HERITAGE VOLUNTEERING GROUP
CREATING CAPACITY 2021
Rebuilding volunteering in the heritage sector post Covid
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The coronavirus outbreak has had a profound impact on the heritage sector, with many organisations spending much of 2020 with their doors closed. Few have escaped the financial, operational, and strategic challenges created by this crisis and its legacy is expected to stretch well beyond 2021.

Volunteers are vital to enabling our organisations to heal from this and move forward. Their ingenuity and support will be central to creating new and innovative solutions that not only allow our sector to survive but to thrive. To do this, though, heritage organisations must possess a culture that allows us to fully leverage volunteer talent.

In 2020, in partnership with Historic England, we undertook a piece of work to explore if this culture exists and what was needed to rebuild volunteering capacity in our sector. This report explores the findings of that work and makes three key recommendations:

- Volunteer engagement, and support for volunteering, needs to become more strategic
- Support is needed to develop volunteering and create lasting cultural change
- Respondents feel generally confident to redeploy volunteers but have some concerns
Much of what you will read relates to the strategic and structural changes that are required. We are committed to supporting volunteer engagement professionals within the sector and to providing access to the resources needed. However, lasting cultural change, that enables the sector to maximise the impact of volunteering, requires cross-sector support and buy-in at an organisational level.

Volunteers are the route to a brighter future for our sector, but this will only happen if organisations think strategically about their involvement, invest in their participation and provide the leadership to create new and innovative models of volunteering. Whether you’re a Funder, a Chief Executive or a Volunteer Engagement professional, the data in this report is provided to help you make the right decisions about volunteering and to ensure that, as a sector, we are able to unlock the power of volunteering.

Matthew Hick
Chair
May, 2021
In spring 2020, we worked with Historic England on a paper which explored the role volunteers and volunteering would play in “Rebuilding Capacity in the Heritage Sector”. As well as highlighting the impact and value of volunteers to the sector, the paper explored the challenges we faced, the strategic and structural changes needed and the support that should be provided.

As part of this work, a survey was conducted with our members, between 30 April and 11 May 2020. This was completed by 62 people and represents a response rate comparable with our 2019 sector survey. Over half of the responses came from independent and local authority run organisations, with 50% of respondent’s organisations having less than 100 volunteers.

The findings presented on the next few pages come from this research.

**FIGURE 1. TYPES OF RESPONDENT**

Responses were received from organisations across the heritage sector. The largest proportion came from independent institutions.
Responses were received from organisations with volunteer programmes of varying size. However, over half came from places with less than 100 volunteers or less.

**FIGURE 2. NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS PER ORGANISATION**

62 people from different organisations responded to the survey.

40% of responses came from independent organisations.

100 50% of responses came from organisations with less than 100 volunteers.
The first finding from our research is that if heritage organisations are to fully leverage volunteer talent, support for volunteering and volunteer engagement must become more strategic. Across the sector, senior volunteer engagement roles, like Heads of Volunteering, are rare and 40% of organisations have no volunteering strategy. Worryingly, this figure rises to 43% for organisations who say they can’t operate without their volunteers. Unsurprising, perhaps, given that only 38% of respondents from these organisations described their senior management teams as being highly engaged in the strategic development of volunteering.

Even in independent organisations, who are the most reliant on volunteer support (70% said they could not operate without their volunteers), levels of strategic thinking about volunteer engagement remain low. Whilst 57% have a volunteering strategy in place, only 40% of leadership teams are highly engaged in the strategic development of volunteering and only a quarter employ a senior volunteering position – Volunteer Manager or above.

Volunteers can make a significant operational and strategic contribution to heritage organisations, delivering outcomes that support an institution’s ambitions around community engagement, diversity and inclusion and social mobility. To achieve this, leadership teams need to become more engaged with the strategic development of volunteering. Strategies that map out progressive long-term plans need to be developed and implemented and senior roles needed to be created to support their creation.
of organisations said volunteers were critical to their operations

45%

of organisations who say volunteers are critical to their operations don’t have a Volunteer Manager

20%

of organisations don’t have a volunteering strategy

40%
SUPPORT IS NEEDED TO DEVELOP VOLUNTEERING AND CREATE LASTING CULTURAL CHANGE

Covid-19 has had a huge impact on heritage organisations and is likely to leave a legacy that lasts well beyond 2021. However, we believe that this provides a huge opportunity for the sector to rethink volunteering and develop new models of volunteer engagement that are more diverse, resilient and impactful. To achieve this, though, the findings here suggest that support is needed in a range of areas.

Our research showed that just 8% of respondents were very well equipped to develop new models of volunteering, with a worrying 38% saying they were not. These figures are, broadly speaking, reflective of the sector’s readiness to diversify their volunteer programmes – with 38% saying they weren’t well equipped to do so. Our research also revealed that, specifically, organisations need help recruiting more diverse volunteers, creating innovative ways to engage volunteers and sharing and accessing useful resources.

We are committed to supporting volunteer management professionals within the sector and to providing access to the resources they need. However, lasting cultural change, that enables the sector to unlock the power of volunteering, requires cross-sector support and buy-in at an organisational level to provide resources and time that is required. Specifically:

- Leadership training for volunteer managers is needed to support development, make them more effective at delivering cultural change and gaining organisational buy-in
- Training should be developed to help volunteer management professionals create more diverse, inclusive and resilient volunteer programmes
- Resources, which support the development of diverse, inclusive and resilient volunteer programmes need to be made available and easily accessible
FIGURE 5. PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS HAVING DIFFICULTY ACCESSING DEVELOPMENTAL RESOURCES

Over 50% of respondents said they had trouble accessing specialist advice. Whilst a third of respondents identified problems accessing training materials, examples of best practice and guidance materials.

FIGURE 6. ORGANISATIONAL REQUIREMENTS TO DELIVER CHANGE

Alongside better access to guidance materials, the two greatest requirements respondents identified for developing their volunteer programme are greater organisational and senior management buy-in.

8% of respondents said they were very well equipped to develop new models of volunteering.

50% of respondents said they needed wider organisational buy-in to deliver a more effective volunteer programme.

44% of respondents find it difficult to access specialist advice.
Longer-term, there are concerns about job substitution, replacement and displacement and the role volunteers will be asked to play in the face of job cuts. We do not support the replacement of paid roles with volunteers; however, we do believe that organisations should consider volunteers as part of their wider workforce. In so doing, they should seek to make volunteers a more impactful and meaningful part of their organisation enabling them to undertake roles that build capacity, increase organisational resilience and generate income.

Key to doing this are skilled volunteer engagement professionals and leadership teams who will listen to them. Together, these two parties can ensure that when volunteers are redeployed, or new roles created, it is done in a way that will have maximum impact without threatening job security.
ABOUT US

At the Heritage Volunteering Group our mission is to help you unlock the power of volunteering through collaboration and sharing best practice.

Through Inspire, our twice yearly networking forum, we help volunteer managers connect and share best practice. At our Annual Conference we bring together leaders and practitioners from across the sector, providing a national platform for connectivity and sharing new ideas.

Using Twitter, Facebook and Linkedin we connect with thousands each day. Whilst our website provides a place for you to access helpful resources, connect with local networks and discover innovative volunteer projects.

To learn more about our work, visit our website or follow us on one of our social media channels.

[heritagevolunteeringgroup.org.uk/](http://heritagevolunteeringgroup.org.uk/)
[twitter.com/HeritageVols](http://twitter.com/HeritageVols)
[facebook.com/groups/heritagevolunteering](http://facebook.com/groups/heritagevolunteering)
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