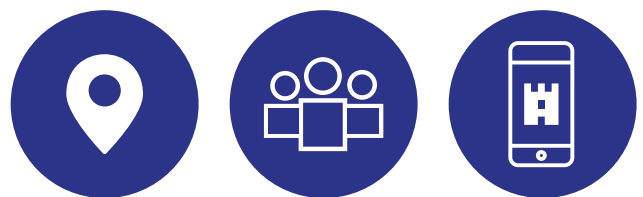


Inclusive Volunteering Report



MAKE YOUR MARK
— IN VOLUNTEERING —

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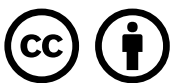
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Make Your Mark is an ongoing campaign to make heritage volunteering for all in Scotland. It was created in 2020 as part of **Our Place in Time**, Scotland's first national strategy for the historic environment.

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1. Summary

Introduction

Volunteering¹ is often seen as a social and individual good, contributing to personal and collective health and well-being, where people and communities are invested in, recognised and supported. However, for this potential to be fulfilled, the voluntary sector has to think about the inequalities faced by society as a whole, discarding a view of volunteering as solely initiated or driven by choice or openness. The voluntary sector has an important role in challenging and transforming inequalities, where the commitment to making a difference is often part of organisational missions and stated intentions.

People volunteer all of the time. They may help out a neighbour. It might be part of religious observation or service. It can form part of the norm of a community. But what gets called ‘volunteering’ is often a recognised and structured opportunity that can accrue social privilege or help to scaffold access to economic privilege.

How can we ensure that volunteering as a sector represents and serves the breadth and depth of our society’s needs? How do we ensure it doesn’t revert to older forms of philanthropy which created a hierarchy between people with the skills and resources to help the world around them, and people, places, and organisations, which need help?

Volunteering organisations may be able to act as transformative sites of participation, able to respond to questions of varied resourcing,

recognition and support. At present, this report reveals a patch-work provision of inclusive volunteering experiences, resources, supports and practices in Scotland. While this is a consequence of the informality around much volunteering (and is an important benefit in terms of flexibility), it can unintentionally foster the very same inequalities that volunteer organisations work so hard to overcome in their social mission.

Footnote

1. Scottish Government (2019) defines volunteering as: “Volunteering is a choice. A choice to give time or energy, a choice undertaken of one’s own free will and a choice not motivated for financial gain or for a wage or salary. ‘Volunteering’ describes the wide range of ways in which people help out, get involved, volunteer and participate in their communities (both communities of interest and communities of place).” Volunteering can be both formal (undertaken through a voluntary organisation) and informal (helping out others in a self-managed way). While often focusing on formal volunteering roles within organisations, this report also queries a neat division between informal and formal roles, with the latter accruing more recognition, whilst the former being often necessarily practised in more disadvantaged communities and without the benefit of social recognition or economic reimbursement. ←

About this Project

With the support of the Scottish Government, and as part of Scotland's Volunteering Action Plan, a project was developed by Make Your Mark and the University of Strathclyde to support inclusive volunteering programmes across Scotland's voluntary sector.

The project had two elements:

- Gathering evidence on barriers to cultures of inclusive volunteering in volunteer organisations and community-led groups with lived experience of marginalisation ² (delivered through focus groups and a survey).
- Designing an Inclusive Volunteering Toolkit.

The project commenced in October 2022 with the first development programme workshop, and came to a close in July 2023 with the launch of the Inclusive Volunteering Toolkit. This report offers a summary of key findings and recommendations from the project.

Footnote

2. 'Marginalisation' describes the process by which some people are 'systematically excluded from meaningful participation in economic, social, political, cultural and other forms of human activity in their communities and thus denied the opportunity to fulfil themselves as human beings' (Ng et al, 2014). The term highlights the inequality that underpins the creation of identities and hierarchised power structures. As people have multiple identities (sex, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, nationality, immigration status, socio-economic class, etc), each person has a combination of multiple marginalised and non-marginalised identities. The idea of marginalisation as having multiple and sometimes compounding structural dimensions has been termed and popularised as 'intersectionality' (Crenshaw, 1989). ←

Why inclusive volunteering matters

Volunteering has significant economic and social impacts in Scotland. Volunteering supports skills development, improves individual physical and mental health and wellbeing and strengthens social bonds within and between communities (**Scottish Government, 2019**). Although volunteering has many benefits, it has not historically been accessible or inclusive for everyone.

There have been various initiatives aiming to address inclusive volunteer programmes. In 2004, the Scottish Executive published its Volunteering Strategy to improve volunteer experiences, remove barriers to participation and support young people through targeted interventions such as Project Scotland. In 2013, the UK-wide #iwill campaign sought to increase by 50% the proportion of young people taking part in meaningful social action by 2020. In 2017/18, the **Scottish Government indicated its intention to reinvigorate volunteering** by focussing on young volunteering opportunities during the Year of Young People and supporting groups experiencing barriers to volunteering. In 2019, The Scottish Government published **Volunteering For All**, which provided a comprehensive framework for articulating a national narrative for the value of volunteering, alongside a strategic approach to incorporating volunteering into broader programmes of inclusive social and economic growth.

Major reports such as **Time Well Spent** (Kanemura et al, 2022) and resources such as **Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in Volunteering** (NCVO, 2021), have been vital for capturing the complexity of intersectional inequalities, the long-term impact of the pandemic, and the ongoing cost of living crisis on the volunteer sector. As the voluntary sector becomes more important for maintaining services and care in society, how can we ensure that the benefits of volunteering are equally shared, and that the full breadth

and depth of our society's experience is represented in the volunteering sector?

To date, many of the initiatives to remove barriers to volunteering have focussed on youth engagement. From 2009–2016, the percentage of young people aged 11–18 in Scotland who volunteered at least once per year significantly increased from 33% to 52% and remained steady at approximately 50% through 2019 (**Volunteer Scotland, 2020**). Youth volunteering has decreased by 12% between 2019 and 2022, predominantly due to the impacts of COVID-19 and the cost of living crisis, but still remains 10% higher than average adult (over 18) volunteering engagement (**Volunteer Scotland, 2022a**).

Whilst initiatives have been successful in increasing youth volunteering, disparities in engagement have persisted across other demographics.

From 2007 to 2017, the **Scottish Household Survey** indicated that volunteer engagement rates were consistently lowest amongst people:

- without a degree or professional qualification
- from lower income groups
- from more deprived areas
- from minority ethnic groups

The most recent Scottish Household Survey (2021) similarly found that those most likely to volunteer are:

- people with a degree or professional qualification
- from higher income groups
- from less deprived areas
- white and non-disabled

The disparities in volunteering have profound implications for wider society, where the accrual of benefits for more privileged people increases inequality.

intentionally blank

2. Key Findings

Although ‘inclusion’ has been a priority of national volunteering agendas in Scotland for almost two decades, systemic inequalities, a lack of staffing and funding dedicated to volunteering, a lack of volunteer equalities data and entrenched organisational cultures continue to make formal volunteering inaccessible for many people, especially those from marginalised groups. However, it is again important to note that marginalised people have historically and currently volunteer informally at high rates, a practice necessitated by long-term exclusion from access to economic, social, political and cultural privilege.

Despite significant barriers to societal and organisational change, the progress made in increasing youth engagement shows that with sustained commitment across the voluntary sector, coupled with adequate staffing and funding, change can be made. This research builds on existing inclusion initiatives, many of which focused on youth volunteering, and uses an intersectional model to analyse multiple dimensions of marginalisation and suggest key recommendations for inclusive volunteering programmes.

Barriers to volunteering

Our research has identified a few key barriers to inclusive volunteer engagement, including:

General under-confidence in EDI-focused policy, legislation and practice.

Many volunteer organisers expressed a nervousness or lack of confidence in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion, especially in relation to what their organisations were legally required to do to support a diverse range of people to volunteer. Many also noted uncertainty around what terms to use when speaking about various identities and backgrounds, and expressed a fear of ‘getting it wrong’.

A lack of organisation-specific strategies and targets for inclusion.

Whilst many volunteer organisers expressed their intentions to foster a welcoming environment for everyone, there was a lack of concrete commitments, plans and targets for inclusion work within organisations. Instead, volunteer organisers were more reactive to specific volunteer requirements. This is likely a function of volunteer engagement staffing and funding limitations noted by many respondents.

A lack of proactive and specific inclusion strategies can lead to marginalised people being engaged as a ‘tick box’ exercise wherein they are expected to fit into structures that don’t suit their needs and desires for

volunteering. This can create volunteering relationships that are not mutually beneficial and exploitative in that marginalised people fulfil organisational EDI quotas, but do not have positive volunteering experiences.

If organisations do not take a proactive approach to inclusion, the onus is put on volunteers to highlight their needs and ask for adjustments, which can make them feel like ‘the problem’.

Lack of collection of and standardisation in data collection around volunteer demographics.

Collecting equalities data on volunteers is not legally mandated, and so many organisations do not collect such data, or collect some equalities data (e.g. on age), but not other equalities data (e.g. on race, sexuality, class).

The lack of collection of equalities data, and the varying types of equalities data collected, makes it difficult to get an accurate understanding of who, and who does not, volunteer. Our research initially sought to collect volunteer equalities data in Scotland’s heritage sector and produce a benchmark for future inclusion work. However, as less than a third of respondents collected equalities data, there was not enough data to produce an accurate representation of volunteers.

Organisations that do collect equalities data have expressed an unwillingness or anxiety around sharing their equalities data for sectoral and national benchmarking efforts.

This could be for several reasons:

- People are not clear on why equalities data is collected, and how it can be used to improve inclusion within their volunteer programmes.
- People are not confident with GDPR and regulations around data collection, and may be nervous about the legalities of collecting, processing and sharing personal data.
- People may think that their organisations are not diverse, and may be nervous about measuring or reporting this to boards and funders.
- People are committed to the idea that ‘everyone is welcome’ in their organisation, thereby discouraging action on a problem that they may not think exists.
- People are nervous that expanding and diversifying volunteering may threaten paid jobs.

Recent events (COVID-19 and the cost of living crisis) disproportionately affecting marginalised people.

Broader societal inequalities shape how and if people can engage with volunteering. Marginalised people are more likely to have greater time and economic pressures that make it more difficult for them to volunteer, and the resulting lack of diversity in many voluntary organisations can lead to a lack of awareness of varying needs, abilities, cultures, lived experiences and backgrounds. Due to these embedded inequalities, marginalised people have been living through various periods of crisis. The contemporary cost of living crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic have disproportionately affected marginalised people, further entrenching inequalities and increasing barriers to volunteering.

Perception of volunteering as predominantly for white, non-disabled and middle class people continues to entrench existing inequalities.

Even though the majority of focus group participants volunteered formally and informally, expressed experiencing benefits from volunteering or were very interested in volunteering, there remained a perception that volunteering wasn't 'for them' because:

- The informal volunteering and mutual aid practised by these communities is often not recognised or easily measured by national or governmental bodies.
- Marketing and imagery of volunteers often lacks representation of marginalised people.
- Marginalised groups are often positioned as somewhere to 'reach out' to or recruit from, rather than involved in the development of volunteer programmes or roles.
- Some participants expressed negative experiences with voluntary organisations failing to meet their needs, making them feel like 'tick box exercises' wherein organisations expressed a willingness to be inclusive without dedicated support for volunteers of different backgrounds and abilities.
- Many voluntary organisations recruit via word-of-mouth, often resulting in homogenous volunteer cohorts and restricting knowledge of opportunities to existing audiences.

Enablers to volunteering

Our key recommendations to overcome these barriers and enable a diverse range of people to volunteer are:

More active support for organisations undertaking inclusive volunteering initiatives.

More active support for inclusive volunteering could take the form of guidance and development programmes.

Volunteer Scotland already provides extensive inclusive volunteering guidance at a national level, but more regional or sectoral advocacy bodies such as Make Your Mark would provide organisations with more tailored and regular support, and help to influence those within their sector around the importance of inclusive volunteering. Furthermore, advocacy bodies could develop smaller Communities of Practice, such as the Make Your Mark Volunteer Organisers Network, for peer-to-peer support around inclusive volunteering, including sharing what went well and suggestions of what to do differently.

These advocacy bodies, as well as Third Sector Interfaces (TSIs), could also look to offer more tailored support for individual organisations to develop inclusive volunteering strategies and targets. Make Your Mark has trialled this approach by partnering with inclusive recruitment specialists at AAI Employability to support 10 voluntary organisations in Scotland to develop inclusive volunteering strategies. A full report detailing the process of creating inclusive volunteering strategies and recurring themes identified by participants is available for download. These organisations will also share their learning through a series of case studies, thereby providing more guidance for other organisations looking to develop their own inclusive volunteering strategies.

Making inclusion commitments, plans and targets publicly available would give potential volunteers confidence that organisations are being proactive in their approach to inclusion, and that their needs would be met, thereby encouraging them to volunteer.

Co-designing volunteer programmes with marginalised people

Partnering with community, social and third sector organisations led by under-represented groups and communities is the most effective way to model collaborative leadership in equalities. Working in partnership with organisations that are experts in equalities and inclusion would also help to upskill staff in relation to EDI and work to resolve people's lack of confidence around EDI policy, legislation and practice.

Working in partnership would position potential volunteers as having a wealth of knowledge and experience, rather than positioning them as beneficiaries of upskilling via the organisation. Involving marginalised people in all aspects of the volunteer programme also removes the onus from volunteers to opt-in or get involved.

Involving marginalised people in the development of volunteer programmes will also inform inclusive recruitment practices and ensure that volunteers are recruited through a variety of methods, such as local LGBTQ+ cafés, Afro-Caribbean restaurants, WhatsApp groups, Facebook membership pages, and in a variety of formats, such as online, print, multiple languages, Braille, audio, video and BSL.

Development of flexible and varied volunteer roles

In light of the impact of embedded inequalities and the contemporary COVID-19 pandemic and the cost of living crisis on marginalised people, developing flexible and varied volunteer roles will be key to enabling marginalised people to volunteer despite increased disabilities and health issues, as well as mounting economic and time pressures. Volunteering, as a way for people to improve wellbeing, build social networks and practice or develop skills, can also help to tackle societal inequalities.

Volunteer organisers could explore micro-volunteering, digital volunteering, event volunteering and family volunteering as varying ways for people to volunteer, and highlight on recruitment materials how roles can be adjusted to suit varying needs and interests of volunteers.

Increased funding for volunteer organisers and volunteer programmes.

Many people who organise volunteers do so as part of a larger role, such as community engagement or events management. Due to staffing and funding pressures, some people who organise volunteers are volunteers themselves. In order to ensure that volunteers have proper support and that inclusive volunteering strategies have adequate staffing to be enacted, organisations should prioritise hiring volunteer organisers.

Beyond staffing, having an adequate budget for volunteers is especially critical in light of supporting volunteers during continued periods of crisis, including COVID-19 and the cost of living crisis. When writing funding bids, volunteer organisers could include budgets for paying volunteer expenses, as well as covering childcare costs, offering snacks or meals and including provision for interpreters.

Increased promotion of volunteer stories from diverse backgrounds.

Sharing blog posts, audio recordings or videos of volunteers from a range of backgrounds talking about their volunteering experiences would play a key role in changing the perception of volunteering as predominantly for white, middle-class people.

Supporting organisations to collect and report equalities data.

Advocacy bodies and Third Sector Interfaces (TSIs) could signpost organisations to best practice in collecting equalities data, such as that from Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) and Evaluation Scotland, as well as organise events and publicise case studies on the importance of collecting equalities data. For example, Make Your Mark intends for a large part of its 2024 annual conference to focus on the importance of collecting equalities data, as well as how to collect it and use it effectively to make change.

Funders could also require that any project that involves volunteers report on volunteer demographics in line with standardised equalities forms developed by SCVO. Advocacy bodies with memberships, such as Make Your Mark, could also require reporting on volunteer demographics as a requirement of membership.

Further research into inclusive volunteering

Whilst this research has illuminated key barriers and enablers for inclusive volunteering, as well as foregrounded the lived experiences of marginalised people, there is more to be done.

Further focus groups could be held with marginalised people based outwith Scotland's Central Belt, as marginalisation is experienced differently across and within urban and rural areas. Further focus groups could also be held with people with convictions as well as people with experience of long-term homelessness, perspectives that were missing in this research.

The survey of heritage volunteer organisers could also be replicated across volunteer-involving organisations in other sectors to build a national picture of inclusive volunteering practices and provide points for comparison and difference between sectors.

3. Analysis

The recommendations and findings in the report are drawn from the existing expertise in Make Your Mark, reports and resources produced and shared widely in the UK volunteer sector, alongside a specially designed survey and series of commissioned focus groups.

This mixed-methods approach was designed to elicit different types of responses. With volunteer organisations, we used surveys to allow anonymity in the expectation that it would generate more honest responses. The fear of ‘getting it wrong’ with equalities and inclusion is itself a barrier to achieving positive outcomes. The focus groups were designed to create an informal peer-led environment where people could speak honestly about their perception of volunteering, and their experiences of volunteering (including the experience of people hesitant about volunteering).

Survey of volunteer organisations and groups

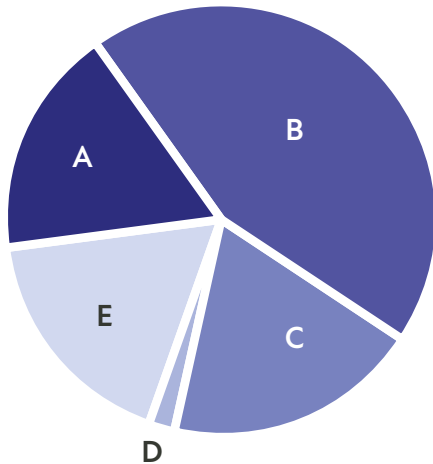
The survey was a combination of open and closed questions to allow us to gather data alongside qualitative responses. 52 responses were received from volunteer-involving heritage organisations, with 73.1% (38) already Make Your Mark members.

The organisations who responded represent the majority of heritage volunteers in Scotland, as well as represent a range of sizes of heritage organisations, from entirely voluntary run (17.3%) to having more than 250 staff members (17.3%). The largest group (44.2%) of respondents were small to medium sized heritage organisations with between 1-10 staff members.

Most respondents came from small organisations with some dedicated staffing to support volunteering. Just over half did not collect information on volunteering hours, and almost two thirds did not collect equalities data. Of those that did collect equalities data, a majority did not have confidence in sharing this data. This in itself was interesting: while organisations did have a sense of who was volunteering (and why tracking protected characteristics might matter), there was fewer resources dedicated to how that impacted participation (through the volume of volunteering hours or range of engagement). The reticence around sharing summarised equalities data speaks to the sensitivity of the data (in terms of how it’s collected, stored, shared and used).

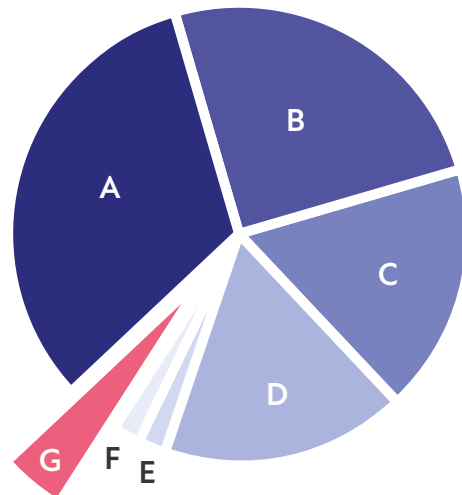
Key data on these organisations is shown across the four following charts:

Chart 1: How many paid staff members does your organisation have?



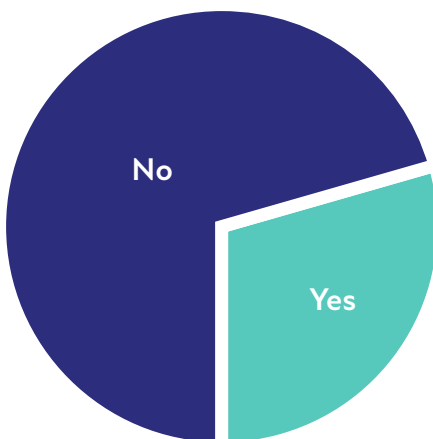
- A. No Paid Staff Members (Entirely Volunteer Run)** (17.3%, 9 Organisations).
- B. 1 to 10** (44.2%, 23 Organisations).
- C. 11 to 25** (19.2 %, 10 Organisations).
- D. 51 to 100** (1.9%, 1 Organisation).
- E. 250 or more** (17.3%, 9 Organisations).

Chart 2: Does your organisation have a volunteer organiser role?



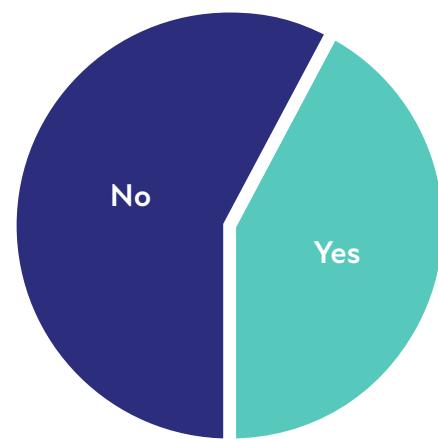
- A. As part of a paid staff member's duties** (32.7%, 17 Organisations)
- B. Shared by a few paid staff members** (25%, 13 Organisations).
- C. As a paid staff member's entire role** (17.3%, 9 Organisations).
- D. A volunteer oversees other volunteers** (17.3%, 9 Organisations)
- E. Shared between paid employees and volunteers** (1.9%, 1 Organisation).
- F. Project based, so there aren't always volunteers and their organisers** (1.9%, 1 Organisation)
- G. No** (3.8%, 2 Organisations)

Chart 3: Do you collect equalities data about volunteers' demographics and background (gender, age, etc)?



- > **No** (63.5%, 33 Organisations).
- > **Yes** (26.5%, 19 Organisations).

Chart 4: Would you be willing to share anonymised, summarised equalities information about your volunteers with Make Your Mark for the purposes of this survey?



- > **No** (57.9%, 11 Organisations).
- > **Yes** (42.1%, 8 Organisations).

We chose to survey heritage sector volunteer organisers for two key reasons:

1. The heritage sector has a proven track record of working in partnership to achieve sectoral aims. The heritage sector published its first joint, national strategy **Our Place in Time** in 2014, which was refreshed with the publication of **Our Past, Our Future** in 2023. Make Your Mark was created as part of Our Place in Time, and with 87 members across Scotland is an initiative that demonstrates the capacity of the heritage sector to work together to implement change. We were able to tap into the history of collaboration and networking within the heritage sector and use Make Your Mark's pre-existing networks to quickly gather data to produce a sector-wide picture of inclusive volunteering practices.
2. Existing research on demographics in the heritage sector indicates that the volunteer base is not very diverse across multiple dimensions, and predominantly consists of older, non-disabled, white people from less deprived areas. These are the same groups overrepresented in volunteering across Scotland's wider voluntary sector (**Scottish Government, 2021**). This means that fostering inclusive volunteering practices in the heritage sector can have a large immediate impact, as well as provide a road map and case studies for other sectors to make a change.

Whilst the heritage sector provides an insightful picture of current inclusive volunteering practice, the survey data has limits. Recent research into the heritage sector highlights the current turbulence and uncertainty facing the sector, specifically how recent and current events like the COVID-19 pandemic and cost of living crisis are threatening the existence and sustainability of many heritage organisations across Scotland.

The heritage sector relies on older volunteers, many of whom were and are shielding due to

COVID-19 or are leaving roles due to health issues. According to the most recent **UK Heritage Pulse Report on volunteering (2023)**, only 14.1% of respondents said volunteer recruitment had gone well, and only 8% of respondents said that attracting volunteers from a broad range of ages and backgrounds had gone well.

According to the **UK Heritage Pulse report on price increases and impact** published in September 2022, only 47% of organisations felt confident or very confident they could accurately predict the financial outlook for their organisation over the next 12 months. While the cost of supplies and overheads was recorded as increasing for 91% of respondents, 55% of organisations had not implemented or planned any measures in response.

This means that the survey data collected in February and March 2023 provides a snapshot in time, and is likely to change with the continued uncertainty and upheaval caused by the pandemic and inflation.

Diversifying Volunteering: Existing Approaches to Recruitment

The most popular method of recruitment was 'word of mouth' (92.3%). This could begin to explain why many heritage organisations have reported issues with recruiting a diverse range of volunteers (**Carr, 2023**). Oftentimes word of mouth promotion results in recruitment of people of similar backgrounds and experiences to the existing volunteer base.

Organisations' websites (76.9%) and social media (75%) were the next most popular recruitment methods. The high level of digital volunteer recruitment could be linked to organisations' desires to recruit younger people, as people aged 19 – 29 are the most active age group on social media. However, a heavy reliance on digital media could exclude people who cannot afford computers or phones, have no time to go online due to work

or other commitments, lack technological ability or experience barriers in using screen technology. Posters (32.7%), Make Your Mark portal (30.8%) and local volunteer centre or third sector interface (42.3%) all ranked as middling strategies.

Partnering with local charities to engage with a more diverse range of volunteers was used as a recruitment method by 25% of respondents. Research and practice in inclusive engagement has shown that building relationships with groups representing marginalised people is the most effective way to diversify volunteer programmes. These groups are trusted messengers within communities and can provide feedback on how to make opportunities, sites, policies and practices more accessible (**Volunteer Scotland, 2022b**).

12 (92.3%) of the 13 respondents who indicated that they used this recruitment method were Make Your Mark members, representing about one third (31.2%) of campaign members who answered the survey. Only 1 of respondent who indicated that they used this recruitment method was not a Make Your Mark member, representing 7.1% of non-campaign members who answered the survey. This is an early indication that the Make Your Mark campaign is successful in supporting the development of more inclusive volunteering practices amongst members.

Qualitative Responses on Making Volunteering Inclusive

The survey contained options to write in free-text format to respond to set questions.

How do you foster an inclusive environment for volunteers at your organisation?

We offered some prompts for this question and many respondents referred to these, without necessarily unpacking what a ‘taster session’, ‘open days’, ‘try-out days’ or ‘multi-lingual provisioning’ might mean in their particular settings.

Responses tended to gesture towards inclusive feelings that were not necessarily linked to clear policies or practices, e.g. ‘We offer a friendly and open environment’. Only a slight majority of respondents (55.8%) stated that they had organisation-wide equality, diversity and inclusion policies or guidelines.

Many noted the interpersonal and relational aspects of creating a good atmosphere e.g. ‘Nothing formal, just day-to-day interaction to create a welcoming environment’. This was linked with organisational methods of recruitment via personal relations and proximity:

- ‘volunteers are recruited through personal contact’
- ‘we rely on informal interaction’

Other responses noted ‘flexible’ methods, or ‘open’ opportunities, centring volunteers’ ‘choice’:

- ‘Volunteers may opt for their choice of role’
- ‘Role within X is flexible according to volunteers’ needs and wishes’

It may be that having ‘no minimum expectations’ could create disadvantage and

uncertainty rather than flexibility, as people new to volunteering generally or with a sector or organisation specifically may not have a sense of expectations, time commitments and benefits of volunteering, thereby dissuading them from getting involved.

Similarly, there may be a missed opportunity to capitalise on volunteers' full and pre-existing skill-set by emphasising 'no experience is necessary': across all ages and experiences volunteers often want to consolidate their skill set and may look to be matched with organisations able to support this desire. For older volunteers in retirement this might be about recognising previous and ongoing skills in previous workplace contexts; for younger people this might be about building skills for future educational and/or employment opportunities. There are certain groups, particularly refugees and people seeking asylum, whose skills may not be fully recognised by their country of arrival. The emphasis on 'no experience' may not fully invite in or capitalise upon the valuable experiences of such groups.

There was an assertion of organisational members and/or potential volunteers being free to choose or opt-in, e.g. 'All members are offered the opportunity to volunteer. Some do, some don't. If interested we invite them along to spend some time with the people/section they are interested in'. However, recruiting from the existing membership base may not be effective in attracting new audiences and ensuring diverse recruitment. An insistence that 'everyone is welcome' may explain why there is a nervousness and/or reluctance around gathering and sharing EDI data that may indicate a lack of representation; this welcoming gesture may gloss over the hard work to be done in practising rather than expressing inclusion.

Some respondents mentioned fostering inclusivity through adapting resources, opportunities and training. These adaptations were primarily related through the provision of materials, such as offering versions online and in print, and in languages other than English.

Training was linked to often rather undefined skills workshops, inductions and training sessions, although some links were made between a skilling-up and a potential return to paid employment, e.g. '... supporting the community back into work roles if they wish ...'. Several organisations mentioned additional support needs in terms of volunteers' learning and language capacities:

- 'We offer large print, dyslexic friendly fonts, are fully accessible and tasks can be tailored to suit individual needs'
- 'We have a relaxed recruitment process. We supply information visually, verbally and written to enable wider access when engaging with materials. We can provide large print formats if needed'

More formal skills/qualifications were mentioned, e.g. Duke of Edinburgh awards, school placements and buddy schemes, although the survey indicated that recruitment through educational providers was not prioritised, with only 1.9% of respondents listing it as a recruitment method.

Several organisations were honest and upfront about the need to do more to make their organisation more inclusive:

- 'We could do more here'
- 'To be honest we are only now realising that we may not currently be inclusive, and are embarking on ways to volunteer that are inclusive'
- 'Our initial volunteer interview process is very informal but your question has made me think we should be doing more!'

Such good intentions were also evident in statements such as:

- 'We would adapt as necessary'
- 'Nothing at the moment but we would like to consider options'

One respondent also indicated that the survey itself provided ‘food for thought!’. These seemingly indicate good intent, but may be less proactive and more reactive, as responsive to needs (e.g. specific volunteers’ requirements) or necessity (legislation/guidance). Several noted the limitations to developing inclusive policy and practice, including a lack of funding and/or staff, e.g. ‘We have no-one dedicated to volunteering full or part time’.

Other organisations seemed versed in good policy and practice and could relate examples, using legalistic language to speak of ‘reasonable adjustments’³ and working with organisations and volunteers to ‘teach us how to be more inclusive and reach different audiences’:

‘Offering info on our website about some of the ways we are trying to reduce barriers to volunteering. Making inclusivity core to our work, not just to volunteering (eg. our collections reflect diverse people’s lives and experiences; our programme includes diverse speakers, and creatives). Offering flexible volunteer roles which are tailored to volunteers’ interests, availability, what they feel comfortable doing, what they want to learn. Offering different ways to apply. Accessible building, large print, wheelchair access, laptop set up for vols with visual impairment, etc. Clarity about our commitment to make volunteering accessible from the get go: on our website, when we meet vols for the first time, in the application form. Always asking what we can do to make it easier for them to be involved’.

Others spoke of in-person adaptation (‘Ask people if they need any adjustments and accommodate this where possible, tailoring volunteer experience to individual needs’), financial reimbursement (‘re-imburement for costs incurred during volunteering’) and a range of non-financial benefits were also expressed such as ‘tea/lunch’ and ‘coffee morning’ provision.

Footnote

3. Reasonable adjustments are changes that organisations must make if being disabled puts someone at a disadvantage compared with others who are not disabled. A workplace adjustment is a change to a work process, practice, procedure or environment that enables an employee to perform their job. A workplace adjustment goes beyond the legal requirement of ‘reasonable adjustment’ – what an employer must do under Equality Legislation, and instead focuses on the aspiration of the employer we want to be – looking at what can be done rather than just what must be done. See gov.uk’s documents on [Workplace Adjustments and the Onboarding Process](#), and [Reasonable Adjustments for Disabled Workers](#) for more examples. ←

What barriers could prevent or dissuade people from volunteering with your organisation?

Respondents identified a range of barriers which might act to prevent or dissuade people from volunteering, including a sense of limited finances and time.

Significantly, the onus was often put back on the individual volunteers to come forward to participate, even as structural inequalities were identified. This was evident in statements around volunteers 'choosing' their role and organisations being 'open' to everyone, which was contrasted with an acknowledgement of a sense of limitation, for example around volunteers' temporal and economic resources and sites' inaccessibility. Having 'confidence', 'knowledge' and 'technological' or 'communicative skills' represented another way of framing access as something volunteers themselves could challenge by effectively 'skilling-up'.

Barriers were also identified and located within existing voluntary organisations, which included the physical premises of buildings, often seen as just matter-of-fact or insurmountable:

- 'Poor heating in an old building'
- 'We have a huge barrier with the age of the museum that we cannot do anything about'
- 'We are located on a cobbled street which is difficult to navigate'
- 'listed building'
- 'access only by car'

Interestingly both old and new sites related these physical factors, framed as factual and potentially leading to an unchanging and narrow view of 'the problem', seen as one of 'objective', 'unchanging' infrastructures (buildings, stairs, streets, cars) rather than as a necessary responsiveness to equality legislation and protected characteristics.

Respondents also identified barriers in the felt cultures of groups. Everyday cultures, expectations and assumptions of organisations may be felt as, for example, white and/or middle-class and may mean that marginalised ethnic groups and/or those from working-class backgrounds feel less welcome. Some organisations are known and even celebrated as large, well-funded, prestigious and elite, and with fee-paying membership bases. These realities may not best signal organisational commitment to EDI.

Notably, there was reported staff resistance to expanding and diversifying volunteering, including through reimagining and varying roles, with suspicion that increasing volunteering numbers could be used to reduce paid staff, e.g. 'Currently working on increasing the variety of roles. Still some staff resistance'. Such sensitivities may at least partly explain general reluctance to share equalities data, which itself acts as a barrier to understanding and transforming the sector.

Focus Groups on Inclusion and Volunteering

To gain an understanding of barriers and enablers to volunteering from marginalised people, the project partnered with several volunteering organisations working with specific marginalised groups including African and Caribbean people, Muslim women, and disabled people. We also conducted a focus group with students, with LGBTQ+ representation.

Questions focused on participants' experiences and perceptions of volunteering in Scotland, as well as barriers to volunteering and how these could be removed.

Focus groups varied between 5-12 members and ranged in age from '18-29' to '70 and over', describing themselves as 'African, African Scottish or African British', 'African: any other African ethnic group', 'Caribbean, Caribbean Scottish or Caribbean British', 'Caribbean or Black: any other Caribbean or Black ethnic group', 'Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British', 'Pakistani, Pakistani Scottish or Pakistani British'; 'White: Scottish', 'White: Other British', 'White: Irish'. Participants described themselves as Buddhist, Christian, Muslim and not religious. Participants identified as cis gender, trans gender and non-binary. As indicated by partial postcode data, participants also lived in areas of varying advantage and disadvantage, according to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation.

Whilst focus group participants represented a range of ages, ethnic groups, genders, religious backgrounds, abilities, sexualities and socioeconomic backgrounds, participants were all based in the Central Belt of Scotland.

Participating in the focus groups could itself be seen as mirroring some of the broad concerns around inclusive volunteering in terms of who enters and gets involved in community spaces, and who and what is recognised, supported and remunerated.

To enable a diverse range of people to participate, focus group participants were offered a gift token and lunch as recognition of time and energy invested in this process.

As facilitators we asked participants how we could facilitate their participation in the group and support those with experiences of financial hardship, gendered care, experiences of discrimination, socio-legal precarity, and cultural and linguistic diversity.

The following pages contain a summary of these focus groups:

Focus Group A

Large Scotland-based community-led grassroots organisation centred on disability rights, advocacy, policy and awareness.

This focus group foregrounded the joys, pleasures, frustrations and barriers associated with volunteering. In this focus group, skills development was a secondary factor in participating in volunteering. Purpose, social value and social connections were a much bigger imperative.

Highlights included:

- A powerful sense of being valued, feeling belonging and having purpose.
- Creating opportunities for other disabled people.
- Improving an understanding of how to work with disabled people (from staff, to volunteers and user communities).
- New social networks and opportunities.

Challenges included:

- Basic awareness of disability and access within volunteering organisations.
- Becoming the resident 'expert' on all disability.
- Finding good, flexible opportunities to accommodate conditions (e.g. chronic illness).
- Feeling like a 'problem' for asking for adjustments.

Significant barriers included:

- Lack of resources (e.g. screen readers) within organisations.
- Lack of organisational awareness or understanding of disabilities.
- Lack of information about what reasonable adjustments can be accommodated within organisations.
- Lack of dedicated resources to support access (e.g. additional travel expenses).

Focus Group B:

Muslim women-led grassroots organisation informed by an intersectional approach to women's inclusion in Scotland.

This focus group centred education, compassion and equalities in their discussion. There was a discussion of how equalities work had positively influenced Scottish institutions over the decades, especially in relation to race. However, a number of culturally-specific issues could be improved.

Highlights included:

- Taking a compassion and empathy-centred approach to societal contribution.
- Learning from others, others learning from you.
- Creating cultures of openness by meeting new people from different walks of life.
- Aligning culturally-important values around community service with broader volunteering opportunities.

Challenges included:

- Basic financial support (especially around childcare and transport).
- Cultural sensitivities (especially around confidentiality of personal circumstances).
- Lack of skills development.
- Lack of support for wellbeing.

Significant barriers included:

- Family or community judgement.
- Lack of recognition or value.
- Being overworked, especially in emotionally intensive investment.
- Support for understanding disability in minority religious and cultural volunteer-led organisations.

Focus Group C:

Black-led organisation fostering community and cultural programming for African and Caribbean heritage people in Scotland.

This focus group foregrounded very basic barriers to inclusion, especially for refugees and people seeking asylum in Scotland. The conversation ranged across a variety of topics but social integration, skills development and employment were recurring concerns.

Highlights included:

- A positive way to meet people from different cultures and connect.
- A mechanism for reducing isolation and loneliness.
- A route to developing skills that can directly aid employment.
- A method for developing new social networks, especially for newer migrants, people seeking asylum and refugees.

Challenges included:

- Accessing 'good' volunteering opportunities that can help to build diverse skills.
- Knowing how to access opportunities and how different voluntary sectors advertise.
- Decreasing opportunities for 'lived experience' volunteering in the NHS.
- Openness and transparency about how 'good' volunteering opportunities with support (e.g. travel expenses) are allocated.

Significant barriers included:

- A lack of response to volunteering applications and enquiries.
- Hesitation and confusion around volunteering and employment rights for people seeking asylum (amongst volunteer organisations).
- Accessing information about opportunities.
- Availability of opportunities beyond retail.
- Support with childcare costs and transport.

Focus Group D:

Students from diverse cohorts at a major Scottish university.

This focus group surfaced broader questions about the nature of volunteering, especially what 'counts' as volunteering (mutual aid, grassroots activism, etc).

Highlights included:

- Volunteering having the potential for positive social change.
- Volunteering helping with skills development.
- Opportunities for learning and meeting new people.
- Opportunities to contribute to collectives with a common purpose.

Challenges included:

- Available time to volunteer, especially through the cost of living crisis.
- Finding opportunities in organisations which share values about diversity and inclusion.
- Perception that volunteering is there to escalate the careers of middle-class young people.
- Confidence in the 'value' of the opportunity, especially when other forms of unpaid work are available.

Significant barriers included:

- A lack of financial support for volunteering, such as paying travel expenses.
- A gap between attitudes to social justice amongst particular groups and organisational demographics being predominantly homogenous.
- A lack of opportunities where your voice or contribution can help to enact change or make a difference.

Focus Group Data Analysis

The four focus groups contained much rich insight, discussion and debate and it was clear that people have much knowledge, passion and experience in and for the subject area. Alongside both new and sustained commitment to volunteering – as a lived experience and as a sense of future possibilities – focus groups highlighted several challenges around inclusive volunteering. There were different opinions about the worth and cost of volunteering, both socially and individually, with the call for a diversity of approaches and opportunities, including for recruiting within and through minoritised communities by using diverse channels to advertise opportunities (e.g. local LGBTQ+ cafés, Afro Caribbean cafés, WhatsApp groups, Facebook membership pages, etc.).

Three focus groups mentioned ‘box ticking’ as a tokenistic measure involving organisations gesturing towards equality and diversity but without creating full and sustainable change (“Was it just a tick-box exercise? Like, I’m determined that they will be accessible, whether they want to be or not”, Group A). While many had a sense of agency and commitment to making change and for ‘people like us’, there is a need to think beyond asking people to find their own solution to the ‘problem’. Making minoritised groups always and fully welcomed, equipped and supported in the sector should be a norm.

Notably, racialised inequality and discrimination was often not explicitly named as racism but rather often implied and gestured towards amongst focus group members, revealing the difficulty and potential unease in naming inequalities. That said, one group did mention ‘subtle racism’ (“I think there’s subtle barriers but I think there’s subtle racism. When young people go for jobs they get the degrees and it’s very difficult. Sometimes you have to go down south to get the experience and then come back up”, Group B). Here, the ‘confidence’ in naming inequalities, particularly racism, was seen to implicate both individuals and organisations; confidence for minoritised people to speak and a confidence in volunteering organisations about how to make those voices more meaningfully heard. Interestingly, ‘whiteness’ as a structuring force beyond individualised racialised bodies was named by the student focus group whose members were all white:

“It can also be about sort of spaces appearing sort of like white spaces, you know? And if something sort of appears as sort of like white space, because actually there’s a lot of white power there and, you know, there’s predominantly white people who are kind of, sort of historically involved in a particular field, then there can be a different sense of comfort in deciding that you’re going to volunteer in that space, you know, depending on, you know, whether you have white skin or black skin or a person of colour.”

(Group D)

Respondents spoke variously about group precarity (e.g. as students, Muslim women, Afro Caribbean women and men, refugees, people seeking asylum, disabled people, members of the LGBTQ+ community) where social and legal futures were not always felt as secure, safe or even known. Many of the issues that participants and organisations grappled with speak to broader societal inequalities and vulnerabilities, including having a safe and accessible usable space for members, providing childcare and making an inclusive space even with the challenges of resources, infrastructure and investment.

“Yeah, childcare could be an issue, as well, you know, for a family. You know? Where to keep the child, or who is going to volunteer? That could be a big problem. So childcare is a massive thing.”

(Group C)

While barriers against participating are outlined in the above example, conversely, there can be a compulsion to volunteer given the lack of and/or inability to work.

“I feel like another group that volunteers would be the asylum seekers, definitely, because they are not allowed to work. So it’s their only other option to, like, keep busy, and at least have that in your case, as well. Because, at the end of the day, you are going to be asked how you’ve been integrating with the surroundings, so since you can’t work, you can’t do any other thing, you only have one option, to volunteer.”

(Group C)

Participants have been living through various periods of crisis including the contemporary cost of living crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. It is important to remember that these are local, national and international crises and implicate participants in wide networks, including as migrants, first generation citizens and people seeking asylum, and as members of families and communities.

“As well as we want to communicate it [information] in English, we also want to make sure that we communicate it in the languages that people best understand, just so that they get the information properly. And that’s what we did successfully in COVID, you know, and we want to continue to be doing that.”

(Group C)

“**Speaker 1:** Because providing time and energy for free during a cost of living crisis doesn’t feel like a benefit. Does that make sense?”

Speaker 2: I mean we were talking earlier about government cuts kind of creating like more of a need for volunteering, so kind of from that point of view, so the economic, like well we’re trying to fill the gaps that the government should be filling by getting like random people to step up and, you know, take on those responsibilities, even though they probably already have plenty of responsibilities of their own. And like from that point of view, like from a capitalist point of view, like no one actually cares about people. So it’s got to be more of an economic thing. Sorry that’s quite cynical, but it’s true.

Imagining populations as having needs in and beyond ‘crisis’ contexts may help more fully situate volunteers as equipped with a range of skills, preferences and choices and as having needs and critical concerns. In this we see a challenge to wholly positive, naïve or traditional ideas of volunteering, which may reinforce gender inequality:

“So like the Scottish Government kind of definition of volunteering, like is a housewife a volunteer? Like I feel like she ticks the same boxes, you know?”

(Group D)

Common concerns were around the transactional nature of volunteering and how to best think about the exchange of skills, expenses, friendship and, importantly, the forms of recognition involved:

“People’s reasons for volunteering ... I mean, the fact that there is no compensation means that value should be the compensation. There’s also picking up skills, but again, that’s a secondary thing.”

(Group A)

“I think in our culture it’s more – it’s a sense of perhaps obligation.”

(Group B)

There were ideas of how the potential for invisibility or inequality ('obligation'), and even exploitation ('working for free') could be offset by a commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion values and practices. Diversity could be imagined through having a varied offering of roles rather than to be filled or signalled by 'diverse people'. Reciprocity was also valued in that if organisations use volunteers, this use should be rewarded and celebrated, where volunteers become 'part of it', reflected in the commonly related experience that lived experience was often shared between service providers and service users:

“Speaker 1: You’ve been welcomed that’s a big thing, you know, you don’t feel you’re a volunteer, you feel you’re a part of it.

Speaker 2: Also it’s accepting the diversity, acknowledging it and bringing to context, you know, not making someone feel outsider.”

(Group B)

“I was a good way of attracting other disabled people to volunteer, and be all inclusive, and all that. Which I didn’t see as being a bad thing, but I thought, ‘There’s a lot that can be learned on both sides here, including the people recruiting the volunteers.’ So when I was in, I took charge of a few things.”

(Group A)

“But also I think you can’t really bring it home to yourself, you know, what you’re experiencing. Volunteering if it’s like you’re dealing with depression or anxiety or something, you know, you can’t bring it home, you have to just leave it there. There’s only so much you can do really. The other thing I feel in volunteering you can do for an organisation, you know, something you’ve experienced yourself so you can relate better. For instance like bereavement I feel if I’ve experienced that so I can help somebody in that. It helps yourself as well by helping somebody else going through that.”

(Group B)

All focus groups mentioned the need to think of volunteering as involving a wider set of opportunities: some respondents lived with the reality of often feeling undermined and under-appreciated, where assumptions were made about incapacity particularly in terms of race, gender, disability and social class:

“What I’ve found sometimes is, like, charities that are for disabled people sometimes seem quite taken aback that disabled people want to volunteer for more active physical roles.”

(Group A)

“Sometimes you apply for where you want to volunteer, and then they never call you back... they were asking me to go and bring proof of address, bring this, bring ... I sent everything to them, they didn’t call me. But the other person, she was not asked anything. They just asked her to come, and they interviewed, and she was given the place, and she is still there until now ... Yeah. I have known a lot of people, because of their status they have been unable to volunteer. Because, like, when they settle, they really are interested in, like, the NHS, for example, or schools, education, they will ask them for a reference, and it can be very, very difficult to get one. It is not really open to everybody.”

(Group C)

There are questions of resources and training within these mis-recognitions (“recognising that the barrier isn’t your impairment; it’s the lack of support” Group A) and focus group A in particular talked about making ‘reasonable adjustments’, while all groups were attentive to volunteering opportunities being aligned to personal needs and desired benefits:

“But how would reasonable adjustments, like, be defined? And I guess, in terms of volunteering, yeah, that could be a barrier, just depending on what an organisation is willing to do, or to spend, to make volunteering accessible.”

(Group A)

“Maybe creating opportunities to say, ‘If there is ever going to be a gap in your volunteering, that’s okay, let us know, and we can make an arrangement,’ rather than losing a volunteer altogether ... I volunteered in the past, with a couple of different youth organisations, but I found, because my health conditions are unpredictable, and a lot of those things are scheduled, I had to stop volunteering, because I wasn’t reliable.”

(Group A)

A key area through which to signal a commitment to EDI was in engaged recruitment, involving marginalised communities from the outset, including in imagining volunteering opportunities, rather than as somewhere to ‘outreach’ to or recruit from. A more ‘of, with, for, by’ approach was preferred, with privilege at times overtly named:

“For me when I think of volunteers I think of my middle-class peers at university who had the time to do that because their parents paid for their rent, and I had to go and actually work to pay for my rent.”

(Group D)

“And because pantries, for example, they offer more choice and more dignity than perhaps are perceived in food banks, you know? And then I kind of also thought about a thing that I volunteered for, although I wouldn’t call it volunteer, but I would think about getting involved in the community in a different way, you know? And it was the [anonymised] which was ... with a demographic that was predominantly women and predominantly middle-class white women. Not exclusively, but predominantly, you know? So, you know, I think really you really need to think about the kind of organisation that it is, you know, and where it’s come from, you know, where the impetus has come from, in terms of volunteering and, you know?”

(Group D)

Involvement, engagement and recruitment was seen as a way to start from and learn with minoritised groups, utilising different strategies and thinking through specific and specialist contributions that volunteers may offer:

“Advertise in, like, African communities. This is something I just learnt quite recently. Every African country has a WhatsApp group. Right? Every African country has a WhatsApp group, where everyone is there. So, like, for volunteering opportunities, let them advertise there. You know? Find the people that run these groups, or if there’s nobody in particular running them, just get someone who is in the group.”

(Group C)

“Because they [teachers] thought she was autistic they didn’t introduce her to the Arabic language because we read the Quran as Muslims. So we [volunteers] start teaching kids maybe from earlier on so they learn Arabic alphabet, then they join letters and read the Quran. She’s not been introduced at all because they thought, oh no it will be too much for her.”

(Group B)

While all participants expressed moments of hope and joy in and across the sector, particularly in terms of ‘making a difference’ to other people, including ‘small changes’, at times this was tempered with a sense of limitation in re-imagining bigger sector-wide and indeed societal changes:

“So I guess part of the idea, the point of kind of more inclusive volunteering would be to like bring in new perspectives and new voices, but at the same time like as a volunteer how much, you know, how much influence would you have if you were like volunteering in a museum? You could be like ‘oh hey that’s kind of, you know, why don’t you include something, a Black artist’, or, you know, whatever historians, ‘in this exhibit?’ But, you know, the head curator’s not necessarily going to listen to you.”

(Group D)

“**Speaker 1:** I think another thing that sometimes I’ve [come] across..., not here, believe me not here, but in other places I’ve volunteered, it’s felt so tokenistic and yeah we really want you here, we need you to be here, we need your experience and things like that but you really feel you’re only there to tick the box. Because they’ve got a criteria of people that they need and they maybe need – quite often the tokenistic old person or ... you’re important because you represent the disabled community and so it’s, you know, that you’re just there to tick that box.”

Speaker 2: You’re there just for that – just for ...

Speaker 3: Just for the numbers sake.

Speaker 4: It’s just to fill that quota isn’t it.”

(Group B)

The critique of filling a quota, or ticking a box, touches on superficial inclusion policies, as gestures which do not realise equality, diversity and inclusion as an ongoing and resourced effort. This is made all the more problematic when ‘doing good’ can also gloss over questions of reciprocity, remuneration and recognition, as well as broader social justice:

“It’s unpaid labour. Like that’s how I feel ... And there’s a part of me that feels with volunteering as well that people do it to like make themselves feel better about their own privilege, like so I think that you could call it social good. If you have to categorise in one of those things, whether it’s altruism or to get ahead, my cynicism makes me think that it’s, people say that it’s for the social benefit but it’s actually for to give themselves the skills that they know that they can access through that.”

(Group D)

“So like I used to volunteer a lot in my church with kind of like, kind of the kids work and things like that, and they’d always be like ‘come on everyone, we’re a big church, there’s like hundreds of people here. Can some other people volunteer instead of just the same person always like doing the coffee or the flowers?’ And it’s just, it does tend, yeah, so. And again I know that’s like a gendered thing as well, but it’s just like, it does tend to be the same people who volunteer for everything and then get burnt out.”

(Group D)

Speaker 4: “It’s like box ticking. So like Black Lives Matter and things like that and, you know, Defund the Police, Abolish the Police, Abolish Borders, things like that. Like is that volunteering in the same way, because it’s definitely about like correcting and like addressing a social ill? And like so people within that who volunteer for organisations that are addressing those issues, like is that not volunteering as well? Or is it activism? So like the Scottish government kind of definition of volunteering, like is a housewife a volunteer? Like I feel like she ticks the same boxes, you know.”

(Group D)

We have deliberately included lengthy quotes in this section to amplify the responses of the focus group participants. Collectively, they raise issues related to the perception of volunteering, economic barriers to access, as well as offering a critique about the ‘value’ of volunteering. The benefit of inclusive volunteering isn’t simply to diversify who volunteers in organisations; it also includes expanding how we count and value the role of volunteering in inclusive social and economic prosperity in Scotland.

4. Recommendations

Drawing on existing literature, a new survey and specially commissioned focus groups, this project found that there was a large variation in approaches to making volunteering more inclusive in Scotland, with initiatives often being driven by key individuals. While this is a natural consequence of the informality around much volunteering (and is an important benefit in terms of flexibility), it can unintentionally foster the very same inequalities that volunteer organisations work so hard to overcome in their social mission.

By working with members of Make Your Mark, and a range of community-centred focus groups, we identified key recurring barriers, including:

- 1.** Using inclusive best practice in volunteering to drive change.
 - 1a.** There is a general under-confidence in EDI policy, legislation and practice (with some exceptions).
 - 1b.** There is variation in data collection to track the participation of volunteers with protected characteristics meaning organisations cannot confidently identify and evidence issues related to inclusion.
 - 1c.** There is a lack of high-quality data to begin national or local equalities-focused benchmarking (e.g. around participation rates).
- 2.** Ensuring broad and open approaches to engagement and participation.
 - 2a.** Economic barriers have worsened due to the cost of living crisis and have disproportionately impacted marginalised communities.
 - 2b.** Many existing approaches to volunteer recruitment fail to reach a fuller range of Scotland's diverse population (e.g. through the production of accessible materials or recruitment through a range of community channels).
 - 2c.** Perceptions about 'who' volunteering is for continue to shape the volunteering sector and entrench existing inequalities.

A lot of groundwork is required before there can be a national approach to benchmarking progress in equalities and inclusion in the volunteering sector in Scotland. There is a danger that partial data will skew the 'real' picture, and that only large, well-resourced organisations with distinct volunteering demographics will be captured.

Our recommendations are focused on developing knowledge, skills and capacity in inclusive volunteering across Scotland, and across volunteering sectors.

The key **recommendations** from this project include:

- More active support for organisations undertaking inclusive volunteering initiatives (through an advocacy body such as Make Your Mark or Volunteer Scotland).
- Creating a tiered national framework for inclusive volunteering that can help to structure the development of organisations and groups depending on their size and capacity.
- Developing Communities of Practice for reflections on the process: what went well / suggestions of what to do differently.
- Working in partnership with community, social and third sector organisations led by under-represented groups and communities in order to model collaborative leadership in equalities.
- Working with marginalised people to co-design flexible and varied volunteer roles that suit a range of volunteers' needs.
- Prioritising the hiring of volunteer engagement professionals, who, if well resourced, can support a range of volunteers and ensure they have a good experience.
- Access to additional financial resources to support volunteers facing the most severe economic barriers.
- Developing inclusive volunteering case studies (from organisations who have delivered an inclusion action plan).
- Raising awareness on the importance of collecting equalities data and offering tailored support to benchmark equalities data and set individual organisational action plans and targets.
- Supplementary resources to support existing material on GDPR and safe data storage in relation to personal information and data collected for equalities.
- Establishing trusted repositories of sectoral and national equalities data around volunteering.

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Further Reading

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Appendix A:

Focus Group Questions

1. Do you think there is a typical volunteer?
If so, who are they?
2. Do you think people volunteer:
 - 2a. Because they'd like to make a social contribution?
 - 2b. Because they'd like to improve their CV/employment opportunities?
 - 2c. Both – but which is the bigger motivator?
3. In your view, what are the benefits of volunteering? What are the drawbacks? (Too time consuming? Too expensive? Need to work?)
4. Do you think volunteering is an important contribution to society? Why? Are some kinds of volunteering (for example, in a school or hospital) more important than other kinds (for example, in a museum or community centre)?
5. What do you think EDI challenges are in volunteering? Is volunteering accessible to all?
6. Is whether or not you're paid the only difference between working and volunteering?
7. **For those of you who volunteer**, where do you volunteer?
8. **For those of you who don't**, is it something you'd consider doing? What kind of volunteering would you like to do and why?

- 9.** The definition of volunteering used by the Scottish Government includes :“the giving of time and energy through a third party, which can bring measurable benefits to the volunteer, individual beneficiaries, groups and organisations, communities, environment and society at large. It is a choice undertaken of one’s own free will, and is not motivated primarily for financial gain or for a wage or salary.”
- 9a.** Do you think mutual aids (a voluntary group or community which shares and swaps skills and resources) are a form of volunteering? Or are they something else?
- 9b.** Do you think grassroots DIY cultures (for example a feminist collective) count as volunteering? Or are they something else?
- 10.** Do you think belonging to marginalised communities (for example, LGBTQ+ communities, BAME communities) makes you more or less likely to volunteer? Why?
- 11.** Do you think being from a working class background makes you more or less likely to volunteer? Why?
- 12.** With the cost of living crisis, do you think the primary societal benefit of volunteering today is social (helping people) or economic (providing time and energy for free)?
- 13.** If you could set up a volunteering organisation tomorrow, what would it be for/about?

Appendix B:

Focus Group

Demographics Form

1. What is your postcode?

2. What is your age range?

- | | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Under 18 | <input type="checkbox"/> 40 to 49 | <input type="checkbox"/> 70 and over |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 18 to 29 | <input type="checkbox"/> 50 to 59 | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 30 to 39 | <input type="checkbox"/> 60 to 69 | |

3. What is your gender?

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agender | <input type="checkbox"/> Non-binary | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Genderqueer or genderfluid | <input type="checkbox"/> Questioning or unsure | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (write in): |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Man | <input type="checkbox"/> Woman | |

4. Do you identify as transgender?

- | | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|--|

5. What is your sexuality?

- | | | |
|------------------------------------|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aromantic | <input type="checkbox"/> Pansexual | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asexual | <input type="checkbox"/> Queer | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (write in): |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bisexual | <input type="checkbox"/> Questioning or unsure | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gay | <input type="checkbox"/> Straight (heterosexual) | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lesbian | | |

6. What is your religion?

- | | | |
|---|---------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Church of Scotland | <input type="checkbox"/> Sikh | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Roman Catholic | <input type="checkbox"/> Jewish | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (write in): |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other Christian | <input type="checkbox"/> Hindu | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Muslim | <input type="checkbox"/> Pagan | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Buddhist | <input type="checkbox"/> None | |

7. What is your ethnicity?

- African, African Scottish or African British
- African: any other African ethnic group
- Arab, Arab Scottish or Arab British
- Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British
- Pakistani, Pakistani Scottish or Pakistani British
- Indian, Indian Scottish or Indian British
- Bangladeshi, Bangladeshi Scottish or Bangladeshi British
- Chinese, Chinese Scottish or Chinese British
- Asian: any other Asian ethnic group
- Black, Black Scottish or Black British
- Caribbean, Caribbean Scottish or Caribbean British
- Caribbean or Black: any other Caribbean or Black ethnic groups
- White: Scottish
- White: Other British
- White: Irish
- White: Gypsy / Traveller
- White: Roma
- White: Polish
- White: any other White ethnic group
- Mixed or multiple ethnic groups
- Other (write in):

8a. Do you have a physical or mental health condition lasting or expected to last 12 months or more?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

8b. (If answered “Yes” to 8) Does this illness or condition affect you in any of the following areas:

- COVID / long COVID
- Dexterity (for example lifting or carrying objects, using a keyboard)
- Energy levels (fatigue)
- Hearing (for example deafness or partial hearing)
- Learning or understanding or concentrating
- Memory
- Mental clarity (brain fog)
- Mental health
- Mobility (for example walking short distances or climbing stairs)
- Physical pain
- Stamina or breathing fatigue
- Socially or behaviourally (for example associated with autism, attention deficit disorder or Asperger’s syndrome)
- Vision (for example blindness or partial sight, cataracts)
- Prefer not to say
- Other (write in):



MAKE YOUR MARK
— IN VOLUNTEERING —