

The New Alchemy

How volunteering turns donations of
time and talent into human gold

March 2015

Joe Saxton, Tim Harrison and Mhairi Guild



Contents

Introduction – the rise and fall of the selfish volunteer	3
Part 1 – The changing landscape for volunteering	6
Part 2 – Trends in volunteering over the last decade.....	27
Part 3 - Harnessing volunteer motivations.....	34
Part 4 - How are the mechanics of volunteering changing	40
Part 5 - Engaging the young, the old and the family to volunteer	54
Part 6 - How do we manage the 21st century volunteer?	65
Part 7 - Our final thoughts.....	82

A tribute to John Ramsey

This report is dedicated to the memory of John Ramsey, co-founder of the Association of Volunteer Managers, who passed away in September 2014.

John Ramsey was a pioneer of professional volunteer management for 20 years, and imparted to us some of his understanding and experience in the writing of this report. Below are some of the quotations from our interview with him.

"Brilliant volunteer involvement isn't the preserve of money rich organisations, it's the preserve of people rich organisations."

"The image 10 years ago I think was pretty poor, it had a real do-gooding element to it. I think part of that was that it wasn't being sold properly...you wouldn't do it, because you'd be seen as a do-gooder etc. I think what we see now, and I have to go back to the Olympics again, that volunteering is seen as something different now, something a lot more special."

"It's important that dialogue is a two way relationship and you've got to keep that two way relationship going. People will want to leave volunteering at some point in their lives, and it's important to understand when that point is. If you miss that point, they're going to get unhappy and at some point they might just walk out one day and never come back."

"We talk about removing the volunteer glass ceiling, so we're quite good at involving high numbers of people in relatively low skilled roles, what we want to get better at is also involving small numbers of people in higher skilled roles - so things like the consultancy are a good example of that, people who might have a particular expertise or specialism and want to support property operations."

"What we try and do as well as possible is understand why they volunteer for us, what they expect from us, and how that changes over time... If they're not honest with us about that then it makes it difficult for both of us. I would say that I don't mind what your reason is for volunteering with us, I don't mind if it's for a purely selfish reason. As long as you're achieving what we ask you to achieve and what you wanted to achieve, brilliant, absolutely brilliant. So yes - be honest, be respectful, and I guess trust us."

"During the Olympics a lot of the news items were about how brilliant they looked in their uniforms and people would speak to them. Volunteers were seen as real people, whereas a lot of organisations try and mould volunteers into what they want them to be. I think what we need to learn from that is that we want to positively encourage volunteers just to be themselves, to show their personalities. I don't think we as a sector do that at the moment. We're kind of scared that volunteers will say the wrong thing."

"The product we're selling isn't competing against other volunteer opportunities, it's competing against people's spare time. So many people would say they can't volunteer because they've got no spare time. They did have spare time, but they value it so much higher than volunteering, that's the simple truth. So that's why we need to be much smarter about how we sell our volunteering product."

Introduction – the rise and fall of the selfish volunteer

Our last major report on volunteering in 2005 ended with the conclusion that, considering the seismic shifts in socio-demographic trends and the expectations of 21st century life, it was no longer enough to rely on the older lady helping out in the charity shop five days a week.

Volunteers of all ages needed greater flexibility, more meaningful experiences and more creative recruitment and management to help unleash their potential; it was, we argued, the age of the 'selfish volunteer'.

"To help people be altruistic, we need to help them be selfish. Volunteering can help volunteers overcome loneliness, meet friends, gain skills, get jobs, or just feel good about themselves. The selfish volunteer is not a bad person, or part of an unwelcome trend – it is at the heart of the future of volunteering."

The 21st Century Volunteer (2005)

This insight still holds true in 2014 and to an extent, this revised report builds on the concept of unleashing the 'selfish volunteer'. Indeed, for a time, it was our working title. However, during the course of our research, it became clear that while many things have changed in volunteering, there is a great deal that stays constant. We could talk about the myriad of reasons that prompt people to give their time. We could talk about how volunteering is under-resourced compared to fundraising, its testosterone-charged big sibling. We could talk about the spectrum of quality of volunteers and management.

However, what has really struck us this time is that volunteering, at its core, remains transformational. It transforms both the giver and the receiver. It transforms the organisation's ability to deliver to beneficiaries cost-effectively. Put simply, volunteering can bring out the very best in people.

The process of volunteering is therefore a kind of alchemy. Volunteering takes up that most universal of human resources - time. It takes that universal resource, so often squandered, and uses it to transform people's lives. It takes a universal base asset and turns it into the human gold of changed lives.

It is all too easy for researchers like us to stay distant from our work, to be 'dispassionate' about our subject matter. In the case of volunteering, we have been sucked into the universality, the power and the passion when volunteering works at its best; when donations of time and talent are turned into the equivalent of human gold.

Part 1 of this report looks at the **changing landscape** of volunteering and the impacts of economic, social and technological trends.

Part 2 looks at **trends in volunteering** over the last decade, examining the changing demographics of volunteering.

Part 3 looks at **harnessing volunteer motivations**, how charities can best employ their volunteers by understanding what drives them.

Part 4 looks at the changing **mechanics** of volunteering, examining how charities can adapt their volunteer roles to get the most out of them.

Part 5 looks at **the young, the elderly and the family** in volunteering, and how these important groups engage with volunteering.

Part 6 looks at the **management** of volunteers, and investigates how organisations can develop their volunteering strategies to take advantage of the changes occurring in the sector.

Part 7 is our **final thoughts**, summarising our findings and discussing our recommendations for charities working with volunteers.

Where there is a quote in italics without a source or a reference, it will be from the 20 or so interviews we carried out for the report. We have kept them anonymous to emphasise the collective wisdom of our interviewee input, rather than single out the individual contributions.

Our interviewees

This report was only made possible by the following sector professionals who gave their time and expertise in our interviews, and for that we offer our sincere thanks.

John Ramsey	Age UK
Nikki Squelch	Alzheimer's Society
Francesca Kelly	ASA
Paul Okroj	Chest Heart Stroke Scotland
Richard Middleton	CRUK
Jamie Ward Smith	Ivo
Nicolette Spera	Macmillan
Terri Trinder	MyVoiceLondon Team
Tope Hunter	MyVoiceLondon Team
Victoria Arneil	MyVoiceLondon Team
Gillian Morris	MyVoiceLondon Team
John Palmer	MS Society
Helen Timbrell	National Trust
Ania Sciagala	Oxfordshire Mind
Kim Safianoff	Reach Skills
Alan Murray	RSPB
Rachael Bayley	Save the Children
Rhiannon Horsely	Student Hubs
Ruth Taylor	Student Hubs
Laura Owen	Youth Net
Olly Benson	Youth Net
Rob Jackson	Rob Jackson Consulting

Part 1 – The changing political, technological, social and economic landscape for volunteering

Political impacts on volunteering

Recessionary economics and the age of austerity

Since the 2008 crash, the public and individual purses have been extremely tight. Banks were bailed out, economies shrank and unemployment and under-employment grew. For individuals, the obvious priorities have remained securing and retaining employment, meeting rent or mortgage payments and getting food on the table. While charity donations and volunteering have stayed surprisingly stable (as the next part¹ of this report will show), the all-too-understandable concern within the third sector has been how to capture public generosity during a downturn. To volunteer your time for a charitable cause, you must first have it available to give and financial insecurity has left this in short supply.

The austerity policies of the coalition government, a response to the later years of the crisis, are meanwhile having even more complex structural implications for volunteering, which may take several more years to be fully understood. At the broadest level, public spending cuts during a time of economic hardship have created increasing demand for services. Charities have stepped into the gap left by the state and are working to offset the impact of cuts in housing, welfare and other key public sectors. There has also been a significant expansion of specific volunteer-led services such as food banks in direct response to welfare changes.²

The picture is therefore mixed. On the one hand, the demand for volunteers is higher than ever at the very time individuals have their work cut out looking after their own families. On the other, austerity may or may not be boosting volunteer levels regardless (seen in the 2012-13 Community Life survey, discussed further in part 2) as people step in to save local services, ranging from libraries³ to search and rescue services⁴. This apparent increase has been hailed by coalition ministers as a sign that their Big Society agenda is working⁵ (though a dip in the most recent

¹ See the endpiece of the report for details on the different parts of this report

² Curtis, Andrew (2013) 'Volunteering for Stronger Communities Research Project Year one Report: Summary and Key Findings' Institute for Volunteering Research. <http://www.ivr.org.uk/images/stories/VSC%20Research%20Project%20Summary%20Final.pdf>. Viewed April 22, 2014.

³ Hope, Christopher (4 January, 2014) 'Is The Big Society Finally Here? Big Surge in Volunteers Helping Out at Libraries' The Telegraph. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/10549932/Is-the-Big-Society-finally-here-Big-surge-in-volunteers-helping-out-at-libraries.html>. Viewed April 22, 2014.

⁴ Hardcastle, Jim & Derounian, James (20 October 2011) 'Search and Rescue Volunteers Lost in Budget Cuts'. Guardian Professional. <http://www.theguardian.com/voluntary-sector-network/community-action-blog/2011/oct/20/search-rescue-volunteers-budget-cuts>. Viewed April 22, 2014.

⁵ Hope, Christopher, 'Is The Big Society Finally Here?'

Community Life survey makes that argument more difficult). However, critics have pointed out that in some cases, volunteers may be taking the places of paid staff. For example, the 44% increase in library volunteers in 2013 was accompanied by a 7% drop in paid staff.⁶ Such moves have unknown consequences for the quality of services and for local employment, as well as for the long-term direction for the delivery of key communal goods.

Recent work by the Institute of Volunteering Research has also suggested that the coalition government's welfare reform may be leading to an increase in demand for volunteer placement services in a different way, as the unemployed are increasingly told to undertake volunteer work to retain their benefits.⁷ This demand comes at a time when volunteer centres have lost, on average, 12% of their local authority funding. The Institute's initial report paints a picture of voluntary services facing increased demand alongside decreasing resources. While the true impact of austerity on volunteering may still be unclear, many within the sector report significant concerns, particularly in light of the toll taken on the infrastructure for developing UK volunteering:

*"I think the cuts have been a bad thing because there just isn't the infrastructure there to support volunteering anymore ... less than 10 years ago this country was hailed internationally as having one of the best programmes on developing volunteering infrastructure in the world and now it's about as far from that position as it could possibly be."*⁸

From bloated government to 'Big Society'?

When the coalition government took over from Labour in 2010, we heard much about the advent of the 'Big Society', imagined as a much more integrated yet informal, spontaneous and bottom-up flourishing of the voluntary and community sectors. Alleviating the social impacts of public spending cuts, we would see investment and support that emphasised grassroots civil society and creativity over the more structured support model that had developed during thirteen years of Labour government. We would be exchanging a well-funded but arguably unsustainable third sector policy for a lower-cost, more user-driven model that emphasised local ingenuity and the true spirit of voluntarism. So far, so sensible.

The rhetoric of the 'Big Society' has had substantial influence on the national conversation about volunteering, though opinions vary more regarding tangible impact. Encouraging and increasing volunteering was a central tenet of the Big Society agenda set out by the coalition in summer 2010⁹ and its flagship initiative has been the creation of the National Citizen Service, a residential citizenship programme, with an element of volunteering, open to all 16 and 17 year olds in England.¹⁰ The programme has expanded quickly, from an initial pilot of 8,500

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Curtis, Andrew (2013) 'Volunteering for Stronger Communities Research Project Year One Report.'

⁸ We interviewed 20 volunteering experts for this report and we quote them throughout it. Their insights underpin much of what we say and it's unfair to name and praise by attributing quotes. The list of interviewees is available in the introduction

⁹ The Cabinet Office (2010). 'Building the Big Society'
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/78979/building-big-society_0.pdf. Viewed March 27, 2014.

¹⁰ The Conservative Party (2014) 'Big Society'
http://www.conservatives.com/Policy/Where_we_stand/Big_Society.aspx. Viewed March 26, 2014. National Citizen Service <http://www.ncsyes.co.uk/>

young people in 2011 to 26,000 in 2012, with an anticipated total of 90,000 this year.¹¹ More broadly, the government also committed to training 5,000 Community Organisers to 'identify local leaders and bring people together to act on what matters in their communities'.¹²

Such government-led initiatives are not new, but they add to the roster of schemes we noted in our first report, such as the Millennium Volunteers, the Citizenship Survey (which preceded the current Community Life programme) and the ChangeUp volunteering hub that are now no more. Back in 2005, Dr Justin Davis Smith of the Institute of Volunteering Research (and now part of NCVO along with Volunteering England) felt that volunteering had made its mark on the agenda, regardless of future government changes, suggesting:

"Whoever is in power in the future, volunteering will be high on the political agenda for two reasons: 1) As part of the public sector reforms (i.e. public sector can't deliver on its own) and 2) Due to increasing recognition that volunteering is good for society and good for the community cohesiveness."

Sadly, his optimism now seems misplaced. So while new initiatives have not been in short supply, the big picture for volunteering infrastructure has tended to look much bleaker. An example of this is when Volunteering England merged with NCVO in 2012 after the Cabinet Office halved their strategic partner grants, which led to large income drops and staff losses on both sides. Some of the most common criticisms of the Big Society rhetoric have been its perceived failure to deliver concrete results rather than just be rhetoric. Others have argued that it has worked primarily as a diversion to austerity measures; the necessity of charities and volunteers stepping into the gap left by a receding state re-packaged as a liberating opportunity for local innovation and more sustainable models of service delivery.

Volunteering for better or worse in a time of austerity

Opinions within the volunteering sector remain mixed, with strong concerns about the reduced funding environment mingled with the recognition that there are some benefits to being forced into more innovative approaches. There is undoubtedly a hard edge to this as charities have been forced to survive with less. Lots of organisations have seen a growing reliance on volunteers. In some instances, this is because they kind of embrace Big Society, but in lots more instances it's because of the cuts agenda. The latter has meant they've had to find alternative ways of delivering services with less money than they had in the past.

In this way, the economic crisis and the political responses to it have had impacts that are difficult to unravel and which combine both harmful and productive impacts. It has certainly changed the way many organisations have had to think about their funding mix, their service delivery and the whole range of resources at their disposal, sometimes for the better and sometimes purely out of funding desperation.

¹¹ Natcen Social Research (2013) 'Evaluation of National Citizen Service: findings from the Evaluation of 2012 Summer and Autumn NCS Programme.

http://natcen.ac.uk/media/205475/ncs_evaluation_report_2012_combined.pdf. Viewed March 26, 2014.

¹² The Conservative Party (2014) 'Big Society'

In some cases meanwhile, it is possible to overstate the impact since, as Rob Jackson notes, paid and unpaid work are often not in zero-sum opposition but coexist, while the majority of voluntary sector organisations have never had paid staff and remained reliant on volunteers throughout. The biggest impacts have therefore been around the kind of strategic thinking and future-proofing that organisations have needed to undertake, as well as the broader questions raised about how the public, private and third sectors will intersect in the delivery of public services and shared goods in the future.

Austerity may be the root of volunteering innovation

A number of interviewees emphasised that the silver lining to the drying up of statutory funding in recent years has been more initiative at sector, organisational and individual level; the sense that we have all needed to roll up our sleeves and come up with more creative solutions.

"I think that when there is less money around... actually what it can do is bring out the creative and innovative aspects of society. Rather than just that these services close, people come together and make them happen in their own way and I think that's been a marked change which the recession has had a direct impact on."

"Because there's less central government funding out there people are being forced to innovate."

"One of the impacts is that 5 years, 10 years ago, we would have always said the state would deliver for us and it was a public service - a lovely example is libraries, libraries were a public service that local authorities delivered and now a vast number of libraries are volunteer-led and are not public service... that's a really big shift and I think that shift is only going to grow."

At a broader level, the key concerns that sector commentators have raised during the research conducted for both editions of this report have related to the same key areas and are systemic, rather than related to specific governments:

- Government initiatives are often not structured in a considered and sustainable manner
- Such schemes can be great in awareness-raising and generating demand for volunteering, but are less helpful when it comes to developing the infrastructure necessary for the supply side, e.g. investment in effective volunteer management to create appropriate and engaging opportunities
- New, headline-grabbing programmes such as the National Citizenship Service are prioritised, rather than building on what is already working and is sector-led (which would be more cost-effective and more sustainable)

So whether we have Big Society or Big Government, volunteering continues to have a strongly political dimension and the outcomes of this often fall down in a similar way. Few would argue for less sector-led innovation and creativity or a command-and-control government relationship with third sector development. However, it also seems clear that a strong funding environment and stable political support for volunteering infrastructure, such as Volunteer Centres and effective volunteer management, are invaluable in ensuring the national commitment to volunteering we've so long paid lip-service to goes beyond the sound bite.

The hubris of the Olympics

While it may seem strange to fixate on a single, albeit global, event as a turning point for volunteering, the 2012 London Olympics has loomed large in discussions of UK volunteering in recent years. So what did it really mean? Did it herald the joyous new world of volunteering spirit, commitment and infrastructure it appeared to that warm summer, or was it just hot air?

The Olympics certainly got many people excited about volunteering. 240,000 people applied for the 70,000 Games Maker volunteer positions and the profile of volunteering was boosted considerably.¹³ Surveys of Games Makers taken immediately after the Olympics showed that the overwhelming majority were satisfied with their volunteering experience. Nearly half indicated they expected to volunteer more in the future than they had before the Games.¹⁴ However, the authors of the study were keen to point out it had taken place in the immediate 'afterglow' of the Games and they were therefore cautious of this result.

Whether the Olympics impacted upon volunteering more widely is a mixed picture. A 2013 survey by the Olympic legacy charity Join In found that 31% of respondents said the Games Makers had positively changed the way they viewed volunteering, but only 2% had volunteered more as a result of the Olympics.¹⁵ Meanwhile, nfpSynergy's 2013 research found only 2% more people had volunteered as a result of the Games (see figure 1).¹⁶ This has led some commentators to suggest that the Olympic effect will be short-lived and not translate into a long-term increase in volunteering.¹⁷ This scepticism was reflected in our research.

¹³ Loughborough University (2013) 'Report 5: Post-games Evaluation Meta-Emulation of the Impacts and Legacy of London 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/224181/1188-B_Meta_Evaluation.pdf. Viewed March 25, 2014.

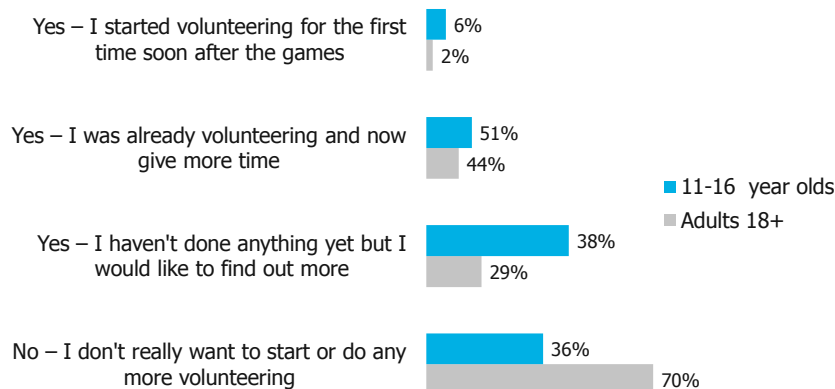
¹⁴ Dickson, Tracey and Benson, Angela (2012) 'London 2012 Games Makers: towards Redefining Legacy' https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/224184/Games_Makers_Annex.pdf. Viewed March 26, 2014.

¹⁵ Jenna Pudelek (June 10, 2013) 'Half of People Don't Know Where to Find Out About Local Volunteering Opportunities, Survey Shows' Third Sector Online. <http://www.thirdsector.co.uk/news/1185575/Half-people-dont-know-find-local-volunteering-opportunities-survey-shows/?DCMP=ILC-SEARCH>. Viewed March 26, 2014.

¹⁶ nfpSynergy (March 2013) Charity Awareness Monitor.

¹⁷ Jenna Pudelek (19 February 2013) 'Analysis: Is the Rise in Volunteering a Triumph for the Government?' Third Sector Online. http://www.thirdsector.co.uk/Policy_and_Politics/article/1171165/analysis-rise-volunteering-triumph-government/. Viewed April 17, 2014.

Figure 1: Have the Olympic games inspired volunteering?



Do you think the London Olympic and Paralympic games last year have inspired you to volunteer your time to a charity or community group. Please chose the statement which best applies to you

Base : 2031 adults 18+, 496 11-16 year-olds
Source: YEM Feb 2013, nfpSynergy, Britain

The Olympics may have been good for the volunteering brand...

On the plus side, there is a strong sense that the event boosted the profile of volunteering and meant that for the first time, many people could turn on the TV and think, "Perhaps volunteering could be for me after all."

"I think the Olympics is a good thing in that it lifted the veil for the public about how volunteering wasn't necessarily as stereotypical - the little old lady in the charity shop etc - as a lot of them thought. A lot of people saw, probably for the first time, people of all different backgrounds and ages having a really good time, a lot of people probably more explicitly than ever before, if they went to any of the Olympic sites, came across people who were volunteers. So I think a lot of people felt differently about volunteering after the Games."

But the ball was dropped in the follow-through post-Olympics

On the other hand, there has been a common consensus that both the sector and the government missed an opportunity to turn the Olympics effect into a meaningful legacy for volunteering. The Games had some excellent examples of how volunteering can and should be managed, i.e. flexibly and creatively, with senior buy-in and whole-organisation engagement. Yet for many, there is a sense that this was not capitalised on at the critical moment.

"The Olympics was fantastic in terms of how they engaged with volunteers... but what have we as a sector learned from that, and how can we use that in terms of going forward? There's been a big gap there that the sector has missed out on."

"I think that message hasn't got out about the effort and learning that went into that, the skills - not the skills of the volunteers but the skills for the rest of the staff in managing volunteers... it was more than just talk."

Most of the uncertainty may therefore stem from the heightened expectations as to what the Olympics could or should have done for volunteering. After all, it was a

unique kind of event, promising an utterly different type of experience to that offered by the majority of charities seeking volunteers.

"I think there is a big difference between someone wanting to volunteer at the Olympics and hold Usain Bolt's trainers, and someone volunteering at a local lunch club [but] there was this amazing opportunity and I don't think [we] as a sector really built on the fact that the image of volunteering had changed."

And finally, it is important to remember that, contrary to what coverage may have implied during that period, volunteering was not invented with the Olympics. For the most part, it simply shone a spotlight on the extent of the work already being done throughout the UK in dozens of sectors.

"You talk to some people and it's almost like volunteering was invented on the day that the Opening Ceremony started, so everybody's looking at "how can we learn the lessons and build on the legacy of 2012, without really understanding what was there beforehand and how things are changing as a result."

"My gut reaction is it's probably the 2012 Olympics that actually made people realise that they were doing stuff anyway."

Rather than being remembered as a glorious one-off, the Olympics should therefore be viewed as an inspiring, exceptional example of what's possible when we build volunteering into our organisations and harness human interest on a grand scale. Thousands of volunteers have been doing this every single day, before and since.

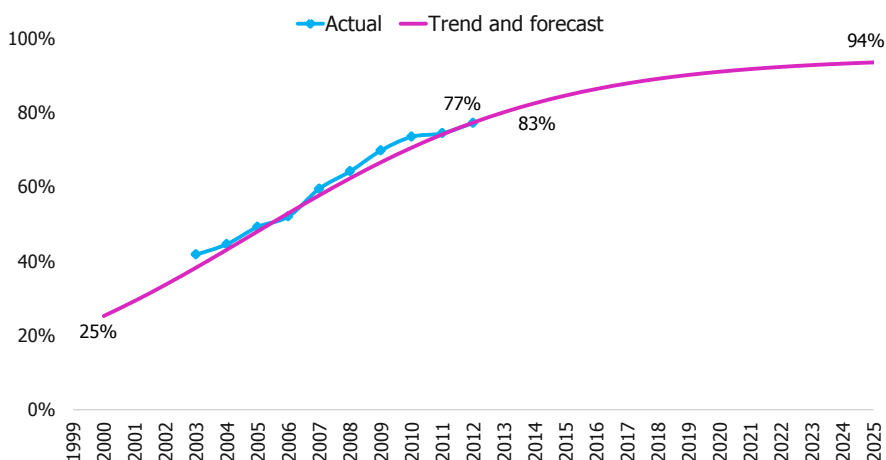
The technological impacts on volunteering

New technology, new volunteers?

A decade may seem like a long time ago for some of us. When we stop to think about the communications landscape, it's been a particularly dizzying period of change. Systems and processes still mired in Web 2.0 advanced to whole new levels of sophistication, with user-generated content, interactive forums and a host of web-based and IT solutions to problems and anachronisms that 2005's third sector hadn't even recognised. Facebook (2004) and Twitter (2007) took over the world, becoming verbs in the process and now being used for a wealth of purposes, from marketing to viral campaigns.

As many nfpSynergy reports have emphasised over the last decade, understanding, mastering and deploying new technologies - from how to harness the potential of SMS to embracing global digital fundraising - have become indispensable to charities' toolkits¹⁸. The growth in online access (see figure 2), whether it be through tablets, laptops, smartphones or TV, is the key enabler of change.

Figure 2: Internet usage from 2000 to 2025
(% using the internet at least once a week, forecast from available data)



Internet penetration continues to edge upwards and we expect more than 90% of British adults to be going online at least once a week by 2020.

Source: Source: Oxford Economics/nVision, UK, 2014

Our use of and reliance on technology to conduct all aspects of our professional and personal lives continue to skyrocket. Today, around 35% of us use our phones to

¹⁸ nfpSynergy (2011), *Sending out an SMS 2.0: The potential of mobile phones for charities and non-profits*; (2011) *Passion, persistence and partnership: the secrets of earning more online - 2nd Edition*; (2010) *It's Competition but not as we know it*.

access the internet daily, forecast to rise to 69% by 2020.¹⁹ The 60% taking part in social networking looks set to rise to 78% during the same period.

While a decade ago this still appeared very skewed towards the young, trends are flattening out fast as the baby boomer generation advances into retirement. At the most obvious level, charities have needed to catch up and put such new technologies to use across all traditional activities. This has included exploring what advanced website functionality and social media can bring to volunteer and donor recruitment, communications and evaluation, whether as a complement to existing work or as a new spin on old approaches.

Yet beyond this expansion of existing practices and priorities, the horizon has also shifted for 'new' forms of volunteering. These increasingly seek to adapt to our hectic, plugged-in lifestyles and working hours, with concepts like 'micro-volunteering' becoming increasingly prevalent. The term is new but contested, with some viewing it as a bold new frontier for time-poor, cash-rich audiences, while others dismiss it as a buzzword repackaging the ad hoc opportunities which were always available.

Digital technology may create micro-volunteering opportunities

A recent report by NCVO defined micro-volunteering as 'bite-size volunteering with no commitment to repeat and with minimum formality, involving short and specific actions that are quick to start and complete'.²⁰ A great deal of micro-volunteering has been conceptualised and undertaken digitally, but there's no reason that it can't be used to define any short donations of time.

The reason the idea has tended to be so contested is that many of the actions defined this way, such as online fundraising or signing petitions, are not universally considered 'volunteering', nor are they novel in their nature. Some also raise concerns regarding the technology-focus of micro-volunteering efforts, viewing this field, along with innovation in the sector more generally, as too youth and tech-obsessed.

"It's a new name but it's not necessarily new activity. I think it's got a new focus because you can do it on a smart phone, maybe tied into social media a bit more... but at one end of the scale, micro-volunteering is [simply] short term volunteering: doing something for Children In Need, giving a relatively small proportion of your time and you're not necessarily doing it online but that meets a lot of people's definitions of micro volunteering."

"Part of the problem is trying to come up with the right range of activities that enable that type of participation and certainly the traditional charity projects don't really fit comfortably into that model... trying to push charities to carve up traditional volunteer roles into bite sized chunks that can be done on a PC or just for an hour in the morning - there's not enough incentive to do that and a lot of the activities just don't translate well. I'm not saying there isn't potential in the future for [micro-volunteering], but I think if you see it more as an opportunity to enable people to collaborate on a common cause and with less obsession about the technology and

¹⁹ nVision (2013), *Techno-Trends UK : 2020 and Beyond*

²⁰ Browne, Joni, Jochum, Veronique and Ockenden, Nick (2013) 'The Value of Giving a Little Time: Understanding the Potential of Micro-volunteering' *National Council for Voluntary Organisations*.

the virtual aspect of it, then maybe we'll get a bit further with it but so far, I don't think it's taken off in quite the way that anyone thought it would."

There is a growing demand for volunteering opportunities that are flexible and time-limited to fit into people's busy lives, as future sections explore. Technology also undoubtedly has a key role to play in supporting more time-limited volunteering in order to make large numbers of people donating small amounts of time logistically possible, and its impact more meaningful. While micro-volunteering will not be an appropriate fit for some formats - for example, any requiring substantial training or screening, such as working with vulnerable people or children - it can offer charities a valuable way to engage both new and 'old' volunteers in new ways. In this way, we ensure that the low barriers which prevent many people from fitting volunteering into their lives are increasingly addressed and overcome.

The social impacts on volunteering

The complexity of 21st century life continues apace

Our report draws attention to some of the broader social, political, economic and technological trends with implications for volunteering over the coming decades. We have also highlighted them elsewhere over the year.²¹ Many of these themes are still very salient and underline one of the key arguments this report makes; you need to understand your audience and respond to the pressures affecting their capacity to give time. A few of the most prominent trends are reiterated below. However, in planning your volunteering strategy, it's worth doing some further research of your own into the broader trends likely to be impacting your own particular target audiences.

We are ageing

As a country, we are getting older (see figure 3). The average life expectancy in the UK is now 78.7 years for men and 82.6 years for women.²² In the 2011 census, there were 9.2m people aged 65+ in England and Wales, making up 16% of the population.²³ The number of us aged 90 or over increased from a third of a million to half a million between 2002 and 2012.²⁴

This trend certainly has serious implications for service demand and delivery across the health and social welfare sectors in the coming decades, but it also impacts the availability of prospective volunteers. On the one hand, older citizens have always made fantastic volunteers and have long been a pillar of many charities' voluntary workforces. They usually have ample time to offer, a strong engagement with charities more broadly and other key motivations, such as making friends and keeping busy into their retirement years.

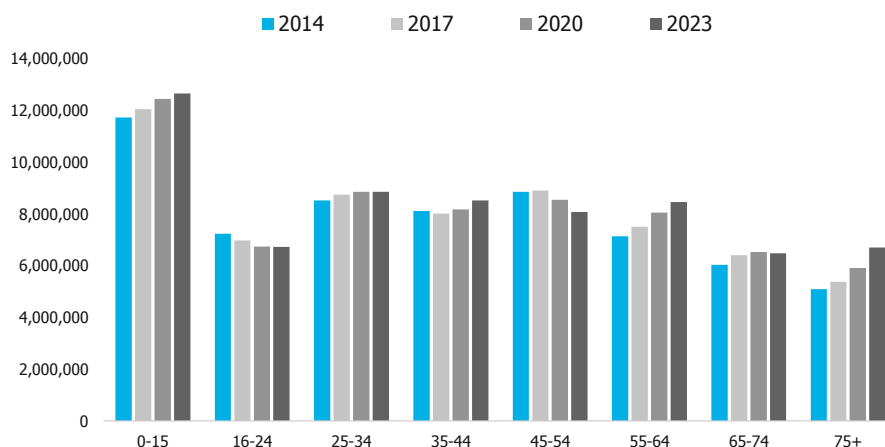
²¹ See (2010) *It's competition but not as we know it*; (2011) *Look! nfpSynergy did my PEST analysis for me* (2011).

²² Office for National Statistics, (2014), Population: '8 facts about life expectancy and the 90 & over population' (Accessed June 2014: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census-analysis/>)

²³ Office for National Statistics, (2013), Population: 'What does the 2011 census tell us about older people?' (Accessed June 2014: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census-analysis/>)

²⁴ Office for National Statistics, (2014), Population: '8 facts about life expectancy and the 90 & over population'

Figure 3: Age structure of the population in Great Britain. (Projected populations at mid-years by age at last birthday | ONS forecast, 2013)



Source: Population Projections, National Statistics/nVision, UK, 2013

On the other, it is crucial to note the ways in which generations now reaching retirement age differ from those of the past. These include health, attitude, affluence, lifestyle and above all the fact that they are likely to be working longer than ever before.²⁵ See our focus on retirees in a few pages time for more detail.

The family is changing

Family structure has changed a huge amount over the last century, particularly over the last 30 years. Gender roles have transformed, with 71% of UK women economically active in 2012 compared with just 59.3% in 1971.²⁶ The number of single-person households has also risen steeply since 1979, a trend which is projected to continue. More of us are co-habiting or raising children alone, fewer are living as married couples, and most of us are crossing traditional thresholds such as marriage, procreating and moving out of home later than ever. Family structure also remains very fluid in the 21st century with re-marriage, complex extended families and shifting households, which are often smaller in size but less traditional in form.

The implications for volunteering are complex and varied. On the one hand, volunteering often thrives in more integrated communities as part of the broader social tapestry, and more fragmented, anonymous societies can be a challenging environment to build up the social capital which both underlies and nurtures voluntary action. Social isolation can also be an aggravating factor for other issues which increase demand for charities' services, such as financial difficulty or health and social care. On the other hand, individuals are more likely than ever to live alone or away from families and so are increasingly likely to seek out social lives and

²⁵ This is money (2014), 'New state pension age: As we're all told to work longer, when will you be able to retire?' (Accessed June 2014: <http://www.thisismoney.co.uk/money/pensions/article-1679780/New-state-pension-age-retire.html>)

²⁶ The Fawcett Society (2009), 'Are women bearing the burden of the recession?' March (Accessed June 2014: <http://www.mbsportal.bl.uk/secure/subjareas/hrmemptyrelat/fawcettsociety/138407burden09.pdf>)

support networks outside the home. With fewer dependents, we may just have more time and affluence to look for causes and challenges beyond our doorsteps.

We are more educated, but financial independence is more elusive

The expansion of higher education has been astronomical in recent decades. Overall, by 2011–12 there were around 2.5 million students in higher education, an increase of half a million since 2001–2002²⁷ and an almost five-fold increase since the academic year 1970/1, when 621,000 gained a degree.²⁸ Since 2001, the number of students gaining a first degree has risen by 17%, while the number securing a postgraduate qualification has risen by 27%.²⁹

However, with the introduction of higher tuition fees in 2010, the process is more expensive than ever. Despite early assurances that reaching the initial cap of £9,000 p.a. would be the exception rather than the norm, a large proportion of universities have opted for higher prices and the indications are that this is likely to rise still higher in the future.³⁰ So despite evidence that a degree is still ultimately financially beneficial regardless of a competitive job market, research is suggesting most students will still be paying off their loans into their 40s and 50s, while many will never clear the debt.³¹

There are complex intersections here with broader issues affecting young people – and into the future, when they're our working age population at large – such as housing costs and the changing structure of the job market. However, at a basic level this has a number of key implications for volunteering including:

- Students continue to offer a large, accessible pool of potential volunteers and ensuring their CVs are replete with extra-curricular experience is now a necessity for future employment, rather than a 'nice-to-have'
- Those who volunteer will increasingly be highly educated and likely to expect that existing knowledge and skillsets will be used effectively
- Students are now graduating with substantial and ongoing debts. For some graduates, volunteering for purely altruistic reasons may well become a luxury as soon as paid work is secured (if only for a while)

Choices, choices...

Choice has long been the buzzword across all areas of life, from political rhetoric on mixed public service delivery to the bewildering array of options that govern our lives as consumers. Driven by technological innovation, market competition and deregulation, we have out of necessity become skilled researchers and navigators of this new terrain. We assess the relative merits of fibre-optic versus regular broadband and complex cable TV packages with the same expert eye now required for school and UCAS applications, GP registration and filing tax returns.

²⁷ Universities UK (2013), 'Patterns and Trends in UK Higher Education' (Accessed June 2014: <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/highereducation/Documents/2013/PatternsAndTrendsInUKHigherEducation2013.pdf>)

²⁸ The Independent (2010), '1970 vs 2010: 40 years when we got older, richer and fatter,' 3 July (Accessed June 2014: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/this-britain/1970-vs-2010-40-years-when-we-got-older-richer-and-fatter-2017240.html>)

²⁹ Universities UK (2013), 'Patterns and Trends in UK Higher Education'.

³⁰ The Guardian (2014), 'Universities minister refuses to rule out increase in tuition fees,' 23 March (Accessed June 2014: <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2014/mar/23/tuition-fees-catastrophe-lib-dems-labour>)

³¹ BBC (2014), 'Students could be paying loans into their 50s – report,' 10 April (Accessed June 2014: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-26954901>)

By the same process that UK citizens become more adept at managing the proliferation of choice and competition, they also become more discriminating in terms of what they expect when committing to any new venture – and that includes volunteering for you.

We are more culturally diverse than ever

High net immigration in the last few decades, from the EU and beyond, means that British society continues to evolve quickly, with a broader mix of cultures, faiths and languages than ever before. In the 2011 census, 86% of the population identified themselves as white and 81% identified as white British, a decrease from 92% and 88% in 2001. Every other ethnic group saw proportional rises. For religion, 59% identified as Christian, 5% did so as Muslim and 25% reported no religion.³² While these figures do not appear particularly diverse, there is a strong geographic skew, with a much greater mix seen in London (40% non-white population) and, to a lesser extent, the Midlands. Net migration has also continued to hold positive, despite a slight decline since 2011.

This diversity has implications for charities in a number of ways. On the one hand, it is likely to continue increasing demand for new services, particularly from community and voluntary sector organisations that have long been essential to supporting new immigrants. It is also noteworthy that many austerity impacts have tended to hit minority communities and organisations harder. In volunteering, traditional assumptions about who is interested in your work and able to offer time may prove very outdated. Look beyond your typical audiences and you may be surprised to discover volunteers it never previously occurred to you to target.

³² Office for National Statistics (2014), Ethnicity and Identity: 2011 Census Data (Accessed June 2014: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/taxonomy/index.html?nscl=Ethnicity+and+Identity>)

The economic impacts on volunteering

We are comparatively affluent with raised aspirations

Income has grown considerably in recent decades, with the median UK salary reaching £27,000 in 2013.³³ There is a long tail to UK earnings, with much of the population earning dramatically more than the average, and it remains a very unequal society, exacerbated by the economic pressures and policies outlined above. However, household disposable income has generally witnessed an upward trend over the last 30-40 years and, viewed apart from the downturn of the last six years, we spend much more of this money on leisure than we did previously, particularly with regard to technology and holidays.

This disposable income has presented opportunities for charities to secure larger donations from a broader spectrum of society. It also provides the chance to access more campaigning and fundraising engagement through harmonising with leisure paths. These include new technologies, participatory 'lifestyle' events and other fundraising methods that tie in with the explosion in leisure spending or 'giving while living' trends. In terms of volunteering, the theoretical promise is of a comparatively affluent generation with enthusiasm and time for new activities, social movements and ideas. More pessimistically, it serves to emphasise the time-pressure most people are under and to ramp up the competitive environment that charities seeking volunteers find themselves in. As one interviewee put it:

"We all have things we want to do in our lives, and it might not be volunteering. You know, volunteering is not the most important thing in my life. So how we can bridge that gap between what we want and what the volunteers want?"

The importance of baby boomers over the next 20 years

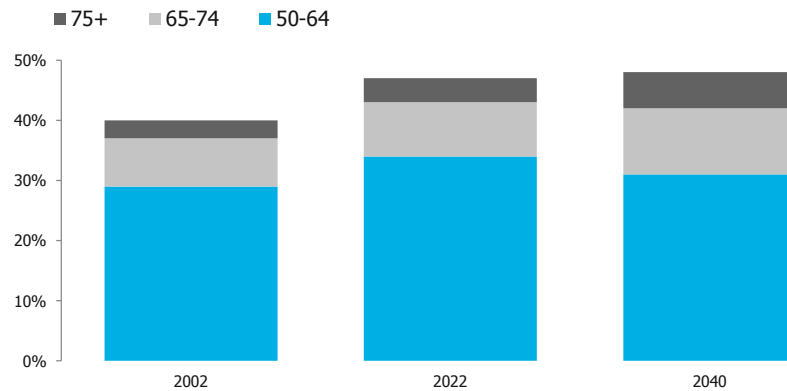
The most important understanding for charities to reach about their engagement with older generations is how much 'old age' is changing. While some knowledge and assumptions about older individuals may still apply, much is being turned on its head, from the diminishing time we actually have on our hands for 'a bit of charity work to pass the time' to the growing technological literacy that will see mobile internet access increase.

Not only are the generations in their late 60s and older (the baby boomers) increasing in number, retirement itself is being increasingly postponed. Even when that time comes, it is spent much more actively and often with significant disposable income. As figure 4 shows below, the share of spending on leisure services and goods by the over-50s has long been substantial and is projected to rise significantly over the next 30 years, particularly among the oldest demographics of 75+.

³³ Office for National Statistics (2013), Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (Accessed June 2014: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/ashes/annual-survey-of-hours-and-earnings/2013-provisional-results/stb-ashes-statistical-bulletin-2013.html#tab-Annual-earnings>)

Figure 4: Share of spending on leisure goods and services by the over 50s

Forecast based on changes in numbers in each age only



Base: UK
Source: nVision

With the over 45s already the most active donors and volunteers, the greater proportion of older people we will witness over the coming decades will continue to offer charities a positive pool of volunteers. In light of what we know about charity engagement trends, it is therefore ironic that, as one interviewee noted, *"We are still youth-obsessed when it comes to volunteering, everything seems to be about young people to the complete non-reference to anything about older people"*. Regardless of prevailing political focus, it is clear that understanding the way in which retirement is changing as the baby boomers enter it has become crucial to charities wishing to continue making use of their best volunteering assets.

The impact of choice and baby boomers on volunteering

The final section of this part of the report looks at two specific areas of people's changing lives, both of which are of particular relevance to volunteering and volunteer managers.

The explosion of 21st century choice and why volunteering needs to play catch-up

Once upon a time, voluntary organisations had a steady supply of volunteers who did not particularly care either for whom they volunteered or how effective the organisation was, so long as it filled their time and felt like charity work – or at least so it now seems. Today's landscape of infinite access to information, high levels of education, financial strain and myriad of leisure opportunities means a whole new world for volunteer managers hoping to capture an audience for their work. Armed with an extensive education – formally or informally acquired - and the finely honed investigative skills that come from dealing with the proliferation of choice in every aspect of their lives (jobs, shopping, finance, leisure), the average punter has learnt to be more discriminating and more demanding. We know what we want and expect in terms of roles, communications channels, flexibility and customer service. A sign saying 'Volunteers wanted' with a phone number attached is unlikely to cut it.

It's competition with weekend breaks and overseas holidays that matters

As our interviewees reminded us, you are not just competing with other charities – and that's certainly a crowded and tough enough market on its own. You are also competing with everything else an individual might be doing with those precious five hours a week: family time, TV, cinema, the gym, post-work drinks, Sunday lunch with friends and the Saturday sales. Never has it been more crucial to ensure that what you offer potential volunteers is worthy of their time and effort. While we may be tempted to view these prospective volunteers as becoming more demanding or even 'selfish', it is important to remember that it is not individuals who have changed - the world has moved on and it is crucial that volunteer development and management moves with it.

Research from the British Social Attitudes Survey has revealed that 46% of private sector and 53% of public sector workers say 'an interesting job' is 'very important' to them (second only to job security).³⁴ In all aspects of our lives, we expect to be able to research numerous options and sift through targeted marketing materials, whether we're shopping around for jobs, new bank accounts or holidays abroad. As many of our interviewees in the volunteering sector pointed out, we now quite rightly expect sophisticated customer service, responsiveness and multiple communication channels in all areas of our lives. Is there any reason why volunteer recruitment and management should operate in a bubble where antiquated rules apply?

³⁴ Parker, L. and S. Bevan (2011) *Good Work and Our Times*. The Work Foundation, p24
http://www.theworkfoundation.com/DownloadPublication/Report/291_GWC%20Final.pdf

The example of the volunteer centre that argued it was unrealistic to expect them to respond to an enquiry about volunteering within three weeks represents a view from a bygone age.

From 28 days to 24 hours

Twenty years ago, if you bought something through a catalogue or in response to an advert on TV, the accepted norm was 28 days delivery. It is now less than 24 hours or next day. This is because it's now our expectation as people in society - we want to be able to manage our availability online for example, because it's increasingly where we manage our finances. We want to receive a response, even if it's just a holding response, within a couple of hours, not three weeks. People's expectations are changing and we are getting more demanding, but that's because we are doing so as a society.

This is in large part a manifestation of the spread of the consumer model across broader areas of life. However, it also speaks to a deeper need to redress the volunteering balance towards a deal that fits with what *volunteers* really want and need from their experience, rather than just what the organisation requires:

"As a sector, we are struggling to recognise what is increasingly a more consumer-focused marketplace. If people are expected to give up their free time to do something in the community, yes altruism is always going to be a strong motivating factor, but actually it's also activities that fit in with my lifestyle, that fit in with my interests and my skills and I think this sector traditionally has never really focused on what the volunteer wants, it was primarily focused on what it wants and has just expected people to fit in with that. That's worked fairly well for a fair old while but I think increasingly that model is less attractive."

"Personally, I have experienced a much higher level of expectations from volunteers that we (as VMs) will be organised, have meaningful work for our team, give appropriate training, support and recognition and, most importantly, the volunteers will have a say in what the organisation does and how it does it."

Overall, volunteers now expect much more from charities in terms of being given meaningful work, having a say in how their programme is run and receiving appropriate training, support and recognition. Volunteers are also in many cases better educated, more diverse, more skilled and as a result more demanding. Crucially, this should be considered a *positive* thing. Charities need to remember that an informed, demanding volunteer is an engaged volunteer – one who knows what you do, why it is important and who is ready to talk to others about it. This is a volunteer not prepared to accept second best and who challenges your organisation to up its game.

"They're not prepared to put up with some of the things that sometimes go along with shoddy volunteer management, like your expenses being paid late or nowhere for you to park when you turn up or not being told what's going on... People have higher expectations of the quality of their experience. I think that's probably a good thing."

This doesn't mean charities can or should bend to all volunteer demands. It simply means that new, 21st century expectations should be welcomed as an opportunity to rise to the challenge, not as an obstacle to business as usual. The third edition of this report will pick up these themes in detail and look at the key principles that

organisations need to be absorbing into their volunteer strategy.

Boomtime? What to remember about baby boomers and the new retirees

As discussed above, society is ageing but not as we've known it. As the 1960s generation approach retirement, their outlook, life expectancy and attitude to ageing are very different from those of their parents, who might only have expected to see out one more decade. National healthcare, improved nutrition, post-war affluence, economic security and home-ownership have all brought today's sixty-somethings to a very different place; one where good medical care and social support can mean even a late retirement could realistically last 30 years or more.

It is also less likely to be time for a rest and growing retreat from the world, at least early on. With a unique historic window, it is likely that baby boomers will have lived a more comfortable and secure adult lifestyle than their children will be able to replicate, given 21st century pension and housing costs. They are prepared to both enjoy retirement through travel and hobbies, and to assist their children's and grandchildren's generations when they may be struggling with education, housing and childcare costs that were more navigable during their own youth.

Attitudinally too, today's retirees see the world differently in ways that shape their preferences, expectations and approach to volunteering.

- **Social change** - as a generation, baby boomers challenged authority. They may have grown up to manage hedge funds and invest in property, but they remain the most adventurous, educated and socially liberal generation of retirees the world has ever seen
- **Expectations of fun** - with kids leaving home, a generation with unprecedented affluence can look ahead to spending more time and money on themselves in retirement
- **Opportunity** - with savings in the bank, mortgages paid off and broad horizons, this is the first generation with the means to actually fulfil their expectations

As one report into capturing the volunteering potential of this generation advised, marketing efforts do well to remember that this generation is not ageing in the sense their parents did and messaging must reflect this:

*"Any organisation that aims to recruit baby boomers now and in the future would be well-advised to adopt the strategy of restructuring their recruitment campaign around a more youthful message and to advertise a range of challenging and creative opportunities."*³⁵

Similarly, reports by organisations such as Demos³⁶ emphasise the different value base of the post-war generation, whose individual and often anti-establishment perspective, combined with financial independence and education, have meant raised expectations and a more critical approach to civic engagement. Their engagement with charities, as with politics, business and social mores, is likely to be

³⁵ Economic implications of an ageing Australia - http://www.pc.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/14219/sub028.pdf

³⁶ Demos, *The New Old* - <http://www.demos.co.uk/files/thenewold.pdf>

more informed and challenging than those who came before.

The dutiful volunteers are dying out

Instead of a generation of older people who are very service-oriented, duty-driven and happy to turn out to volunteer in wind, rain and snow, we have instead a baby boomer generation. If they embrace volunteering, they will want more flexibility, more empowerment and to be more self-directed in what they do. They'll want to be able to drop things so that they can manage their responsibilities, like caring for their parents, children and grandchildren. They have higher expectations of what life is going to be like, longer retirement and more affluence (for some). Several are even going back into work after retirement because of the way the recession has affected pension values.

Baby boomers have different expectations

Meeting these different expectations makes it vital for charities to learn lessons from the changes in external climates concerning service culture, meaningful experiences and professionalism more broadly. Older volunteers can no longer be relied upon as a 'sure thing', driven by a sense of duty and a need to fill their days. They expect an organisation to be run effectively and for their volunteering experience to deliver a tangible sense of achievement. The social dimension is still key, as the figure from our survey of volunteer managers above shows, but this still requires structure. For today's retirees, in good health and often with wide social circles, charity work will be just one of a number of routes to self-fulfilment and socialising. Charities cannot afford to be complacent.

"The traditional older volunteers were the ones that we all relied on, who would give that regular time commitment. The baby boomers I think have a different attitude, that's possibly going to be the last remaining affluent group of older volunteers with money. They've got children who they're sending off to university, quite a few of them have good pensions. They're different and they want different things. So it's not simply us just doing the same thing with them, we still have to understand their flexibility and wants from the volunteering, with what we do."

Yet despite this impression of carefree retirement bringing adventure and opportunity, it is also vital to be aware of the unique position of this generation and the pressures this has created. The recession, the pensions crisis, stock market volatility and even successive housing bubbles all raise concerns over whether older people can afford to retire in security, given the ongoing financial burdens and anticipated care costs of their longer life expectancies.

"I think the biggest threat to this demographic is going to be when the retirement age goes up, whether or not people - because they're going to have to work into later life - will have as much time or motivation to work in an unpaid capacity."

This has also been the first generation to experience such a tight squeeze in caring responsibilities, with children, grandchildren and sometimes ageing parents all requiring support. Graduate debt, the property market and care costs all contribute to the picture of provider-obligations extending worryingly far into the supposed golden age of retirement for many in their sixties and seventies.

It is also important to note that with busy lives, older volunteers are more likely to consider stepping up an involvement they already have with an organisation than embarking on something totally new. Much of the challenge for volunteer managers, therefore, will be around keeping older volunteers interested and finding ways to

deepen their opportunities and reflect their changing needs and commitments. The general principles that apply to all volunteers regarding the need for personalisation, consultation and flexibility are particularly pertinent when it comes to tapping into the potential that has always existed among older volunteers.

And finally baby boomers seem to be much more likely to want to make a difference through their volunteering. Boomers have been a 'change-the-world' generation and want to see that in their volunteering as well. As one commentator puts it, boomers want to make a real difference, not just a contribution.

Part 2 – Trends in volunteering over the last decade

Having outlined the social, economic and political changes of the last decade in Part 1, we're left with several important questions:

- ◉ Where does this leave us in terms of who volunteers, when and how?
- ◉ What do we know about the motivations and expectations of volunteers and how they are evolving in light of the changing volunteering landscape and external constraints?
- ◉ What shifts have there been in the motivations for volunteering in the last decade?

1. Who, how often and how much?

As Part 1 suggested, encouraging and increasing volunteering has remained a central political thread in the Coalition government era. 'Big Society' rhetoric, coverage around the 2012 Olympics and coping strategies to save local services threatened by funding cuts have all appeared to herald a boost in the number and visibility of volunteers in the UK.

There have always been challenges in interpreting volunteer trends. Foremost among these is the impact of differing definitions on the one hand, and the fact that raw statistics tell us too little of the underlying reality which would make their interpretation meaningful on the other.

In the first instance, we have distinctions between 'formal' and 'informal' volunteering, the frequency and nature of time given and the different socio-economic and cultural contexts that shape how likely a respondent is to view their activities as 'volunteering' (as opposed to calling it helping their church/being neighbourly/pooling childcare and so on). It is also complicated by discontinuities in studies tracking this kind of information. Among the most important sector-wide surveys, for example, was the Home Office's Citizenship Survey. It ran from 2001, but for cost-cutting reasons was replaced in 2012 with the new Community Life Survey, which utilises a different sample composition and scope of topics.

In the second instance, it has always been clear that for measuring this type of communal good in particular, the most illuminating data is often necessarily qualitative and therefore harder to collate on a large systematic scale. What is the cause and effect when figures on frequency or the average time given rise or fall? How do we account for the cultural differences that inform how people identify their volunteering? What do any of these numbers tell us about the real value of volunteering at any given point, both for volunteers themselves and the causes they are aiding?

Trends in giving

The past six years have been financially tough. Many charities have had to contend with both reductions in statutory income and changes to their voluntary income as government and individuals altered their spending to deal with harsh economic

realities. Yet nfpSynergy's Charity Awareness Monitor (surveying a nationally representative sample of the British public several times a year) has nonetheless registered a remarkable resilience in the number of us who give to charity. Three-quarters of the public consistently say they have given in the previous three months and, on mean score at least, even the amount given remains fairly constant.³⁷

Where we have seen more impact, unsurprisingly, is on trends regarding the *ways* in which we give. Ad hoc methods, such as cash collections, event sponsorship and, most notably, charity shop donations, have been in the ascendancy and more reliable, regular giving has faltered. This is perhaps driven by people's falling optimism for their ability to be able to give in the future.

2014 is the first time since the financial crisis that our research has seen the proportion of people expecting their giving to increase in the year ahead exceed that of people expecting it to decline, suggesting news of green shoots may tentatively be beginning to resonate. This suggests that while our overall willingness to engage with charities has remained healthy even in crisis, the ways in which we participate have had to evolve to fit our straitened circumstances. We are still receptive and keen to do our part, but we – and the charities who hope to benefit from our support – need to be more flexible and creative.

Looking into the figures themselves, the 2012-2013 Community Life Survey found that the number of people volunteering at least once a year, both formally and informally, has increased since 2010³⁸. Although annual volunteer rates remain lower than those observed in 2001 or 2005, this increase in volunteering since 2010 represents a break from the decline that was observed from 2005 onwards.

However, it is important to note that while the main dip observed fell between 2008/9 and the more optimistic uplift seen in 2012/13, the latter represents the first data provided by the new survey. We must therefore exercise caution when viewing it as trend data directly comparable with its predecessor, the Citizenship Survey.

When looking at formal and informal volunteering separately, different trends emerge. Formal volunteering (volunteering with official groups, clubs or organisations at least once in the last year) increased from 39% in 2010-2011 to 44% in 2012-2013 (putting it at the same level as 2005). Similarly, informal volunteering (providing unpaid help, usually to friends or neighbours, at least once in the last year) has increased by 7% to 62% in the same timeframe (and it was 68% in 2005). This suggests the welcome news that volunteering figures are now in recovery and back up to pre-recession levels, albeit not at some record high.

However, it is worth exercising caution due to both the methodological change between the 2010/11 and 2012/13 figures and because trend data since 2001 reveals intermittent fluctuation in both formal and informal measures. This would suggest the latter in particular tends to have some volatility. While the Coalition Government has claimed the rise is a direct result of the Big Society agenda³⁹, others argue that volunteers stepping into the gap left by austerity measures may

³⁷ Charity Awareness Monitor 2014, nfpsynergy (<https://nfpsynergy.net/nfpsynergy-monitors/charity-awareness-monitor>).

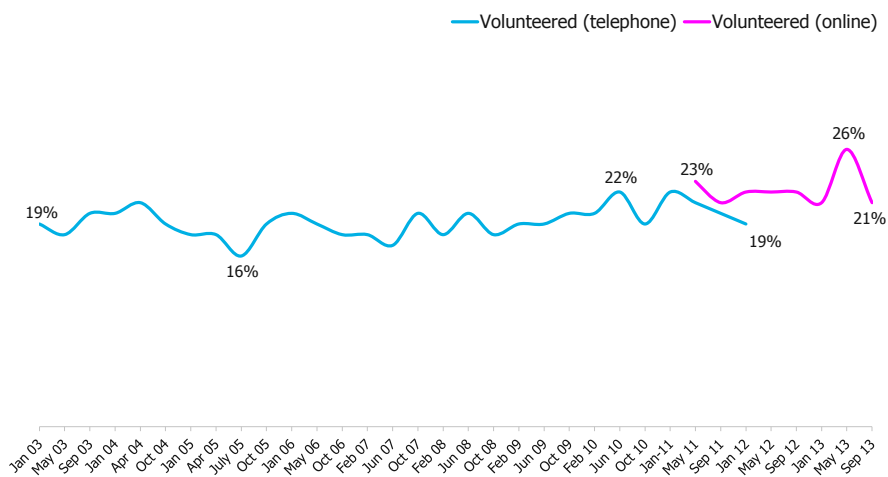
³⁸ Cabinet Office (2013) *Giving of time and money: Findings from the 2012-13 Community Life Survey*.

³⁹ Mason, Tania (12 February 2014) 'Rise in Volunteering Vindicates Big Society, Say Ministers' Governance.

have contributed. It may also be noteworthy that the first waves of the Community Life Survey were carried out in the wake of the London Olympics.

nfpSynergy's Charity Awareness Monitor (CAM) uses a different methodology⁴⁰ and paints a slightly different picture of volunteering, asking whether respondents have given time to a charity or other organisation in their local community in the last three months. In the below we can see that although there are fluctuations, volunteering levels have generally remained relatively consistent over the last ten years at around one fifth of the British population (figure 5).

Figure 5: Proportion of people who have volunteered in the last three months - 2003-2013



"Have you given time as a volunteer in the last three months, to a charity or other organisation, or in your local community?" **Yes** (Telephone and online surveys)

Base: 1,000 adults 16+, Britain
Source: Charity Awareness Monitor, 2003-2013, nfpSynergy

The nfpSynergy research in July 2014 found that 26% of people had volunteered in the last quarter (this probably equates to Community Life's definition of formal volunteering). This is not so far from Community Life's finding that 29% of people report having volunteered at least once in the last month (the same level as in 2005).

There may also be other potential explanations that inform the gap. These might include whether there is an English bias towards volunteering (CAM is Britain-wide), or whether the greater specialism of the Community Life survey encourages more careful consideration of community engagement. A third explanation might be whether face-to-face interviewing introduces social desirability bias when reporting one's own philanthropic behaviours.

However, more relevant than precise figures may be the lack of stark, conclusive changes in trends over the last decade. This interpretation is endorsed by Staetsky and Mohan, who reviewed and compared a range of volunteer survey methodologies for the Third Sector Research Centre in 2011⁴¹ and highlighted the

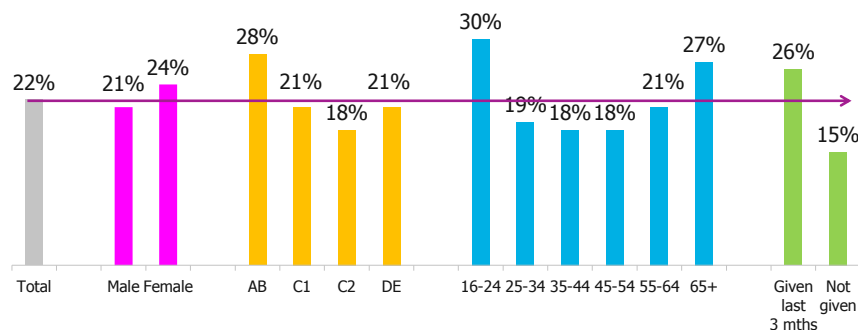
⁴⁰ The Charity Awareness Monitor (CAM) is run on behalf of a syndicate of UK charities and uses a nationally representative British sample (incl. Scotland and Wales) of 1000 per wave, conducted online between four and six times per year. Community Life primarily uses a face-to-face methodology of c.6915 participants interviewed on a rolling quarterly basis and focuses solely on England.

broad consistencies in findings from different ones. Pertinent to the broader themes of this report, they note the difficulties of collecting reliable volunteering data and suggest that “the absence of well-understood and widely-agreed concepts of voluntarism in the public mind introduces uncertainty in people’s responses”. Their conclusion was that volunteer levels had remained relatively stable over time and were unlikely to drop substantially.

Who is the 21st century volunteer?

The Charity Awareness Monitor data on volunteering can also be broken down by key demographics to get a snapshot of those who participate in volunteering. The below shows data collated from 7,000 respondents over the period 2011-14:

Figure 6: Proportion who have given time as a volunteer in the last three months broken-down by gender, socio-economic status, age and charity donor (September 2011- September 2013)



“Have you given time as a volunteer in the last three months, to a charity or other organisation, or in your local community?” **Yes**

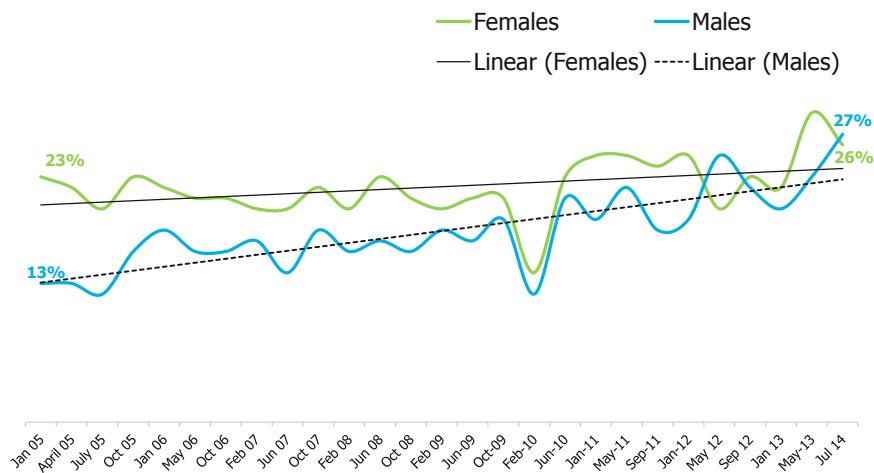
Base: All respondents from 7 waves @ 1,000 adults 16+ each, Britain
Source: Charity Awareness Monitor, Sep 2011 - Sep 2013, nfpSynergy

Women and men now nearly equally likely to volunteer – a marked contrast from 10 years ago

Figure 7 (on the next page) shows that when averaged out over a three year period (2011-14), the levels of men and women who volunteered in the last three months are much closer than past data has suggested. To be specific, 23% of women said they had volunteered in the last three months in Jan 2005, compared to just 13% of men. By July 2014, the figures were 26% for women and 27% for men. The current lack of clear gender bias is corroborated by the Community Life Survey, which finds no significant differences in its 2012/13 data. Figure 7 shows nfpSynergy’s CAM data on this issue.

⁴¹ Staetsky, L and Mohan, J (2011) *Individual voluntary participation in the United Kingdom: an overview of survey information* (Third Sector Research Centre)

Figure 7: Volunteering over time – gender balance



"Have you given time as a volunteer in the last three months, to a charity or other organisation, or in your local community?" **Yes** (Telephone and online surveys)

Base: 1,000 adults 16+, Britain

Source: Charity Awareness Monitor, 2003-2014, nfpSynergy

Affluence still linked to volunteering

Rates of volunteering also vary by socio-economic class, with more affluent people still more likely to volunteer. This correlates with recent research from TimeBank, which found that "people classified as being at risk of social exclusion (defined here as having a long-term limiting illness or disability, having no formal qualifications, or being from an ethnic minority group) were less likely to regularly participate in volunteering."⁴² This is echoed by the Community Life Survey, which found that 36% of people who live in the least deprived areas regularly volunteer, in contrast to 19% of people living in deprived areas.⁴³ This is likely to be impacted by a range of factors, from the time available for economically unproductive activity to the education which may socialise us into volunteering behaviours.

However, it is also important to note that as all data is self-reported, it may also relate to how we define time spent caring for others and contributing to our community, as well as how much responsibility we feel to participate in such activity. It may be, for example, that higher social grades are more likely to categorise their activity as 'volunteering' and to feel the weight of expectation.

A concave age trend; youth and retirement

The two age groups most likely to volunteer are young people and retirees, making a concave trend that hollows out in the intervening years of work and raising a family (look back at Figure 6 for a snapshot).

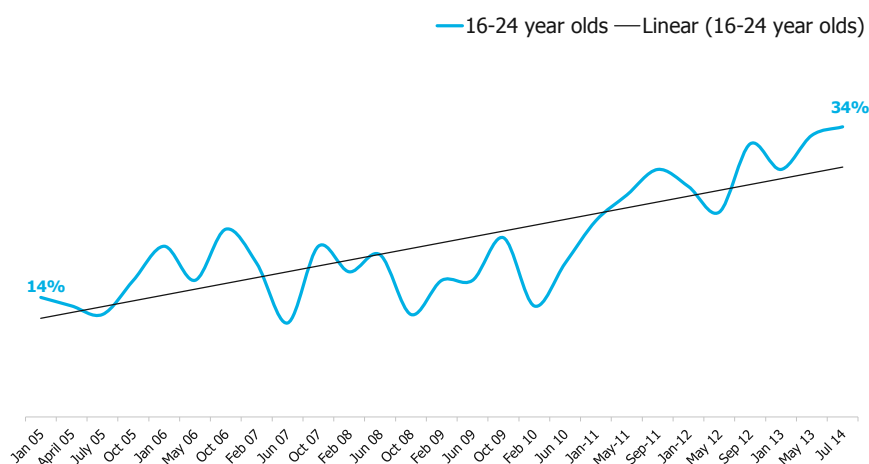
Since 2005, CAM data has seen volunteering double amongst young people, as shown in Figure 8. Between 2003 and 2005, only 14% of 16-24 year olds had volunteered in the last three months. By 2014, that figure had risen to 34%. Youth volunteering has also grown on a global scale. A 2013 report by the Charities Aid Foundation, which explores global giving trends, found that young people (15-24

⁴² Time Bank (2013) Key facts <http://timebank.org.uk/key-facts> Accessed: April 30th 2014.

⁴³ Cabinet Office (2013) *Giving of time and money: Findings from the 2012-13 Community Life Survey*.

years old) are propelling a rise in global volunteering.⁴⁴

Figure 8: Volunteering in young people is increasing



"Have you given time as a volunteer in the last three months, to a charity or other organisation, or in your local community?" **Yes** (Telephone and online surveys)

Base: 1,000 adults 16+, Britain

Source: Charity Awareness Monitor, 2003-2014, nfpSynergy

In the same time period, CAM data suggests volunteering among 25-64 year olds remained around 10% lower than the levels of those aged 16-24. This all changes when people reach retirement age, with figures shooting back up to 28% among the over 65s. The implications of this are clear. It is the youngest and oldest of us with the most free time and indeed both groups have strong reasons for wanting to gain or freshen up skills, as well as meet like-minded people. However, there are broader issues at stake in how the motivations and pressures on these groups are changing, and how the sector must adapt in response.

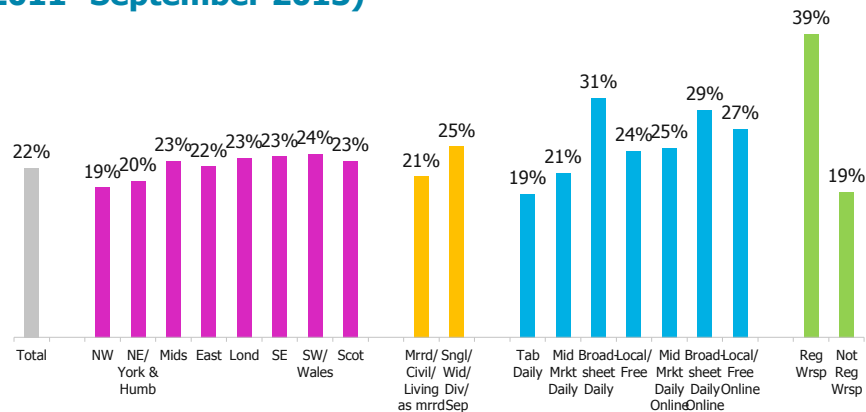
Singletons and regular worshippers

As Figure 9 shows, volunteering remains relatively consistent across most regions of the UK, but we do see slightly lower levels in the North West and North East of England (20% and 20% respectively, compared to 22% overall). Volunteers are also now more likely to be single (in contrast with data in our last report, which put married couples slightly ahead).

Most significantly - and in keeping with all other research we have done on faith and charitable engagement - regular worshippers are the likeliest of all groups to volunteer (39%, compared to 19% for non-worshippers). Meanwhile, broadsheet readers are the likeliest media demographic to say they volunteer, further emphasising the points made about regarding affluence and levels of education.

⁴⁴ Low, J (2013) *World Giving Index 2013: A global view of giving trends*.

Figure 9: Proportion who have given time as a volunteer in the last three months broken-down by region, marital status, newspaper read and worshippers (September 2011- September 2013)



"Have you given time as a volunteer in the last three months, to a charity or other organisation, or in your local community?" **Yes**

Base: 7 waves @ 1,000 adults 16+ each, Britain
Source: Charity Awareness Monitor, Sep 2011 - Sep 2013, nfpSynergy

The connection between volunteering and charitable giving

Figure 6 showed that those who do not donate to charity are also less likely to volunteer. Only 15% of those who did not give in the last three months had volunteered, while a quarter of those who gave money also gave time. In many ways this is an obvious link, showing that different forms of engagement with charities or community life are likely to co-exist, whether because of means or personal inclination.

The Centre for Charitable Giving and Philanthropy has further investigated the relationship between these two forms of giving by reviewing a number of different data sources. When carrying out bivariate analysis of data on volunteering and charitable giving, the report found evidence of a positive relationship between the two variables⁴⁵. However, this form of analysis does not explain the nature of this relationship. Upon further multivariate investigation, the study found mixed evidence about whether the relationship between volunteering and charitable giving was causal, correlative or associational. With this in mind, the positive relationship is indeed concluded to be the result of shared determinants/propensity, rather than a causal relationship between volunteering and charitable giving.

The development of philanthropy that combines both volunteering and charitable donations offers a vehicle for both forms of giving to coincide. Giving circles are an example of this. Here, people pool their financial resources and then give time as volunteers to collectively choose a cause which will receive their donation. In some cases, the selected cause also receives additional volunteer time from participants.

⁴⁵ Hill, M (2012) *CGAP Working Paper: The relationship between volunteering and charitable giving: review of evidence.*

Part 3 - Harnessing volunteer motivations

So we know volunteers are still out there, active and similarly constituted, if now slightly younger with a more balanced gender split. But what are they all doing? In a word: everything. During 2014's Volunteers Week, The Guardian's Voluntary Sector Network even reported on some of the sector's more eccentric outposts, with advertised roles ranging from mascot surgeon to chicken knitter!⁴⁶

Volunteers support a vast array of organisations in different sectors, spanning countless roles and levels of commitment. The Community Life Survey found that the sectors most popular amongst volunteers were sports and exercise (52%), hobbies, recreation, arts and social clubs (42%), religion (36%) and children's education and schools (34%). When asked which activities were carried out while volunteering, around half of those who formally volunteer on a regular basis said they help run activities and events, raise or handle money or take part in sponsored events.

The benefits of researching and understanding motivation

To effectively engage with this eclectic group of volunteers, it is essential to understand their motivations for giving time. This is the case both at a general level – all the contextual and socio-economic factors discussed in Part 1 – and at a personal level. What brings people to your organisation in particular and what will deepen their engagement or encourage them to stay?

This section discusses some of the main benefits of understanding motivation and emphasises the need to maintain an ongoing conversation with your volunteers throughout their time with you. Organisations that regularly ask their volunteers why they are there, what they value in their roles, what's missing and what their expectations are will build up a detailed and bespoke body of knowledge about their volunteer profile. This will secure the following key benefits:

Understanding and managing expectations

When we understand what is feasible or necessary, we're better equipped to weigh up whether something is right for us and less likely to become disillusioned. There will always be a balance between what you need as an organisation and the ideal role for a new recruit. If what you desperately need right now is door-stepping for donations, envelope stuffing or events clean-up, make sure this is clear. Also ensure you know where this fits into the bigger picture for your work and which other opportunities will be available for those volunteers in a few months' time. Talk to

⁴⁶ The Guardian (2014), 'Wanted: musical sea eagle. The five weirdest volunteer roles', 3 June. http://www.theguardian.com/voluntary-sector-network/2014/jun/03/volunteering-roles-charity-weird-top-five?CMP=tw_t_gu

your volunteers and be clear about roles; if you never manage expectations, you'll have no idea why new and apparently enthusiastic recruits disappear within a month.

Encourage ownership and innovation

How often have you heard someone say: "I find it easier to learn when I'm interested in what's being taught"? We like things we are good at (and often become good at the things we like). If volunteers are given scope to choose their projects and help shape the volunteer programme, they will be much more invested in and fulfilled by their work. Meanwhile, you reap the benefits of the ideas and energy they bring to your organisation. By understanding skills and drive, volunteer managers can better match volunteers to roles, and by allowing flexibility and co-creation, they encourage ownership and excellence.

Manage volunteer satisfaction and reward

The very act of asking what volunteers want, what they enjoy and what could be improved shows that you care, that their contribution matters and that the relationship is a two-way street. By encouraging volunteers to think about why they are with you, you help to reinforce their commitment (e.g. 'to make a difference', 'to learn new skills', 'to help someone else with a situation my family experienced'). By asking about what you could do differently, you build in an early warning system for when things aren't going well. These tactics mean value is reinforced and you have a mechanism to understand and respond to both satisfaction and concerns, both of which better equip you to continue engaging volunteers both current and new.

Recruit volunteers effectively and continuously

By regularly documenting current volunteers' motivations, your organisation builds up case studies, quotes and data that will help target future volunteers more effectively and maintain an ongoing relationship with current ones. You are empowered to better understand which people are drawn to your organisation and their communication preferences, but also to identify gaps. For example, if it turns out that you see very few volunteers interested in increasing their skill base, perhaps it's time to reconsider the options for more skilled volunteer roles (research, office work, mentoring) and your offer to those who might be interested. If you know your cause appeals to women 45-54 for instance, could you be targeting mums re-entering the workforce?

A typology of volunteer motivations

So we know understanding motivation is critical, but it's important to remember it is also one of the most nebulous areas to grasp and varies tremendously by individual, charity and era. As one interviewee noted:

"Motivation is one of the most over-researched topics [but] none of the research really gives a practitioner anything valuable because everyone's different."

However, despite their complexity and variability, a grounding in types of motive and the way these play out *for your organisation in particular* is invaluable for the volunteer manager. The True Volunteer Foundation summarised volunteer motivations into these three categories: **altruistic** motives, **instrumental** motives

and **obligatory** motives⁴⁷. If, like us, you were a bit bewildered by what these all meant, here are the explanations:

Altruistic motivations are fuelled by the hope to 'give something back.' For example, the giving of skills or expertise to a cause or area where it is most needed. However, even for apparently selfless motives, volunteering is generally a symbiotic relationship between the organisation and volunteer. Very few volunteers do something they hate because they are altruistic. Moreover, a volunteer is almost always likely to receive some form of benefit from volunteering, be it maintaining skills, combating isolation or the peace and well-being that comes from offering help to those in a difficult situation.

Instrumental motivations are more clearly underpinned by an element of self-interest. This type of volunteering is considered and undertaken as a form of self-development. For example, the developing of new skillsets, developing one's career trajectory or volunteering for networking purposes. Among the most critical of these in today's context, employability, is discussed further below.

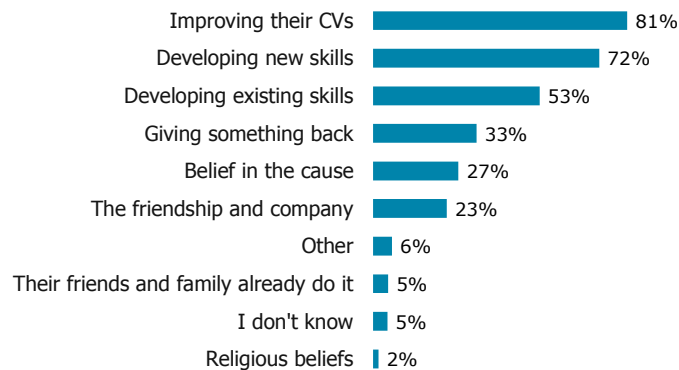
Finally, **obligatory** motives include people who feel obliged to volunteer due to moral or religious duty. These types of volunteers are less common today than instrumental volunteers, but as shown in figure 9, the link between faith and volunteering is still firm. Furthermore, even where the moral element may be less relevant, in some environments there may still be a strong aspect of social conformity or one-upmanship at play.

Whichever family of motivations is the strongest in your own volunteer profile, it is vital that managers plan volunteer strategy, recruitment and management in a tailored way. For volunteers who are primarily motivated by a belief in the cause and a desire to make a difference, it may be that they are flexible and likely to remain engaged whatever their role (no matter how mundane), so long as it is clear how this work contributes to the greater good.

Where the primary motivation is more linked to acquiring specific skills however, it will be more crucial to ensure suitable training and role design to ensure needs are met. For most of us, it will be a mix of many factors, as suggested by figure 10. It shows volunteer managers' perceptions of which motives have become more important over the last five years.

⁴⁷ Krutkowski, S (2014) *True Volunteer Foundation: Understanding volunteer expectations and motive fulfilment*.

Figure 10: Increasing motivations to volunteer



"Do you think any of these have become more important to volunteers over the last five years? Please select all that apply"

Base: 516 Respondents
Source: Managing Volunteers Survey 2013, nfpSynergy

28

Below is a summary of some of the most common motivations volunteer managers should keep in mind when designing volunteer roles, divided up by soft, hard and altruistic motives.

Table 1: The spectrum of potential volunteer motivations

Soft (less tangible) motivations	Hard (more tangible) motivations	Altruistic motivation
Ability to work with others	Skills (organisational, leadership, management)	Contribute skills, knowledge, experience
Communication skills	Qualifications	Make a difference
Social opportunities	Specific training (e.g. counselling)	Desire to 'do unto others as you would have done unto yourself'
Confidence	Allowances	Advance a cause that is close to your heart
Time on hands	Travel	
Fun	Team building	
Relieve boredom		

It is also useful to consider that, regardless of motivation, 47% of the volunteers asked in our research started volunteering because somebody asked them to. Similarly, 37% of non-volunteers said they would be interested in doing so and that a key incentive would be 'being asked'. It sometimes is that simple. Volunteers rarely stop out of sudden disengagement with a cause. Instead, they do so because of low recognition and support, lack of autonomy and freedom or because they are poorly matched to a task in terms of skills or experience. To paraphrase, volunteers will often start through inspiration and leave through exasperation.

Finally, for many of us the barriers remain predictable, if exacerbated, in the current

era. As the Community Life survey identified, work commitments (58%), looking after children or the home (31%) and people having other things to do with their spare time (24%) are the key barriers cited by those who are not regular, formal volunteers.⁴⁸

Employability is the new black in volunteer motivations

When thinking about volunteer motivation, one central theme arises from the circumstances discussed earlier in this report and requires more specific attention; the 21st century significance of voluntary experience for employability. It is likely that the 'instrumental' use of volunteering to achieve professional goals has always played a part, whether in gaining skills in the first place or keeping them fresh later in life. However, there is little doubt that the current age of austerity, together with more long-standing changes in access to higher education and the competitiveness and composition of the job market, has pushed the salience of employability to the fore.

As many have noted, volunteering for this reason is especially common amongst students or recent university graduates hoping to enhance their employment prospects.⁴⁹ Many schools, colleges and universities are encouraging volunteering to enhance CVs, develop new skills, help studies, gain experience of working life and create a network. Increasing employability is regularly cited as one of the reasons why youth volunteering has increased so dramatically and respondents to our volunteer management survey also noted an increase.

Volunteering in a role which provides career-enhancing experience is particularly desirable for young people hoping to work in the third sector, not least because, as with many other industries, the rise of unpaid internships has tended to reduce its number of entry level positions.⁵⁰ For employers in the private and public sectors, the voluntary sector provides a pool of creative talent worth recruiting. When asked if volunteering had a positive effect on career development amongst young people aged 16-25, 87% of employers agreed.⁵¹ However, 30% of employers also agreed that when considering a job application, it was irrelevant whether or not a young person had volunteered, suggesting the employability effect is far from guaranteed.

High levels of unemployment are only compounding the need for extra-curricular experience and this means the need is not restricted to those new to the job market. Many graduates several years out of higher education remain willing to take unpaid internships given the scarcity of graduate-level jobs, with the former becoming increasingly competitive. At the other end of the scale, many older people may volunteer in order to diversify their work lives, like considering a career change or seeking professional development for example. In this context, volunteering can offer a great way for people to pursue other goals and interests that may not be met by their primary paid employment. For retirees meanwhile, volunteering offers a chance to revive aspects of their career that they enjoyed.

More disturbingly, unpaid work has also been introduced as a requirement to obtain

⁴⁸ Cabinet Office (2013) *Giving of time and money: Findings from the 2012-13 Community Life Survey*.

⁴⁹ Thorne, R (2013) *The virtues of volunteering* <http://www.independent.co.uk/student/student-life/the-virtues-of-volunteering-8774013.html> Accessed April 30th 2014

⁵⁰ Intern Aware and Unite the Union (2013) *Interns in the Voluntary Sector: Time to end exploitation*

⁵¹ vInformed (2008) *Youth volunteering: Attitudes and perspectives*.

Jobseeker's allowance. Those claiming the allowance will be obliged to carry out a six month unpaid work placement or risk losing it.⁵² Such work may be taken in a number of industries and the government is encouraging charities to take part in the scheme. However, critics argue that there is no evidence that such schemes will encourage employability and that they will instead reduce the number of paid jobs. Many in the third sector argue more specifically against charities utilising this type of resource, not only out of ethical discomfort, but also for the detrimental impact it may have on the ethos of volunteering more broadly.⁵³

Overall – and despite the common belief that volunteering can help enhance employment options – research conducted by the Third Sector Research Centre (TSRC) has found that the connection between volunteering and employment is more complicated than first assumed.⁵⁴ Although there was some evidence that volunteering improved employability for some people, this was highly dependent on who the individual was and how often they volunteered. When looking at age, the TSRC found that 45-60 year olds received the most positive effect on employment, while there was no such positive correlation between volunteering and employment for young people and students.

The increasingly complex and intense nature of job market competition thereby introduces new challenges to the volunteering landscape. While skills and career development always played a role in volunteer motivation, for young people and the under/unemployed there is an increasing level of perceived necessity to source unpaid work that promises CV-enhancing experiences.

It is therefore more vital than ever that volunteer managers understand and empathise with the pressures that bring prospective volunteers to their door. They must ensure that they design roles that will attract motivated candidates and create win-win situations for both charity and job-seeker. Any individual or charity that thinks it's 'all about them' will be creating a recipe for disappointment. The ideal volunteering opportunity makes sure that both the individual and the charity get what they want from the partnership.

⁵² Information Daily (2014) 'Government 'Workfare' scheme is 'forced unpaid labour'
<http://www.theinformationdaily.com/2014/04/28/government-workfare-scheme-is-forced-unpaid-labour>
Accessed (30th April 2014)

⁵³ <http://www.theguardian.com/voluntary-sector-network/2013/oct/14/george-osborne-volunteering-not-free>;
<http://www.theguardian.com/voluntary-sector-network/2013/oct/15/volunteering-distinction-help-to-work>

⁵⁴ Third Sector Research Centre (2013), 'Link between volunteering and employment 'complicated' says new research'

Part 4 - How are the mechanics of volunteering changing

"Brilliant volunteer involvement isn't the preserve of money rich organisations, it's the preserve of people rich organisations."

With so many factors impacting contemporary volunteering, it is easy to see how daunting the task of taking a strategic approach and proactively shaping its future may appear. However, the future of volunteering is ultimately in the hands of those already doing the key jobs: those in strategic leadership, volunteer managers, and of course, volunteers themselves. This part considers three main themes that charities must deal with to unleash the potential of volunteers for their work: the significance of the spirit – or 'brand' of volunteering; what 21st century volunteering looks like; and how we manage this brave new world of voluntary resourcing.

The importance of the image of volunteering

What is the volunteering 'brand' that does or should work to appeal to prospective supporters? Does it matter? And whose responsibility would it be to nurture?

The volunteer 'brand'

Even in 2014, with an unprecedented level of professionalisation, the third sector remains slightly uncomfortable with the notion of branding at all. To understand something like volunteering, which we still tend to view as an ideally selfless act, in terms of brand and marketing can appear challenging. Not to mention the primary importance of ensuring our 'product' is right and that substance is prioritised over an unnecessary preoccupation with rebranding, as one of our interviewees pointed out:

"The risk is being all shop window and nothing on the shelves isn't it? That you can re-brand and try and change perceptions with some shiny marketing and new messaging but actually, if the nature of the experience someone is going to get is broadly the same as before, how effective will that be?"

However, just as it is both reasonable and productive to look at what both parties gain from the act of volunteering and in this way enhance the experiences offered, it is important to think about how these benefits are marketed more assertively. And while we have made some progress in boosting the profile and perceived value of volunteering, and bringing it into the new age, it still lags behind other dimensions of charity engagement:

"I think it's one of the biggest challenges of our society really; that volunteering, unlike donating to charity, volunteering still doesn't have a high profile in the public consciousness, in the way that donating to charity does."

"The image 10 years ago I think was pretty poor, it had a real do-gooding element to it. I think part of that was that it wasn't being sold properly...you wouldn't do it, because you'd be seen as a do-gooder etc. I think what we see now, and I have to go back to the Olympics again, that volunteering is seen as something different now, something a lot more special."

So at a point in which we still face many barriers to encouraging volunteering on a large scale, as outlined in part two, why would this marketing effort *not* require a

more effective brand presence? Indeed, as our interviewers pointed out, it was just this PR boost that the Olympics was so successful in delivering, however fleeting. It proved for that moment in time that perhaps volunteering was not just something 'other people' do but something we could all be part of; something fun, something flexible to our time and interests, something *not* requiring selflessness or a 'do-gooder' personality.

There is a real need, then, for us to shake off both the cultural modesty and the sector's tendency to prioritise a fundraising profile that leads us to downplay the importance of volunteering; to stand up and be counted, and make a clear, unabashed case for civic participation.

"I think there's something about our culture of 'Oh yeah of course I help out, we all help out' [but] there's a shift of saying 'I'm a volunteer, I'm a dementia friend champion, I'm this, I'm that'. Where people are actually saying this as a positive thing to be doing. I went out to dinner with a whole bunch of Californians, and when I told them what I did for a living, they said 'Oh yeah, you're no one unless you engage in some kind of service!'"

"If I say to you, 'think of donating'... you could reel off half a dozen like Children In Need and Comic Relief, that you know are all about giving money for good causes. But we don't have anything like that when it comes to giving time and I think that's a real shame actually. It's something that we just don't seem to have cracked in this country, partly because I think the sector just can't agree with itself as to what it should be saying ... but maybe communicating the benefits of giving money is just much easier than talking about volunteering."

"When I was in the States I noticed that there was a real level of awareness and salesmanship and pride around volunteers... Like in the gay district of San Francisco there was like a whole bunch of scooters lined up with stickers that said "Volunteers are sexy"! And then I walk into a shop, I had no idea it was a charity shop, and saw these people wearing diamante brooches that said "volunteer"... There was huge awareness and I think we're only just starting to develop that awareness and the pride behind it."

Taking care to nurture Brand Volunteer is also a great way to promote volunteer satisfaction and ensure everyone involved feels a healthy glow of self-esteem and pride at the part they are playing, producing a virtuous cycle of engagement. It is a well-observed phenomenon that the more we are treated a certain way – as clever or kind or strong or attractive – the more we rise to it. So even volunteers who start slow, or are motivated by more immediate personal gains, are likely to grow into their role and become more engaged if they are made to feel part of something bigger and more important. Ultimately we all want to feel better about ourselves, the world and our part in it: volunteering marketing and experience that doesn't speak to this instinct will always be missing a trick, however well it targets more self-interested motives.

The Pygmalion and Galatea effects: rising to expectations⁵⁵

The Pygmalion phenomenon suggests that we perform better when higher expectations are placed on us and, conversely, if little is expected of us, we are less likely to rise to the challenge. Essentially, we adapt to others' perceptions of us and often have a tendency to act in accordance with them. Research conducted by Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson in 1968 showed that if children in a classroom were picked out as showing particular promise, they were likelier than others to prove this judgement right; expectations becoming reality.

Similarly, the Galatea effect suggests that this also works with our own self-image. If we think of ourselves as effective and capable, we are more likely to act as such. Or in Henry Ford's words, 'Whether you think you can, or you think you can't, you're probably right.' Applied to the ethos of volunteering, we can hypothesise that when charities and volunteer managers treat people as compassionate and generous individuals and the enterprise of volunteering as fun, rewarding and valuable, their commitment is likelier to be sustained and their experience richer as a result.

So who needs to be playing the central role here? There is certainly a need for louder sector-wide voices, as agreed by all survey respondents and interviewees. Yet beyond the role for government or umbrella organisations, the most effective cheerleaders for volunteering are those on the front line: volunteer managers, those who communicate on their behalf and volunteers themselves. Spending a little less time on the practicalities and a lot more on developing the **stories** and **voices** of volunteering is therefore time well invested – and the more of these tales, the better. While Brand Volunteer matters, it should be anything but unified: multiplicity, diversity and personalisation of experiences and access points are key.

And while we are getting better at this there is still much work to be done to ensure everyone can imagine themselves contributing in some way.

"I would imagine [10 years ago] there was a predominance of either people just not really understanding what [volunteering] was or that it was just seen as a very middle class, white female activity, working in quite a traditional charity shop role, that a lot of people wouldn't identify with.... I still don't think that a lot of people would consider themselves volunteers but I think there is a sense that doing something in the community, beyond what you're being paid to do, is accepted a bit more as a norm and therefore people may have a slightly wider expectation or perception of what volunteering might be. So rather than something done by white middle class women, it could be done by me or you or any of our immediate social networks. That's a slow change that needs to happen but I think it's definitely started."

It is also important to note that this brand has a responsibility to beneficiaries too. Just as we want to be able to cultivate and tap into altruism, even while targeting a broader range of motivations; we want to emphasise the help to be offered without reducing service users to victims. Moving away from the 'do-gooder' image mentioned by a number of interviewees and towards a much more multi-faceted, rich experience that depicts volunteers as learning and gaining from the exchange, just as beneficiaries do.

⁵⁵ It took a PhD and several degrees to come up with this headline.

This non-monetary exchange of time and energy for growth and social capital is something unique to the charity sector – and if outdated impressions of volunteering are still prevalent, now is the perfect time to change them and help refresh the way that the charities are viewed as a whole in the process. The more visible your volunteers, the more diverse they are in profile and role, the more empowered and vocal they are about why they're working with *you* - the better you do on every level. At a time when debates about public trust, concern about CEO salaries and admin costs, and the ongoing political hot potato of charity campaigning remain prevalent, nothing is more effective evidence of your mandate or better ambassador than an enthusiastic volunteer spreading the message about why they do what they do.

This is why volunteering is so crucial and why it is time for the sector to stop viewing it as secondary to the serious fields of fundraising or communications. Like both, it is alchemy – a process by which we take raw material and turn it into a tool to enact a change in the world. Volunteers can be not only the face of your services or a cheap way to secure key skills but a fundraising asset in and of themselves, a brand ambassador that keeps spreading the word years after they leave, and a channel through which you can truly connect with communities.

The rise of customisation and flexibility in volunteering

First and foremost, flexibility, adaptability and variety are now key for volunteer placement and there is little place left for what we dubbed the 'brawn' volunteer in our 2005 report. This is the one-size-fits-all role, with teams directed straight into envelope-stuffing, change-counting or office clearing with scant regard for the skills they bring or the hopes they have for their experience. Times have changed and volunteer expectations with them. As our interviewees all noted, it is now crucial that organisations respond to this and rise to the challenge if they are not to risk the flow of volunteers drying up altogether.

"All the time it's about pick and mix, it's not about one system for everybody.... it's about tailoring not just to your organisation but to what that team's doing, or what the aims of that role are, or what bit of work you've highlighted you're trying to progress towards. [It's about] your charity's goals and how that piece fits into the puzzle... It's about tailoring it continually."

"[It's about] how we adapt, how we're much more flexible, how we learn to let people do things for themselves, how we tailor our programmes and opportunities so that they're much more flexible and much more tailored to what people really want to do and what they're interested in - rather than just what works for us all the time. And I think that is a big challenge, I think it's a huge challenge."

In our 2014 survey of volunteer managers, too, 80% of those on the front-line agreed that volunteers are now more aware of what they want to get out of their experience - 28% of these agreeing 'completely' and half agreeing 'somewhat' while only a small minority' actively disagreed'.⁵⁶ Interestingly, however, managers were less sure that volunteers were "more demanding" than they used to be, with just 41% agreeing completely or somewhat, 34% neutral and 20% actively disagreeing.

⁵⁶ See page 66 for full summary of key findings.

What this underlines is the fact that it is not volunteers changing – to become more high-maintenance than their easy-going predecessors – but the world around us. Even in the context of recession impacts, less than a fifth (18%) thought volunteers had become more demanding about their tasks.

It is important to remember that, as part 1 of this report described, the world we all live in is now faster, more hectic and offers more choice than ever - and volunteering experiences can't remain stuck in the static past. Charities do not need to innovate for its own sake or abandon all traditional roles but they do need to start exercising more creativity and flexibility in the way volunteer roles are set up. It is therefore essential the sector continues to diversify the kind of roles that are available, integrating them into organisational goals and finding ways to build volunteering opportunities which can fit into different life stages and be responsive to volunteers' other commitments in the way donating already is.

Canadian research has emphasised that of those who do not volunteer, 69% nominated 'lack of time' as a key reason and 46% said they were unwilling to make a year-round commitment.⁵⁷ We know all too well that time and the difficulty of a regular commitment will continue to be the core obstacle to volunteering, for all the reasons outlined earlier. Even if the real reason lies elsewhere, lack of time will be the easy excuse for volunteers who simply have too many competing demands to prioritise charities. So let's make it easier and more attractive for them.

"The product we're selling isn't competing against other volunteer opportunities, it's competing against people's spare time. So many people would say they can't volunteer because they've got no spare time. They did have spare time, but they value it so much higher than volunteering, that's the simple truth. So that's why we need to be much smarter about how we sell our volunteering product."

"If people become increasingly time poor, then the challenge is to come up with opportunities that are much more appealing and much more flexible and much more able to accommodate the time poor, but also have quite clear calls to action."

To accommodate these constraints, it is vital that charities become more flexible and imaginative in the way they conceptualise volunteering and its management. Time, minimum commitments, levels of supervision and locations for volunteering all need to become much more adaptive. As Rob Jackson described it in our 2005 report, it is helpful to ensure a clear beginning, middle and end to a volunteering opportunity, so that volunteers have a clear sense of what they are signing up for and don't feel beholden to a lifelong commitment. This doesn't preclude an ongoing role, or prevent the volunteer from moving on to another task. In fact, offering a more time-specific commitment is likely to be much more effective in maintaining enthusiasm and a sense of free will – rather than a voluntary role becoming a chore they feel bound to.

"It's important that dialogue is a two way relationship and you've got to keep that two way relationship going. People will want to leave volunteering at some point in their lives, and it's important to understand when that point is. If you miss that point, they're going to get unhappy and at some point they might just walk out one day and never come back."

⁵⁷ 'Understanding Canadian Volunteers', Norah McClintock.

The potential of micro-volunteering

Micro-volunteering is perhaps the most obvious way in which the sector has tried to incorporate more time-flexibility into volunteering. On the one hand, these are often viewed as 'taster roles' to introduce prospective volunteers to tasks before too much investment in training, and hopefully lead to more substantial commitment. Indeed, our survey results showed 45% of volunteer managers thought it provided a "good introduction" to volunteering and volunteering experts such as Steve McCurley in the US have suggested short-term roles may lead to bigger pools of long-term volunteers by making it easier to sample volunteering and allow small commitments to lead to larger ones.

"All the evidence suggests that if you give people an opportunity to have a go at something before committing themselves, then they're far more likely to take that first step..., they're far more likely to do more of them or adopt a longer term volunteering habit, even if it continues to be episodic."

While this possibility should help to allay charity fears that short-term opportunities will dilute proper induction and training, and simply lead to higher volunteer turnovers; perhaps the 'gateway volunteering' argument is also missing a trick. Making volunteering more accessible should certainly open the way to incremental engagement of a more on-going nature and foster patterns of voluntary work which keep evolving throughout a supporter's lifetime. However, even if it doesn't – and simply reaches people unlikely to offer a larger commitment, or those who would have volunteered more extensively anyway - does that make the initiative a waste?

Perhaps rather than continuing to see a dichotomy between 'micro' and regular volunteering, we simply need to be opening up the way we see volunteering altogether. Rather than seeing micro-volunteering as a gateway opportunity, the sector is trying to package 21st century volunteering into a 20th century logic, which still tends to view long-term commitment and retention as the proper end goals. It may be that a micro-volunteer becomes a traditional volunteer, or perhaps they will simply dip in and out of small-scale tasks sporadically, and that would be a fine outcome too. Expanding volunteering and making it resilient to 21st century life means embracing all these possibilities.

Case Study: Micro-volunteering

Gamer volunteering: Cancer Research UK's 'Genes in space'

"Genes in Space is the world's first free mobile game that uses the collective force of players to analyse real genetic data and help beat cancer sooner."

'Genes in Space' is a mobile app in which players analyse variations of real gene data by moving through an intergalactic assault course. It makes up one aspect of the innovative micro-volunteering and digital volunteering approach being taken by Cancer Research UK. This approach centres on the 'digital do' button on their website which when pressed suggests a single, often quick and easy way to volunteer, donate or fundraise.

The charity has previously used online volunteering through an online program called CellSlider released in 2012, where volunteers classify different types of cells within images of tumour samples. Its success meant that within two years 200,000 people had participated, classifying two million cancer images between them, "six times faster than it would have taken a team of scientists." Smart-phone technology may help 'Genes in space' reach even greater success as the game is more accessible than its predecessor and more likely to fit into everyday life.

The combination of entertainment and reward therefore allows Cancer Research UK to tap into a very different group of volunteers than would be attracted to more traditional roles. The game is marketed as a way to transform "boring train journeys, queues for that gig or waiting for that friend who's always late" into "exhilarating space adventures." Indeed at no point is volunteering mentioned in the game's description. Instead, the more serious benefits of the game (to cancer research) are presented as an added bonus to the entertainment itself.

Regardless of the eventual commitment, the pool of participants is widened, work is completed and word-of-mouth is passed on in ever-more diverse circles. As Nikki Squelch of Alzheimer's UK (a health and social care organisation which we might assume requires more reliable ongoing volunteers) views it, we simply need to be more creative about conceptualising and recruiting roles – as well as altering our idea of successful outcomes:

"Don't just recruit one person for one role. Look at different ways of doing things. So if you know that you've got a dementia café that needs people to help out with catering every week, why just recruit one person to do it? Why not recruit three or four and then just say "come on guys, share the burden, talk to each other, who's going to cover each day? What's better? To attract one person who does 10 hours or to attract 10 people who do one hour? It's all about balance. Yes there's less cost in terms of the process of engaging one person, but how long can they realistically sustain 10 hours... and by the way you've only got one person knowing about the cause, so wouldn't it be better to have 10 people knowing about the cause, speaking about the cause, attracting more people?"

Ultimately charities should see all energy invested in every supporter or volunteer, as an investment in the future; however fleeting or uncertain their engagement may be over a lifetime. As mentioned above, the Pygmalion effect may mean that being viewed as a volunteer, for however small a task, leads to a virtuous circle where individuals start viewing themselves in a more altruistic light and seeking more involvement. Alternatively, perhaps someone who otherwise might never have had time to contribute anything at all, is finally able to offer half an hour once or twice a

year. What proves most valuable is nurturing the idea of 'lifecycle supporters' rather than 'lifetime volunteers', who do what they can, when they can, and will mention it to others.

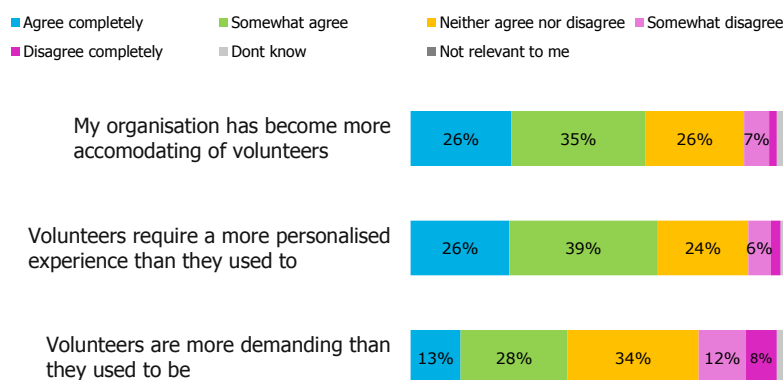
"Who are they going to talk about to their friends and family about their time volunteering? They will talk about how it's brilliant, and they're the best people to recruit other volunteers with, because they're not being paid to say nice things. There's value around giving the volunteer a fantastic experience and not handcuffing them to the office, until they escape. I think that's why it's so important to have that flexibility within the volunteering experience."

Personalisation: removing the volunteer 'glass ceiling'

A key aspect of this process of making things easier, not harder, for society to embrace volunteering is personalisation. In 2014, almost nothing in our lives remains untailed. In a time when, described earlier in this report, the personalisation of choice dictates everything from public services to digital TV, it is anomalous to continue assigning volunteers to tasks they have little connection with and offering no opportunity to evolve their engagement according to interest and aptitude. On the one hand, while many core tasks will always need doing, it also seems a tremendous waste to imagine those countless individuals unable to apply their talents: former finance directors rattling tins, marketing students doing the filing or those with a lifetime of caring for others stuck in more back-office roles when they could be working in befriending or care roles. On the other, a fulfilled volunteer able to pursue their interests is a happy volunteer.

In our survey, the majority of volunteer managers agreed that volunteers now require a more personalised experience than they used to, a quarter (26%) agreeing completely and a further 39% agreeing somewhat.

Figure 11: Volunteers within organisations



"Volunteers are more demanding than they used to be: To what extent do you agree with the following statements on volunteers in your organisation?"

Base: 501 - 509 Respondents
Source: Managing Volunteers Survey 2013, nfpSynergy

29

Balancing organisational need against the need to grow with individuals is therefore a critical skill for the 21st century volunteer manager who hopes to nurture a lively,

engaged volunteer team and a culture that uses its resources creatively. This was also a theme our interviewees strongly endorsed.

"We talk about removing the volunteer glass ceiling, so we're quite good at involving high numbers of people in relatively low skilled roles, what we want to get better at is also involving small numbers of people in higher skilled roles - so things like the consultancy is a good example of that, people who might have a particular expertise or specialism and want to support property operations."

"They don't want to sign up to a role, they want to sign up to the cause... They don't want to be managed. They want to be engaged, and I think that is a big challenge for organisations [that may have] a real strong command and control culture"

"What we try and do as well as possible is understand why they volunteer for us, what they expect from us, and how that changes over time... If they're not honest with us about that then it makes it difficult for both of us. I would say that I don't mind what your reason is for volunteering with us, I don't mind if it's for a purely selfish reason. As long as you're achieving what we ask you to achieve and what you wanted to achieve, brilliant, absolutely brilliant. So yes - be honest, be respectful, and I guess trust us."

Personalisation is not about trying to cater to every whim, nor being obliged to construct entirely bespoke roles. It is simply about signing up the volunteer as an individual, respecting their uniqueness and working together to ensure your organisation is making best use of their talents. One of the great things about the Olympics, thought some, was that it created this impression: volunteers being themselves and bringing their own energy rather than being forced into a mould:

"During the Olympics a lot of the news items were about how brilliant the volunteers were and you saw volunteers singing and dancing. You saw volunteers on the tube train in their uniforms and people would speak to them. Volunteers were seen as real people, whereas a lot of organisations try and mould volunteers into what they want them to be. I think what we need to learn from that is that we want to positively encourage volunteers just to be themselves, to show their personalities. I don't think we as a sector do that at the moment. We're kind of scared that volunteers will say the wrong thing."

It is perhaps here that consumer culture is most influential, as we have transitioned from passive audience for brands to active, critical agents. This change poses a potential shock for charities, especially larger ones used to running volunteers in a more traditional way. As one of our interviewees puts it:

"We're seeing a greater expectation by individuals to be able to choose an activity that they want to do, that fits in with their lifestyles, as opposed to simply slotting into what charities expect them to do. It's almost like putting more emphasis on the consumer, as opposed to the charity."

Allowing this amount of tailoring and autonomy is a sea change that may feel daunting, but imagine the pay-offs: happier, more engaged volunteers; a more authentic public face for the public and beneficiaries alike; and a potentially limitless pool of human resources to marshal for your cause.

Case Study: Volunteers in the driving seat

Setting the research agenda: Alzheimer's Society's Research Network

Volunteering opportunities at Alzheimer's Society include their innovative 'Research Network', which consists of 250 volunteers who are themselves dementia sufferers, carers or former carers. Volunteers have 6-8 grant applications sent to them every 2 months, as well as invitations to sit on grant panels with other professionals. They also have the opportunity to monitor current research projects, allowing for volunteers and researchers to understand the pressures and priorities for each group. The volunteers ensure that outcomes from research projects result in tangible benefits for dementia sufferers and help spread the message to local communities once new findings and benefits are available.

Potential members are referred by medical professionals, colleagues, friends and families and the Network's success is attributed to combining the knowledge and experience of those living with the illness with the skills and knowledge of research professionals. The Research Network is now in its 15th year (originally named 'Quality Research in Dementia') and has won an award for its effectiveness.

A wide range of specialist support is provided to participants including a 2-day training course when first enlisted. They are also provided with personal support from the Research Network Area Co-ordinator and the local Alzheimer's Society volunteer officer to answer any questions they have. Each member of the Research Network has access to the online Alzheimer's Society's training and educational resources. The scheme is a fantastic example of how volunteering doesn't have to be restricted to traditional or low-skilled service delivery roles - but can contribute substantively much higher up in the organisation and feed into areas usually thought of as highly professionalised. It also ensures that those most affected by dementia have a meaningful voice in setting the Society's research agenda, rather than being treated as passive beneficiary groups.

Putting volunteers at the heart of shaping their own roles

In order to achieve this vision for 21st century volunteering, a consultative and responsive approach to what volunteers have to offer and what they want to achieve is vital. Many organisations will already have some form of volunteer survey and supervision systems in place which offer the perfect starting point to make sure your information-gathering process is right. What questions do you need to ask to ensure you are capturing the right information about your volunteers' skills, hopes, suggestions and grievances? What personal supervision structure needs to be in place so they feel both supported and as though they are helping to design their own experience? And are there new ideas which would help any of this communication along – from volunteer-specific portals for larger charities through to something as simple as encouraging a Facebook group for current and former volunteers to share ideas?

"I think a lot of it is about knowledge and it's about having a much better understanding about what it is your potential volunteers are interested in and what they want to do... it's obviously a starting point to look at your organisation and work out what it is you need to be done but at the same time, you need to be doing a lot more consultation with existing volunteers or potential volunteers"

As already discussed, feeling that we are making progress is a key driver for most of us in any venture, whether paid or unpaid. So rather than treating volunteering as an ever on-going cycle, building in milestones and goals may be very beneficial to maintain a sense of purpose, as well as reviews and one-to-ones; just as many of us have in our professional lives. Even for longer-term, on-going roles, it is helpful to ensure there are short and medium-term goals to help keep volunteers motivated and engaged with the role. Above all, it is desirable that volunteer managers encourage their volunteers to play an *active* role in this process; able to help set goals and define skills or experiences they are keen to use or build.

Getting the most out of your empowered volunteers

Your 21st century volunteer comes to you more knowledgeable than ever - give them autonomy and you may be surprised at how much innovation starts to flourish. A key benefit of an empowered volunteer, much like a paid employee, is their ability to offer and test new ideas and ways of working. For a charity able to relinquish some control, and the idea that volunteers must be under constant supervision, the pay-off could be the most low-cost and imaginative innovation vehicle you've ever had.

Volunteers are operating outside the world of paid HR resourcing and may well already have academic or professional experience relevant to all the bright ideas you never have the time or money to explore. Listen to their suggestions, recruit or look out for skillsets that tally with ideas you already have on the backburner and have the courage to offer as much autonomy as you're comfortable with for the project. Harnessing volunteer innovation can be as simple as finding the marketing student happy to take on that new audience research project you have in mind, or recruiting someone who works in event management happy to pilot a new fundraising concept pro bono. Or it may be much more ambitious, involving brand new corporate volunteering schemes to departments you never thought would be suitable for volunteers.

A further benefit from a more consultative model of volunteering is simply that it fosters and utilises much more authoritative engagement. Your typical volunteer is no longer a passive caretaker doing what's expected and asking few questions, but a knowledgeable, dynamic asset to the cause, engaging critically with your work. After all, this is how we now approach both our professional and personal lives: why should volunteering be any different? As Rachael Bayley of Save the Children argues, many volunteers now want much more information about strategic decisions, while others are happy with more limited involvement – and both are clear about their preferences:

"For volunteers who are more engaged with your cause for whatever reason, they want much more information about the reasons why and how... "Why is it six months ago you were campaigning about nutrition and now you're campaigning about another topic?" and they want to be able to say that as a chief executive would. Then there's another group of volunteers who feel much more pushed for their time and they want to do little snippets of things, which they can access very easily, through digital or practical means. They want to know "I can count 10 of these or sort 50 of these and that helps, I get a thank you via a text and I want less

information, I don't want loads of big presentations and the reasons why you're doing this".

Few of us would hope to spend our career having tasks assigned arbitrarily to us or our professional objectives being dictated without active feedback - if for no other reason than we are naturally more invested, empowered and effective when we exercise agency in our work.

"As organisations use the language of engagement much more and think about and talk about wanting to work with local communities and with their volunteers or with their members or supporters, that raises expectations to being able to work in partnership."

Let's make sure that volunteer management allows charities to meet those heightened expectations.

Professional volunteer recruitment marketing

So how does all this manifest in practice? Of all the messages this report emphasises, there is one which dominates and which was most frequently reiterated among our interviewees: **understand your audiences and create opportunities that work for them**. It is also important to remember that it is the world changing, not the volunteers themselves. They are no more 'demanding' or 'selfish' than before, but the landscape of engagement has shifted for all of us. Keeping pace with this may seem tougher and more high-maintenance at first glance, but it's a necessary investment with strong returns – more engaged, diverse and potentially, life-long supporters and the chance to create truly sustainable voluntary resourcing models across all the work you do.

And just as we need to think harder about the right people in the right roles, recruitment messages need to be much more engaging, clear and targeted. In short: **don't market volunteering, market the product**.

In our 2005 report we cited a five-step process outlined in Canadian research for targeting specific volunteers effectively.⁵⁸ This approach remains every bit as salient to volunteer managers today and is well worth internalising so it structures all role development and recruitment messaging. Remember to consider not just hard, tangible motivations such as learning skills but also the softer, more altruistic motivations outlined earlier in this report.

1. Define the task/role that needs to be addressed – your resourcing wish list
2. Select an appropriate target group – researched and understood
3. Consider:
 - What are their motivations? What benefits will they respond to?
 - What are the barriers to their involvement?
4. Based on key motivations and barriers, consider how the task/role could be packaged to create the most compelling offer
5. Outline your message:
 - What will the volunteer gain?
 - What will the task/role accomplish for your organisation/for the community?

⁵⁸ 'Understanding Canadian Volunteers', Norah McClintock.

When designing new roles, organisations should be continually referring back to their vision and mission. What are you trying to achieve and how? Are there things your organisation would like to achieve that are not currently being addressed or resourced? Are there things you would like to do more of - or better? And finally, how could the discrete tasks and roles implied in all this break down into individual volunteer responsibilities? This resourcing 'wish list' can help ensure that volunteers are being deployed effectively and also make it much simpler for volunteers themselves – almost all of whom will be there to make some kind of difference, regardless of self-interest - to understand the task and see 'the point' in their work.

Table 2: A targeted volunteer recruitment strategy

Application of the five-step process for developing an effective recruitment/management strategy	
Task	Organise a major fundraising event
Target group	20-25 year olds
Key motivations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making a difference • Enhancing career potential • Opportunity to socialise
Relevant trend data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students more likely than non-students to volunteer so consider targeting universities
Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time, especially during classes and in block exams • Money for travel and expenses
Packaging considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people are looking to enhance their careers, but we do not have the resource for full training. We will target students with relevant theoretical knowledge (e.g. hospitality students) and offer them the chance to apply their skills in the real world • In order to a) ensure the job is done properly and b) provide extra incentive, we may contact potential corporate partners to find 'mentors' on whose advice and experience volunteers can draw, even via email • Plan event for the end of the summer so students don't have conflicting priorities in terms of classes and exams • Consider allocating to a small number of students so that the role feels supported and social, building soft skills • Allow working from home if they preferred
Message	"Are you a hospitality student looking for fun work experience, the chance to meet people and a way to make the world a better place? Then do we have an opportunity for you. Here at Rainforest Concern we are looking for three enthusiastic and talented students to work together in developing and overseeing a major fundraising event. Funds raised from the event, which will be held at the end of the summer holiday, will go towards the preservation of the beautiful but disappearing Peruvian rainforests. Successful applicants will be given complete creative control and will receive tutelage and support from one of the commercial sector's leading event managers. Travel expenses and a professional reference will be provided"

Some core principles to remember when planning your volunteering opportunities: first, time-flexibility is key wherever feasible; second, you must market an opportunity, not volunteering overall – and know who you're selling it to; and third, the role of using the appropriate technologies and media to facilitate this is a crucial opportunity only partially learned in the volunteering sector. Thinking creatively

about the best media to use for your purposes can also have the potential to make ongoing organisation and communications much more volunteer-led in the long run.

"Given how many people use [Do it] every month, there's clearly a big demand for it and you look at the growth of social media and how simple it is for people to put a call out and to promote what they're doing ... I think technology is absolutely critical and that if you're not using it to engage and develop relationships, then as an organisation you're definitely missing out."

The next part of this report focuses on a few of the key target audiences that charities need to get to grips with and suggest some of the critical themes volunteer managers will want to bear in mind when engaging with them.

Part 5 - Engaging the young, the old and the family to volunteer

Making volunteering an unpaid job for experience-hungry young people

When it comes to attracting young people, the key game-changer has been the increasing competition of the job-market and the additional pressure that the recessionary context has placed on those just entering the workplace. While the development of skills and experience has always been a crucial motivation for young people seeking voluntary work, the need to acquire extensive CV material amidst a shrinking pool of traditional 'entry-level' roles is now essentially pre-requisite to gainful employment. The good news is that young people are definitely on the look-out for good quality volunteering opportunities: Our survey found that volunteer numbers peaked at the start and close to the end of the age spectrum, with notable dips reported in the core child-rearing decade of 35-44 and among the over 75s. It was also felt by 40% of managers that the recession had led to a rise in younger volunteers.

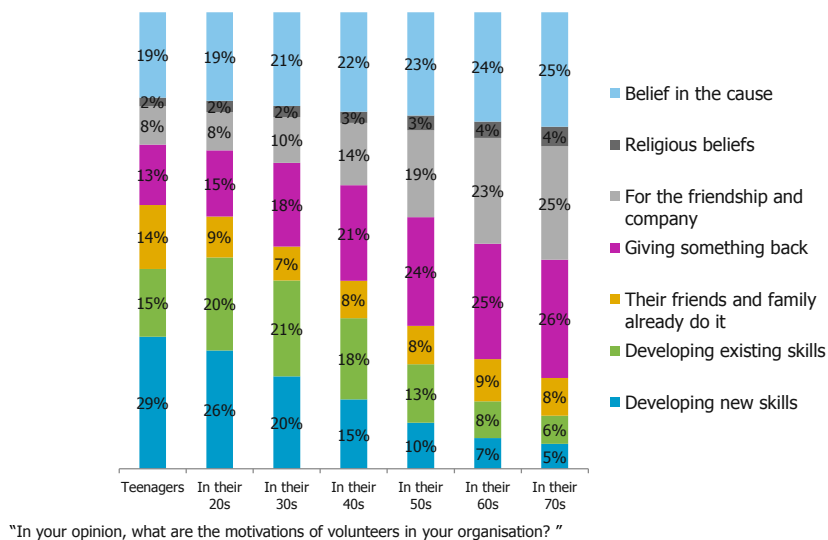
Motivations have always been wide-ranging but it also seems clear that tangible, practical benefits are crucial for young people needing help accessing the career ladder. Our volunteer managers⁵⁹ felt that of all the motives they had noticed increasing across the board, improving CVs came top (81%) and developing new skills next at 72%. Skills-based factors were specifically deemed most important for younger volunteers, against more cause and social-related factors for older volunteers, as the below shows.

Light opportunities that speak to fun, socialising and leisure still have their place, but the key takeaway is that young people are often in need of meaty, substantive placements that offer them something significant to take into the future.

"In an increasingly competitive jobs market volunteering is one of the things that a lot of young people aspire to, to try and do and get on their CV... [There is] a greater expectation for people to actually have good quality experience within the opportunities that are available, rather than the light touch, fluffy things.... I think people are looking for some quite decent, meaty work that they can count on their CV."

⁵⁹ Our volunteer manager survey is covered in the next chapter of this report.

Figure 12: Motivation of volunteers by age



Base: 516 Respondents
Source: Managing Volunteers Survey 2013, nfpSynergy

50

For charities seeking to attract young people, therefore, it is important to ensure opportunities work on three levels:

- Providing strong skills-building and skills-testing
- Providing unique and distinctive experiences and challenges to broaden young people's horizons
- Being sensitive to the language, support and packaging of an opportunity so they come away able to boast a significant addition to their CV

Unsurprisingly, the volunteering focus for young people has often been on students; both because of some evidence that students are generally more likely to volunteer than non-students⁶⁰ and for the self-selecting reason that young people are most easily accessed in an educational setting of some kind. However, in the pressurised setting young people find themselves today, it is important to take a more inclusive and creative approach to cultivating young audiences.

Concerns regarding the lack of clarity regarding 'internships' do need to be taken seriously: Even among volunteer managers, we found substantial agreement that legislation needs to be clearer on the distinction between internships and volunteering, with 64% overall agreement and over a third agreeing completely. To a certain extent, the distinction is a marketing issue which can help lend more weight and authority to a placement on a CV. However, there are also important questions to consider regarding the structure, duration, fairness of expectations and terms of commitment for an intern experience, which may often be structured much more closely to a paid role and on which the third sector should take care to act responsibly and with integrity.

"In terms of internships, it tends to be much more about wanting to develop skills and experience, which is great, a lot of our volunteers want to do that as well, it's no different. The one difference is by calling it an internship, it actually attracts more

⁶⁰ 'Understanding Canadian Volunteers', Norah McClintock.

young people from colleges than if we call it volunteering. It really is as simple as that, so I think there needs to be a greater clarification within the volunteering sector - that we are clear that actually unpaid internships are generally just volunteering opportunities. I think that's where it's got confused."

Encouraging clarity in volunteering

It will be particularly important in the current climate to ensure charities are clear what is, and isn't, likely to lead to a job, and be aware of the potential for exploitation where young volunteers may be hoping for a paid opportunity to arise. As with all expectations, channels of communication should be kept open and honest regarding the nature of the roles being offered.

"Certainly we've seen more and more younger people coming through who want to do volunteering as a way into paid employment and I would say particularly in the last 2 ½ - 3 years, when the jobs market has been as it is, there's been more of those volunteers specifically looking for something that will help them to get a job. There was always that, that's been around forever in volunteering but I think there's more of that now."

More broadly, as one of our interviewees noted, culturally we run a risk of putting young people off volunteering altogether if roles do not hit the right balance or are too aggressively marketed at a generation already facing wide under-employment, rising housing costs and huge student debt. Volunteering is no silver bullet, guaranteeing employment, and linking the two together too closely may backfire.

"One of the things that slightly worries me about the fact that we've got a generation of young people who want to work but society tells them that what they've got to do is go and volunteer instead, so we could be storing up problems for ourselves in the future - young people who are actually turned off volunteering because it was what everybody made them do when what they wanted was paid work. So I think there's some big changes down the line and I'm not entirely sure organisations are ready for them."

"I think when you look at some of the wider research about whether in general volunteering helps employability, I think there are mixed results. And I think that depends on the quality of the volunteering, the individual has to value it at some leveland the quality of the volunteer placement has to be good ... it's a mixed picture, it's not the magic wand, it's not the same for everybody."

Beyond these concerns, there are many practical points regarding youth volunteering that organisations do well to remember, however obvious they sound. Placements must be flexible to take into account holiday periods, when students may go home, and also exam times. Students need to be able to find out about and sign-up for volunteering opportunities online and make best possible use of social media. And above all, charities must be able to provide clear, attractive and accessible information on volunteering so that young people used to snappy, sophisticated and dynamic media sources can relate to the opportunities on offer. This doesn't mean style over substance but simply that charities ensure they are thinking in their audiences shoes and not simply expecting that the truly committed volunteer will wade through information to find them.

Case Study: Widening access to opportunities

Online databases: Do-it.org.uk

The increasing reach of online 'hubs' where volunteers can register to be matched with a wide range of organisations and different activities is one of the most significant developments in volunteering since our first edition. An example of this includes do-it.org.uk, one of the largest volunteering databases, which has been running since 2000. The opportunities on offer vary from one-off support for charity events, through to three or six month long commitments as a befriender to a vulnerable member of society. They also vary between unskilled and skilled positions. The site states that most volunteers can expect "payment of out-of pocket expenses (e.g. travel); a clear idea of what your role will be; and appropriate training and support" and individual details are left to each organisation to define.

As well as more general databases, we have also seen the development of some targeting specific types of volunteering opportunities. International Citizen Service is a volunteering hub which offers 18-25 year old opportunities for international volunteering in a more targeted format, and requires each volunteer to fundraise £8,000 on their own to cover the costs. It promises to cover the expenses of the actual trip, as well as providing training for the 8-10 week long project, and the option to continue campaigning work afterwards. Volunteering opportunities for the ICS can therefore capitalise on younger groups seeking alternatives to gap year travelling while building up their CVs, in order to offer a unified and specialised offer for a demographic with a clear interest in acquiring skills alongside adventure.

The Samaritans have long provided an example of how to do this well. Young people can easily transfer to a different regional office during holiday time and its website manages to tick off a number of points regarding accessibility:

- The website and subsequent volunteering page is easy to find
- The page stresses how important volunteers are to the organisation and emphasises the opportunity to make a real difference
- It highlights that volunteering with the Samaritans will be an 'experience' – a challenging and rewarding one
- It offers different mechanisms through which people can volunteer, including online.
- Provides information about possible volunteer opportunities including details about skills needed, training offered, support and level of commitment expected
- Provides pictures and stories of young volunteers from different backgrounds, showing that Samaritans is a place for a diverse range of vibrant young people
- Presented concisely so readers can find exactly what they need to know

When seeking to engage with young people, therefore, the best advice is to understand the pressures they are under and look around at what other charities are offering. Formal accreditation schemes are still woefully thin on the ground, and the Community Volunteering Qualifications previously offered by Asdan Education was recently announced to be discontinued.⁶¹ Demos, along with other organisations, is arguing that there is a pressing need for the development of meaningful volunteer qualifications that employers can use to evaluate job

⁶¹ Wyborn, I. (2014) 'Why there is a need for volunteering qualifications,' Volunteering Hub, *The Guardian* (Accessed June 2014:<http://www.theguardian.com/voluntary-sector-network/2014/may/20/why-there-is-need-for-volunteering-qualifications>)

applications (both young and older).⁶² Yet even in their comparative absence, charities must be live to the needs of their youngest supporters: what's happening with the job market and what might you be able to offer or package differently? Ensure you are offering something of tangible social and professional benefit that young people already warm to your cause might benefit from. As Helen Timbrell notes, for those interested in third sector work or conservation in particular, a National Trust placement can be a really competitive offer that is entirely win-win, whether volunteers stay on or not:

"There's quite a good track record of people moving on and less likely to stay on as volunteers but I don't think that's a failure, I don't think that's not a success. If their motivation for volunteering was to move into paid work and it's helped them do that, that's a success to me."

Once again, it is about rethinking the terms of the 21st century volunteer and what success looks like as part of the holistic support cycle, rather than a more narrow focus on 'retaining'. For young people just starting out in charitable engagement this could include volunteering, interning, paid work, donating, fundraising or online campaigning – or simply having a one-off positive experience that helps set them up and sends them on their way as informal ambassadors.

"Younger people will come in and come out of volunteering because they've got so many things going on in their lives. Volunteering isn't going to be the most important thing on their agenda, and that's where the flexibility bit comes in. Saying, "You can come in and do this bit, and when you want to leave that's fine." Because we've giving you a brilliant experience, when you've got time to volunteer again, the idea is that you'll come back to us. You want to create that ongoing relationship regardless of whether they happen to be volunteering with you at that particular time... If they've got money to donate at some point in the future, who will they donate to - a charity they volunteered for, or a charity they've got no experience with?"

Older people are different: they have more time!

So how to recognise these changes and ensure you are working with your older volunteers to offer experiences both valuable and adaptable for their retirement years? The usual motives assumed of this group may still apply regarding opportunities for friendship and giving something back, different and challenging opportunities that utilise a lifetime of professional skills may be much more critical than in the past. And sadly, many people still find themselves isolated – especially into the older retirement age bracket, as one of our interviewees notes:

"A lot of our volunteers, one of their key motivations around that is that a volunteer for them tackles social isolation, it tackles loneliness, it enables them to get out of the house. Or they've experienced a service with us and they want to get more involved."

However, volunteer opportunities must also recognise that our 60s, 70s and even 80s are not what they once were and, as a charity, your voluntary role is likely to be

⁶² Wyborn, I. (2014) 'Why there is a need for volunteering qualifications,' Volunteering Hub, *The Guardian* (Accessed June 2014:<http://www.theguardian.com/voluntary-sector-network/2014/may/20/why-there-is-need-for-volunteering-qualifications>)

competing with ongoing work commitments, grandchildren, global holidays, active social lives and other new hobbies.

When exploring volunteer habits amongst the elderly, the Royal Voluntary Service found that 1 in 5 older people volunteer for two or more charities⁶³. That is over two million retirees aged over 60. Many of these volunteers were branded 'Portfolio volunteers', meaning that they carry out a range of different volunteer roles with a number of organisations. While men often volunteered with community sport organisations or health charities, women spent time working with children's charities and lunch clubs.

When asked what motivated them, 83% of over 60 year olds stated that they believed the work of the charity was very important, and for 76% this was a cause close to their heart. 46% of the elderly volunteered because they felt they needed a purpose, while 39% did so to follow in the footsteps of a relation. Finally, 15% volunteered to gain new skills and 3% decided to volunteer as they were fed up with a spouse! The reasons are as varied as at any age and roles on offer should reflect this. As another of our interviewees put it:

"[The challenge is] the increasing range of other things that you can do with your leisure time and the fact that people are working longer and if they're not working longer, they're probably looking after their grandchildren, they are much more selective about what they're going to do with their free time and therefore, expect to be able to give in a slightly more flexible way. We've identified all of those things as trends that we need to face into.

They want flexibility so they will still give you 70 hours but they just want to give you 70 hours every Tuesday; they'll work on a project but do it in their own time, some weeks spending many hours on it, some weeks they won't. They still give you considerable skills and experience and considerable time, but in a flexible, changing way all the time, and charities and organisations need to be making the most of that."

Older people: a changing demographic

So investigate further and make fewer assumptions. Look at those already working with you and consider their different life stages, levels of affluence and the interest they display. Think about what different typologies become visible when we stop viewing this group as a homogenous 'retiree' demographic. The busy woman in her late 60s, still working part-time and also looking after the grandkids a few times a week but seeking a new challenge for her one spare afternoon a week? The gentleman in his 70s struggling to adjust to retirement after a busy career and keen to use his professional skills to stay busy and pass on expertise? The couple almost into their 80s but taking several cruises a year and looking for something they can dip in and out of when back in the UK? Older people still provide as fantastic a pool of voluntary resourcing as ever but they increasingly look very different from the way the sector has come to know them and require greater flexibility to deploy to the greatest effect.

⁶³ Royal Voluntary Service (2013) 1 in 5 older people volunteer for 2 charities or more <http://www.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/news-and-events/news/1-in-5-older-people-volunteer-for-2-charities-or-more> Accessed April 30th 2014

It is also important to note that old assumptions about the ways to communicate with older audiences become less salient by the year. While there are clear age patterns to many technologies, things move quickly and use of the internet and mobile technology is growing fast. So again, research your particular audiences rather than falling back on lazy assumptions – phone and postal mail may still be important to many but ever-larger proportions will expect email contact and Facebook messaging, just like their younger counterparts.

A final note of caution may be that if the right opportunities do not seem to be forthcoming, for this generation as well as younger people, we may simply see increasing numbers of older people doing it for themselves and setting up entirely new initiatives. This may promise an even greater, more diverse and flourishing third sector but for existing charities hoping to harness the baby boomer potential, it should also serve as a warning: adapt and evolve your offer, or risk losing out.

"I was in Canada recently and they were saying that they're starting to see baby boomers wanting to volunteer, not enjoying the experience they get from traditional voluntary sector organisations and so they're going off and setting up their own organisations... So if [we are] not adapting to the way that the world's changing and continuing with traditional models, then some volunteers may get frustrated with that and go and set up their own organisations to try and tackle those issues instead... that's certainly what we're seeing in North America and I think we'll start to see it here as well."

Group volunteering: families, friends and employees

When thinking about group volunteering opportunities, for most of us, the go-to image would be a corporate morale-building day involving painting (or re-painting) a classroom or building something superfluous in an expensive, high-maintenance arrangement that provides little real use for the charity – and often little in the way of a meaningful charitable engagement for the individuals concerned.

"The traditional model has been around companies sending their staff out for a jolly day painting sheds and digging ditches and whatever [and] their impact is questionable because quite often the charity has to make up activities to provide for staff and do you really want someone who's not particularly skilled, coming in to redecorate your premises? You don't do you? It's a bizarre concept but one that's been around for a long time."

The challenge then remains in creating group opportunities that fill a genuine need and work for both parties, while allowing for more one-off participation. It is perhaps group volunteering which brings volunteering closest to a broader community-engagement model; less about service delivery itself and more about the wider way in which you engage with society – part brand and marketing, part fundraising, part services.

Two obvious opportunities to get it right are employee volunteering and family engagement – but there is no reason we shouldn't be thinking harder about how to facilitate all kinds of group opportunities that allow us to deconstruct the divide between volunteering and leisure (or even 'working') time. In short, we need ways to further blur the lines and transfer the 'giving while living' equation that has worked so well in fundraising, to the volunteering sphere.

Workplace engagement

Engaging employees in volunteering initiatives ought to be a no-brainer, in the same way that seeking sponsorship from colleagues is. Bring corporate social responsibility together with skills and team-building work, alongside providing an entry point for employees to engage further as private individuals appears to promise win-win outcomes. As so often, charity and corporate relationships are already well-integrated into funding and marketing functions in many organisations from corporate events, formal partnerships and sponsorships through to the pro-bono model already common in sectors such as law.

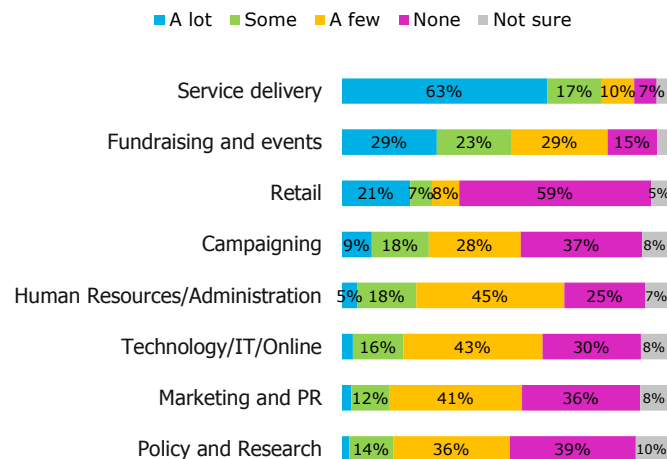
The next step in expanding and regularising a greater role for employee engagement must therefore be twofold: **expanding workplace opportunities for regular volunteering allowances** and more substantive pro-bono placements in areas of professional expertise; and **developing more effective and mutually beneficial group opportunities** that combine useful work or income for the charity with team-building or strategy functions for the company.

In the first instance, the sector should focus on developing more consultative or project-based placements for professionals who can bring much-needed expertise to a charity within the rubric of their working hours. This could be a day a week over a period of time, or even a short secondment. Or it could be as simple as a rolling company commitment to a lunch club, with individual employees signing up to one lunchtime per fortnight. The options are endless and could be entirely tailored to the needs of individual charities and companies; however it would be necessary that such volunteering be structured as entirely voluntary in nature rather than an additional duty which employees are under pressure to take on. Particular partnerships might develop their own pathways, based on the interests of employees and the most fruitful options for their skillsets. Helping tutor children, adult education or TEFL? Placements at a lunch club for the elderly? Or more ambitious rolling placements involving more focused support on research, finance, HR, marketing or consultancy?

"In the late 90s, early noughties, a lot of employee volunteering would have been geared around teams of employees going in and painting community centres and clearing up canals. A lot more of it now is "How can we get our HR people in to provide strategic HR advice into organisations?" There's probably been a shift in emphasis within their CSR programmes, again as a consequence of the recession - so they've either been giving less money and more donated time or they've been requiring organisations to take on employee volunteers from their company far more, in order to get financial donations."

Whatever the appetite and sense of such skills-based volunteering, it is still extremely under-utilised in light of the potential. In our volunteer managers' survey, for example, the departments volunteers were most involved in were, as expected, service delivery, and fundraising and events (figure 13). Yet sizeable proportions of a third or more estimated they had no volunteers in areas like Policy and Research, Marketing and PR, IT and Campaigning: all areas ripe for extra resourcing of both an expert and support nature.

Figure 13: Areas of work for volunteering



"How many volunteers does your organisation have in the following fields? If there is another field where you have volunteers, please use the box at the bottom for 'other'."

Base: 516 Respondents
Source: Managing Volunteers Survey 2013, nfpSynergy

51

There is a natural and obvious tie-in here with the more general up-skilling of volunteer opportunities discussed above. What roles and tasks require attention in your organisation that you have perhaps never thought appropriate for volunteers? In the same way as a retired company director may be perfect to lead a substantive new project you've been meaning to pilot but have been unable to resource, could an existing corporate partnership be the way into a much-needed consultancy on the upgrade of your IT system? The National Trust is just one charity whose internal consultancy roles have purposely increased in the last decade, ensuring that volunteers are regularly canvassed for their input regarding skills they'd like to share, rather than relying on fortuitous coincidence alone:

"You'll often come across those stories of someone who's been gardening for six years and then someone's sat down and had a conversation and discovered that they used to be a finance director and they might be able to provide a bit of advice on property finance... those things happen quite often, I think they happen in most organisations."

"If companies are more able to develop initiatives with pro bono skills-based type work, I'd like to see a lot more of that. I think having something that's a lot more low key but practical, so that small companies can just access information about what needs to be done and can very easily engage, for a low cost... we need to see more of that."

No department should be viewed, then, as 'ring-fenced' from volunteer engagement, as the example given earlier from Alzheimer's UK highlights further.

In the second pathway - developing more effective group opportunities - we are on a much more traditional footing. However, here, being able to take control of the scenarios which work for you as charity and marketing those clearly, is essential. This means identifying the work which will be genuinely useful and require minimal resourcing from the charity's side on the one hand, or ensuring that team days spent doing 'charity work' are properly monetised and secure sufficient income to make them worth the investment of time. In this context, it should be clear what is

on offer: the work to be done; the donation required to participate; and the ways in which it provides a meaningful personal development, skills or team-building experience for the company taking part.

The challenge is that both pathways also need to be championed strongly within companies themselves – however, this is already a case well advanced in many sectors in the fundraising sphere and therefore ripe for expansion. Demos has reported on the enormous benefits to employers of factoring in volunteering opportunities to nurture professional skillsets and personal development objectives.⁶⁴ Recent research by Pilotlight meanwhile suggests that volunteering actively makes business leaders likelier to both understand charity work and become donors,⁶⁵ so finding creative ways to facilitate even deeper ties with companies you already work with (or those who may be warm to your cause) could be more beneficial across all departments than you ever imagined. This is where it is vital that volunteer strategy becomes more integrated with fundraising, if it is not already: talk to your counterparts in fundraising, events or corporate partnerships about potential opportunities. You may be surprised to discover how close you already are to taking your corporate relationships to the next level.

Quality family time

A more unfamiliar concept, family volunteering opportunities are a rich vein only just beginning to be explored. Where volunteering experiences can provide something educational for the kids and the chance to do something novel together, charities have a real opportunity to connect with entirely new audiences; all the more significant when we remember our survey's finding that the main dip in volunteering comes in the 35-44 age bracket. At first glance it may appear high-maintenance or hard to structure; yet when we abandon a purely 'service-delivery' concept of volunteering and think instead about developing meaningful community engagement, it becomes a brilliant vehicle for building support early in life and effectively breaking down the 'leisure-time'/volunteering dichotomy.

"If volunteering is a leisure activity and I'm doing it in my spare time and I'm having to choose between volunteering and spending time with my family, I'm going to spend time with my family. If I can do both together, that's great and it also speaks back to building that culture of giving amongst young people."

National Trust provide a great example of how finding the right kind of projects can open up a whole new category of engagement. As Helen Timbrell argues, if you consider the idea from a service-delivery angle, you'd never bother as there will always be more effective ways to get a job done. But considered from the perspective of greater community engagement, inspiring young people to learn about nature and get outside, of widening a support base beyond a traditional ABC1 55+ female audience – it becomes brilliant; a creative solution that contributes to multiple strategic goals and becomes just one more way the Trust demonstrates its value and relevancy.

"If you're a property, family volunteering can feel like a hard, complicated way of getting work done - so if you're a ranger or a warden and you want a field cleared, you probably wouldn't start by thinking, "I'll get some 4 year olds and their parents

⁶⁴ Demos (2014), *Scouting for Skills* (<http://www.demos.co.uk/publications/scoutingforskills>)

⁶⁵ Civil Society (2014), (Accessed June 2014: <http://www.civilsociety.co.uk/fundraising/news/content/17664/>)

to come and do it". You'd start with "I'd love to have a member of staff do this but I haven't got the money for that". Then you'd go "I'd love to pay a one off contractor, I might not have the money for that"...[But] if you come at it from the lens of "I need to connect with my local community, I'm trying to grow my family audience at the property, I'm trying to attract new people and find new ways for them to get involved," then you might think "this is a great way of doing that, that also happens to get some work done".

Case Study: Group volunteering

Combining leisure and charity: National Trust's family volunteer days

Piloted in 2010, the family volunteering days run by the National Trust are based in a wide range of the Trust's properties. Families can participate with a variety of different tasks, from cleaning beaches to acting out historical roles or acting as tour guides for other groups. The scheme, with its focus on encouraging families to engage with their local trust properties, fits into the wider National Trust strategy that by 2020, "everyone feels like a member" of the Trust. The scheme has also provided the National Trust with a way to tailor their future activities, as participating family volunteers also provide input and feedback on the Trust's events and activities. Family volunteering is also one way that the organisation is trying to expand its traditional volunteering demographics beyond older, wealthier supporters.

The scheme is not without challenges and the benefits of involving families have had to be balanced against a need for efficiency and professionalism in the tasks given. This involves overcoming a traditional tendency in charities to view volunteers as "just a way of getting the work done, rather than a form of engaging with new audiences or with audiences generally." As a programme, however, it is an effective example of how volunteering schemes can be adapted to fit the specific nature of a charity's work in a way that combines necessary work with widening community engagement.

As interviewees emphasised, the fundamental competition charities face is not winning a prospective volunteer from another organisation but from time otherwise spent in leisure. Charities must therefore think about how they can remove that binary and offer both; taking volunteering beyond isolated individual experiences and into our home and working lives.

"I think that volunteering should be a very social thing, it should be fun, you should enjoy it, I appreciate some roles might not be quite so enjoyable but ideally it should be fun, and having the opportunity to volunteer with your friends and family seems like a great thing to do. But it's been a marketplace that's been very slow to evolve."

Part 6 - How do we manage the 21st century volunteer?

"If you want fantastic volunteering, it needs to be owned by the leadership of those organisations."

Moving on to consider how we operationalise this new volunteering vision, it is clear that many organisations, large and small, are already doing amazing work to revolutionise its management. However, with a long history of more conservatively organised volunteering strategy, restructuring volunteer management for the 21st century is no small task. This section outlines the key findings from our 2014 Managing Volunteers survey of over 500 volunteer managers and draws on our interviews to highlight some of the key areas for improvement in (re)learning how to manage volunteers in a way that can unleash their potential.

Professionalisation of the field and the view from the frontline

The professionalisation of volunteer management has grown in recent years, with Heads of Volunteering playing an increasingly senior and strategic role in many charities - and larger charities in particular often engaging regional volunteer development managers across the country. In some organisations, the administration and workforces around volunteering have become extensive and sophisticated. Interviewees largely agreed we have made progress – many noting that when they started out, there wasn't even a section for volunteer-related roles in most job listings – and many new volunteering and volunteer management organisations have sprung up in recent years. However, it remained uncontested that recognition of the profession still lags behind in many organisations and in comparison with other third sector specialisms. In short, as one participant noted, progress is present but patchy:

"There are some qualifications that didn't exist eight years ago like the ILM - the Institute of Leadership & Management have got a Level 3/4/5 in volunteer management, the NOS exists which didn't exist eight years ago, the National Occupational Standards - but would I say yes it is as clear as accountancy or CIPD, where they say "This is the route you need to take, do this, that and the other"? I don't think it's there."

Research from the Institute of Volunteering Research has shown that the vast majority of people who manage volunteers still do it part-time or as a bolt-on to another role that they already have, bringing a wealth of volunteer management experience but more limited formal training.⁶⁶ This insight was shored up in our survey, where only 16% of respondents spent more than 75% of their time managing volunteers, compared with over half spending just 25% of their time or less. In many organisations, too, it is increasingly common to see volunteers managing other volunteers. With volunteer centres losing funding – the Volunteer

⁶⁶ Brewis G., M. Hill and D. Stevens (2010) *Valuing Volunteer Management skills*. –Third Sector and Institute for Volunteering Research (Accessed June 2014: <http://www.ivr.org.uk/component/ivv/valuing-volunteer-management-skills&qh=YToxOntpOjA7aToyMDEwO30=>)

Centre network in 2011/12 saw its lowest funding since 2008/09, with a shrinking number of funding sources and demand out-stripping capacity⁶⁷ - it is clear that the vocation remains under-prioritised, under-professionalised and under-supported:

"Volunteer managers are having to adapt and change but they're having to do it quite often; not only with the same level of resource that they had five years ago but with less, because volunteer management is the first thing that gets cut so that more money can go into the fundraising budget. How the volunteering sector needs to respond is by taking volunteering as a strategic priority more seriously, by actually investing in and supporting it... a lot of organisations if they're going to develop a better volunteer programme, they go outside for funding to do it, which speaks to the fact that they see it as an add-on rather than as part of their core function."

Managing Volunteers Survey 2014

The Sample

In case you are interested...

- 513 respondents working in volunteer management, reached in May 2014 via an online survey
- Predominantly female (81%) and England-based, with an even spread of ages: a quarter under 35, a quarter over 55 and half between 35 and 54
- A mix of sectors, size and income, with a particular showing in health, young people and social welfare. Almost a third work in organisations with 1000+ volunteers but 18% with 25 or less. 22% are in organisations with £10m+ but a fifth come from charities under £250k
- Strong volunteer management (VM) experience, with just 10% in their first year in the field and 32% with over 11 years of experience. 40% hold the title of Volunteer Manager, with 10% Heads of Department and 8% at CEO or Director level. The vast majority (93%) are paid
- A third (31%) spend over 50% of their time managing volunteers, while almost half spent 25% or less and a minority of 16% spend more than 75% of their time in this way

Perceptions of changing volunteer engagement

Volunteer composition and motives

Volunteer managers report an even spread of ages amongst their volunteers, with the only notable dips reported in the core child-rearing decade of 35-44 and over 75s. Most perceive a gender skew, with 73% estimating their volunteers to be over 50% female. Their volunteers work in a mix of fields, with VMs estimating the highest presence in Service Delivery, and Fundraising and Events. Sizeable proportions of a third or more estimated they had no volunteers in areas like Policy/Research, Marketing/PR and Campaigning.

⁶⁷ Institute for Volunteering Research (2013) *Annual Return of Volunteer Centres 2012* (Accessed June 2014: <http://www.ivr.org.uk/images/stories/Institute-of-Volunteering-Research/arvc%202013%20summary%20final.pdf>)

- ◉ Asked about changing volunteer motivations, most VMs reported the increased importance in improving CVs (81%) and developing new or existing skills (72%/53%)
- ◉ VMs perceive a clear age pattern regarding the relative importance of motivational factors, with skills-based factors deemed most important for younger volunteers and more cause and social-related factors for older volunteers. The strongest age skews were estimated in developing new skills (youth), giving something back, and friendship and company (both older volunteers)

Attitudes and perceptions

Encouragingly, our survey found that the vast majority of volunteer managers enjoy working with their volunteers (84% agree completely, 15% somewhat) and the majority are really impressed by volunteers' commitment (68% agree completely, 27% somewhat). Nonetheless, there is also strong agreement that volunteers are now more aware of what they want to get out of their experience (28% completely, 52% somewhat agree) and only a small minority actively disagree.

- ◉ A majority also agree that volunteers now require more a more personalised experience than they used to (26% agree completely, 39% somewhat)
- ◉ That said, VMs were less sure that volunteers were "more demanding" than they used to be, with just 41% agreeing completely or somewhat, 34% neutral and 20% actively disagreeing
- ◉ Overall, a quarter completely agree that their organisation has become more accommodating of volunteers, with 61% agreeing overall
- ◉ Micro volunteering was largely thought to be a "good introduction" to volunteering (45% in agreement)
- ◉ There was substantial agreement that legislation needs to be clearer on the distinction between internships and volunteering, with 64% overall agreement and over a third agreeing completely; and more moderate agreement that volunteers were now performing duties once done by paid staff (60% overall agreement, 22% completely, 24% who disagreed)

Communicating

- ◉ When recruiting, the most popular methods are own webpage (80%), email (74%) and phone (53%), with a relatively strong presence for social media (Facebook 53%, Twitter 47%). Only a third (37%) report using an online portal or site especially for volunteering
- ◉ For communicating with existing volunteers, email dominates (93%), followed by face-to-face (86%) and phone (87%). Social media is also lower than for recruitment, with just 37% using Facebook and 28% Twitter

Perceived impact of recession

Almost half of the volunteer managers surveyed (47%) have noticed an increase in volunteers, and 40% say they've seen an increase in younger volunteers.

- ◉ However, a third (33%) think it's become harder to retain those volunteers
- ◉ Only 18% think volunteers have become more demanding about their tasks, while a third (35%) think the recession has raised the profile of volunteering,

and opinion is evenly split about whether it has meant volunteers giving more or less time

Internal support in the VM role

When asked about how important volunteer management is considered by senior management in their organisation, 63% of those surveyed answered 'Very important' and a further 30% 'Somewhat important'. Just 6% answered 'Not very' or 'Not at all'.

- Almost half (47%) were happy or very happy with the level of support for VMs within their organisation but the same proportion (46%) felt their organisation could do more

External support for volunteering: the sector and beyond

There is strong agreement amongst those surveyed on the need for a more powerful representative body, with over two thirds (69%) in agreement overall and 37% agreeing completely. Looking at Government support for volunteers, 42% agree that the current Government supports volunteering for the young (with 25% disagreeing), and just 24% agree that it supports volunteering for older people (with 28% disagreeing).

- Asked about the adequacy of leadership from current infrastructure bodies, VMs feel best about how volunteering is represented to Government; 69% viewing leadership as 'Good' or 'Excellent' and a further 20% as 'Reasonable'. Another 60% feel providing a platform for best practice is 'Good' or 'Excellent' but a quarter (24%) rate as 'Not very good' or 'Very poor'
- Of more concern is the perceived adequacy of leadership within the sector itself, with just 42% viewing the championing of volunteering within the sector as 'Good' or 'Excellent', 24% as 'Reasonable' and a substantial quarter rating it as 'Not very good' or 'Very poor'. More problematic still is the adequacy of leadership on driving innovation within the sector, with just a quarter (24%) rating it as 'Good' or 'Excellent' and 28% viewing it as 'Very poor'

When asked about what would be most useful in an infrastructure body, sharing best practice tops the wish list (84%), followed by training (70%), the opportunity to meet other VMs (67%) and accessing online materials (66%). One of the VMs interviewed elaborated on this point:

"The volunteer management sector, if there is such a thing, is probably not as open and accessible as it could be ... there is this expectation that it's very much around the HR based model and probably doesn't embrace the volunteers that manage other volunteers in local informal community groups for example. I think it may have been stalled in the last couple of years - initially there was a sense of volunteer management being really important but it has plateaued a bit and lost its momentum."

Nonetheless, others perceived a change in tides, with a resurgent focus, perhaps a result of economic strain, which makes the current moment ripe for renewal.

"There has been a period where organisations have really paid very little attention to their volunteering infrastructure, and as a result the number of volunteers has decreased, and it seems to me that there's a tide turning now where you just see a

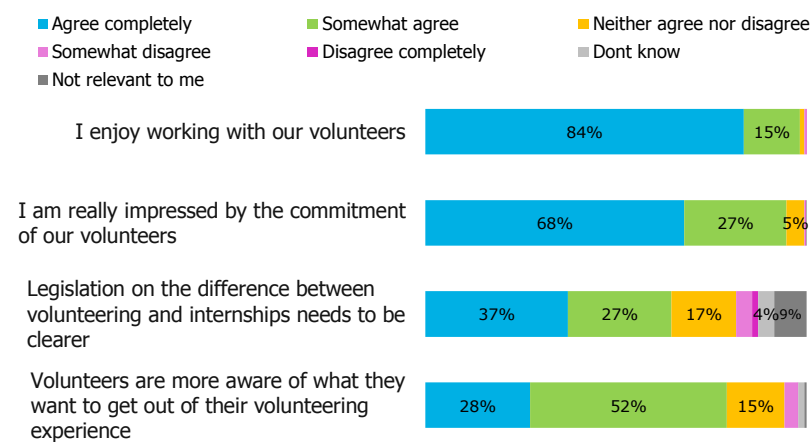
few more volunteer management jobs coming out where they're being tasked with reinvigorating the voluntary agenda for the organisation, and you do think there might be something around austerity that's making people think about, 'Actually are we using all the resources we have?'"

So with individual volunteer managers taking on this challenge and a number of organisations making strides to move the profession forward and take on more of a leadership role – such as the Association for Voluntary Managers (AVM) and informal networking movements such as VM Movement, with its Thoughtful Thursdays blog hosted by Ivo – we decided to add some further data to the mix.

Our findings

In May 2014, we carried out original research with over 500 respondents, all of whom had volunteer management as part of their main job role and explored some of their key challenges and perceptions. This section has shown a comprehensive summary of these findings, and selected figures are also shown throughout this report.⁶⁸ Topics ranged from perceptions of current volunteer motives and the impact of recession, through to perceptions of support within organisations and the adequacy of sector leadership on volunteering. The results felt strikingly positive in terms of volunteer engagement, with 99% enjoying working with their volunteers (84% agreeing completely with this statement) and 95% impressed by their volunteers' commitment, as shown in the figure below.

Figure 14: Volunteers within organisations



"Volunteers are more demanding than they used to be: To what extent do you agree with the following statements on volunteers in your organisation?"

Base: 501 - 509 Respondents

Source: Managing Volunteers Survey 2013, nfpSynergy

54

However, while there were encouraging signs in terms of organisational support – 93% thinking senior management viewed volunteering as important – it was extremely ambivalent, with just half happy with their organisation's support for volunteer management and half feeling it could do more. Sector leadership also left much to be desired in terms of championing volunteering and driving innovation within the third sector.

⁶⁸ For a copy of the full slide deck, please email us at insight@nfpsynergy.net

Organisational buy-in: the case for taking unlocking potential

One of the strongest and most fundamental messages that came up in our interviews, reiterating the survey findings in favour of increased support for volunteer managers, was the importance of strong, unwavering senior buy-in.

"It's not enough to just get volunteers, volunteering doesn't just happen, it's always a managed and supported and enabled process. If we want volunteering to be successful, we need to make sure that the management, or the empowering and enabling of that process, is successful."

For an organisation to unlock its volunteer potential, participants agreed, the primary obstacles were rarely a lack of individual champions, volunteer management talent or feasible scope for more diverse volunteer roles. Instead, an organisational reluctance to expand volunteer capacity, prioritise its growth or grant greater autonomy remained a problem, among the following themes.

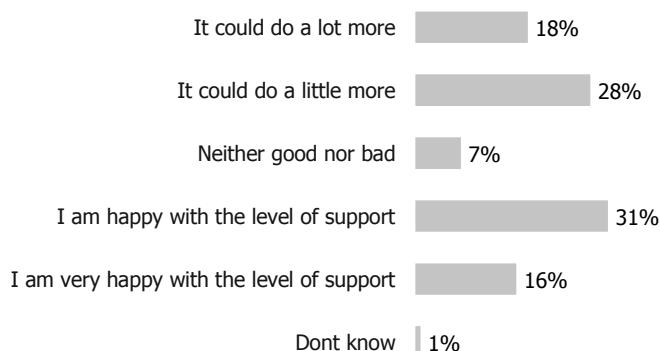
Senior representation

Along with the broader professionalisation of volunteer management, there has been a visible increase in senior level roles, job structure and training opportunities, as many interviewees acknowledged:

"If you were to look through job adverts now, you'd see more senior positions around volunteer managers and certainly there are a few positions where volunteer management roles are almost on the senior management team. There's certainly a much closer level to that strategic decision-making role than probably at any time since I've been in the sector".

However, the senior buy-in that is pre-requisite to wider staff engagement and strategic planning still has a long way to go, as made clear in the figure below, showing that less than half of volunteer managers responding to our survey were happy with their current level of support.

Figure 15: level of support for volunteer managers



"How do you feel about your organisation's current level of support for volunteer managers?"

Base: 512 Respondents

Source: Managing Volunteers Survey 2013, nfpSynergy

61

While particular initiatives or levels of resourcing may come and go with changing fortunes, the need for volunteer development to be taken seriously at Director-level and higher was agreed to be crucial in order for an organisation to truly transform its resourcing and unlock volunteer potential. One interviewee noted that the real accomplishment of the Olympics lay in its demonstration of what senior-level engagement with voluntary resources really looks like:

"What LOCOG did brilliantly was that at the very top - the chief executive and senior management - they really bought into volunteering, they valued volunteers, they celebrated it, and owned the volunteering strategy. That was probably the number one thing that made it successful. If you actually look back at a lot of organisations, that doesn't happen... volunteering [often] isn't discussed at the board level, it's much lower down the agenda. That's why it doesn't necessarily always work. So that's one of the key lessons that needs to be learned from the Olympics - if you want volunteering to be a fantastic experience for volunteers, but also be really impactful, there needs to be real leadership at the top."

Raising the profile of volunteer strategy

The key challenges to embedding volunteer strategy will vary and for many at the day to day level, the core problems may still be about the practicalities of getting enough volunteers in, processing them and meeting targets. But at a deeper level, there is a need to embed the strategic prioritisation of volunteering in a way that happened long ago with fundraising. Not viewing it as a nice-to-have, an attractive addition to your resources, but as a serious consideration and fundamental asset recognised within senior management teams.

"One of the issues I see a lot amongst my peers is that lots of people think volunteering is a good thing but they don't think about all the parts and how you really embed that into your culture... and I think the real challenge is around senior management teams. A lot of people often say to me, "if only our trustees believed

in volunteering, then our senior management team would do it" and I can see that's helpful but I don't think it's the deal changer. The trustee is looking at the big picture over the top, they're not going to say, operationally, if you engaged 100 volunteers, wouldn't that be more effective or have a greater impact... they're holding the senior staff to account to operationalize, that's how charities work. So for me I think the message hasn't necessarily got through to the senior management teams in various charities."

It is crucial therefore to start at the top, as the organisations already excelling in volunteer development have been able to do. It is no coincidence, then, that charities doing particularly interesting work with volunteering also tend to boast meaningful senior roles in the field, where those leading volunteer development sit on a level with peers in Fundraising, Membership or Communications and are therefore better situated to champion their agenda and argue for joined-up strategy across these departments. Such organisations have been able to discern the benefits of a more integrated understanding of engagement across donor, member and volunteer co-ordination functions and may also have significant functions around external engagement more broadly; rightly seeing community volunteer engagement as knitted in with voluntary income, partnership-building and marketing objectives.

Hands-on senior experience of volunteer management can be instrumental here, as noted by research participants in connection with the Olympics success story.

"The message that hasn't really got out there is the amount of work that the Olympic central team put in the planning for involving volunteers... [they] started that programme four years out, prior to the Olympics. So every member of staff in the Olympic delivery body, LOCOG, had practical experience of managing volunteers and they had various rules in the way that worked... If they wanted a role doing over the week, that manager had to think "I'm going to have three volunteers in doing this function, how do I make sure the handover works between them during the week?"

As that respondent emphasised, the Olympics therefore offers the sector a master class in how to embed volunteer management experience at all levels. Ensuring everyone had exposure to volunteers and even senior directors were themselves managing teams of volunteers meant everyone learned the flexible management skills necessary to harness a diverse, shifting workforce. And even more importantly, a deep understanding of both challenges and benefits evolved at a senior level.

Building staff support

The potential barriers to building a positive and confident culture around volunteers can be substantial and are crucial to tackle if volunteer managers are not to be left fighting an uphill battle. Many interviewees reported staff anxiety within charities around letting go when it comes to volunteers, comprising both concern about volunteers appropriating paid roles, reluctance to take on the perceived burdens of managing volunteers, and fear about allowing more volunteer autonomy. As one individual we spoke to put it:

"My biggest challenge is staff buy-in... [You hear] 'I had a volunteer once that didn't work out, they were too much hard work'. There's a thing around the culture and ethos, around the value that volunteers can bring... They kind of look at it as a burden for themselves. They don't actually see the potential benefit... They'll say

"Well, managing a volunteer isn't in my job", and you think "Are you are kidding me?"... Not only is it there but if you want more people to be supported, then the best way to do that is to have volunteers... I don't know if it's fear of loss of professionalisation or fear of job loss. I don't know what it's about, but there's a real organisational ethos problem we see."

It is in this area that senior-level prioritisation and agenda-setting is vital, alongside empowering volunteer managers to tackle broader organisational culture and training needs. Charity staff as a whole need to be open to viewing volunteer potential differently and to taking on some responsibility for utilising it in their work. Unease can be understandable, both through fear of change, territorialism and concern about taking on additional responsibility where time is likely to already be stretched. Where vulnerable client groups are involved, this will be particularly exacerbated; yet should never be viewed as precluding meaningful volunteer roles, as success in utilising a dedicated and diverse portfolio of volunteer opportunities in organisations such as Alzheimer's UK shows.

The direct threat felt has also been strongly exacerbated by recession, further highlighted in our survey findings of 60% overall agreement with the statement that volunteers were now performing duties once done by paid staff, against only a quarter actively disagreeing.

"Maybe people see volunteers more as a threat now than they did 10 years ago... The idea of 'volunteers are people who are going to take my job' has always been there but I think it's probably been more significant now than it was."

When managers often feel they are competing for budget and strategic priorities, this tension is likely to continue. Yet staff know better than anyone how tight their funds are and therefore the value of ensuring all resources are deployed.

Moving from a command and control culture to a trust-based and enabling culture is a seismic change, as some interviewees noted. The challenge for senior management and volunteer managers in post is therefore to make the case across the workforce as a whole that you are already sitting on a gold mine - and it is crucial for everyone, not just formal volunteer managers, to play a part in unleashing that. Volunteer managers need to be in the vanguard of this battle for hearts and minds, working to alleviate concerns, make the case for greater opportunity and participation and embedding progress in organisational change.

Letting go of the HR model of volunteering

Part of the difficulty in transforming the potential of volunteering is due to the paradigm within which volunteering has tended to be viewed: the obvious analogy is HR management. In keeping with this, volunteer managers and senior management alike have tended to focus ever more on process and systems management, a rigour which has been positive in many ways but arguably obscured the need for change in others.

"When you get a bunch of volunteer managers in a room today these days, they tend to talk about systems and processes and admin and bureaucracy, more than they do about dealing with people... I think that's the case when we did the original version in this report but I think it's become even more so."

"It's about letting go of some of that control, as opposed to assuming that you have to manage every single hour of every single volunteer. That's a big challenge, particularly for larger charities - but it shouldn't be because when you look at how fundraisers, people who raise money for your organisation, how many of them just go off and do it on their own or create their own activities? I think that happens in huge numbers of cases very successfully. We need to be doing a lot more of that with volunteering and that is about not relying on that professional HR model, it is about relinquishing control and giving more control to the volunteers to do things for themselves."

The HR model makes sense in many ways and is not without valuable lessons: supervision and support; the need to consult and set objectives; proper legal oversight to protect both parties. However, it is a different kind of resource, with different legal implications. Imposing the same framework all too often risks hampering innovative – and less resource-intensive - ways of working that could both alleviate the burden on paid staff and managers, and offer volunteers more freedom and responsibility.

Why, asked some interviewees, must volunteering occur within work hours? The perception that volunteers must be actively managed, with staff on call if anything goes wrong can mean an overly rigid structure that is high-maintenance and laborious on both sides, as well as having no basis in the requirements of many charity services, in particular those involving social care. As one individual remarked, even if managers arrange to be 'on-call' for after-hours emergencies, a system that allowed for much more flexible volunteer scheduling would still be vastly simpler to administer and supervise.

In light of all the arguments made in the previous section regarding increased time flexibility, personalisation and greater responsiveness and consultation, charities should therefore work towards retaining the useful aspects of the HR model and abandoning the rest. Not least because even among paid staff, flexi-time, increased autonomy and home-working and greater consultation are increasingly becoming the norm. Staff encouraged to view volunteers not as competition or burden but as a dream-team of additional resourcing that enhances, rather than mimics or replaces, the paid workforce in what one participant described as a *"a blended service"*.

This means educating service designers and managers to re-examine what roles are realistic for volunteers and how paid and unpaid staff can work alongside one another on core tasks. In some sectors or tasks, staff support and oversight may be much more crucial, while in others a strong community culture may make a light-touch volunteering infrastructure more viable. However, in this way an aspect of volunteer management can be built into all job descriptions, without undermining the specialist volunteer management role, and staff can be re-inducted to understand how they can help enable volunteers, directly or indirectly.

Building a sustainable strategy and integrating the supporter life-cycle

Building a volunteer capacity with the ability to transform your work and evolve with need requires a far-sighted strategy which won't collapse under pressure, or be reliant on specific individual champions at any given time. Capacity issues will remain, even where dedicated volunteer managers are in post, and the external challenges in terms of creating dynamic, flexible, competitive volunteering offers

that are sensitive to demographic factors are substantial. Prioritising volunteer development therefore needs to be written into long-term organisational priorities. The focus must move from “Have our recruitment numbers gone up and are there a few success stories here and there” to “Are we creating a sustainable model that is equipped to deal with change and which can outlast individual champions?”

Ultimately, this comes down to traditional organisational problems of siloed departments, with fundraising, communications or volunteering competing for resources and working in an implicit or explicit hierarchy of importance. For 21st century organisations trying to do more with less and innovate while streamlining, it is necessary to look holistically at available resources rather than fragmenting functions. The supporter life-cycle must become the focus, rather than the pursuit of particular types of donor or engagement which will always remain sensitive to economic change, methods of giving and stages of life.

“It’s about being joined up ... it’s the whole talk about supporter integration so at the age of 16, somebody may not be a particularly great donor for you but they’re a great volunteer. They then go on to university and do rag and raise money for you, they then get a job and so they can’t volunteer so much and it’s cultivating that lifelong relationship focused on what the individual wants and when the individual says “no”, saying “that’s fine, no problem” but then coming back to them at a later date. I think if organisations holistically get that right, then that’s when we start to see some of the potential benefits but you’re not going to get that holistically right, if you only look at it in an income generation perspective, or you only look at it from a volunteer management one - the whole ‘How does somebody support our organisation?’ debate needs to be integrated and strategic.”

Making the case for volunteering

So what are the key takeaway points here in making the case for volunteering within your organisation?

- 🌀 **Making effective use of all your resources.** Your volunteers are the best asset you barely realise you have, don’t subordinate them to donors
- 🌀 **Don’t fetishise the money.** Innovation and improvement are rarely all about financial resources, however helpful they are. While it is easy and obvious to value donor income, its utility and importance appearing to require no further championing, it has been all too easy to under-estimate volunteers as a cheap service-delivery mechanism of varying use and reliability. Not so; they are at the heart of what you do and investing in their capacity should not be viewed in opposition to traditional fundraising but as another side of the same coin
- 🌀 **Recognise your brand ambassadors.** Volunteers are a huge asset among both supporter and beneficiary audiences. The evidence that you prompt such commitment is invaluable, nurturing trust and functioning as a self-sustaining awareness-raising initiative that lasts well into the future
- 🌀 **Experiment and innovate.** No time or money for that key piece of market research your Policy and Research team have had in mind for the last year? Someone have a great idea for a new grassroots event or viral campaign that you’ve no resources to investigate or pilot? Hire volunteers interested in trying it out, with the skillsets to match. Talk to existing supporters about their ideas for what you could be doing better – they may already be one step ahead

Empowering volunteer managers

With senior representation in place, the best thing your organisation can then do is empower its volunteer manager/s and allow them a strong, secure mandate to develop volunteer capacity in their own way. They are the alchemists who can turn the raw human resource of time freely given into real gold for your organisation. They are also likely to be the ones in the vanguard of understanding the 21st century volunteer and best-placed to unlock their potential. As Rob Jackson notes, understanding within the sector more broadly and amongst many senior personnel has been slower to catch up, but “volunteer managers and the people who work with volunteers day-to-day realise that things are changing and have different views and perspectives.”

At its most fundamental, empowering volunteer managers means treating the post as a serious profession, with a valuable and clear set of objectives and a secure mandate to focus substantively on volunteering. Think substantively about what is important to the recruitment of this role, what skills and ongoing training are necessary for the post-holder to really deliver, and how you will ring-fence their time for volunteer development. As Helen Timbrell of the National Trust puts it: *"when we say volunteer managers, what do we really mean? We probably mean people who are doing normal job with a bit of volunteer management but what were their experiences of being recruited and inducted and set up to be a successful volunteer manager?"*

VMs with resources and autonomy

As our survey showed, volunteer managers are positive about their role and deserve the trust, training and resourcing to do it properly – with a clear mandate from the top that can nurture self-belief on the ground. Training and adequate resources are a critical foundation, since confidence in professional expertise is often substantially defined by external prompts. And as Rob Jackson argues, without a great sense of their own professional expertise and confidence as a pre-requisite, it will be difficult for managers to prepare themselves for the scale of the challenge they face in championing volunteering within their organisations:

"There are a lot more people now who are coming into the volunteer management because they see it as a career, rather than falling into it but I still think there's a self-belief [problem]. If you talk about volunteer managers, you are talking about people who are full time volunteer managers, people who are part time volunteer managers, volunteers who are managers as well as paid staff and lots of people who are volunteer managers as a tag on to another job. It's really difficult to define that in the way that it is easy to define who a lawyer is or who a teacher is..

Stemming from the self-belief issue is the ability to influence and the confidence - not just within an organisational level but also on a bigger stage... Who's going to have that voice? Do we really see ourselves as a profession, do we really see ourselves as having credibility? Because why would an organisation take volunteering strategically seriously if we don't take ourselves strategically seriously?"

However, core investment in your volunteer team and development strategy will be a pre-requisite to trouble-shooting the future: ensure it is fit for purpose today, with one or more dedicated and supported roles depending on organisational size, and watch the pay-off. Hearteningly, many survey respondents spoke very warmly of the training and support systems in place and felt valued in their work:

"I am happy I get monthly support meetings and we have annual joint progress reviews. I feel that I am supported and well respected."

"My line manager is always accessible, regular team meetings and information from Head Office."

"I have the full support of the SMT & MMT as well as excellent relationships with all volunteers."

"CEO is 'volunteer aware'. Charity as a whole is increasingly putting volunteers at front of mind and agenda."

"I have the flexibility and autonomy to recruit and organise volunteers in a way that suits the organisation and the volunteers."

"Training, recognition, support, Board of Directors realise the importance of volunteers and this feeds down within the organisation."

However, others emphasised that they often struggled with securing budgets and the time necessary to work directly with volunteers, as well as in some cases still needing to justify the volunteer programme:

"Give us a budget and more hours/resources to do job."

"Constantly having to fight for resources and justify existence of volunteer programme."

"Give me more admin support. I'm drowning in a sea of volunteer applications and I'm not finding time to write policy."

"More time to manage volunteers. I only get 12 hours a week"

"Constantly having to fight for resources and justify existence of volunteer programme"

As in all sectors, we therefore see a mixed picture of support, training and claims on time and money.

Mobilising the new volunteering

While many interviewees emphasised that lack of funds in particular should not rule out progress, it is clear that volunteering should never be considered in purely economic terms, as the 'cheap option'. Not only does this belittle the rich vein of experience and dedication that volunteers bring, but investing in voluntary resources is still fundamental to making your organisation fit for purpose and resilient for the future. With professionalisation comes a certain amount of 'red tape', time and necessary money spent on recruitment, vetting and support. Stephen Bubb of ACEVO last year wrote a column debunking the Government's idea of volunteering as 'free', with the words *"Volunteers need to be supervised, managed, insured and trained – and that costs money."*⁶⁹ Or as one research participant put it: *"The problem with the sector is, do we have the resources and are we set up to involve more volunteers in what we do? And the answer for me is not yet. Not yet, because it needs more investment. It can be done but it needs investment, and that's the whole issue... volunteers give their time for free, but volunteering is not cost free."*

⁶⁹ Bubb, S. (2013), 'George Osborne needs to understand that volunteering isn't free', Volunteering Hub, *The Guardian* (Accessed June 2014: <http://www.theguardian.com/voluntary-sector-network/2013/oct/14/george-osborne-volunteering-not-free>)

As Nikki Squelch describes the volunteer capacity-building of a large charity, it is evident that mobilising such a valuable resource is anything but cheap or easy, even if its ability to deliver over and above its costs are beyond doubt:

"Our volunteer journey is extensive... planning, attraction, recruitment, selection, which includes de-selection, induction - and that induction includes volunteer handbook, e-learning opportunities, face to face training opportunities, our role specific training... and then we recommend regular supervision, either group or one to one, depending on the nature of the role... We do pulse surveys and engagement surveys... And then we're building our volunteer engagement networks and we're really letting that self-flourish... I mean we do pretty much everything."

Autonomy or this 'self-flourishing' is then the next lesson for both managers and volunteers alike. Since command and control won't work for 21st century volunteering strategy, it is vital that volunteer managers feel empowered to work freely and try less regimented approaches. This might be as simple as regular opportunities offered, more flexibility in allocation and oversight; or it could be about throwing the doors open and re-working volunteer vacancies from scratch. Either way, recruit for and nurture volunteer management as the professionalised vocation it is and allow managers to do the rest.

The volunteer management toolbox

Appropriate support and recognition of the specific challenges of the job – for example the fact there is less of a legal framework to support you than when managing paid employees but you are likelier to lose volunteers at any point. It is also important to get the essentials right in terms of research and information systems, use of technological resources and ongoing evaluation and monitoring processes. A number of interviewees highlighted how far behind volunteering systems tend to remain, from recruitment right through to management, with too many organisations still relying on antiquated communications with volunteers, such as requiring people to call the office in person to schedule shifts or arrange expenses. Specialised online databases or in-house volunteer portals are also still comparatively under-utilised for recruitment and ongoing communications.

"Given how many people use Do-it every month, there's clearly a big demand for it and you look at the growth of social media and how simple it is for people to put a call out and to promote what they're doing ... I think technology is absolutely critical and that if you're not using it to engage and develop relationships, then as an organisation you're definitely missing out."

Researching and evaluating your volunteer programmes must also be a priority, to survey and understand volunteer motivations and satisfaction, and ensure ongoing improvement. Many charities find it useful to survey both paid and unpaid staff at the same time, treating them as distinct resources requiring different questions and analysis but ultimately providing a holistic picture of how different spheres of work are progressing. If knowledge is power, there needs to be more of both in the volunteering field and gathered consistently.

"I was speaking to one civil servant and he said, "It's lucky this government believes in volunteering, because as a sector you haven't really demonstrated that volunteering really works." I thought that was really interesting, and that's still the case. As a sector, we are terrible at measuring the impact of volunteering on service users, on volunteers and on the wider community. We need to get that right, we need to say, what is the difference volunteering makes and volunteers make?"

Everybody in an organisation believes their work's really important and until you have those impact measurements, I think you're at a real disadvantage."

While modernising systems incurs expenses, when got right, it is less time and resource-intensive than a hierarchical structure that assumes volunteers must be actively managed, top-down. Furthermore, as Jamie Ward-Smith of volunteering platform ivo emphasises, with social media and other free platforms so widely available for mobilising volunteers, there is now a very low bar to making effective changes that allow volunteers to increasingly manage themselves.

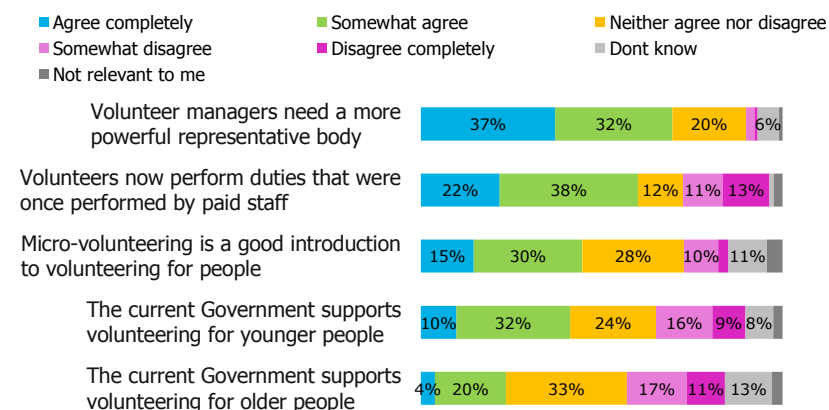
In the long term and in light of the evolution of public services and larger socio-economic pressures discussed in Part 1 of this report, it is worth remembering that volunteer management has the potential to evolve into an even bigger role; one managing not just volunteers but re-thinking the future of service provision and how we deliver social goods overall. Today's volunteer managers need to be engaging with the big picture and issues of legal distinction, job substitution and the ethos of voluntarism, since volunteers could in 50 years' time theoretically be doing anything from nursing through to care homes inspection. It will be helpful to ensure volunteer managers are increasingly equipped to be asking and piloting some of these much larger issues, as Rachael Bayley of Save the Children advises:

"The volunteer managers of today need to be making sure that everybody really understands volunteering; that volunteering is going to become more prevalent and more people are going to be doing different things. They need to be talking about that, to start that debate. For example, volunteers running libraries - is that job substitution or not? ...It will be different, that's the key thing, no longer are we expecting five librarians to work full time and run a library, we're saying "this group of 60 volunteers will all contribute different numbers of time, in different formats [and] they will keep that library open. When we look at the longer view, 100 years ago social workers were usually women in the community who saw that other people needed help and went in and supported them and gradually that evolved into a profession... [But] will that same cycle that we've seen with libraries happen, will that same cycle happen with social work for example? Or with nurses?" Rachael Bayley, Save the Children

Sector leadership fit for purpose

The overall picture emerging from our research, both qualitative participants and survey respondents, suggests that the existing infrastructure is not sufficient in its current form to provide decisive leadership in volunteering; either its championing within the sector and in the face of the challenges described here, or in its knowledge and best-practice sharing functions. As figure 16 shows, 7 out of 10 respondents agreed that volunteer managers in particular need a more powerful representative body.

Figure 16: Levels of external support for volunteers



"To what extent do you agree with the following statements?"

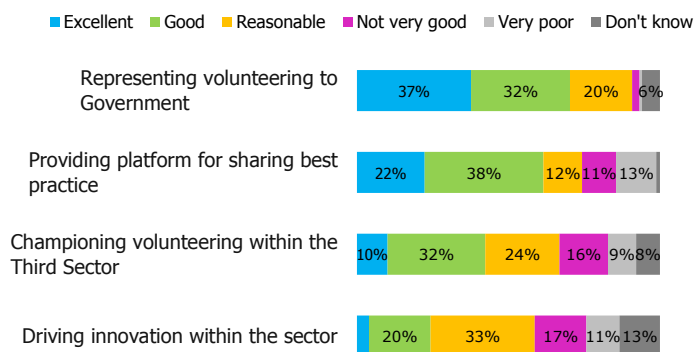
Base: 506- 509 Respondents

Source: Managing Volunteers Survey 2013, nfpSynergy

62

Moreover, as figure 17 shows, while representation of volunteering to government is viewed positively, on best-practice sharing and championing volunteering and innovation within the third sector, volunteer managers feel the leadership from current infrastructure bodies needs further work.

Figure 17: Leadership from infrastructure bodies



"How adequate is current leadership from current infrastructure bodies in the following areas?"

Base: 499- 502 Respondents

Source: Managing Volunteers Survey 2013, nfpSynergy

63

Interviewees similarly noted the relative absence of clear sector leadership on volunteer policy and emphasised that current innovation and support tends to come from outside traditional forums and focuses on the (extremely valuable) areas of networking and knowledge-sharing, such as VM Movement which connects volunteer managers and resources:

"That's one of the exciting things about peer support, is that all we did was provide

the platform [for Thoughtful Thursdays], they're the ones that organise the support, which I think is really cool because they design it and it's all volunteer run."

So while few felt that further bureaucratisation or formality were themselves desirable in a field which needs to develop increasing flexibility and exactly this type of self-driven dynamism, the need for more professional qualifications and accreditation – for both managers and volunteers themselves – as well as a more central infrastructure body in line with the role played by the Institute of Fundraising, felt pressing.

Embracing uncertainty

Ultimately, the lesson here is that charities must embrace the uncertainty that comes with a 21st century volunteer strategy. This is not to underestimate the challenge. Ensuring the cost-effective use of resources is important, adequate oversight for voluntary roles is not something to be skimmed on, and in large charities in particular, the scale of co-ordination required to run effective voluntary workforces is substantial.

However, this need for planning and co-ordination should not be confused with regimented scheduling or systems that cannot allow for individual tailoring. Plan uncertainty in throughout your research and recruitment processes so you know, for example, which roles are attracting ambitious young people just needing the experience to move on to paid work, so there are few surprises or feelings of bitterness when someone is trained before moving on. Once organisations have the courage to stop trying to make their volunteering experiences look like paid work on the one hand, or a regular donor commitment on the other, something far more exciting and inspiring may emerge.

Part 7 - Our Final Thoughts

This report has offered new quantitative and qualitative research to explore some of the key trends impacting 21st century volunteering culture. It has argued that the economic crisis, political trends and technological change have combined with broader socio-economic trends to make a compelling case for transforming the volunteering sector so it is fit for purpose.

Change is needed so that volunteering is valued and prioritised in the third sector and beyond. It needs to become personalised and adaptive to change and be managed with skill and professionalism. In order to achieve this, it is vital that organisations remain sensitive to the societal changes and trends impacting today's volunteers. Below are some of the key headline trends and issues that organisations using volunteers need to take on board.

Volunteers and their needs are changing

Brains over brawn - engaging, skills-based roles for cause-literate volunteers

Volunteers want to know what is in it for them, be it career-experience, a life-changing experience or a chance to use their skills, build team morale or make friends. Volunteering experiences that fail to take these motives into account or respect that a placement is a two-way street will always be a struggle to fill and remain high in turnover. If you wouldn't expect a paid member of staff to do the job, where is the incentive for a volunteer?

In a world full of competition, choice and consumer-driven marketing, we are all used to researching and securing the right option for our needs. We are also more likely than ever to be making that choice based on both the right opportunity and the right cause. The traditional volunteer image was of the elderly lady working in a charity shop to fill her days, but for the majority of today's volunteers, what your organisation does, how and where they can contribute to that is key.

Most volunteers are likely to come to you well-intentioned and inspired to help and it is counter-productive to waste this enthusiasm and risk disillusioning new converts to the cause. This isn't to say menial tasks have no place, but organisations must manage expectations and try to deliver a role worthy of someone's time.

All hail the motivation of the selfish volunteer and the sustainability of their commitment

If we strip the term 'selfish volunteer' of any pejorative content, we simply acknowledge that as individuals today, we are as interested in what we get out of volunteering as what we put into it. We also want to be able to work around our other commitments and bring different skills and interests to bear, many of which may be highly useful to charities. It will not always be feasible for a volunteer to literally write their own job description or bounce from department to department and from role to role.

It should, however, become increasingly possible in forward-thinking organisations to incorporate greater flexibility, consultation and co-creation into placements. This is increasingly how we work as paid staff, providing flexi-time, secondments, ongoing skills-development and the opportunity to build our own career paths. Why not set out to offer as much freedom as possible and see what your volunteers are capable of?

Volunteers can build social capital and create the glue for communities

Much has been written about the increased atomisation of society and the last 40 years have witnessed economic restructuring, unprecedented mobility, changing family structures and the dislocation of traditional communities. Yet for all this transformation, much of which has also brought great benefits, we still have a strong shared interest in creating social cohesion as shown in the recent growth of localism movements, grass-roots community organisations and the strength of opposition to some of the worst impact of public spending cuts.

Volunteering has a powerful role in creating and sustaining this social capital, precisely because it is one of the few ways to get to know people from other backgrounds and other generations and to do so outside of the monetary economy.

When we get involved in volunteering, we come together for a cause bigger than ourselves and reach a network of like-minded people. Even as charities aim to connect more with individual needs, they should not under-estimate the continued value of their social offer and their role in nurturing more empathetic and interconnected communities.

"I think the social aspect of volunteering is going to grow in importance, people wanting a sense of belonging to something, people moving around much more... I think volunteering has always had an important role to play in bonding and bridging social capital and it will continue to do so even more."

The need to integrate giving time, giving talent and giving money

Giving money and giving time are two sides of the same coin

Our first report emphasised the rapid professionalisation of fundraisers and fundraising in light of the increasing competition in the charity 'marketplace'. We highlighted the fact that while most charities had already learned to invest in fundraising specialists and develop their fundraising mix, similar progress for volunteering was very much in the early stages. Few organisations were investing in volunteer strategy, recruitment and management in the way that had become commonplace in other areas of the sector. There was also no trade body equivalent to the Institute of Fundraising or menu of professional development and qualification options.

This report has suggested that while some progress has been made, there is still a need for charities to take volunteer management and strategy seriously in the same way they do with fundraising. There is still a tendency to view volunteers as a bolt-

on, rather than every bit as valuable as financial income. Learning the lessons from other roles and strategies can help to really unlock the potential of your volunteers when viewed as an essential pillar of your resources.

Hold the snake by the tail: integrating giving and living across the ages

Recent governments have tended to focus quite obsessively on encouraging youth volunteering and for all kinds of reasons: the urge to make young people more employable, trying to reach younger charity audiences early, the ever-present societal anxiety about young people's behaviour and social conscience. This report has emphasised the importance of more robust, meaningful and CV-friendly experiences for young people, particularly in light of the recession and the fiercely competitive job market.

However, it has also argued that this group should not be prioritised at the expense of older volunteers, particularly the crucial retiree generation, whose needs and interests have changed considerably. This age range has always been the backbone of volunteering and will continue to be so, but charities need to recognise the different requirements of the baby boom generation in order to continue offering something of value.

Overall, it is vital that we better integrate the two sides of the giving experience – time and money – and start viewing the supporter life-cycle holistically. At most times in our lives, we are rich in either time or money, but rarely both simultaneously.

If we want to keep supporters all the way from the nursery through to the nursing home, we need to respond to priorities and needs at different points of life. In youth, we have time but not money and are seeking meaningful work experience, are open to low-cost activism such as online campaigning and we're looking for adventurous opportunities that dovetail with other ambitions, like travel or music.

As 20-somethings, people have money but rarely time, as careers get underway, the housing ladder looms and low-maintenance direct debits alongside challenge events that segue with existing fitness goals may be particularly appropriate. As families with young children, people often have neither money nor time, but may be looking for ways to mix kids' social education with quality family time. Later in life, both time and money may be more available, but life experience and multiple commitments will mean voluntary roles must be flexible and take professional skillsets and retirement ambitions seriously.

So if charities want to keep supporters through all these twists and turns, both volunteering and fundraising products must be responsive and able to move seamlessly between different types of engagement.

Innovate and personalise volunteer roles for both individuals and groups

Personalising the volunteer experience is crucial to get the best deal for both charity and individual. This requires flexibility and creativity to think about which different activities might work for volunteers, how their time commitment could be revised to allow more sporadic engagement and ever-greater consultation with volunteers themselves.

In the group setting too, it is important to trial new models of volunteering, with family volunteering and corporate opportunities particularly ripe for development. Facilitating more expert pro-bono and consultative placements, as well as a more win-win model of group volunteering (a substantial donation and extra hands on deck for charities, team-building away-days, a PR shine and community engagement for companies) is important in the latter instance. Meanwhile, family volunteering promises the chance to foster early engagement with children and access an otherwise hard-to-reach life-stage.

The key then is diversifying the models of volunteering on offer so that some emphasise donations and others professional expertise, some focus on palpable service-delivery and others on awareness-raising and community engagement. Rethink what is possible and use volunteers themselves to pilot new schemes and ways of working.

"What we try and do as well as possible is understand why they volunteer for us, what they expect from us, and how that changes over time. I don't mind what your reason is for volunteering with us, I don't mind if it's for a purely selfish reason. As long as you're achieving what we ask you to achieve and what you wanted to achieve, brilliant, absolutely brilliant. Be honest, be respectful, and trust us."

Marketing volunteering to create the win/win

Beyond KPIs for 'recruitment and retention' to measures of engagement and satisfaction

The numbers game has long dominated the volunteer development paradigm. This is to the frustration of many in the sector who may be seeing great progress in their programmes but not necessarily in the way we're accustomed to measuring it, or who simply want to see more innovative metrics get a look in. Focusing on people through the door, like many aspects of volunteering culture, borrows heavily from the HR model of staff retention with success marked as bums on seats.

This is understandable – numbers are easier to measure than more qualitative outcomes like levels of commitment or passion and are linked with very real issues around time invested in training and stability needed to plan services ahead. However, in light of the trends this paper highlights, focusing on numbers risks missing the more serious goals for future-proofing your work. Leaders in the sector increasingly recognise that their real success must lie in ensuring volunteers engage, have a meaningful experience and are free to come and go as they need to in order to continue fitting volunteer commitments into their lives.

It is therefore worth considering how else you might measure success in your organisation. Which other KPIs could be prioritised to benchmark your progress – volunteer satisfaction, participation in shaping programmes, propensity to engage with other areas of your work, perceptions of organisational goals and values? And which step changes might this entail or encourage in strategic thinking about volunteering? Perhaps you'd discuss how informed and passionate your volunteers are about current campaign priorities, rather than how many you recruited this year.

You may talk about how many returned or became donors, rather than continued in their first volunteer role, or about how likely they are to report high levels of

satisfaction. Perhaps you would focus on which new volunteering initiatives were trialled over the last two years or which roles took off in departments that were previously volunteer-free. By moving beyond the numbers game, you might discover exciting new metrics that chime with the organisational innovation, resilience and flexibility you need to navigate the 21st century charity marketplace.

Market the product and the mission, not 'volunteering'

Our 2005 report emphasised the need to productise volunteering and it remains a critical insight reiterated by many of our collaborators, yet it's only partially digested within the sector. 'Volunteering' is not the product; the product is the opportunity. Think about your audiences, both existing and potential, and identify your existing opportunities. Brainstorm the new avenues that always seemed a bit too risky or unfeasible and productise your offers in a way that enables targeted marketing.

You're not just asking 'the public' to 'come and volunteer' - you're asking healthcare students to offer an evening a fortnight to visit an isolated older person and work on their people skills. You're asking a semi-retired baby boomer to contribute one or two mornings a week to assist with stocktaking in their local shop, or for young families to sign up for a weekend to work on an environmental project as a change from the Saturday matinee. The marketing of volunteering needs to focus on the benefits, rather than just the means of giving time.

We don't respond to open-ended or generic marketing in any other area of our 21st century lives. Everything is tailored, from internet ads and our TV package to our specific needs. Imagine if an ad said "wash your clothes more!" The new tailored approach is used in everything else, so why would the old one still work in volunteering?

"I always think of it as you are basically selling something, you're selling a product... So if I wanted to buy a particular book, I wouldn't ring up someone who said, "I'm selling books." I'd ring up the person who was saying, "I'm selling these types of books". We need to understand what we are selling, who we are selling it to, what the benefits are. We would never say, "Come and volunteer," we would describe what you're doing: "Come along and help with people with dementia," or "come along to a lunch club," or whatever it is."

Getting the internal structures and strategies right

Volunteer managers are the new alchemists – professionalise and empower their roles

Volunteer managers are in the vanguard of the new volunteering environment and potentially in piloting entirely new hybrids of how we deliver core social goods through a combination of private, public and third sector engagement. They need a strategic framework, strong training and support and a secure mandate to work their magic and transform potential into gold.

Even for causes where volunteers are overwhelmingly cause-driven and recruitment appears self-generated, there are innumerable barriers to participation, such as time, income and confidence. It is volunteer managers who can channel this passion into a valuable resource for your cause and try out new ways to meet organisational objectives through voluntary participation. The 'best in show' roles have come a long way and, as our survey showed, they enjoy their work and show confidence in

how seriously it is taken by their organisations. However, in terms of sector infrastructure and leadership, substantial senior support and confidence and securing the time and resources necessary to do their jobs justice, there is still a long way to go.

"Volunteer management probably isn't yet valued and recognised as much as other professions... How do we help the individuals in that profession, raise that awareness and how do we campaign and lobby influencers to have a greater understanding of volunteer management?"

But nurturing volunteering should be part of everyone's job

The volunteer management role must be trained, supported and valued as a specialist profession, but organisations must also recognise that working with volunteers and enabling greater participation should work across all departments and job levels. To fully integrate volunteers into your mix of resources and value them as a shared asset, everyone should share responsibility for unleashing potential. As some interviewees suggested, charities should look at how to build a volunteer management dimension into all job descriptions and re-induct staff at all levels into their role in enabling volunteers, whether directly or indirectly.

Rather than viewing volunteers as a burden, a threat or something that has nothing to do with them, charity staff should be encouraged to feel comfortable with volunteer work and the move from a command and control to an enabling culture. When everyone knows that resources are tight and departments need to work creatively with what they have, the message should be that you are sitting on a gold mine of human potential and all staff have a part to play in unlocking it.

Organisational support for volunteering must come from the top

...and run all the way down. The indispensable importance of senior buy-in for volunteer development was noted time and again by interviewees. For volunteering to be taken seriously and practitioners to stand a chance of optimising the opportunities, it can't be the expendable, neglected sibling to fundraising or communications. Heads of Volunteering or Volunteer Development and their equivalents should be operating at a senior level and able to work in partnership with those managing donor income, corporate partnerships and communications. They need a clear mandate to transform the way volunteering is understood and resourced.

"What LOCOG did brilliantly was that at the very top - the chief executive and senior management - they really bought into volunteering, they valued volunteers, they celebrated it, and owned the volunteering strategy. That was probably the number one thing that made it successful. If you want volunteering to be a fantastic experience for volunteers, but also be really impactful, there needs to be real leadership at the top."

Volunteering strategy is not just for Christmas (or for the Olympics)

And more radically, as we note above, it's not even just for service delivery. As an organisation, you need to be asking whether you are laying the groundwork for the future, so that volunteer development is written into strategic priorities and you

know exactly how you'd like it to play into other core organisational goals. While there is much great work being done, many in the field are aware of the scale of the challenge and the importance of promoting lasting, sustainable models that will outlast individual champions and provide a flexible framework for 21st century volunteers.

These need to be models that don't assume one or two traditional demographic types, be it the older charity shop assistant or the university graduate seeking an internship, but ones that give you the tools to develop a whole suite of targeted, adaptable experiences that enrich your work while offering something meaningful in return.

"I think the way that smart organisations need to think is "What are all the resources that we've got available?", money, people, talent, skills, gifts of time and gifts in kind other than money. "How do we deploy those most effectively? How do we spend our money most effectively" and if that means paying people to do something that volunteers did in the past and having volunteers doing things that paid people did in the past, then that's a creative way of thinking about it. Rather than "if we don't have the money, we can't do this". Because that makes the voluntary sector no different from the private sector."

"All the time it's about pick and mix.... it's about tailoring not just to your organisation but to what that team's doing, or what the aims of that role are, or what bit of work you've highlighted you're trying to progress towards. [It's about] your charity's goals and how that piece fits into the puzzle."

Volunteering is at the very heart of humanity

Using volunteers to turn donations of time into human gold

Volunteers have too often been seen as cheap 'service-delivery' and a slightly unreliable resource to be 'used' for particular ends. This fails to recognise the richness of volunteering, which at its best provides the greatest brand ambassadors you've ever had, the injection of invaluable experience, skills and energy into your work and the heart and soul of what you are trying to achieve as a value-driven charitable organisation.

As we heard from a number of senior professionals, what is still badly required is an attitudinal shift, away from seeing volunteers merely as a means to an end and towards an understanding of their broader potential and value. You need to find ways to give them a fantastic experience and don't sweat about the exact form the 'pay-off' will take – it could be traditional metrics like retention or future donations, or it could be as simple as a volunteer still mentioning their three-month work experience to people in 15 years' time and always making time to drop a coin in your collection tin rather than another one.

"What matters is that they have absolutely a positive experience and will talk positively about their experience, because word of mouth is still the most powerful way to get people engaged with us. Our kind of measure is would you recommend volunteering with the Alzheimer's Society to someone else? And if you say "yes", we're happy. It doesn't matter if you've been here for two weeks or whether you've been here for 20 years."

Volunteering - the new alchemy

Volunteering is at the heart of the third sector. It is what makes it different from profit-driven organisations and its best asset in building public empathy and trust. Put simply, it's the place where it all began. As individuals and as a society, whatever our priorities and self-interest, we still yearn for greater social engagement, something meaningful and a better future. So in order to allow us to continue giving time in our busy and challenging futures, organisations need to step up and give volunteering the prominence it deserves.

At the heart of our title for this report, The New Alchemy, is an altogether more powerful and more inspiring notion than simply delivering the work of charities.

For us, the alchemy of volunteering is that it takes a resource that every person is given in equal portions and turns it into one that changes people's lives. That change is for both the giver and the receiver, the volunteer and the beneficiary, the individual and the organisation.

For us, the alchemy of volunteering is that time is a resource so often underused, be it watching TV, being engrossed in social media, becoming lost in a book, lying in bed or a whole host of other activities. Volunteering can take that wasted time and turn it into something altogether more powerful.

For us, the alchemy of volunteering is that it does something the 17th century alchemists were unable to do; to turn a base resource into (human) gold and in the process create 'an elixir of life which confers youth and longevity'. For all the mundane and very important things that volunteering can do, it can do something altogether more remarkable; it can use the gift of time, that we all have, to make us better people. That is why volunteering is the new alchemy.

About this report

This is our second major report on volunteering. We published The 21st Century Volunteer in 2005 and it was our most popular free report for many years. But over time, many things in the world of volunteering, charities and the wider economic, social and political climate have changed.

In the summer of 2013, we decided to update The 21st Century Volunteer. Perhaps inevitably, the more we looked at the data, the more people we talked to and the more we looked at the trends, an entirely new report emerged. We found we had enough data and ideas to create a longer report than we would normally write.

A report like this comes about because of the work of many people in addition to the authors. Particular thanks go to Rachel Egan, Thea Mueller, Kate Cranston-Turner, Bijal Rama, Susan Hetherington and Rick Wright. We are also hugely appreciative of all the people who filled in our volunteer manager survey, and particularly of those who took the time to be interviewed. Contact joe.saxton@nfpSynergy.net if you have any queries, congratulations or complaints!

About nfpSynergy

nfpSynergy is a research consultancy dedicated to the not-for-profit sector. Our aim is to provide the ideas, the insights and the information to help non-profits thrive. We run syndicated tracking surveys and carry out bespoke projects. We are widely recognised as one of the leaders in non-profit market research.

We survey a range of audiences, including the general public, journalists, MPs and Lords, young people and regional audiences in the UK and Ireland. Each year we also deliver around 50 projects for non-profit clients. We carry out focus groups, conduct face-to-face and telephone in-depth interviews, run workshops and perform small and large-scale desk research projects.