



# Research report: Inclusion in Volunteer Programmes



**Volunteer  
Ireland**  
Obair Dheonach Éireann

**VOLUNTEER** **NOW**  
*think · act · do*

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## Foreword

It gives us great pleasure to contribute to the foreword of the *Inclusion in Volunteer Programmes Report*. The research team from Dublin City University and Queen's University Belfast are very pleased to have collaborated with Volunteer Ireland and Volunteer Now on this project, funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs, through the Shared Island Civic Society Fund (SICSF). Managing the project in partnership with Volunteer Ireland and Volunteer Now, we delivered an evidence-based report which provides rich and noteworthy information to inform the development of a toolkit and interactive training to support Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs), North and South, to improve inclusion and diversity practices.

The study provides insight into the experiences of organisations' inclusivity in their volunteer programmes. The research included individual and focus group interviews with a range of VIOs from across the island demonstrating how best practice in their organisation can be implemented in a wide variety of VIOs. We would like to acknowledge and thank the volunteers who took part in this research, not only for their contribution to this report but also for their vital contribution to the voluntary sector across Ireland.

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## Introduction

Inclusive volunteering programmes play a pivotal role in fostering diverse and equitable participation in voluntary activity within communities. As societies strive for greater inclusivity and social cohesion, understanding the efficacy and impact of these programmes becomes more important.

The purpose of this project was to identify best practice in “Inclusion in Volunteer Programmes”. This information was used to develop a toolkit and associated training to support Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs) to improve the inclusivity of their volunteer programmes. The main objectives were to:

1. Identify best practice in inclusion in a volunteer programme;
2. Convert the information obtained into a toolkit suitable for small, medium, and large VIOs; and
3. Develop training that can be delivered in-person or through a virtual learning environment.

This publication focuses on the key findings from a literature review, a series of individual interviews and a focus group carried out with volunteer managers from a range of VIOs in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Exploring the work of these VIOs will provide information, support, and guidance for other VIOs to enhance the inclusivity of their volunteer programmes.

# Key findings

In this section, we delve into the insights gained from capturing the firsthand experiences of participants in implementing an inclusive volunteer programme. Through their experience and stories, we uncover valuable practices that foster inclusivity. These findings provide insight into the nuances of creating environments where diverse volunteers feel valued and a sense of belonging. By putting these experiences together, we aim to provide actionable insights for VIOs committed to enhancing inclusivity in their volunteer initiatives. The findings are presented under the following headings: 1) Motivations, 2) Inclusion practices, 3) Monitoring processes, 4) Supports, 5) Recognition, 6) Retention and 7) Barriers to inclusivity.

## 1. Motivations

Emphasising the reasons that people may want to volunteer should help organisations to recruit a diverse selection of volunteers.

### a) Altruism (making a meaningful change):

- Organisations should seek to emphasise the contribution that their voluntary activities make to people's lives, and how the organisation's values may be like those of potential volunteers.

Participants spoke about how volunteers are motivated by seeing the **value** of their activities in helping others:

"But I think that the main thing is **they just want to see children have fun, participate**. It's not about the medals. Like that's our mantra. It's about taking part, and a lot of people who volunteer, they just want to see their children or their nieces, nephews, or friends of theirs, **they want to see every child playing and taking part** and they are just it's... I think they get joy from the kids' joy."

Participants also spoke about how volunteering acts as a way for volunteers to express their altruistic values:

“And people who share their values, people who are working towards a goal that they themselves align with. And **I think volunteering is an expression of someone's values** and someone's commitment to things. Like our volunteers would really align with our own vision of a kinder world, a world where no good food goes to waste”

**b) Social Factors** (making friends and connections):

- Organisations should consider emphasising to potential volunteers that volunteering may provide them with the opportunity to make friends with like-minded people.

Participants spoke about the social benefits for volunteers:

“A lot of them do it for the craic as well like, I mean because we would have ones who come as groups sort of to volunteer. So, we would have had... like in the past we would have had 8 or 9 young people who came along to volunteer at the same time. So, **they're coming as a sort of a friendship group for the fun of it**, as well as anything else.”

Participants spoke about how volunteering might allow volunteers to integrate into their community:

“So, another particular group is people who are new to the city who **want to come and make friends**, whether they're here for a few months or whether they've just moved here with a partner or for work or whatever – it's a good way to sort of jump straight into you know sort of **making an instant friend group.**”

Participants spoke about how volunteering allows volunteers to meet people with similar interests:

“The immediate thing that comes to mind is that there's a significant chunk of LGBT or non-binary youth. They find this place very supportive and a kind of **a nice bubble to get to be themselves in** and feel much more comfortable with their sense of identity.”

**c) Personal Development** (enhancing and utilising skills):

- Organisations could also emphasise the personal benefits that volunteers may get from participating in a volunteering opportunity, such as *CV enhancement* or *attaining a reference*.

Participants spoke about how volunteering might increase the chances of a volunteer getting paid employment in the future:

“As I mentioned, younger people, their goal could be a bit more strategically aligned in terms of their **future career prospects.**”

Participants also spoke about how volunteering might be beneficial for participants' mental health:

"Well, I would say some of them with mild mental health issues have been **recommended by their doctors** to do something of a physical nature and get out in the fresh air. They saw that it was an opportunity."

#### d) Personal circumstances

- The specifics of an individual's life (e.g., being newly retired) may lend themselves to participating in a volunteer opportunity. However, these factors are likely to be outside the control of a volunteer organisation.

Participants mentioned that volunteers who have a lot of free time are more likely to volunteer:

"And they are here because obviously they are **not allowed to work**. And they have nothing to do all day every day."

Participants spoke about how someone might be motivated to volunteer because of their own personal history (lived experience), for example having participated with the VIO in some capacity when they were younger:

"So, our volunteer base are mainly people who have had direct experience or indirect experience of mental health. People from other mental health charities and want to give something. So, we would say that a **high proportion of our volunteers do have lived experience** or have a very clear awareness of mental health."



## 2. Inclusion practices

Participants discussed many different practices they implement to increase volunteer diversity. Learning from these practices should help other VIOs to improve their inclusivity.

1. The practice mentioned most often during discussions was **flexibility**.
  - Organisations that can be flexible or adaptable in the roles they offer are more likely to recruit and retain different groups of volunteers i.e., flexible timetabling, assigning specific duties, etc.
  - For example, offering roles that require a low English language requirement may attract new immigrants or asylum seekers that may be excluded from participating in order areas.
  - Offer roles that appeal to a **broad array of skill sets** and allow volunteers the chance to **move between roles** within the organisation.

Participants discussed how flexibility is inherent in their organisations. They believe that this is a key factor that drives inclusion, as this flexibility allows them to accommodate a wide range of different people.

In other words, they were able to be inclusive to different groups of volunteers because they had a range of roles available to suit different abilities or skill sets.

They also emphasised how their organisation can adapt to volunteers' different needs, providing them with the ability to change their duties within the organisation if they need to.

Several participants spoke about how their organisation chooses to focus on the tasks, rather than on volunteers' individual characteristics. They believe this improves inclusivity as anyone who can complete the necessary tasks will be considered for a volunteer position, regardless of their background or identity:

"In other words, we're looking for the skill sets, and the right people in that sense. We like to have a **range of people from different professions**. That's diversity as well. So, for instance, people from an agricultural background, people not necessarily working at all, in other words unemployed people – they may very well have skill sets that we need."

“It is important to **have the right skills** on the Board as well, because we're in a fast-paced financial services market. We have to have solicitors, accountants and IT people and all of that as well.”

In addition, participants spoke about being able to change the nature of tasks that volunteers do within the organisation and being able to change volunteers to a completely different role if the need arises:

“And I'm unsure whether I can stay, because of the time commitments for them, we say, well, look, there's a local service just up the road, and it's open 24/7, so **you can change your role** to Saturday.”

Participants spoke about how some roles within their organisation don't require volunteers to be fluent in the English language, which allows new immigrants or asylum seekers to participate:

“We would work with folks and **if they understand**, if they feel comfortable, and they can communicate where they have questions or where they have concerns. You know, we would work in that context as well.”

2. Participants also spoke about various practices they implement at the **recruitment stage** which allow them to diversify their volunteer base.

- Participants discussed **targeting specific groups of people**, such as asylum seekers, and encouraging them to volunteer.
- They also spoke about the methods they use to recruit volunteers and emphasised the importance of having **different strategies** (e.g., *social media, word of mouth*) to appeal to different groups of potential volunteers.
- In addition, many participants reported having **strong links with local groups**, in a way that allows them to source volunteers from the local community.

### a) Targeting specific groups

Participants discussed how they made efforts to reach out to specific groups of people that otherwise might not apply for or participate in volunteer roles. For example, recruiting corporate volunteers to fulfil certain volunteering requirements:

“We have volunteers in today who are from a food partner. Part of that partnership would be the provision of a certain number of volunteering days and that's exactly it. You'd get **a team of staff together, they'll come in and it is an away day**. It's a volunteer experience that they do as well, and it helps them to understand the context of what the partnership is providing.”

### b) Different recruitment strategies

Participants also spoke about how they used different strategies for recruiting people, in a way that broadened the volunteer base and gave volunteering opportunities to people who otherwise might not have been able to volunteer.

They spoke about using diverse channels for volunteer recruitment, such as social media, believing that their recruitment approaches broadened the array of people who could volunteer for their organisation:

“Yeah, so on Facebook we would have maybe about 25,000 followers. We have a huge number of areas and counties that have their own Facebook page. So, 420 areas and 26 counties. So, what we would do is we would send out a form through our website. It would just be a save the date. It'd be a volunteer recruitment drive. So that would go to all our areas and counties in early January. **They would publish it on their own Facebook page as well as our Facebook page or LinkedIn or whatnot.**”

### c) Links with other groups and local channels

Participants how links with other groups in the area allows them to recruit diverse groups of people:

“I suppose identify what groups you want to be involved, and where the gaps are and then maybe target organisations within that umbrella in your local community. So, if it's mental health you know, if it's learning disability, if there's an asylum seekers group, you know, **speak to them directly and find out**, because most of these organisations will have their own pool of volunteers.

“Flyers... I really think that the **local newspaper** was great or if there's a **local council magazine** that goes to all homes. You know, specific to that area.

3. All participants spoke about the **internal processes** they have in place with the aim of fostering inclusion and diversity.
- They emphasised the **attitude** of their organisation, discussing how the principles of inclusion and diversity are key to their operations, throughout all levels of the organisation
  - They spoke about how they try to make sure that the **opinions of as many volunteers as possible are solicited and listened to**, so that inclusion needs can be identified and implemented where possible.

Seen this way, these organisations see inclusion and diversity as being **explicitly beneficial** to their functioning, and as such it is worth investing resources and effort into their attainment.

### Attitude

Participants spoke about cultivating an inclusive culture within their organisation, in a way that makes the organisation more diverse:

“It's about ethos, it's about attitude. And it's about the attitude from all our workers as well. If you've got somebody who sees, a problem, rather than a strength, I mean, you know, it's not... like we go back to that thing, **it's not what's wrong with you, it's what's strong with you.**”

### Diverse perspectives

Participants spoke about the benefits of including opinions and perspectives from a wide range of people within their organisation:

“I think diversity is very important in terms of the background people come from. We do try to attract people from all sorts of different backgrounds, in terms of their **religious background, cultural background**. We see diversity as a real plus, to have people from those different backgrounds.”

## Reflective practice

Participants discussed being reflective in questioning their own practices regarding inclusion and diversity, to ensure they are doing the best they can:

“Or where there is a lack of diversity, and being curious about that and **being curious** about why that's showing up - **is there something structurally about the programming that is keeping us from really showcasing all the work and the interests of all different sections of society?**”

### 3. Monitoring processes

Participants mentioned several different institutional monitoring processes they have in place, to ensure that volunteers' needs are being met and that they are supported in contributing to the running of the organisation.

- **Formal monitoring** – participants spoke about volunteer surveys, review meetings, and induction processes.
- **Informal monitoring** – participants emphasised the importance of having open communication with volunteers and having a general overview of the group dynamics within the volunteer cohort.
- In addition, participants also described how they **monitored the needs of the whole organisation**
  - by determining future recruitment needs, and
  - seeking input from volunteers as to how the running of the organisation could be improved.

#### Formal monitoring

Participants spoke about conducting surveys of volunteers to get feedback and uncover any concerns regarding volunteer participation:

“And we do **an annual volunteer survey** and an **annual staff survey about volunteers** and how it feels for them, and we are reintroducing our client survey this year again to **get clients' views on volunteers**. So, all that kind of influences the interactions that we have throughout the year.”

Participants spoke about conducting meetings with volunteers, to discuss how they are getting on in their voluntary role:

“Yeah, we would have regular support and supervision with a staff member for those volunteers, and so they **have an opportunity to feedback on how the experience is for them**. And, for that person, to feed back to them how they're getting on within the organisation as well.”

### Informal monitoring:

Participants frequently emphasised the importance of maintaining open and honest communication with volunteers, to ensure they can discuss any issues they are having within the organisation:

“If someone you know has an issue, I state very clearly that you must **come and tell me about it**. And it can be a very minor thing.”

Participants spoke about how they would keep an eye on a group of volunteers, to ensure that their activities are being completed and that any issues are being identified:

“And just be aware, **awareness is crucial**. If you're aware, in the garden. Their level of comfort and our comfort, what our own comfortable state might be.

### Organisational monitoring

In addition to monitoring individual volunteers, participants also reported how they monitor the overall needs of the organisation, to ensure there are always enough volunteers to support the running of the organisation:

“Yeah, so we know, for example, when our main events are, we also know when the deadlines are for all the local events. So, we know for example that indoor soccer must be finished by the thirtieth of April next year in every locality. They know that as well, so they're **already planning for that and looking for volunteers** in those sectors.”



Participants discussed the importance of allowing the views of volunteers to inform the running of the organisation:

“We're trying to **involve people much more in the solution from ground level up**. That's the new direction... We want to have a nice mix of people on that working group. I think what we're trying to do **is involve volunteers more in our national decision-making process** as well.”

Some participants spoke about how moving to an online system for managing volunteers has helped/will help them to streamline the monitoring process:

“We started that last year and we've got some funding to create our **own internal volunteer management system**. I cannot wait to start that because it will cut down a lot of my time.”

## 4. Supports

Participants discussed the range of supports they have in place for their volunteers, as well as the supports that allow diverse groups of people to participate in the volunteering process. Those having issues with volunteer inclusion should consider implementing some of these supports.

- Many of these supports were directly **role-related**, explicitly aimed at supporting volunteers to complete their assigned tasks. These task-related supports included training, English-language support, mentoring/shadowing and regular check-ins with volunteers.
- Participants also discussed **non-task-related support** they give to volunteers, such as helping volunteers with administrative tasks that arise in their daily lives, e.g. completing forms.

### Role-related supports

This relates to supports that volunteers receive from the organisations that are specifically designed to help them complete their required tasks.

Participants spoke about how volunteers receive training within the organisation to improve their skills in a particular area and support them to undertake varied tasks:

“We also **offer a lot of training**. So, you know, they do the safeguarding 1, 2, and 3 – 3 is if they want to be a liaison officer. We provide all that for them, and we have a calendar on our website. **A training calendar** – so for example tonight there's Canva training, so I'm delivering that. And that's just to teach some volunteers how to do posters and, you know, do up some nice graphics for social to get more children involved. So, we provide all those for free.”

Participants also spoke about providing volunteers with supports to help them improve their English language skills with the aim of enhancing their ability to volunteer:

“And in recent times I've been fortunate enough to get English classes, so one off, a miracle really, from the council, they paid for **conversational English classes for those particular volunteers.**”

Participants spoke about how volunteers receive support through shadowing or being mentored by a different volunteer or a paid staff member:

“One of the things we're trying to do as well is – we're trying to make sure that people who are now stepping off boards may sit on a mentoring committee, so that **they can actually help people, new people coming in**, in terms of settling in and understanding a lot of the technical terms that of course come with being involved in a financial services organisation.”

### **Supports outside work**

This relates to supports that volunteers receive that are not specifically directed at completing tasks. These had to do with helping volunteers with tasks in their everyday lives. Participants spoke about how they would help volunteers with administrative tasks outside of their direct volunteer role:

“So, we are all, staff-wise very good at thanking a volunteer, being helpful to a volunteer. You know, there's lots of things you've got to do for volunteers that are not connected to your job. **References, passport application forms, finding them holiday insurance**, you know, lots and lots of things like that.”

## 5. Recognition

All participants spoke about the importance of providing adequate recognition of volunteers' contributions, with the aim of improving volunteer retention.

- All participants discussed **formalised, internal recognition processes** that happen within their organisation, such as a volunteer celebration event, volunteer awards, or posting on social media to celebrate volunteers' achievements.
- Participants also discussed **less formal internal processes** of volunteer recognition such as thanking volunteers and ensuring that respect for volunteers permeates all levels of the organisation.
- Additionally, some participants mentioned that they sought to receive **recognition from external sources**, either for individual volunteers, or the organisation.

### Internal recognition

This describes processes that take place to ensure that volunteers feel that their contribution has been noticed and appreciated. These include formal and informal processes.

#### Formal

Participants described hosting an event to recognise the contributions of volunteers:

"There is **an event we usually hold, on a yearly basis**. It's a celebration of volunteering, but it's also a celebration of young people's social action efforts, because we say that like every instant of social action is volunteering, but not every instance of volunteering is social action."

Participants spoke about giving volunteers internal awards to recognise their contributions:

"The volunteer awards are a big event – that was the largest we've had this year, we had 132 attendees which was lovely. And it was so lovely with volunteer stories, clients' stories, and staff, etc. So again, **making people feel part of something, you know, that's bigger than just the service.**"

Participants spoke about posting on social media to thank volunteers:

“For example, when a person got the forklift licence – well 2 of them got their forklift licence this year – two asylum seekers. So, **we’ll have a cake, they’ll be photographed on Facebook**, and it’ll say congratulations for achieving their forklift licence.”

### **Informal**

Participants spoke about the principle of volunteer recognition and how they would thank volunteers for giving up their time for the organisation. They emphasised this as being integral throughout all levels of their organisation:

“For example, our CEO will always make time to stop into the break room and have a chat with the volunteers and just see how they're getting on and just thank them. I think **that it's seemingly a small thing but it's valuable** because it's you know it's from the bones basically. That is showing that appreciation.”

Participants also spoke in general terms about the importance of recognising volunteer contributions:

“I think that **if someone volunteers it's important to hold on to them** – that they feel valued in that sense, that they're brought into decisions I think that's very important.”

## External recognition

This is recognition received by either the organisation, or an individual volunteer, from a source outside the organisation itself.

Participants discussed trying to receive accreditation from outside bodies, usually by demonstrating adherence to a set of standards:

"We have the **bronze certificate from the Irish Centre for Diversity**. So, we're aiming for silver. So, for us, and we've recently just done training on it with the Irish Centre for Diversity, for our board members."

"At least one, 2 of our people got a recognition from the Volunteer Centre or **they were nominated Volunteer of the Year.**"

## 6. Retention

Participants spoke about the factors that they believe increase volunteer retention.

- **Benefits** that volunteers get from volunteering: participants mentioned the social aspect of volunteering, as well as the satisfaction they get from completing their volunteer work.
- Another important factor discussed by participants was the **promotion of a healthy relationship** between the volunteers and the organisation. This was achieved by making volunteers feel valued, providing them with opportunities for progression within the organisation, and (in some cases) providing them with non-monetary rewards, such as a day out.
- Participants also identified **threats** to volunteer retention, most notably volunteers moving on from the organisation for reasons outside the organisation's control.

### Volunteer-level factors

This describes the factors specific to an individual volunteer that affect (in a positive way) their decision to remain volunteering in the organisation. These factors are usually personal benefits that might accrue to a volunteer, such as a feeling of satisfaction from completing voluntary work.

Participants described how the social benefits of volunteering, such as making new friends, were a factor driving volunteer retention:

"There's a **strong sense of friendship and camaraderie**, that exists between people who work here or who volunteer here, who would be my close friends, who I'm going to contact in case of emergency and things like that. The reason you do keep coming back is because you get to talk to those people."

Participants discussed how volunteer retention was improved due to volunteers feeling satisfied with the work they do:

“Yeah, I think, yeah, well people do come in, and they never can get out, so I think there is a sense in which people do **really feel that they get something out of it**, that they do stay.”

Participants also discussed how the scheduling fits into the daily schedules of many volunteers:

“I think it's the accessibility of it in terms of **when it fits into their life on a practical level**. If it works for you, you know, if Monday morning is your day to do it then that kind of works. So, the consistency that we're able to offer works for many people.”

### **Promoting a healthy relationship between volunteers and the organisation:**

This relates to how organisations try to develop a durable relationship with volunteers and the organisation. Participants spoke about how the maintenance of this relationship would be likely to improve retention, as volunteers would feel part of the organisation.

Participants described how they can award non-monetary gifts, such as tickets to an event or a “day out”, to help volunteer retention:

“And sometimes, you know, there **are little perks to the job**. Like for example, tonight we're taking a large group and we're going to the Panto. We will have a couple of volunteers coming on that. That's when they can see those little perks and they still enjoy what they're doing. It is about having a bit of fun with it, you know, **when it doesn't seem like a chore**.”



Participants described how volunteers feel like the work they do is valued by the organisation, which keeps them coming back to volunteer:

"It's **reinforcing our gratitude with people**, you know, and that helps for people to feel good about themselves. Cause although I say like we're not here as an organisation that is for the volunteers, we couldn't do what we do without the volunteers. So therefore, we want people to feel included and that they're welcome, and we want people to get that lovely sense of well-being and sense of purpose from being in."

Participants described how the maintenance of an open communication channel between the organisation and its volunteers was key for improving retention, as volunteers who were kept in the loop about the organisation were more likely to give up their time:

"I think it's asking, communication. It's just because I think when people drop off, we feel like they've made a choice. But **they just felt like it was, I haven't been asked, therefore I'm no longer a volunteer.**"

Participants described how there was the opportunity for internal progression within their organisation, so that a volunteer who keeps giving up their time would be awarded higher-level duties to do:

"We are developing more of a **hierarchy in terms of responsibility**. Not that we have ranks exactly, but we are developing more positions of seniority."

## Threats to retention

Participants also spoke about the factors that hinder their ability to maintain their existing volunteer base, despite their best efforts to keep volunteers coming back. They described how volunteers were likely to move on from their volunteer positions for reasons outside of the organisation's control, such as moving to a different city, or getting a full-time job:

"Or they or **they'll be relocated**. The bulk of our volunteers are from the asylum-seeking volunteer end or asylum seekers, the bulk of them. So, we must be constantly aware - as soon as they're employed or relocated, we are going to take a nosedive in numbers."

Closely related to the idea of resource constraints more generally (see relevant section in Barriers), participants discussed how they would like to have more resources available to reward volunteers for their contributions, which they believe would drive retention:

"**I would love a budget each year and treat all the volunteers**. But no, it doesn't work like that for obvious reasons, but I'll always say you know, it's for everybody."

## 7. Barriers

Participants spoke about the barriers they believe affect inclusive volunteer programmes.

- **Internal barriers:** word of mouth leading to homogenous volunteers, struggling to diversify volunteer base, need for inclusion policy
- **Role-related barriers:** nature of activities may not be attractive, timetabling
- **External barriers:** resources, recruitment process cumbersome, image of organisation

### Internal barriers

This relates to factors within an organisation (specifically, how the organisation is run) that participants reported as being detrimental to their ability to recruit and retain a diverse base of volunteers.

Participants discussed how the use of word of mouth as a recruitment strategy may lead to a lack of diversity in the volunteer pool, as people will tend to recruit others who are like themselves demographically:

“With word of mouth, **unless you feel that you do have a very diverse pool of volunteers who are spreading that word, you're not going to have the diversity show up.** For example, if there is a certain age profile or ethnicity spreading the word, they may be spreading it to a similar age group, I can imagine, a similar profile.”

Participants discussed in general terms how they were struggling to attract varied groups of volunteers:

“I think we could do **more active work in reaching out to marginalised communities** and having representation there.”

## Work-related barriers

This describes factors related to the work carried out by a volunteer organisation that negatively affect their ability to recruit a diverse group of volunteers.

Participants talked about how the work that is done by their organisation may not appeal to a lot of people, or that their work is unsuitable for specific people (e.g. children) which limits their efforts to diversify their volunteer base:

“And in general, we’re trying to target those young people who wouldn’t normally avail of services, i.e. the ones who would be deemed to be problematic within communities. So that would be the type of young people that we’re trying to attract. So therefore, again, **it doesn’t leave it very appealing for a volunteer.**”

Participants discussed how the timetabling of the work they do may not suit different groups of people, e.g. parents being unable to volunteer in the evenings due to childcare commitments:

“And even as a service, not just within our own area, I would say that we have struggled with recruiting our volunteers, retaining volunteers, because a lot of the time, **it’s quite a difficult job. I mean, these are not hours that suit most people.** And our projects will be out, they could be out 7 nights a week, you know. And it really doesn’t suit an awful lot of people.”

## External barriers

This relates to factors outside an organisation's control that impede their ability to recruit diverse volunteers. In general, participants expressed frustration about these factors and their lack of ability to affect them.

Participants spoke about the general resource constraints they face, which may prevent them from doing as much as they would like in terms of volunteer recruitment and development:

"I think one weakness, you're probably going to get it from everyone, is **resources and funding**. I mean **we don't have enough**, and if there's anyone out there... We don't have enough."

Participants spoke about how the process of becoming a volunteer for their organisation could be long and complicated, which may prevent some people from being able to volunteer:

"I think for us as part of streamlining our process **we want to reduce the number of steps that people must take to get involved**, and that's a big thing for us because we are such a safeguarding focused organisation. Because we do think that puts some people off."

Participants discussed how the organisation may have an image of being "uncool" which may prevent younger people from wanting to volunteer:

"Yes, perception can be a barrier. We done a survey recently about young people's perception of our organisation. **And young people look at us as for older people, nice and warm and friendly places for my granny** and my auntie and whatever to be members of or volunteer."

# Conclusion

In conclusion, our research into inclusive volunteering programmes highlights the importance of addressing specific areas to ensure their effectiveness and sustainability.

Being aware of volunteers' **motivation** has emerged as a crucial factor in creating inclusive programmes, as volunteers are driven by diverse incentives, from altruism to personal development.

Implementing **inclusive practices**, such as accessibility accommodations and diverse recruitment strategies, are essential for fostering an environment where individuals from all backgrounds feel welcome and valued.

**Monitoring mechanisms** play a pivotal role in assessing programme strengths and identifying areas for improvement. Regular evaluation enables organisations to adapt strategies and better meet the evolving needs of volunteers and communities.

Additionally, providing **robust support systems**, including training and mentorship opportunities, enhances volunteer engagement and satisfaction.

**Recognition** serves as a powerful tool for reinforcing volunteer commitment and acknowledging their contributions. Public acknowledgment and gratitude foster a sense of belonging and encourage continued involvement.

Effective **retention strategies** are vital for sustaining volunteer momentum over the long term. Cultivating meaningful relationships and offering opportunities for advancement are key to retaining dedicated volunteers.

However, our research also highlights various **barriers** that can hinder inclusivity and volunteer participation. These may include structural barriers like lack of transportation or childcare, as well as attitudinal barriers such as discrimination or prejudice. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach, including community partnerships and advocacy efforts.

In summary, creating a truly inclusive volunteering programme necessitates a comprehensive approach that considers motivation, inclusive practices, monitoring, support, recognition, retention, and barriers. By prioritising these elements, an organisation can build thriving volunteer communities that reflect the diversity and strength of the populations they serve.

