



Leaders of Volunteers Competency Framework

April 2026

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	3
2. Overview of the framework	4
3. How to use the framework.....	6
4. Competency framework.....	8
Domain 1: Strategic Volunteer Leadership.....	8
Domain 2: Volunteer Engagement and Development	10
Domain 3: Volunteer Management and Retention.....	11
Domain 4: Operational and Administrative Management.....	13
Domain 5: Leadership and Professional Practice	15
Domain 6: Partnership and Advocacy	17
5. Appendices	18

1. Introduction

What this framework is

This framework sets out what effective volunteer leadership looks like in practice. It supports individuals, managers, and organisations to develop, recognise, and improve how volunteers are led and supported.

How it can be used

The framework can be used in a range of ways to support practice and development, including:

- Supporting individual self-assessment and development
- Guiding training and learning programmes
- Informing role descriptions and expectations
- Supporting performance and development discussions
- Improving volunteer programmes and practice
- Promoting consistent standards across organisations

Why it matters

Strong volunteer leadership is essential to delivering meaningful and sustainable volunteering. This framework supports:

- A clearer understanding of what good volunteer leadership looks like
- More consistent practice across organisations and settings
- Better support and experience for volunteers
- Stronger volunteer programmes and outcomes
- Recognition of volunteer leadership as a professional role

2. Overview of the framework

What the framework includes

The framework is organised into six areas of practice that reflect the key parts of leading and supporting volunteers:

1. Strategic Volunteer Leadership
2. Volunteer Engagement and Development
3. Volunteer Management and Retention
4. Operational and Administrative Management
5. Leadership and Professional Practice
6. Partnership and Advocacy

Each area sets out what a leader of volunteers needs to know and be able to do in practice.

How the levels of practice work

The framework describes three levels of practice. These show how skills and responsibilities develop over time. People may operate at different levels across different areas depending on their role and experience.

Level 1: Getting started

This is for someone new to volunteer leadership who is building confidence in their role. They are learning how to communicate clearly, work with others, and support basic volunteer activities.

Level 2: Practitioner

This is for someone who works independently, manages volunteer activities, and supports volunteers to take part in their community. They plan, organise, and improve volunteer programmes, and support others in their roles.

Level 3: Leading the way

This is for someone in a senior or strategic role who leads practice, influences others, and shapes how volunteering is delivered. They support the development of others and contribute to organisational direction and culture.

How the framework is structured

Each competency area includes statements across the three levels. These describe what practice looks like at each stage.

The statements are written in plain English and focus on what people do in practice. They can be used to support development, discussion, and improvement.

How to read the framework

The framework is designed to be read across the levels and competency area.

- Level 1 focuses on building understanding and supporting practice
- Level 2 focuses on applying skills and working independently
- Level 3 focuses on leading, influencing, and improving practice

Progression is not always linear, and people may demonstrate different levels across different areas.

3. How to use the framework

Who is framework for

This framework can be used by individuals, managers, and organisations involved in leading and supporting volunteers.

For individuals

You can use this framework to:

- Understand your current level of practice
- Identify your strengths and areas for development
- Plan your learning and development

How to use it:

- Read each competency area
- Identify the level that best reflects your current practice
- Use this to plan your next steps

For managers

You can use this framework to:

- Support development conversations
- Set clear expectations
- Identify training and support needs

How to use it:

- For one-to-one discussions
- Agree current levels based on examples of practice
- Identify areas for development and support

For organisations

You can use this framework to:

- Develop role descriptions
- Design training and development
- Review and improve volunteer programmes
- Support consistent practice

How to use it:

- Map roles to appropriate levels
- Use competencies to guide training
- Identify gaps in practice

Understanding the levels of practice

The framework includes three levels of practice:

- **Getting Started:** building confidence and understanding
- **Practitioner:** working independently and managing activities
- **Leading the Way:** leading practice and influencing others

People may operate at different levels across different areas depending on their role and experience.

How development happens

Development can take place in different ways, including:

- Learning through experience
- Training and workshops
- Mentoring and support
- Reflecting on practice

4. Competency framework

The following tables show what volunteer leadership looks like at each level of practice. Each competency area sets out a clear progression from building understanding, to working independently, to leading and improving practice.

Domain 1: Strategic Volunteer Leadership

To help leaders of volunteers' plan, organise, and improve volunteer involvement so it supports the organisation and makes a difference.

Competency Area		Level 1: Getting Started	Level 2: Practitioner	Level 3: Leading the Way
1.1	Showing the Difference Volunteering Makes	Describe how volunteering helps others using simple and clear examples.	Present relevant examples or basic data to clearly show how volunteers make a difference.	Use reliable evidence to show impact and influence decisions about volunteering.
1.2	Encouraging Citizenship and Inclusive Civic Communication	Explain how volunteering connects people to their community in a clear and inclusive way.	Encourage people to take part in community activities by engaging different groups effectively.	Promote volunteering as an important part of community life and influence how people take part.
1.3	Making Sure Volunteer Roles Support the Organisation's Goals	Recognise how volunteer roles support the organisation's goals.	Align volunteer roles with organisational goals and clearly explain their value.	Lead how volunteer roles support long-term goals and influence organisational planning.
1.4	Programme Planning and Implementation	Use simple plans to support volunteer activities and follow agreed processes.	Plan and improve volunteer programmes using feedback and experience.	Lead improvements and introduce new approaches based on evidence and need.

1.5	Leading Equality, Diversity and inclusion in Volunteering	Treat all volunteers fairly and use inclusive behaviour in day-to-day practice.	Identify and remove barriers to participation and challenge unfair practice.	Lead and improve inclusive practice across the organisation and influence culture.
1.6	Understanding Volunteer Models and Structures	Describe different ways people can volunteer.	Choose and adapt volunteer models to suit needs and context.	Design and lead flexible volunteer models that support long-term goals.
1.7	Decision-Making and Prioritisation	Follow guidance when making decisions about volunteer activities.	Make informed decisions by balancing needs, priorities, and available information.	Make difficult decisions that balance impact, risk, and fairness.
Good planning helps you identify the volunteers you need and how they support your organisation. Once your goals are clear, the focus shifts to recruiting, welcoming and developing the right people.				

Domain 2: Volunteer Engagement and Development

To help leaders of volunteers find, welcome, and support people to take part, feel included, and grow in their roles.

Competency Area		Level 1: Getting Started	Level 2: Practitioner	Level 3: Leading the Way
2.1	Advance Volunteer Learning and Growth	Encourage volunteers to take part in training and try new tasks.	Support volunteers to set goals and take part in learning that builds their skills.	Develop and lead learning approaches that support volunteer growth and progression.
2.2	Effective and Inclusive Recruitment	Follow agreed steps to recruit and welcome volunteers in a fair and inclusive way.	Reach out to different groups and adapt recruitment to improve access and inclusion.	Lead inclusive recruitment approaches that widen participation and improve diversity.
2.3	Understanding Volunteer Motivation	Ask volunteers why they want to take part and what they hope to gain.	Use an understanding of motivation to match people to roles and support their involvement.	Use insight into motivation to shape recruitment, engagement, and volunteer experience.
2.4	Volunteer Induction and Early Support	Share key information so volunteers understand their role and the organisation.	Deliver clear and structured induction that prepares volunteers for their role.	Design and improve induction processes that support safe and effective involvement.
2.5	Volunteer Screening and Selection	Ask simple questions to understand interests and check basic suitability.	Use structured selection methods to assess fit for roles.	Lead fair and consistent selection processes that support quality and inclusion.
2.6	Using Volunteer Feedback to Improve Practice	Collect feedback from volunteers and share it with others.	Use feedback to make improvements and inform decisions.	Use feedback and insight to improve volunteer experience and influence planning.

Recruiting and developing volunteers brings the right people into your organisation and prepares them for their roles. The next step is to keep them engaged and supported over time.

Domain 3: Volunteer Management and Retention

To help leaders of volunteers' support, organise, and retain volunteers so they feel valued, included, and continue to take part.

Competency Area		Level 1: Getting Started	Level 2: Practitioner	Level 3: Leading the Way
3.1	Volunteer Support, Inclusion and Communication	Support volunteers in their roles and treat everyone fairly in day-to-day interactions.	Provide consistent support, listen to volunteers, and communicate in a way that helps them feel included and supported.	Promote inclusive practice and create ways for volunteers to share their views and influence decisions.
3.2	Supporting and Understanding Volunteer Motivation	Ask volunteers why they take part and show interest in their experience.	Use an understanding of motivation to support volunteers and improve their experience.	Use insight into motivation to improve retention and shape volunteer experience.
3.3	Day-to-Day Volunteer Coordination	Use simple tools or plans to organise volunteer activities.	Coordinate activities so volunteers know what to do and feel supported.	Put systems in place to manage volunteer activities effectively.
3.4	Peer Support and Team Development	Work well with others and support fellow volunteers when needed.	Support team development and help build confidence in others.	Develop future leaders and build strong and supportive volunteer teams.
3.5	Volunteer Recognition	Thank volunteers and show appreciation regularly.	Use different ways to recognise volunteer contributions.	Lead recognition approaches that support retention and engagement.
3.6	Volunteer-Staff Relationships	Encourage positive working relationships between volunteers and staff.	Support good communication and teamwork between volunteers and staff.	Promote a culture where volunteers and staff work well together.

3.7	Conflict Management and Resolution	Recognise when there is a problem and know who to go to.	Resolve issues fairly and follow agreed processes.	Lead fair and consistent approaches to managing complex issues.
3.8	Supporting Volunteer Wellbeing	Be aware of how volunteers are feeling and offer support when needed.	Recognise signs of stress and support volunteer wellbeing.	Promote wellbeing and put supports in place to prevent burnout.
Now that volunteers are supported in their roles, the next step is to make sure the organisation has clear systems, accurate records, and defined responsibilities to support effective delivery.				

Domain 4: Operational and Administrative Management

To run volunteer programmes smoothly by using good systems, managing time and resources well, keeping clear records, and making sure volunteers and organisations meet their responsibilities. This helps build trust, encourages fairness, and supports active citizenship through shared responsibility.

Competency Area		Level 1: Getting Started	Level 2: Practitioner	Level 3: Leading the Way
4.1	Using Systems and Digital Tools	Use basic digital tools to support volunteer activities.	Use systems and digital tools to organise and manage volunteer activities.	Lead the use of systems and technology to improve how volunteer programmes are managed.
4.2	Managing Data and Records	Keep accurate records and follow data protection requirements.	Manage volunteer data and use it to monitor activity and performance.	Lead systems for data management and reporting that support planning and decisions.
4.3	Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting	Track basic information such as attendance and participation.	Use data to review activities and improve how things are delivered.	Use data and reporting to improve programmes and support decision-making.
4.4	Managing Resources and Budgets	Identify what is needed to support volunteer activities.	Manage resources and budgets to support delivery.	Plan and allocate resources to support sustainable delivery.
4.5	Policies, Risk and Compliance	Follow policies and apply basic safety, safeguarding, and data protection practices.	Apply policies and legal requirements and raise any issues.	Lead the development and review of policies and ensure compliance across activities.
4.6	Managing volunteer engagement using	Use basic online tools to support communication and learning.	Support volunteers to take part using digital tools and online platforms.	Lead the use of digital approaches to support and develop volunteers.

	technologies and online tools			
By building clear systems and managing operations well, a volunteer leader creates a strong foundation for leadership. This supports good decision-making, professional practice, and the development of themselves and others, which are explored in the next section.				

Domain 5: Leadership and Professional Practice

To help leaders of volunteers act professionally, lead by example, and support their own development and the development of others.

Competency Area		Level 1: Getting Started	Level 2: Practitioner	Level 3: Leading the Way
5.1	Reflective Practice	Seek feedback and reflect on your role to improve your practice.	Reflect on experience and use learning to improve how you work.	Promote reflective practice and support a culture of learning.
5.2	Ethical Leadership	Follow ethical guidelines and treat others with respect.	Make fair decisions and respond appropriately to concerns.	Promote ethical practice and lead values-based decision-making.
5.3	Mentoring and Coaching Others	Learn from others and ask for guidance when needed.	Support others to learn and build confidence in their roles.	Guide and mentor others to develop their skills and confidence.
5.4	Personal Development	Identify your learning needs and take part in development activities.	Take responsibility for your development and apply learning in practice.	Promote development and support others to plan their learning.
5.5	Supporting Volunteer Transitions and Exit	Acknowledge when volunteers leave and thank them for their contribution.	Gather feedback from volunteers and use it to improve practice.	Lead structured approaches to volunteer exit and ongoing engagement.
5.6	Managing the Balance Between Leadership and Management	Understand the difference between leadership and management.	Balance day-to-day tasks with supporting and guiding others.	Support others to balance leadership and management in their roles.

5.7	Cultural Awareness and Inclusion	Respect different backgrounds and treat people fairly.	Adapt your approach to support inclusion and different needs.	Promote inclusive practice and support equality across the organisation.
5.8	Emotional Intelligence and Resilience	Show awareness of your own behaviour and respond to others with respect.	Manage your responses in challenging situations and support others.	Promote a positive and supportive environment that builds resilience.
5.9	Professional Judgement and Boundary Setting	Understand your role and know when to seek support.	Set clear boundaries and make decisions within your role.	Make difficult decisions and maintain boundaries in complex situations.
Good leaders work with others, build strong relationships, and bring people with them. The next section focuses on working with people inside and outside the organisation and promoting the value of volunteering.				

Domain 6: Partnership and Advocacy

To help leaders of volunteers build strong relationships and promote the value of volunteering inside and outside the organisation.

Competency Area		Level 1: Getting Started	Level 2: Practitioner	Level 3: Leading the Way
6.1	Building Strategic Partnerships	Contact community groups and build basic working relationships.	Develop and maintain partnerships that support volunteer activities.	Lead partnerships that support shared goals and long-term impact.
6.2	Advocating for Volunteering	Share positive messages about volunteering in your organisation.	Promote the value of volunteering to others using clear examples.	Promote the value of volunteering and influence how it is understood and supported.
6.3	Representing the Organisation	Take part in meetings and share volunteer views when needed.	Represent the organisation clearly in meetings and external settings.	Lead how the organisation is represented and build its profile.
6.4	Community Engagement	Ask for feedback and involve people in activities where possible.	Plan and run activities that involve volunteers and the community.	Build ongoing relationships with communities and support long-term engagement.
6.5	Volunteer Voice and Representation	Ask volunteers for their views and share them with others.	Support volunteers to contribute to planning and improvement.	Promote volunteer involvement in decision-making and governance.
6.6	Volunteer Advocacy and Stakeholder Engagement	Share how volunteers contribute within your team or organisation.	Engage with stakeholders to highlight the value of volunteering.	Build strong stakeholder relationships and position volunteers as key contributors.

In practice, this means building trust, working with a wide range of people, and promoting the contribution of volunteers. Leaders of volunteers use their relationships to strengthen volunteering and create a shared sense of purpose.

5. Appendices

Appendix 1: Self-Assessment Tool

You can use this to reflect on your current level of practice and identify areas for development.

Competency Area	Current level	Evidence	Next step
Showing the Difference Volunteering Makes	Practitioner	Used volunteer feedback and simple data in a report	Use stronger evidence to support decisions

Example

A volunteer coordinator reviews their role and identifies that they are working at Practitioner level but want to move towards Leading the Way by improving how they use evidence.

Appendix 2: Manager Review Template

You can use this to support development conversations and agree next steps.

Discussion areas:

- Current level of practice
- Examples of practice (evidence)
- Strengths
- Areas for development
- Agreed actions

Example

- **Current level:** Practitioner
- **Evidence:** Manages volunteer activities independently and supports team members
- **Strength:** Strong communication and organisation
- **Development area:** Using data to improve programmes
- **Action:** Attend training on evaluation and apply learning to next programme

Appendix 3: Role Profile Mapping			
Role		Suggested level	
Volunteer Coordinator		Practitioner	
Volunteer Manager		Lead the way	
Example			
A small organisation uses the framework to define a Volunteer Coordinator role and aligns it to Practitioner level, helping set clear expectations and development goals.			
Appendix 4: Training and Development Planning			
Competency Area	Development Need	Action	Timeline
Volunteer Motivation	Improve understanding of motivation	Attend workshop and apply learning	3 months
Example			
A manager identifies that a staff member needs to improve how they support volunteer motivation and agrees a short training plan with follow-up.			