

GIVERS

A glance at the myths, motivations and barriers behind volunteering in sport



Join In and Simetrica carried out a comprehensive review of the behavioural science behind volunteering and, in particular, volunteering in sport in 2016. The result is GIVERS, an evidence-based tool which transforms raw data on over 300,000 volunteers into a set of easy-to-use, practical steps that will help organisations recruit, retain and reward volunteers.

A huge misunderstanding

Sport organisations currently face a major hurdle in volunteer recruitment. One issue is that **55% of the public don't realise community sports clubs rely on and are run by volunteers.**

An enormous opportunity

When people do know about volunteering in sport there are also some misconceptions. **Commonly people cite a lack of physical fitness, sport knowledge and skills as a major barrier (26%) to getting involved.** There's a perception that you have to be fit and sporty to volunteer in sport. In reality, the volunteer roles that clubs most need filling are in fundraising, marketing and digital.

Don't ask, don't get

While most people hear about volunteering opportunities via word of mouth (always the best form of marketing), almost as many (36%) looked for volunteer opportunities specifically in sport online and on social media. This compares with only 21% of people who looked for general volunteer opportunities online.

Sport volunteering is younger and more digital. Surprisingly, only 15% of people who do volunteer in sport found out about their opportunity from their club directly asking them, while **16% of people say the reason they don't volunteer is, very simply, that they have not been asked.**

Sport volunteers do more volunteering and enjoy it more

Once people are involved they'll most likely have a great time volunteering: **60% of volunteers say they help out in sport because they enjoy it**, a figure 7% greater than for volunteers overall. They are also more likely to say they would volunteer more if they had more time (46% of sports volunteers compared to 31% of volunteers overall).

But, are sports volunteers taken for granted and burned out?

Despite loving what they do and doing more, sports volunteers are far more likely than other volunteers to stop volunteering. A massive 32% stopped or reduced their volunteering in the last year compared with 17% of general

volunteers. We have some clues as to why: **18% dropped out or reduced their volunteering because they felt their club was badly organised** and 19% felt it was someone else's turn to step in.

The concept of time and some good news

When asked, **42% of people cite the reason they volunteer in sport is to fill spare time.** Others when asked say they don't volunteer because they don't have the time. Clearly time is both one of the biggest motivations but also one of the biggest barriers and even though the research says people enjoy volunteering in sport, it needs to be clear in messaging what the benefits are to volunteers from joining in.

Good news

The benefits of volunteering in sport are available in abundance and contribute more to wellbeing than any other type of volunteering. Different groups benefit for different reasons. For example, women from lower socio-economic groups have the most to gain from the happiness they get from volunteering in sport and are also more keen to use their existing skills and develop new ones.

Overleaf we present GIVERS: six practical principles that apply to all volunteering in sport. It is an evidence-based approach to increasing, and retaining more volunteers.

G Growth (and wellbeing)

One of the biggest motivations for and benefits from sport volunteering is its impact on wellbeing, health, life satisfaction and sense of purpose – both Hidden Diamonds and this new research proves this applies more so to sport than other sectors. (We even found that volunteering in sport brought 25% of the happiness and wellbeing benefits of being married!) This is not a well-known fact, and yet 13% of people say they would volunteer in sport if it was proven to improve happiness. Awareness of and emphasis on the wellbeing benefits of volunteering provide an important tool to recruiting new volunteers.

E Experience (and ease)

One of the major findings from this research is the importance of improving the 'delivery gap' on sports volunteers. They are overworked and feel under-appreciated by the clubs, groups and organisations to which they give their time. The 'peak experience' for any volunteer is crucial - make sure you create a big, positive, memorable moment in their day, it's what they will remember and come back for.

The other finding is that online recruitment is even more important for sports volunteers and those interested in volunteering in sport. Making volunteering opportunities easy to find and join in with is crucial.

I Impact

A large part of the wellbeing gains from volunteering are in feeling a greater sense of purpose. National-level data shows that regular, formal volunteering has a more significant and positive effect on wellbeing than other types of volunteering. Quite possibly the regularity enables the volunteer to see the impact of their volunteering as the club or project develops. Older age groups in particular want to see this. Making sure that the volunteers see, feel and understand the impact of their volunteering is vital to retaining their valuable gift of time.

R Recognition (in order to retain)

Volunteers in sport need to be better recognised and rewarded. We need to communicate the impact of their work, especially to men, as a huge 32% of sports volunteers report stopping or reducing their volunteering in the last 12 months – based on the 5.6 million sports volunteers in the UK, this is a potential loss of 1.79 million annually. A simple 'Thank You' is the least we can all do but making this integral to the 'peak experience' (see above) could be the most effective.

V Voice (and messaging)

Some of the key messages to come out of this research are – 'you don't have to be fit or sporty to help out in sport' and that 'volunteering in sport makes you happier'. Reflecting this in who makes the ask and what they say, should lead to more people responding to recruitment drives. Words, colours, pictures and people are incredibly important in a person's decision to volunteer. This is an area that is easily overlooked and it is important to invest time and effort to get this right.

S (Sport is...) Social

Volunteers in sport are up to six times more likely than general volunteers to be motivated by the social benefits of volunteering (meet new people, make new friends, share experience with friends). 13% of sports volunteers would volunteer more if they thought it would help them to meet new people. We can also link this to the Growth and wellbeing element of GIVERS in sport as those social connections are a crucial part of emotional wellbeing. In very simple terms – show your opportunity as involving lots of happy, smiling people.

We would love to hear how clubs and groups across the UK implement these tips. Drop us a line at joinin@sportandrecreation.org.uk with your stories.