



Scottish
Volunteering
Forum



An Open Letter to Senior Managers & Boards of Volunteer Involving & Deploying Organisations in all Sectors

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been significant. Yet amongst all the gloom of the last year, volunteers have been a source of hope and optimism, supporting the most vulnerable in our society in a myriad of practical ways. This volunteering has continued because of the passion and commitment of individuals who refuse to stand by and see people struggle and suffer. It is no understatement to say that volunteers have saved lives, their contribution to our collective wellbeing providing the light of hope for millions through their darkest days.

Some organisations have adapted service delivery models to continue involving volunteers, often in new ways. In other organisations, staff who lead volunteers have been furloughed or made redundant, removing a vital source of support for sustained volunteer participation.

Some volunteers have been unable to take part in their normal roles because of restrictions. Some volunteers have been stood down for much of the pandemic, as organisations have struggled to pivot to home-based delivery or implemented policies on who can and cannot volunteer to satisfy guidance around social distancing. Many people have volunteered through mutual aid groups and individual acts of kindness.

Volunteers are vital players in the ways your organisation and your community will recover and move forward, as is evidenced by the crucial role volunteers are playing in the vaccine rollout in different ways across the UK. Their ingenuity can also be central to creating new and innovative solutions yet to be considered by your team.

To fully leverage volunteer talent, you must include at the decision-making table the person who leads volunteer engagement in your organisation. They offer a perspective few others see. Including their leadership and voice will enable you to define your organisation's future sustainability strategy. In order to effectively achieve this, those organisations writing this letter implore you to make these four commitments:

- **Invest in volunteer engagement** – It is easy to overlook the strategic impact your volunteers have on your organisation and its mission: from board members & committees, to donors, fundraising supporters and the wider team of volunteers working across your activities. Now is the time to invest in your organisation's volunteer engagement leadership to ensure a great volunteer experience and to maximise the value of this wide-ranging support. Recognise that volunteers aren't a way to cut costs but to deliver greater value to your work, working in partnership alongside paid staff, if you have them. Nurture relationships in meaningful ways that resonate with your volunteers, remembering that they are powerful advocates for you in local communities. Engage and partner with funders to elevate their understanding and support of strategic investment in your organisation's volunteer engagement strategy.

- **Plan for the future** – Your organisation and the way it works will look different when the pandemic finally ends. Make sure volunteers are part of the discussion about future ways of working. Avoid designing workplaces, working practices and digital technology that work for paid staff but not volunteers. Call upon your volunteers for their agility. Support them to remain nimble and ready to respond to the changes necessary to drive sustained strategic outcomes.
- **Think in new ways** – The economic impact of COVID-19 has been and will continue to be significant. New challenges will call for fresh solutions to address your community's needs. New risks will need to be embraced and managed in order to seize the opportunities and challenges we all face. Invite the limitless pool of talent your volunteers offer to help create new answers to the unsolved questions.
- **Make equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) a priority** – During the global pandemic we have seen a renewed focus on EDI, due in large part to the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor in the USA and, more recently, the murder of Sarah Everard in London. Put simply, we cannot build a future for all that is based on the prejudices and inequalities of the past whether they relate to race, gender, disability or anything else. Now is the time to be looking at your volunteer team and ensuring it reflects the diversity of the modern UK, moving beyond good intentions to tangible actions.

Now is the time for you to ensure that your organisation's capacity to support communities is sustained and developed for the future. This only happens when your greatest resource – a diverse pool of caring, talented, resourceful people - benefit from your attention and investment, through well-developed engagement and leadership of volunteers.

As a crucial first step, we encourage you to meet with your volunteering lead as soon as possible to discuss how you can ensure volunteer energy is essential to your future plans and sustainability.

If you would like more information and any advice around the issues raised in this document, please contact any of the signatory organisations listed below.

Who is behind this open letter?



[Association of Volunteer Managers \(AVM\)](#)

The Association of Volunteer Managers (AVM) is an independent membership body that aims to support, represent, and champion people in volunteer management in the UK regardless of field, discipline, or sector. It has been set up by and for people who manage volunteers.



[Association of Voluntary Service Managers \(AVSM\)](#)

In existence for over 25 years, AVSM – the Association of Volunteer Service Managers – is a national membership organisation for anyone managing volunteers in hospice or palliative care settings.

Run by members for members, we provide information, training, and support to staff in over 120 hospices across the UK.



[Helpforce](#)

Helpforce partners with health and care organisations across the UK to accelerate the growth and impact of volunteering. We are an independent not-for-profit innovator, focused on co-creation with NHS Trusts and systems, and rapidly sharing insights and best practice.



[Heritage Volunteering Group \(HVG\)](#)

At the Heritage Volunteering Group our mission is to help you unlock the power of volunteering through collaboration and sharing best practice. Passionate and always smiling, we believe that by inspiring collaboration and creating opportunities for people to share ideas we can help transform volunteering in the heritage sector.



[National Association of Voluntary Services Managers \(NAVSM\)](#)

The National Association of Voluntary Services Managers is a membership organisation that exists to support and develop best practice in volunteer management in the NHS and Healthcare, to enhance the experience of patients, carers, the public, volunteers, and staff.



[Rob Jackson Consulting Ltd](#)

Rob Jackson Consulting Ltd provides consultancy, training, speaking, writing, and mentoring services in strategic volunteer engagement and volunteer management. We are passionate about engaging and inspiring people to bring about change.



[Scottish Volunteering Forum](#)

The Scottish Volunteering Forum is a collaborative group of cross-sector organisations that are committed to developing and improving volunteer participation in Scotland. We exist to influence the strategic landscape and champion innovative approaches using our collective intelligence and expertise.



[Volunteer Now](#)

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