds, which consider some of the motivations and barriers these audiences face. For example, Active Lives and UK Coaching's research report highlight that women are significantly less likely to be in leadership or front-line delivery roles, such as club management, officiating or coaching. While among children and young people, girls are more likely to do coaching, there remains a disparity, with boys who volunteer more likely than girls to be a sports leader or ambassador⁴.

Despite the inequality we see with adults, we generally see greater diversity among younger volunteers, with boys and girls equally represented, and the profile of children and young people with a disability or long-term health condition, and those

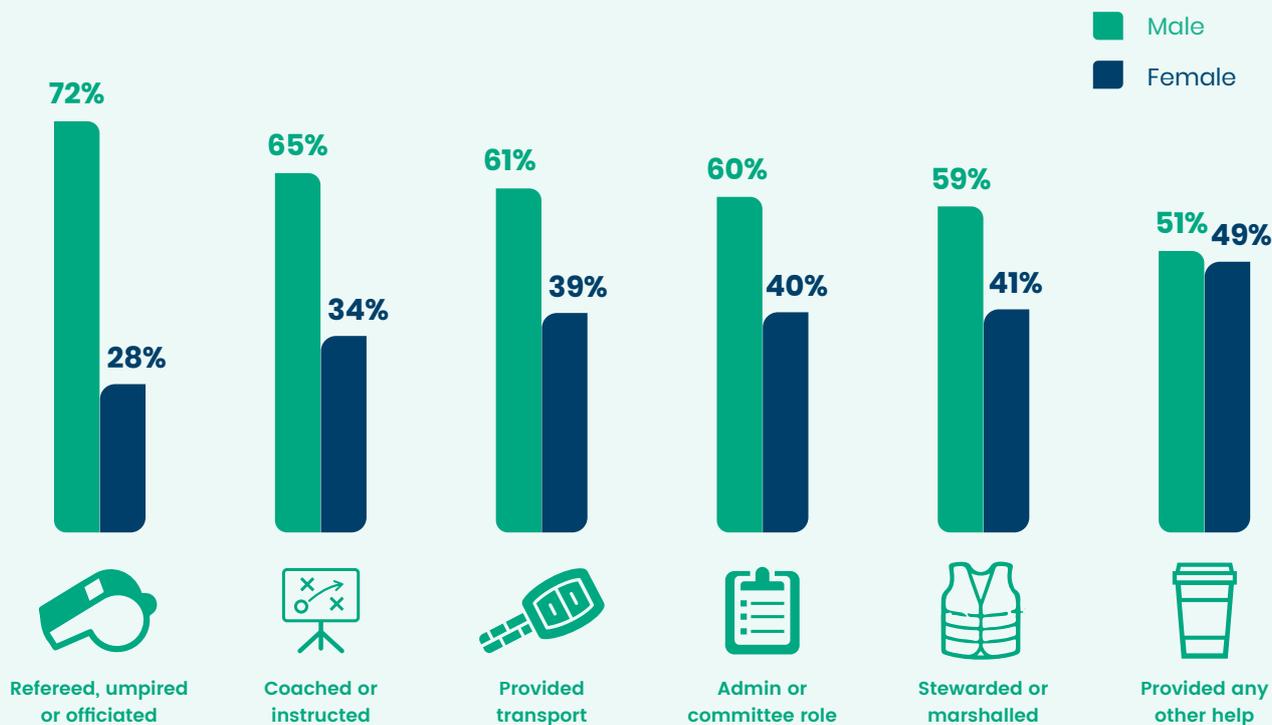
from an ethnic minority who volunteer, broadly matching that of the population⁴. With evidence suggesting that those who give their time when they're young more likely to volunteer in later life, this is an important audience to consider⁵.

Encouragingly, where programmes specifically seek to engage and collaborate with diverse audiences, they're seeing positive results. For example, our Interim Evaluation Report⁸ from the Volunteering Funds show some early success in recruiting more women and girls (53.2%), those living in more deprived communities (40.7%), those from ethnically diverse backgrounds (38.6%) and those with a disability (20.2%).

Check out [p27-30](#) for programme learnings which can help you diversify your volunteers

Volunteer roles and gender

Profile of roles undertaken amongst adults (aged 16+) who have **volunteered at least twice** in the last year



Active Lives Adult Survey, November 2019/20



Case Study:

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) is running a unique volunteer programme to engage British South Asian women into activator roles, in turn, supporting children to play cricket in a safe and fun environment. Shruti Saujani, ECB city programme manager said:

“This has the potential to make a massive difference to cricket in this country. We are already seeing some incredible stories of South Asian women across the country taking up the game and becoming role models for the next generation.”

Before launching their programme, the ECB worked with local communities and women to understand what they'd want from the opportunity, whether to spend time with their kids, to develop skills or to make friends locally, and then designed the programme and the support around this.



Explore further

For more information about diversity across the UK in all sectors, please see the Community Life survey results²⁸ and NCVO's Time Well Spent²¹ report, who are also due to publish a specific report on diversity in 2020. JUMP's The ABC of BAME²² report also makes a compelling case to ensure people from all ethnic backgrounds, and their inter-sectional identities, are considered individually, rather than being treated as an overall homogeneous group, whilst their A Bit Rich²³ report explores socio-economic background.

For those wishing to understand life-stage and volunteering further please see our volunteering and gender Spotlight report², Habit of Service report³⁰, Lifecycle of Volunteering in Sport²⁵ and Pathways through Participation³⁴.

The Evaluating Youth Social Action report³⁹ from the government's Behavioural Insights Team is an important part of the evidence base for the benefits of volunteering among younger people, which you may also wish to explore further.

Section 2: Opportunities and challenges

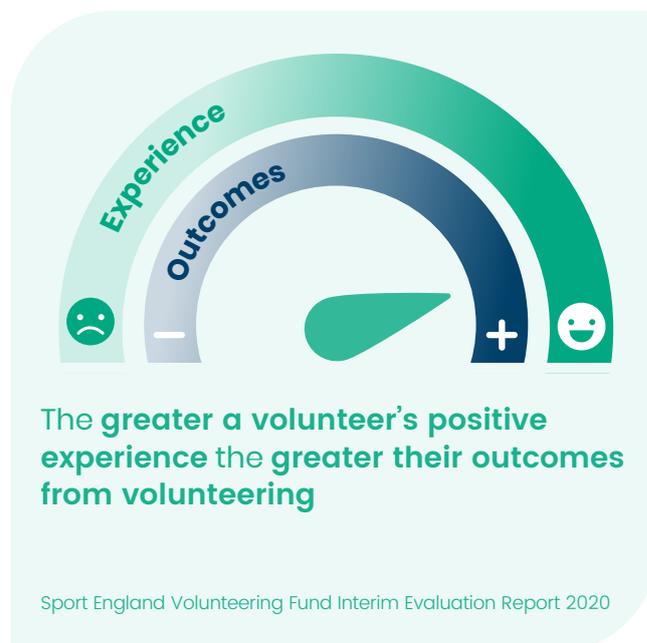
Element 4: Experience

Evidence suggests the majority of current sport and physical activity volunteers do so because they enjoy it^{25,14}.

Volunteering allows people to give something back to their sport or community. It's often sociable, enabling people to make new friends, or learn new skills. And we also know there's a positive association between wellbeing and volunteering, with people who've volunteered in sport at least twice in the last 12 months reporting better outcomes than those who did not ([see Outcomes section](#)).

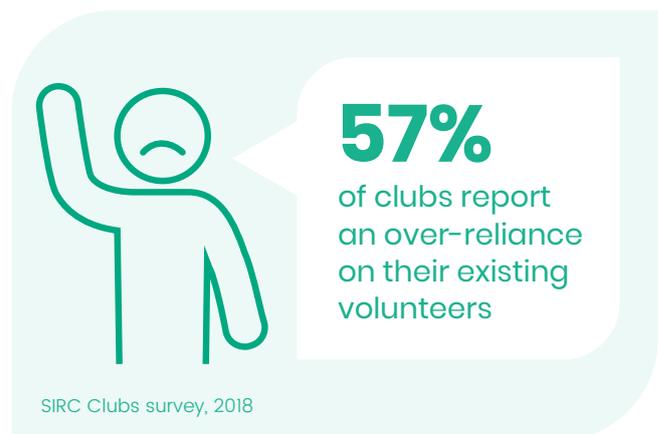
The relationship between experience and outcomes is an important one. Our Volunteering Funds Interim Evaluation report⁸ shows that the more satisfied a volunteer was with their experience on a project, the more likely they were to report an increase across the outcome measures. This emphasises the importance of ensuring volunteers are provided with high quality meaningful opportunities. Organisations have an important, ongoing role to play to ensure that once volunteers are recruited, they continue to want to give their time and that their motivations and expectations are met.

Check out [p27-28](#) for programme learnings on experience and motivations



JUMP's Lifecycle of Volunteering in Sport report suggests sport volunteers are generally committed, with 89% reporting they intend to do the same or more volunteering next year. Yet we know that for some, their experience is not always positive. Volunteers in community clubs are often overstretched, with 70% of clubs identifying a need for more people to help run the club and 57% reporting an over-reliance on their existing volunteers, with many holding multiple roles⁵. This is supported by the NCVO, who found that 24% of those who volunteered at least once a week felt it was 'feeling too much like work'. In Lifecycle of Volunteering in Sport²⁵, those who didn't have such a positive experience, and had reduced or stopped volunteering, were less likely to have made new friends through volunteering and received limited or no support, training or induction.

There is also concern that those who are under-represented within sports volunteering are less likely to have a positive experience of volunteering in sport, including women, people from different ethnic backgrounds, disabled people and the LGBT+ community. Women in Sport, the Activity Alliance, Volunteering Matters and Pride Sport have all undertaken work to explore this further and have produced best practice guides and recommendations to improve the experience for these groups.



Negative experience

Nearly **half of disabled people** said they had a **negative experience volunteering in sport or physical activity** (48%) compared to one third (33%) of non disabled people.



48%
Disabled people



33%
Non disabled people

Encouraging more disabled people to volunteer in sport, 2017. Activity Alliance.

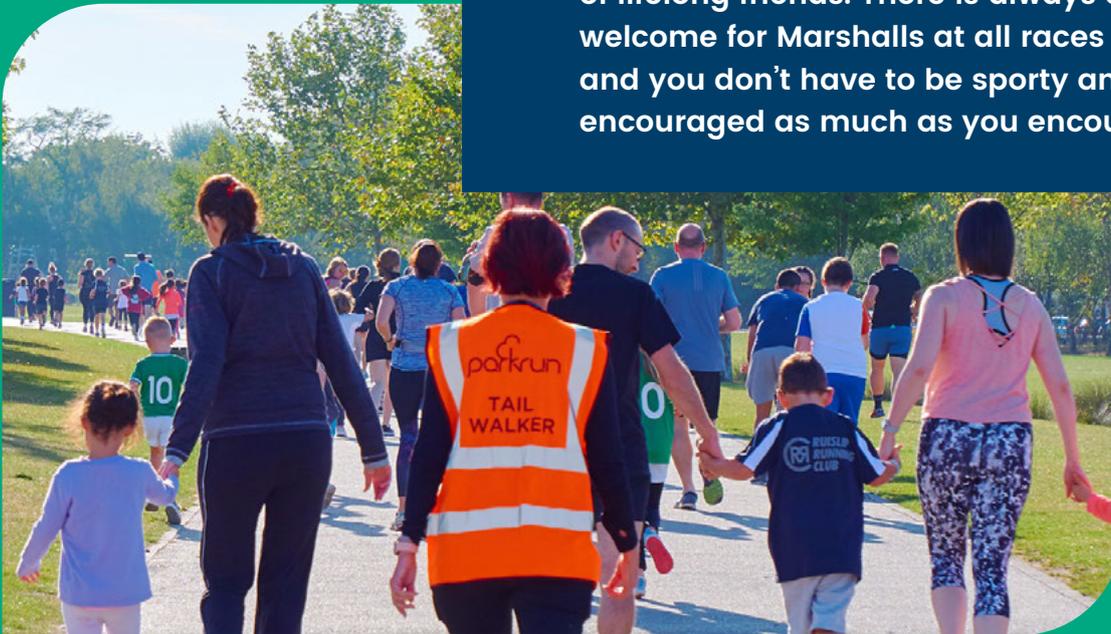


Case Study:

parkrun is one of the biggest and easiest sport organisations to volunteer with and they've always placed the volunteer experience alongside the runners' experience at the forefront. For example, they're famous for the volunteer round-of-applause at the start of all their races.

“ We know that some people can feel a little nervous about volunteering at parkrun. We try to make it a great experience” explains one parkrun volunteer coordinator.

Su Browning is one of thousands of parkrun volunteers and can be seen every Saturday morning in her high-vis vest, waving her pom-poms and encouraging parkrunners around the 5km course. “I love encouraging and making parkrunners smile. I have made loads of lifelong friends. There is always a warm welcome for Marshalls at all races and events and you don't have to be sporty and you'll be encouraged as much as you encourage”.



Explore further

When thinking about volunteer experience and expectations, also consider how volunteers want to give their time. Lifecycle of Volunteering in Sport²⁵, Time Well Spent²¹ and GIVERS all look at these overlapping areas. Linked to this work, both NCVO in the Time Well Spent²⁵ report and our work with Pro Bono Economics identified not just the importance of recognition within a volunteer programme but also for volunteers to see and feel the impact of their contribution.

Along with the #iwill campaign, we've both produced guides to what a meaningful volunteer and youth social action experience looks like, to ensure all those who give their time are able to have a great experience and benefit from the outcomes of volunteering and social action^{16,37}.

Section 2: Opportunities and challenges

Element 5: Volunteering in the modern world

As our lives change , how we spend our time and what we expect from our volunteering experience changes too.

Even within the first few weeks of the coronavirus restrictions we saw some of these, such as use of technology, sense of community and the growth of self-starting groups, change rapidly.

Recent events have occurred against a backdrop of a decline in formal volunteering in the UK. Since a relative high in volunteering in 2012 and 2013, Community Life²⁸ survey shows there's been a decline in people

formally volunteering across the UK. This was also reflected in the results of Active Lives in 2017-18³, with the number of people volunteering in sport falling by more than 400,000, and by a further 197,000 in 2018-19. However, as the Road Ahead²⁰ report finds, 'more and more ways of 'doing good' are emerging, with people wanting to get involved in decentralised and networked ways, and self-organising around causes and issues'. Interestingly, volunteering continues to be local community focussed, with 80% of volunteers giving their time in their neighbourhoods (NCVO).

Volunteering levels

Volunteering levels have decreased with the number of people volunteering in sport falling by more than 400,000 in 2017-18, and by a further 197,000 in 2018-19.



Active Lives Adult Survey, Nov 2017/18

The Road Ahead²⁰ goes on to note that pressures on time mean ‘there’s also an increasing preference for opportunities that are flexible and quick to start’. Balancing time and a desire to make a difference can be overlaid with life stage as Lifecycle of Volunteering in Sport²⁵ and Pathways through Participation³⁴ have done. Both of these reports highlight the importance of understanding what else is in a person’s life, such as if they have a young family, or ill health. The NCVO have identified that while 70% of people have volunteered at some point in their lives, only 7% have done so ‘consistently and heavily’, with many looking for opportunities they can dip in and out of.

The current reality and perception of sport volunteering doesn’t always match up to the changing expectations of those looking to give their time. For example, 55% of the public don’t realise that community sport is volunteer-run, with 26% believing you need to be sporty or have technical knowledge to volunteer³¹. Or the reality, as evidenced in SIRC’s Club Volunteers Survey⁵, which found that volunteer roles within community sport are typically structured in a way which require weekly (and sometimes daily) commitment, and on average current sports volunteers do so for 5.9 years²³. Repeated studies, including the SRA’s Club Survey¹², show that the lack of time, opportunities being inflexible, and competing with family and work commitments are most often cited as reasons for not volunteering, or reducing or stopping volunteering in sport and activity.



70%

of people have volunteered at some point throughout their lives

but only **7%**

of those people have been consistently and heavily involved throughout their lives

NCVO Time Well Spent, 2019



23%

of current volunteers do so exclusively as a **one-off activity** or dip in and out of activities.



Of those who would like to volunteer in the future:

only **30%** were interested in **giving time regularly**

NCVO Time Well Spent, 2019

The pace at which technology is integrating into daily life has also had an impact on how people give their time, with 56% of current UK volunteers already giving their time in a mixture of online and in person²¹. Within sport, the use of technology in major event volunteering, where video interviews, communications and technology are widely used⁴, can be a stark contrast to finding opportunities locally and the experience of traditional recruitment approaches.

Consideration should be given to how to use data and technology to improve access to opportunities and the ongoing management and support of volunteers. Technology is one area in particular where the government's lockdown restrictions have meant business-as-usual has fundamentally changed, such as running club AGMs online. Or in the case of the GoodSam NHS app, 750,000 people signed up to help and have been introduced to a system where the volunteer selects when they are available, immediately, by updating their status online.



Beyond societal trends relating to technology and changing expectations, the consequences of the coronavirus will impact on the volunteering landscape in many different ways, and we're working with partners to understand and share these learnings as we look ahead to creating volunteering models fit for the future.





Case study:

Access Sport's Team100 project is all about diversifying volunteering to empower local communities to get active, so the benefits are shared across all groups. All the Team100 opportunities are flexible around work and family commitments, some can be done at home or work and include micro-volunteering – small tasks that can be completed quickly and support their mission of getting the community active.

Current examples of Team100 opportunities are at adventure playgrounds, BMX clubs, walking groups, table tennis and more. Roles, such as social media support, marketing and fundraising, can be done remotely at flexible times.

They've successfully used WhatsApp and Facebook to engage those from lower socio-economic groups, as well as individuals who have not previously volunteered. The feedback from Team 100's volunteers, is that to increase engagement, the journey must be as seamless as possible – the smaller the ask, the better.



Explore further

The NCVO's Road Ahead²⁰ report and the National Trust's 2030 trends video²⁹ are both great starting places to think about the social, technological and demographic changes and the impact on volunteering.

Check out [p27-29](#) for tips on modern approaches to volunteering

Section 3

What have we learned?



Section 3: What have we learned?

Conclusions and programme lessons

In November 2017 we launched our Potentials and Opportunity Funds, volunteering programmes aimed at creating a new generation of volunteers and reaching under-represented audiences.

More than two years on from those initial investments, our national evaluation, in partnership with CFE Research, is helping us to identify some of what's working within the funded projects; to recruit more diverse volunteers and in delivering a positive volunteer experience that we know is important to ensuring volunteers can experience the benefits from giving their time.

You can access the full report⁸ on our website and the table below summarises the key learning to date across the volunteer journey. The table below touches on many of the key themes covered earlier in this guide and hopefully shows how the learning and insight referenced here can be put into practice when designing and delivering a volunteer programme or project.

We know research and insight is only truly valuable when it's communicated in a way that will enable it to have an impact on the ground and so we encourage you to use this guide to prompt your thinking about how you might adapt your approach to volunteering

in the future. Whether that's making small changes to improve the volunteer experience or considering how you might work with different partners to recruit volunteers from different communities.

Learning together

This guide reflects a point in our learning journey as an organisation. We're keen to work with a wide variety of partners to continue to learn together and build on the evidence and insight here that can help us all to achieve our ambitions for volunteering in sport and physical activity.

As we continue to build our understanding on what the future of volunteering looks like post-coronavirus, we'll share the insights and continue to support the sector to understand how volunteering in the 'new world' looks, and in turn, support those who are so vital to our sector.

We're always interested in receiving insight from partners and examples of how you're applying it. Please do get in touch if you have any insight, learnings or experiences to share, or if you have any feedback on how we can better communicate insight and learning in the future.

Contact the volunteering team at volunteering@sportengland.org

What have we learned from our volunteering fund?

	Design and set up getting your project ready	Reach and recruit finding your target audience	Engage and retain providing a good experience	Sustain and grow keeping things going
 <p>People involving your audience</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Engage with your target audience early to get to know them and build trust.Be led by your audience and design your project to fit their needs, address their barriers and appeal to their motivations. Work with them to co-design how your project will work, including the volunteering model and other aspects like incentives and promotion.Aim for a volunteering model that is flexible enough to take in life's ups and downs and which can fit around existing commitments. E.g. make family volunteering feel like a fun day out, not a commitment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Everyone has different reasons for volunteering, but we found the most popular were to help people, learn new skills, have fun, socialise and be involved with sport.The most common barriers included lack of confidence or self-esteem, language barriers, poor IT skills, lack of time or money, cultural sensitivities, and a lack of interest in 'traditional' volunteering opportunities.You may need to build trust with your audience before they are willing to engage – try going through partners, networks and people they already trust.Social media offers cheap, targeted promotion but converting reach to recruitment can be difficult.Word of mouth can be highly effective.Referrals and recommendations e.g. from friends, family, teachers, local partners etc. also work well.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Satisfaction and enjoyment are key to retaining your volunteers and to achieving outcomes. The more satisfied they are, the more they will get from it.Offer training and support to build self-esteem and confidence in those who aren't quite ready to volunteer yet.Involve your volunteers in developing the roles and activities they provide to create ownership – 'by them, for them'.Incentives, rewards and recognition can help volunteers feel valued, especially if they've been involved in choosing and designing them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">When volunteers are ready to move on, connect them with other places, services or volunteering activities that might interest them.Talk to your volunteers and your target audience early on about the future of the project and what might happen. Involve them in planning for its sustainability.

Design and set up
getting your project ready

Reach and recruit
finding your target audience

Engage and retain
providing a good experience

Sustain and grow
keeping things going



People
(cont'd)

involving your audience

- Introduce new and prospective volunteers to the concept of volunteering and what your project involves. Taster days are a good way to do this and help ease any apprehension.
- Consider carefully the language you use. 'Sport' and 'physical activity' can be a good hook for active people but may put other people off. Terms like 'volunteering' and 'social action' also won't appeal to everyone.
- Use existing volunteers to offer relatable role models who can inspire new people to want to volunteer.
- Keep in touch with new volunteers to retain their interest and build a good relationship. Contact absent ones to see if you can help – sometimes this is all they need to decide to return.



Place

using local assets and context

- Get to know the place you'll be working and use local knowledge to help design your project.
- Identify venues, facilities and other assets that are local, known and accessible to your audience.
- Plan around seasonal factors like light evenings and warm weather, as well as local events or festivals.
- Use existing networks, meetings, groups and places to reach your audience. Go where they already are and with places and people they already trust and respect. E.g. local parks are great free community assets where people often gather.
- Design materials with your audience and place in mind. What local context, imagery, cultures and traditions might be relevant?
- Use community champions, existing networks and hyper-local partnerships to embed your project in the community and make it more sustainable.

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Partners

working with others

- Partners are critical to helping you set up your project. They can offer expertise, advice, facilities, equipment, training, promotion and much more.
 - Look for partners with a corporate social responsibility strategy: could your project help them?
 - Target enthusiastic senior decision-makers, and spend time building trusting, committed partnerships.
 - Consider providing an information pack to partners so they're informed about your project, how it'll work and what it's trying to achieve.
- Reach more of your target audience by working with, and through, partners who are already known to and trusted by them.
 - Use your partners' existing networks and relationships to raise awareness of your project, provide more ways to join it, and to offer a greater range of activities.
- Share service provision with partners – staff, facilities, promotion etc. – to reduce your project overheads.
 - Use partners to help you offer a variety of options to your volunteers to help engage and retain them.
 - Ensure partners who are offering volunteer roles or placements are willing to adapt and be flexible with them, so they can respond to the needs of volunteers to help keep them engaged.
 - Manage your partnerships throughout. Be clear on expectations, maintain regular communication and ensure you both deliver on your commitments.
- Work with partners to offer activities your volunteers can move onto once they complete their time with you.
 - Strong project partnerships can have mutual and lasting benefits for the organisations that continue into the future.

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Project team

Your staff and organisation delivering the project

- Plan in enough time to prepare and mobilise your project, including recruiting or training staff, reviewing evidence or conducting new research, and engaging with your target audience.
 - If you can, pilot and test your delivery model and use what you learn to improve it before you launch.
 - Use or build your organisation's (existing) profile in your project areas – this can create demand and interest among prospective partners and raise awareness among local communities.
 - Ask your funder to recommend known, credible partners to work with.
 - Work with your funder to agree proportionate evaluation plans that meet your and their objectives.
 - Speak regularly and openly with your funder. Aim for a collaborative and trusting relationship where you can share and learn from failure as well as success.
- Employing and deploying staff who can identify and empathise with the target audience can help volunteer recruitment – the 'someone like me' effect.
 - Ask your funder if they can provide any help or support with marketing – such as branding or social media.
 - Be mindful, as you recruit, of whether your evaluation processes and tools are accessible to and appropriate for your target audience. If not, speak to your funder to agree how you can adapt them.
- Speak to other projects and your funder to share ideas, challenges and successes to providing a good volunteer experience.
 - Help project staff and volunteers to understand the challenges people face to being active. This can help deliver a better experience to participants, making it more rewarding for staff and volunteers alike.
 - Share project updates, successes and evaluation findings with your volunteers – let them know about all the great work they're contributing to.
- Talk to your funder about your hopes, fears and plans for sustainability from the start. Consider what is possible and find out how they can help you.
 - Use the success of your project to increase interest from other funders and partners, and to support and promote your organisation's broader aims and mission.
 - Raise awareness of your project across your organisation by sharing stories and learning and offering opportunities for non-project staff to be involved.
 - Think about how your organisation could help your project, such as by lending staff, sharing resources, covering certain costs etc.

For more information on this insight or to talk to us about applying it to your project, contact us at volunteering@sportengland.

Sources, links and further reading

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