

Vision for Volunteering: Insights and Inspiration

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Learning and Storytelling Officer

The Vision for Volunteering Themes



**Awareness
and
appreciation**



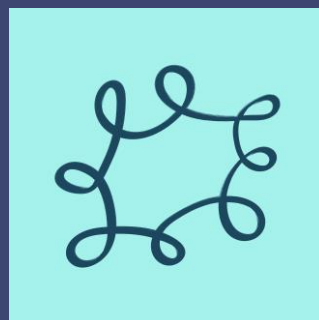
Power



**Equity and
Inclusion**



Collaboration



Experimentation

Awareness and Appreciation: Insights from the last year

Terminology matters

Not everyone uses the word 'volunteer' to describe their work.

How can we make informal, one-off and 'for fun' volunteering feel just as appreciated and valued as formal volunteering?

"I never once thought of myself as a volunteer, or also the people that we were working alongside as volunteers. It was just something that we were all really passionate about and the only way we could make the games and the events happen were to give our time. But I never really thought of myself as a volunteer."

- Charlotte, trustee and volunteer manager

Understanding impact

To feel appreciated, volunteers, volunteer managers and policymakers need to be aware of the impact that volunteering has. However, that can be difficult to capture.

How can we best present this information to volunteers and others, including making use of role models?

"My favourite thing that I've done volunteering was probably see the difference that I've made, even if it was like really small things... Seeing how even a really small interaction, or something that's just really easy and small and practical for me to do made a difference and really made someone happier and made their day."

- Laura, volunteer

Passion is key

A key motivator for volunteers is that the work connects with their personal passions.

How can we use this two-way benefit to support, attract and retain volunteers?

"It's a two-way thing as well. It's not purely altruistic. I do things because I enjoy doing them... What I've found is that you must do things that you've got your heart into. I do it because I want to do it."

- Richard, volunteer & parish councillor

Funding challenges are a demotivator

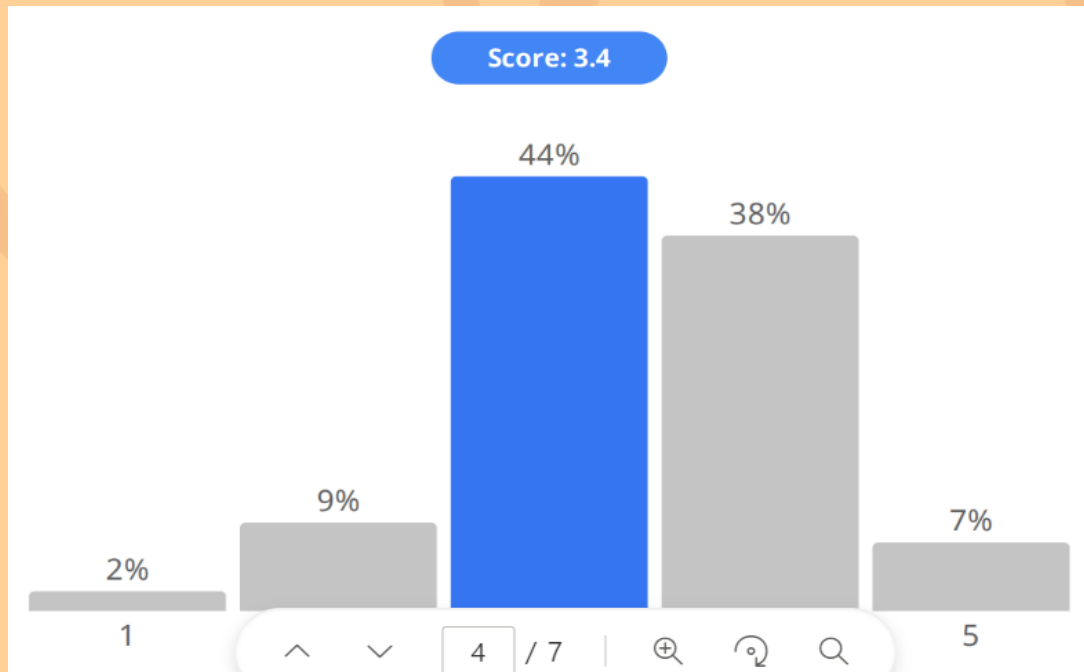
Short-term funding creates anxiety in volunteers and can undermine other positive efforts to make volunteers feel appreciated and valued.

How can we protect volunteers from fundraising anxiety?

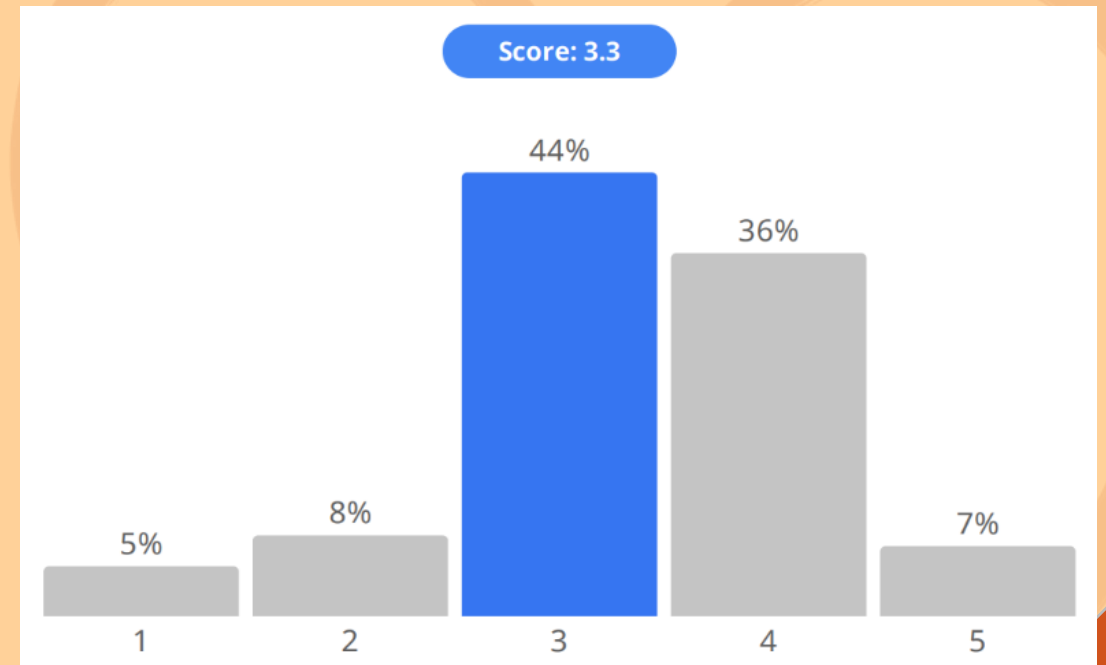
"Probably the biggest challenge is finding funds and raising money to deliver these projects."

- Richard, volunteer and Parish Councillor

How would you rate your organisation for Awareness and Appreciation?



How would your volunteers rate you?



What are you doing well on Awareness and Appreciation?



What needs improvement on Awareness and Appreciation?



Looking ahead

- **Influencing up** - volunteer managers and volunteers themselves see the value of volunteers, but there's more work to do among senior leadership, funders and policy-makers. Data is your friend here!
- **Storytelling** – it is important to allow volunteers to tell their stories in their own words, providing inspiration for others as well as qualitative insights into their needs, wants and motivations.
- **Listen to your volunteers** – the best way to know how volunteers want to be appreciated is to ask them



Power: Insights from the last year

Giving volunteers more power is good for everyone

Giving volunteers more power to lead on changes could make volunteer opportunities more **attractive and aid with recruitment.**

How can you give your volunteers more opportunities to feel included and listened to?

"Volunteering is about giving people opportunities to feel included, to feel that they can learn something, to feel like they can develop new skills and develop themselves as an individual. It's up to us as an organisation to have a system to do this."

David, support worker at
Emmaus North Staffs

Volunteer have power, but may need help to fully realise this

Volunteers often have a lot of power but lack the **understanding** of their own power and value. Some volunteers will need more help with this than others.

How can you help your volunteers step into their power?

"It is very important to me thinking about the opportunities that people do or don't have for giving their time and their care to others. People's choices are massively constrained by how much power they have."

- Michael, volunteer centre manager and volunteer

Power v leadership

It is easier for organisations to give power to volunteer voice (e.g. through co-production) than it is to recognise volunteers as **leaders**.

Do you know the difference? How can you give your volunteers more decision-making power?

"Recognise that volunteers themselves have got far, far more to offer than simply being the cannon fodder for the tasks that staff recognise that need doing. Volunteer-led and developed volunteering is going to become increasingly important."

- Dave, volunteer development officer,
Nottingham CVS

Lived experience

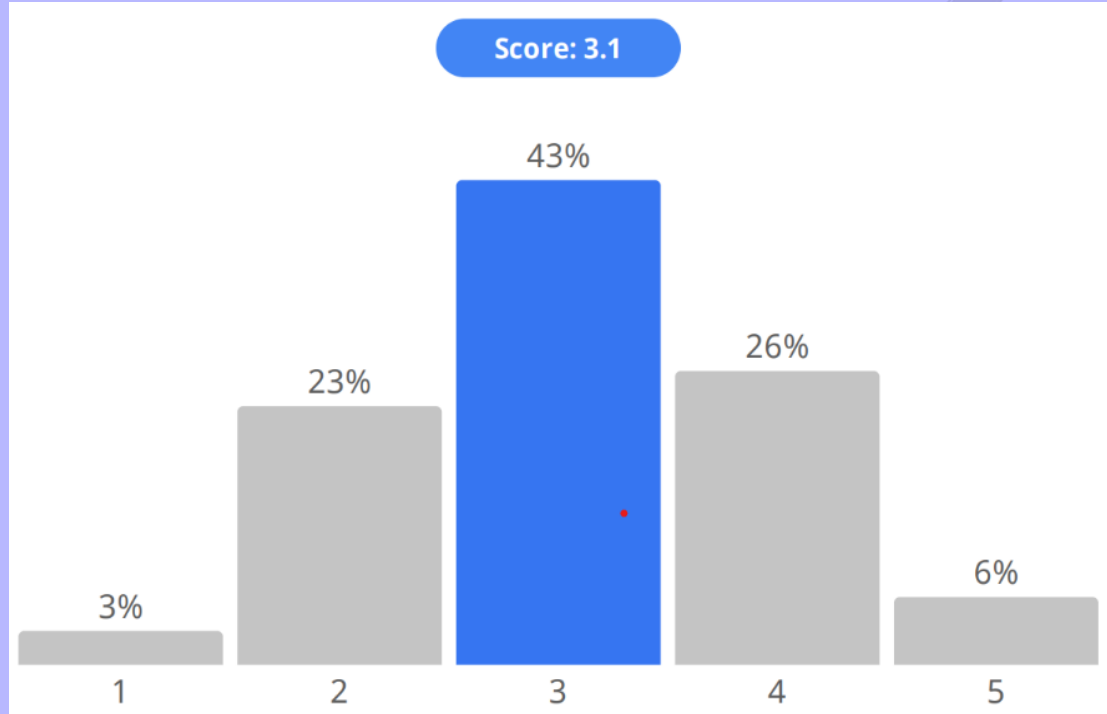
Involving the voices and ideas of volunteers is important for tailoring initiatives that **resonate** with those involved.

How is your service delivery built around your volunteers? Have you built in consideration of lived experience?

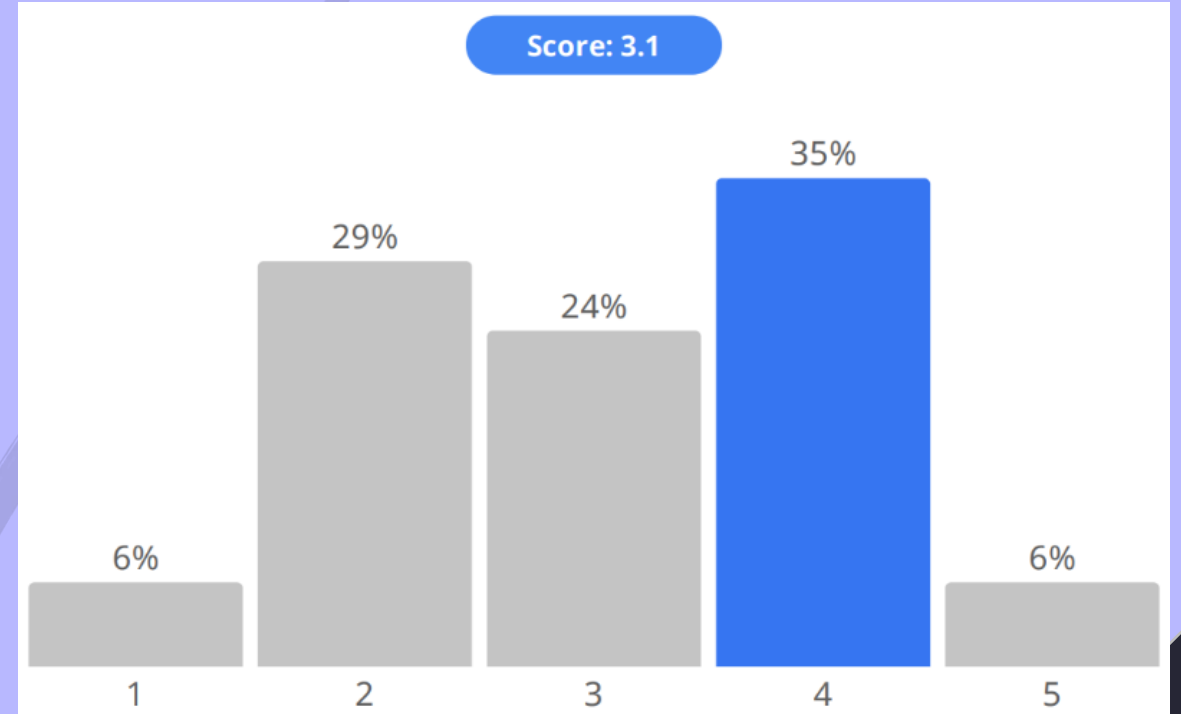
"Volunteering is a two-way process, every party needs to benefit from the experience so it's about understanding their why... It's then about creating a conducive environment where they can express themselves."

- Yunus,
Volunteer Engagement
Manager, Sanctuary Care

How would you rate your organisation for Power?



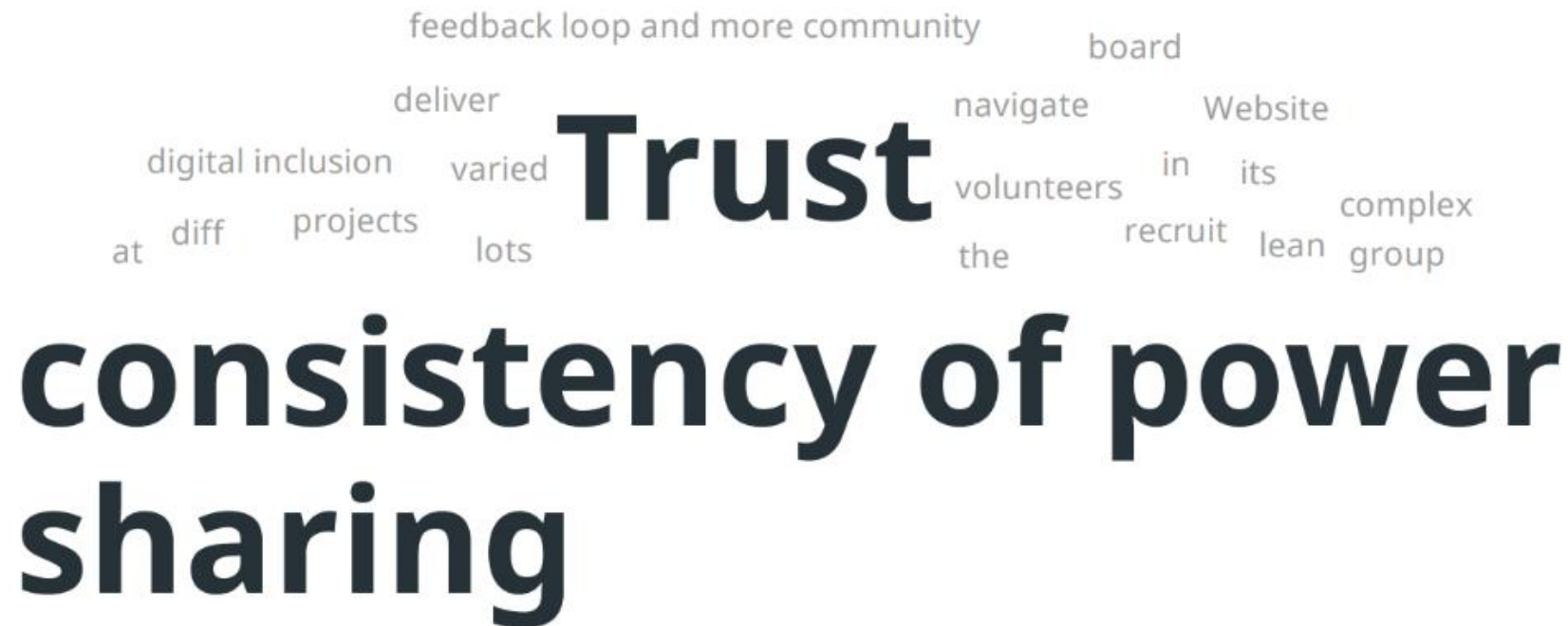
How would your volunteers rate you?



What are you doing well on Power?



What needs improvement on Power?



A word cloud visualization of feedback on power improvement. The words are arranged in a circular pattern around a central point. The most prominent words are 'Trust' and 'consistency of power sharing', which are significantly larger than the others. Other words include 'feedback loop and more community', 'board', 'navigate', 'Website', 'in its', 'complex', 'group', 'lean', 'recruit', 'volunteers', 'the', 'lots', 'varied', 'projects', 'diff', 'at', 'digital inclusion', 'deliver', 'women', 'younger', 'to opportunity', 'grant', 'opportunities', 'deevolop', 'more truly volunteer led activity', 'nothing', 'trusting', 'the', 'more power/reconition', 'designing roles with volunteers', 'would like to give volunteers more autonomy in some way', and 'departments'.

Trust

consistency of power sharing

Looking ahead

- **Co-production** – “nothing about us, without us”. Make sure you’re involving volunteers wherever possible in decision-making and service design. Trust that they know their stuff
- **Storytelling** – stories can be used as a way to amplify volunteer voices and allow them to speak in their own words about the issues and causes that they care about
- **Investment** – investing in volunteers through training, coaching, mentoring etc gives them the skills, confidence and capability needed to step into leadership roles



Equity and Inclusion: Insights from the last year

Tried and tested methods work best

There are many different ways to make volunteering opportunities **accessible** – from flexible timings, to assisted roles, to inclusive recruitment, to robust expenses.

Have you picked the low-hanging fruit? What else could you do?

"Diversity is incredibly important in everything that we do... There's more we can do... We try our best to have the door open to as many people as possible ."

- anonymous Vision for Volunteering storyteller

Barriers

There are long-running and new barriers to inclusion within volunteering. For example, the **cost-of-living crisis** is creating new barriers to accessing volunteering opportunities.

What are the unique barriers where you are?

"I work in the most unequal borough in the country, and my experience is that people from the poorest parts; marginalised and racialized people; people who are disabled; and so on, often make as good or better volunteers than somebody who has the means to make many more choices about what they do with their time."

- Michael, volunteer centre manager

We can only learn from each other

Equity and inclusion is something that many organisations are taking seriously – there is a lot of **learning** out there that needs to be shared.

What have you done that you can share with others? How can you learn from those around you who are doing E&I well?

"Diversity is incredibly important in everything that we do... We want to make sure that we try and represent in our volunteering teams the communities that we support."

- Steven, volunteer manager

Flexibility

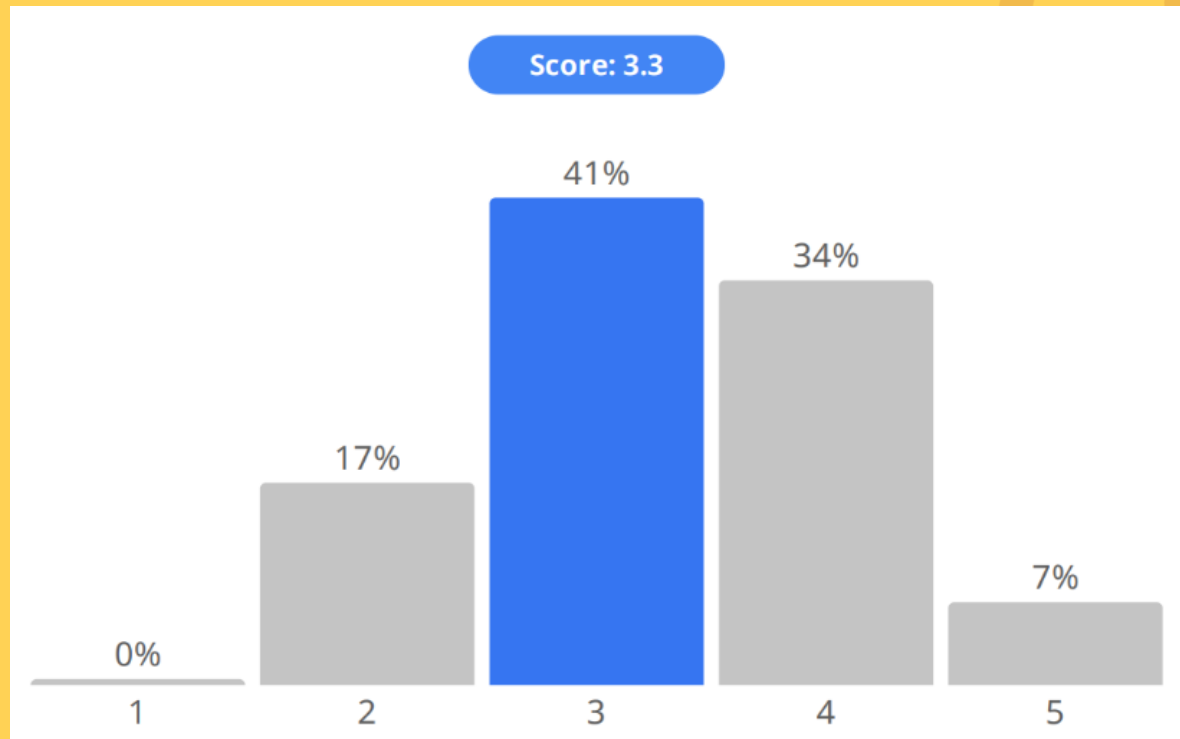
Flexibility can sometimes feel like a balancing act between our legal, safeguarding and practical duties, or a nice 'add-on'. But it should be as integral to our operations as everything else.

How do we build flexibility in by design?

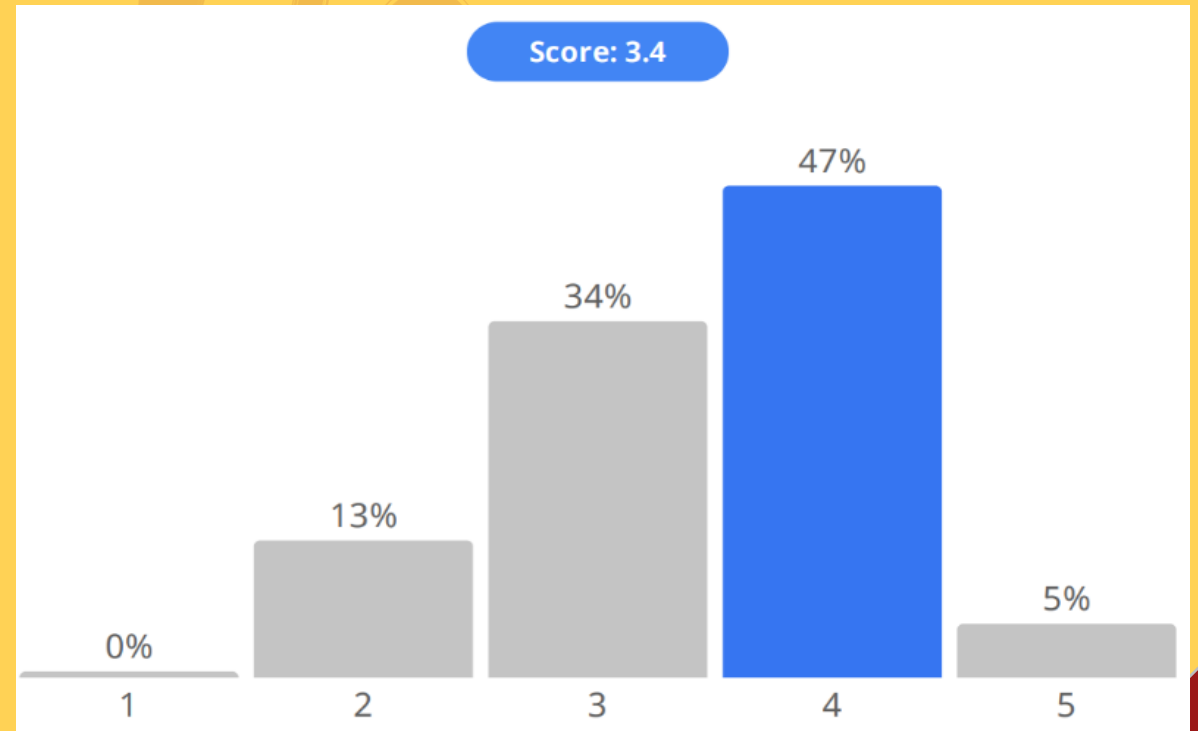
"I know that we need to make volunteering more open, and we need to make it more flexible and we need to make it more community-led, easier-to-access. But then when I sit here as a volunteer manager or somebody in that kind of role I'm thinking about risk, I'm thinking about compliance, I'm thinking about safeguarding."

- Charlotte, volunteer manager and volunteer

How would you rate your organisation for E&I?



How would your volunteers rate you?



What is going well with Equity and Inclusion?



What needs improvement?



Looking ahead

- **Listening** – equity and inclusion must be intentional. This requires truly listening to and collaborating with both volunteers and beneficiaries to shape environments they are eager to engage with, rather than making assumptions.
- **Expenses** – making expenses easy to access is a quick-win to make your volunteering opportunities more accessible
- **Flexibility** – build volunteering opportunities around the volunteer and their needs, not the other way around



Collaboration: Insights from the last year

Funding is a good opportunity for collaboration – but can be a hindrance

Competitive funding processes can contribute to a lack of **trust** between local organisations. Conversely, more funders are looking favourably on **joint bids** for funding.

How can you work with others in funding matters?

"Organisations often don't realise how much common ground and shared goals they have. Get them talking, and great things happen!"

- Georgie Grant, Director at Onion Collective CIC

Collaboration is always worth it

Investing in networking and collaboration is always worth it – but this can be challenging when you don't have much **time or capacity**.

How can you make time and space for networking and building relationships?

"It's a really amazing thing to get together with other people and do things and make a difference – and don't underestimate that. That's such a powerful thing."

- Molly Sweeney, Community Programme Manager

Have you tried sharing volunteers?

Sharing volunteers, or having volunteers who work with more than one organisation, is an easy way to share skills, connections and avoid duplication.

Who could you collaborate with to make this happen where you are?

"The best things we build, we build between people – the approach I've taken is that I've tried to be a person who connects people and thinks about interesting ways to combine people's strengths and goals together to try and take collective projects forward."

Michael, volunteer centre manager and volunteer

Collaboration needs to go all the way to the top

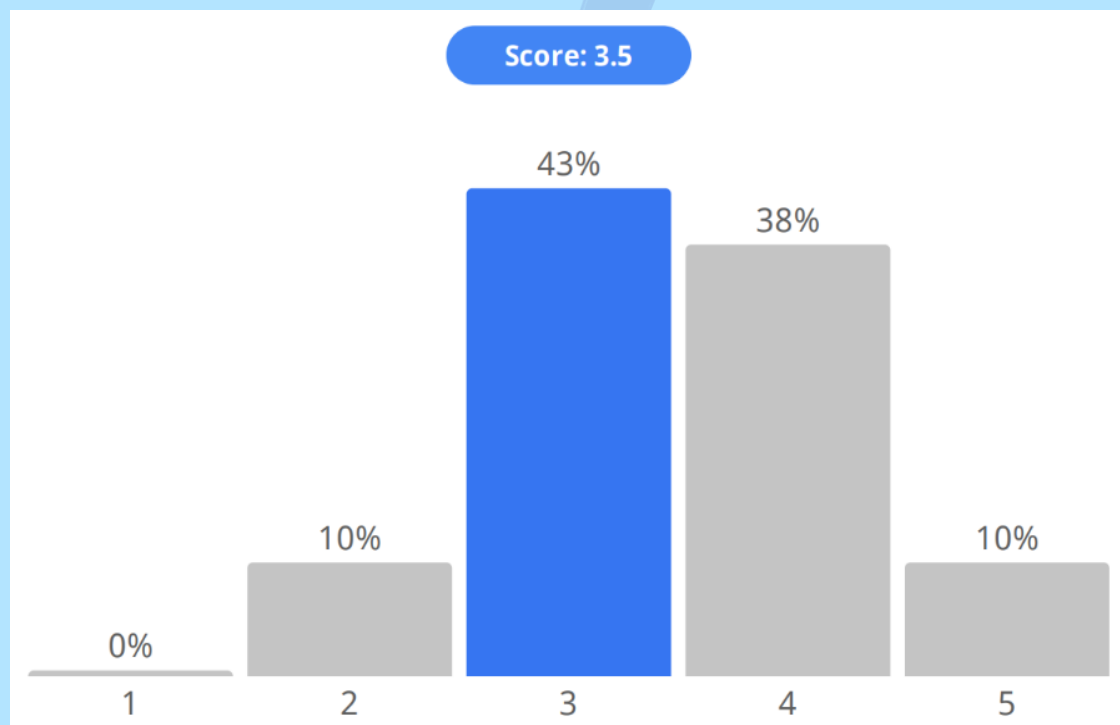
A key challenge for collaboration is around getting **senior buy-in** for meaningful collaboration.

How can you sell the benefits of collaboration and partnership working to senior leaders?

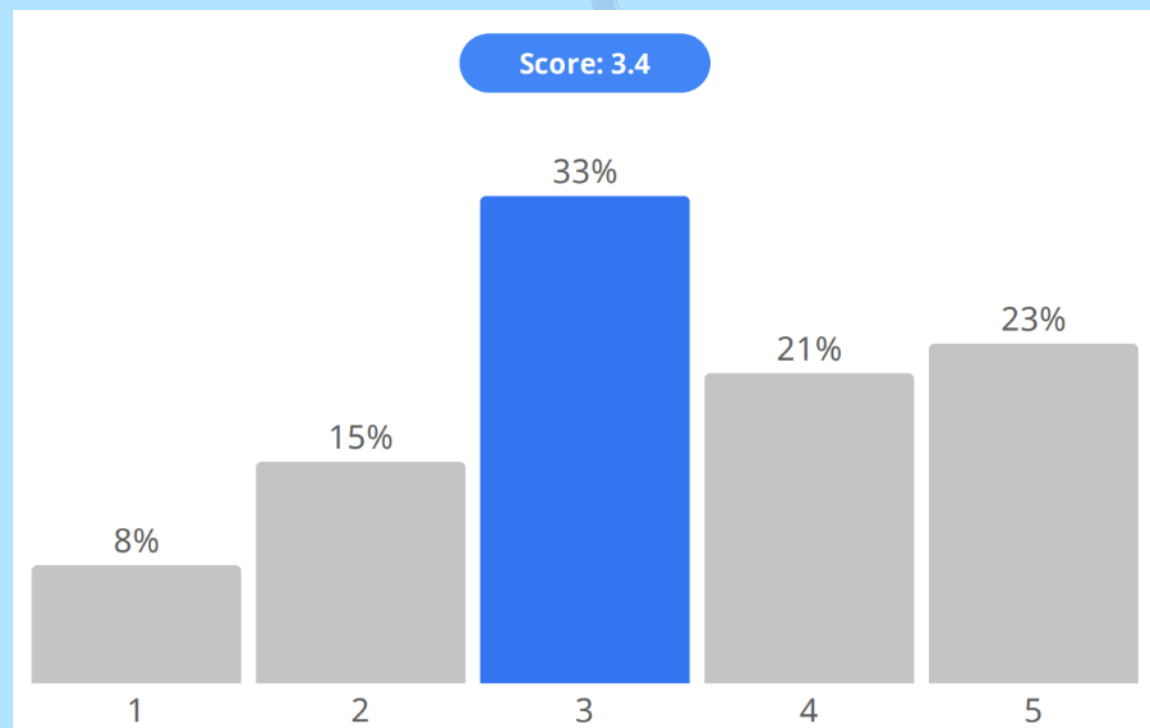
"We can potentially collaborate in lots of different ways - from, we have a broken chair, to their programme is really inclusive, to we've got clients looking for different volunteering and can signpost them to others."

- Rowan, Staffordshire Sexual Health Charity

How would you rate your organisation for Collaboration?



How would your volunteers rate you?



What are you doing well with Collaboration?



What needs improvement with Collaboration?



Looking ahead

- **Senior buy-in** – senior leaders and trustees must recognise the value of collaboration as a contributor to business-as-usual, not an extra nice-to-have
- **Reframe your thinking** – don't view other local charities as competitors. Instead view them as mutual collaborators
- **Skill sharing** – skills swapping or mutual aid with other local charities can help you get specialist skills without paying for it – and will help build local connections while you're there



Experimentation: Insights from the last year

Resistance to change

A key challenge of experimentation is **resistance to change** – from staff, volunteers or members of the community. Change can be scary!

How do you experiment in way that feels collaborative and empowering?

“We’re looking into a volunteer management system, but some team members have become fearful this could erase their jobs. It takes baby steps to make progress.”

- Voluntary organisation from Leicestershire

Small change is still change

Experimentation doesn't have to be about big dramatic changes – find the little things that need tweaking and start there.

What's one thing that's always bothered you that you wish you could do differently?

"Just go ahead and do it, because even the tiny little things make a massive difference... it's the small things that matter the most. No matter what you do, it's going to make a difference. Anything you do to make a change will affect somebody in some way."

- Milly
#iwill ambassador and youth social activist

Listen to and learn from others – including volunteers

Learning from others is key – from those within your sector as well as others. Make sure this includes **empowering and listening to volunteers**, as this can be a great source of new ideas and approaches.

Who can you learn from locally?

"One thing leads to another. But it can only [do that] if we listen to other people, by speaking to each other and listening to what they have to say. It all starts with communication. Speaking and listening."

- David (Support Worker) and Chris (Volunteer) at Emmaus North Staffs

Failure is your friend – but fear of failure hinders innovation

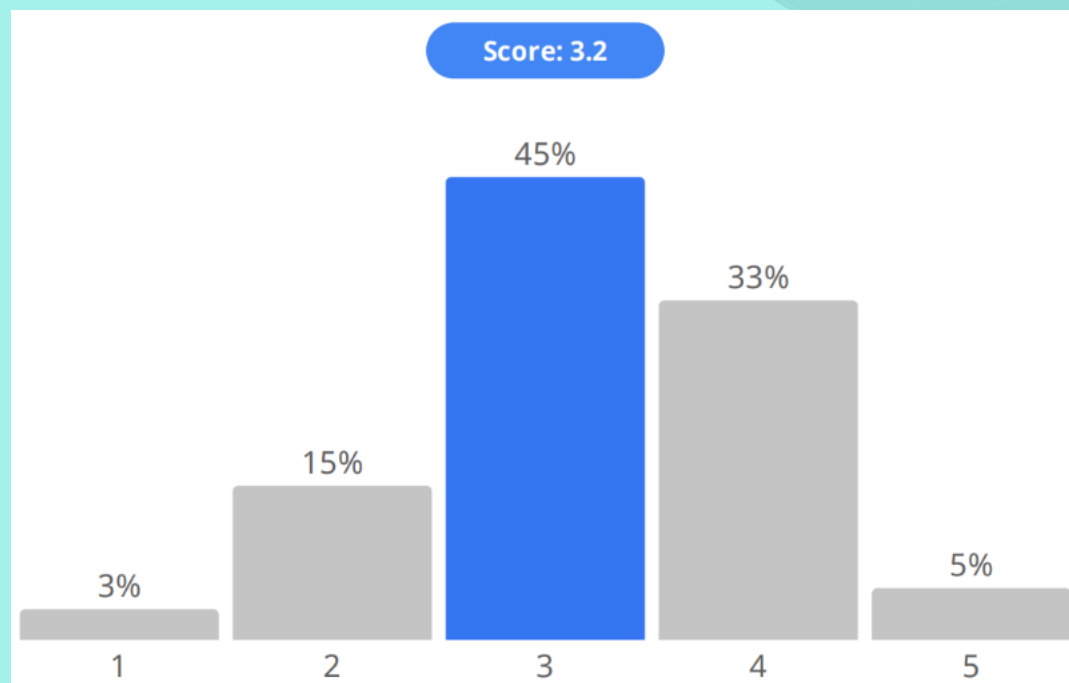
We need to learn from **failure** just as much as we learn from success. But experimentation can be hampered by a **fear of failure**.

How can you redefine your relationship with the unknown in uncertain circumstances?

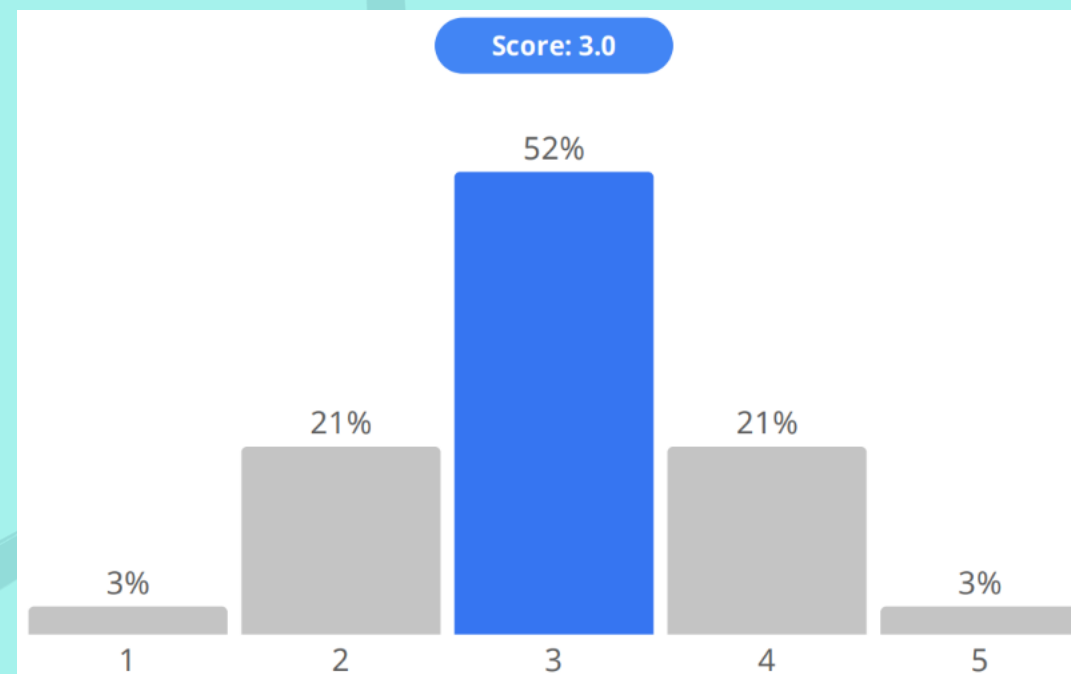
“Pay attention to the things that are a bit awkward and sticky. Say to people running organisations ‘why are they like that?’

- Molly
Volunteer Manager for
Groundwork London

How would you rate your organisation for experimentation?



How would your volunteers rate you?



What are you doing well on Experimentation?



What needs improvement on Experimentation?



Looking ahead

- **Micro-volunteering** – this is an increasingly popular experimental method of attracting and involving more volunteers
- **Share your learning** – talk about what you're doing! If something does or doesn't work, take the lessons from that or share it
- **Baby steps** – experimentation and innovation are incremental. Even small change can make a big difference

The Vision in practice

- the strategic

Birmingham's Vision for Volunteering



- Co-produced with citizens, voluntary, community, faith, social enterprise, public sector and academic partners
- Three principles:
 - Celebrating difference
 - Collaboration
 - Awareness and appreciation
- See more <https://www.visionforvolunteering.org.uk/localising-the-vision>

Cheshire West and Chester Vision for Volunteering workshops



- Series of workshops to discuss what the Vision is and how it can be used locally
- Made use of the Vision for Volunteering Toolkit to run discussions – this is free to download from our website <https://www.visionforvolunteering.org.uk/toolkit>
- Findings and ideas will feed into a new 5-year Volunteering Strategy

Volunteering Matters'

'Volunteering in Place' workshops



- Sessions held with young people involved in youth social action, people with additional need and people who are refugees and asylum seekers
- Key reflections:
 - Connect people to decision makers
 - Support long-term funding and sustainability
 - Showcase a positive future for volunteering
 - Be more strategic in supporting diverse spaces
 - Shape projects around people

The Vision in practice

- and the practical

Kent Wildlife Trust 'Down to Earth'



Kent Wildlife Trust ran a project with women in Romney Marsh to become involved in volunteering and the community, often for the first time.

These women were encouraged to take ownership of and responsibility for ongoing activities, creating activities and roles that suit their individual circumstances.

#iwill campaign



The #iwill movement empowers youth social activists aged 10-25 years old from all backgrounds by supporting them to campaign, volunteer and fundraise.

They believe that all children and young people should be supported and empowered to make a positive difference on the issues that affect their lives, their communities and broader society.

Communities 1st trustee recruitment



Communities 1st hosted 'Speed Matching' events across the community with an emphasis on inviting groups who may typically be underrepresented.

They worked to demystify trusteeship and challenge preconceptions among would-be trustees, as well as preparing hiring organisations to think more deeply about their needs and how to attract interest

Watchet Place Based Social Action



Watchet won funding through the Place Based Social Action programme to support residents to work together to identify the issues they felt needed addressing.

This led to new links being forged between groups which had previously not worked together, leading to a community transport scheme, a printed community newspaper, and the refurbishment of a bookshop which now hosts training courses and a youth club.

Staffordshire Wildlife Trust micro-volunteering event



Staffordshire
Wildlife Trust

Hosted a small micro-volunteering event for asylum seekers and refugees in partnership with VAST, making bird feeders and spending time in nature.

This allowed people to experience volunteering for themselves, sometimes for the first time, boosting their confidence and helping them realise what they can offer

Stay in touch

<https://www.visionforvolunteering.org.uk/newsletter>

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