

Spark Somerset

Scoping Research: Volunteering in Somerset

Research Findings
May 2025

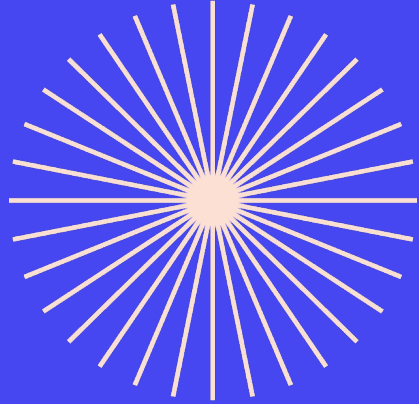
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Wonder.

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CONTENTS

- 1. Background, research objectives & methodology**
- 2. Current state of play**
- 3. Three risks on the horizon**
- 4. Opportunities for investment**
- 5. APPENDIX: Deep-dive into the volunteer journey**



Background, research objectives and approach

Background

Spark Somerset support Somerset's voluntary and community sector organisations to help change lives and build healthy, resilient communities through information, advice, training and forums, and by sharing expertise, building partnerships, inspiring social action and advocating on the sector's behalf at local and national level.

Although Somerset has a thriving community of volunteers, in recent years volunteer numbers have been declining – in 2024 24.48% of voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations observed a decline (State of the Sector, Spark Somerset), reflecting national trends influenced by the cost-of-living crisis.

Spark Somerset are coming together with health partners as part of the Volunteering for Health grant to **explore how the volunteering system in Somerset can be less fragmented and continue to flourish across communities, thereby reducing pressure on the system and supporting better health/care outcomes.**

To kick-start the Volunteering for Health partnership, Spark Somerset have embarked on a 6 month scoping phase to inform the approach for the coming years, ensuring solutions are insight-led and hypotheses are evidenced.

Spark Somerset saw a need for quantitative and qualitative research to 1) understand the current organisational strengths and challenges at play in volunteer organisation landscape and 2) understand the current volunteering experience in Somerset, and ultimately identify the key opportunities for change and innovation to feed into the Vision for Volunteering.

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Objectives

OVERARCHING AIM: To better understand the range of voluntary activities, experiences of volunteering, and diversity of the volunteer community across Somerset.

Two core research objectives:



1. Gain a system-wide understanding of how volunteering is working across Somerset

- What does the current landscape look like in terms of challenges and organisational cross-working?
- What can we learn from organisations that successfully recruit and retain volunteers to apply across the sector?

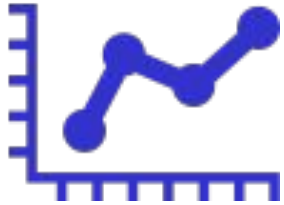


2. Deep-dive into individual volunteer experiences and those who are interested in volunteering

- What are the motivations and barriers to volunteering?

Methodology

To answer our research aims, we deployed a mixed methodology designed to reach a wide range of volunteers and organisations across Somerset.



Rapid desk research

to review national publicly available data and build in findings from health setting volunteer programme mapping work conducted by Sarah Cherry



Consulting

volunteer-involving organisations through round table discussions and Spark Somerset's in person forum workshop event



Online surveys

with current, lapsed and potential volunteers, and organisations



In depth Interviews

with people currently volunteering in Somerset

Sample: snapshot

VOLUNTEERS



Quantitative survey: 255 residents of Somerset

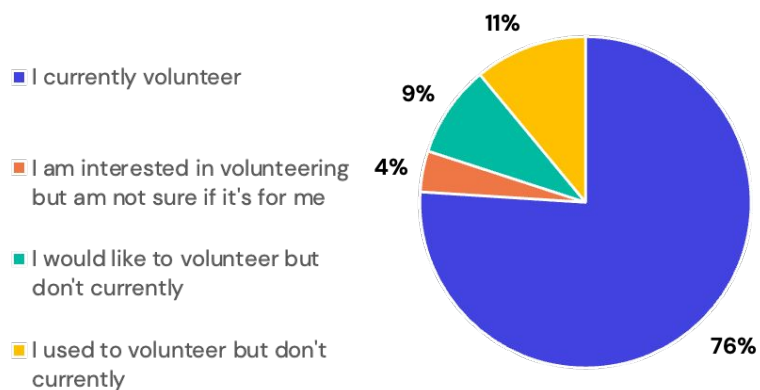
- 194 currently volunteering, 61 lapsed or considering



Qualitative interviews: 10 volunteers

- Mix of gender, age, volunteering roles and experience

Survey: Which of these best describe you? (n=255)



VOLUNTEER-INVOLVING ORGANISATIONS



Quantitative survey: 62 volunteer-involving organisations

- Including 21 Volunteer Coordinators, 19 Managers, 5 CEOs, 5 Trustees, 12 in other roles



Roundtable discussions and forum: 60+ organisations

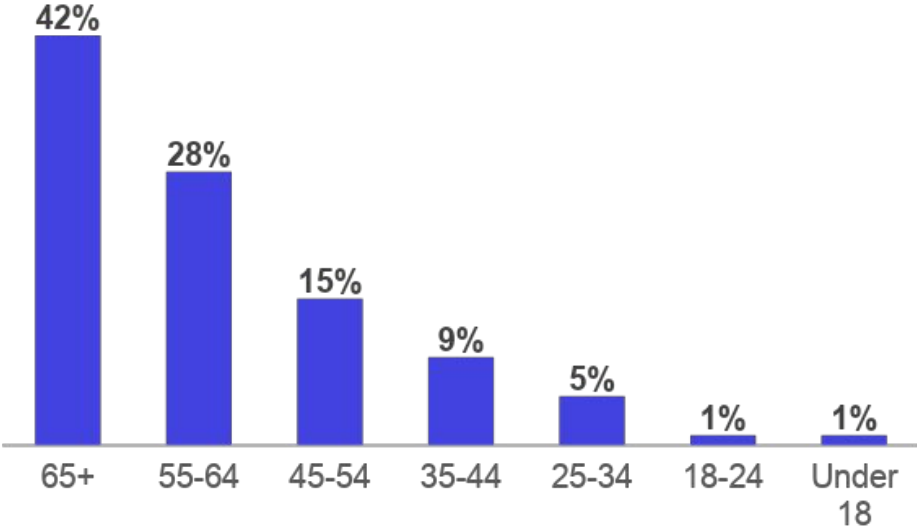
- Mix of 50–60 small and large organisations at the Forum
- One round-table discussion with 4 small organisations and one with 3 larger organisations

Sample: demographics of volunteers

This survey included a high representation of women and age 55+, but achieved strong representation of people with disabilities and from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

AGE: 70% are age 55+

How old are you? (n=255)

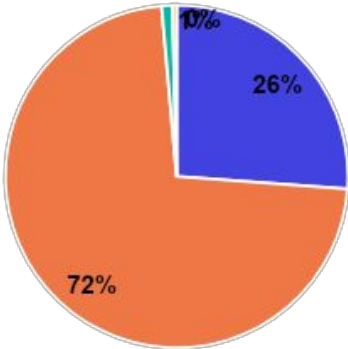


DISABILITY: 22% of respondents say they have a disability, long-term health condition, or special educational need

GENDER: 72% are female

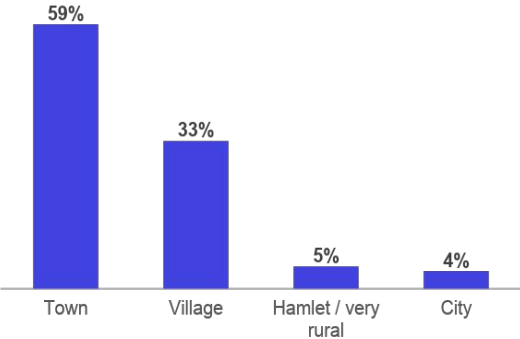
How do you identify? (n=255)

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say
- Non-binary



LOCATION: Mix of towns and villages represented

What type of area do you live in? (n=255)

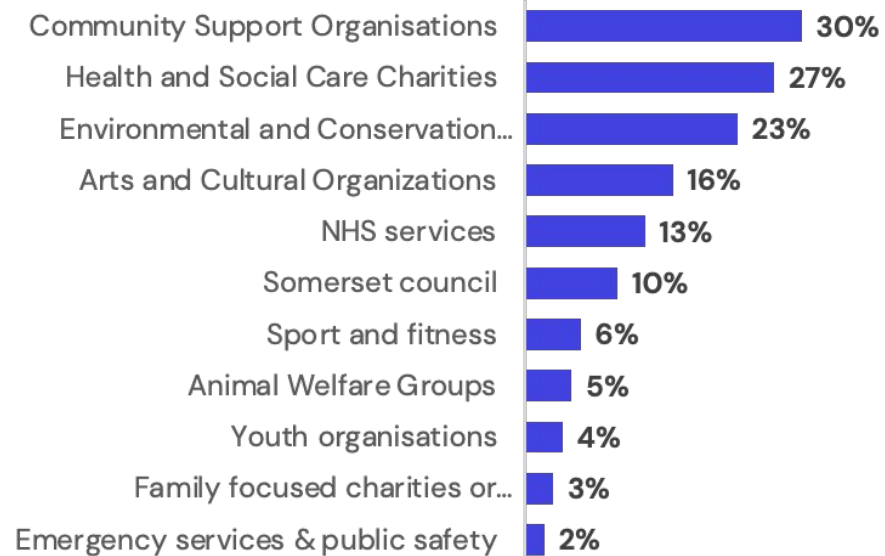


ETHNICITY: 89% of respondents are 'White: English, Scottish, Welsh, Northern Irish or British'. Census data from 2021 indicates that 96% of residents in Somerset identify as White British, suggesting that this survey has good representation, proportionately, of volunteers from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

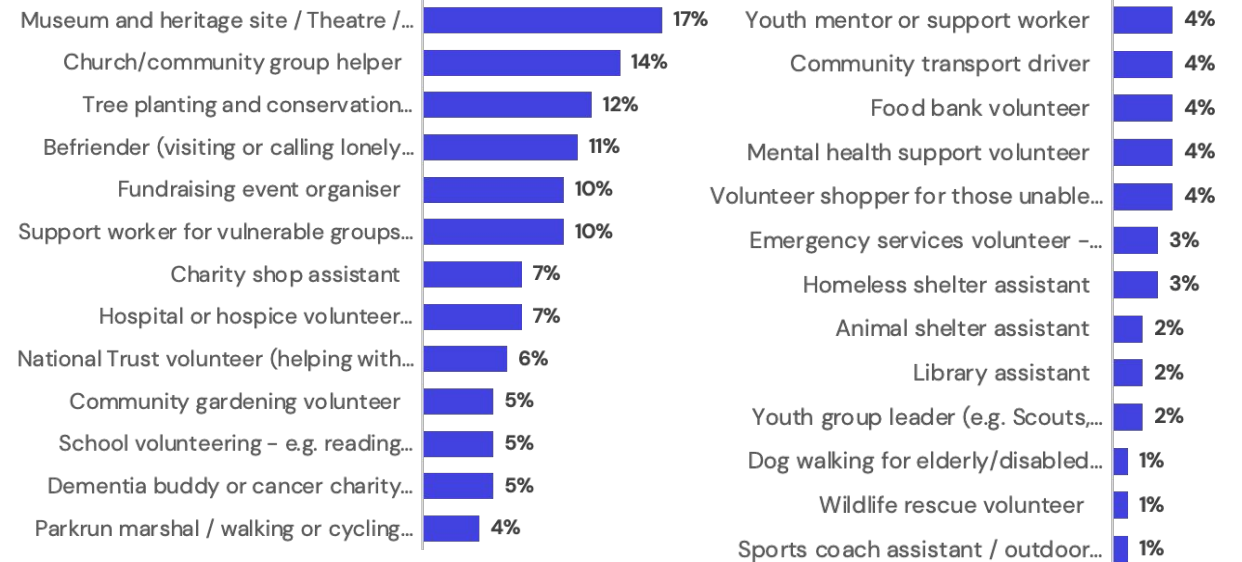


Sample: a range of voluntary roles represented

What type of organisation(s) are you volunteering for?
(n=186)



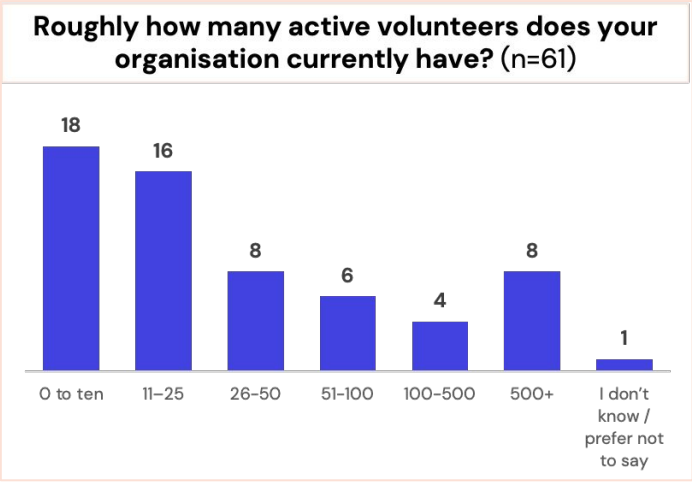
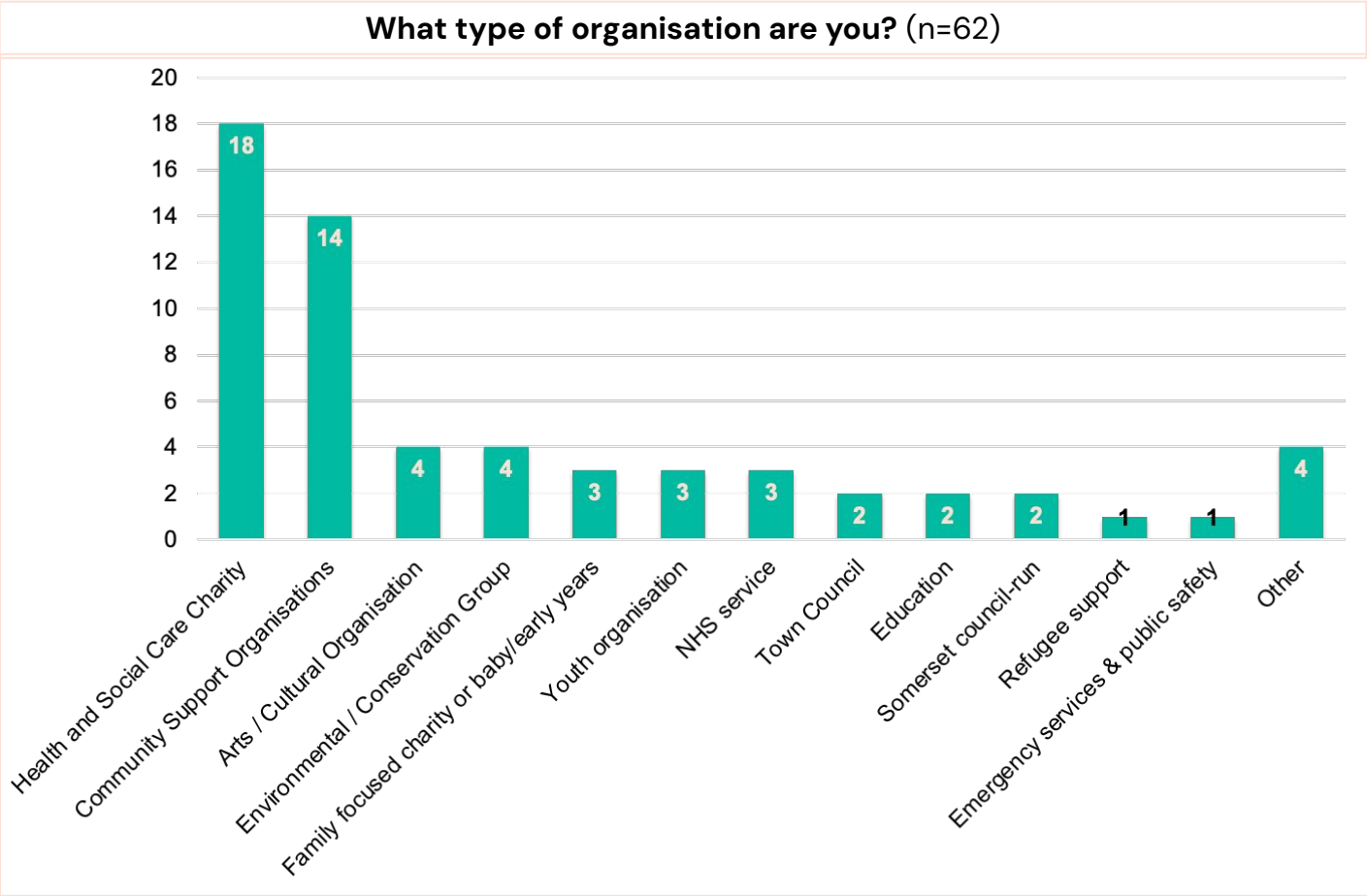
Which volunteering activities/roles are you currently taking part in? (n=194)



Sample: broad range of 62 organisations surveyed

TYPE OF ORGANISATION: a large number of health and social care organisations represented

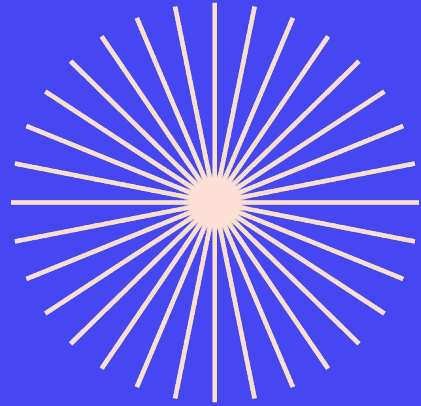
SIZE: Included a full range of sizes, with more participants from smaller organisations represented



Research limitations

Self-selecting sample: recruitment for this study was done through Spark Somerset's network. Subsequently, the sample is biased towards those in more formal volunteering roles having used 'Spark a Change' with less reach to potential or lapsed volunteers.

Participants are predominantly in 'formal' volunteering roles: Though efforts were made to include people involved in informal roles, the 'volunteers survey' predominantly reached participants who consider themselves 'volunteers' and has potentially missed out those who actively participate in community citizenship and may not define themselves as volunteers. Further research would be needed to understand the needs and motivations of people who don't define themselves as 'volunteers'.



Current state of play

Volunteering is deeply valued by organisations and deeply rewarding for volunteers in Somerset


There is a deep sense of pride and gratitude for volunteers across the sector

Volunteers are universally seen as essential, not optional. Many organisations describe them as the **“heart” of their work**, emphasising how much day-to-day service delivery — and community connection — depends on their time, energy, and care.

For many volunteers, what begins as a small act of giving back becomes something much more meaningful — an integral part of their identity, routine, and sense of belonging.

While experiences naturally vary between organisations, **volunteer feedback is generally positive.**

89% of volunteers report a **good or very good experience** in their role



“We honestly couldn’t do what we do without them — our volunteers are the heart and soul of this place”

Somerset has a committed and loyal community of volunteers

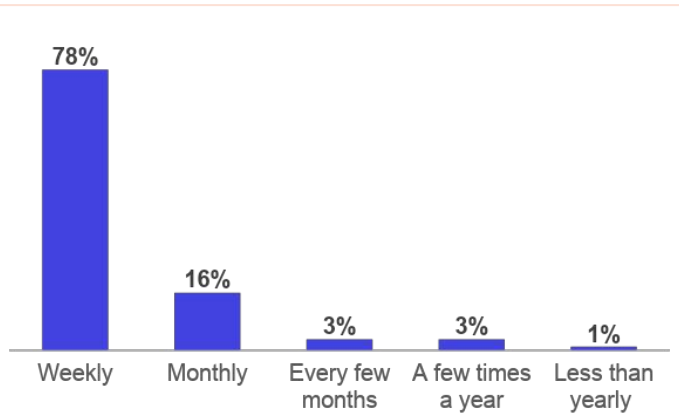
Of those currently volunteering (78% of survey sample) most volunteers surveyed have multiple roles, volunteer weekly and long-term:

78% volunteer weekly

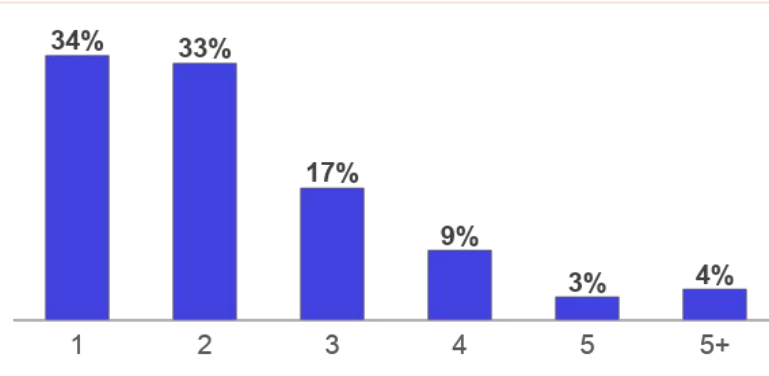
67% have 2 or more roles

89% have been volunteer over 1 year and **54%** have been volunteering over 6 years

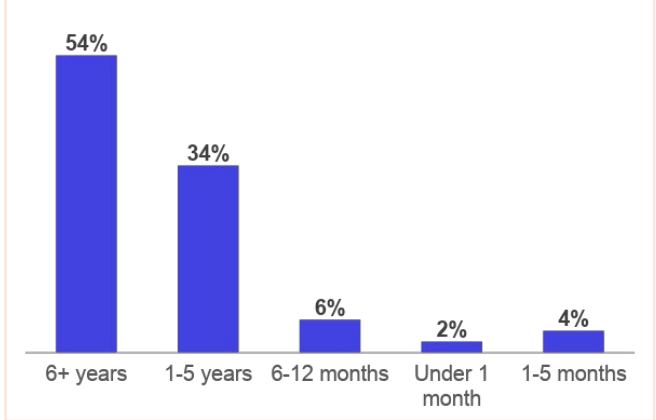
How often are you volunteering?
(n=194)



How many voluntary roles do you have currently?
(n=194)



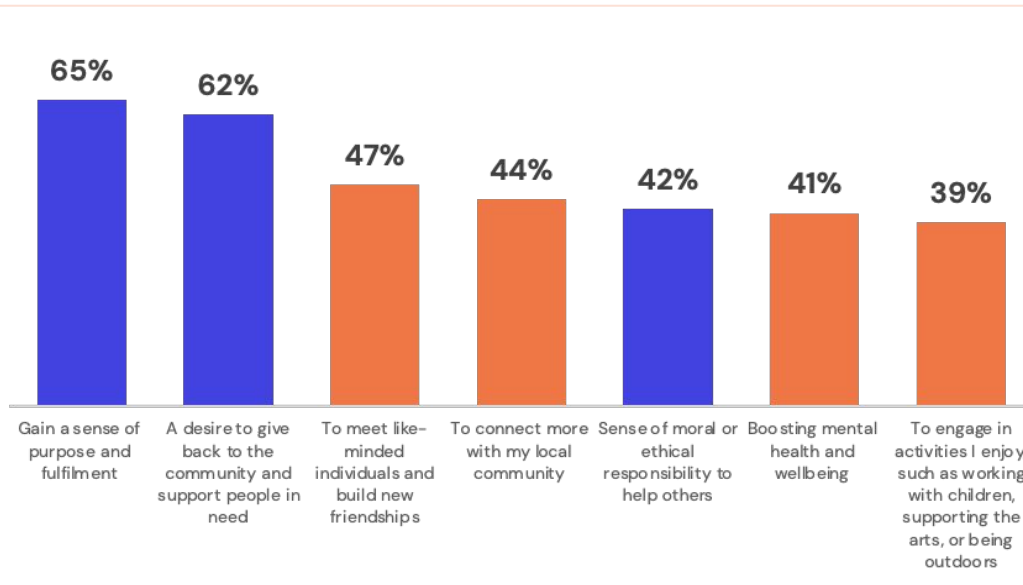
How long have you been volunteering for?
(n=194)



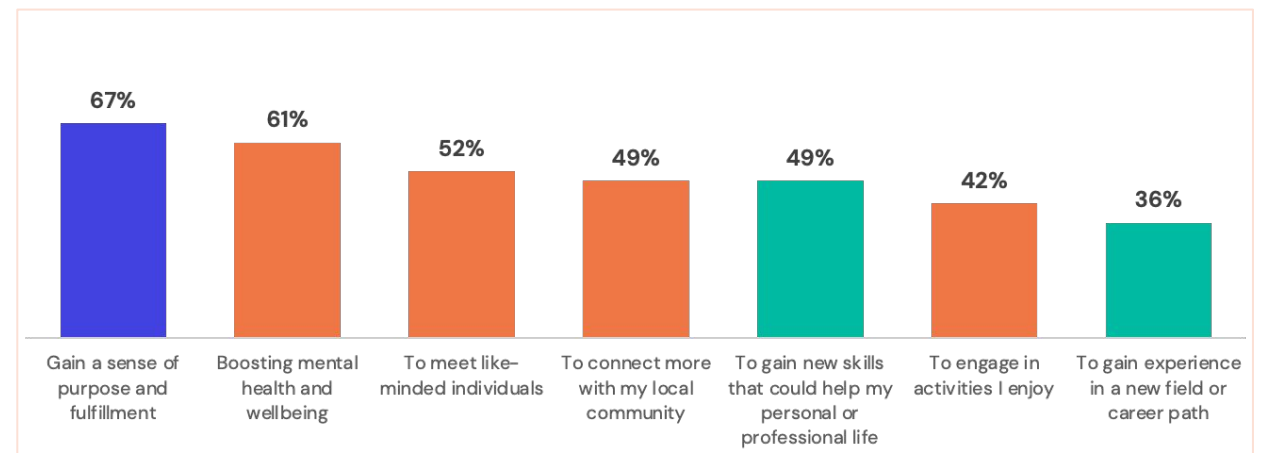
Most volunteers are driven by a sense of purpose, connection and wellbeing

The biggest driver for volunteers is to gain a sense of purpose and fulfilment, and give back to others. A large number of volunteers are also motivated by meeting like-minded people, connecting with their community and boosting their own mental health and wellbeing. These are also the most attractive benefits to potential volunteers.

CURRENT VOLUNTEERS: Which of these reasons were motivators for you deciding to volunteer? (Top 7, n=222)



POTENTIAL VOLUNTEERS: Do any of the below benefits of volunteering appeal to you? (n=33)



Sense of purpose

Well-being

Building skills

Finding purpose and wellbeing through volunteering

Case study: Adam

Adam, 65, began volunteering after retiring and dealing with personal challenges, including the loss of a family member and battling cancer personally. His volunteer roles in A&E departments, and providing support to people who are homeless give him both purpose and wellbeing.

“I didn’t want to just sit at home after retiring, so I began looking for ways to stay active and make a difference”

“The community I work with, especially at the hospital, has been incredibly supportive. You meet so many different people and learn so much from them”

Volunteering brings Adam both emotional and physical benefits. Volunteering in A&E, despite its challenges, has been rewarding and fulfilling, especially as it keeps him physically and mentally engaged.

“It helps me stay sharp and gives me something to look forward to”

Adam values the relationships formed through volunteering. His role allows him to connect with others and contribute meaningfully.

“Volunteering gives my life structure, purpose, and it reminds me that I can still make a difference”

For Adam, volunteering is about more than giving—it’s a way to find purpose. Adam’s experience shows how volunteering can be a source of fulfillment, even after experiencing personal loss and health struggles.



A positive cycle of give and take sustains individuals' volunteering journeys

The start of the volunteering journey generally starts from the initial act of giving back; an individual wanting to help and give back to a cause they empathise with.

Volunteering sparks a positive cycle of personal growth and connection, which keeps volunteers engaged and wanting to give back.

This cycle often significantly improves a volunteers' wellbeing, sense of purpose and growth. **The cycle then becomes sustaining; the more people gain the more they want to give back.**



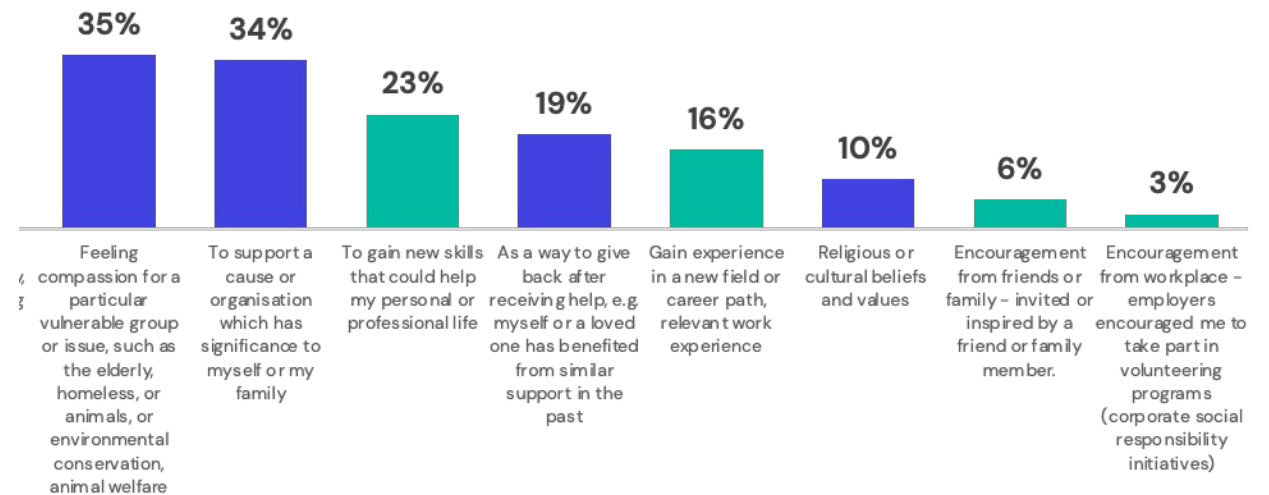
A smaller number of volunteers are also motivated by building their skills

A fifth of volunteers (23%) said gaining new skills was a reason they decided to volunteer.

16% decided to volunteer to gain experience in a new field or career path.

Although this is the main driver for a smaller cohort of volunteers, we heard through the qualitative interviews that volunteering is having a powerful impact on skills development with strong and positive outcomes.

CURRENT VOLUNTEERS: Which of these reasons were motivators for you deciding to volunteer? (Bottom 8, n=222)



From volunteering to career through skills development

Case study: Sam

Sam, 23, transitioned from volunteering with an emergency health service to a paid role in the ambulance service. After recovering from a major injury, Sam began volunteering in a remote role to stay engaged with healthcare while building skills that eventually led to a career in the sector.

“Volunteering allowed me to stay involved in healthcare without the physical strain,”

Sam’s journey began when they sought a way to stay active after their injury. They joined an emergency health service as a volunteer, managing logistics for urgent medical deliveries, which gave them purpose during their recovery. Through their volunteer role, Sam developed key skills in communication, logistics coordination, and managing high-pressure situations. These skills directly translated into their new position within the ambulance service.

“The skills I gained, like managing teams and handling emergency situations, helped me transition smoothly into my paid role,”

While Sam found volunteering rewarding, they faced challenges with balancing their hours due to benefit restrictions.

“The government limits how many hours I could volunteer, which was difficult when I wanted to give more time,”

The hands-on experience allowed Sam to transition confidently into the paid role, making a significant impact from the start. Sam’s experience shows how volunteering can provide valuable skills that lead to career opportunities.

W. ***“Volunteering gave me the confidence to pursue a career I’m passionate about,”***

Despite this broadly positive picture, there are several challenges at play...

Volunteers' time is being stretched

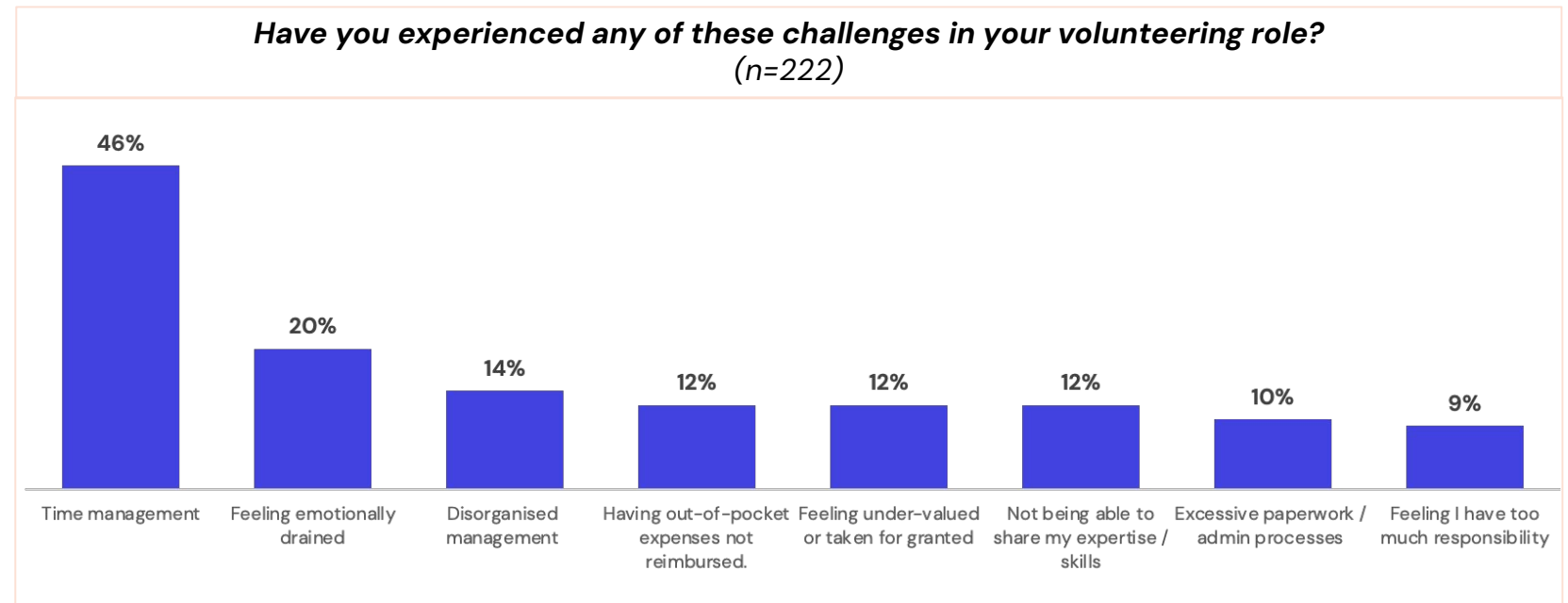
Volunteers are often juggling competing demands on their time, balancing volunteering amongst home and personal commitments, and commitments to multiple roles (67% have 2 or more volunteering roles)

46% of volunteers stated time management as a challenge they have experienced – the highest ranking challenge.

Volunteers shared with us how they are often balancing their volunteer hours amongst home and family commitments. If a role is too rigid in the demands on their time, it can make it more stressful for them to manage and difficult to sustain long term.

Whilst they understand the need for a certain level of commitment, volunteers value it when a role allows them some level of flexibility

"It can be a lot you know, keeping up with it all. And sometimes they ask you to help with extra things and you feel bad so I do what I can but what with my grandchildren to help with as well it can be a lot to fit in and I find myself quite busy" **Volunteer, female, 65+**



High demands and limited support can lead to volunteers feeling fatigued

When roles expect too much of volunteers, demands on training are high, or support is lacking, this can sometimes lead volunteers to feel fatigue in a role.

For many, **wellbeing** is a core motivator. When volunteers feel tired in a role, the benefits dissipate and they will typically disengage and leave the role.

A minority of volunteers interviewed shared these experiences with us.

20% of volunteers say that they have felt emotionally drained in a volunteering role

49% of volunteers think volunteers need more recognition and to feel more valued

"The training was okay, but just really bureaucratic. You had to follow so many procedures... I don't want to do this, you know, I'm a volunteer. You can't do it unless you tick those boxes." **Volunteer, Male, 25**

On the other end of the spectrum, volunteers feel frustrated when their skills aren't utilised

"It should be easier for agencies to access me as a volunteer and use my experience/skills. I have worked and volunteered for decades in services for children/families, etc. (e.g. with children and young people with SEN, Early Years care and education). I also have training/experience in supporting vulnerable adults in the community and with adult literacy/numeracy. I have served on committees for charities. Spark a Change does not offer opportunities that exploit my skills and experience." **Volunteer, Female, 65+**

"I've volunteered as a driver and use the GoodSam app to find tasks – and there have been none in my location! I've asked my coordinator if there are in fact any driving tasks in my area and got no response. So I feel like giving up" **Volunteer, Male, 65+**

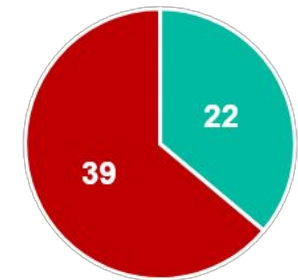
12% of volunteers say that they have not been able to share their expertise or skills

14% of volunteers have experienced disorganized management

Over half of organisations said they do not collect feedback from their volunteers

We regularly **collect feedback** from our volunteers (N=61)

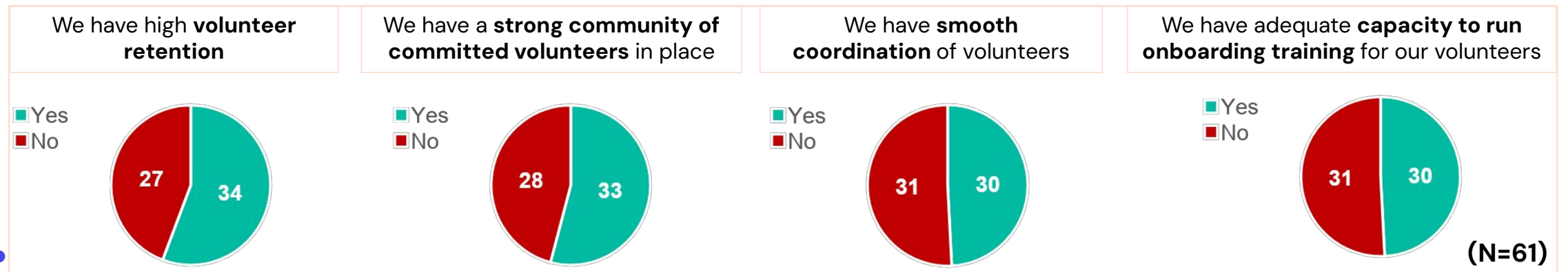
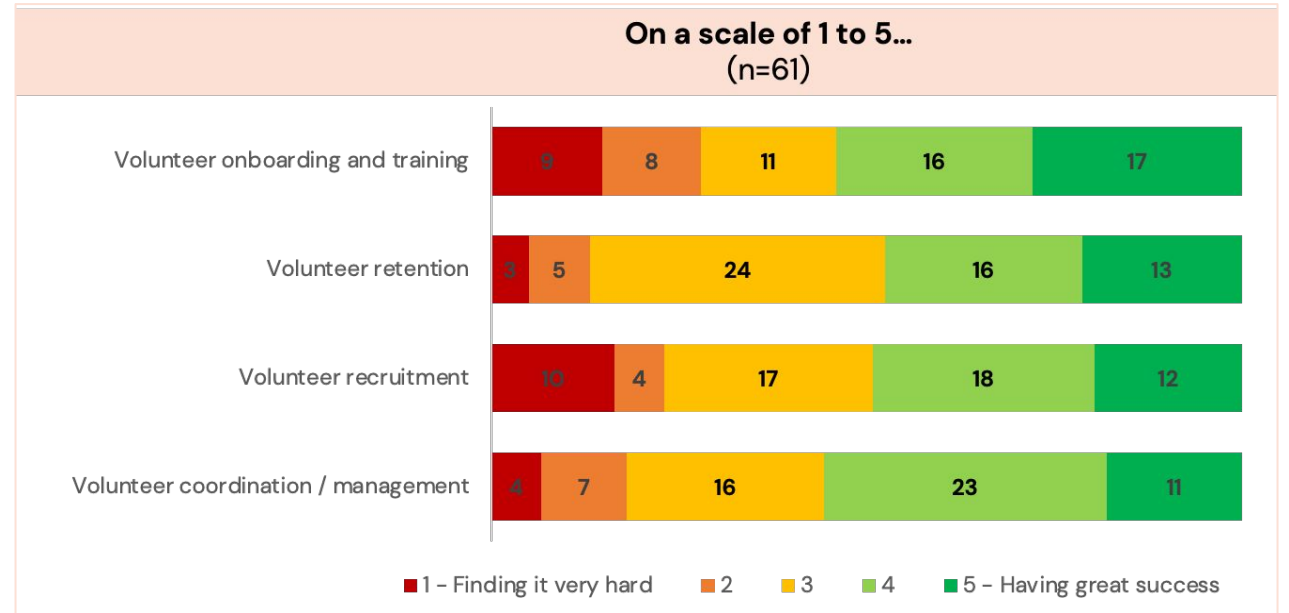
■ Yes
■ No



There is a mixed picture in terms of how challenging organisations find volunteer engagement

In the survey with volunteer organisations about half reported having challenges with volunteer recruitment, retention, capacity to run volunteer training and smooth coordination, whilst others were having success in these areas.

This shows how the landscape is uneven for volunteering organisations in terms of how easy/difficult they find it to manage and retain volunteer.



Smaller organisations are often at a disadvantage

Smaller organisations are often disproportionately struggling to recruit, retain, and manage volunteers. They often have less time, infrastructure, and flexibility — placing them at a disadvantage compared to larger, better-resourced organisations.

Several factors compound this challenge:

- **Limited staff capacity:** Volunteer management is often squeezed into already overstretched roles, with little time for check-ins, training, or relationship-building.
- **Insecure funding:** Small organisations are more likely to experience funding instability, making it harder to invest in volunteer coordination or longer term role development.
- **Narrower range of roles:** With fewer service areas and limited ability to tailor roles, smaller groups can struggle to offer the same appeal as larger organisations.
- **Type of service matters:** More emotionally demanding roles (e.g. in mental health or crisis support) are harder to fill than lighter-touch opportunities like animal care or outdoor volunteering — and small organisations often don't have the flexibility to shift what they offer.

"We're doing brilliant work — but with no time or budget to make volunteering easy or rewarding, it's hard to keep people engaged."
Volunteer-involving organisation

"It's frustrating when bigger organisations can offer training or perks we just can't compete with."
Volunteer-involving organisation

"Larger organisations can offer better experiences, so naturally they attract more people. We're all fishing in the same pond." **Volunteer-involving organisation**

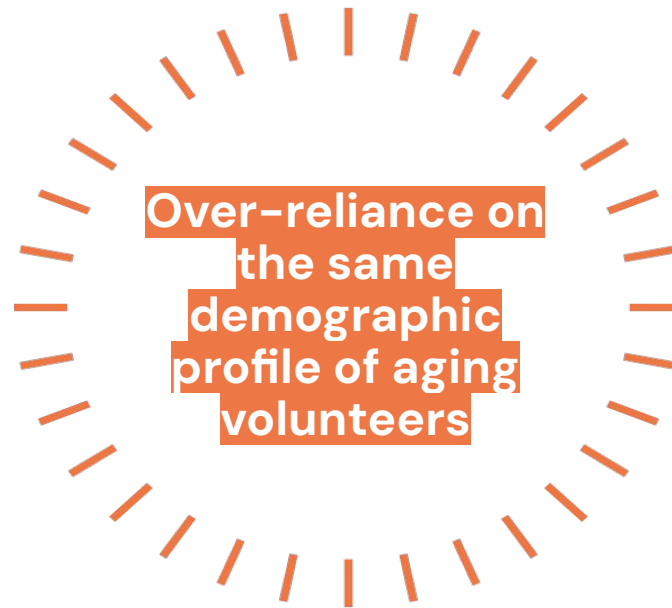


Three risks on the horizon

There are 3 emerging risks on the horizon for the sector as a whole...



Volunteer-involving organisations need more volunteers but lack capacity to adequately support



Over-reliance on the same demographic profile of aging volunteers



Lack of collaboration in a fragmented system

1. Volunteer-involving organisations need more volunteers but lack capacity to adequately support

With organisations under increasing pressure within the current funding landscape amidst cuts to statutory services, there are increasing demands on voluntary services and on staff resources.

This need transfers onto voluntary roles, but;

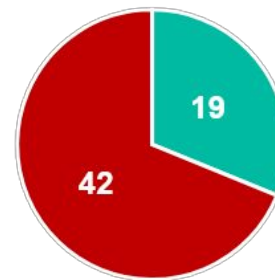
- Most organisations can't 'recruit enough' volunteers for positions they need
- This puts greater pressure on services and current volunteers
- Overstretched staff teams aren't able to sufficiently invest in the volunteer experience to adequately support their volunteers.
 - For smaller organisations this issue is significantly amplified

"We're doing everything we can, but with no extra funding, volunteers are taking on more and more – it's hard to sustain."
Volunteer-Involving organisation

69% of organisations said do not have enough volunteers

We **have a sufficient number** of volunteers

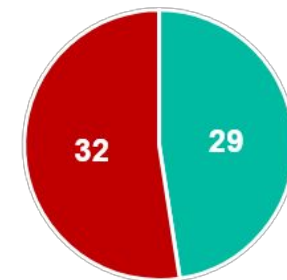
■ Yes
■ No



Over half of organisations said they are not able to provide consistent ongoing support and training for their volunteers

We are able to provide **ongoing support and training** for our volunteers

■ Yes
■ No



POTENTIAL IMPACT: Greater numbers of volunteers will burn-out and disengage

2. There is an over-reliance on the same demographic and profile of aging volunteers

While Somerset appears to have a thriving volunteer community, the volunteer pool is smaller than it looks given that 67% of volunteers are in 2 or more roles.

As such, the same committed volunteers are being over-relied upon and these tend to be white, middle-class women over 60.

63% of volunteers surveyed agree that **'more needs to be done to support and encourage people from diverse communities to volunteer'**

Demographics of survey participants shows:

Predominantly older volunteers. The majority of volunteers are older adults, with a significant representation from individuals aged 60 and above.

Underrepresentation of younger adults. There is a noticeable lack of volunteers in the 20–50 age bracket, highlighting a gap in engagement among younger demographics.

Gender imbalance. Women constitute a substantial proportion of the volunteer workforce, indicating a gender imbalance in volunteering roles.

State of Sector findings also showed:

Limited Ethnic Diversity. The volunteer base lacks ethnic diversity, with most volunteers identifying as White British, suggesting the need for more inclusive outreach strategies.

Socioeconomic Homogeneity. State of the Sector findings show volunteers predominantly come from middle-class backgrounds, indicating a socioeconomic homogeneity that may not reflect the broader community.



POTENTIAL IMPACT: An unclear volunteer pipeline and diminishing volunteer population

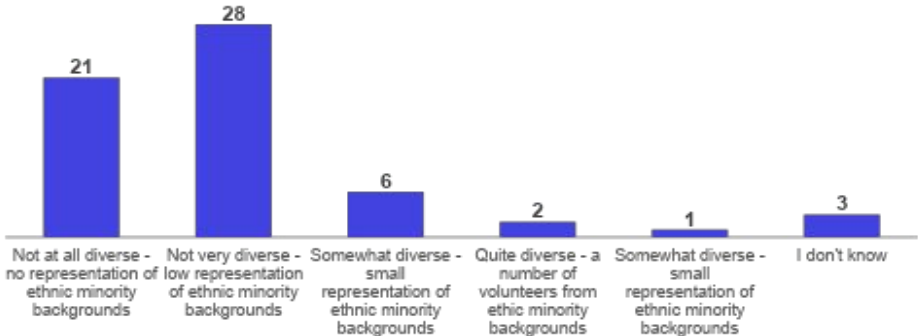
Organisations reported a similar picture, with a large portion of volunteers being aged 55+

A slight majority of organisations consulted stated that the demographics of their volunteers do represent the community they support, but 47% said they don't – again indicating this challenge affects about half of organisations. Most organisations (75%) have a majority of volunteers over 55, indicating that age is the biggest challenge being faced with limited diversity.

GENDER: 50% stated their volunteers are mostly women, 34% reported a fairly equal mix
AGE: 75% stated their volunteers are mostly aged 55+

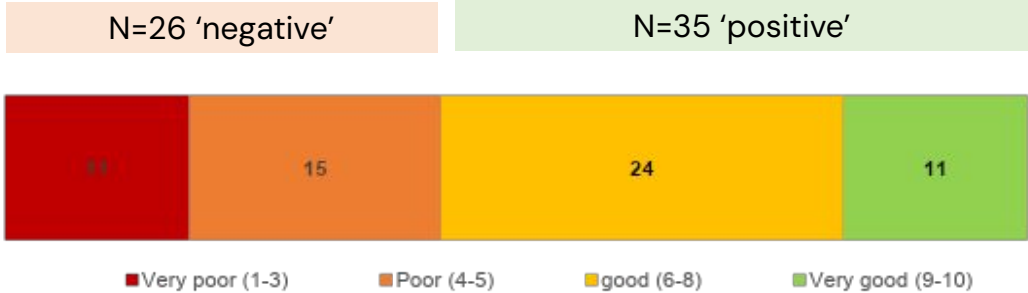
ETHNICITY: 80% state their volunteers aren't ethnically diverse

How ethnically diverse are the volunteers within your organisation? (n=61)



43% of organisations reported that they don't think the demographics of their volunteers represent their community.

How well do you think the overall demographics of your volunteers represent the communities you support? (n=61)



However, the 2021 Census data indicates that the vast majority of residents in Somerset identify as White (over 96%)

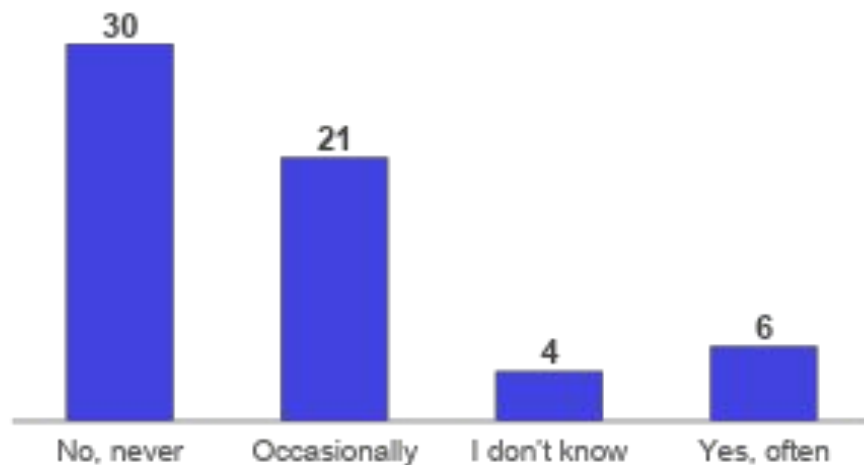


3. Lack of collaboration in a fragmented system

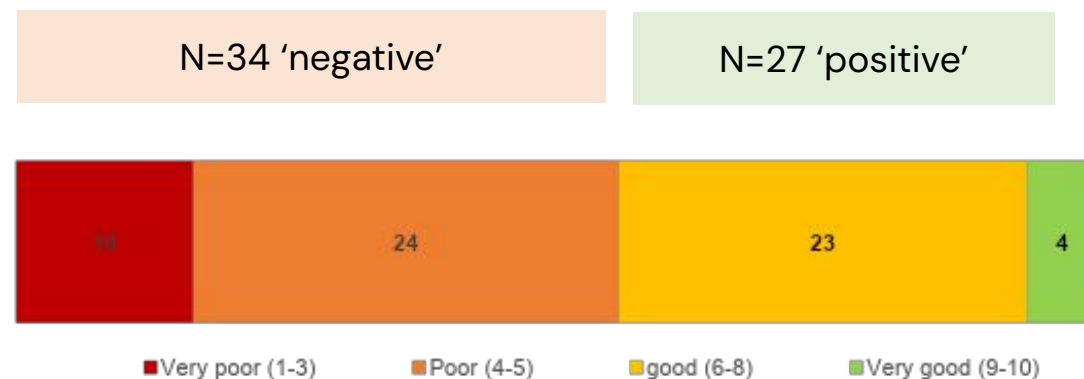
Half of organisations have **never collaborated with other organisations** to solve problems around volunteer recruitment, training, management or engagement.

56% think volunteering is **not well coordinated** across Somerset

Have you ever collaborated with other organisations to solve problems around volunteer recruitment, training, management or engagement?
(n=61)



How well do you think volunteering is coordinated across voluntary organisations in Somerset? (n=61)



POTENTIAL IMPACT: Growing divide between small and larger organisations, lack of joined up approach needed to solve sector-wide issues

Appetite for collaboration is high, but the system is fragmented

Most organisations want to work more collaboratively, share knowledge, and ease the volunteer journey:

- There is a lot of positivity towards Spark Somerset and the 'Spark a Change' platform in work to date supporting volunteer-involving organisations, bringing them together and helping connect volunteers and organisations

But there is more to be done as the system is currently fragmented:

- Both structural and attitudinal barriers stand in the way. Organisations are fearful of losing their volunteers, and don't have the capacity or bandwidth to get the ball rolling.
- Volunteer recruitment processes vary widely; the health and social care sector has particular needs around confidentiality and GDPR/Safeguarding
- Safeguarding and training are often duplicated
- Funding competition discourages open collaboration
- Larger organisations are often better equipped to invest in the volunteer experience than smaller organisations. This results in a competitive edge for well-resourced organisations, leading to unequal access to volunteers across the sector.

"I think Spark Somerset is doing a great job — they're bringing people together and making volunteering more visible." **Volunteer-involving organisation**

"Even though we're in the same sector, we're often in competition. That makes collaboration harder, but not impossible — we just need support to get there." **Volunteer-involving organisation**

"I think there's a real hunger to share ideas and resources — people want to help each other, but we're all so stretched." **Volunteer-involving organisation**

Volunteers are also calling for more coordination & collaboration between organisations

For volunteers, finding ways to collaborate and share resources is top of mind and seen as key to overcome the challenges being experienced.

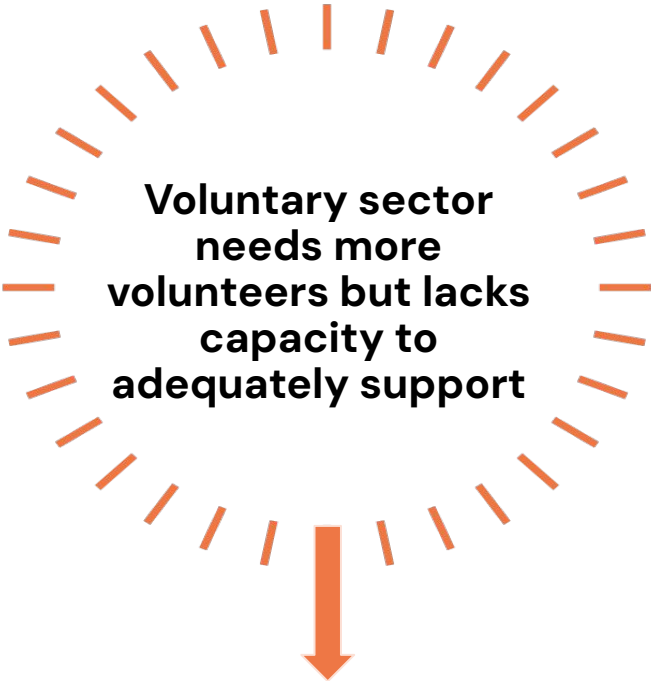
They would like processes to be streamlined and more connected, and a simpler way to volunteer for multiple organisations.

57% of volunteers think volunteering processes need to be **more connected and streamlined**

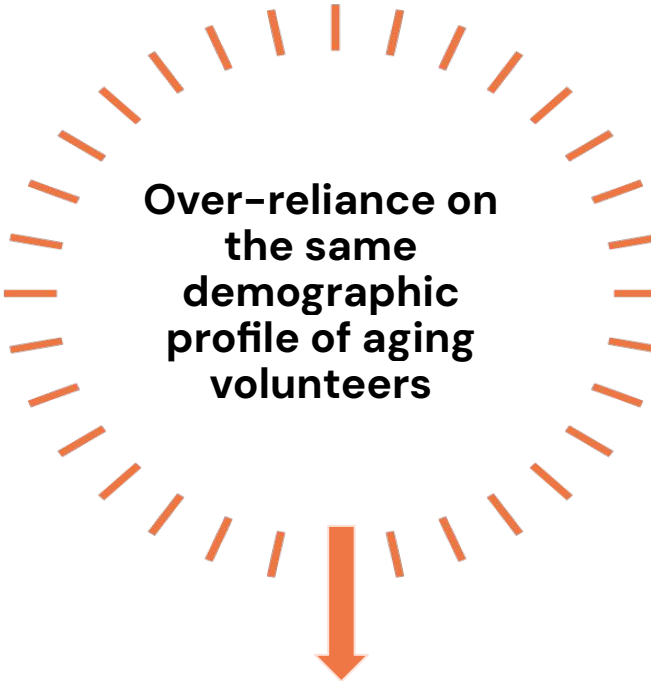
53% would like there to be a **simpler way to volunteer for multiple organisations.**



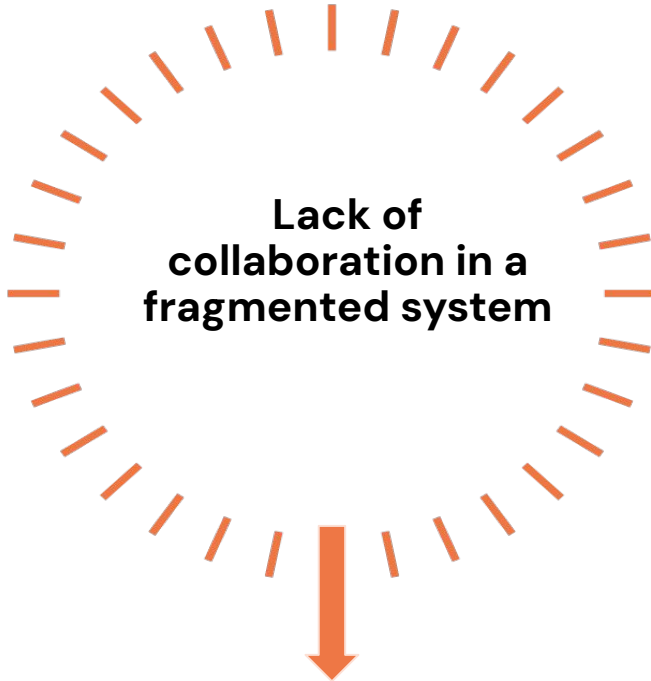
Without investment the potential impact of risks on the horizon are sizable



POTENTIAL IMPACT: *Greater numbers of volunteers will burn-out and disengage*



An unclear volunteer pipeline and diminishing volunteer population



Growing divide between small and larger organisations, lack of joined up approach needed to solve sector-wide issues





Opportunities for Investment

Investment is critical to ensure future-proofing of volunteer pipeline and sector success

There are opportunity areas where investment in innovation can help to:

1. Increase diversity of volunteering pool
2. Inspire a new generation and expand how volunteering looks in the future
3. Leverage resources across sector to close the divide between small and large organisations, increase capacity and prevent volunteer burnout

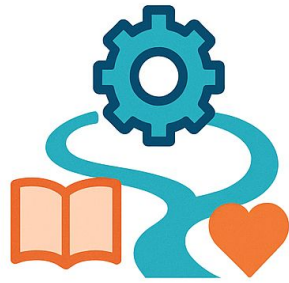


This would enable organisations to keep volunteer wellbeing at the forefront and ensure future pipeline.

There are four key opportunity areas for investment



1. Enable collaboration between volunteer-involving organisations and with volunteers



2. Develop skills-focused volunteer pathways



3. Reimagining volunteering to include the varied forms of active citizenship in communities



4. Build strategic partnerships with the private sector

1. Enable collaboration between volunteer-involving organisations



Appetite for collaboration is high, organisations want to come together, but they aren't sure how.

Spark Somerset are uniquely placed to help shift the culture and support the sector to find a way to come together.

There is a shared appetite for:

- Shared infrastructure (e.g. onboarding tools, volunteer passport)
- Standardised safeguarding and training modules
- Spaces to connect and collaborate

Potential benefits:

- Improve overall volunteer experience, especially of onboarding, coordination/management and training.
- Voluntary sector is more robust as a whole and better able to work together to tackle sector-wide issues
- Better sharing of resources to save organisations time and improve quality
- Increased efficiency of training and procedures
- Seamless redirection of volunteers if a role can't work for them anymore due to logistics
- Saving volunteers time with duplication of training or other processes
- Reducing pressure on smaller organisations, and strain on resources, preventing volunteers having to over-commit within their roles.

1. Enable collaboration with volunteers to shape the future of sector



Volunteers bring valuable insight from lived experience on the frontline — they understand what works, what’s missing, and where systems could improve.

- Many volunteers are eager to contribute ideas, not just time — but aren’t always given a structured way to do so. Involving volunteers in co-design leads to more relevant, inclusive, and effective services, especially for marginalised communities.
 - Creating space for volunteer voices builds ownership, connection, and long-term commitment to the organisation or cause.
 - Structured involvement — like feedback loops, peer networks, or volunteer panels — ensures input is heard and acted upon.

As the sector adapts to new challenges, volunteers should be seen as co-creators, not just contributors.

*“Since probably 2018, I’ve been volunteering in Somerset mental health services as someone with lived experience, and often as a peer worker... I feel I can meaningfully help improve the sector if I had more of a voice” **Volunteer, Female, 35***

*“I’d love to be part of shaping what we do next — I see things on the ground that others might miss.” **Volunteer, Male, 50***

2. Develop more skills-focused volunteer pathways

Volunteering is delivering strong outcomes for volunteers seeking skills development, a career change or new opportunities. This motivation comes from a slightly younger demographic, however this is currently a minority. There is an opportunity to build opportunities in this area to encourage new demographics to volunteer and bolster the sectors workforce.



- **Skills-focused volunteering** supports personal growth, employability, and confidence, making volunteering more meaningful and sustainable.
 - These pathways can be formal (e.g. accredited training, shadowing, routes into paid roles) or informal (e.g. on-the-job learning, peer mentoring).
 - Volunteer-to-Career pathways are a promising innovation, particularly in the health and social care sector, where the need for workforce development is growing.
- **Service user → volunteer → expert by experience pathway**
 - There is an opportunity for organisations to create clear pathways where service users become volunteers, and later progress to roles as “experts by experience.”
 - This can help individuals rebuild confidence, gain skills, and reconnect with purpose — while bringing valuable insight back into the system.
 - When supported well, it leads to stronger, more inclusive services and creates routes into employment or peer leadership.

These pathways contribute not only to individual development, but to wider system goals, including workforce readiness, lived-experience leadership, and inclusion.

*“The peer support groups are a great asset to the PCN, it gives us the opportunity to refer patients to like minded people, they really help out at our community clinics as we don't need to put as much staff resource into running them. A lot of our Wellbeing offers couldn't happen without the volunteers”***Volunteer-Involving organisation**

Skills pathways can be impactful for volunteers and organisations

Case study: Jane, 45

Jane has struggled with mental illness for most her adult life, which has prevented her from maintaining paid work.

Despite these challenges, Jane discovered volunteering as a meaningful way to engage with her community, support her mental health and others. 7 years ago, she began volunteering with mental health services in Somerset in roles such as running a local coffee morning, participating in a mental health community group and working as an expert by experience.

Through her volunteering connections, Jane recently secured her first paid job in 20 years, for a Somerset-based mental health service.

“Volunteering has built my confidence so much and helped me develop skills that have led me back to paid work. I never ever thought I’d be able to work again – for people with mental health challenges, volunteering is an amazing way to boost confidence in your own abilities and gain experience in professional environments”

Case study: St Margaret's Hospice

St. Margaret’s Hospice has developed a strong volunteer-to-career pathway, helping volunteers build skills and move into health and care roles.

- Volunteers often start in community-facing roles like retail or admin, gaining confidence and experience.
- Many progress into patient support roles — such as ward assistants, family support volunteers, or care administration.
- Structured training and mentoring prepare volunteers for paid roles in healthcare and support services, both within the hospice and across the wider care system.

“Some volunteers start in our retail shops, then progress to admin, care support, and even staff roles.”— St. Margaret’s Hospice

3. Reimagining volunteering to include the varied forms of active citizenship in communities



Many people already contribute to their communities in meaningful ways — but don't consider it volunteering. This includes things like: delivering shopping for a neighbour, supporting a school event, helping a grassroots sports team

These acts of community spirit and active citizenship are vital — yet they often fall outside formal volunteer definitions.

Reimagining volunteering means recognising and valuing this hidden effort and redefining volunteering outside of traditional confines (e.g. older lady in a charity shop) which feels outdated, especially for younger, working-class, or underrepresented communities.

More informal, flexible models are needed to attract new demographics. To widen participation, organisations need to meet people where they are — with language, structures, and expectations that feel relevant to their lives.

"It's about meeting people where they are — some people want to dip in and out, and we need to make space for that."

Volunteer-involving organisation

"We often find people who are helping neighbours, organising events, supporting groups... but they don't realise that's volunteering."

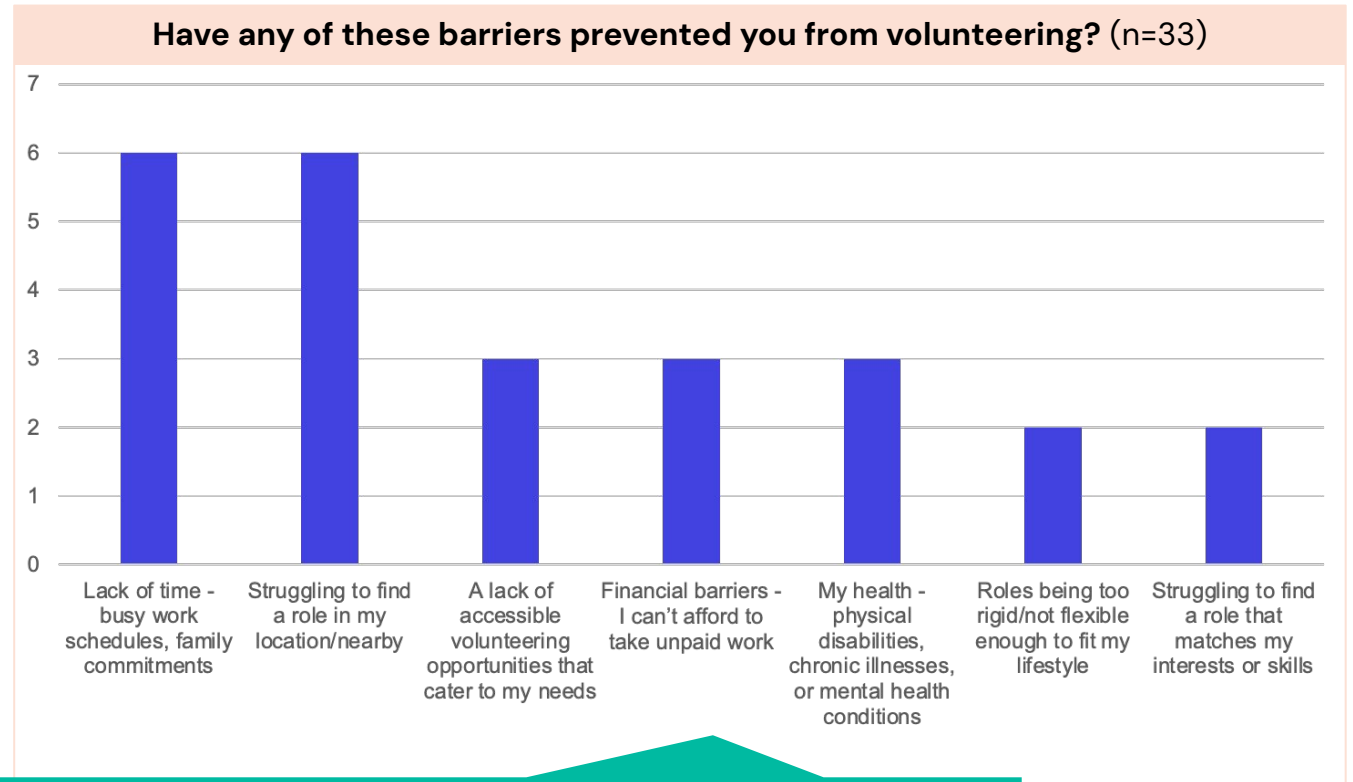
Volunteer-involving organisation

Reimagining volunteering could help to tackle a major barrier to volunteering: 'lack of time' & 'struggling to find a role'

Many people say they would like to volunteer but feel they "don't have the time" — often because they associate volunteering with long-term, weekly commitments.

By promoting micro-volunteering, flexible roles, and informal acts of giving, we can show that even small contributions count — making volunteering feel more achievable and inclusive.

Organisations can also think more laterally about what roles they could offer, this may be particularly helpful in health settings such as GP practices where finding a role for volunteers to do is a major barrier



"I would love to volunteer more, but opportunities in my area are limited" **Lapsed Volunteer**

"When you're dealing with health issues, it's hard to commit to volunteering regularly without affecting your recovery" **Non-Volunteer**

"We need to break away from this idea that volunteering is a big commitment. It can be five minutes. It can be an hour." **Volunteer-Involving Organisation**



Strategic partnerships with the private sector is an area of untapped potential



Corporate volunteering is a largely underutilised opportunity in Somerset, but one with significant potential to strengthen the volunteer ecosystem — particularly when embedded into a wider, place-based strategy.

Several organisations expressed a growing interest in employer-supported volunteering, recognising that partnerships with businesses can extend far beyond just offering hands-on support. Volunteering can be a gateway into a deeper relationship, where businesses not only contribute staff time, but also offer in-kind resources, funding, or longer-term support.

Corporate volunteers typically offer short-term, team-based engagement, which is ideal for event support, practical projects, or awareness-raising campaigns. If managed well, this kind of engagement can also support an organisation's fundraising and visibility goals.

However, smaller organisations often lack the capacity, confidence, or connections to initiate these relationships. There is clear potential for:

- Brokerage support to connect charities and businesses
- Shared guidance or templates for managing corporate groups
- Inclusion of local employers in place-based volunteering strategies — linking social impact with workforce engagement

"We've seen people volunteer through work and then come back on their own — or their company donates after seeing the impact."

Volunteer-involving organisation

Summary of questions to take into innovation process...

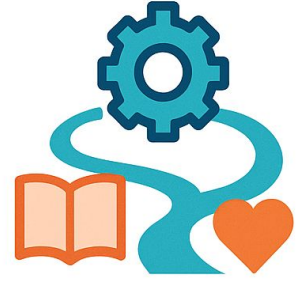


How might we involve volunteers' perspectives in shaping services and systems? and co-design the future of sector with them?

How might we make it easier for organisations to share tools, knowledge, and volunteers?

How might we reduce duplication (e.g. safeguarding, training) across organisations?

How might we build trust and incentives for collaboration in a competitive funding environment?



How might we support volunteers to grow and progress through their roles?

How might we better link volunteering to employment or accredited learning?

How might we support service users to become volunteers, and volunteers to become experts by experience?

How might we better promote skills-acquisition as a key benefit of volunteering?



How might we recognise and support people who contribute informally in their communities?

How might we redefine volunteering so that more people see themselves in it?

How might we design roles that are flexible, low-commitment, and time-sensitive?

How might we segment our approach to meet the needs of different groups (e.g. young people, carers, working adults)?



How might we engage local businesses in employer-supported volunteering?

How might we align business volunteering with our community needs and values?

How might we turn one-off corporate volunteering into longer-term relationships?

How might we create shared value — where volunteering supports both community impact and business goals?

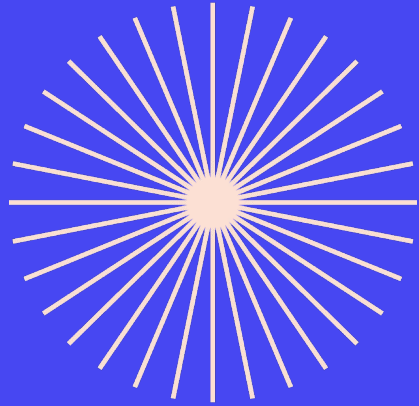


Thank you!


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APPENDIX:
**Deep-dive into the Volunteer
Journey**



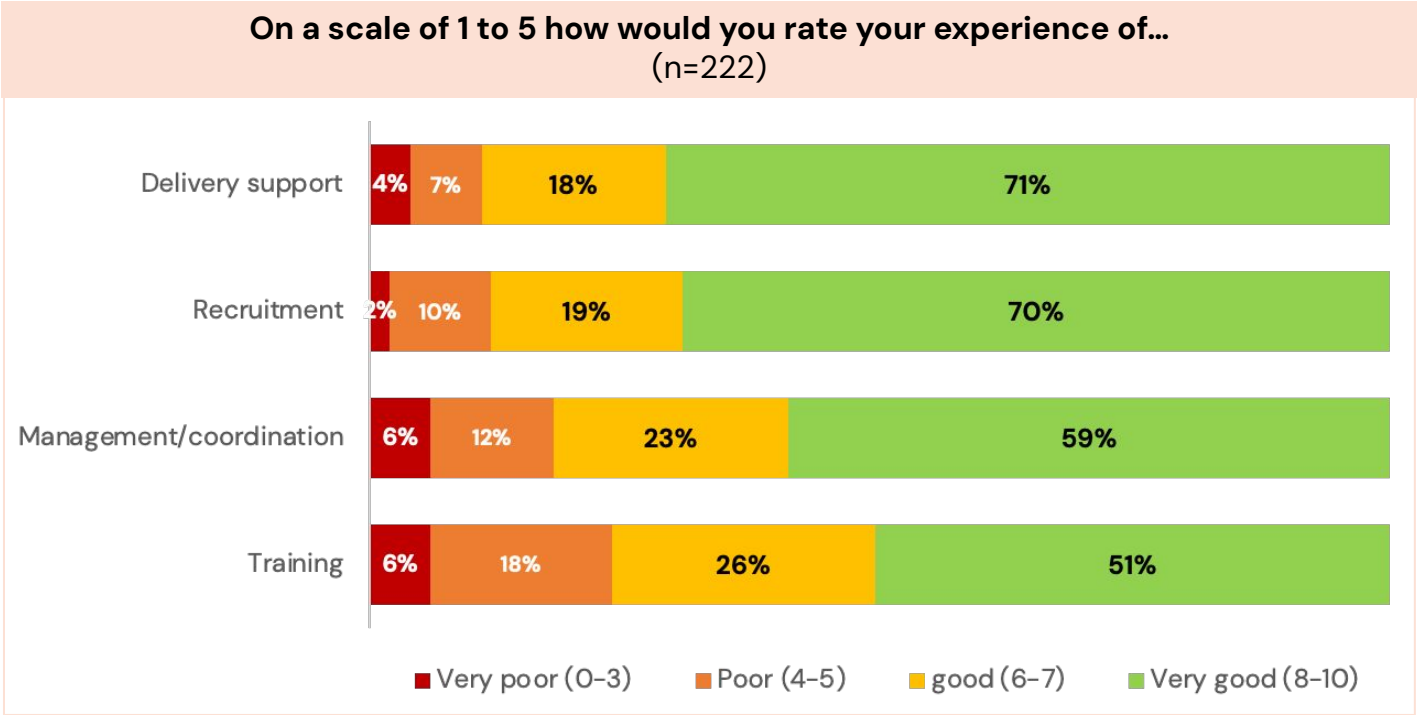
“The better organisations to volunteer with have straightforward processes, procedures and are able to recognise and utilise a volunteer’s previous knowledge, skills and experience. Support is accessible but you’re not over-managed.”

Volunteer, male, 65+

Volunteers experiences are broadly very positive, especially when carrying out their role

Experiences vary greatly between organisations. Generally, volunteers are happy in delivering their role and with the recruitment process. Management and training are the areas showing the most opportunity for improvement.

From hearing about volunteers' varied journeys, we have pulled out factors that contribute towards a positive experience and watchouts that can hamper volunteer experiences in each of these areas.



Recruitment

89% of volunteers said they had a good – very good experience of recruitment

Positive contributing factors:

- Volunteers find platforms like Spark a Change useful for discovering opportunities.
- Being able to quickly jump in and get involved in a small way – giving a role a go before committing more formally, e.g. helping out at an event
- Clear information about what's involved in the role and what the time commitment is
- A welcoming and inclusive environment helps new volunteers feel comfortable.

"Being able to jump in and help out at an event before committing more formally really appealed to me,"
Volunteer, Female, 55



Watch outs:

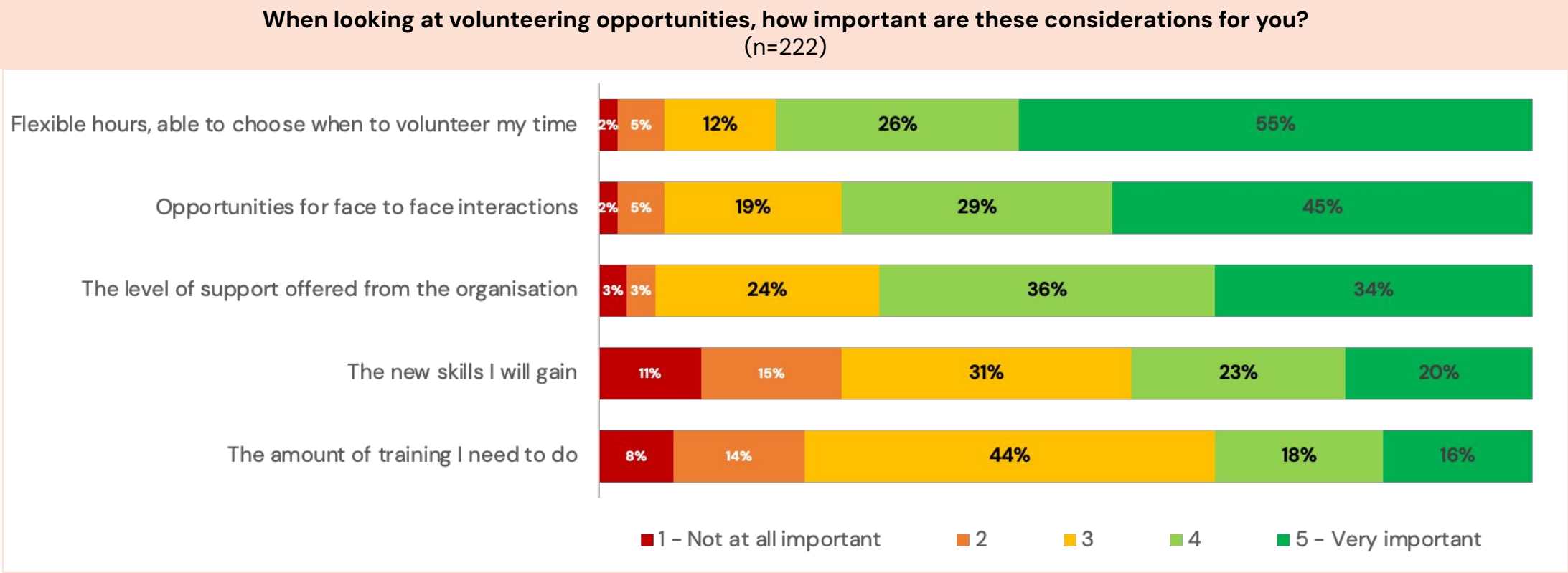
- Lengthy interview processes that feel too 'formal'
- Some organisations struggle with clarity in describing role, making it difficult for volunteers to feel they have a clear role
- Too many procedures and red tape can discourage volunteers

"It was hard to stay motivated with all the paperwork and formalities,"
Volunteer, Female, 22

"A lengthy interview process can feel too formal and off-putting for people just wanting to help,"
Volunteer, Male, 50

Recruitment: when considering roles, flexible hours is volunteers' top consideration

81% stated flexibility is important to them when looking at new volunteer opportunities; the highest ranking consideration of those asked.



Training

A quarter of volunteers reported challenge in this area.

Although 77% of volunteers said they had a good or very good experience of training, 23% reported a poor-very bad experience.

Positive contributing factors:

- Only providing the information needed
- Opportunities to further develop your skills and access more training during the role
- Learning 'on the job' more practically

"I've found the training offered really good - I work on the till in the cafe and that was really practical and specific training to help me get to grips with it"
Volunteer, Female, 55

Watchouts:

- Having to do training that feels irrelevant for the role
- Duplications across organisations causes frustrations, Volunteers feeling they have to 're-do' the same training multiple times, time wasting
- Too much online training with no face to face element

"Training also needs to be appropriate to the volunteering role - one organisation was keen that I prove my knowledge of underground cable and chainsaw safety when the role was supporting autistic spectrum adults in their homes!"
Volunteer, Male, 65+

Carrying out volunteer position

89% report a good or very good experience when carrying out their volunteering;

71% are having a 'very good' experience demonstrating volunteers are broadly enjoying their role. This is where they feel the benefits and get a lot out of it.

Positive contributing factors:

- Seeing the difference they are making first hand helps volunteers to feel that it's worthwhile
- Interaction with others, building relationships, feeling part of a community
- Feeling valued and supported

"The benefits have just been... being part of a team, being part of the world of work, which is really hard to access when you're struggling with your mental health. The friendships I've made through volunteering have enriched my life, and I feel valued as part of a team." **Volunteer, Male, 25**

Watchouts

- Being too disconnected from beneficiaries
- The difference they are making feels intangible
- Feel unneeded or like your time is wasted
- Not getting any feedback
- Having little interaction with other people
- Not having enough support, or having too much responsibility, leading to overwhelm

"Sometimes I feel a bit on my own managing things, like I don't want to be a pain and always ask lots of questions but it would be good to have more regular check-ins"
Volunteer, Female, 30

Management / coordination

72% report a good – very good experience of volunteer coordination;
18% rated their experience of management poor.

Positive contributing factors:

- Being able to give feedback, opportunities for reflective discussion
- Being able to get feedback about how your doing
- Peer support
- Volunteer connection / thank you opportunities / social events

"We have an end of summer bbq most years and it's lovely as all the staff and volunteers are there and it's a nice way to celebrate all that has been achieved"

Volunteer, Female, 30

Watchouts

- Personality clashes
- Feeling excluded or treated differently from paid staff, e.g. excluded from a team lunch

"It would be really helpful to get a bit more feedback on how I'm doing and I could give feedback on how I think the service is going. Reflective 2-way conversation is important"

Volunteer, Male, 65+

14% report having challenges with disorganised management of volunteers