

Vision for Volunteering Briefing Note for NAVCA members

Introduction

The Vision for Volunteering is a collaborative project that provides a framework for improving the volunteering landscape. It was co-produced by a wide range of volunteer-involving organisations including many NAVCA members.

NAVCA members work across four functions to strengthen the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector: leadership and advocacy; partnerships and collaborations; capacity building; and volunteering. This means that NAVCA members are best placed to understand their local volunteering context. You will understand the issues that your communities currently face when it comes to volunteering. For example, there may be challenges around volunteer recruitment or retention, accessibility of volunteer roles, diversity of volunteers, or something else. These challenges present opportunities for local infrastructure organisations to catalyse positive change in volunteering, using the Vision for Volunteering as a framework to prompt your discussions and actions.

Organisations that support, develop and enable volunteers have a responsibility to demonstrate and promote evolving good practice in volunteering: encouraging flexibility and collaboration, recognising who is excluded from volunteering and putting the gifts, skills and expertise of the volunteer at the centre. The Vision for Volunteering creates the opportunity for VCS organisations to rethink how they work, share power and practise meaningful inclusivity with volunteers. As leaders in the sector, local infrastructure organisations have the opportunity to enable VCSE organisations to make the most of this opportunity.

For an overview of the current volunteering landscape and an introduction to the Vision for Volunteering, please see the attached **Volunteering Think Piece by NAVCA**. If you're short on time, we published a blog version of this here: <https://navca.org.uk/news/f/volunteering-how-can-we-think-for-the-future>

The Vision for Volunteering and the Four Functions of Infrastructure

The Vision for Volunteering has five themes:

- **Awareness and appreciation** - A future where a culture of volunteering is part of everyone's life and volunteer roles are given the recognition they deserve.
- **Power** - A future where volunteers (and the communities they work with) lead on change that matters to them.
- **Equity and inclusion** - A future where it's easy for people to give their time and energy to the causes they care about, they feel welcomed, and the benefits are equally distributed.
- **Collaboration** - A future where collaboration is natural and spontaneous, where people do great stuff together because they want to.
- **Experimentation** - A future where communities aren't afraid to try new things to develop their own innovative solutions to engaging and supporting volunteers.

These five themes intersect with the four functions of infrastructure, which give some more context to the unique position that local infrastructure organisations hold in their local communities:

- **Volunteering:** Volunteering, whether formal or informal, is integral to thriving communities. NAVCA members encourage and nurture volunteering opportunities, so that people can build connections and work together on things they care about, driving positive change locally.
- **Leadership and advocacy:** Communities, both individuals and organisations, should have an impact on decisions that affect the place they live in. NAVCA members are leaders and advocates in their communities, mobilising action to strengthen our sector's voice and influence on key decision-makers and funders. Local infrastructure organisations bring together diverse groups and marginalised communities to mobilise ambition and aspiration.
- **Partnerships and collaborations:** Places and communities are strengthened when organisations work collaboratively. NAVCA members create opportunities and drive effective joint working by building networks and partnerships between local organisations and strategic partners. Through nurturing these trusted and reliable relationships, communities are better equipped in both times of crisis and in the development of ongoing projects.
- **Capacity building:** When local voluntary and community organisations have access to practical support, people and communities become more resilient and able to flourish. NAVCA members provide resources or advice to facilitate community development. This work is both strategic and developmental, building strong foundations so that the local voluntary, community and social enterprise sector thrives.

By exploring the Vision for Volunteering with your community, NAVCA members can make connections between their work and the aims of the Vision.

Bringing the Vision for Volunteering to life

We want to achieve systemic change, so that VCSE organisations are able to apply the values and aims of the Vision to their local circumstances and activities, and are supported to make the changes needed to place the volunteer at the centre and make volunteering a usual part of everyday life. There are no easy answers or quick fixes as to how this approach to volunteering might be integrated into mainstream activities and projects, and it will look different in every community. This phase of the Vision project is very much about building a network, developing the themes and impetus behind the changes needed. LIOs have a key role in this – using the framework to develop and adapt your own approaches to volunteering locally.

Many local infrastructure organisations and volunteer centres have already started work to develop the themes behind the Vision, including creating a new or updated volunteering strategy for their local area, renewing online volunteering support services, or co-producing revised volunteering policies and practices. Consultation across the breadth of the VCSE sector has been widely used as a foundation for the work by these organisations.

Vision for Volunteering pilot programmes by LIOs

In March 2023, a small number of NAVCA members received limited funding to pilot some initial work on implementing the Vision for Volunteering. In-person consultation events to bring together volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations have been used as the basis for co-production of work programmes. Where multiple events have been held, wider groups of representatives were invited, such as service commissioners – local authorities or health services – local grant makers and funders, civic anchor organisations, large employers and universities. NAVCA members took care to ensure that the voices of volunteers were heard, acknowledged and acted on within these consultation processes.

Consultation has enabled the details and nuances of each of the themes of the Vision to be explored in depth with a focus on translating and applying it in the local area. This means that the context of a place can be taken into account when co-designing or co-producing the next stages of the process. All the Vision's themes have been considered in consultation, but most LIOs have used this as an opportunity to focus on weaker areas or where they want to focus new developments.

Equity and inclusion is a priority for all of us, with a focus on listening to people with lived experience of exclusion from volunteering, identifying the barriers they had experienced, and being guided by this group to identify the changes needed for inclusion across different excluded groups.

NAVCA members recognised the need to encourage collaboration in all parts of the VCSE sector (between volunteers and paid staff, between communities, organisations and local government etc.), but barriers such as competition for funding can limit collaboration. The need to create new or enhance existing meetings, where different organisations and groups can come together to discuss meaningful collaboration, was highlighted.

The key learning points of the consultations can be summarised as follows, with more detailed case studies below.

- The Vision can act as a ripple effect, with suggested small steps or actions to start to make changes.
- Look at what small, achievable steps you can make now to make positive change.
- Connect local organisations together and provide a regular check-in, so ideas and plans for the Vision can be shared, and problems can be addressed together.

Case Studies

In this section, we share some examples of case studies from NAVCA members working to bring the Vision to life locally. We hope you can use these examples as inspiration for your work.

Aligning Existing Volunteer Strategy with the Vision - Voluntary Action LeicesterShire (VAL)

Voluntary Action LeicesterShire (VAL) focused on two themes of the Vision: equity and inclusion, and experimentation. Following the Covid-19 pandemic, they noticed lower engagement from local volunteers, partly due to some charities having to stop or substantially change the work they were doing with volunteers. Potential volunteer interests also changed, with people looking for more creative, exciting and impactful roles.

VAL used two themes from the Vision to focus discussions at two roundtable meetings for 12 local VCSE organisations. All were facing challenges such as: limited staff time to recruit, manage and support volunteers; competing for a limited pool of volunteers; onboarding procedures which were time consuming; and volunteers not always feeling part of the team once recruitment and induction were completed.

One roundtable explored how organisations can involve volunteers from diverse backgrounds and excluded groups, such as young people, ethnically diverse communities and nationalities, people with disabilities and people from lower socio-economic groups. The second roundtable asked questions about experimentation in volunteering. Partner VCSE organisations at the roundtables made commitments to experimentation, equity and inclusion.

VAL will monitor the progress partners are able to make over the next 12 months. Discussions have contributed to the creation of an action plan for volunteering development work in the area and there will be further engagement with VCSE organisations, as an action plan is put together for the other Vision themes.

Adapting the Vision to Fit the Needs of a Local Area (1) - VAST (Voluntary Action Stoke on Trent)

VAST (Voluntary Action Stoke on Trent) used a world café session to explore the Vision for Volunteering in a local context and get buy-in from stakeholders to participate in the longer-term planning and strategy for the Vision. The approach allowed the Vision to be adapted for Stoke on Trent.

Their session hosted up to 20 stakeholders and gathered different perspectives, validated those perspectives through discussion and consultation, and moved towards a consensus on the priorities for implementing the Vision. The event had tables facilitated by a staff member (a table host) and one staff member presenting the same set of questions as different groups of people moved between the tables, discussing each theme. This helped to facilitate a more holistic response and gather a local view.

This consultation has enabled VAST to plan further events and activities which reflected stakeholder priorities to implement the vision.

Adapting the Vision to Fit the Needs of a Local Area (2) – Wirral CVS

A newly-formed volunteer managers forum co-designed a workshop with Wirral CVS to discuss the future of volunteering, shaped around the themes of the Vision. The workshops were designed to explore what volunteering could look like in the future and how this should respond to local needs. Two workshops were held with strategic partners and volunteer-involving organisations, exploring the five themes of the Vision and identifying local priorities for each theme. A separate workshop will be held to explore volunteering to support digital inclusion, which is a priority issue in the area.

By drawing together strategic partners and volunteer-involving organisations, each theme was discussed in detail, barriers and challenges were identified and a co-production approach was used to develop creative aspirations and objectives. The groups also agreed the priorities for each theme, which forms part of the next phase of work on volunteering for Wirral CVS.

Developing a Volunteer Strategy and Brokerage Platform

Cambridge CVS have started work on the development of a county-wide volunteer strategy and action plan, using a new volunteer brokerage platform in partnership with Hunts Forum. The strategy will be co-produced with VCSE organisations, and the intended outcome is improved coordination and to support the sector to recruit more volunteers.

Two consultation events were held to co-produce a new volunteer portal for the county. This gathered feedback from potential users with detailed guidance on what would benefit both recruiting organisations and potential volunteers. There was a focus on equity and inclusion, particularly recruiting volunteers from more diverse backgrounds; how to collaborate on basic training for volunteers and volunteering organisations, including offering more EDI related training; experimentation in how volunteers are recruited and how the skills, interests and expertise of volunteers brought out. A new volunteer portal has now been commissioned from an IT partner and additional sources of funding identified.

Next steps

This briefing note has provided an introduction to the Vision for Volunteering, the importance of local infrastructure organisations in bringing the Vision for Volunteering to life, and the ways that you might go about doing this in your local community. Alongside this document, there are the following resources:

- Vision for Volunteering Session Plan Toolkit (Word doc)
- Vision for Volunteering Participant Notes Template (printable PDF to be distributed at the start of the session)
- Session Feedback Form for Participants (Word doc, this also includes an equality monitoring form)
- Report Form for Host Organisations (Word doc)
- Session PowerPoint (this is editable, feel free to add your own branding – the first slide notes have instructions on how to do this)
- Volunteering Think Piece June 2023 (PDF)
- Social Media Messages (Word doc)

We'd love to hear about what you're doing locally around volunteering and the Vision, to develop our work around it and develop further resources. Please fill in the Report Form for Host Organisations and send it to comms@navca.org.uk, or get in touch with Jill Hopkinson, Policy Manager at NAVCA, or Maddy Desforges, CEO at NAVCA, to share your experience. We'd also welcome feedback on the toolkit as a whole.

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