



The State of UK Volunteer Management 2026



Connected for Impact



By Casper Harratt,
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Introduction

Volunteers are the heartbeat of communities across the UK. They give their skills, their passion and their time to causes that matter to them, and against a backdrop of stretched budgets and busy lives, they keep showing up.

From food banks and community gardens to cultural festivals and national events, the people who give their time – and the people who lead them – remain a quiet, powerful force for good.

This is our second annual State of UK Volunteer Management report. Last year, in *Investing in Impact*, we found a sector that valued its volunteers enormously but under-invested in the infrastructure to support them. Twelve months on, the picture is more encouraging – and more nuanced.

Some headlines stand out. This year 92% of organisations say volunteers are critical to delivering their mission, up from 88% in 2025. And for the first time in two years of asking, the sector is telling us that recruitment is getting easier: 46% now say it is easy to recruit volunteers, up sharply from 35% last year. Almost half (49%) report that their volunteer numbers have grown.

But beneath the optimism sits a clear dividing line. The organisations that consistently deliver a great volunteer experience – who thank and reward their volunteers, train them well, and feel they are using technology effectively – have one thing in common: connected, integrated systems that let them understand how their volunteers interact with the whole organisation. A positive volunteer experience, this year's data suggests, is enabled by joined-up systems. Where those systems are absent, good intentions struggle to translate into a good experience.

This report explores that story across five sections: the state of volunteering today; recruitment and growth; structure, strategy and resource; experience and systems; and the early, cautious arrival of AI.

We've called this year's report "Connected for Impact" for two reasons. Firstly, connected systems were the leading indicator of success. But more importantly, because the biggest theme that kept coming through was the deeply human motivations that keep volunteer managers doing what they (you) do, and the deeply human connections that are made through volunteering.

Thank you to every one of the volunteer champions who took the time to share their experience with us.

Research methodology

The State of UK Volunteer Management 2026 is based on a nationwide online survey of volunteer managers, coordinators and programme leads, built using Alchemer and distributed by Rosterfy through its own networks and trusted third parties. Fieldwork ran from 27 April to 23 May 2026, led by Susie Mullen, a leading analyst and researcher with deep experience in the not-for-profit sector.

In total we received 386 responses (of which 125 were partial completions), 14% more responses than 2025. The vast majority of respondents (82%) work in the charity sector, with smaller numbers from sporting, cultural,

education institutions and councils. 2% were based in Ireland and the remainder across the UK.

The volunteer programmes represented span an enormous range, from as few as 5 volunteers to as many as 72,000, with a median of 143 volunteers per organisation and a mean of 1,592. To make sense of that spread we grouped organisations into four size bands: small (40 or fewer volunteers), medium (41–150), large (151–600) and very large (more than 600). Many of the most interesting findings this year only appear when you look size band by size band.

Where we draw year-on-year comparisons, we do so only for questions asked consistently across both years. A handful of questions were refined or added for 2026 – these are noted as new where relevant.

Key findings

Eight themes run through this year's data:

1. **MISSION-CRITICAL, AND RISING.** Volunteers are valued more than ever. 92% say volunteers are mission-critical, up from 88% in 2025, and engagement is high – 60% say more than three-quarters of their volunteers are active.
2. **RECRUITMENT HAS GOT EASIER.** 46% now say recruitment is easy, up from 35% last year – a statistically significant shift. There is no single driver, so we treat it as encouraging rather than conclusive.
3. **WORD OF MOUTH STILL WINS.** For most organisations, the single most effective recruitment channel is word of mouth (32%). The exception is organisations with mostly Gen Z volunteers, for whom digital channels come first.
4. **YOUNGER VOLUNTEERS, EASIER RECRUITMENT.** 84% of organisations whose volunteers are mostly Gen Z say recruitment is easy – far above the sector average. Younger volunteer bases recruit more easily, and through different channels.
5. **VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT IS GROWING IN VISIBILITY.** Volunteer management is now a department in its own right for 30% of organisations – roughly twice the proportion in 2025.
6. **INTEGRATED SYSTEMS ENABLE A GREAT EXPERIENCE.** The organisations that reward, thank and train their volunteers well, and that use technology effectively, overwhelmingly share one trait: connected, integrated systems.
7. **CHALLENGES ARE SPREAD, AND SIZE-SPECIFIC.** There is no single biggest challenge. Recruitment, retention, unrealistic time expectations and burnout are all cited by more than one in four – and the top three challenges change with organisation size.
8. **AI HAS ARRIVED – QUIETLY.** Just over half (54%) use AI, almost entirely for writing tasks, and attitudes are broadly neutral. VMS adoption sits at 48%. Attitudes are surprisingly neutral, pointing to a sector at an early, cautious stage of its AI journey.



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It's heartening to see the increases in organisations having volunteer strategies and volunteering teams and departments in this year's report, but there is still so much more to do. Reports like this are crucial in continuing to raise the profile of volunteer management as a profession and helping to equip volunteer managers to do the important work they do. After all, as one respondent says, the work of volunteer management is about making the world a better place.

Dr Helen Timbrell, Volunteering Consultant, Researcher and Coach and co-Founder of the Aspiring Heads of Volunteering programme

Before we begin: what volunteer managers love about the job

We opened the survey with a simple, open question: in a sentence or two, what do you enjoy most about working with volunteers? The answers were a reminder of why this amazing sector keeps going. By a clear margin, the two biggest themes were passion for the cause (38%) and making a difference (37%), followed by the diversity of people and perspectives volunteers bring (26%), the skills and fresh ideas they offer (21%), and the joy of watching volunteers grow (19%).

Almost every answer was relational. People wrote about camaraderie, about hearing volunteers' stories, about watching someone arrive nervous and leave with new confidence and skills. It is worth holding that in mind as we get to this year's findings on technology and AI – because the part of the role volunteer managers cherish most is precisely the human connection that no system can replace.

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It's so human! I love enabling people to make the difference they want to make.

– Volunteer Manager

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Volunteers are the lifeblood of an organisation. Their commitment and compassion make everything we do possible. I love hearing their stories of why they support us and understanding them as individuals. They are the reason I love the sector.

– Volunteer Manager



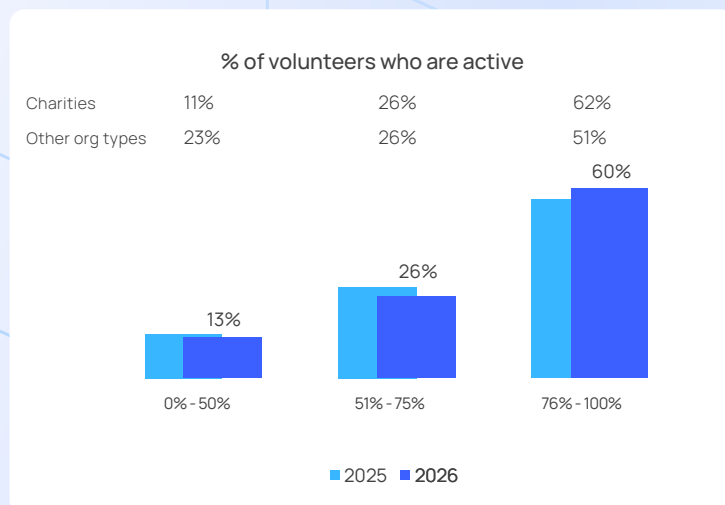
Part 1: Volunteers are mission-critical – and active

Whilst there's never been any doubt about how critical volunteers are, it's always nice to see it confirmed in the numbers. 92% of respondents say volunteers are important to achieving their organisation's mission, up from 88% in 2025. The small number who say volunteers are not important tend to come from organisations with very few volunteers. For everyone else, volunteers are absolutely central, and fully embedded in how the organisation functions.

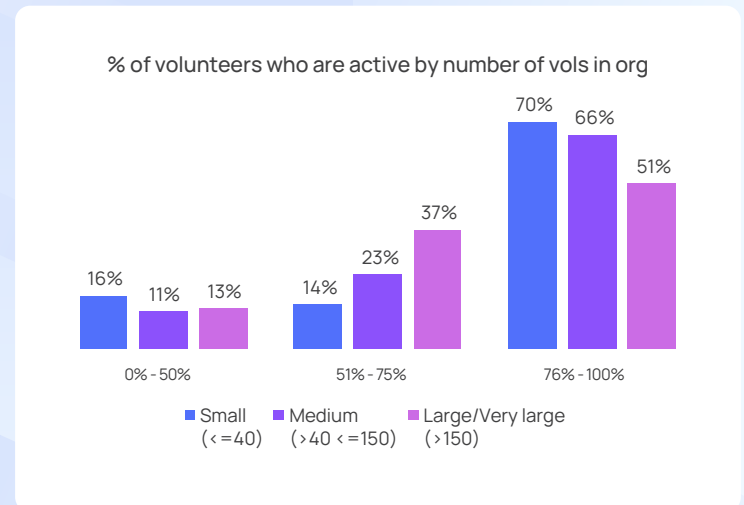


Engagement is high, but harder to sustain at scale

Volunteers are not only valued, they are active. 60% of organisations say that more than three-quarters of their volunteers are active – defined as having signed up for a shift, registered for an event, completed a form or undertaken training in the last 12 months – and 86% say more than half are active.



Two patterns stand out. Charities tend to report higher proportions of active volunteers than non-charities, and smaller and medium organisations report higher activity rates than the largest ones. In other words, engagement is strong everywhere, but participation becomes harder to maintain as programmes scale.



Worth noting: the largest organisations are not necessarily managing their volunteers less well – they may simply have more volunteers than they can keep continuously busy, or find it harder to keep eyes on everyone.

The activity gap at greater scale looks less like a failure of engagement and more like a capacity and matching challenge – which is exactly where structure and systems start to matter (see Parts 3 and 4).



Supporting people to make a difference in the local community. I'm just the facilitator; the volunteers are the ones doing the real work.

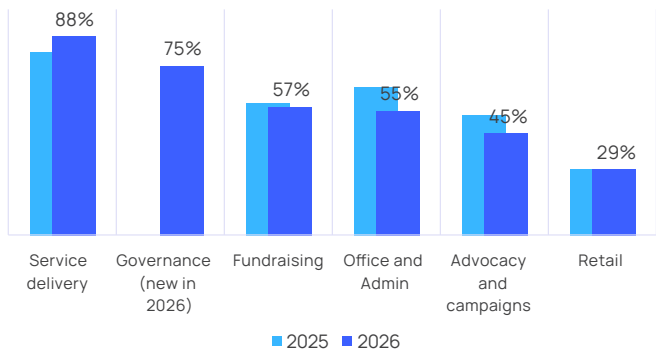
– Volunteer Manager

Service delivery and governance lead a diverse mix of roles

The volunteers organisations rely on most are those who deliver services (88%) and those who provide governance (75%, newly captured this year), followed by fundraising (57%), office and admin support (55%), advocacy and campaigns (45%) and retail (29%). Most organisations draw on a genuine mix: the average is between three and four volunteer types, rising only modestly with size – from three types in small organisations to four in the very largest.

Programmes are diverse regardless of how many people volunteer. Notably, organisations that rely on retail volunteers tend to be the largest, manage their volunteers through HR, and are very likely to have a volunteer management system in place.

Volunteer types



	AVERAGE NUMBER OF VOLUNTEER TYPES
SMALL (<=40)	3.2
MEDIUM (>40 <=150)	3.6
LARGE (>150 <=600)	3.7
VERY LARGE (>600)	4.0

An ageing volunteer base

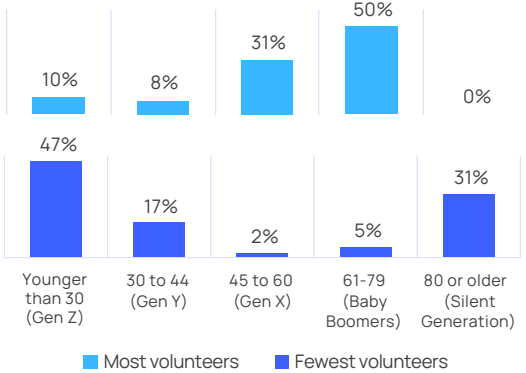
Volunteer age profiles remain skewed towards older generations. Half of all organisations (50%) say their volunteers are mostly Baby Boomers (aged 61-79), up from 44% last year. Just 10% say their volunteers are mostly Gen Z, and 47% report Gen Z as the group they have fewest of. This is the long-standing shape of UK volunteering – but as the next section shows, the organisations that have managed to attract younger volunteers are having a markedly different experience of recruitment.



The 2026 findings paint an encouraging picture for UK volunteering. When onboarding is simple and barriers are low, recruitment and retention follow naturally – and it's great to see volunteer management earning the strategic recognition it deserves. Technology should complement great volunteer management, not add to already stretched workloads. Burnout among volunteer professionals remains a real concern, but the direction of travel is positive, and that's worth celebrating."

– Daniel O'Driscoll, Engagement Consultancy

Most & Fewest volunteers by generation



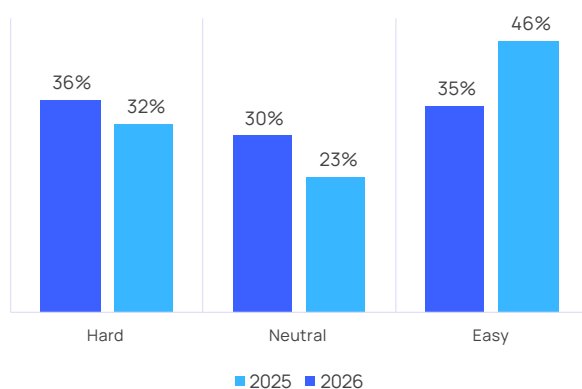
Seeing a volunteer start with low confidence and leave for employment or other opportunities with the skills and knowledge to succeed.

– Volunteer Manager

Part 2: Recruitment is getting easier – but no one driver explains why

Last year recruitment looked evenly balanced between difficult, neutral and easy. This year the balance has tipped. 46% of organisations now say recruitment is easy, up from 35% in 2025, while the proportion finding it hard has fallen from 36% to 32%. This is a statistically significant shift.

How easy is recruitment?



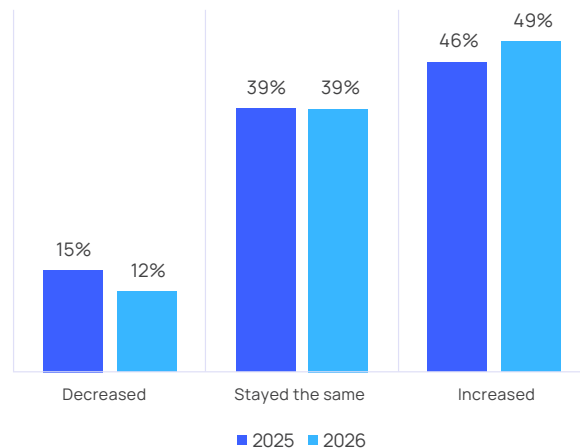
The honest answer to 'why?' is that we cannot point to a single cause. A 'driver analysis' did not find any one variable with a strong, reliable relationship to ease of recruitment. The two factors that came closest – though neither was statistically significant – were the age of an organisation's volunteers and the proportion who are active. Organisations with younger and more active volunteer bases tend to find recruitment easier.

A note of caution before anyone declares the volunteer recruitment challenge over: this may be a genuine, lasting easing, or it may be a single good year. With recruitment ease, volunteer-number growth (49%) and 'our cause is popular right now' (51%) all moving together, it is possible the sector is enjoying a cyclical tailwind of public goodwill rather than a structural change. We would treat 2026 as encouraging evidence to watch, not proof of a new normal – and we will be looking closely at whether it holds in 2027.

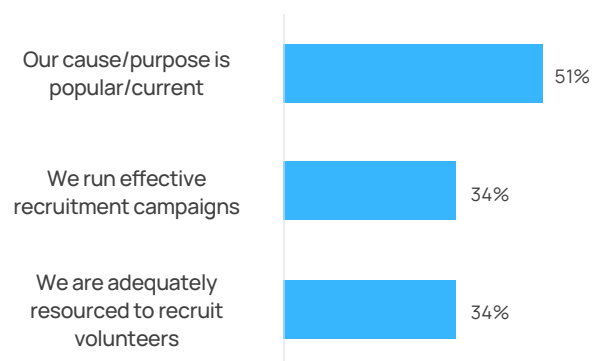
Volunteer numbers are growing

Almost half of organisations (49%) say their volunteer numbers increased over the past year, up from 39% in 2025, with only 12% reporting a decline. Where numbers grew, the single biggest reason given was passive rather than active: 51% put it down to their cause or purpose being popular and current. Beyond that, the two most cited active factors were running effective recruitment campaigns (34%) and being adequately resourced to recruit (34%). Where numbers fell, the leading reasons were poor engagement with volunteers (44%) and insufficient internal staffing (38%).

Change in vol numbers in last year



Reasons for increase



Word of mouth is still the most effective channel – with one exception

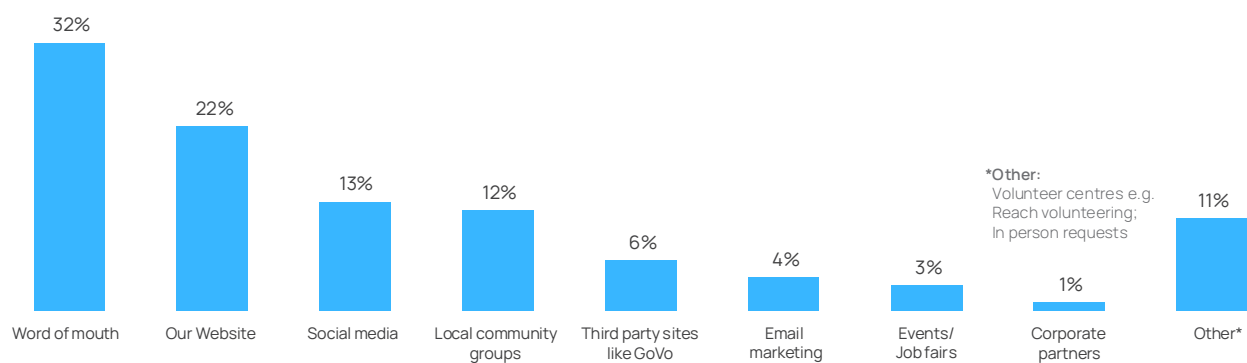
For a third of organisations (32%), the single most effective recruitment channel is word of mouth, ahead of their own website (22%) and social media (13%). In the commercial world this would be called a 'customer referral', and the lesson is the same one businesses learn: the best, most cost-effective marketing is happy, well-looked-after 'customers' (volunteers) who tell their friends.



Young people seem much more enthusiastic to give. Volunteering is almost cool again!

– Volunteer Manager

Single most effective recruitment channel

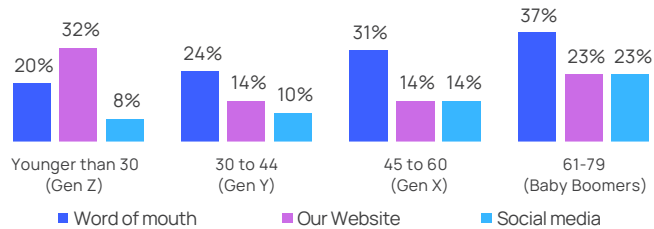


But there is an exception to the word-of-mouth rule. Among organisations whose volunteers are mostly Gen Z, the website – not word of mouth – is the number one recruitment channel. And 84% of those Gen Z-majority organisations say recruitment is easy, against a sector average of 46%.

These findings join up into a self-reinforcing loop that is easy to miss when you read each chart on its own. Organisations with older volunteers rely on word of mouth, and word of mouth tends to recruit more people who look like the existing base – so older programmes stay older.

Organisations with younger volunteers lean on digital channels, find recruitment easier, and keep attracting more young people. Channel choice is not just a tactic; over time it quietly shapes who your volunteers are. Breaking the loop – for organisations that want a younger base – means deliberately investing in the online experience rather than waiting for word of mouth to do something it structurally cannot.

Most effective recruitment channels



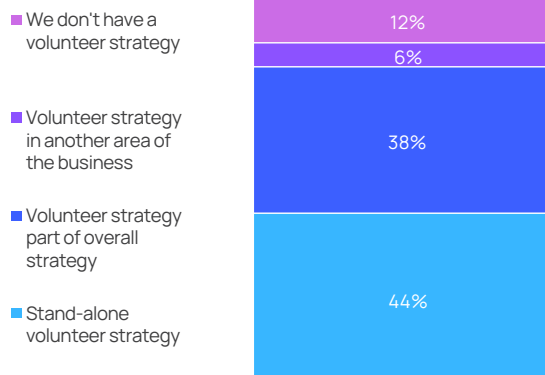
Part 3: Structure, strategy and resource

If volunteering is mission-critical, how is it owned and resourced inside organisations? The answer, as last year, is: in a wide variety of ways – but with a clear maturing trend.

Most, but not all, have a volunteer strategy

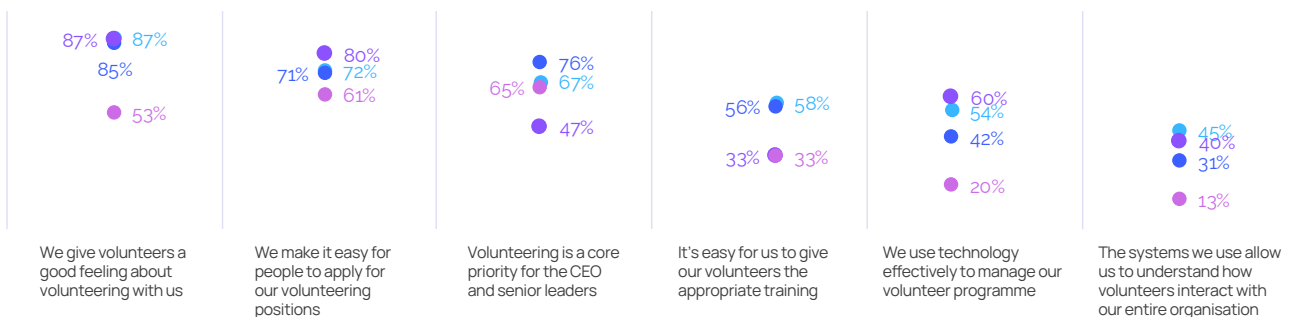
Most organisations have a volunteer strategy of some kind: 44% have a stand-alone volunteer strategy, 38% fold it into their overall organisational strategy, and 6% locate it in another area of the business. That leaves 12% with no volunteer strategy at all. Reassuringly, there is little to separate those with a stand-alone strategy from those whose strategy is part of the wider plan – both perform similarly on the experience they provide. What matters is having one. Organisations without any strategy score lower across almost every attitudinal measure, and – despite often saying volunteering is a priority – struggle to deliver a good volunteer experience.

Volunteer Strategy?



% Agree...

- Stand-alone strategy
- Volunteer strategy part of overall strategy
- Volunteer strategy in another area
- We don't have a volunteer strategy



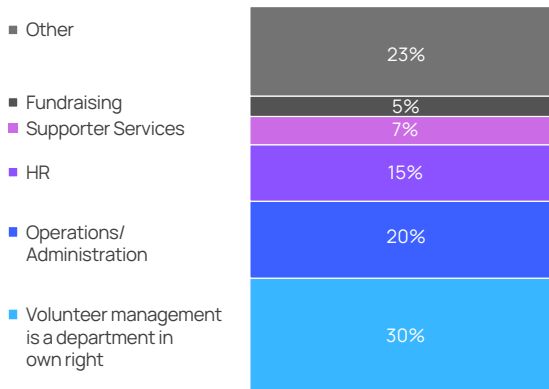
These findings are a real cause for optimism; volunteers are mission-critical, recruitment feels easier, and younger volunteers are reshaping routes into participation. But the real test is what sits behind volunteer experience. Strong strategy, seamless recruitment, meaningful support, timely communication and training and recognition all depend on excellent, integrated systems. If organisations want volunteers to stay and also recommend them, experience cannot sit apart from infrastructure or from the human connection that makes volunteering unique.

– Katie Bradshaw, KTB Consultancy

Volunteer management is becoming a department in its own right

This is one of the most encouraging shifts of the year. Volunteer management is showing-up as a department in its own right for 30% of organisations – roughly twice the proportion we saw in 2025. Where volunteering doesn't have its own department, it most often sits within operations or administration (20%) or HR (15%), with smaller numbers in supporter services and fundraising.

Where does volunteering sit?



Staffing varies widely and tracks closely with the number of volunteers: the more volunteers an organisation has, the more paid staff support them. Just under a third (31%) have only one paid member of staff managing volunteers, 28% have six or more, and 9% have none at all.

There is a clear structural pattern in where volunteering sits, too:

organisations with large teams managing large numbers of volunteers tend to run a dedicated volunteer department or manage through HR, while those with a single member of staff usually attach volunteering to operations or admin.

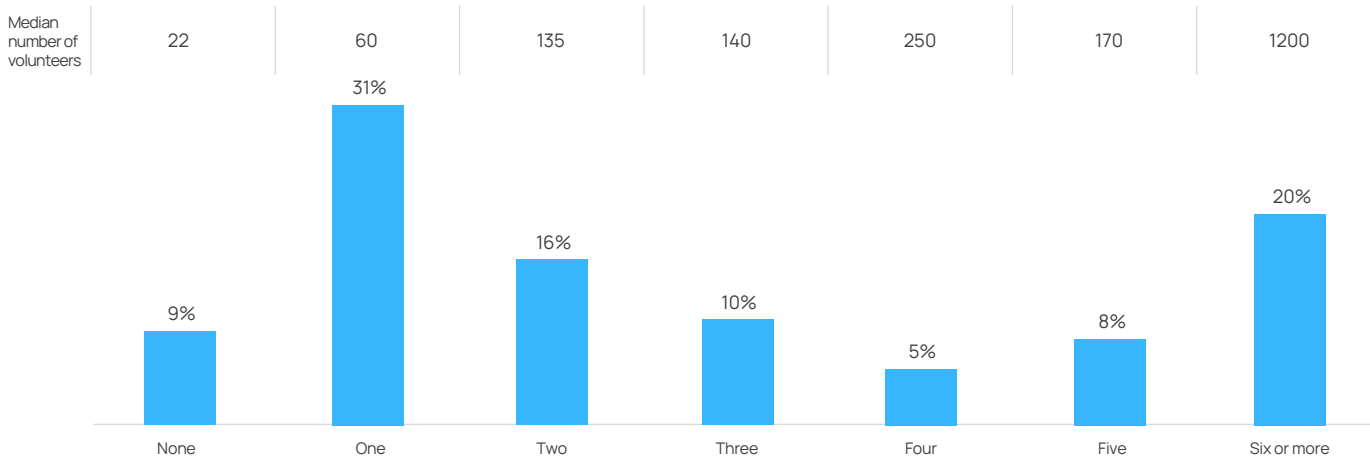


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It's an honour to work with so many people from so many backgrounds with so much to offer.

– Volunteer Manager

Number of paid staff



Part 4: Experience and systems – the integration advantage

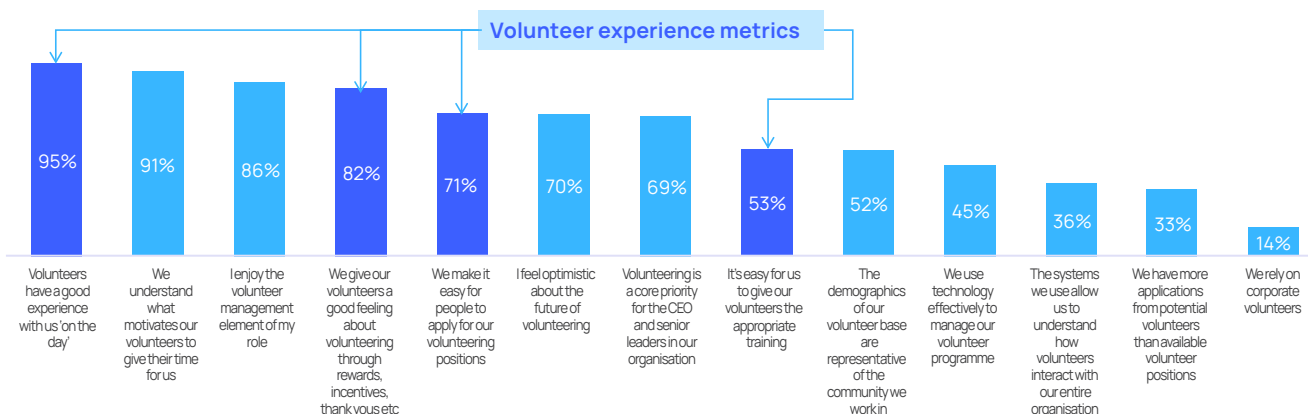
Volunteers, on the whole, have a good experience. 95% of organisations agree their volunteers have a good experience 'on the day', 91% understand what motivates their volunteers, and 82% say they give volunteers a good feeling about volunteering through rewards, recognition and thank yous.

The picture is less rosy once you move beyond the day itself. Only 71% say it is easy for people to apply for their volunteering roles, just 53% feel they give volunteers appropriate training, and only 52% believe their volunteer base reflects the community they serve. Lower still are the technology measures: 45% say they use technology effectively to manage their programme, and just 36% say their systems let them understand how volunteers interact with the whole organisation.

What separates the best volunteer experiences

No single metric guarantees a great volunteer experience. But three things show up again and again among the organisations that deliver one: a strategy, scale, and – most consistently – advanced, integrated systems. Among organisations where more than three-quarters of volunteers are active, 87% reward, thank and incentivise their volunteers well; among those with integrated systems, the figure is 94%. Organisations that say they give appropriate training are far more likely to have integrated systems (66%) and to use technology effectively (64%). And organisations that use technology effectively are markedly less likely to report falling volunteer numbers – only 25% of those with declining numbers say they use tech well.

% Agree



% Agree





Effective management of volunteers is fundamentally about people and relationships. It's positive to see evidence that integrated systems contribute to stronger volunteer experiences because the best systems don't replace human connection, they create more space for it. Whether you're supporting 50 volunteers or 50,000, success comes from understanding what motivates people, helping volunteers feel valued and connected throughout their journey, and creating flexible opportunities that meet the needs of both volunteers and communities. Strong systems provide the foundation that makes this possible. Get that right, and your volunteer programme will flourish.

– Jennie Mann, Bloom Volunteering

REWARD, THANK, INCENTIVISE % AGREE

DON'T HAVE A STRATEGY	50%	↓
VOLUNTEER NUMBERS DOWN VS YA	66%	↓
¾+ VOLUNTEERS ARE ACTIVE	87%	↑
'ADVANCED/INTEGRATED SYSTEMS'	94%	↑

MAKE IT EASY FOR PEOPLE TO APPLY % AGREE

VERY LARGE (600+ VOLUNTEERS)	45%	↓
VOLUNTEER NUMBERS DOWN VS YA	56%	↓
EASY TO RECRUIT	77%	↑
'ADVANCED/INTEGRATED SYSTEMS'	83%	↑

EASY TO GIVE APPROPRIATE TRAINING % AGREE

DON'T HAVE A STRATEGY	31%	↓
6+ PAID STAFF	64%	↑
'ADVANCED/INTEGRATED SYSTEMS'	66%	↑
USE TECH EFFECTIVELY	64%	↑

USE TECHNOLOGY EFFECTIVELY % AGREE

VOLUNTEER NUMBERS DOWN VS YA	25%	↓
LARGE/VERY LARGE	51%	↑
USE A VMS	66%	↑

ADVANCED / INTEGRATED SYSTEMS % AGREE

STAND ALONE VOLUNTEER STRATEGY	43%	↑
USE A VMS	46%	↑

Taken together, these findings describe an integration advantage. The same group of organisations tends to pull ahead on several fronts at once: they have a strategy, they use a VMS, they reward and train their volunteers well, they use technology effectively, and (as Part 5 shows) they are also the ones experimenting with AI.



It's inspiring to see how much people will give freely to help make their communities happier and more resilient.

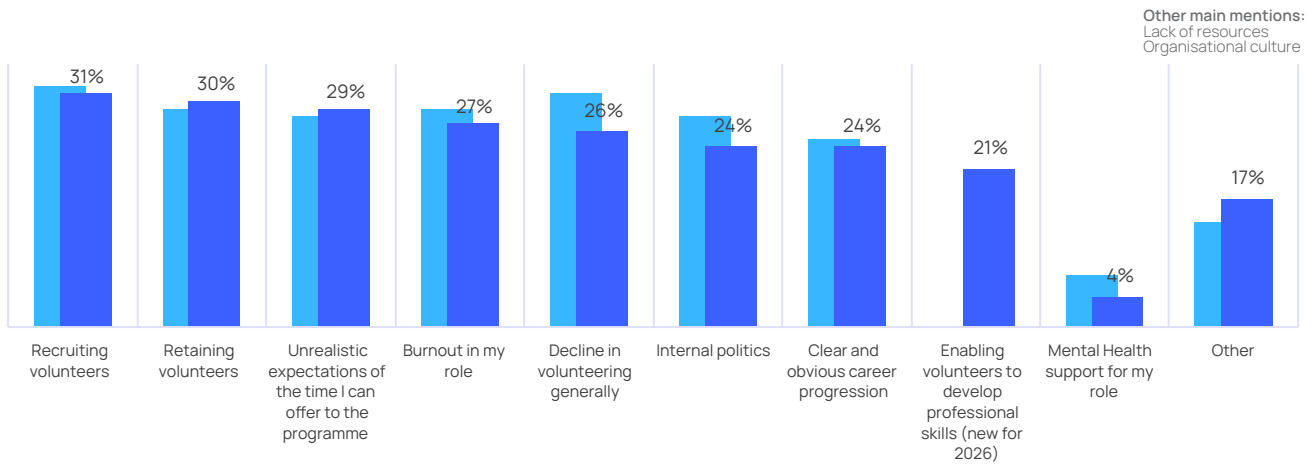
– Volunteer Manager

No single challenge – and the ranking changes with size

There is no one dominant challenge in volunteer management. Recruiting volunteers (31%), retaining them (30%), unrealistic expectations of the time managers can give (29%), burnout (27%) and a general decline in volunteering (26%) are all cited by more than a quarter of respondents, with internal politics, career progression and developing volunteers' professional skills close behind.



Main challenges



The more revealing story is how the ranking of challenges changes by organisation size. Small organisations are most stretched by unrealistic expectations on their time and a perceived general decline in volunteering. Medium organisations are most focused on recruitment and retention. Large organisations worry about clear career progression and burnout.

The very largest are most concerned with retention and internal politics. Only one challenge appears in the top three for organisations of every size: recruiting volunteers. It is the universal concern – everything else depends on how big you are.

There is a practical takeaway here, particularly for the support that senior leaders offer to volunteer managers: generic **'how to manage volunteers'** advice will always half-miss. For example, a small organisation needs help protecting its one stretched coordinator's time; whereas a very large one needs help with navigating the politics of a big team.

What would you say are the main challenges in your role?

RANKING	SMALL (≤40) N=73	MEDIUM (>40 ≤150) N=73	LARGE (>150 ≤600) N=64	VERY LARGE (>600) N=35
1ST	Unrealistic expectations on my time	Recruiting volunteers	Clear/obvious career progression	Retaining volunteers
2ND	General decline in volunteering	Retaining volunteers	Burnout	Internal Politics
3RD	Recruiting volunteers	Clear/obvious career progression	Recruiting volunteers	Recruiting volunteers
4TH	Enabling vols to develop professional skills	Burnout	Recruiting volunteers	Unrealistic expectations on my time
5TH	Retaining volunteers	Unrealistic expectations on my time	Unrealistic expectations on my time	General decline in volunteering
6TH	Burnout	Internal Politics	Internal Politics	Burnout
7TH	Clear/obvious career progression	General decline in volunteering	General decline in volunteering	Enabling vols to develop professional skills
8TH	Internal Politics	Enabling vols to develop professional skills	Enabling vols to develop professional skills	Clear/obvious career progression

Part 5: Software and AI

– a sector at the starting line

If integrated systems are what separate the best volunteer experiences, where does the sector stand on technology? Early on the journey, is the short answer.

Just under half use a volunteer management system

48% of organisations now use a volunteer management system (VMS), up slightly from 44% in 2025. Adoption is heavily tied to size: among the very largest organisations roughly three-quarters use one, against only around a quarter of the smallest. In practice, a VMS tends to arrive once an organisation passes around 150 volunteers – the point at which spreadsheets stop coping. The benefits organisations look for from a VMS are revealing. Top of the list are compliance – having clear oversight of every volunteer (82%) – and efficiency, reducing workload on in-house teams (81%), followed by measuring impact (73%) and improving the volunteer experience (65%).

Benefits of VMS



It's worth highlighting that the single biggest reason organisations want a VMS is compliance and oversight – yet half of those without one are running their volunteer programmes on spreadsheets, which offer almost none of that oversight, audit trail or safeguarding assurance. There's a clear opportunity here, between what organisations say they need and the tools many are actually relying on.

Where a VMS is absent, the barriers are practical rather than philosophical: 55% say the financial investment simply isn't available, 34% lack the capacity to research and procure a system, and a smaller group find it too hard to convince leadership or feel they are too small to need one.

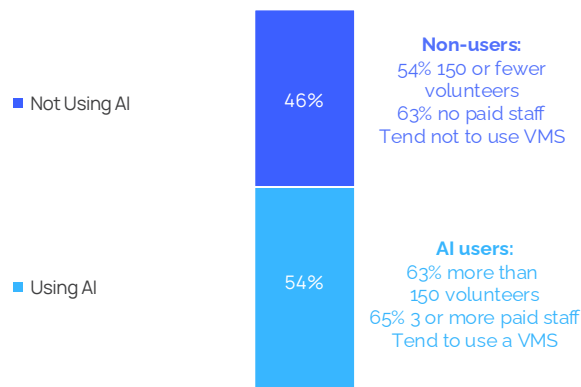
If you're interested in kickstarting the process to choose a VMS.

[Download our free guide](#)

AI has arrived – but only just

Just over half of organisations (54%) now use AI in some form, with the rest not yet using it at all. As with a VMS, AI users skew larger and better-staffed: 63% have more than 150 volunteers and 65% have three or more paid staff, while non-users tend to be smaller, with no paid staff and no VMS.

AI Usage



What stands out is how narrow the use is. AI is being used almost entirely for writing copy: volunteer role descriptions (51%), volunteer communications (48%) and social media posts (42%). Uses that would genuinely change the work – analysing volunteer feedback to spot patterns (23%), creating impact reports (27%) or matching volunteers' skills to roles (a mere 2%) – remain rare.

AI Uses (% of AI users)



In other words, the sector has so far pointed AI at the easiest, lowest-value task – drafting text – and barely touched the things that could really move the needle on recruitment, retention or impact measurement. That is not a criticism so much as a signpost: the upside still in front of volunteer managers is far larger than what they are currently getting from AI.

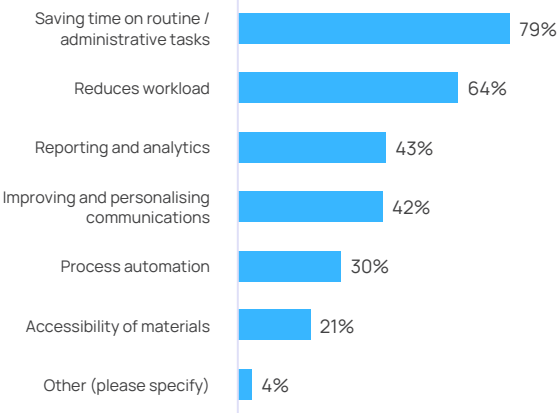
Among the organisations using AI, the benefits reported are overwhelmingly about efficiency: 79% say it saves time on routine tasks and 64% that it reduces workload. The concerns, meanwhile, are human. The single biggest worry – cited by 46% – is that over-reliance on AI could erode human judgement and relationships, followed by data protection and privacy (43%) and ethics (36%).

Attitudes are neutral – mostly because the sector as a whole hasn’t engaged yet

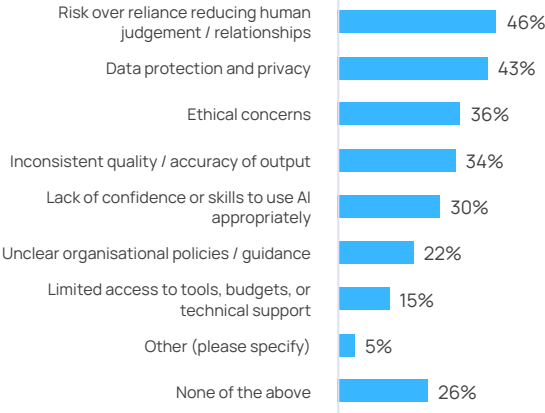
Overall, attitudes to AI in volunteer management are broadly neutral. AI users skew positive (49% positive) while non-users skew negative (36% negative), but the dominant response across the board is ‘mixed or unsure’.

Agreement that AI will actually help is low, and falls the closer you get to the heart of the role: even among AI users, 37% agree it will make recruitment easier, 35% that it will improve the volunteer experience, and just 17% that it will improve volunteer retention.

Benefits of AI (AI users only)



AI concerns/challenges



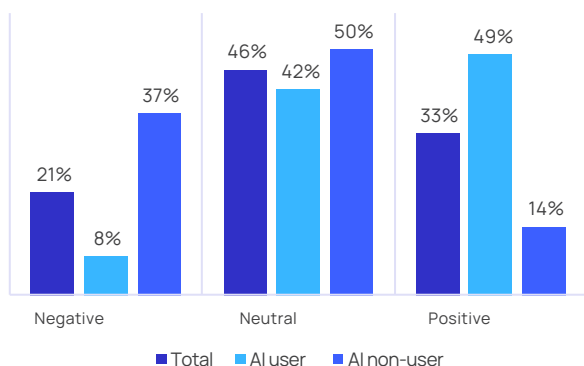
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I was particularly interested to see the relatively neutral attitude towards AI. In a sector that is often balancing limited resources with growing demand, AI has the potential to be a valuable tool. However, these findings suggest organisations are being thoughtful rather than rushing in. That’s encouraging, because while technology can support volunteering, it should never replace the human connection, empathy and sense of belonging that keep volunteers engaged.

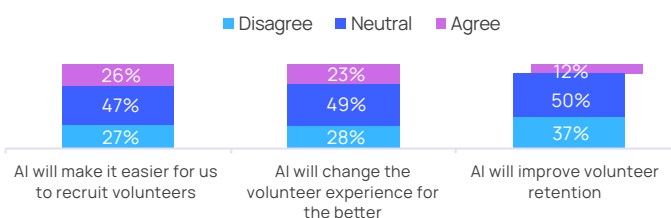
Victoria Dickinson, VA Consultancy



Attitude to AI



Agree or disagree?



The neutrality is telling – and surprising. By now, most other sectors have engaged with AI to the point where they're either excited or terrified by it. A 'neutral' attitude is probably the least common. This is driven by the fact that the sector that hasn't yet engaged enough with AI to form a view – many respondents seemed unsure how to answer at all. Most volunteer managers are neither chasing AI's full potential nor alarmed by its risks, simply because they aren't really using it yet.

The 26% of users who report no concerns at all point the same way: you can only weigh the risks once you've engaged with the tool. For context, AI adoption in volunteer management lags well behind neighbouring functions such as fundraising. Caution must be exercised with AI, but there is a clear opportunity in front of volunteer managers.

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Volunteers bring a lot of different perspectives and expertise – there's always something new to learn, and their enthusiasm is contagious!

– Volunteer Manager

Recommendations

The organisations getting the most from their volunteers in 2026 are not necessarily the biggest or the best-funded – they are the most joined-up. Five practical steps follow from this year's findings.

1. **HAVE A VOLUNTEER STRATEGY.** Even a simple one is enough. The data is clear that organisations without any strategy fall behind on almost every measure of volunteer experience, and that it makes little difference whether the strategy stands alone or sits within the wider plan. If you don't have one, that is the first thing you can do that will bring the biggest benefit.
2. **INVEST IN JOINED-UP SYSTEMS.** The single biggest predictor of a good volunteer experience this year was connected systems that let you see how volunteers interact with your whole organisation. If you are still on spreadsheets, you are missing the oversight and compliance you yourself say you need most.
3. **MATCH YOUR CHANNELS TO WHO YOU WANT TO REACH.** Word of mouth is powerful but conservative – it recruits more of who you already have. Organisations that want a younger volunteer base should invest in their website and digital application experience, which is the channel younger volunteers actually respond to.
4. **TREAT YOUR CHALLENGES AS SIZE-SPECIFIC.** There is no universal playbook. Protect your coordinator's time if you are small; focus on retention and team dynamics if you are large. Diagnose your size-specific challenge before reaching for generic advice.
5. **MOVE AI BEYOND WRITING.** Most organisations are using AI only to draft text. Start small but deliberately – with clear guidance on data and privacy – and explore the higher-value uses (feedback analysis, impact reporting, skills matching) where the real gains sit. The human relationships volunteer managers treasure are exactly what AI should free up time for, not replace.

Conclusion: Connected for Impact

Two years of data now tell a consistent story.

UK volunteering is resilient, valued and – this year – quietly optimistic.

Volunteers are more firmly mission-critical than ever, recruitment has eased, numbers are growing, and volunteer management is maturing into a department with its own seat at the table.

But the gains are not evenly shared. The organisations delivering the best volunteer experiences are the ones with a strategy, the right people and – above all – connected systems that let them understand and look after their volunteers as whole human beings. The organisations most in need of that lift are too often the least likely to have it. Closing that gap, not chasing the next shiny tool, is the work in front of the sector.

And through all of it runs the thing volunteer managers told us they love most: the people. The stories, the growth, the camaraderie, the genuine human connection. The promise of better systems and smarter tools is not to automate that away – it is to give the people who lead volunteers more time to do the part only they can do.

About Rosterfy

Rosterfy is proud to be a partner to the volunteering sector, supporting organisations as they scale their volunteer programmes, work more efficiently and improve the volunteer experience. Our platform helps connect people to the causes and communities they care about, with tools for recruitment, scheduling, communication and reporting, and a modern, app-based experience for volunteers themselves.

Our ability to gather insights like those in this report comes from working closely with the sector and a commitment to innovation that meets the real, evolving needs of volunteer management. Whether you manage 200 volunteers or 200,000, we're here to help you build a better volunteer experience.



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