

Institute for
Volunteering
Research

research bulletin

National survey of volunteering and charitable giving

Managing for success

Volunteers' views on their
involvement and support

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Office of the **Third Sector**

This research bulletin is one of a series published by the Institute for Volunteering Research to explore and disseminate aspects of *Helping Out: a national survey of volunteering and charitable giving (2007)*.

The Helping Out study carried out in 2006-07 provides a new evidence-base about people's volunteering in England. The study focused on formal volunteering, that is help given through an organisation or group, and did not include informal volunteering, that is help given as an individual.

This research bulletin explores the ways in which volunteers are supported and managed, and their reflections on these interventions. It analyses volunteers' responses to questions about the way in which volunteering is organised in the main group where they help out. It compares the experience of regular and occasional volunteers. Regular volunteers are those carrying out formal volunteering activities at least once a month. Occasional volunteers are those carrying out volunteering activities less frequently than once a month and include episodic or one-off volunteers. This bulletin also looks at differences in the management of volunteers according to the types of activities they undertake.

The provision of volunteer management

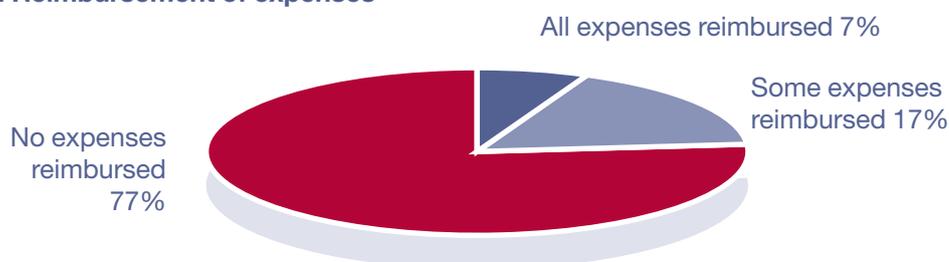
The ways in which volunteers reported being supported and managed varied considerably, although it would appear that many do not receive the kinds of support often promoted as good practice in volunteer management.

The most common form of management experienced by volunteers was access to someone within the organisation to whom they could turn for advice and support. More than four-fifths (83 per cent) of volunteers reported that they had access to advice and support in their main volunteering role. A sizeable minority (18 per cent) did not.

Other elements of recognised good practice in volunteer management were less common. More than three-quarters of volunteers said they had not been provided with a role description (81 per cent), had not received training for their role (79 per cent), and had not attended an interview or had a chat with someone in their organisation before starting volunteering (78 per cent).

Over half of volunteers (54 per cent) said that they had not incurred any expenses from their volunteering. However among those who had, more than three-quarters said their expenses had not been reimbursed (see figure 1).

Figure 1: Reimbursement of expenses



Base: All current volunteers who had incurred expenses (unweighted = 694). Don't know/refusal responses excluded.

Overall, the study suggests that the more frequently you volunteer the more likely you are to receive support and management from your organisation (table 1). While 25 per cent of regular volunteers had received training, this was true of only 10 per cent of occasional volunteers. Regular volunteers were also more likely than occasional volunteers to be asked to take part in an interview or chat before commencing their volunteering, and more likely to receive a written role description.

Table 1: The receipt of volunteer management practices, by volunteer status

	Occasional volunteers %	Regular volunteers %	All current volunteers %
Received training (already trained)	10 (1)	25 (3)	19 (2)
Asked for interview/chat before starting volunteering (interviewed at later date)	11 (1)	24 (3)	19 (2)
Provided with a role description	13	24	19
References taken up	5	16	11
Asked for details of criminal conviction	10	24	18
CRB check	9	25	18
<i>Base (unweighted)</i>	<i>505-510</i>	<i>835-839</i>	<i>1342-1351</i>

Base: All current volunteers. Don't know/refusal responses excluded.

The activities volunteers carried out also made a difference to the likelihood of experiencing volunteer management practices (table 2). For example, those involved in befriending or advice were twice as likely to be provided with a written role description as those in fundraising roles. Volunteers involved in giving advice were most likely to receive training, followed by volunteers in befriending. Those involved in raising and handling money (the most common volunteering activity) were least likely to receive training.

Table 2: Receipt of management practices, by type of volunteering activity

	Received training (already trained)	Asked to interview/chat, prior to starting (interviewed at later date)	Provided with a role description	References taken up	Asked for details of criminal conviction	CRB check	Base (unweighted)
	%	%	%	%	%	%	
Giving advice, information, counselling	43 (1)	32 (*)	37	24	30	25	175-177
Befriending	40 (1)	40 (3)	40	24	34	34	136-138
Educating	36 (3)	30 (2)	28	19	35	41	256-257
Visiting people	35 (2)	31 (3)	31	16	27	27	175
Representing	31 (3)	25 (1)	34	20	28	28	205-207
Campaigning	30 (0)	23 (3)	30	11	15	15	124-127
Committee member	29 (3)	22 (2)	30	12	21	23	340-343
Secretarial, administrative, clerical	29 (1)	24 (2)	29	12	18	18	263-266
Transporting	26 (2)	26 (2)	23	18	27	29	212-214
Organising, helping run an event	22 (2)	19 (3)	20	12	23	27	544-547
Raising, handling money	16 (2)	17 (2)	18	10	16	17	721-724
Other practical help	21 (2)	19 (4)	18	13	22	23	319
Other help	16 (1)	26 (1)	20	20	15	13	94-95
All	19 (2)	19 (2)	19	11	18	18	1342-1351

Base: All current volunteers. Don't know/refusal responses excluded.

*** Represents percentages of less than 0.5%

The differences according to the regularity of volunteer involvement and type of activity were, on the whole, more important than who the volunteer was. The receipt of training, for example, did not vary significantly according to age and sex. Nonetheless, demographic profile does appear to have had some impact on volunteers' experiences. Women, for example, were more likely to be CRB checked than men (21 per cent compared to 15 per cent), while young volunteers aged 16-24 years old were most likely to be provided with a role description. However, these differences might reflect the different types of roles that different groups of volunteers were involved in.

Reflections on the experience of volunteer management

Overall, the study found that volunteers were generally positive about the way their organisation involved and managed them, although they highlighted some areas for development.

Advice and support was available for most volunteers, yet the majority (82 per cent) felt that they didn't need it. Among those who said they did want it, 94 per cent said what they received was adequate. Similarly, most volunteers who received training were pleased with it with 64 per cent saying it was 'very adequate' and 32 per cent 'fairly adequate'.

In addition, the vast majority did not mind if an organisation took up references or asked them to take part in an interview/chat or to undergo a CRB check (table 3).

While the majority of volunteers did not receive written role descriptions, it would seem that most would not want to. Two-thirds (65 per cent) of all current volunteers said that having a role description would not be a good thing. Many volunteers felt role descriptions were unnecessary, often because of the nature of their voluntary work or because they already felt clear about what they needed to do:

'It's voluntary so I would not have thought it needed anything like that.'

'A lot of what I do is quite spontaneous and part of the reason I enjoy doing it is because it is not full of paperwork.'

This emphasis on informality and flexibility was raised by a number of volunteers who felt a written role description would make their volunteering too rigid and formal:

'With a written description there's a certain amount of pressure.'

'It would be too formal and take the fun out of things because I enjoy the flexibility of volunteering without the restrictions of a written job description.'

Table 3: Reflections on different aspects of volunteer management

	Did not mind at all	Minded a bit	Minded a lot	Base (unweighted)
Interviews	99	1	*	307
References taken up	97	3	0	173
Asked for details of criminal convictions	96	2	2	258
CRB check	97	1	2	270

*Base: All current volunteers who had received individual volunteer management interventions. Don't know/refusal responses excluded. ** Represents percentages of less than 0.5%*

The regularity of involvement in volunteering seemed to make a difference to how volunteers felt about the way their volunteering was organised. Regular volunteers, for example, were more than twice as likely as occasional volunteers to say they needed advice and support (24 per cent compared to 10 per cent).

The activities volunteers were involved in also made a difference. For example, 45 per cent of those who provided advice, information or counselling felt they needed advice and

support, compared with 18 per cent of volunteers involved in fundraising and 25 per cent of those involved in organising events.

Overall, it would seem that volunteers are reasonably happy with the organisation of their volunteering. Nearly a third (31 per cent) of regular volunteers felt their volunteering could have been better organised. This figure has decreased significantly from the 71 per cent of respondents who reported in 1997 that their volunteering could have been better organised (Davis Smith, 1998). Nonetheless, despite the improvement, it is still an area of concern. More generally, more than a quarter (28 per cent) of current, regular volunteers felt there was too much bureaucracy in their organisation and nearly a fifth (17 per cent) thought volunteering was becoming too much like paid work.

The implications of poor management

Concern about poor organisation and management do not seem to be causing individuals to stop volunteering. The study suggests that it is more likely for volunteers to leave their organisations for personal reasons, in particular changing home or work circumstances, rather than because they are unhappy with what the organisation does or doesn't do. Few former volunteers said they had stopped volunteering because the organisation was badly organised (2 per cent), because their efforts weren't appreciated (1 per cent) or because they were out of pocket (1 per cent). Organisations being overly bureaucratic and concerns about the risks and liabilities of volunteering also had a negligible impact on people's reasons for leaving.

However, while these factors may not cause people to leave their volunteering, the study suggests they may discourage people from getting involved in volunteering. Those who had not been formal volunteers in the previous year, but wanted to get involved, were most concerned about bureaucracy. Nearly half (49 per cent) said this put them off volunteering. A similar proportion said they were worried about risk and liability (47 per cent). A quarter (25 per cent) were discouraged from volunteering because they were concerned about being out of pocket.

Implications for policy and practice

The study found that on the whole volunteers felt supported and recognised by the main organisation they volunteered with. They were not especially demanding when it came to formal management practices but they were generally satisfied and did not object to different management practices when they received them.

Other research has found that what is particularly important is not just what organisations do but the way they do it: ensuring that volunteering is well organised and managed but at the same time not overly bureaucratic; having the various volunteer management practices in place but delivering them in a subtle way. As Gaskin's research (2003) found, it is about achieving a 'choice blend', in which organisations combine 'choice and control', 'flexibility and organisation', 'informality and efficiency', 'personal and professional support'.

The different ways in which volunteers are involved and managed across activities as well as the different approaches to involving regular and occasional volunteers suggests that

there are a host of different models and approaches taken to managing volunteers and organising their involvement – one size does not fit all.

Exploring the attitudes of non-volunteers and current volunteers, the study highlights the differences in the perceptions of volunteering among non-volunteers and the actual experiences of those volunteering. While many potential volunteers were put off volunteering by too much bureaucracy, far fewer regular volunteers felt it was a drawback. Similarly, while concerns about risk and liability put people off getting involved, it was a minor concern for current volunteers. This suggests that organisations and the volunteering sector have some way to go to reducing barriers, overcoming concerns and fears, and promoting the volunteering experience.

References

Davis Smith, J. (1998) *The 1997 National Survey of Volunteering*. London: Institute for Volunteering Research

Gaskin, K. (2003) *A Choice Blend: what volunteers want from organisations and management*. London: Institute for Volunteering Research

The Helping Out study

The Helping Out study was carried out by NatGen and the Institute for Volunteering Research, on behalf of the Office of the Third Sector within the Cabinet Office. It was designed as a follow-up study to the 2005 Citizenship Survey to represent the general (adult) population in England. Face-to-face interviews were carried out in October 2006-February 2007. In total, 2,156 respondents were interviewed for the main sample (a response rate of 62 per cent), and 549 for a separate minority ethnic boost sample (a response rate of 51 per cent).

The main findings can be found in Low, N., Butt, S., Ellis Paine, A. and Davis Smith, J. (2007) *Helping Out: a national survey of volunteering and charitable giving*. London: The Cabinet Office.

Full copies of the study report are available online at:

http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/third_sector/Research_and_statistics/third_sector_research.aspx

This bulletin was written by Joanna Machin and Angela Ellis Paine, IVR.

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Regent's Wharf
8 All Saints Street
London N1 9RL
Tel: +44 (0) 20 7520 8900
Fax: +44 (0) 20 7520 8910
E-mail: ivr@volunteeringengland.org
www.ivr.org.uk

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