



Report sponsored by:



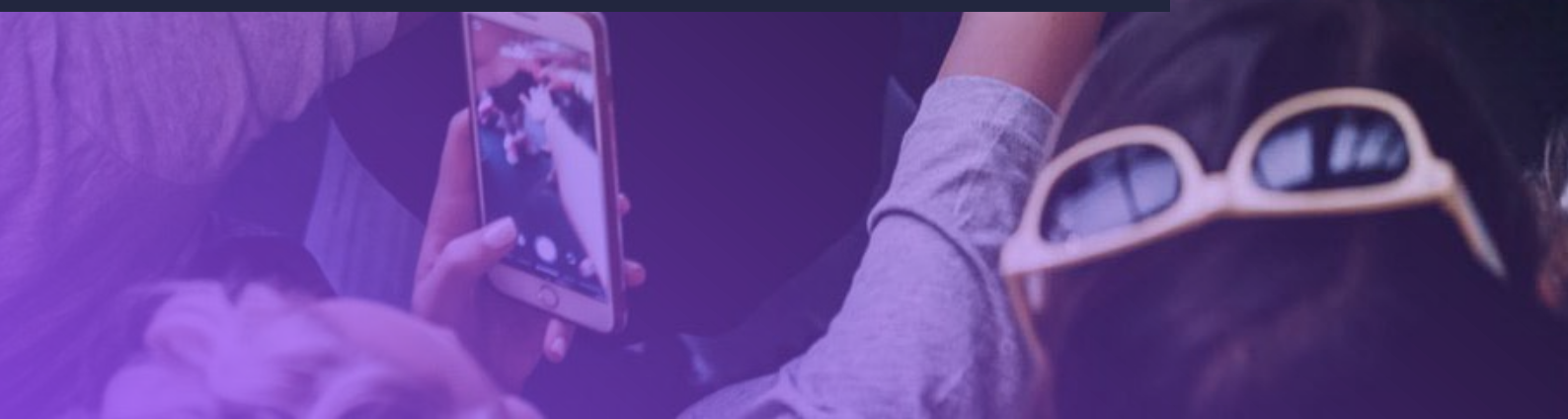
# TIME FOR GOOD

Volunteering trends and challenges at the dawn of a new government

April 2025

---

Authors: Joe Saxton and Tim Harrison-Byrne



# CONTENTS

---

<b>PART 1</b>	<b>Volunteering trends over the last decade</b>	<b>04</b>
<hr/>		
<b>PART 2</b>	<b>Initiatives and key stakeholders in the world of volunteering</b>	<b>08</b>
<hr/>		
<b>PART 3</b>	<b>What is the role of technology in volunteering?</b>	<b>12</b>
<hr/>		
<b>PART 4</b>	<b>The elements of a strategy for growing the role of volunteering in society</b>	<b>15</b>
<hr/>		
<b>PART 5</b>	<b>Some key take-aways about volunteering over the last decade</b>	<b>18</b>

# Introduction

**Volunteering is at the heart of many communities around the UK. It is the giving of time that makes many communities so strong. It is the people who month in, month out, give their time that provides support for millions of people. Volunteering also lets charity shops flourish, provides services in hospices and for the homeless, and creates a better natural environment and raises money for charities and good causes. It is the giving of time (and money) that is at the heart of a supportive, caring society.**

This report tries to pull together some of the threads and trends for the current demographic profile of volunteers, as well as analysing recent initiatives, and setting out some hallmarks of good practice for individual charities. It also sets out the elements of a strategy for developing volunteering in the first year of a Labour government in Westminster.

This report has a number of sections:

**PART 1** looks at volunteering trends over the last decade based on data from nfpResearch's regular tracking of public attitudes and behaviours towards charities

**PART 2** covers the different organisations, initiatives and research in relation to volunteering and volunteering management

**PART 3** explores the role and rise of digital technology in volunteering recruitment and management

**PART 4** looks at what might be the key elements of a strategy to increase volunteering levels

**PART 5** summarises some of the key learning from the last decade of volunteering research and experience

As well as our data from our survey, and our knowledge of volunteering from our previous two reports, we interviewed Ruth Leonard, Rob Jackson, Chris Wade, Chris Martin and Ash Staines for this report. You can find out more about them and their organisation at the end of the report. Their wisdom and insight inestimably improved our report, but any errors remain all ours.





## PART 1

# Volunteering trends over the last decade

nfpResearch has been tracking the number of people who volunteer for over 20 years, and this first part of the report looks at the demography of volunteers (see below for a note on definitions)<sup>1</sup> and how it has changed over the last decade. It also compares the profile of volunteering in the UK with Ireland and Canada, where we also carry out research. For those who are interested there is also a box on the methodology of our research, and some of the challenges in measuring volunteering activity.

## THE UK – ASPECTS OF VOLUNTEERING IN THE UK

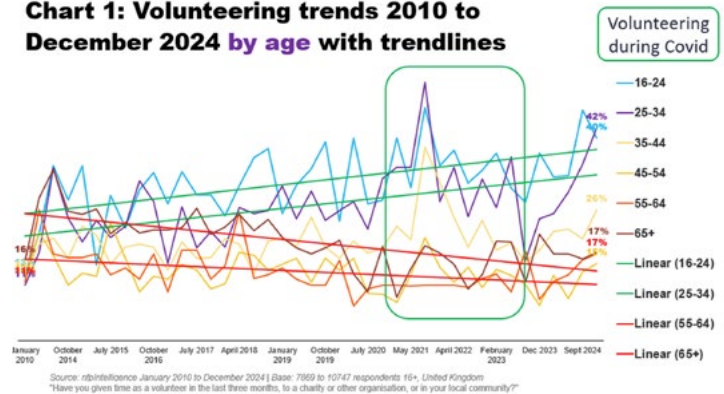
### YOUTH VOLUNTEERING IS RISING, AND OLDER PEOPLE'S VOLUNTEERING IS FALLING

Chart 1 shows changes in volunteering by age since 2010 till December 2024. For the sake of clarity we have added trendlines. Those age groups where volunteering is going up are in green, and those that are decreasing are in red.

A careful examination of those red and green trendlines show that it is the under 35s where volunteering is growing, and it is the over 55s where volunteering is on the most decline. In particular, it is the over 65s where volunteering is on the fastest decline. To put some percentages on these changes, in March 2012 just 21% of 16–24 year-olds had volunteered in the last three months. By March 2024 32% said they had volunteered in the last 3 months.

Conversely for the 55–64 year-old age group, 26% volunteered in March 2012, and by March 2024 just 12% said they had. For the over 65s the figure were 28% in 2012 and 17% in 2024.

**Chart 1: Volunteering trends 2010 to December 2024 by age with trendlines**



It is hard to definitively establish why these changes are taking place. The rise in youth volunteering is probably due to the increased emphasis on volunteering in schools and universities, as well as an emphasis on young people volunteering in successive governments' policy (Millennium Volunteers, Vinspired, National Citizen Service etc.). Waxing lyrical about volunteering is a vital part of most school children and young people's university applications through UCAS, and many universities provide credits for volunteering. This may well establish the volunteering habit at an early age, which then continues into their twenties and thirties.

In contrast, the decline in volunteering among the older age groups is probably due to a combination of very different factors: pension provision is getting worse, and the state pension is starting later; Covid has made people re-evaluate their lives as well as left many people with longer-term health problems. On top of these, the economic situation has left many people financially worse off, of which the cost-of-living crisis is only the final straw. All these combine to mean older people have less money and may not be able to spare the time to volunteer. On top of this there has been comparatively little government policy to encourage older people to volunteer, compared to young people.

### COVID SAW A SPIKE IN VOLUNTEERING FOR YOUNG PEOPLE (ESPECIALLY MEN), AND A DIP FOR

<sup>1</sup> The question we ask in our research is 'Have you given time as a volunteer in the last three months, to a charity or other organisation, or in your local community?' This matches more closely with the formal volunteering definition used in the Citizenship survey, though probably not exactly. More on methodology in the box at the end of part 1.

## OLDER PEOPLE

Charts 1 and 2 (in the green boxes) both show the impact of Covid on volunteering rates. For many communities and demographics, Covid produced a flourishing of volunteering activity: people were furloughed and unable to do their normal activities. So they volunteered. In particular, men volunteered more as chart 2 shows – in October 2018 22% of men were volunteering, while 2 years later the figure was 40% of men. The comparable figures for women were 22% and 22%!

Younger age groups also volunteered more during Covid. For the 25–34 year-old age groups, the increase was particularly dramatic. In October 2019, 24% had volunteered in the previous 3 months. By September 2021 a whopping 51% had.

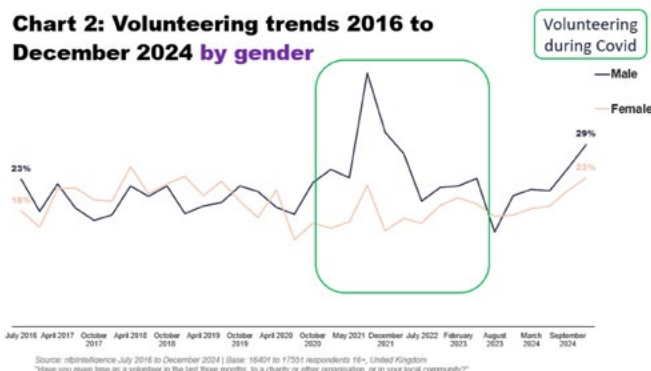
The older age groups typically sheltered, or had parental responsibilities, during Covid, and volunteered less. Of the 45–54 year-old age groups, 16% volunteered in October 2019, and a year later just 9% had.

## MEN NOW VOLUNTEER MORE THAN WOMEN

Chart 2 shows the gender split for volunteering from 2016. What is interesting is that between 2016 and 2020 the average volunteering rate for men (in the previous 3 months) is 20% and for women is 21%. From April 2020 to March 2024 the average rate is 23% for men and 18% for women.

In other words not only have men volunteered a little more, but women have volunteered a little less. While it is possible to put down some kind of hypothesis for the changes in age, it is much harder to do the same for these changes in the gender of volunteering.

**Chart 2: Volunteering trends 2016 to December 2024 by gender**



<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/news-and-insights/news-index/time-well-spent-2023-volunteering-among-the-global-majority/>

## LONDON HAS HIGHER LEVELS OF VOLUNTEERING THAN THE REST OF THE UK

Along with all the other aspects of volunteering we monitor, we also look at the geography of volunteering. Our analysis dividing the United Kingdom in 8 blocs shows that Londoners volunteer at a substantially higher rate than the rest of the UK.

The average volunteering rate for London between 2010 and 2024 is 28%, while in the East of England and the Midlands it is 19%. At the height of the pandemic 48% of Londoners said they had volunteered, while the next highest was 32%, by those in the South-East. Some of the reasons for that may be linked to the next demographic highlight, as well as the better volunteering and transport infrastructure in London.

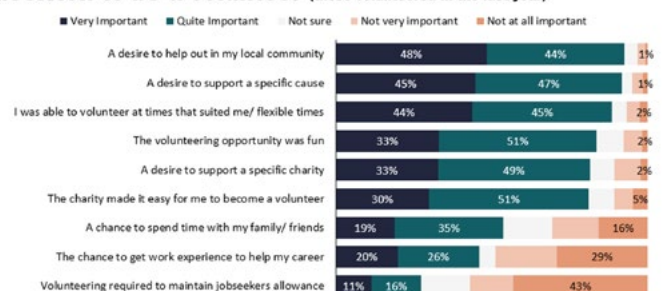
## ETHNIC MINORITIES HAVE HIGHER LEVEL OF VOLUNTEERING THAN WHITE PEOPLE

Ethnic minorities volunteer more than white people. We ask our sample of respondents to tell us what ethnicity they are. While ethnic minorities form around 12% of our typical sample, they volunteer at a significantly higher rate. In the 10-year period from 2014 to 2024, the average volunteering rate for white people is 19% and for those from ethnic minority backgrounds is 32. The NCVO Time Well Spent research<sup>2</sup> by our former colleague Rei Kanemura is worth looking at for those interested in this area.

## HIGHER SOCIAL GRADES VOLUNTEER MORE

We track social grade among our survey respondents, and this shows that those in households led by higher managerial AB roles tend to volunteer the most, followed by C1, C2 and DE. In December 2023 ABs volunteered at 32%, with C1 at 20%, followed by C2 at 15% and DE at 12%. It is worth pointing out that DE is a mixture of a variety of demographics, retired people, students, manual professions and more.

**Chart 3: The importance of different elements in the decision to be a volunteer (those volunteered in the last year)**



## WOMEN'S VOLUNTEERING IS MORE COMMUNITY-BASED, AND SUBJECT TO MORE CONSTRAINTS AND COMMITMENTS

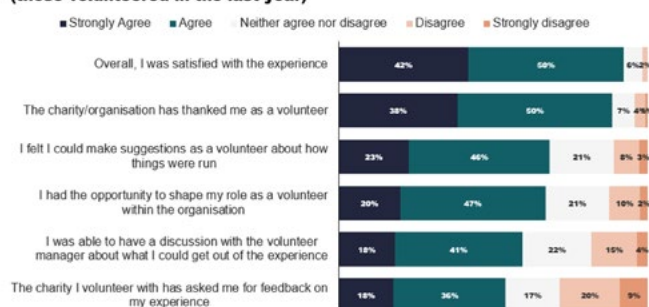
Men are more likely to volunteer in formal settings: through a voluntary organisation or a charity (78% of male volunteers volunteer this way vs 65% for female volunteers), while women are more likely to volunteer with a community organisation or as a school governor (30% vs 24% for men) or through some other kind of volunteering (12% vs 7% for men). Interestingly men are more likely to say they are volunteering for a campaigning organisation (11% vs 4%).

We also ask our respondents what dictates their likelihood to volunteer in response to particular opportunities. Women are more likely to say their volunteering is impacted by opportunities which did not require a specific time commitment (32% vs 24% for men), where there is more flexibility (e.g., weekend / night shifts), flexible volunteer opportunities (21% vs 15% for men), or where their employer offered time off to volunteer (19% vs 16% for men). There is more data in chart 3.

## MOST VOLUNTEERS ARE VERY HAPPY WITH THEIR EXPERIENCE

We are pleased to report that volunteers are happy with their experience and feel they are thanked for their time and trouble. 92% of volunteers agree they are satisfied with their experience (42% strongly agree) and 88% of volunteers agree they are thanked for their time (38% agree strongly). The overall results for a set of questions about volunteering experience is shown in chart 4.

**Chart 4: Experience of being a volunteer**  
(those volunteered in the last year)



Source: nfpPublic research January 2024. Data: 201 respondents in the UK, Canada and Ireland. \*Thinking about your most recent volunteering commitment, please state to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements.\*

## THE UK, CANADA AND IRELAND HAVE SIMILAR AGE PROFILES FOR VOLUNTEERING

Chart 5 shows the age profile for volunteering in the UK, Canada and Ireland from our nfpIntelligence and

nfpPublic surveys in December 2023 in those countries. We thought this chart was interesting because it shows the differences and similarities in the three geographies.

In all three countries the group that volunteered the most is the 16–24 year-olds. In all three countries, there is a decline in volunteering rates with age. In Ireland it is the 65+ who volunteer the least, in Canada and the UK the lowest volunteering rate is in the middle age group – 45–64 year-olds – with a rise in the 65+ age group.

These similarities suggest there are some strong cultural and demographic forces which dictate the rates of volunteering by age, which are common across these three Anglophone countries.

**Chart 5: Volunteering participation by age in Ireland, Canada and the United Kingdom**



Source: nfpPublic research December 2023, 361 to 637 respondents, in UK, Canada and Ireland. Those that answered 'yes' to the question: "Have you given time as a volunteer to an organisation in the last 3 months?"





# About the nfpResearch volunteering data

nfpResearch collects its data in the UK through its nfpIntelligence ongoing, long-term tracking survey. It collects data through monthly online surveys with a sample of 1000 members of the public representative by age, gender and social class. This data has been collected continuously since 2010.

## **The challenges of measuring volunteering rates**

There are a number of challenges in measuring volunteering rates:

- Social desirability bias is the tendency for people to say things that make them look good, or not say things that make them look bad. Volunteering is one such positive thing, so respondents may be more likely to say yes.
- What is volunteering? Some surveys prompt with examples, and then categorise responses into a definition of volunteering and divide volunteering rates into formal and informal. This probably increases the likelihood of saying yes. We don't prompt definitions.
- Not everybody will say the same thing is volunteering. One person will say they have volunteered after 10 mins of time, another only after 10 hours.

All this is a way to say defining an absolute level of volunteering is hard, and comparisons between surveys are not always easy. This is why we ask the same questions survey after survey, which means the changes in responses are probably more important than the absolute rates.

## PART 2

# Initiatives and key stakeholders in the world of volunteering

This part of the report looks at the different organisations who have a role in trying to help charities and community organisations drive or manage volunteering. It also profiles various initiatives in recent years that have tried to push up or encourage volunteers and volunteering, and recent research studies about volunteering.

## THE KEY VOLUNTEERING BODIES

### Association of Volunteer Managers (AVM)

AVM is the main dedicated volunteering organisation in the UK charity sector. It principally supports volunteer managers to help them to do a better job. It has a board made up of volunteer managers and runs a variety of support services for them – including membership, an annual conference and other learning and development activity, a mentoring scheme, and a variety of written resources. Their mission is to inspire and empower leaders of volunteering, to be a recognised community of leaders of volunteers, sharing expertise and support, and to build this through the provision of engagement, resources and advocacy.

■ Website: <https://volunteermanagers.org.uk/>

### NCVO, WCVA and SCVO

NCVO, WCVA and SCVO are the umbrella bodies for the charity sector in England, Wales and Scotland respectively. All three organisations provide a variety of resources to help charities who are trying to recruit or manage volunteers. For example, NCVO runs training courses on recruiting volunteers, as well as courses on governance. WCVA has a specific platform for supporting organisations working with volunteers. See the website links below:

■ Websites: <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/help-and-guidance/involving-volunteers/>

<https://wcva.cymru/volunteering/>

■ [https://scvo.scot/post/tags/volunteering?utm\\_source=scvo&utm\\_medium=website&utm\\_campaign=search](https://scvo.scot/post/tags/volunteering?utm_source=scvo&utm_medium=website&utm_campaign=search)

### NAVCA

NAVCA is the national membership body for local infrastructure organisations, supporting the voluntary and community sector. They are part of the Vision of Volunteering steering group, and they support organisations who want to try and persuade people to volunteer at the local level.

■ Website: <https://www.navca.org.uk/>

### Association of Chairs

Association of Chairs is the main organisations supporting trustees and chairs of charities. It provides a breadth of resources, trainings, webinars, and support. It is important to remember that trustees are also volunteers, just of a very special kind.

■ Website: <https://www.associationofchairs.org.uk/>

### Volunteer Scotland

Volunteer Scotland is the co-ordinating and infrastructure organisation for volunteering in Scotland. It runs training courses, encourages best practice in volunteering and supports the Investors in Volunteers (IiV) programme. It also carries out research and evaluation work and runs a disclosure service. It supports the Scottish Government's volunteering strategy.

■ Website: <https://www.volunteerscotland.net/>

### Volunteer Now (in Northern Ireland)

Volunteer Now is the lead organisation for promoting and supporting volunteering across Northern Ireland. They build recognition for volunteering and celebrate the contribution volunteers make. They provide access to opportunities and encourage people to volunteer. They are a resource for volunteer involving organisations providing support on involving volunteers, governance and safeguarding.



Volunteer Now is also a member of IAVE's Global Network of Volunteering Leadership.

■ Website: <https://www.volunteernow.co.uk/>

### **International Association for Volunteer Effort**

With members in over 125 countries, IAVE is the only international NGO that nurtures and grows volunteer leaders around the world, promoting the ideas and values of volunteering as the fundamental foundation of civil society. Their expansive member network includes volunteers, government agencies, multi-national agencies and institutions, academics, NGOs, businesses and volunteer leadership organisations throughout the world.

■ Website: <https://www.iave.org/>

## **THE VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND MANAGEMENT TECHNOLOGY**

### **Do-it.org.uk**

Do-it is the original volunteer recruitment application. It was originally created as a website over 20 years ago, and now has over 750,000 user accounts. It is the technology that powers the Big Help Out, and it easily allows members of the public to look for volunteering opportunities and charities / non-profits to post opportunities. It is also designed to help companies manage their staff volunteering.

■ Website: <https://www.doit.life/>

### **Volunteero and Team Kinetic**

These two companies are part of a new wave of volunteer management software providers. They both look at the volunteer management process from the non-profit and the volunteer's point of view. They help organisations to recruit volunteers and then to manage them after they are recruited. This allows organisations to send out messages to volunteers through the app on people's phones. In particular this helps with the onboarding process and the co-ordination of areas such as DBS checks and references. They also allow organisations to post volunteering opportunities on the app – such as shifts in a shop or new activities.

■ Website: <https://www.volunteero.org/>

■ Website: <https://teamkinetic.co.uk/> (the blog section is particularly good <https://teamkinetic.co.uk/blog/>)

### **Reach Volunteering**

Reach Volunteering is a volunteer and trustee recruitment website in the UK. It has a host of specific skill-based opportunities for volunteers and trustees in a searchable database, as well as a range of resources on recruiting volunteers, managing them and the same for trustees. Their trustee recruitment cycle is a particularly useful resource. Overall, it is a useful matching website for those looking to be, or wanting to find, volunteers or trustees who have specific skills.

■ Website: <https://reachvolunteering.org.uk/>

### **I-Vol in Ireland**

I-Vol is the national volunteering database in Ireland. It presents users with a variety of volunteering opportunities in a local area. Organisations post their volunteering opportunities, and people who are looking to volunteer hopefully are able to find something they like.

■ Website: <https://www.i-vol.ie/>

## **THE CROSS-SECTOR INITIATIVES**

### **Vision for Volunteering**

The Vision for Volunteering is a collaborative 10-year project designed to create a better future for volunteering. It brings together a number of key volunteering organisations (NCVO, AVM, NAVCA and others) to try and create a better future for volunteering. They have three key questions they are trying to tackle. What do volunteers need now, and during the next ten years, in order to make the most of their effective contributions? How do we capture new practices and technologies and harness them to create a better future for volunteering? How can we let go of practices that no longer serve us and tackle some of volunteering's most long-standing inequalities?

■ Website: <https://www.visionforvolunteering.org.uk/>

## Shaping the Future of Volunteering

This is an initiative led by Royal Voluntary Service and its website says 'We believe volunteering can play a transformative role in creating the kind of society we all want to live in. Volunteering can help address the biggest challenges that we face from COVID recovery to mental health to climate change. We must and will continue to change and develop how we work and engage with all communities. We are building on our heritage of decades of delivering through volunteering but modernising our approach to fit today's expectations and opportunities.'

RVS are also developing a new volunteer recruitment website funded by PPL. It is not certain when this new website will be ready, but it aims to address the potential for additional volunteers that RVS research has identified.

**Website:** <https://www.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/about-us/our-impact/charity-partners/shaping-the-future-with-volunteering/>

## THE VOLUNTEERING EXPERTS

### Rob Jackson and Chris Wade volunteering experts

There are a number of people who are real experts in volunteering, including Ruth Leonard and Shaun Delaney from Association of Volunteer Managers. But the one who is not involved in any of the other organisations above is Rob Jackson. There are few people in the UK, or even the world, who know as much about volunteering as Rob Jackson.

**Website:** <http://www.robjacksonconsulting.com/>

Chris Wade is another volunteering expert who has been active for many years in volunteer management, particularly at MNDA. He is now a consultant and a podcast on volunteering.

**Website:** <https://www.timeforimpact.co.uk/>

## VOLUNTEERING INITIATIVES

### Big Help Out

The most active current national campaign to encourage volunteering is the Big Help Out. It was first run in

the bank holiday for the King's Coronation in 2023 and in 2024 was run in early June. Our research in our surveys of the public suggests that about 26% of men, and 15% of women take part in the Big Help Out in some way. It is mostly targeted at young people – or those are the people who take part the most, our research suggests. In total about 43% of 16–24 year-olds either take part, organised an event, volunteered for a community organisation or a charity.

**Website:** <https://www.thebighelpout.org.uk/>

### NHS Covid Volunteering

The Covid pandemic saw an explosion of people wanting to volunteer. By late March 2020 around 500,000 people had said they wanted to volunteer to help people during the pandemic. Over the course of the pandemic volunteers were used to help at vaccination centres, to deliver prescriptions to people who were isolating, do their grocery shopping, and much more. There was a Covid volunteering app trying to link volunteers with tasks, but by early May 2020, there were newspaper reports of the large numbers of people who were frustrated at the lack of tasks.

The Covid volunteer experience in many ways showed the best and the worst of volunteering and volunteer management. Tens of thousands of volunteers did amazing work helping the NHS and in local communities during the pandemic. But equally hundreds of thousands who wanted to volunteer were unable to do so.

### Games Makers in the 2012 Olympics

In the London Olympics in 2012 the volunteers were called 'Games Makers': as they were helping to make the Games happen. The Games Maker recruitment process began in September 2010, with the organisers receiving more than 240,000 applications. Up to 70,000 people were chosen to become Games Makers. They took on a wide variety of roles across the Olympic venues during the Games: from welcoming visitors to transporting the athletes taking part, helping out behind the scenes in the Technology team and making sure the results get displayed as quickly and accurately as possible.

**Website:** <https://olympics.com/ioc/news/volunteers-helping-to-make-the-games-happen>

## National Citizen Service / Big Society

The National Citizen Service (NCS) and the Big Society were two initiatives of the Cameron Government in the 2010 - 2015 period. The NCS to quote its website is 'Designed especially for 16 and 17 year-olds, the NCS experience exists to engage, unite and empower young people, building your confidence so you can go out there and achieve your dreams, no matter where you're from or what your background is.'

NCS has had a number of different iterations. The original approach was about specific amounts of time in volunteering bootcamps for a specific length of time. The approach now is to offer 'away from home experiences', 'local community experiences' and 'online experiences'. The NCS is not cheap – between 2014 and 2017 it cost £630 million. This makes it by far the most expensive volunteering initiative of recent years. Its funding was withdrawn by the Labour government in November 2024.

In contrast to NCS which had a range of very tangible services, Big Society was a political idea in which key features were about giving more power to local communities, getting more people engaged in local communities, and supporting charities and co-ops. It fizzled before it had really ever got going, for a variety of reasons.

**Website:** <https://wearencs.com/> and [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big\\_Society](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big_Society)

## VOLUNTEERING RESEARCH

### Time well spent and NCVO volunteering

NCVO publish a write-up of volunteering in their Almanac. This is the most comprehensive write-up we can find of recent research, and it's based mainly on the Community Life survey. <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/news-and-insights/news-index/uk-civil-society-almanac-2022/volunteering/>

Both these write-ups report a drop in volunteering rates, but they have little data post-pandemic (whereas the nfpResearch goes up to December 2024). They also did a number of useful write-ups of research which compares volunteering in 2018 and 2022.

<https://www.ncvo.org.uk/news-and-insights/news-index/key-findings-from-time-well-spent-2023/>

### Community Life survey

The other significant study of volunteering is the Community Life survey (previously called the Citizenship survey) which last ran in 2023/24. This survey divides volunteering in formal and informal, probably akin to volunteering for a charity (formal) or community organisation or in the neighbourhood (informal). It also asked respondents if they had volunteered in the last month and the last 12 months. This showed that formal volunteering in the last month was steady at 16% for the most recent survey and the 21/22 survey. The government write-up of the latest survey is here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/community-life-survey-202324-annual-publication/community-life-survey-202324-background-and-headline-findings>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/community-life-survey--2>

### The Institute of Volunteering Research

There are a variety of academic institutions which do some work on volunteering. The Institute of Volunteering Research at the University of East Anglia has been active in this field for several decades; however it seems to be less active at the moment. Nonetheless its archive of materials is worth a look.

<https://www.uea.ac.uk/web/groups-and-centres/institute-for-volunteering-research/people>





## **PART 3**

# **What is the role of technology in volunteering?**

In an era of social media, digital marketing and apps, how can these tools be used to promote volunteering? In particular, is there a gap for a market-leading app that really promotes volunteering? There are possibly as many as a dozen apps that have been made to try and manage and promote volunteering (see part 2 above for more information about apps & websites such as Team Kinetic, Volunteer, Reach Volunteering and I-Vol). These are the challenges any digital services to promote volunteering needs to grapple with:

**Sourcing volunteer opportunities.** Any app which wants to promote volunteering, needs the volunteer opportunities with which to satisfy 'eager to be' volunteers. If there are not enough fresh opportunities, then people will not visit the app regularly.

**Sourcing 'would be' volunteers.** The opposite of the above is equally true. Any app needs regular traffic of potential volunteers, so that organisations feel it is worth their while to keep putting their opportunities on the site.

**Another app, another login.** One of the challenges for any new app is whether people need (or want to create) a new password and login to take part. Almost every app needs some level of data security nowadays. Would a volunteering app require people to create a new login? It is why any volunteer matching tech that could be part of existing social media logins is easier. This includes both levels of traffic, and a friction-free process.

**Closing the volunteer deal.** Once a volunteer finds an opportunity they like, they need to be able to close the deal fairly quickly. A number of organisations have had volunteer promotion campaigns at the national level, only to find that the local branches are too slow to respond. We live in an instant age. Amazon orders get delivered in 24 hours, not the 3 weeks or 3 months that some organisations take to organise volunteering.

**A clear volunteering recruitment brand.** The most successful enterprises in a digital world are those with a well-known brand – for example, the rapid rise of Temu and Shein as online retail giants, has partly depended

on the large amounts they have spent on marketing. To be successful, a volunteering app would need to have a brand fit for the digital age and the audience it is aimed at.

**Apps talking to another.** If volunteering recruitment is to flourish, it needs to be as frictionless as possible. People want to sign up to a service that delivers all, or a significant portion of the available volunteer services in their locality. Nobody wants to have a dozen logins to get all the opportunities available. Apps need to talk to one another.

## **THE NEW WAVE OF TECHNOLOGY DESIGNED TO SUPPORT AND FACILITATE VOLUNTEERING**

The previous section is written from the challenge point of view. It embodies the different hurdles that technology needs to overcome. For many who work in volunteering, technology is not seen to be in much use in volunteer management: it's all about the human touch, as volunteering is a people business.

This second section is designed to show how the new disrupters are shaking up volunteer management. This section is based in part on interviews with Chris Martin from Team Kinetic and Ashley Staines from Volunteer.

### **Using technology to enhance volunteering from the organisation's point of view**

One of the key innovations of the new apps is that they help organisations not just recruit volunteers, but also manage the process of getting their references and DBS checks and induction (or onboarding as it is called in the jargon). Once that stage is complete then the apps are able to run the relationship between volunteer and charity. The core difference is that previous technology focused simply on 'brokerage' (matching volunteer with opportunity) not on relationship management.

## **Smoothing the due diligence process**

One of the big challenges of any volunteer onboarding process is the length of time it can take from initial approach to actually volunteering, and the amount of staff time that process can take. The new technologies can handle all that process while keeping the prospective volunteer in touch with where the process is up to (a bit like delivery tracking apps). The whole process is automated, which is why many charities say it saves them a huge amount of time and money. It also means that the charities will pay a monthly / regular fee to the app providers, which provides for a more secure income model (as opposed to those older technologies which depend on grants and sponsorship).

## **Managing the volunteer journey, not just the initial contact**

It is a universal frustration shared by volunteers that the speed with which an interest in giving time is turned into actual volunteering is too slow. This is often because the 'due diligence' of briefings, induction, references and DBS is often so time consuming – the sending out of emails and the checking of statements all sucks up staff (or other volunteer) time. The new apps allow for the streamlining and automation of that process – saving staff time and speeding up the process.

## **Building a volunteering community**

Anybody who uses the exercise and running app Strava will know how it builds a community by letting users share their runs, cycles, workouts with other app users. They can get kudos and comments from others. Many of the new apps allow for similar community building among volunteers. Clear a footpath – tell your fellow volunteers about it. Have a great day at a charity shop – let the other shop volunteers know. This building of community among volunteers not only increases motivation but also let volunteers know what other volunteers are up to, potentially inspiring and encouraging them to try out new volunteer activities.

## **Volunteering is not just for charities**

Those in the charity sector tend to think of volunteering as being about charities. The reality is that volunteering is a much broader-based activity. Volunteering takes places in schools, in hospitals, in sports clubs, through local authorities, and with the rescue and emergency services to name but a few. This breadth of volunteering activity should be celebrated, and this means that the use for such apps goes well beyond charities and into sport, hospitals, schools, national parks, and many, many more places.





## THE CHALLENGE OF THE UNIVERSAL VOLUNTEERING APP STILL REMAINS

We are all familiar with apps which synthesise data from other sites and present them in a seamless front-end. Rightmove and Zoopla do it for house sales and rentals. Just Eat and Deliveroo do it for home delivery of take aways. There are two big challenges in our view, in creating a thriving marketplace of volunteering recruitment and management apps, which facilitate the development of volunteering and volunteer management.

### 1. The need for universal volunteering data standards and agreed interoperability

API (standing for Application Programme Interface) technology can allow different data put on different apps to talk to each other, overcoming the multiple apps, and meaning that people don't have to create 12 logins for 12 apps in order to get information from all the different organisations. To do this, an API needs an agreed set of data standards so that people can have a login from any one of the apps and get access to data from the other apps. Currently there are no universal data standards in volunteering apps, which allow the apps to talk to each other.

### 2. Creating a household name volunteering brand

API technology doesn't solve the benefit of having one or two well-known brands, which anybody who might want to volunteer has heard of. To create that brand would require a high degree of investment in getting audience recognition, as well as the building up of recognition of a brand over time. There are effectively two routes to this end. The first is the Rightmove approach – where it brings in house data from all the different estate agents under the single brand. The second is the Just Eat vs Deliveroo approach – where there are just a couple of market leaders both of whom have a large slice of the volunteering opportunities to give users a choice of opportunities in their neighbourhood (but not necessarily all the opportunities).

### Where are we now with volunteering and technology?

There isn't yet an app which is the single seamless front end for volunteering recruitment. Indeed there are about a dozen or so volunteering apps in existence, all competing for a share of the market. While this is good for innovation and competition in the marketplace it is challenging for overall development of volunteering development. Do-it is probably the marketplace leader but is seen as somewhat dated by some, and its coverage UK-wide is questioned by others. This is mainly because it is just a recruitment tool, rather than a volunteering management and relationship building tool, but it also requires users to have a Do-it login, rather than being able to use the logins of others.

Overall app technology is revolutionising aspects of the volunteering landscape, and we still haven't seen the end of the revolution, as technology is used to disrupt many of the existing ways of doing things.



## **PART 4**

# **The elements of a strategy for growing the role of volunteering in society**

If there was a sector-wide strategy for the development and promotion of volunteering overall, what would it look like? In the first year of a Labour government it's worth beginning to flesh out how the charity sector could pull together a strategy for volunteering. In our view, any actual strategy would need to contain a number of elements. We set these out below in no particular order.

### **Element 1: Embedding the use of technology in volunteering**

It's clear from part 3 that technology has a growing role in the recruitment and retention of volunteers. The role for technology in recruitment is fairly obvious, even if less universal currently. Smartphone-based apps are an obvious way in which people who are keen to volunteer can seek out volunteering opportunities. Currently there are around a dozen possible apps or websites that people could use to find opportunities. There is no clear market leader, or market leaders – equivalent to the market dominance that Just Eat or Deliveroo have in home deliveries of take away food. Without one or two market leaders who have widespread public recognition it is difficult to see how apps can increase the overall number and ease with which people can find volunteering opportunities.

The retention side of technology is more straightforward. Individual charities can use a specific app for the management of communications with their own volunteers. This can manage messages to volunteers, offer specific opportunities, keep volunteers in touch with wider news about the charity. Because each charity can choose a specific app for its own internal use, there is not the equivalent challenge of the need for a market leader or market leaders.

### **Element 2: Senior support for volunteer management**

Talk to many volunteer managers and they will say that their support for volunteering from senior leadership is somewhere between patchy and non-existent (though some will also say their support is great). The comparison between volunteering and fundraising for senior

support is telling. Almost every charity that wishes to fundraise extensively will have a Director of Fundraising on its senior management team. Yet there are many, many charities who use volunteers extensively but don't have a Director of Volunteering on the senior management team. There are many CEOs who are supportive of volunteering, but warm words butter no parsnips, if the importance of volunteering is not embedded in the structure of the organisation. If we want more charities to look after volunteers better, then we need more senior support in charities, and this cultural change needs to be part of any strategy.

### **Element 3: Passporting of volunteer DBS checks and experience**

Ask any enthusiastic volunteers and the slow speed of the journey to be a volunteer from signing up is a source of frustration, and another is the need for repeated or unnecessary DBS checks. These are two separate issues here.

The first is that many charities in an act of caution ask for DBS checks, when they aren't really necessary. Do trustees really need DBS checks in any but the smallest organisations? The second problem is that individuals who sign up for multiple volunteer opportunities can be asked to get multiple DBS checks. The DBS check should be about the individual, not about the role. If this was achieved, then a DBS check could be like a driving licence and last for an agreed amount of time and universal for all roles.

### **Element 4: Development of recruitment campaigns and strategies**

It is no good having the best volunteer management in the world if we aren't recruiting new volunteers. Unlike fundraising, which tends to be very charity and cause specific, there is greater ability to promote volunteering as a concept. In other words, campaigns to persuade people to think about giving their time to good causes can be effective. The Big Help Out works on this basis: the umbrella brand promotes the idea of giving time, and the local activities and organisations convert the will to give, into actual volunteering. Any volunteering

strategy needs to look at how to persuade people to volunteer, both through individual national campaigns, but also by looking at structures that encourage volunteers. Duke of Edinburgh Awards, UCAS applications and university volunteer programmes such as at the University of Manchester have all had a role in increasing the level of volunteering among the under 35s.

#### **Element 5: Creating marketing strategies for different volunteer audiences**

Not all volunteers are motivated by the same messages, the same marketing channels or the same types of volunteering. Nor are the barriers to volunteering the same for different demographics, or the cause that people want to volunteer for the same. All this means that if we want people to volunteer, we need to devise campaigns that address those barriers and motivations for each different audience. This is another way of saying that one size doesn't fit all, any strategy to boost volunteering will need to carry out audience-based marketing, underpinned by great marketing. These will need to be embedded into the kind of marketing activities like the Big Help Out in order to maximise their effect.

#### **Element 6: The creation of a volunteering infrastructure body for England and appointment of a volunteering czar**

It is striking how many of the interviewees mentioned the need for an overarching volunteer body in England. They lamented the loss of 'Volunteering England' over a decade earlier and pointed out how the co-ordination and development of volunteering in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland worked so much better, because of the existence of an effective volunteering body. So England needs a new volunteering infrastructure body. We believe a volunteering czar to champion and act as a focal point for the development of volunteering would be effective.

At the grassroots level the bigger challenges are volunteer centres. The clarity of support for an umbrella body in the interviews was not mirrored by views on

volunteer centres. In essence, the challenge is that the provision and quality of volunteer centres is hugely mixed, as is the level of funding and the logic of their geographic distribution in relation to need.

#### **Element 7: Development of volunteer management training and qualifications**

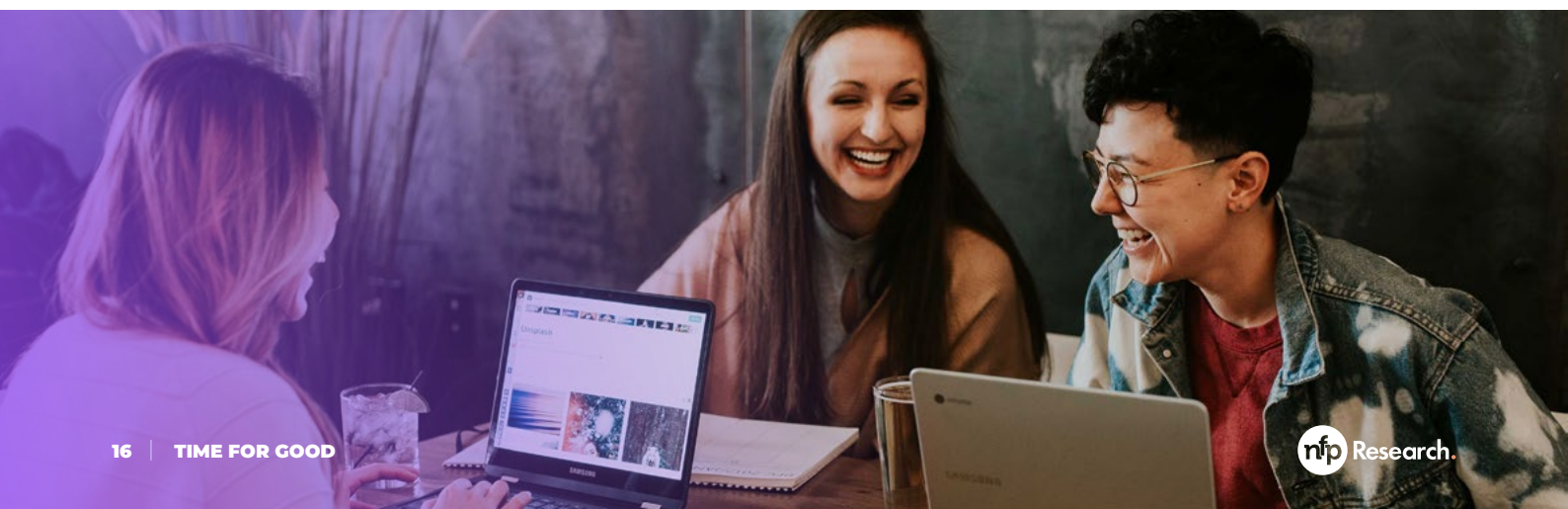
If volunteer management overall is to improve then the type of training that volunteer managers get is a key element. At the moment the breadth and depth of training courses for volunteer manager is much poorer than it is for fundraisers. Given that for charities, the giving of time is just as important as giving money, then the training that underpins both should be of comparable quality. In time, this development of training should lead to the development of more formal volunteering manager qualifications.

#### **Element 8: Clear ownership of a volunteering strategy**

If a strategy like this is to be created it needs to be clear who will own it. Indeed, at this stage it's not even clear who would draft it. But when that drafting is done, shepherded by a working party of engaged volunteer managers and other stakeholders, then the finessing, the marketing and the engagement of other parties can be carried out. But without the ownership of a strategy by a team committed to making something happen, it almost certainly won't.

#### **Element 9: Measuring progress of the strategy**

Measuring the progress of a strategy to improve volunteering is critical. It is no good having a great strategy, if it is not easy to know whether it is, or it isn't working. Which elements of the strategy are motoring, and which left stranded on the strategic hard shoulder. The details of how to measure the progress will need to be incorporated into the strategy itself.



## WHAT DOES AN ORGANISATION NEED TO DO TO RECRUIT AND RETAIN MORE VOLUNTEERS?

It is an easy tendency to imagine that when it comes to volunteers, all an organisation needs to do is 'build and they will come'. In reality, this is rarely the case. Charities and community organisations need to go through a number of stages in order to run a successful volunteer programme. Here are some of them:

### **Understand who might volunteer for you**

The demographic analysis in part 1 shows the extent to which different parts of the population volunteer in different ways and with different constraints and motivations. Women prefer community volunteering. Men prefer campaigning and more formal volunteering. As part of any marketing exercise for volunteering, the first step is to understand who in a population might volunteer for an organisation.

### **Understand what your prospective volunteers want**

It is easy to know what volunteers want, we hear you cry. Volunteers want to give their time! The reality is that different types of volunteers want to get very different things out of their volunteering. Younger people typically want to build their CV or get material for their university application. Parents often want to get something that will give them a collective experience with their children. The over 55s may want something to ease the transition into retirement or provide them with some social interaction. These kinds of needs will dictate what kind of volunteering people get satisfaction out of doing. Volunteering needs to be planned with that in mind.

### **Match volunteering with their lifestyles**

Volunteering needs to match with people's lifestyles. Volunteer opportunities need to happen with timings and commitments that match what people have to offer. Working people do not

volunteer during the working day! School children cannot typically volunteer except after school hours or at weekends. University students probably are not there during the vacations, or in the run up to exams or assignments. How volunteering takes place needs to dovetail with the lifestyles of those who might volunteer. Again and again in the interviews we heard how volunteers want more flexibility and less rigid commitment.

### **Create 'products' and 'packages' to attract volunteers**

One of the solutions to attracting volunteers is to create packages or products designed to appeal to particular types of people. This might be a programme of training and volunteering designed to appeal to young people (the Duke of Edinburgh awards are a form of this), or a more social package designed to maximise the amount of comradeship and camaraderie in volunteering.

### **Volunteers need managers**

One of the ironies is that volunteers need managers, typically paid. This is because if a group of tens or hundreds of volunteers are to be put to the best use, then somebody needs to organise their work, ensure they are satisfied, and the work they are doing is of the right quality. Most larger charities who are serious about volunteering, now have a volunteer manager or managers.

### **Volunteers aren't in it for pay, so the rest of their experience needs to be the motivation**

Salaried employees have the reward of money each month, to help them cope with the challenges of a workplace, even when they do not enjoy it as much as they might want to. The need for a salary keeps people in a job they do not enjoy that much. This is not the case for volunteers. All that keeps them volunteering is whether they get the rewards of giving their time: this can be for their own satisfaction, or knowing they are making a difference to the organisation they are volunteering for. In other words, volunteers may need to be better looked after than employees.



## **PART 5**

# **Some key take-aways about volunteering over the last decade**

## **THE DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES**

**1. Volunteering is at best flat, and at worst is on the decrease.** Although our data does not indicate a decline in volunteering overall, many of the organisations who use volunteers are reporting a decline, and some of these changes are coming through in the surveys. Though none of the other longitudinal volunteering surveys, have the same level of post-pandemic research that nfpResearch has.

**2. The Covid-19 pandemic seems to have changed many aspects of volunteering.** For a variety of reasons the Covid pandemic has changed a number of ways that people volunteer. While there was a spike in volunteering during the pandemic itself, the effects have been longer lasting. Some of the older volunteers have declined to start volunteering again, perhaps finding other ways to spend their time, or finding their health is affected by long Covid.

**3. Young people and men are volunteering more, and older people less.** The long-term demographic changes outlined in part 1 began before the pandemic and have continued after it. In many cases the pandemic exacerbated the changes but does not seem to have altered the direction of those changes. These changes impact on how charities need to recruit and retain volunteers.

## **SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES**

### **4. Volunteers need volunteering management**

The rise of volunteer managers in individual charities has been one of the hallmarks of the last decade. Organisations have realised that to make the most of volunteers, they need professional, typically paid, managers. This has increased the level of learning between organisations, and overall, the professionalism of volunteering.

**5. What volunteers want, and what charities want are often different.** There is a built-in paradox between

what charities want from volunteers, and what volunteers want from charities. Charities want people who will turn up week after week for a regular time slot, and who can be treated like staff but without the pay. Volunteers want some CV-building experience, camaraderie, or to use their existing skills, with the time and flexibility that suits their busy lives. Not an easy circle to square.

## **THE ROLE OF THE WIDER SECTOR AND GOVERNMENT**

**6. Volunteers are not an army waiting to be sent into battle.** Politicians all too often think that volunteers are an army who can be sent into battle on behalf of whatever is the government's latest causes. Boris Johnson is typical of this mindset. There are quotes where he refers to an 'army of volunteers' about the Olympics, about Covid, about the vaccine roll-out, and about digital champions in London. Johnson may be an exception in his candid use of the term, but the danger is that others think this way, even at the level of trustees or charity CEOs, who want to encourage volunteers.

**7. Trustees, PTAs, school helpers, magistrates, sports coaches, litter pickers are volunteers too.** There is a stereotype of what a volunteer is. Probably a person helping in a charity shop or rattling a tin in a high street. But there are all kinds of other volunteers. Trustees are volunteers. Sports Coaches are volunteers. People who pop in on their neighbours are volunteers. Part of the challenge of managing and promoting volunteering is that there are so many types of volunteers, and so many ways in which people can give their time to create a better world.

**8. Everybody has time to give, not everybody has money to give.** One of the reasons that giving time is central to a flourishing civil society is that everybody has 24 hours in the day, 365 days of the year. Not everybody has the same amount of money, but everybody has the same amount of time. This makes volunteering an equitable and universal activity to promote.

**9. Government have a soft power role in encouraging volunteers.** Central (and local) government has a role to play in encouraging volunteering. We have seen this through the Big Society, the National Citizen Service, and some of the other initiatives. However, it is probably a decade since government made any serious effort to promote volunteering or indeed made civil society a central part of its work. We can only hope that the Labour government will do more to promote a civic society. It has to be said that while there are a few signs of greater interest from Labour, they are far from overwhelming.

**10. A campaign to encourage people to volunteer would be welcome.** More volunteers are good for charities and community organisations, good for people's well-being and good for creating the social glue that creates stronger and more vibrant communities. We have seen little in the last decade from either government or charities to increase the number of volunteers, and the amount of time they give. We can only hope that changes in with this new government.

## CONCLUSION

Everybody can give time. Everybody has 24 hours in the day. How we all use that time is the real challenge, and those who give their time to good causes help create a better world. What this report has looked at is the recent trends in volunteering, and how technology, effective marketing and a clear strategy for volunteering can change and improve the landscape for volunteering.

## BIG THANKS GO TO...

The interviewees for the report have been critical in enriching and enhancing this report in countless ways.

Big thanks to all of them:

**Ruth Leonard**, Chair of the Association of Volunteer Managers ([www.avm.org.uk](http://www.avm.org.uk))

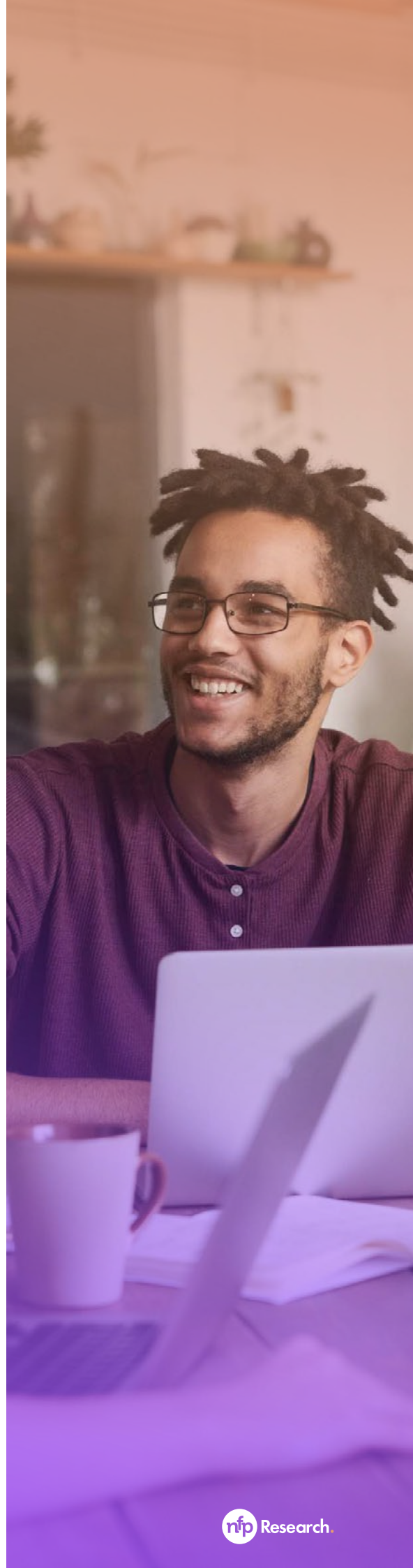
**Rob Jackson**, volunteering consultant (<http://www.robjacksonconsulting.com/>) including details about his podcast)

**Chris Wade**, volunteering consultant (<https://www.timeforimpact.co.uk/>) including details about his podcast)

**Chris Martin**, co-founder of Team Kinetic ([www.teamkinetic.co.uk](http://www.teamkinetic.co.uk))

**Ash Staines**, founder of Volunteero (<https://www.volunteero.org/>)

And **Mark Crosby** of RABI for his comments on an earlier draft.





# About nfpResearch

---

**nfpResearch is a leading market research agency in the not-for-profit sector. We put information in the hands of charities, to help them to help as many people as possible.**

What sets us apart is the quality of our research. Using sophisticated analytical tools, we drill down into the detail to produce rigorous analysis that can take your organisation to the next level. We might not always tell you what you want to hear – but we promise to tell you what you need to hear, and to listen to your vision of where you want to go.

For more information about this report or any other aspect of nfpResearch's work please contact Tim Harrison-Byrne on [tim.harrison-byrne@nfpresearch.com](mailto:tim.harrison-byrne@nfpresearch.com)

**nfpResearch**

68-80 Hanbury St, London E1 5JL  
+44 (0)20 7426 8888 | [nfpresearch.com](http://nfpresearch.com)

Registered in England No. 04387900  
VAT Registration 839 8186 72