



London Volunteering Health Check: All fit for 2012?

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY of a report for the London Development Agency

**By the Institute for Volunteering Research
with Greater London Volunteering**

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Introduction

In many ways volunteering is currently experiencing a bit of a boom. Millions of people volunteer across England each year. Government has never before paid it such an active interest, and the Olympics have sparked a new interest in it among the public, local government and other stakeholders. Alongside these developments there are, however, a number of challenges. The numbers of people getting involved in volunteering are stagnating. It is clear that not everyone is equally as likely to get involved in volunteering with a number of significant barriers to participation. Questions have also been raised about the capacity of the existing infrastructure to develop volunteering to its full potential and more specifically to meet the requirements of 2012.

It was within this context that this study was commissioned by the London Development Agency (LDA). The aims were to provide evidence on:

- a. The nature of volunteering in London;
- b. The provision of support for volunteers and the capacity of the local volunteering infrastructure in the capital.

The research involved five key elements:

- Secondary analysis of data on volunteering in London within national datasets, including the Citizenship Survey;
- Collation of local volunteering studies undertaken within boroughs;
- Mapping the volunteering infrastructure in London;
- A detailed audit and survey of London's Volunteer Centres;
- Interviews with 22 sector stakeholders.

Doing volunteering in London

Nearly three-quarters (72%) of London's population volunteered in some way over the year 2007-8; nearly half (46% did so on a regular basis).

One-quarter (23%) regularly volunteer in a group, club or organisation (formal volunteering). Informal volunteering (on a one-to-one basis) is more common than formal volunteering however, with one-third (36%) regularly taking part in informal volunteering.

Levels of volunteering in London have stayed static since the turn of the century: figures did rise slightly between 2001 and 2005, but have since dipped back down to 2001 levels.

Levels of volunteering in London are comparable to those in England as a whole, although Londoners are slightly less likely to volunteer than their counterparts from some other regions.

Not all Londoners are equally as likely to volunteer, although often the differences are not statistically significant:

- Women were slightly more likely to volunteer than men, although the difference is only significant for 'all volunteering'¹ (50% of female Londoners regularly took part in some form of volunteering, compared to 42% of male Londoners).
- Volunteering also varies by age, with 20-24 year olds being the least likely group to get involved (8% of 20-24 year olds in London took part in regular formal volunteering, compared to, for example, 24% of 16-19 year olds and 16% of 25-34 year olds).
- Ethnicity also makes a difference; although the differences are only significant with regards to formal volunteering at least once in the past 12 months. For example, Asian Londoners (32%) are less likely to engage in formal volunteering at least once a year than White (41%) or Black (43%) Londoners.
- Those who were active in their faith were more likely to volunteer than those who were not (18% of people with no faith were regular formal volunteers, compared to 22% who were religious but not actively so and 30% of people who were actively religious).
- Volunteering also varies according to whether or not someone has a qualification and by the level of qualification. For example, 28% of Londoners with a degree took part in regular formal volunteering compared to 10% of those with no qualifications.

¹ 'All volunteering' encompasses formal, informal and employer-supported volunteering

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Volunteers in London undertake a wide variety of roles. Among formal volunteers (those that help out in groups, clubs and organisations) raising and handling money (undertaken by 52% of regular formal volunteers) and organising or helping to run events (53%) were the most common activities.

Among informal volunteers (those that help out on an individual basis outside groups and organisations) giving advice (61% of regular informal volunteers) was the most common activity.

In terms of how Londoners get involved in volunteering, word of mouth was by far the most common route in. Volunteers were particularly likely to be recruited by others already involved in a group or organisation (55% got involved this way).

Some data is available on levels of volunteering within individual boroughs, with statistics of one kind or another found to exist in at least 20 of the 32 Boroughs. The data suggests that volunteering varies considerably between boroughs. However, this data is not consistent and it varies considerably in its quality. It provides a poor evidence base. At present, therefore, it is not possible to compare propensity to volunteer across London's boroughs.

Data is available for levels of regular formal sports volunteering across London's boroughs. The Active People Survey suggests that levels of this type of volunteering are relatively low in London compared to other regions.

Bexley was found to have the highest level of regular formal sports volunteering in London (5.3%), while Kensington and Chelsea was found to have the lowest (1.9%).

Supporting volunteering in London

There are over 150 organisations in London providing some kind of volunteering infrastructure function – whether that be brokerage, marketing, developing good practice, developing volunteering opportunities, policy response and campaigning, or strategic development of volunteering. Many of these organisations, however, have a wide range of other functions.

With organisations operating at national, regional, sub-regional and local levels; offering generalist and specialist services and with multiple lines of communication between them, the landscape of the volunteering infrastructure in London is relatively complex.

With a number of the national volunteering infrastructure organisations being based in London, a strong regional infrastructure body, several sub-regional networks and almost complete coverage at the local level, London is well covered in terms of volunteering infrastructure provision.

It seems there are considerable demands for volunteering infrastructure services. At the national level the biggest area of demand was reported to be for campaigning and representation. At the local level brokerage, capacity

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building and providing supported volunteering programmes were perceived to be the most in-demand functions.

At the local level, while there is a good geographical coverage, with 32 Volunteer Centres covering all but one borough, there is considerable disparity in terms of the resources available and the level of service provided:

- The median income for London's Volunteer Centres was just over £192,000. This varied, however, from £26,000 to £900,000. On average, Volunteer Centres had seven different funding streams for 2007/8; with 63% of funding for London's Volunteer Centres coming from the public sector (predominantly local government);
- On average, Volunteer Centres employ four full time and three part time staff. The number of full time staff, however, varied from 0 to 18.
- London's Volunteer Centres had more than 53,000 volunteering enquiries in the last year; an average of 1,715 each (143 each month).
- Certain groups of the population are more likely to make use of Volunteer Centres than others. Women are far more likely to enquire about volunteering through a Volunteer Centre than are men (72% of enquiries came from women).
- In general, however, Volunteer Centres are particularly effective at engaging with groups of people who tend to volunteer less or who are considered at risk of social exclusion. For example, while 20-24 year olds were the least likely age group to volunteer in London, Volunteer Centres were particularly successful at engaging with this age group (30% of enquiries came from 19-25 year olds). More than half of the enquiries received by Volunteer Centres were from BAME people looking to volunteer (57%).

There are nearly 9,000 opportunities for volunteers in London currently registered with Volunteer Centres; although the number of registered opportunities varied considerably (from 62 through to 639) between Centres.

Accurate figures do not exist for conversion rates (the proportion of people who enquire that go on to volunteer) as the many Volunteer Centres do not track and record the number of enquirers who go on to volunteer. Estimated figures ranged from 100 to 3,000 volunteers being placed by individual Volunteer Centres each year: a conservative average of 531 equates to over 16,000 volunteers being placed by Volunteer Centres in London last year. From estimates, figures suggest that for every three people who enquire about volunteering, one goes on to do so.

Volunteer Centres also provide a range of services for volunteer-involving organisations:

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- Over 8,500 volunteer-involving organisations are registered with 30 of London's Volunteer Centres; an average of 289 each. A total of 1,190 new organisations were registered with the 30 responding Volunteer Centres in the last financial year alone;
- Each Volunteer Centre trains representatives from an average of 72 volunteer-involving organisations each year. The training provided focused on different aspects of volunteer management, such as recruitment, support, supervision and developing volunteer policies;
- Each Volunteer Centre provides advice to an average of 80 volunteer-involving organisations each year; and holds forums for 45.

Conclusions and recommendations

Volunteering is alive and well in London, but not quite alive and kicking. In many areas there is cause for celebration, but there are also considerable challenges ahead for volunteering.

Millions of Londoners volunteer each year, carrying out a wide range of roles for groups, organisations and other individuals. Volunteers are supported in their helping out by a comprehensive network of volunteering infrastructure organisations. Indeed, London is relatively well covered (geographically) in terms of its national, regional, sub-regional and local volunteering infrastructure when compared to other regions around the country. Volunteer Centres deal with many thousands of enquiries from potential volunteers each year and help to place them in the many organisations registered with them.

There is a feeling, however, that the situation is somewhat fragile. Volunteering is not equal across all parts of London's population. Those aged 20-24 years old, for example, were notably under-represented in volunteering. While the volunteering infrastructure is comprehensive in its coverage across London, it involves a complex array of organisations and at the local level it is relatively fragile with many Volunteer Centres struggling to get the resources they required to work effectively.

Five key areas for development emerge from the research:

- 1 Consideration should be given to how best to increase access to volunteering; tackling barriers to ensure every Londoner has the opportunity to get involved:

The LDA/GLA/LC/Boroughs should consider:

- Supporting efforts to ensure volunteering is inclusive through identifying and tackling barriers to engagement;
- Providing leadership through encouraging their own staff to volunteer;
- Exploring further the 'demand' for more volunteers in London and, if necessary, the best ways to 'grow' volunteering;

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- Supporting the volunteering infrastructure in its work to broker opportunities and to create new ones;
- Working to develop new and inclusive volunteering opportunities within their own institutions.

Volunteering infrastructure organisations should consider:

- Strengthening their good practice function;
- Strengthening their developing opportunities function;
- Building on existing efforts and strengths in supporting the involvement of volunteers with extra support needs.

- 2 Consideration should also be given to strengthening the volunteering infrastructure, filling the few remaining gaps, then working towards sustainable funding, enhancing partnership working and simplifying communications channels:

The LDA/GLA/LC/Boroughs should consider:

- Understanding, recognising, valuing and promoting all six core functions of the volunteering infrastructure;
- Facilitating, supporting and participating in regional and sub-regional networking and partnership working for volunteering;
- Ensuring Volunteer Centres receive sustainable funding;
- Supporting the provision of training for the development of leadership and management skills across the volunteering infrastructure.

Volunteering infrastructure organisations should consider:

- Continuing to campaign for sustainable funding;
- Ensuring complete geographical coverage at all levels;
- Enhancing the profile and understanding of what the volunteering infrastructure does, through reviewing, clarifying and communicating respective roles, activities and outcomes;
- Enhancing cooperation and partnership to reduce duplication and reinvention of wheels;
- Streamlining channels of communication and linkage;
- Developing a clear 'customer care' package for the local volunteering infrastructure;
- Ensuring adequate support is provided down through the infrastructure hierarchy;
- Strengthening leadership with all levels of the volunteering infrastructure.

- 3 Attention should be paid to strengthening the evidence base on volunteering in London. In particular, consideration should be given to creating robust and consistent measures for volunteering at a borough level and to enhancing the evidence base for the impact of volunteering and the volunteering infrastructure.

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LDA/LC/GLA/Boroughs should consider:

- Commissioning research to explore the views and experience of volunteers in London and to investigate the volunteer management capacity of London's volunteer-involving organisations, their demand for more volunteers and for the volunteering infrastructure;
- Commissioning research on the impact of volunteering;
- Commissioning in-depth research to explore the volunteering needs, experiences and barriers of particular minority groups in London;
- Strengthening the evidence base on volunteering at borough level;
- Supporting a strengthening of the evidence base on the effectiveness and impact of the volunteering infrastructure;

Volunteering infrastructure organisations should consider:

- Strengthening the evidence base on the effectiveness and impact of the volunteering infrastructure;
- Ensuring leadership is provided by national infrastructure on how to measure volunteering;
- Developing and cascading guidance, support, training and frameworks for monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment;

- 4 Attention should be given to getting London's volunteers and volunteering infrastructure ready for the Olympics; ensuring that the momentum built through the development of the volunteering strategy in 2006 is not lost:

LDA/LC/GLA/Boroughs should consider:

- Clarifying who is responsible for the volunteering legacy – pre, during and post Games;
- Confirming (and disseminating) LOCOG's adoption of the Olympics Volunteering Strategy;
- Providing clarity on the role of volunteering infrastructure in supporting the Games time volunteer programme;
- Ensuring that the initial momentum that was built around the planning of the volunteering strategy is not lost;
- Coordinating efforts of individual boroughs in the production of local Olympics Volunteering Strategies;

Volunteering infrastructure organisations should consider:

- At the national and regional level, providing leadership on the involvement and role of the volunteering infrastructure in the Olympics, influencing LOCOG and other key strategic partners while also acting as the link to the local infrastructure;
- Developing the 'case' for the involvement of the volunteering infrastructure in the recruitment of Games time volunteers;

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- 5 Finally, consideration should be given to producing a volunteering strategy for London which could then be cascaded down to sub-regional and local levels:

LDA/LC/GLA/Boroughs should consider:

- Identifying a volunteering lead or champion within each of the named regional bodies and within each borough authority;
- Developing a volunteering strategy for London, providing a framework for future borough level strategies;
- Ensuring that there is cross-fertilisation between boroughs developing volunteering strategies;

Volunteering infrastructure organisations should consider:

- Influencing and working with key public sector stakeholders to facilitate the development and implementation of volunteering strategies.

A full copy of the report can be downloaded from IVR's website at www.ivr.org.uk Alternatively, please email ivr@volunteeringengland.org to request a copy.