

THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

COVID-19 Mini-Expo

Attendee voices – Waterfall Question and
Breakout Room Report by Volunteer Scotland

28th June 2021

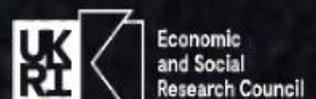


Table of Contents

Waterfall question.....	3
Breakout rooms.....	3
Reflections so far	4
Solutions	6
Appendix 1: Waterfall Question	8
Appendix 2: Break out feedback and key actions 10th June 2021.	12

Waterfall question

As part of 'The Road to Recovery' Expo a new element was added – a 'waterfall' question. This asked all attendees to consider and respond simultaneously to a single question: "*What is the No.1 priority to support the contribution of volunteering to Scotland's recovery.*"

88 of the delegates answered the waterfall question. The answers to the Waterfall question were very succinct, the main themes in response to the waterfall question were:

- Support - 26 respondents
- Collaboration / partnership – 18 respondents
- Funding - 15 respondents

In addition to these three broad categories there were additional themes raised as shown in the table below. A full list of all answers to the waterfall question are included in Appendix 1.

"Supportive structured and valuable volunteering opportunities"

"Making the volunteer experience the best it can be"

"Strengthen connections digitally and non-digitally"

"Healing!"

"Consistent approach and think differently"

"Making sure volunteers are valued, visible and included"

"Safety and support"

"Number one in my opinion is safety of the volunteers"

"Health & Wellbeing"

"Take time to reflect, look at where we are, who we have and how we can support them first. Then look forward."

"Volunteer Management recognition and consultation with volunteers"

"Ensure that the voices of those who stepped back during the pandemic are not lost once we emerge"

"Making it as easy to volunteer as possible"

"Listening to what volunteers need"

"Communication with vols and considering their needs"

Breakout rooms

Reflections so far – *from what you have heard this morning what do you think are the key challenges/issues relevant to recovery?*

The main challenges/issues from the breakout room discussions are:

- **Digital**
 - Positives from digital solutions:
 - The ability to reach a wide geography using digital solutions.
 - Digital is appealing as a method of volunteering for many volunteers.
 - Digital solutions have allowed services to continue.
 - Negatives from digital solutions:
 - Lack of digital equipment / skills in some demographic groups of volunteers.
 - Lack of confidence in using digital technology.
 - A blended approach and more digital training could be the way forward.
- **The need for time for the sector to heal and reflect**
 - The future still feels very uncertain; organisations and volunteers need time to recover before considering recovery.
 - The time scales for removing restrictions are changing and unknown.
- **Bringing back volunteers and engaging with new volunteers safely**
 - As organisations re-engage volunteers and recruit new volunteers the safety of volunteers must be a priority.
 - Confidence needs to be rebuilt with existing volunteers that had to pause volunteering due to lockdown and social distancing.
 - Volunteers need to be brought back at a pace which suits the volunteers and not too quickly.
- **Mental health**
 - The declining mental health of volunteers and trustees during Covid-19 is highlighted as a significant issue.
 - Burnout and stress from unprecedented demand and changes to delivery models are all cited as being detrimental to the mental health of trustees and volunteers.
 - Having mental health support in place for returning volunteers is a priority.
 - Harnessing the mental health benefits of volunteering is also key.

A full transcript of all breakout rooms is included in Appendix 2. Sample responses for 'Reflections so far' are shown below:

Response examples:

“Digital: Access to computers/digital technology/phones is important. Useful for training or contacting other people. A lot of people are still quite scared to come out. “

“Been great resources provided around accessing digital, but the biggest challenge was often providing practical support to people in accessing or using digital platforms.”

“Too eager to move into ‘recovery’ mode – need to reflect, identify what has worked, what hasn’t and what the state the sector is in.”

“It’s important to take recovery in stages – incrementally. For example, we are starting to match up befrienders with young people. But we’re still ‘in the woods’.”

“The need for pausing, reflecting, and healing”

“We need to strike a balance between still trying to respond to the immediate needs and the needs that will emerge from the pandemic that haven’t yet been addressed. There is still a lot to deal with and a lot of re-building.”

“As a rural organisation there are issues relating to digital exclusion and connectivity. Volunteers might have a computer but lack good broadband networks. There is the willingness to engage digitally but they may not have the ability to go online.”

“Is a previous volunteer program the same now and applicable?”

“Bringing back volunteers safely - most things our volunteers do are face-to-face. Challenges of making this as safe and comfortable as possible for volunteers”

“The activities that volunteers return to will require comprehensive risk assessments, being mindful of the decline in health or mental wellbeing of volunteers.”

“Mental health and social isolation were always issues for volunteer managers (VMs) to address, just much more prevalent now “

“Mental health in sector also prevalent – seen a lot of burnout, with many finding social media a challenge”

“Extent to which organisations supporting wellbeing of volunteers, trustees and staff – stresses, strains, mental health. “

Solutions – *what are your ideas on how best to support the contribution of volunteering to Scotland's recovery from COVID-19?*

Three main categories of 'solution' stand out:

1. Collaboration

- The need for collaboration between third sector organisations, communities, TSIs and Government to allow volunteering to build back better.

2. Funding

- The need for long term sustainable funding is needed to help the sector build back and build for the future.

3. Recognition

- Volunteers have played an integral part in supporting Scottish people through the Covid-19 pandemic, and there is a need to give full recognition of the nature and scale of this contribution.
- Longer term recognition needs to be embedded in the volunteer process with volunteers recognised and thanked for their efforts.

A full transcript of all breakout rooms are included in Appendix 2, sample responses for solutions are shown below:

Response examples:

“Build back / forward better – contributions that people can make through volunteering to beneficiaries but also mental health benefits. Need opportunities for everyone to give back.”

“Recognise volunteers who stepped up but also volunteers who couldn't be involved – keep connections e.g. personalised letters”

“Recognised the need to think outside the box and the importance for organisations to meet together to share learnings.”

“Trust between organisations need to be built up and encouraged.”

“More national events (like this Expo) where learnings are shared was suggested.”

“Lack of understanding amongst funders of the vital role of volunteering and value and contribution of volunteers. People are bringing vital skills. There is not enough recognition, and the profile needs to be raised.”

“Long term secure funding”

Collaboration, funding and support (bringing volunteers back safely and addressing mental health challenges) are highlighted in both the breakout room discussions and the waterfall question, highlighting these areas as reoccurring themes that the third sector believe are particularly important in the road to recovery.

A direct comparison between breakout room feedback from the June 2020 and June 2021 Expos is not straightforward due to the different Expo themes and breakout room questions. However, mental health, partnership working, funding and technology are common themes between the two Expos. This shows that some of the key themes emerging at the outset of the pandemic have remained largely unchanged as we look to recovery one year later.

Appendix 1: Waterfall Question

Waterfall Question:

10th June 2021

What is the No.1 priority to support the contribution of volunteering to Scotland's recovery?

"Safety"

"Collaboration ""Partnership working"

"Supportive structured and valuable volunteering opportunities"

"Making the volunteer experience the best it can be"

"Strengthen connections digitally and non-digitally"

"Recognition of importance of volunteering within strategic docs and funding to follow though!"

"Ensure that our volunteers are safe and well"

"Healing!"

"Volunteer strategy updated"

"Governance, guidance, and support"

"Collaboration"

"Understanding, Support and working together"

"Sustainable resource to support new volunteering approaches, such as ESV, as well as to resource good volunteer management. "

"Consistent approach and think differently"

"Making sure volunteers are valued, visible and included"

"Good support and connectedness"

"To help each other in this time of need and help other to recover their pace"

"Resources and awareness raising campaigns to get people to continue to volunteer. "

"The value of what we offer being understood and securely funded"

"Safety and support"

"More Money - funding"

"Clear leadership and commitment to volunteering and adequate resources for volunteer involving organisations to access (not on a 12-month funding model)"

"Clear guidance."

"To build the capacity of VIO"

"Invest in good volunteer's management!"

"Appropriate funding for TSIs and Volunteer centres to help support VIOs who also need appropriate funding."

"Collaboration within sectors"

"Number one in my opinion is safety of the volunteers"

"Support working aged people to continue to volunteer and contribute their skills."

"Health & Wellbeing"

"Collaboration"

"Collaborative partnerships / working between all forms of volunteers and infrastructure organisations"

"Take time to reflect, look at where we are, who we have and how we can support them first. Then look forward."

"A collaborative mixed approach to work from different organisations with climate change aspects involved."

"Addressing barriers to access, including digital poverty, intersectional inequalities and sustainable funding."

"Good volunteer management and support."

"Volunteer Management recognition and consultation with volunteers"

"Funding"

"The opportunity to work in partnership and collaboration with both the private and 3rd sector to share knowledge, skills, resources and experiences"

"Engage Volunteers for input ref recovery- voices"

"Awareness at government level of the importance of volunteering, mentions of it, support for it, from the very top. Now, the value to society of volunteering is understood."

"Ensure that the voices of those who stepped back during the pandemic are not lost once were emerge"

"Ensure that all VIO's, regardless of size, have a Volunteer Manager or access to one"

"Making it as easy to volunteer as possible"

"Listening to what volunteers need"

"Resources - finances, people support"

"Independent Age: maintaining those new ways collaborative working"

"Communication with vols and considering their needs"

"Funding"

"Ensuring a safe and supported environment for volunteers returning to their volunteering roles"

"Making sure everyone is safe!"

"Funding for vol support roles and support for agencies so they can provide Vols with a good experience."

"VASA: funding and infrastructure"

"ensure safe working environment and supporting them throughout."

"Capacity building support to VIOs and TSIs to build back inclusion in volunteering"

"Resources"

"Invest in and support effective volunteer engagement professionals with the knowledge, expertise and insights to help organizations adapt and thrive into the future."

"Partnership and a collaborative approach"

"support"

"the recognition that recovery will be a challenge for volunteers"

"Effective volunteer management structures in place"

"stop, pause, and reflect and core funding opportunities of no less than 2 years, ideally longer... let's build in sustainability and longevity"

"Make funding easier to allow us breathing space so we can recover regroup and respond to the changing demographics that will occur in the next 12 months"

"recognition of the voluntary sector with better financial support"

"having clear guidance and resources to keep volunteers/clients safe when going out visiting people "

"Keeping the interest of volunteers"

"support the volunteers to training"

"partnership"

"safety"

"support, funding, acknowledgement and recognition of volunteer managers"

"Continue to support and build the tremendous contribution volunteers make"

"Nationally co-produced guidance on enabling and taking care of people as opportunities increase/re-open."

"Having policies in place that people feel confident about in terms of safety, accessibility and inclusiveness. A generic one we can personalise would be great!"

"Clear guidance on what we can volunteers can and can't do moving forwards."

"support"

"recognition and support for volunteer management"

"Ensuring the safety of our volunteers"

"partnership working & funding!"

"To be people/individual focused and not process focussed"

"Consistent access to information. Ideally an app regulated by government, but local regionalized spaces managed by local authorities/TSIs, could reduce operational burden and create access to information needed."

"Engagement with volunteers"

"Partnership"

"partnership working"

"how to transition to the face-to-face world"

"Helping those people who had to stop due to pandemic to come back into volunteering esp those most vulnerable/silent/excluded - hearing their voices and supporting them to return"

"Partnership working"

"Maintaining galvanized communities and sector once we leave emergency/crisis mode!"

Appendix 2: Break out feedback and key actions 10th June 2021.

Discussion Questions:

Breakout groups Feedback/Key Actions 10th June 2021

1. **Reflections so far** – from what you have heard this morning what do you think are the key challenges/issues relevant to recovery?

2. **Solutions** – what are your ideas on how best to support the contribution of volunteering to Scotland's recovery from COVID-19?

Reflections so Far:

- Digital: Access to computers/digital technology/phones is important. Useful for training or contacting other people. A lot of people are still quite scared to come out.
- Bringing back volunteers safely- most things our volunteers do are face to face. Challenges of making this as safe and comfortable as possible for volunteers. WhatsApp groups have provided an opportunity for those who are still a bit reticent about coming back to engage with other volunteers and have catch-up meetings. Others have kept up with volunteers via Zoom meetings, but many volunteers are not keen on this.
- Inclusion: One of the biggest volunteering achievements in the past few decades has been around inclusion moving away from volunteering stereotypes. In the last year it has probably gone back 20 years. Research done with Volunteer Scotland (pre-COVID) on the health and wellbeing benefits of volunteering found the people who have the most to gain by volunteering were still the least likely to get involved. Barriers such as poverty/long term health conditions have really been exacerbated over the last year. For many people volunteering helped them survive- these are the groups most likely to have been shielding or who have lost confidence. It will be so difficult for so many people to bridge that gap to being active contributors again.
- Really striking in the research findings that for VIOs 37% say inclusion is a priority compared with 76% of infrastructure bodies. VIO's want to get their services going and need volunteers who can hit the ground running. Capacity and resources are tight, and it is difficult to accommodate those who need extra support to volunteer. The longer people can't volunteer who have the most to gain from it, the worse their health and wellbeing will be and the bigger the strain will be on GP services, primary and secondary care.

Solutions:

- Digital Access- some have engaged with new ways of doing things via digital means. For some it has been difficult- if they don't have the kit or the confidence. Need a solution to support people to use digital tools. Some gave out laptops and had Digital Champions- but hard to engage with people you might never have met. We might exclude some volunteers who have no interest in digital.
- Risk and guidelines- the guidelines and information changes so quickly. By the time volunteers are ready to come back the information has changed again. Very difficult to plan training when things keep changing. At the start of the pandemic the surge in mutual aid presented massive concerns about safeguarding. Didn't want to rain on the parade of the well-intentioned members of the public. We were able to signpost and provide guidance on safeguarding. This

worked well and provided a legacy of good partnership with the TSI's knowledge of formal volunteering and knowing what works to support mutual aid.

- Supporting referral agencies- As a TSI we are looking at how we support referral agencies. Volunteering is only a positive experience if it is managed well.
- Inclusive volunteering- Need support to make quality experiences- potentially additional staff time to enable someone to settle, or additional training for staff to be more inclusive. Let's not reinvent new ways of doing things, look at what worked when we helped volunteering to be more inclusive, bring the old tools out of the box and adapt them for the current purpose.
- Co-ordinating appeals for volunteers: We didn't hear anything about the appeal that went out to volunteers. People will have been put off volunteering. A lot of people will never sign up to volunteer again because they were one of the 60,000+ who signed up and then never did anything.

Discussion Questions:

Breakout groups Feedback/Key Actions 10th June 2021

1. **Reflections so far** – from what you have heard this morning what do you think are the key challenges/issues relevant to recovery?

2. **Solutions** – what are your ideas on how best to support the contribution of volunteering to Scotland's recovery from COVID-19?

Reflections so Far:

When is recovery starting? The timeline is very uncertain:

1. We're 'in limbo'. Our charity is planning ahead, but we 'don't have a crystal ball.
2. We are engaging with our volunteers now in virtual groups. But no timeline for when we will start getting back to F2F.
3. It's important to take recovery in stages – incrementally. For example, we are starting to match up befrienders with young people. But we're still 'in the woods'.
4. There are a lot of young people who want to volunteer, but it's difficult to get charities to take them on.

Solutions:

1. Collaboration is key':
 - The Make Your Mark (MYM) Campaign involves collaboration with 45 organisations. Volunteer programmes have had to be paused for heritage attractions. To help address these challenges the MYM initiative involves, training, events and a volunteer recruitment initiative across the heritage sector.
 - One organisation has been linking up with schools, churches and volunteers. Their work has involved the re-wilding of allotments. This collaboration has focused on both planning joint initiatives and securing funding.
1. Online/digital:

- One organisation was worried that we might lose the upsides of our response to COVID-19, especially the benefits of services delivered online/digitally. For example, it has enabled them to engage volunteers with physical disabilities much more effectively than before the pandemic. (It has almost created a levelling up between disabled and non-disabled people – Facilitator’s interpretation)
- Improved geographical ‘reach’ was highlighted by one participant as a key benefit of online/digital volunteer engagement.
- Another organisation highlighted the importance of offering a ‘blended approach’ to volunteer engagement, during recovery and beyond:
- For some volunteers the digital model is more attractive e.g. they are now offering a telephone befriending volunteer service.
- For others that are not so clued up on technology, the traditional F2F volunteer role is preferred.
- Therefore, the key is being able to offer both engagements models to volunteers
- This would mirror the much-discussed blended approach for staff, with more time WFH and less time in the office, compared to pre-pandemic. One person commented on how their own productivity had increased 100% during COVID-19 – so much more efficient, with high productivity levels. Another described the blended approach as ‘the new norm’.
- A national public sector organisation indicated that its ‘digital strategy’ included the objective of increasing volunteering through digital channels.
- Two participants also highlighted the important environmental benefits for online, digital, telephone engagement:
- Reduced travel – climate change benefits
- More time to engage with the local environment and nature (with health and wellbeing benefits)

2. The idea of a 4 day working week was also raised.

3. Volunteer Passports

- COVID-19 has changed the expectations of volunteers. The speed of volunteer recruitment and onboarding was transformed for many organisations, in response to the need to address the crisis needs in society quickly. The pre-existing bureaucratic processes had to be migrated to a much leaner and efficient engagement process. The hope is that organisations will build upon this post recovery through initiatives such as volunteer passports, where people can register digitally.
- However, others also stated the need for caution i.e. the volunteer passport model would encompass baseline onboarding, including initial baseline safeguarding – but organisations would still need to be responsible for a thorough vetting of their own volunteers.

Discussion Questions:

Breakout groups Feedback/Key Actions 10th June 2021

1. **Reflections so far** – from what you have heard this morning what do you think are the key challenges/issues relevant to recovery?

2. **Solutions** – what are your ideas on how best to support the contribution of volunteering to Scotland's recovery from COVID-19?

Reflections so Far:

1. Funding to support road to recovery.
2. Accessible and affordable online support and training.
3. Large increase in volunteering and not enough opportunities.
4. How do change to support and develop informal opportunities.
5. How do you measure, report on, and show value of informal volunteering?
6. How do we keep volunteers safe? Who will support groups and organisations to make sure they get this right?
7. How do we keep up with ever changing guidance and different levels?
8. How do we know when it is the right time to re-start, we have to consider all roles and the different activities, all have different guidelines, rules, and risk assessments?
9. How do we deal with people/volunteers feeling and opinions?
10. We need more support and guidance to feel confident in re-starting.
11. How do we find a right balance for our volunteers if we keep digital activity?
12. How do we ensure we are being inclusive the changes that might stay?
13. We have seen an increase in volunteering, where we have engaged with new volunteers, what will happened to these volunteers when the new norm happens, will be lose volunteers and struggle to recruit new volunteers.
14. Will everyone look for informal volunteering now, what does this mean for our formal roles?

Solutions:

1. More funding available to support groups/organisations with recovery, to develop new roles, resources, and training.
2. Partnership working, more events like this, more opportunity to learn, ask questions, get support and guidance.
3. Clear guidance on when to re-start, PPE, insurances and risk assessment required.

Discussion Questions:

Breakout groups Feedback/Key Actions 10th June 2021

1. **Reflections so far** – from what you have heard this morning what do you think are the key challenges/issues relevant to recovery?

2. **Solutions** – what are your ideas on how best to support the contribution of volunteering to Scotland's recovery from COVID-19?

Reflections so Far:

1. We are concerned about a lack of volunteers as many wont return, priorities have changed and some have passed away
2. We found with our older person's groups that whilst we could get people access to digital equipment, this didn't help when their was no access to the internet or there is a fear of using technology – we found similar issues with young people, single parents and other groups of people underrepresented in volunteering. We have also seen that the mobility and confidence of older people / volunteers has declined which means some now don't feel confident or able to get the bus or come to a physical space to connect with others, family members also share concerns about encouraging their family members to leave home when they have not done so for a long time.
3. The activities that volunteers return to will require comprehensive risk assessments, being mindful of the decline in health or mental wellbeing of volunteers.
4. There are challenges around the logistics of returning volunteers, some venues not big enough for activities to be socially distanced
5. There was and is the challenge of the government guidance changing regularly and being different across nations and local authorities – especially when the people that individuals engage with, such as family members, friends, staff or volunteers are living in different places with different rules.
6. Agreement regarding the challenge about the drive for volunteers not matching the availability of tasks

Solutions:

1. The rise in volunteering needs to be celebrated and we need to capitalize on the work of Mutual Aid Groups – being reflective about what they did, why it was successful and to seek opportunities to work in partnership in positive and supportive ways.
2. Government policy needs to support volunteering – current policies should be reviewed and updated, with leadership and bottom-up influence.
3. People had already started to change how they wanted to volunteer – there was already an interest in more flexible forms of volunteering and an appetite for neighborliness. Our role now will be to encourage organizations to change and adapt roles to meet the needs of new volunteers.
4. With people starting to step back from roles, which is being seen by our meet and greet volunteers at vaccine centres, we need to think carefully about how we keep people engaged. The group agreed their was a role for different approaches to volunteering, such as Employer Supported Volunteering and family friendly opportunities (as people return to work, choose to spend time with their loved ones)

5. Employer Supported Volunteering needs to be better understood and we need to get it right in our own organizations before we can advocate to others – infrastructure bodies to lead the way.
6. Family friendly volunteering opens the doors to getting young people engaged in volunteering, which we know leads to longer term volunteering.
7. We need to make it easier for people to volunteer, some roles are like applying to be a ‘CEO’ – we should be reviewing role descriptions and processes – thinking about how people can help our organizations in ways that will work for them.
8. We should be realistic about recruitment and make sure we have vacancies for volunteers.
9. We need to find different ways of training volunteers that work within a blended approach to volunteering.

Discussion Questions:

Breakout groups Feedback/Key Actions 10th June 2021

1. **Reflections so far** – from what you have heard this morning what do you think are the key challenges/issues relevant to recovery?

2. **Solutions** – what are your ideas on how best to support the contribution of volunteering to Scotland’s recovery from COVID-19?

Reflections so Far:

1. Services have been adapted eg moved to phone
2. Many older volunteers have not returned to volunteering
3. Many trustees have been lost too
4. Volunteers have been keeping services going but are exhausted and dealing with personal challenges
5. Relationships with the public sector are now stronger than ever
6. The value of the community now understood by the public sector and they realise that they need the sector and volunteers
7. Concern that the partnerships and relationships could be lost if we go back to the way things were
8. Voluntary organisations are providing support to organisations to reopen and deliver services
9. Important to manage volunteer expectations
10. New volunteers have come forward but roles have been limited
11. Lack of resources in the sector mean that organisations are at risk of folding
12. Volunteers need to be well supported and valued – importance of volunteer management
13. Feel uncertainty
14. Worried about those who could not connect whether due to lack of digital access or due to additional support needs
15. Some volunteers who had to step down from volunteering are now less able to volunteer

Solutions:

1. Start a big Trustee campaign to replace trustees that have been lost
2. Mental Health and Wellbeing Hubs to help people connect and talk to each other

3. Management and volunteers could benefit from support eg share experiences through groups/ zoom forums
4. There should be a big thank you from the government and local authorities to all the volunteers
5. Recognise volunteers who stepped up but also volunteers who couldn't be involved – keep connections eg personalised letters
6. The spotlight on volunteering and its value to the community can only be positive thing

Discussion Questions:

Breakout groups Feedback/Key Actions 10th June 2021

1. **Reflections so far** – from what you have heard this morning what do you think are the key challenges/issues relevant to recovery?

2. **Solutions** – what are your ideas on how best to support the contribution of volunteering to Scotland's recovery from COVID-19?

Reflections so Far:

1. No surprises
2. Mental health and social isolation were always issues for volunteer managers (VMs) to address, just much more prevalent now
3. Mental health in sector also prevalent – seen a lot of burnout, with many finding social media a challenge
4. Reflected on the importance of peer support for VMs – many shared similar experiences and gained a lot from reaching out to others for guidance
5. Volunteer Scotland and TSIs have been really helpful as there has been a lot of internal pressure on VMs to know what to do
6. Been great resources provided around accessing digital, but the biggest challenge was often providing practical support to people in accessing or using digital platforms.
7. With the emphasis on/rise of informal volunteering, there is a worry that it makes volunteer management look easy or non-essential. General agreement that volunteer management is a vital role, particularly for facilitating volunteering in those groups who are least likely to volunteer but most likely to benefit from it.

Solutions:

1. There is also a crucial role of TSIs and intermediaries to provide guidance on important issues e.g. safeguarding and data protection, but also to reinforce the importance of dedicated volunteer management resource.
2. VM is a skilled profession but often under-valued by VIOs – needs to be better advocated for and resourced
3. Volunteers Week – saw how thankful volunteers are for good volunteer management and recognition of their contribution

4. Need sustainable funding and resource to support volunteer activity
5. Gap in Scotland for networking and peer support between volunteer managers. Vanessa really valued the 'Volunteer Arms' twitter pub hosted by Sarah Latto during lockdown.
6. AVM not active enough north of the border and expensive – is there a need to establish something similar in Scotland? Role for Volunteer Scotland or the SVF?

Discussion Questions:

Breakout groups Feedback/Key Actions 10th June 2021

1. **Reflections so far** – from what you have heard this morning what do you think are the key challenges/issues relevant to recovery?

2. **Solutions** – what are your ideas on how best to support the contribution of volunteering to Scotland's recovery from COVID-19?

Reflections so Far:

1. The challenge of building up the confidence of volunteers so can return vs recruiting more (especially in a diminishing informal volunteer pool – as people return to work).
2. How hard it was to write to older volunteers and tell them they had to stand down at beginning of covid. Limited opportunity to reengage them use many groups are still not active yet.
3. Recruiting new volunteers is so time consuming for the volunteer managers.

Solutions:

Practical solutions to help solve some of the recruitment issues already occurring are: -

1. Using students to solve some of recruitment issues: -
 - Local college- business students created 'placement' opportunities to help in administration (form filling, telephoning volunteers etc.).
 - Schools – again created opportunities for students to gain experience prior to further education.
2. Some solutions to decrease the pressure on volunteer managers due to increasing demands, pressure to recruit more volunteers etc., all of which is very time consuming. Some solutions currently being considered: -
 - Creating a system where volunteers come in to support the volunteer manager with the all the admin etc. However, it was recognized these needs carefully managed.
 - Creating a pre volunteering training course – to give a new volunteers some awareness of volunteering. The aim is to cut down the amount of work the volunteer manager must do.

Critical issues that remain.

Recognized the need to think outside the box and the importance for organisations to meet together to share learnings. However locally this seems to be problematic. Due to the following: -

- Competition for limited financial support means organisations are less likely to share learnings.
- Not all local authorities actively encourage/ require better collaboration/ partnership.

- Trust between organisations need to be built up and encouraged.

(Policies and guidance to limit these problems therefore seem warranted)

- More national events (like this expo) where learnings are shared was suggested.
- The remaining critical question was how to reduce anxiety (increase confidence) in volunteers again – no solutions to this were found!

Discussion Questions:

Breakout groups Feedback/Key Actions 10th June 2021

1. **Reflections so far** – from what you have heard this morning what do you think are the key challenges/issues relevant to recovery?

2. **Solutions** – what are your ideas on how best to support the contribution of volunteering to Scotland's recovery from COVID-19?

Reflections so Far:

Participants identified two themes important to them which had been raised in the morning:

1. The need for pausing, reflecting, and healing
2. The need to recognise achievements including informal (undirected) volunteering, without immediately repurposing it

Participants felt the need for time to recover and reflect before embarking on new initiatives. They echoed Matthew Linning and Paul Wilson's points about needing to reflect on the effects the pandemic had on volunteers and those who support them. The metaphor used related to needing to rest and recuperate before beginning the physical work of rebuilding.

Solutions:

1. Participants built on the two themes they identified in response to question one.
2. They were particularly concerned about the need to understand the impact of the pandemic on those who support volunteers, e.g. volunteer managers.
3. They suggested that organisations needed to assess the contribution of their staff, recognise their achievement to date and their current and future needs.
4. They suggested that now was not the time to add stresses like pressing to deliver pre-pandemic Key Performance Indicators or to quickly add new ones.
5. They suggested using time now to identify significant positives, such as a renewed focus on inclusion and diversity.
6. They made a point to suggest that it should not just be the views of volunteer involving organisations and policy makers that shape the contribution of volunteering to Scotland's recovery but also the views of volunteers.
7. They also made a point that pausing, reflecting and healing will require resources too, maybe with an additional focus on supporting volunteers in this.

In answer to an additional question by the facilitator, participants reflected briefly about the format of the breakout session and said that very much appreciated the chance to speak and express their views.

Discussion Questions:

Breakout groups Feedback/Key Actions 10th June 2021

1. **Reflections so far** – from what you have heard this morning what do you think are the key challenges/issues relevant to recovery?

2. **Solutions** – what are your ideas on how best to support the contribution of volunteering to Scotland's recovery from COVID-19?

Reflections so Far:

1. Not out of the woods yet, still asked to provide COVID support
2. Some vol roles not COVID-related, many traditional opportunities have been modified to keep safe, but still other roles are primarily COVID directed, supporting people isolating and nervous to integrate.
3. A lot of volunteers are quite elderly, and there is a challenge in bringing on new vols with F2F contact if vols are vulnerable to COVID. How to make safe when vols are vulnerable, tricky to reassure people that things are safe.
4. Online vol doesn't appeal to everyone, so orgs lose out on some vols without regular internet access, those who are nervous about Zoom – this can be excluding.
5. On the other hand, some new online vols may not want to switch to F2F if online was convenient for them, so could lose those volunteers if online opps switch back

Solutions:

1. Policy makers are risk averse to moving forward thru COVID. Role for VIOs to encourage policy makers about what works and what can be done. Best to get out and just do something. Well-managed F2F events and activities, addressing fears and building understanding.
2. All reinventing the wheel separately – need to share good ideas for common problems. Central point with good guidance. Guidance exists, but complex – needs to be more practical, simple and easier to understand.
3. Local authorities have guidance available, but cautious/risk averse and presented as being legislation when it's not. These LA restrictions imposed unnecessarily on small groups who could operate safely with appropriate adjustments, and it is too risk averse.
4. Experience from one participant - charities can't reopen if building controlled by risk-averse local authorities, so can't open and operate even when safe due to lack of control over facilities. Need support for LAs to be less risk averse, and VIOs to challenge/understand guidance and rules from LAs and what they can and can't do.
5. But LA's have important role in circulating guidance – they are the most prominent to local orgs. Could they better signpost to good activity/client group specific guidance developed by other VIOs
6. One participant experience – there has been a better relationship between TSI and LA in COVID than in normal times, getting support with how to operate
7. Different participant experience – poor relationship between TSI and third sector in COVID, so limited support
8. Need solutions to support volunteers online
9. Vols coming looking for online roles such as Board members – these are good for people who want to continue volunteering online

10. Use good practice from staff online practices (e.g. virtual coffee breaks) to support volunteers and improve their comfort with the technology.
11. Really down to individual orgs to make volunteering more inclusive in transition, as each orgs context is different.
12. Expectation of increased demand for volunteers as we transition out of COVID, so need supply to keep up.
13. Will people know that volunteering again restart? Perhaps we need a national campaign to let people know that volunteering is “open again”, to help meet anticipated demand.
14. Support needed with orgs moving to different demographics for volunteer recruitment. E.g. org which traditionally favours older volunteers as greater life experience makes them more effective now looking at recruiting younger volunteers who are more comfortable with the technology and feel less vulnerable in getting out and about to volunteer.

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Reflections so Far:

1. Re-engaging with volunteers is a key focus. Staff have been furloughed; nothing has happened face to face for a long time. The hardest bit of bringing back volunteers will be the mental health and wellbeing of volunteers. Trying to encourage volunteers back but volunteer roles will change
2. Haven’t been able to engage with volunteers and there is now uncertainty about what we can and can’t do. Cannot plan for definite physical distancing. It is personally quite frustrating as don’t know when we can go back to normal
3. There is a lot of anxiety amongst volunteers. Lots of support is needed including around vaccinations, risk assessments.
4. Some of the volunteers have been engaging digitally including monthly catch ups, remote training but always the same faces and some are not interested in volunteering digitally. Planning to adopt blended approaches.
5. You can’t force people to volunteer digitally. We will need to provide refresher training and think about how to re-build teams online and face to face
6. Starting to use a national platform to do online volunteer recruitment but it is difficult as a volunteer manager to transition to this when you are used to having your hand in and working directly with volunteers
7. Government – the continual uncertainty is a common theme. Government is working on a volunteering action plan. We need to strike a balance between still trying to respond to the immediate needs and the needs that will emerge from the pandemic that haven’t yet been addressed. There is still a lot to deal with and a lot of re-building. How far can you go with digital? A key issue is who will respond to digital and who won’t?. If it is a blended mix not everyone will respond to that. Also links to how we should be investing in organisations and infrastructure

8. We shouldn't make the assumption that it is digital first. There needs to be flexibility to reflect what volunteers want and need.
9. As a rural organisation there are issues relating to digital exclusion and connectivity. Volunteers might have a computer but lack good broadband networks. There is the willingness to engage digitally but they may not have the ability to go online.
10. Through the Connected Scotland Fund one org received funding to support service users to use digital but should also have thought about how this could be used for the digital inclusion of volunteers

Solutions:

1. All volunteering plays a role and contributes to recovery
2. Government – Ministers are obviously interested in recovery. Volunteering does do many things. There is a risk of pinning it down too much and you therefore narrow your opportunities for recovery. It is a difficult question to answer. Perhaps the question should be 'What are we doing to create the best conditions? E.g. supporting wellbeing, providing training
3. What needs to happen in terms of training is individualistic and it is down to the role, there needs to flexible ways of supporting volunteers' access to training
4. Volunteer Scotland offer good support e.g. templates of policies but may need more promotion of what they can offer organisations
5. Key challenges for small organisations could be addressed by working with corporate organisations e.g. delivering policies, developing IT skills. There needs to be a willingness of corporate partners. However, there is a mismatch and vol. orgs are not sure how to reach out. Example of Voluntary Action (somewhere? Possibly Glasgow?) making bridges between corporate sector and voluntary organisations.
6. Need to build those relationships, currently don't have an understanding of voluntary sector and sector does not know what corporates can provide.
7. Government – thinking around corporate in government generally focuses on employer supported volunteering but noted role those corporate collaborations could play in supporting volunteering and volunteers
8. Lack of understanding amongst funders of the vital role of volunteering and value and contribution of volunteers. People are bringing vital skills. There is not enough recognition, and the profile needs to be raised.
9. Local volunteer awards are good for recognising volunteers but quite specific.
10. Need something like Saltire awards for adult volunteers to help recognise them

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Reflections so Far:

1. Extend to which organisations supporting wellbeing of volunteers, trustees and staff – stresses strains, mental health.
2. Funding / staffing issues – immediate funding support for recovery period needed.
3. Conflicts between long term strategic opportunities and short term support needs. And keeping everyone safe and well.
4. Resilience building – don't want to forget where we were and put in proper longer term resilience measures.
5. Glasgow had existing resilience funding and planning, future – making sure communities have support in place to build leadership skills and community needs to bring people together quickly. Resilience working.
6. Need for leadership, need to be able to move at pace.
7. Learning together and space to learn.
8. Volunteers enabled organisations to do more.
9. Mental health and well being, skills development for volunteers, gather voice of the volunteer.
10. Ask volunteers what they see the future as. Time to listen.
11. Is a previous volunteer program the same now and applicable?
12. Building of resilience and skills of volunteers.
13. Rural – no volunteers for 15 months, change delivery of service, redirected funding to help families in hardship with shopping vouchers, gas and electricity. When does this support stop and more back to grassroots support? Firefighting, sticking plaster on a much bigger problem. Where does future support come from.
14. Emergency funding ending – how do we support people then? How can the emergency support end?
15. How long is recovery? Reactive time scales (changes in restrictions etc).
16. Concerns for individual volunteers, did they have their own basic needs being met.
17. Loss of income from fundraising in larger charities that provide funding for jobs.
18. How do you keep volunteers engaged that can't volunteer, not everyone can link in digitally?
19. Lack of certainty over the future.
20. Juggling priorities for different time scales.
21. Stuck in this moment.
22. Build back / forward better – contributions that people can make through volunteering to beneficiaries but also mental health benefits. Need opportunities for everyone to give back.

23. Can be isolating as individual organisations, good to have this opportunity to talk to each other.

Solutions:

1. Leadership
2. Training
3. Partnership working
4. Celebrating achievements.
5. Take forward effective lessons learned.
6. Resilience building

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Reflections so Far:

1. No surprises on what has been said
2. Too eager to move into 'recovery' mode – need to reflect, identify what has worked, what hasn't and what the state the sector is in
3. Risk of 'double delivery' virtual and physical this will stretch volunteers and volunteer managers
4. Some organizations started blended delivery early in the pandemic and will struggle to go back to what is was in the past
5. More reflection needed in relation to what support communities need, the overall surge in volunteering will have had a long-term impact
6. Changes are being led by volunteers (mutual aid) not always orgs and vol managers
7. Juggling priorities for different time scales.
8. Stuck in this moment.
9. Build back / forward better – contributions that people can make through volunteering to beneficiaries but also mental health benefits. Need opportunities for everyone to give back.
10. Can be isolating as individual organisations, good to have this opportunity to talk to each other.

Solutions:

1. Long term secure funding
2. How can larger charities/orgs support smaller ones and vice versa – share resources/ideas (72% of registered charities' do not have paid staff)
3. Volunteer Managers to be seen as a profession – sometimes seen as a lesser role
4. More support and supervision for volunteer managers – ensure they are supported

5. VM's provide a caring/pastoral role to volunteers which can take time out of the day – this isn't reflected in their job roles.