

WHITE PAPER

Inclusive Volunteering: How technology and data strengthen diversity

A guide to building more accessible
and impactful volunteer programmes

Introduction

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are essential to building stronger, more representative volunteer programmes. When volunteering is truly inclusive it reflects the communities it serves, removes barriers to participation, and creates meaningful opportunities for all.

Fostering DEI is not only a moral imperative but also a strategic advantage. Inclusive programmes bring a wide range of perspectives, skills, and experiences, leading to more innovative teams and a stronger community connections.

Many organisations struggle to measure and improve DEI within their volunteer programmes. Without clear data, it's difficult to understand who is engaging, who isn't, and why. Funders, stakeholders, and the public increasingly expect organisations to track and report on DEI efforts - but without the right tools, this can be a challenge.

This white paper provides practical guidance on:

- Overcoming barriers to volunteer participation
- Key diversity metrics organisations should track
- DEI principles and the role of technology in volunteer programmes

By leveraging the right data, technology, and strategies, organisations can build volunteer programmes that are diverse, inclusive, and more impactful.



The current landscape

Volunteering is a powerful force for community engagement and social change, but it hasn't always been accessible to everyone. Many groups, including certain ethnicities, people with disabilities, and lower-income communities, face barriers to participation.

The decline in diversity among volunteer groups in the UK has prompted increased attention to DEI in the volunteering sector. Government initiatives emphasise inclusive strategies, particularly for smaller volunteer-involving organisations (VIOs) and those led by minority communities. Clear DEI definitions within funding programmes are also being prioritised to drive long-term engagement and impact.¹

Global Majority

People from the global majority - all ethnic groups except white British and other white groups - volunteer less frequently compared to their white British counterparts. This lack of diversity starts in leadership, with charity boards failing to reflect the diversity of wider society.²

People with Disabilities

Individuals with disabilities encounter several barriers to volunteering, despite their comparable participation rates to non-disabled individuals. Potential volunteers are often deterred by difficulties with access or transport, and organisations may lack information on how to support them.³

Lower-Income Communities

Financial constraints and limited access to information can prevent lower-income communities from volunteering. The cost of participation - such as travel or other expenses - can be a significant barrier, particularly for people from global majority backgrounds.⁴

Implementing a DEI strategy is essential for breaking down barriers, addressing underrepresentation, and creating truly inclusive volunteer programmes.



8%

In the UK, only 8% of charity trustees are non-white, and seven out of ten trustees are men.²



Common barriers and how to remove them

Many people face barriers that prevent them from participating in volunteering. By recognising these challenges and applying solutions, organisations can create volunteer programmes that welcome and support everyone. Leveraging technology and data-driven insights is key to identifying barriers and developing effective strategies for greater accessibility.

Accessibility and Physical Barriers

Traditional volunteer opportunities often require in-person participation, which can exclude individuals with disabilities, mobility challenges, or those without access to reliable transportation.

- Offer remote and flexible roles that allow participation from home
- Ensure physical locations are accessible, with ramps, elevators, and clear signage
- Provide adaptive tools or technology to support volunteers with disabilities

Time and Scheduling Conflicts

Many potential volunteers struggle to find opportunities that fit around work, caregiving, or other commitments.

- Introduce micro-volunteering opportunities that allow people to contribute in short, flexible timeframes
- Offer evening and weekend options
- Use digital platforms to make scheduling easy and transparent

Lack of Awareness and Understanding

People may be unaware of opportunities or unsure how to get started. Complex application processes or unclear expectations can discourage participation.

- Improve outreach through social media, community groups, and partnerships with local organisations
- Simplify the sign-up process with user-friendly digital tools
- Clearly communicate roles, expectations, and impact

Financial Barriers

Financial challenges can prevent people from volunteering, such as out-of-pocket expenses or the need for unpaid time off.

- Reimburse travel and other expenses where possible
- Provide necessary materials, uniforms, or equipment for free
- Offer stipends or small incentives

Cultural and Language Barriers

Language differences or cultural misunderstandings can prevent people from engaging in volunteer work.

- Offer multilingual resources and support
- Provide diversity training and cultural awareness programmes
- Create affinity groups or mentorship programmes

Organisational challenges to addressing barriers

While the importance of DEI in volunteering is widely recognised, many volunteer-involving organisations (VIOs) face challenges in addressing barriers.

Absence of Data

Many VIOs, particularly smaller ones, do not collect demographic data on their volunteers. Without this information, it is difficult to assess representation, identify gaps, and measure the effectiveness of DEI initiatives.¹

Unconscious Bias

Outreach strategies and recruitment methods often reflect existing biases, leading to homogenous volunteer bases. Some organisations say that they lack the expertise or resources to implement inclusive recruitment and tailored engagement strategies.⁵

Time and Resources

Addressing accessibility barriers is often deprioritised due to limited time, resources, and reliance on manual processes. Many organisations lack the tools to streamline volunteer management, making it difficult to offer flexible roles, financial support, or tailored accessibility solutions.

Limited Reporting Capabilities

Without robust tracking and reporting mechanisms, organisations struggle to measure the impact of their DEI initiatives, secure funding, or demonstrate commitment to stakeholders. Funders and partners increasingly expect clear DEI benchmarks and measurable progress.

“Rosterfy has been a really big help in making sure that we are **tracking volunteer data**, able to report against it, and then identify the next steps to make sure that it is representative.”⁶

- Ellie Reid, Head of Workforce Development, London Youth Games



DEI principles for volunteer programmes

Creating an inclusive volunteer programme requires more than intent - it requires measurable action. Organisations must go beyond assumptions and focus on real data, real insights, and real change.

The following areas are key to improving DEI in volunteering.

Representation and Visibility

A diverse volunteer base fosters innovation, strengthens community engagement, and increases impact. Seeing diverse representation among volunteers encourages broader participation. To build a welcoming and representative volunteer culture, organisations should prioritise proactive outreach, inclusive messaging, and diverse role models.

Research shows individuals from global majority backgrounds or with disabilities are more likely to perceive **“not fitting in”** as a barrier to getting involved in volunteering.⁵

Data-Driven DEI Initiatives

Collecting and analysing demographic data is crucial for identifying gaps, tracking progress, and improving inclusivity. Volunteer management software (VMS) can streamline data collection and reporting. By leveraging technology to track volunteer engagement and demographics, organisations can set clear benchmarks and measure DEI efforts more effectively.

Equity-Focused Solutions

True inclusion is not just about opening opportunities to all - it's about actively removing barriers that prevent fair participation. Targeted changes - such as offering travel reimbursement or flexible shift scheduling - can make meaningful difference. VMS features such as automated scheduling and tailored onboarding, can make volunteering more adaptable to diverse needs.



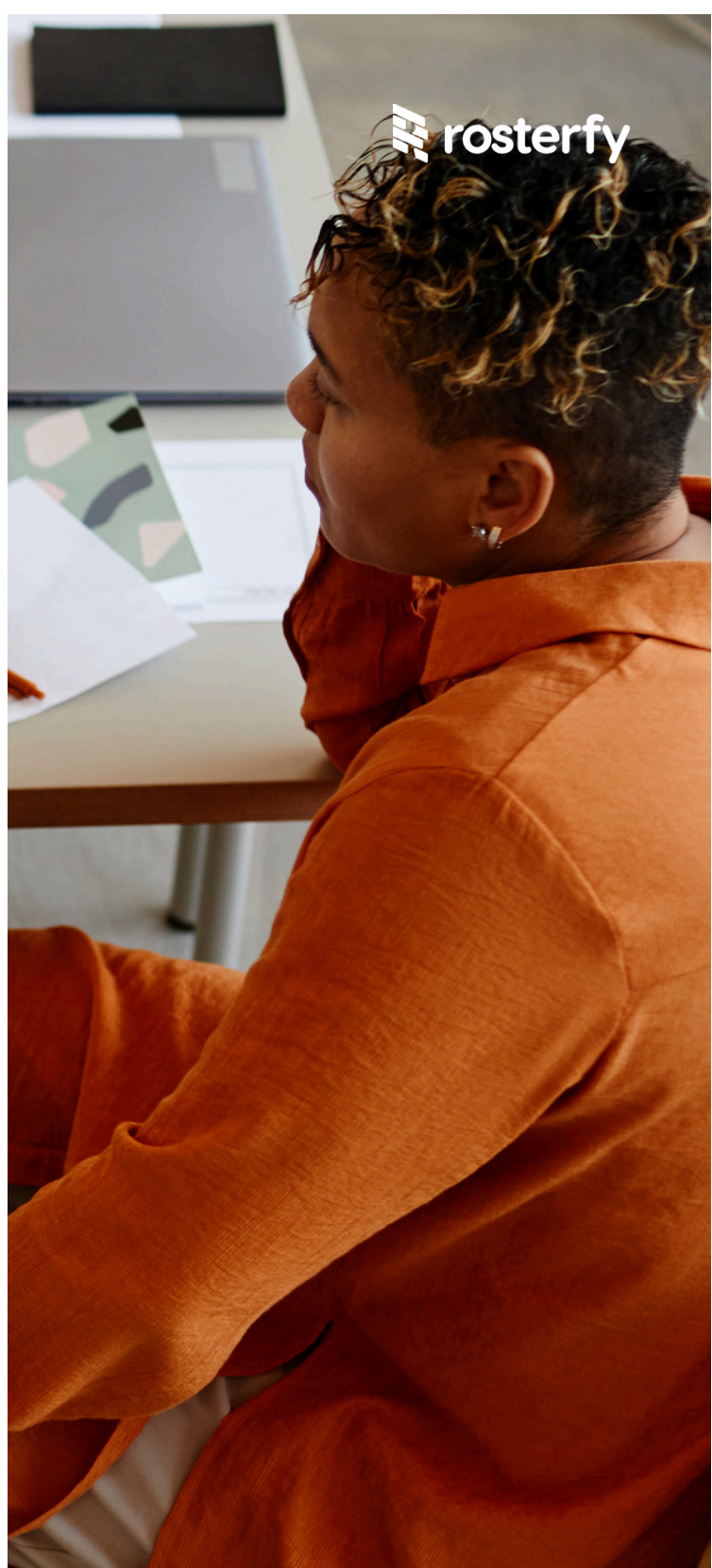
An Intersectional Approach

Understanding overlapping barriers to participation - such as financial limitations, digital exclusion, or cultural expectations - helps tailor volunteer opportunities more effectively. For example, a programme may seem gender-diverse overall but still struggle to engage women from migrant communities. Digital tools can help segment data, revealing hidden trends and ensuring that programmes are accessible to all.

Accountability and Continuous Improvement

Setting clear DEI benchmarks and regularly reporting on progress helps organisations stay accountable to funders, partners, and the communities they serve. VMS can provide real-time insights and automate reporting, making it easier to measure impact and adjust strategies as needed.

By embedding DEI principles into volunteer programme design and utilising technology, organisations can ensure their volunteer programmes are inclusive, accessible, and reflective of the diverse communities they support.



Volunteer-involving organisations that can share results on inclusivity and volunteer demographics were found to increase their relatability and ability to engage more diverse groups of volunteers.¹

Case Study:

Bradford 2025

Bradford is the UK City of Culture for 2025. To help deliver an incredible year of culture, Bradford 2025 are recruiting more than 3,500 volunteers.

As the most diverse UK city outside of London, the volunteer programme is committed to inclusivity and accessibility. By actively engaging individuals from various backgrounds, abilities, and experiences the programme ensures its volunteer force reflects the city's rich demographic makeup.

To build a diverse and representative volunteer community, Bradford 2025 have established partnerships with local organisations such as Race Equality Network. This helps the programme connect with different ethnic groups, promote volunteering opportunities, and provide cultural competency training.

To further enhance accessibility, all shift descriptions in the Rosterfy volunteer portal include detailed access information, and training materials are translated into the 13 major languages.

As John Strawson-Rooney, Volunteer Programme Lead at Bradford 2025, noted:

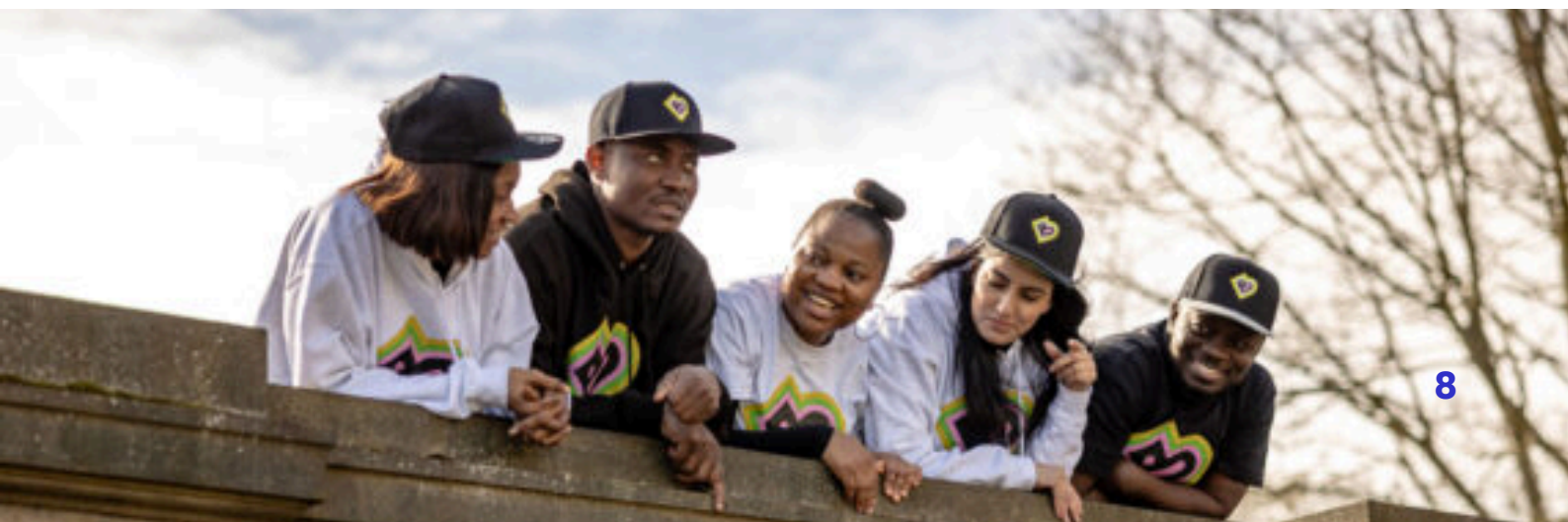
"I think the most important thing to help you recruit more of a diverse group of people is word of mouth, going in person to community groups and adult classes, that's been the best way we can reach people and help them know about our programme"

Who's signing up so far?

- 25% of volunteers aged 18-27, (above the national average of 15%)
- 24 languages spoken by volunteers besides English
- 59% of volunteers identified as being part of various Black or Asian ethnic groups⁸

Bradford 2025's focus on DEI not only enriches the cultural events it supports but also creates meaningful opportunities for personal and professional growth among their volunteers.

[Watch webinar with Bradford 2025](#)



Key diversity metrics organisations should track

Understanding who is engaging in volunteering is the first step toward building a more inclusive programme. Without these insights organisations may unintentionally exclude certain groups or struggle to identify where improvements are needed.

The following key metrics have been identified as essential for volunteer-involving organisations to track in order to strengthen DEI, identify gaps, and create more inclusive opportunities.

Demographic Representation

Collect information on age, gender, ethnicity, geography, and disability status to assess diversity.

Retention Across Groups

Identify disparities in long-term engagement and address potential barriers preventing sustained involvement.

Volunteer Satisfaction and Feedback

Use surveys, questionnaires, and focus groups to gain information on volunteer experiences and identify trends.

Application and Onboarding Drop-Off

Analyse at what stage potential volunteers disengage and refine processes accordingly.

Leadership and Role Distribution

Assess who is taking on leadership positions and whether opportunities are equitably distributed.

Qualitative Insights

Gather personal stories and feedback from one-to-one conversations to complement numerical data and uncover hidden challenges.

Why These Metrics Matter

Without data, organisations may unknowingly reinforce systemic barriers, limiting opportunities for diverse groups. Tracking these DEI metrics enables proactive, evidence-based improvements that foster a more representative and engaged volunteer base.

A 5-step action plan to data-driven inclusion

Collecting DEI data is a starting point - turning insights into action is what makes a difference. By analysing and applying this data, organisations can remove barriers, improve engagement, and create more inclusive volunteer opportunities.

Step 1: Identify Gaps and Trends

Analyse key DEI metrics to understand who is engaging - and, more importantly, who isn't. Look for patterns in underrepresentation and disparities in retention to determine where improvements are needed.

Step 2: Refine Recruitment and Outreach

Use data to inform targeted outreach strategies. Simplify application processes, ensure role descriptions and materials are inclusive, and actively promote opportunities in underrepresented communities.

30%

The Literacy Pirates increased their volunteer conversation rate to over 30% by identifying a drop-off point in recruitment and streamlining application steps in Rosterfy.⁷

Step 3: Adapt Volunteer Roles and Support

Data can reveal accessibility barriers - such as financial constraints, transport issues, or rigid time commitments - that prevent diverse participation. Use insights to offer flexible, remote, or short-term volunteering options and provide necessary support (e.g. travel reimbursement or adaptive resources).

Step 4: Track and Measure Progress

Regularly assess DEI data to monitor whether strategies are making an impact. Implement real-time reporting tools to adjust approaches as needed and ensure accountability.

Step 5: Communicate Findings and Learnings

Share progress with volunteers, funders, and stakeholders to build trust and transparency. Reporting on inclusivity efforts helps organisations demonstrate commitment, attract more diverse volunteers, and continuously refine best practices.

[Read The Literacy Pirates case study](#)



Case Study:

London Youth Games

Background

London Youth Games (LYG) is a charity that uses the power of sport and physical activity to create life-changing opportunities for over 180,000 young people across London each year. Volunteers are essential to delivering these events, and through its GamesForce programme, LYG aims to create an inclusive volunteer community that reflects the diversity of its participants.

Challenge

Managing a large-scale volunteer programme across multiple events was time-consuming and relied on manual processes. Without centralised data, it was difficult to recruit and retain a representative volunteer base. To build a truly streamlined and inclusive volunteer programme, LYG needed automated processes, better data, targeted outreach, and flexible opportunities to support a wider range of volunteers.

Solution

The charity implemented Rosterfy to streamline volunteer management, automate recruitment, and enhance communication. The platform's reporting tools provide LYG with real-time insights into volunteer demographics.

With Rosterfy, LYG has increased visibility of who is volunteering, making it easier to assess representation and address gaps.

As Ellie Reid, Head of Workforce Development, explains:

"Rosterfy is a lot more automated and streamlined, but another massive benefit is the reporting side of it. We can identify gaps and take steps to ensure we have an inclusive and representative cohort of volunteers."

Results

With Rosterfy, LYG have seen significant improvements in volunteer engagement and diversity:

- 917 volunteers recruited and deployed in the 2024 season
- 14% increase in young leaders with disabilities
- 23% growth in unique GamesForce volunteers
- 48% rise in corporate volunteers⁶

LYG has also introduced bespoke inclusion training for volunteers supporting para-events, ensuring a welcoming and accessible experience for all participants. The enhanced structure, combined with data-driven insights, has helped LYG foster a more inclusive, engaged, and scalable volunteer community.

[Read LYG's story](#)

How Rosterfy can help improve DEI

Digital transformation is key for improving DEI in volunteering. Rosterfy helps organisations remove barriers by streamlining recruitment, training, and engagement - making opportunities more inclusive and accessible.

One of the biggest challenges organisations face is tracking and reporting volunteer demographics. Many still rely on manual processes or outdated systems, limiting their ability to measure and improve representation. Rosterfy simplifies this with:

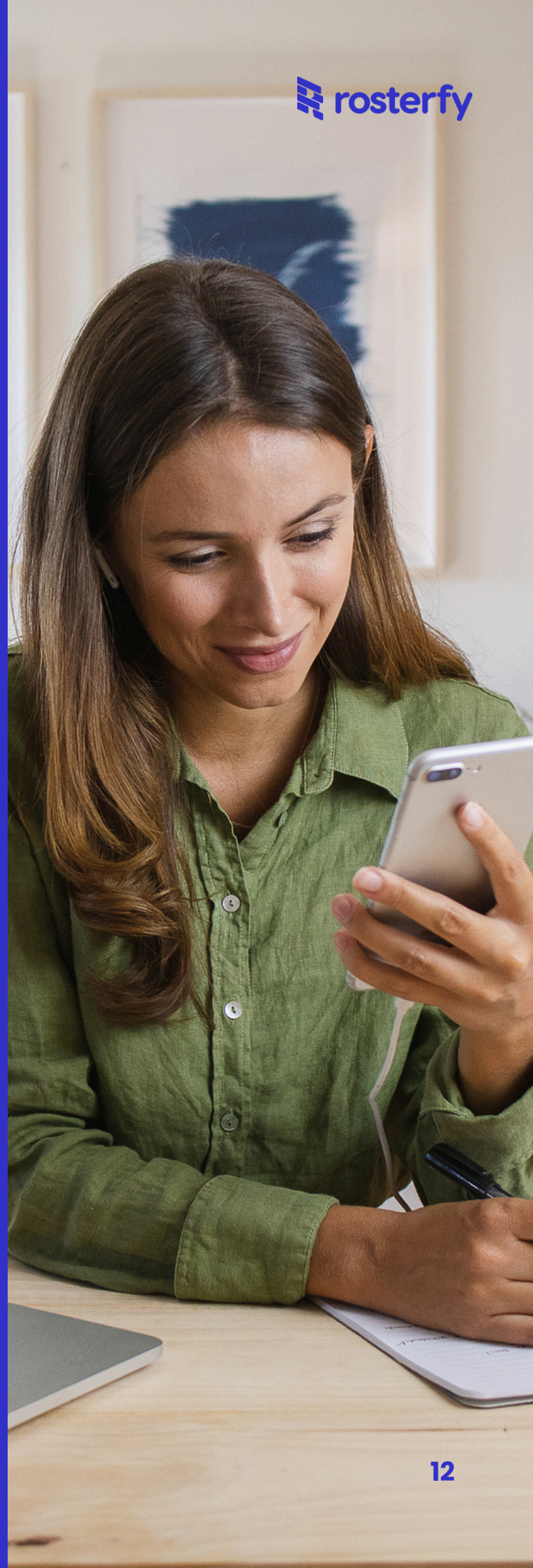
Real-Time Dashboards: Automatically collect and analyse demographic and engagement data for clear insights.

Data Segmentation: Track multiple demographic factors for a deeper understanding of representation.

Custom Reporting: Generate reports that meet funding, compliance, and ESG requirements.

User-Friendly Volunteer Portals: Ensure all volunteers, including those with disabilities, can easily apply and participate.

By integrating Rosterfy, organisations can move beyond good intentions and take measurable steps toward a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive volunteer programme.



Moving forward

Creating a truly inclusive volunteer programme requires data-driven action. By tracking diversity metrics, addressing barriers, and refining recruitment, organisations can build truly accessible volunteer opportunities.

Technology is key to driving change. Platforms like Rosterfy streamline volunteer management, provide real-time diversity insights, and help remove participation barriers. Embedding DEI at every stage ensures long-term impact and a culture of inclusion.

Go to www.rosterfy.com to discover how Rosterfy can support your volunteer programme and DEI efforts.



Sources:

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