



# MAXIMISING THE VALUE OF YOUR RETAIL CHARITY VOLUNTEER PROGRAM



ROSTERFY IS PROUD TO PROVIDE VOLUNTEER  
MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE TO:



St Vincent de Paul Society  
*good works*





# Introduction

## MANAGEMENT AND VOLUNTEER EXPECTATIONS

According to an Independent Sector survey, each hour offer by a volunteer [is worth \\$31.80](#) and around £25 in the UK. That's an increase of 6.2% from 2022. The value of volunteering is growing and so are their expectations.

What's more, volunteers, like employees, expect more from the organisation that brought them on. Frictionless onboarding, clear definitions of roles and up to the minute communication are the minimum expectations.

Volunteers offer organisations outside perspectives that drive innovation, labour that would otherwise cost charities and non-profits thousands of dollars, and a breath of fresh air to company culture.

Volunteers offer so much to a charity or non-profit organisation than a cost-effective workforce.

Retail Charities such as the **British Heart Foundation, Crisis, St Vincent De Paul** and **Oxfam Ireland**, have recognised the need to improve their volunteer onboarding, communication and how they report key metrics. Extra attention has been placed on retention, engagement and the overall ROI of their volunteer program.

Retail charity organisations are exploring options for producing more consistency, but volunteer training is the first step toward this goal. With this mindset, establishments can recruit faster, retain volunteers more easily, optimise training and reward hard work.

Retail charities are competing with each other for the attention of volunteers. We'll look at how they can recruit new volunteers, retain them, improve engagement and make the biggest impact they can for their cause.



# Where Retail Charity is Heading

Retail charity organisations are adopting a private sector mentality, meaning they have shifted toward running more like a business than a typical non-profit volunteer operation. As a result, the retail charity space is increasingly directed by data-driven decision making and more scrutiny is placed on creating a consistent experiences to achieve their targets.

The private sector mentality towards analytics involves marrying the passion,

dedication and drive in the charity sector that's creating engaging experiences for volunteers and raising the standards across the industry.

Many stakeholders and decision-makers at retail charities are expected to keep on top of new trends, discover more efficient ways of working and report on the ROI of their volunteering program.

## A RISE IN ACTIVITY

There are over [11,000 charity shops](#) in the U.K., [2,700 in the A.U.](#) and [25,000 in the U.S.](#), which has resulted in greater brand awareness and higher donation amounts for these retail charity stores.

These retail spaces offer brand items that are high quality at a low cost, making them more attractive to customers looking for organisations that are tapped into the environmental, social and governance (ESG) needs of the public.

The [average retail cost](#) of an item at a retail charity store is £6.53.

Retail charities offer consumers a sustainable alternative to buying brand-new items that are more affordable than something off the rack. The increased cost of living has encouraged people to be more cost-sensitive — driving them toward retail charity stores now more than ever.

From 2021 to 2022, as a result of these initiatives, retail charities have contributed [over £363 million](#) to their parent charities, reports the Charity Retail Association.

*“High Street Charity stores in the U.K. don’t receive preferable rates. We have to ensure the standards we set are very high until the point you wouldn’t even know it’s a charity store. Volunteers play such a pivotal role in our shops and stores due to their significant time commitment that they donate to BHF”*

**Linda Fenn**

Head of Volunteering of the British Heart Foundation.

## HELP IS ON THE WAY

Retail charities are growing rapidly and now is the time to recruit volunteers to help support your efforts. Pro Bono Economics, a volunteer survey organisation, notes that charity organisations should expect an uptick in volunteer applications in the coming year because a new generation of people is getting more involved.

The pandemic put a pretty hard stop to volunteering. But Pro Bono Economics predicts that 2023 and the years to come will bring with it support for greater non-profit initiatives, with one in six respondents between the ages of 18 and 34 saying they plan on volunteering more.

# CHALLENGES FACING THE INDUSTRY:

## Employment

With the drive to do more, what challenges do retail charities and their parent organisations face?

The first is employment. Inflation and the rising cost of living worldwide have deterred many potential volunteers from applying because their time is being put towards paid work. People Management found that [16% of U.K. citizens](#), or 4 million people, have considered working two or more jobs to deal with the financial crisis. Some workers put in upwards of 56 hours a week just to make ends meet.

Although people are rallying for higher wages while balancing several jobs, inflation is making these efforts nearly impossible to keep up. Costs for fuel, food, electricity, gas and other goods have increased 9.6% in the past year in the U.K. and the British dollar has fallen below that of the U.S.

In June of 2022, Australian workers listed [1,009,308 jobs](#) as not their primary source of income, according to Australia Institute, a research organisation. The Australian Institute believes that unless costs equal that of income, the number of people taking on two or more jobs will only increase.

### WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR RETAIL CHARITIES?

With fewer volunteers available to support retail charities, along, employees are forced to pick up the slack. Historically, non-profits have been able to attract incredible talent, but retention has remained their biggest challenge. The reason for this struggle is burnout. McKinsey found that [one in four nonprofit employees](#) in Australia is dealing with burnout symptoms, resulting in six times the number of people considering leaving the organisation.



# CHALLENGES FACING THE INDUSTRY:

## Engagement

Against the rising interest in volunteering, organisations are still struggling to keep volunteers engaged. Charities are very aware of the connection between engagement from volunteers and their ability to retain them. charity and non-profit organisations rely on referrals to support their programs.

Let's take a look at how management within retail charities can improve engagement:



### APP-BASED CHANNELS

The digital revolution has hit every industry, including the retail charity sector. This means that volunteers are looking for more organisations to engage with app-based solutions while volunteering. App-based engagement can keep volunteers up-to-day about wins and losses, scheduling changes, expectations and collaborative efforts.

Apps are a great way to initiate real-time communication as well. A volunteer can ask questions about the opportunity while supervisors can keep someone updated during the opportunity.



### REWARDING VOLUNTEERS

Whether it's a shout-out on a social channel, a digital badge or some sort of gift, volunteers want to feel acknowledged for their work. Without them, the organisation would struggle to operate and rewarding volunteers for their time and effort will keep volunteers engaged.



### ONLINE ONBOARDING

Volunteers should be able to sign up and go through the onboarding process on any device to decrease application abandonment, a common challenge for volunteer establishments. [Volunteer portals](#) can help an existing volunteer know which positions and opportunities are available — and have the ability to apply right away.



### TRACKING PROGRESS

Tracking volunteer hours offers, donations raised, reviews, feedback and more helps retail charities to measure the success of their program, make improvements and keep volunteers engaged. Having greater visibility of what's happening and the ability to set goals is a game changer for many non-profit organisations.

# CHALLENGES FACING THE INDUSTRY

## Enrolment

They've seen your advertisements, heard the good news about your cause and spoken to someone involved. Yet still, despite all of that, applicants haven't enrolled. This is common for charities and nonprofit organisations — even for those that focus on delivering a good experience.

A barrier to enrolment may include the work involved in signing up, paperwork, signatures, screening and background checks. The system takes a lot of time and effort from admins to process each application with back-and-forth emails that often get lost in the shuffle.

Instead, frictionless onboarding through automation can alleviate some of the pressures administrators have to deal with while engaging volunteers throughout the process.

Volunteer management software can help keep applicants on track during the application process. A visual application module can help get volunteers moving and motivated to reach the end — yes, [gamification](#) in the volunteering sector is a reliable tactic. In fitness apps, tracking finances and water reminders, we've seen that people want to feel like they're reaching goals in a way that doesn't feel like work, the same goes for volunteer applications.

A volunteer onboarding platform that sends reminders, shows progress and is easy to use can help volunteers reach the end of their applications without much effort on the administrative side.



# CHALLENGES FACING THE INDUSTRY:

## Retention

Like many industries, such as food and beverage and nonprofits, there are seasonality challenges to overcome. Young volunteers in high school or college apply for opportunities because they need to reach deadlines for school, or they volunteer over the summer — both scenarios ending in three to six months.

Volunteers are crucial for organisations that rely on their support. It's more cost-effective to manage retaining volunteers on a long-term basis than putting in additional effort to recruit, onboard and train new applicants.

In addition to seasonal volunteers coming in from school projects, nonprofits often run into issues with retention in general. Volunteers leave for many reasons, but some actions can be taken to ensure they can stick around for longer.

### HOW TO IMPROVE RETENTION:

- Timely and clear communication of role expectations
- Establishing a thorough training process
- Matching volunteers with their skills
- Ensuring enough time between shifts to avoid burnout
- Collecting and implementing volunteer feedback

Adopting a private-sector mentality around a volunteer-based organisation can help level up this sector immensely. Many volunteers arrive while working another job and expect similar practices during their volunteer hours. A workplace employs best practices to ensure their employees are happy and continue to enjoy their work, including all of the points listed above.

Looking at how your organisation manages volunteer expectations and learning more about their needs can help smooth out volunteer frustrations. Implementing their recommendations and taking a chapter from the private sector can help improve volunteer retention.



# CHALLENGES FACING THE INDUSTRY: Visibility and a Loss of Revenue

At the end of the day, if there aren't enough volunteers to work in retail charity stores, the doors have to close permanently. According to the Charity Retail Association<sup>3</sup>, 13.8% of charity retail shops were forced to close between 2021 and 2022.

This is a loss in monthly income, and the cost of closing the store all together could hurt retail charities even more.

To avoid closing stores, volunteer management is vital. According to Civil Society, retail charity stores are [gaining more traction](#) by 10% post-pandemic. But without volunteers to run the store and manage customers, these profits will pass charity shops by.

With the right volunteer management software, volunteers are more likely to stick around, which means higher ROI for your retail charity store.



# Charities and Non-profit Trends

Although the rising costs of living around the world is putting pressure on people to find more jobs, it is creating more interest in retail charity stores. The costs of goods and services here are more affordable and social media has created excitement in this sector of shopping.

*“The cost of living is making people look for value for money in everything they buy. People are much more mindful about reusing items.”*

**Linda Fenn**

Head of Volunteering at the British Heart Foundation.

Instagram and TikTok trends are leaning towards retail charity to help users find unique items they won't find anywhere else.

Additionally, stores are collaborating with charities as well. TK Maxx, for example, launched a campaign called [Give Up Clothes for Good](#), where people can offer a bag of gently used clothes, and the corporation will donate up to £25 to Cancer Research U.K.

The trend is working alongside consumers' growing desire to reduce their carbon footprint. Recycling used clothes help cut production costs and the waste put forth when companies create new items — a concern that has [continued to grow](#) since the pandemic.

But what else is happening in the charity retail space that could help or hurt its efforts in attracting volunteers and revenue?



## HIRING

Nearly [60% of all nonprofits](#) don't have a formal recruitment strategy. While big named organisations can naturally attract volunteers, this isn't always the case for smaller nonprofits. Instead, they must put forth more effort to get their brand name out there and create excitement in the community.

Recruiting the right people is necessary to:

- Fundraise for donations.
- Reduce operating costs and overheads.
- Introduce new skill sets to the team.
- Expand donor networks and community connections.

You'll know it's time to expand your volunteer network if you've noticed employees or current volunteers are feeling overworked, showing signs of burnout or there is a gap between the organisation's goals and the profitability of your initiatives.

It's okay to be picky while looking for volunteers, however. The right people will feel like they fit better with the organisation and its purpose. To this point, it's important to fully understand where a new volunteer is necessary for the establishment and what their function will be — focus and organisation are key here.



## A WEAK BRAND PRESENCE

An essential part of attracting new volunteers who are excited about your mission is to strengthen brand awareness. Getting people to know not only that your organisation exists, but the mission behind it can help support your overall goals.

Brand awareness is the first step toward building brand loyalty, so volunteers and shoppers are more likely to choose your organisation over another. It helps create value for your brand.

Consider these questions as you explore the strength of your brand:

- What does your brand stand for?
- Does your brand have an impactful voice in the community?
- What tone of voice does your brand use to connect with shoppers?
- What is the aesthetic of your brand?
- What are your values and is that clear to people outside your organisation?
- What motivates volunteers to pick your retail charity in particular?

Start building your brand by communicating your story online and often to volunteers. You must give something for people to connect with such as the impact of volunteering. What does volunteering do to assist the organisation's overall goal and how does each helping hand help reach that goal?



## ORGANISATION TRANSPARENCY

Hand-in-hand with creating a strong brand is transparency. Trust in charities is vital to urge people to get involved. According to the 2022 Edelman Trust Barometer, the global tendency is to [distrust nonprofit and charity organisations](#).

The best way to improve trust in organisations is to be completely transparent with the public and those involved. This means communicating how much the organisation has earned and how those donations and retail shop profits are being used.

At the volunteer level, transparency also means communicating volunteer expectations from the beginning. Not only should you have a clear vision for how the volunteer will contribute, but also details for their day-to-day and how this impacts the overall goal of the establishment.



## VOLUNTEER ACCOUNTABILITY

Along with communicating expectations, how is your organisation holding volunteers accountable for their duties? This is essential to ensuring the volunteer's success and contribution to the organisation.

This method isn't only great for volunteer retention but for the organisation as well. Tracking volunteer performance can help with recruitment in the future.

Supervisors should have a platform to report how the volunteer is doing while on site. If the individual applies for a new opportunity, administrators will have a point of reference for how well they did last time, the skills they showcased and where (if anywhere) they should be placed next.



## USING SOFTWARE TO IMPROVE ENGAGEMENT

Apps and online platforms can help improve engagement dramatically from application to final sign-off. If you've noticed a gap between initial applications and the final onboarding step, digital recruitment software can allow admins to better track, follow up and reward volunteers for completing the process.

Training is a sore point for many retail charities. With so much turnover or a fast-paced environment, admins often forget how important it is to train new volunteers. However, better-informed volunteers perform at a higher level and feel more confident in their performance — contributing to higher retention rates.



## HOW TO MAXIMISE THE VALUE OF YOUR RETAIL CHARITY VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

Want to bring all of these challenges together into a solution? Invest in efficiency.

Volunteer management solutions by Rosterfy help to smooth the recruitment process from start to finish. Admins can keep a close eye on every step of the onboarding process, how a volunteer performs while on the job, collect supervisor feedback and place a volunteer more quickly based on their interests.

Task automation through Rosterfy takes the pressure off your admin team — allowing them to manage every facet of your volunteer lifecycle. When your team has more time to focus on recruitment, the quality of the communication and meeting store goals, your cause can make a bigger impact.



# Conclusion

## THE IMPACT ROSTERFY CAN HAVE ON YOUR RETAIL CHARITY VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

The retail charity space is changing. The focus on meeting objectives, measuring impact, increasing engagement and the overall volunteer journey is seen as the key way a charity can grab the attention of volunteers.

It all starts with recruitment. Rosterfy helps streamline the process for both admins and applicants. Instead of sending endless emails and following up with unreliable applicants, admins and volunteers can track the paperwork necessary to get to the next step and automate screening and background checks.

*"We're able to say exactly how many volunteers we have in our shops and stores as well as supporting our events as part of BHF's Action Team. That's because of Rosterfy. For referencing alone, Rosterfy saves us around 15 minutes per applicant, representing a significant time saving across the volunteering functions"*

### Sue George

Volunteer Development and Systems Manager at the British Heart Foundation

Admins have more time to choose where to place volunteers based on their interests and skills.

Timely and relevant communications managed through automation and

workflows help to keep volunteers engaged, informed and eager to progress in their journey with your organisation. Rostery's ability to empower the volunteer with their own portal makes viewing opportunities, keeping up to date on training and receiving important communication simple.

When you're able to get volunteers to show an interest in supporting your cause, streamline their onboarding and ensure excellent communication throughout their journey, you can improve retention and even become advocates of your cause.

**Rosterfy is the solution you need to improve cost efficiencies, future-proof your volunteer program and get visibility of the impact you're making.**

#### Sources

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