The Value of Volunteering

How to calculate the economic value and ROI of your volunteer programme

Abstract

Volunteers create value that most organisations can describe but few can prove.

The usual estimate counts the hours volunteers give and ignores what it costs to recruit, train, schedule and keep them, so the number rarely survives a board or funder question. This paper argues that volunteer value should be calculated the same way as any other investment: full value against full cost. It sets out current economic benchmarks for the UK, the US and Australia, a corrected three-step method for calculating volunteer ROI, and the levers that move that return. Organisations that measure both sides of the equation can defend their programme budget, and make the case for the infrastructure that grows it.

Key definitions

Volunteer value	The estimated monetary worth of the time volunteers give, usually total volunteer hours multiplied by an hourly replacement rate.
Replacement cost method	Valuing volunteer time at what it would cost to pay someone to do the same work. It is the most widely used method by national statistics bodies and sector researchers.
Volunteer programme cost	Everything an organisation spends to run its volunteer programme in a year, including staff, systems, training, compliance checks, uniforms, expenses and recognition.
Volunteer ROI	The return generated for every unit of currency invested in the programme, calculated as (volunteer value minus programme cost) divided by programme cost.



Executive summary

Volunteer value is measurable, but only when you count the full return and the full cost. These five insights summarise the case.

1 **Volunteers are a national-scale workforce.** US volunteers gave 4.99 billion hours worth US$167.2 billion in a year. UK volunteers gave 688 million hours worth £15.5 billion. Australians gave 618 million hours of formal volunteering in 2025.

2 **Replacement cost is only part of the value.** The UK Government's 2025 valuation added £8.26 billion in volunteer wellbeing benefits on top of replacement cost in England alone. Volunteers are also donors, advocates and future recruits.

3 **Most calculations count value but not cost.** An hours-times-wage figure shows what volunteers are worth. It does not show whether your programme is a good investment. ROI needs programme cost on the other side of the equation.

4 **Experience protects the return.** Volunteer hours only hold their value if volunteers come back. In the UK, the share of volunteers likely to continue fell from 80% to 77% between 2018 and 2022, and more now say volunteering feels too much like paid work.

5 **Coordinator time is the biggest lever.** Programme cost is mostly people time spent on admin. British Heart Foundation halved its volunteer admin after moving onto Rosterfy, freeing coordinators for recruitment and engagement.

Sources: AmeriCorps, Volunteering and Civic Life in America (2024). Pro Bono Economics, Civil Society and Volunteering: A Force for Growth? (2025). Australian Bureau of Statistics, General Social Survey 2025, via Volunteering Australia. DCMS / London Economics, Estimating the Economic and Social Value of Volunteering (2025). NCVO, Time Well Spent 2023. Rosterfy customer data.



01 What is the economic value of volunteering?

Volunteering is worth tens of billions a year in each major English-speaking market. Using the replacement cost method, US volunteers contributed US$167.2 billion of work in a single year and UK volunteers £15.5 billion. In Australia, formal volunteering hours rose to 618 million in 2025. The current national benchmark for one volunteer hour is US$36.14 in the US.

When most people picture volunteers, they picture event-day bibs and donation tins. In reality, volunteers keep hospitals, food rescue networks, sporting federations, emergency services and local councils running all year round. National statistics bodies exclude that work from GDP, which is why researchers estimate it separately.

MARKET	ANNUAL VOLUNTEER HOURS	ECONOMIC VALUE	HOURLY BENCHMARK
United States	4.99 billion (formal, 2022 to 2023)	US$167.2 billion	US$36.14 (2025)
United Kingdom	688 million (2024)	£15.5 billion	About £22.50 (Rosterfy calculation from PBE totals)
England only, including wellbeing	About 12 million formal volunteers (2021 to 2022)	£24.69 billion	Not applicable
Australia	618 million (formal, 2025)	Not published nationally on the same basis	About A$53 (Rosterfy calculation from ABS Labour Account)

Source: AmeriCorps, Volunteering and Civic Life in America (November 2024). Independent Sector and Do Good Institute, Value of Volunteer Time (April 2026). Pro Bono Economics, Civil Society and Volunteering: A Force for Growth? (July 2025). DCMS / London Economics, Estimating the Economic and Social Value of Volunteering (July 2025). Australian Bureau of Statistics, General Social Survey 2025, via Volunteering Australia. ABS, Labour Account unpaid care estimates (June 2026): 834.2 million volunteering hours in the September quarter 2025, valued at A$44.3 billion.

Which hourly rate should you use?

Use the hourly cost of the paid role your volunteers would otherwise need, including employer on-costs. That is the most defensible figure for a board or funder. If you do not have role-level data, use your national benchmark from the table above. Independent Sector notes that its US figure is an estimate of an average volunteer hour, not a price for every role, so skilled roles such as first aid, coaching or clinical support should be valued higher.

US$36.14
per volunteer hour in the US (Independent Sector, 2025)

£22.50
per hour in the UK (Rosterfy calculation from PBE totals)

A$53
per hour in Australia (Rosterfy calculation from ABS Labour Account)

Why does this matter for your organisation?

These totals show the scale of the workforce you are managing. They do not show whether your own programme is a good investment. The rest of this paper shows how to calculate that.



02 What value do volunteers create beyond replacement cost?

Volunteers create at least three kinds of value that an hours-times-wage figure misses: wellbeing for the volunteers themselves, financial support and advocacy for the organisation, and the atmosphere that makes participants and supporters come back. These are harder to price, but credible research now puts numbers on several of them.

Wellbeing value

Volunteering measurably improves the wellbeing of the people who do it. The UK Government's 2025 valuation estimated formal volunteering in England was worth £24.69 billion once wellbeing was included, an average of £2,012 per volunteer. Of that, replacement cost accounted for £1,339 per volunteer.

89%
of UK volunteers feel they make a difference.

75%
say volunteering improves their mental health and wellbeing.

48%
say it improves their physical health.

Source: DCMS / London Economics, Estimating the Economic and Social Value of Volunteering (July 2025). NCVO, Time Well Spent 2023.

Giving and advocacy value

Volunteers are often your most committed supporters. In Fidelity Charitable's 2020 study of 1,842 US donors, 62% had volunteered in the past year, and 39% said they are more likely to volunteer with an organisation before donating to it. Volunteering also lifts giving for a meaningful minority, especially younger supporters.

18%
of donor-volunteers give more because they volunteer.

33%
among Millennials, compared with 12% of Baby Boomers.

Source: Fidelity Charitable, The Role of Volunteering in Philanthropy (2020).

For a deeper look at turning volunteers into fundraisers, see Rosterfy and Jigsaw's **Volunteers as Fundraisers** white paper.

Experience value

At events and in services, volunteers shape how people feel. A cheer at mile 20, a calm voice at a first aid tent, a friendly face at the gate: these moments decide whether participants, guests and volunteers return next year.

Andrew Newman, Director of Workforce and Operations for the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games, made this point on Rosterfy's Engaged Volunteer Podcast. He noted that a business case can show volunteers cost less than paid staff, but the deeper value is what volunteers bring to the experience, which he saw first-hand with London 2012's 70,000 Games Makers.

> **"There is just this intangible spirit that volunteers bring to events."**
>
> **Andrew Newman**
> Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games

How should you report this wider value?

Report replacement cost as your core, defensible number. Report wellbeing, giving and experience value alongside it as supporting evidence, using your own survey and donor data where you have it. Keeping them separate stops a board or auditor from discounting the whole figure.



03 Why does volunteer experience drive volunteer value?

Volunteer value only compounds when volunteers come back. Every volunteer who leaves takes their future hours with them and adds recruitment, screening and training cost for their replacement. A good experience lowers programme cost and protects volunteer value at the same time, which makes it the single biggest driver of ROI.

What does a better experience look like in practice?

The organisations getting the most value from volunteers treat the volunteer journey like a customer journey: fast to join, clear about what to expect, easy to manage shifts, and recognised for the impact they make. That needs coordinators with time to engage, which is why reducing admin is the starting point.

British Heart Foundation	British Heart Foundation reduced volunteer admin by 50% after consolidating volunteer operations on Rosterfy, creating a more consistent experience across a national network.
Starlight Children's Foundation	Starlight Children's Foundation previously ran event volunteers through phone calls, emails, spreadsheets and manual data entry. After moving to Rosterfy, it ran its programme with 1.5 FTE instead of 3, while growing events and volunteer numbers by around 150%.
Lifeline Australia	Lifeline Australia increased recruitment processing from 3 to 5 applications per hour to 10 to 12 per hour within a week of moving to Rosterfy.

Source: Rosterfy customer data and published case studies.



04 How do you calculate the value and ROI of your volunteers?

Calculate volunteer ROI in three steps. First, multiply total volunteer hours by an hourly replacement rate to get volunteer value. Second, add up everything the programme costs over the same period. Third, subtract programme cost from volunteer value and divide by programme cost. Any result above zero means your programme returns more than it costs.

Step 1: Calculate your volunteer value

Volunteer value = **Total volunteer hours** × **Hourly replacement rate**

Use verified hours from your check-in or timesheet records, not estimates. For the hourly rate, use the cost of the equivalent paid role or your national benchmark (US$36.14 in the US, about £22.50 in the UK, about A$53 in Australia).

Step 2: Calculate your full programme cost

Add up every cost of running the programme over the same 12 months:

PROGRAMME COST CATEGORY	WHAT TO INCLUDE
Staff	Volunteer managers and coordinators, including on-costs, plus the share of other staff time spent on volunteers
Systems and technology	Volunteer management software, devices, integrations
Training and compliance	Induction, role training, background and safeguarding checks
Uniforms and merchandise	Shirts, lanyards, kit
Volunteer expenses	Travel, meals and other reimbursements
Recognition	Thank-you events, awards, gifts
Office and communications	Phone, printing, messaging costs

Step 3: Calculate your volunteer ROI

$$\text{Volunteer ROI} = \frac{\text{Volunteer value} - \text{Programme cost}}{\text{Programme cost}}$$

Multiply the result by 100 to express it as a percentage.

Worked example

An Australian charity's 500 volunteers gave 40,000 verified hours last year. The programme cost A$530,000 to run: A$300,000 staff, A$55,000 systems, A$45,000 training and compliance, A$30,000 uniforms, A$65,000 volunteer expenses, A$25,000 recognition and A$10,000 office costs.

VOLUNTEER VALUE	40,000 hours × A$53 = A$2,120,000
PROGRAMME COST	A$530,000
VOLUNTEER ROI	(A$2,120,000 – A$530,000) ÷ A$530,000 = 3.0, or 300%

For every A$1 invested in the programme, the charity gets **A$4 of volunteer value back**: its original A$1 plus A$3 of return.

Illustrative example only. Figures are hypothetical and do not represent a specific organisation or Rosterfy performance claim.

How should you read your result?

ROI RESULT	WHAT IT MEANS
Below 0	The programme costs more than the value of the hours it delivers. Look for unfilled shifts, high turnover or admin-heavy processes
0	Break-even. Volunteer value exactly covers programme cost
Above 0	Positive return. 0.25 means A$1.25 back for every A$1, and 3.0 means A$4 back

There is no industry-standard target. The most useful comparison is your own result year on year, and the most useful question is which lever moved it.

05 How do you increase the ROI of your volunteer programme?

You can raise volunteer ROI in three ways: increase the value of the hours volunteers deliver, lower the cost of delivering them, or become more efficient. In practice the three work together. Coordinator time freed from admin is usually reinvested in recruitment, onboarding and engagement, which lifts retained hours and value.

Lever 1: Increase volunteer value

1. **Fill more shifts.** An unfilled shift is value lost. Reliable scheduling, reminders and easy swaps keep attendance high.
2. **Keep volunteers longer.** Every returning volunteer brings their hours back without new recruitment or training cost.
3. **Onboard faster.** The longer an applicant waits, the more likely they drop out before their first shift.
4. **Match skills to roles.** Skilled roles carry a higher replacement rate, so capturing volunteer skills at sign-up lifts the value of the hours they give.

Lever 2: Reduce programme cost

1. **Automate onboarding and compliance.** Manual screening, document checks and training sign-off are the biggest drains on coordinator time.
2. **Replace spreadsheets and email chains.** One system of record removes duplicate data entry and errors.
3. **Verify hours automatically.** QR or kiosk check-in produces audit-ready hours data without manual reconciliation.

Lever 3: Become more efficient

Use technology to automate manual processes so you can do more with the same resources. The coordinator time you free up goes back into recruiting more volunteers and spending more time retaining them, which raises volunteer value without adding programme cost.

See what these levers could be worth for your programme with the Rosterfy ROI calculator.

Calculate your ROI

What difference do the levers make?

Using the worked example above (40,000 hours, A$53 an hour, A$530,000 programme cost):

SCENARIO	VOLUNTEER VALUE	PROGRAMME COST	ROI
Baseline	A$2,120,000	A$530,000	300%
10% more retained volunteer hours	A$2,332,000	A$530,000	340%
30% less staff time on admin	A$2,120,000	A$440,000	382%
Both levers together	**A$2,332,000**	**A$440,000**	**430%**

Illustrative scenarios for explanation only. They are not Rosterfy performance claims.

Where does volunteer management software fit?

If any of these questions are hard to answer, your systems are probably costing you return:

- ☐ Is your volunteer database in a spreadsheet?
- ☐ How long does it take an applicant to go from sign-up to first shift?
- ☐ How do volunteers change or cancel a shift?
- ☐ Can you report verified volunteer hours to your board today?
- ☐ What is your volunteer retention rate?

Purpose-built volunteer management software works on both levers at once. Rosterfy brings recruitment, screening, onboarding, training, scheduling, communication, check-in, recognition and reporting into one platform, so coordinators spend their time on volunteers rather than admin.

Spark (Australian Open)	Spark, running volunteers for the Australian Open, achieved a 99% attendance rate across more than 4,000 shifts.
SecondBite	SecondBite compressed a volunteer onboarding process that used to take 4 to 10 weeks into a much shorter automated sequence.

Source: Rosterfy customer data and published case studies.



06 How should different organisations apply this?

The method is the same everywhere, but where the return comes from differs by size and sector. Large, multi-site organisations gain most from consistency and reporting across entities. Smaller programmes gain most from cutting coordinator admin. The table below shows where to focus first.

By organisation size

Enterprise (multi-site, multi-entity, typically 500+ volunteers): calculate ROI per programme, site or entity as well as overall, so leaders can see where value is being lost. Involve Finance early to agree the hourly rate and cost categories, and IT to confirm data security and integration with HR and CRM systems. Report the result to the board annually alongside compliance metrics.

Mid-market (single organisation, one or a few programmes): start with one programme and one year of data. The Head of Volunteering usually owns the calculation and presents it to the CEO. The quickest gains typically come from automating onboarding and shift management.

By sector

ORGANISATION TYPE	WHERE ROI IS USUALLY WON OR LOST	WHAT TO MEASURE FIRST
Major events and sports commissions	Peak-day attendance and no-shows across thousands of shifts	Shift fill rate, attendance, cost per rostered hour
Sport federations	Consistency across national, state and club levels	Hours and retention by entity, admin time per entity
Health and cause-led charities	Onboarding speed and compliance across a federated network	Time from application to first shift, compliance completion, retention
Food rescue and food security	Shift reliability against perishable supply	Shift fill rate, onboarding time, hours per volunteer
Government and civic	Coordination across departments and audit-ready reporting	Verified hours by department, compliance records

"Rosterfy enabled our small team to confidently execute our workforce management strategy."

Matt Cullen
Volunteer Program Manager, ICC T20 World Cup 2020 Local Organising Committee

To go further than ROI and build a full measurement framework, see Rosterfy's **What Should You Measure From Your Volunteer Program** white paper.



Frequently asked questions

What is the value of a volunteer hour?

There is no official hourly value for volunteering in Australia, but the ABS Labour Account implies about A$53 per volunteer hour. For comparison, Independent Sector values one US volunteer hour at US$36.14 for 2025, and UK national totals imply about £22.50. The most accurate rate for your organisation is the cost of the paid role a volunteer replaces.

How do you calculate the economic value of volunteers?

Multiply total volunteer hours by an hourly replacement rate. For example, 40,000 hours at A$53 an hour equals A$2,120,000 of volunteer value. This is the replacement cost method, the approach used by most national statistics bodies and sector researchers.

What is the formula for volunteer ROI?

Volunteer ROI equals volunteer value minus programme cost, divided by programme cost. A programme delivering A$2,120,000 of volunteer value at a cost of A$530,000 has an ROI of 3.0, or 300%. That means A$4 of value for every A$1 invested.

What counts as a volunteer programme cost?

Include everything spent running the programme over the same period as your hours: staff time, volunteer management software, training, background and safeguarding checks, uniforms, volunteer expenses, recognition and communications. Leaving out staff time is the most common mistake, and it overstates ROI.

What is a good volunteer ROI?

Any result above zero means the programme returns more than it costs. There is no industry-standard benchmark, so the most useful measure is your own trend year on year. If ROI is falling, check shift fill rates, volunteer retention and coordinator admin time first.

How does volunteer management software improve ROI?

It raises volunteer value and lowers programme cost at the same time. Automating onboarding, scheduling, communication and hours tracking frees coordinators from admin, improves shift attendance and retention, and produces verified hours data you can report to a board or funder.

About this paper

Sources

1. AmeriCorps, Volunteering and Civic Life in America, November 2024.
2. Independent Sector and Do Good Institute, University of Maryland, Value of Volunteer Time, April 2026.
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7. NCVO, Time Well Spent 2023, with figures as reported by Civil Society and The Scouts.
8. Fidelity Charitable, The Role of Volunteering in Philanthropy, 2020.
9. Rosterfy, The Engaged Volunteer Podcast, episode with Andrew Newman.
10. Rosterfy customer case studies: British Heart Foundation, Starlight Children's Foundation, Lifeline Australia, Spark (Australian Open), SecondBite.

About Rosterfy

Rosterfy connects communities to the events and causes they care about through volunteer and workforce management technology. Since 2014, it has powered more than 150 million volunteer hours for charities, major events, sport federations, food rescue organisations and governments in more than 35 countries. One platform covers recruitment, screening, onboarding, training, scheduling, communication, check-in, recognition and impact reporting, so volunteer teams spend less time on admin and more time on their mission.

Want to calculate your own volunteer ROI? Chat with our team and we'll walk through your programme's numbers with you.

Chat to our team



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