

Executive summary

Volunteering England, in consultation with the voluntary and community sector, has developed a ten-year vision and strategy for the volunteering infrastructure in England, as a sector-led companion to the government's soon-to-be-published *Capacity Building and Infrastructure Framework for the Voluntary and Community Sector*.

This publication sets out that vision and strategy, together with Volunteering England's proposals for the new core functions that the infrastructure should perform locally, regionally and nationally in order to provide effective and cohesive support for volunteering in England.

Vision

The volunteering infrastructure in England has evolved over the past fifty years largely without a sense of cohesive strategy or a plan for long-term sustainability. Volunteering England's vision is of a modern, dynamic, strategic, co-ordinated and sustainable infrastructure for volunteering at national, regional and local level.

This volunteering infrastructure will:

- Increase the quality and quantity of volunteering.
- Provide a comprehensive understanding of volunteering in all its expressions, and be known and recognised for this expertise.
- Be publicly recognised with a physically identifiable local presence.
- Be respected for its person-focused approach to social issues, and to this end will support volunteering in all its diversity.
- Be trusted and respected for its expertise, flexibility, campaigning, quality of service, effectiveness and efficiency.
- Set a cutting-edge agenda in opinion forming and policy development within volunteering.
- Be accessible, collaborative, empowering, professional and transparent in all its dealings with people and organisations.
- Be seen as indispensable by the general public and by the public, private and voluntary sectors.

- Work to rigorous, externally accredited and comprehensive minimum standards locally, regionally and nationally in order to ensure high-quality, innovative and progressive services that are focused on measurable outcomes.
- Have strong international links.

Strategy

In preparing a strategy to deliver this vision, ten key areas of work were identified. These key areas, the principal actions necessary to progress them and a series of one, two, five and ten year milestones to achieve these, are:

The definition of volunteering

Current definitions of volunteering need to be updated to reflect the breadth of voluntary activity.

- Volunteering England will lead on research and consultation to arrive at a new, commonly agreed definition of volunteering.
- This will be backed up by two statements, one on the importance of volunteering and one placing volunteering within the culture and ethos of society.

Volunteer management

Research clearly shows that volunteer management needs to be strengthened and given greater recognition.

- Investing in Volunteers and Excellence in Volunteer Management programmes will be developed to the point where they become recognised as essential and are both financially self-sustaining.
- Accredited training, linked to national occupational standards for volunteer managers, will be seen as essential and will be funded by volunteer-involving organisations.
- A service to advertise employment opportunities in the volunteering field will be developed to become the market leader in the recruitment of volunteering staff.

Executive summary

Awareness of volunteering

Volunteering should be seen as indispensable to the well-being of society, and everyone who wants to volunteer should be able easily to find routes to doing so.

- Promotional materials and campaigns, including the use of information technology in public places, will be developed to the point where volunteering has a high profile and there is widespread public recognition and celebration of volunteers.

Volunteering infrastructure – general

There should be a clearly identified volunteering infrastructure, with strong relationships with volunteer-involving organisations, at all levels. Collaborative working practices should be developed and a coherent national policy framework should be established, which should be reflected regionally and locally.

- Duplication and gaps in volunteering infrastructure provision will be addressed so that there is clarity and awareness about the roles of different infrastructure organisations, and memoranda of understanding between the different organisations.
- Accredited training and the funding to deliver it will be established, leading to qualifications of the staff of infrastructure organisations.

Volunteering infrastructure – national

Closer collaboration is needed to provide a workable national strategy, with more formalised partnerships and strategic alliances.

- A more strategic approach to delivery will be achieved through the England Volunteering Development Council.

Volunteering infrastructure – regional

A regional tier of infrastructure is needed to improve the quality of provision and ensure consistent coverage.

- A regional volunteering infrastructure will be established in each of the nine government regions, implementing a fully resourced strategy for each region.

Volunteering infrastructure – local

Research shows that there are currently an unsustainable number of local volunteer development agencies and declining provision in rural areas. Fewer organisations employing more staff are needed to deliver services and achieve more effective local penetration.

- A common consumer brand for the local volunteering infrastructure will be implemented.
- Resourced development plans will be implemented in all counties/unitary authorities/metropolitan areas.

Quality standards for volunteering infrastructure

Quality accreditation and impact assessment processes need to be implemented for volunteering infrastructure organisations at all levels, and should be both tough and credible.

- Quality accreditation and impact assessment will be developed to the point where they are adopted by all volunteering infrastructure organisations locally, regionally and nationally.
- Quality standards will be well known and respected, with the use of the local brand identified with excellent service by the public and by volunteer-involving organisations.

The role of volunteering initiatives

While there will always be new initiatives, volunteering is predominately a local activity, and as such the role and importance of the local volunteering infrastructure should be acknowledged.

- The sector will work with government on the appropriate involvement of the volunteering infrastructure with new initiatives on volunteering. It will progress to a position where it is leading on initiatives to improve the quality, quantity and diversity of volunteering in England, and is also influencing others in the development and delivery of these initiatives.

Executive summary

Funding

There needs to be a strategic funding framework to support volunteering infrastructure at all levels.

- Benchmarks and frameworks for volunteering infrastructure will be established, ultimately with funding tied to these.
- Volunteering infrastructure organisations will identify which existing services can be charged for and which potential ones can be developed.
- Funding streams will be diversified so that ultimately all volunteering infrastructure organisations will be funded from a variety of sources.

Core functions

The existing range of core functions for volunteering infrastructure clearly needs to be further developed and simplified in order to encourage strategic and cohesive delivery at local, regional and national level.

The core functions proposed by Volunteering England are:

Brokerage

- The volunteering infrastructure will have a clear understanding of the role, range and remit of voluntary activity, and will hold information on a wide range of volunteering opportunities.
- It will offer potential volunteers support and advice in matching them with appropriate volunteering opportunities.

Marketing volunteering

- The volunteering infrastructure will creatively and innovatively market and promote volunteering through local, regional and national events and campaigns, with publicity material targeted at different groups of potential volunteers. It will promote a national consumer-facing brand for local volunteering infrastructure.
- It will make full use of the latest technology to promote its work.

Good practice development

- The volunteering infrastructure will work to increase the volunteering knowledge base of its own staff and volunteers, as well as that of other individuals, organisations and groups at all levels.
- It will develop and deliver training and accreditation strategies.
- It will regularly be contacted by other agencies, groups and individuals seeking information about volunteering issues.

Developing volunteering opportunities

- The volunteering infrastructure will work in close partnership with a wide variety of other agencies to develop volunteering. It will have a clear plan to realise the potential within the local community in which it operates.
- It will ensure that its services are accessible and will promote volunteering to specific groups of people who face barriers to volunteering.
- It will work creatively to develop imaginative non-formal opportunities for potential volunteers.

Policy response and campaigning

- The volunteering infrastructure will be aware of local, regional and national government proposals and policies which may have an impact on volunteering. It will lead and/or participate in campaigns on volunteering issues.
- It will be the first port of call whenever a comment on volunteering is sought by the media.
- It will campaign for increased awareness of volunteering and for a more volunteer-literate and volunteer-friendly climate.

Strategic development of volunteering

- Volunteering England will take a strategic approach to the development of social policy at local, regional and national levels, aiming to support proposed changes which would facilitate volunteering and

Executive summary

challenge those which would inhibit it. It will monitor and evaluate the impact of the volunteering infrastructure.

- The volunteering infrastructure will have close links with volunteer-involving organisations at all levels and will be actively involved in relevant networks.

It is intended that this publication will act as a benchmark for future monitoring, impact assessment and reporting.