

# Drivers in demand for volunteers

Qualitative research

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# Contents

Executive summary	1
1 Introduction	6
1.1 Context and research questions	6
1.2 Methodology	6
1.2.1 Research design	6
1.2.2 Stakeholder interviews	6
1.2.3 Volunteer focus groups	8
1.3 Interpreting the insights	9
1.4 Structure of the report	9
2 Drivers in demand for volunteers	10
2.1 What drives demand for volunteers?	10
2.1.1 Individual support needs	10
2.1.2 Wider community needs	11
2.1.3 Organisational views on the value of volunteers	12
2.2 How does demand vary across the year?	13
2.2.1 Seasons and associated weather conditions	13
2.2.2 School holidays	13
2.2.3 Seasonality not affecting variation	14
2.3 COVID-19 and demand	14
2.3.1 Decrease in demand for volunteers	14
2.3.2 Increase in demand for volunteers	15
2.3.3 Responding to COVID-19, lockdown and demand for volunteers	16
2.3.4 Sustaining demand for volunteers after lockdown	17
3 Supply of volunteers	18
3.1 The availability of volunteers	18
3.1.1 Responsibilities and commitments	18
3.1.2 Making volunteer roles more accessible and inclusive	19
3.2 Visibility of volunteer roles	20
3.2.1 Varying visibility of volunteer roles	20
3.2.2 Promoting and publicising volunteer roles	21
3.2.3 Reframing volunteering	21
3.3 Personal interest and experiences	21
3.4 Seasonality and time of year	22
3.5 Impact of COVID-19 on volunteer supply	23
3.5.1 Decreased availability of volunteers	23

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3.5.2 Increased availability of volunteers	24	
3.5.3 Increased visibility of volunteering during the pandemic	24	
3.5.4 Personal interests and motivations	25	
3.6 Harnessing and managing new volunteers from the pandemic	25	
3.7 The future of volunteering	26	
<b>4 Conclusions</b>		<b>28</b>
<b>Appendix A. Topic Guides</b>		<b>31</b>
<b>Tables</b>		
Table 1-1 Stakeholder achieved sample		7
Table 1-2 Group composition		8
Table 1-3 Diversity in other characteristics across groups		8

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# Executive summary

## Introduction

The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) commissioned the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) to conduct an exploratory study into what drives demand for volunteers across England. The aim was to gather evidence to better understand trends in volunteering. As part of this, the supply of volunteers was also considered. The focus was on formal volunteering, where individuals had given unpaid help to a group, club or organisation. The research considered two key research questions:

- What drives demand for volunteers and the support they provide, and how does this vary across the calendar year?
- How have restrictions under COVID-19 affected these drivers?

Insights from this research will support ongoing responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and DCMS' future volunteering policy.

## Research approach

The study used a qualitative approach comprising: (a) twelve interviews with organisations who either supported volunteering or worked with volunteers, and (b) three focus groups with a total of twelve volunteers. Interviews were conducted with the following types of organisations: (1) local authorities; (2) local voluntary, community and social enterprises (VCSEs); (3) volunteer involving organisations (VIOs); and (4) community groups. The interview sample included national organisations and those working across the South East/London, the Midlands, North East, Yorkshire and the South West. Participants were strategic or operational staff responsible for managing volunteering or volunteers within their organisation. Volunteers who took part in a focus group had been involved in formal volunteering at least once since January 2020 and were recruited from two regions: the North West and West Midlands. The three groups took place sequentially and were segmented according to how regularly the participants had volunteered, and whether they had started volunteering before or during the pandemic. This report presents insights from both the stakeholder interviews and volunteer groups.

## Demand for volunteers

Organisations working with volunteers reported delivering a wide variety of *types* of volunteering activities, ranging from welfare and social support to sports and education activities. The research highlighted the role of volunteers in helping to support a) the delivery of existing services provided by the public sector and b) the work of charitable organisations who involved volunteers in their work.

The demand for volunteers was driven by three key factors:

- **Individual support needs** – organisations reported needing volunteers to meet the needs of various population groups. This included meeting welfare needs for those who were financially struggling (e.g. food banks); social support needs for those that were socially disconnected (e.g. befriending services), particularly during the pandemic; and the transport needs of those who could not access important services (e.g. community transport activities).

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- **Wider community needs** – this was where organisations required volunteers to support the delivery of public services and amenities. This included contributing to local health service provision (e.g. helping in hospitals), culture and recreation industries (e.g. tourism) and helping with environmental conservation (e.g. maintaining outdoor spaces).
  - **Organisational views of the value of volunteers** – organisations recognised the potential for volunteers to enrich service delivery because they were independent of statutory services and they brought their lived experience of an issue. In addition, demand for volunteers was high where volunteering was important to an organisations' service delivery ethos or where it enabled them to fulfil a statutory requirement, such as the provision of Independent Visitors<sup>1</sup>.

Seasonality was not a major consideration for newly established organisations and those supporting volunteering in their community, rather than directly involving volunteers in delivery. However, where seasonal variation was noted, organisations provided two reasons for this:

- **Weather conditions** - organisations reported seasonal variations in demand where population needs and behaviours were affected by cold or hot weather conditions. For example, needing volunteers in the winter to help vulnerable groups such as older people and homeless people who were particularly affected by the cold, or to organise charity fundraising events during the summer.
- **School holidays** – holiday periods had a differing impact on the demand for volunteering, which varied by sector. They increased demand for certain sectors, for example, food banks needed more help to support children who relied on school meals. However, holidays decreased demand for other sectors, for example the need for volunteers to operate school transport.

### **Responding to COVID-19 and lockdown**

Organisations also reported that the pandemic had affected demand both in terms of the *type and level* of support they needed. It decreased the level of demand where organisations had to pause their volunteering activities because of lockdown and social distancing regulations, particularly during the first lockdown.<sup>2</sup> Conversely, it increased the demand for particular types of volunteering where existing needs, such as loneliness and isolation, increased during lockdown and new practical and emotional support needs emerged from individuals having to shield and self-isolate (e.g. delivering food or medicines). Organisations used two strategies to respond to the increase in demand associated with COVID-19: developing new partnerships between community groups and other frontline organisations and redeploying existing volunteers to new roles (e.g. volunteers in the health sector pivoting to provide support to the vaccination programme).

### **Supply of volunteers**

Four factors drove the supply of volunteers. These were:

**Volunteer availability relative to other commitments** – availability was determined by individuals' responsibilities and other commitments such as employment, studies, childcare and care for others. Influenced by their commitments, participants across the study observed that supply of volunteers fell into two patterns:

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<sup>1</sup>The role of Independent Visitor was created under the Children's Act (1989) to befriend children and young people in care. Independent Visitors are adult volunteers who give up some of their free time to take a special interest in a child or young adult, especially those placed in a residential setting who would benefit from a more individualised relationship.

<sup>2</sup>The first lockdown was introduced on the 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020. Restrictions included not being able to leave the home unless for shopping for necessities, exercise, medical need, and work where absolutely necessary.

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(1) *Regular volunteering*: associated with people with fewer commitments. An exception to this was individuals who had started to volunteer during the pandemic, despite having considerable work and other commitments. Flexible working practices, such as working hours, and being able to work at home during the pandemic helped these individuals to manage their commitments so that they could volunteer.

(2) *Occasional, one-off or ad hoc volunteering*: associated with people with more commitments.

Stakeholders across all sectors reported that volunteers were primarily people aged 60 and above, who were usually retired and who had more free time; and young adults, usually students, who were seeking to gain skills related to their academic or vocational interests.

**The visibility or public awareness of volunteering and types of volunteer roles** – the supply of volunteers was affected by the extent to which volunteering, and different types of volunteer roles were prominent in public consciousness. For example, food banks often had a surplus of volunteers interested in a front-line role, but struggled to find people to fill coordinating, management or administrative roles. Promoting and publicising less visible roles was seen to be vital. But organisations sometimes lacked the funding to advertise them, and the resources to manage and coordinate the resulting supply. There were also calls from organisations working with volunteers for the concept of volunteering to be reframed to attract volunteers. For instance, for volunteering to be promoted in terms of the *mutual benefits* of volunteering, and its *empowering* aspects, rather than being referred to as unpaid work.

**Personal interests, experiences and motivations** – the stakeholder interviews and volunteer discussions noted both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations in the supply of volunteers, although they were not always mutually exclusive. *Intrinsic motivations* were where individuals were driven by personal interests, values, connections and past experiences (e.g. volunteering for a cancer charity because of having previously had cancer or supporting someone with cancer; or having a faith and volunteering at a faith-based school or charity). *Extrinsic motivations* were explicitly related to the needs of others, and the wider community or society. Being able to see the impact of their work, and feeling they were making a difference, was therefore vitally important for volunteers motivated by extrinsic concerns.

**Seasonality and the time year** – according to stakeholders, the winter months of December and January saw the greatest interest in volunteering. This was associated with helping elderly people and the homeless during the colder months, the ‘Christmas spirit’ and its association with charitable giving. It was also connected with New Year’s resolutions when people wanted to help others, develop a new focus in their life, or gain new skills. Interest from young adults peaked in September, at the start of the new academic year. By contrast, there was a drop in interest in volunteering during the summer months of July and August, when people wanted to enjoy the warm weather and time off from studies or work. Organisations working with volunteers ran campaigns to take advantage of peaks in interest in volunteering, but also emphasised the need for continuous recruitment to cope with troughs in supply. Further research on how volunteering is influenced by seasonal events and festivals across different cultures and religions is important to fully understand trends.

It was noted that people who offered to volunteer wanted to get started as soon as possible. The processes necessary to get them onboard (such as training or DBS checks), while necessary for safeguarding in some roles, sometimes did not reflect the voluntary activities that people ended up doing in others. This acted as a barrier to supply and to retention of volunteers.

Several strategies were suggested to increase the supply of volunteers, and for making volunteering more inclusive. These involved:



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- *Building a bank or network of volunteers* – this was a strategy employed by organisations such as mutual aid groups, that involved people initially offering small amounts of time or skills, and then being matched to demand as required. This allowed a wider range of people to get involved in volunteering and for people to build a commitment to volunteering over time.
  - *Advanced warning to volunteers to let them know when they were needed* – this worked better for people who had other commitments, allowing them to plan when they volunteered, and achieve a better balance between voluntary activities and other aspects of their lives.
  - *Providing more opportunities for online and remote volunteering* – this enabled organisations to involve people who had busy lives, or who found it difficult to travel to a specific place to volunteer.

## The impact of COVID-19 on volunteer supply

The COVID-19 pandemic affected the drivers of supply in different ways, as a result of national lockdowns, stay at home and self-isolation instructions, and shielding guidance.

**Availability of volunteers** – there was a decrease in in-person volunteering due to lockdown restrictions, the fear of infection among older people and people with long-term health conditions, and additional caring responsibilities (e.g. looking after family or friends shielding or children due to school closures). However, the supply of volunteers also increased because of flexible working practices during the pandemic (discussed above), as well as the disruption in some employment sectors, and the availability of working age people who were furloughed as part of the Government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.<sup>3</sup>

**Increased visibility of volunteering** – media coverage of the pandemic, and a sense that people had a common cause, meant that voluntary organisations reported a strong sense of duty among the public to respond. This was also facilitated by the development of mutual aid groups in neighbourhoods. Stakeholders stated that the increased visibility of volunteering in the public consciousness was an opportunity that should not be lost.

**Personal interests and motivations** – views differed as to the way in which the pandemic influenced personal interests and motivations to volunteer. One view was that there was a shift in public attitudes towards being more selfless and aware of the needs of others. This was particularly evident in the actions of those who provided people in need with practical help such as shopping and support dealing with isolation and loneliness. An alternative view, however, was that the pandemic had negatively affected personal interests and motivations to volunteer, attributed to stay at home orders, social distancing, and ongoing fears of infection.

Participants also provided insights into how the unprecedented interest in volunteering from the pandemic could be harnessed. Organisations emphasised the importance of partnership work between established voluntary organisations and new mutual aid networks. Supply and demand for volunteer services was matched by some mutual aid organisations and local authorities that used databases to link offers of time and skills to the specific needs of beneficiaries. More established organisations were able to offer less experienced ones their skills in volunteer coordination, basic training, the safeguarding of volunteers and recipients of services.

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<sup>3</sup> The Job Retention Scheme was introduced in March 2020 in response to the Coronavirus pandemic. The scheme meant that employers who were unable to maintain their workforce because their operations had been affected by COVID-19 could furlough employees and apply for a grant to cover a portion of their usual monthly wage costs.

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Post pandemic, organisations were hopeful that the surge in the number of volunteers, often coming from diverse backgrounds, would be sustained. To help them achieve this, they felt they needed to capitalise on the high profile of volunteering during the lockdown and to have the types of flexible and responsive approaches to volunteering outlined earlier, such as building a flexible bank of volunteers. They also felt that further funding was needed to enable community and voluntary networks to continue to work alongside statutory organisations to deliver services.

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Context and research questions

The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) commissioned the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) to conduct an exploratory study into what drives demand for volunteers across England as part of its work to gather evidence to better understand trends in volunteering. As part of this, the supply of volunteers was also considered. The study focused on formal volunteering, where individuals give unpaid help to a group, club or organisation.

The research considered two key research questions:

- What drives demand for volunteers and the support they provide, and how does this vary across the calendar year?
- How have restrictions under COVID-19 affected these drivers?

The insights from this research will support ongoing responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and DCMS' future volunteering policy.

## 1.2 Methodology

### 1.2.1 Research design

A qualitative approach involving both volunteering organisations (stakeholders) and volunteers was used to meet the exploratory aims of the study. Fieldwork took place between February and March 2021 and involved:

- **Twelve in-depth interviews with strategic or operational staff** ('stakeholders') responsible for the organisation as a whole and/or formal volunteering in organisations.
- **Three focus groups with volunteers** to discuss patterns of volunteering and the motivations of people who volunteer.

Stakeholders and volunteers were selected using purposive sampling, a marker of quality in qualitative research<sup>4</sup>. This meant selection was guided by a set of primary and secondary criteria to capture a diversity of views and experiences across different formal volunteering organisations and types of volunteers. The sub-sections below outline the approach taken with each group of participants.

### 1.2.2 Stakeholder interviews

#### Sampling and recruitment

Table 1-1 shows the way in which stakeholders were selected to capture potential diversity in experiences by organisation type and region.

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<sup>4</sup>Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., Nichols, C. M., and Ormston, R. (2014). *Qualitative Research in Practice*. Second edition. Sage: London.

The organisations we spoke to included local authorities who used volunteers to support paid staff in delivering services, organisations who supported volunteering in their local community and acted as a brokerage service and those with a charitable purpose who worked directly with volunteers. The organisations spanned different types of volunteering activities, including social support and welfare (e.g. befriending services), healthcare (e.g. first aid), food provision (e.g. food banks), as well as sports and youth services.

**Table 1-1 Stakeholder achieved sample**

<i>Primary criteria</i>		<i>Achieved sample</i>
Organisation type	Local authorities (LAs)	2
	Local Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprises (VCSEs)	3
	Volunteer-Involving Organisations (VIOs)	4
	Community groups	3
Region	South East	2
	London	2
	South West	1
	North East	1
	East Midlands	1
	West Midlands	1
	Yorkshire and Humber	1
	National <sup>5</sup>	3

In addition to these primary criteria, type of area (urban/rural) and level of deprivation were also monitored as secondary criteria as these could potentially influence the demand for types of formal volunteering.

Stakeholders were identified through a web-based search using the National Council of Voluntary Organisations’ website alongside a general internet search to identify organisations across sectors and regions. Organisations were then approached, and participants selected from those that opted-in according to the selection criteria agreed with DCMS.

## Interview delivery

Stakeholder interviews were designed to be as convenient as possible for busy individuals to take part in. They were carried out by phone or online using Microsoft Teams software and lasted up to 45 minutes. Interviews tended to be one-to-one, but some paired interviews were also conducted where the organisation felt there was more than one person who could comment on volunteering patterns and drivers. A discussion guide was developed in partnership with DCMS – this can be found in Appendix A.

<sup>5</sup>These were national organisations who worked across the UK. Most had a regional branch.

## 1.2.3 Volunteer focus groups

### Sampling and recruitment

Three focus groups were conducted, involving twelve participants in total (four in each group) from the North East of England and the West Midlands. These two regions were selected to ensure coverage of areas outside of London; there was limited scope to include further regional diversity, given this was a small-scale qualitative study. Two of the groups were with participants that had volunteered prior to the COVID-19 pandemic to reflect the focus of the study on understanding long-term patterns in volunteering. The final group was with participants who were new to volunteering insofar as they had begun volunteering since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Volunteers were recruited using a trusted external recruitment agency, who drew on their database of contacts to identify potential participants. This approach was taken as the study was conducted during a national lockdown and free-flow, street-based recruitment was not permitted.

To aid participants' recall of their volunteering patterns, only participants that were currently volunteering or had volunteered at least once since 2020 were included in the study. Provided this inclusion criterion was met, participants were then selected purposively according to whether they had started volunteering before or after the COVID-19 pandemic had begun and how regularly they volunteered. Gender, age and ethnicity were also monitored as secondary sampling criteria to capture potential diversity in experiences and views on volunteering patterns.

Table 1-2 summarises the group compositions. Groups were segmented by how regularly people volunteered so that participants had a shared experience of volunteering to facilitate the group dynamic and help them feel comfortable in being able to contribute to the discussion. Within each group we ensured there was diversity in their personal circumstances (such as age and gender) to bring out a full range of views (see Table 1-3).

Region	North West	2	2	2
	West Midlands	2	2	2
Regularity	Regular	4	0	2
	Occasional	0	4	2
Experience	Pre-pandemic	4	4	0
	Since pandemic	0	0	4

Gender	Female	7
	Male	5
Age	21-30	4
	31-40	2
	41-50	4

	61-70	2
Ethnicity	White British	10
	Asian (Bangladeshi)	1
	Asian (Indian)	1

## Focus group delivery

Focus groups took place online using Microsoft Teams software at times that were as convenient as possible to participants and lasted up to 60 minutes. They were moderated by two NatCen researchers, with discussion focusing on motivations for volunteering and the drivers underpinning why and when people volunteered. All participants received a £30 electronic high street voucher. The discussion guide used for the focus groups can be found in Appendix A.

## 1.3 Interpreting the insights

All interviews and focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis. The data were managed and analysed using NatCen’s Framework approach, which facilitates robust qualitative data management and analysis by case and theme<sup>6</sup>. The analysis focused on thematic understanding of the range and diversity of experiences related to the demand for, and supply of, volunteers, including during the pandemic. The report avoids giving numerical findings, since qualitative research cannot support numerical analysis. Instead, purposive sampling focuses on the range and diversity of experiences or views across the sample. Wider inference can be drawn on this basis.

In terms of diversity, the study managed to include a range of stakeholders and volunteers, as outlined in tables 1-1 and 1-2 above. However, there were potential limitations affecting the diversity in the achieved sample. For stakeholders, the study was able to include a limited number of individuals outside of the South East and London. For volunteers, the study was able to include only a limited number of volunteers from ethnic minority groups and religions.

## 1.4 Structure of the report

Following this introduction, **Chapter 2** discusses the drivers in the demand for volunteers from the perspective of stakeholders. **Chapter 3** explores the supply of volunteers in meeting these demands from the perspective of both volunteers and stakeholders. This includes understanding patterns of volunteering, the drivers underpinning these, and the strategies used by stakeholders to meet demand. **Chapter 4** concludes the report by bringing together the insights on demand and supply to address the research questions and highlight the implications that follow on from these.

<sup>6</sup>Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., Nichols, C. M., and Ormston, R. (2014). *Qualitative Research in Practice*. Second edition. Sage: London.

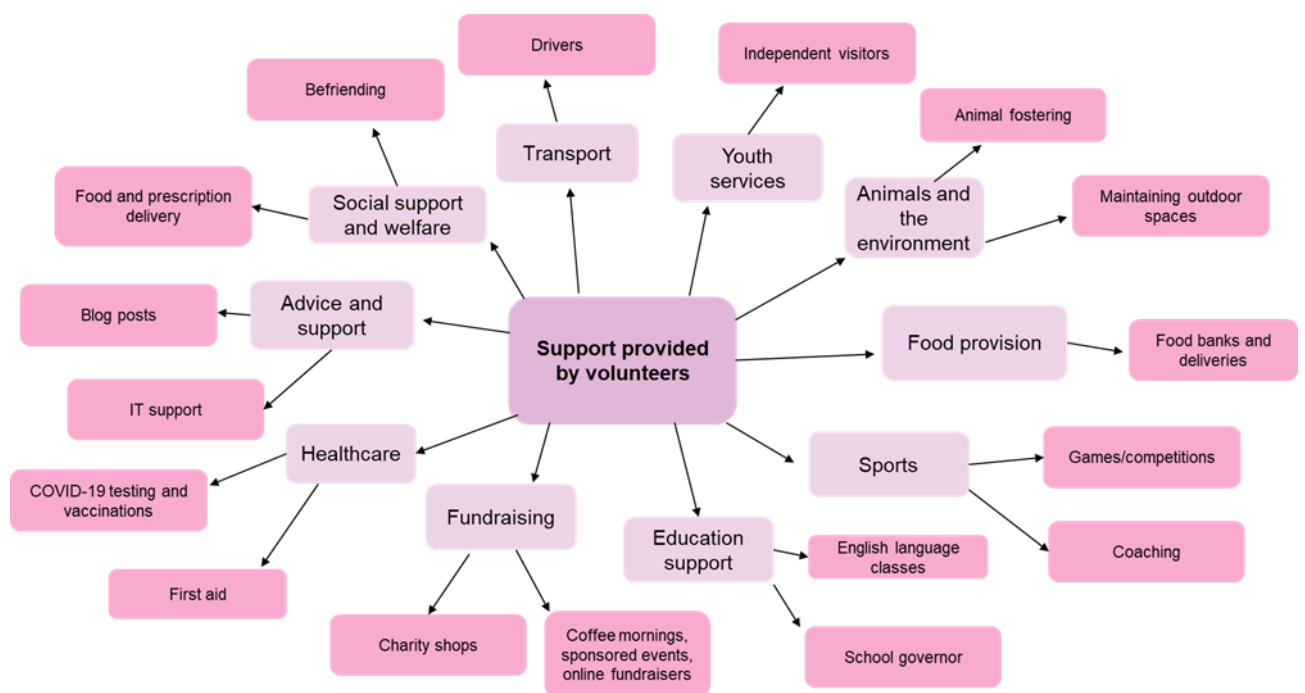
## 2 Drivers in demand for volunteers

This chapter explains the perceived drivers affecting demand for volunteers. Drawing largely on the stakeholder interviews, it explores the type and level of demands for volunteers, how these demands differed across a typical calendar year, and how they were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

### 2.1 What drives demand for volunteers?

Stakeholders framed the demand for volunteers in terms of the type and level of support they needed from them to deliver activities. Figure 2-1 presents the range of activities provided by organisations and volunteer participants across different sectors.

Figure 2-1 Support provided by volunteers



The range of different types of support illustrated in the figure above highlights the role of volunteers in:

- Helping to deliver existing services (such as local authority transport)
- Supporting the work of charitable organisations working to address issues such as food insecurity, arising from poverty and deprivation.

Demand for volunteers to help deliver services was driven by three key factors. These were 1) the support needs of individuals, 2) those of the wider community, and 3) the perceived value of volunteers to organisations. These drivers are discussed in turn in the sections below.



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## 2.1.1 Individual support needs

Stakeholders noted three broad types of individual needs that underpinned the demand for volunteers and the types of support they offered. These were: welfare, social support and transport needs.

**Welfare needs** of those who were financially struggling created demand for volunteers to support charities working to provide necessities, such as food. Stakeholders working in this sector observed a rise in need for their support, particularly over the last five years. This was attributed to increased levels of poverty corresponding to a decline in statutory support services. The comment by a stakeholder below was illustrative of this perceived pattern:

*“[T]here's not as many services to pick from, so I think people are coming to food banks sooner than they would have done ten years ago because no one else is able to catch them before they get to us.” (Stakeholder, VIO)*

Stakeholders stated that demand for food banks also varied geographically, with more deprived areas experiencing a higher demand. A community group in one of the most deprived areas in England supplied volunteers to their local food bank which a high proportion of the local population were dependent on. In contrast, a volunteer centre based in an affluent area stated that they had fewer roles to fill in services such as food banks, and instead it tended to be charity shops looking for volunteers.

There was also variation within areas, reflecting weekly and seasonal fluctuations in need. For example, a food bank charity reported predictable peaks in demand from families with children during the school holidays (discussed further in section 2.2.2). They also mentioned less predictable variations where some weeks were busier than others. It is possible that such variations reflect the unreliable nature of income for those in poverty, due to changes or delays to benefits being paid.

**Social support needs** related to those experiencing isolation and loneliness led to a demand for volunteers to help people feel more connected, through befriending schemes and social clubs. There were some specific population groups who this support was targeted at, including older people (over 65) and/or those living in large cities. Stakeholders said that a high level of isolation and loneliness was driving the need for this support, and noted that this had been exacerbated over the last year due to restrictions in social contact (discussed further in section 2.3). Stakeholders also reported seasonal variations in the support needed by the elderly living alone, with the demand for volunteers to provide social support higher over the winter months (discussed further in section 2.2.1)

**Transport needs** were evident where individuals required help to access services, such as healthcare or education. This need was especially pronounced in areas where transport options were more limited, costly, or in remote locations. The types of support provided in response to this need included a volunteer-led transport service set up by a Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) to help local people complete essential journeys, such as attending hospital appointments.

*“The demand arises from partly the nature of the area we live in, partly the cost of other forms of transport and availability of it.” (Stakeholder, VCSE)*

Local authorities also provided transport and used volunteers to deliver this service, partly because this enabled them to fulfil their responsibility to provide local transport options for vulnerable groups while also minimising costs.

## 2.1.2 Wider community needs

In addition to the support needs of specific groups, the demand for volunteering was informed and driven by the needs of wider communities. In particular, the need for



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volunteers to support the delivery of public sector services and local amenities, as shown in the following examples:

- **Health service** – demand for volunteers with clinical skills was driven by the needs of the health service and its users. They were needed to support paramedics and hospitals cope directly with emergencies, particularly during the winter. They also helped to reduce the number of people requiring emergency care, for example, by assisting at events with large crowds such as festivals, often in the summer. Health related volunteering had seen a large increase in demand over the last year with clinically trained volunteers needed to support the NHS during the pandemic (e.g. for the COVID-19 vaccination programme). These seasonal fluctuations and the perceived impact of COVID-19 are discussed in sections 2.2 and 2.3 below, respectively.
- **Culture and recreation industry** - tourism and recreation were driving demand for volunteers to support the culture and heritage industry, particularly in areas which were rich in attractions. The support needed included help in running cultural events and activities and providing support staff at attractions. Across a typical year, stakeholders reported demand for volunteers varied reflecting seasonal patterns in tourism, discussed further in section 2.2.
- **Environment** – local environmental issues created a need for volunteers to perform maintenance and improvement tasks, often as part of community conservation projects. Demand was also driven by the recognition that drawing on volunteers was a way to increase community engagement and improve access to the environment, whilst reducing the cost-burden of this on publicly funded services. This was illustrated by a project in one local authority which focused on fostering local residents' sense of responsibility by asking them to adopt and maintain small areas of land and footpaths.

### 2.1.3 Organisational views on the value of volunteers

A further driver in demand was organisational views on the value of volunteers in contributing to service delivery. Volunteers were in demand where services, and those who managed them, understood their value to enhance service delivery:

*"I think once you get people who understand how volunteers can really enrich what you can deliver, that's what drives the need for them if that makes sense."(Stakeholder, local authority)*

There were two main ways in which volunteers were seen to add value to public services:

- **Delivering support independent from public services and authorities:** for instance, a local authority who engaged volunteers as part of a project to increase the stability of foster care placements said that the beneficiaries appreciated that volunteers were independent from institutions and not paid to be there. This was encapsulated in the use of volunteers as Independent Visitors<sup>7</sup> for looking after children.
- **Having lived experience of an issue:** stakeholders spoke of the value of involving volunteers in delivery of support services where they had previous experience of the issue at hand, such as previous offending behaviour or being a victim of domestic abuse. They stated that beneficiaries were more likely to listen to advice

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<sup>7</sup>The role of Independent Visitor was created under the Children's Act (1989) to befriend children and young people in care. Independent Visitors are adult volunteers who give up some of their free time to take a special interest in a child or young adult, especially those placed in a residential setting who would benefit from a more individualised relationship.

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when delivered by volunteers who had similar experiences to them. As one participant put it: “...people listen more to people that have been through things” (Stakeholder, Community group).

Furthermore, demand was linked to organisational values and objectives. This was exemplified by a youth sports charity whose charitable mission was to equip young people with skills to volunteer in their local community. Rather than involving volunteers in delivery of a service, they provided young people with opportunities to volunteer, and considered the benefits for individuals, such as gains in confidence and skills, to be the main reason for doing so. A participant from this organisation said:

*“We don't use volunteers in a way that we need volunteers to run our activity; we develop leaders and volunteers to better themselves for the purpose of what we believe as an organisation.” (Stakeholder, VIO).*

## 2.2 How does demand vary across the year?

The demand for volunteers also varied for reasons to do with the seasons and associated weather conditions, as well as school holidays. However, some organisations found it difficult to comment on seasonal or time of year demands for volunteers, and the reasons for this are discussed below.

### 2.2.1 Seasons and associated weather conditions

Demand for volunteers was influenced by the colder weather in winter and the warmer weather in the summer. Winter was noted as a time of poorer health for the population due to cold temperatures and increased risk of illnesses (particularly respiratory conditions), especially for vulnerable groups, such as those living in poorly heated homes, the elderly, and homeless people. Organisations working with these groups needed volunteers to help provide warm clothing and to signpost beneficiaries to various forms of support with heating costs and emergency accommodation. Organisations who used clinically trained volunteers to help the health service cope with health and medical needs reported increased demand during the winter for these reasons.

Demand was also related to the actions of the public during the winter period when these needs were higher. Organisations distributing food to those in need reported increased demand for volunteers to help with managing food donations over the Christmas period. As one participant put it:

*“We also see a real spike in donations in November and December, and from a dignity perspective we will not give out Christmas food in January. Just being able to turn that food around really quickly and get it out the door kind of adds an extra crunch point.” (Stakeholder, VIO)*

Increases in demand for volunteers during the summer were in part because warmer weather allowed more outdoor activities such as sponsored runs, and the need for volunteers to support the tourism industry. However, this often occurred at the same time as a decrease in the supply of volunteers as people wanted to take advantage of the warmer weather during the summer holiday period from work and studies (see section 3.4).

### 2.2.2 School holidays

School holidays also affected demand for support from volunteers in different ways, depending on the sector. For example, food banks saw an increase in demand from families with children during the school holidays who relied on free school meals. On

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the other hand, organisations providing transport to schools saw a decrease in demand for school bus drivers: “...in the summer, when children aren't at school ... we don't need our drivers so much.” (Stakeholder, local authority)

## 2.2.3 Seasonality not affecting variation

However, seasonality was not a major consideration across the stakeholder sample, especially for local VCSEs and mutual aid groups. Local VCSEs found it difficult to reflect on seasonal fluctuations in demand. This might be because, unlike other stakeholders, they did not always directly work with volunteers. As a brokerage service (linking up volunteers with opportunities), they were, however, well placed to comment on seasonality as it related to availability of volunteers (discussed further in Chapter 3.4). In addition, the community mutual aid groups who took part in the study were unable to comment on typical seasonal variations as they had only been set up in March 2020 at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Where seasonality did influence demand, this was in response to changes in community needs which affected the *type* of support provided by volunteers, rather than the overall quantity of volunteers. Organisations discussed drawing on their existing network of volunteers to meet these needs. For this reason, seasonal fluctuations did not typically necessitate an increase in their volunteer base.

*“We don't have seasonal spikes of demand where we resource up. The only experiences we've had of that have been COVID.” (Stakeholder, VIO)*

## 2.3 COVID-19 and demand

### 2.3.1 Decrease in demand for volunteers

Many activities delivered by volunteers in our study were put on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic and especially during lockdowns, which led to a fall in the demand for volunteers. Stakeholder organisations already in existence when the pandemic started said there were several reasons for this:

- **Closure of services and activities:** lockdown rules either did not permit certain activities or meant they had to operate in new ways. Volunteers involved in supporting events or contributing to running venues, such as heritage attractions, charity shops and libraries, were not able to deliver these services. This significantly reduced the number of volunteers needed. For instance, one participant said:

*“Last year, pre-COVID, I put 137 volunteer roles on, new roles. This year, we have had a grand total of ten.” (Stakeholder, VCSE)*

Whilst this was the general picture, the easing on lockdown restrictions during the summer of 2020 drove an increase in demand for volunteers, especially for outdoor events where the risk of transmission of COVID-19 was lower.

- **Challenges faced in switching to remote working and online delivery:** VCSEs and local authorities highlighted that many services had not been taking on, or involving volunteers, due to the challenges associated with switching to remote volunteering and making workplaces COVID-safe. The former was demonstrated where volunteers performing administrative tasks for a volunteer centre had been unable to continue during the pandemic. This was because the database system they used was only compatible with certain devices, and the phone system could not be operated remotely without a handset, of which there were limited numbers.

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Another reason why volunteer engagement had been paused was due to the complexities of making volunteering safe during the pandemic. This was especially the case where volunteers enriched a service but were not necessarily vital to its delivery, such as with public libraries. As discussed by a local authority below, the priority was seen to be opening to the public in the first instance (as the library had been closed for so long) before making the workplace COVID-safe for the inclusion of volunteers:

*“...when the libraries opened up, they started to get their volunteers back in, but obviously, they needed to make sure that everything was COVID-safe for their staff. Then when they started opening up for members of the public, it was like opening to members of the public was the most important thing, rather than getting the volunteers back.” (Stakeholder, local authority)*

### 2.3.2 Increase in demand for volunteers

On the other hand, stakeholders noted an increase in demand for volunteering to deliver emergency support, as some existing needs among beneficiaries were exacerbated, and new needs emerged.

Existing needs and demand for volunteers increased in relation to health and wellbeing. Organisations providing health-related services saw an increase in demand for support from clinically trained volunteers to help the NHS cope with the first wave of infections, by providing extra ambulances or triage support in emergency departments. Those services that were already supporting people who felt isolated or lonely also saw increased demand for their services and volunteers due to lockdown restrictions and the closure of face-to-face support services and activities.

One local VCSE noted that mental health needs had become more prominent across different demographic groups, due to the restrictions on social contact which had increased isolation for groups that had perhaps not experienced this before.

*“I think lots of people have been put into that situation of not having that network around them because their network isn't allowed to travel or is isolating themselves. That need has widened. I just think there's an acknowledgement about demand for mental health support across the board really because I think, there's just a sense that there's a real fatigue across all age groups and all demographics in terms of managing.” (Stakeholder, VCSE)*

Organisations adapted existing services such as social clubs to take place online and, in some cases, launched virtual befriending schemes. Simultaneously, new community groups, such as mutual aid groups, were founded in response to lockdown restrictions announced in March 2020.

*“We set it up because we felt that there was going to be a need for people to be supported through lockdown.” (Stakeholder, Community group)*

Practical needs associated with lockdown restrictions and shielding guidance<sup>8</sup> resulted in an increased demand for volunteers. In particular, the fact that many people could not leave their home meant they required help with practical day to day tasks, such as shopping for food. This was especially the case when lockdown restrictions were first announced in March 2020, due to the unprecedented nature of the situation, fear of infection and shortages of essentials. Receiving specific funding to run COVID-specific services during the first lockdown helped organisations to offer emergency support (such as shopping deliveries) free of charge.

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<sup>8</sup>Shielding refers to guidance designed to protect individuals classed as extremely clinically vulnerable from contracting the COVID-19 virus, by asking them to stay at home and to only leave for essential reasons, such as exercise and medical appointments.

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Other peaks in demand for volunteers were linked to: (a) new types of health-related needs due to the COVID-19 testing and NHS vaccination programmes; (b) providing training and help for people with limited digital skills, to enable them to keep in touch with family, friends and neighbours, and to reduce the likelihood of exclusion from services which had migrated online.

### 2.3.3 Responding to COVID-19, lockdown and demand for volunteers

#### Partnership working to meet changes in demand

Among both existing and new organisations there was the view that organisations who used volunteers had responded to the increase in demand both quickly and effectively. Two main factors were considered to have facilitated this:

- **Partnerships between community groups and other frontline organisations** – these enabled organisations to utilise local knowledge to understand needs and meet rising demand whilst avoiding the duplication of support. For example, a mutual aid group involved in setting up a community hub to coordinate delivery of services said that this helped the sector meet rising demand, by directing volunteers to organisations where they were most needed.

*“What we found was that there were lots of organisations in that all of a sudden, because of a massive increase in demand for their services, they needed a massive increase in volunteers. So what we were able to do through our very sophisticated database, and very large cohort of volunteers that we've managed to recruit, was then identify volunteers that we could send them off in batches, to these organisations and fulfil their needs very swiftly”. (Stakeholder, Community group)*

- **Existing local infrastructure** - stakeholders also noted that good partnerships between community groups and frontline organisations depended on existing local infrastructures that had been built up and established over time:

*“The systems that were put in place, I think were really good and worked really well because they were very much based on harnessing local community networks, and working with charities who already had really good, strong links into the community.” (Stakeholder, VCSE)*

#### Redeploying volunteers

Organisations also reported deploying existing volunteers into new roles. An organisation who had recruited and deployed vaccination volunteers described being able to 'pivot' in response to this need, particularly as they were no longer required to provide medical assistance at large events which were not permitted.

*“Because normally we deploy people into situations where people gather and do things, obviously, COVID has stopped you doing that. If you look at how we've pivoted to support the NHS, demand is through the roof.” (Stakeholder, VIO)*

Some participants reported making use of specific databases or tools, such as social media platforms like Facebook, to match up needs with support. These tools enabled them to keep track of volunteer availability and assign tasks. A mutual aid group, for example, said that this system was integral for matching up volunteers with people in need:

*“We have the people in need, that contact us and say, 'I need some help with shopping or a prescription or a dog walk and I just want a chat', and then we*



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*have our volunteers'. They go into one centralised system and geographically, the software says, 'Right, the best person for that individual, who also has the right skills, is this volunteer here', and then we'll try and match them with that. Then if it's a long-term goal, then we'll get that volunteer then becomes their good neighbour, and they'll go and do whatever that person needs them to do for them.'* (Stakeholder, Community group)

### 2.3.4 Sustaining demand for volunteers after lockdown

It was noted by participants that meeting demand for volunteers was made easier by the unprecedented increase in interest from the public to volunteer, partly driven by the fact that more people had more free time due to the furlough scheme.<sup>9</sup> While they recognised that demand for volunteers directly related to COVID-19 would decrease as the vaccination programme took effect, there was an expectation that the support needs arising from the social and economic impacts of the pandemic would see a prolonged demand for volunteers.

*"There is a tidal wave coming our way in terms of support needs. The Citizens Advice Bureau is absolutely swamped. The food bank is now running at its busiest period ever."* (Stakeholder, Community group)

In this respect, participants thought that it was important to capitalise on the increased prominence of the importance of volunteering highlighted by the pandemic. Suggestions for how organisations might harness supply are discussed in the next chapter.

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<sup>9</sup> The Job Retention Scheme was introduced in March 2020 in response to the Coronavirus pandemic. The scheme meant that employers who were unable to maintain their workforce because their operations had been affected by COVID-19 could furlough employees and apply for a grant to cover a portion of their usual monthly wage costs.

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## 3 Supply of volunteers

This chapter describes the factors that were considered to affect the supply of volunteers, including how this was influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. It describes the way in which the supply of volunteers was influenced by their availability relative to other responsibilities and commitments; the visibility of volunteering and different volunteer roles to the public; the personal interests and experiences of volunteers; and seasonality. It also examines the role that these factors, and others, had during the COVID-19 pandemic in influencing the overall supply of volunteers. Finally, it highlights what stakeholders thought could be learnt from the pandemic about harnessing and managing the supply of volunteers in the future.

### 3.1 The availability of volunteers

One of the most significant factors affecting the supply of volunteers was their availability, and the requirements and/ or flexibility of volunteer roles relative to their responsibilities and commitments.

#### 3.1.1 Responsibilities and commitments

Availability was determined by individuals' responsibilities and commitments, such as employment, studying, childcare and care for others. Across the board, volunteers said that decisions about what level of volunteering they could offer, and/ or the type of volunteer role they undertook, had to strike a balance with their other responsibilities and commitments.

Stakeholders across all sectors reported that in their experience volunteers tended to be in the following two demographic groups:

- People aged 60 and above, usually retired, who tended to have more free time and fewer competing responsibilities.
- Young adults, usually students, who sought out volunteering opportunities to gain skills relevant to their academic or vocational interests.

There were, however, volunteers who participated in the groups who were otherwise in employment and said that they offered their time around their working hours (during evenings and weekends, or on their days off.) Furthermore, it must be noted that due to the nature of the study, the research was unable to capture the full range and diversity of groups involved in volunteering.

#### Factors affecting levels of availability and retention

The focus groups with volunteers identified two main factors that affected the availability and retention of volunteers. These were to do with how regularly they could volunteer, and the level and intensity of activities necessary to get them on board in delivery. The regularity of volunteering was described in two ways, which were not necessarily mutually exclusive:

- **Regular volunteering:** this involved a consistent and ongoing commitment to a role or activity. Regular volunteers were responsible for delivering regular services, such as, running an English language class, writing blogs, posting information online, or coaching a children's sports club. It differed in how structured or flexible it was, with some activities taking place at the same time each week, whilst others offered a greater degree of flexibility. For example, one volunteer said that they volunteered twice a week at a food bank but that they were able to choose which days they worked. This type of volunteering tended to suit those with more time to

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offer, with stable lifestyles or patterns of other commitments. However, there were individuals with commitments, such as full-time work or childcare responsibilities, who had started to volunteer since the onset of the pandemic. This has been facilitated by the growth of flexible and remote opportunities, which enabled volunteers to work from home, for example.

- **Occasional volunteering:** this was less frequent and often required commitment over a shorter timeframe. It included ad-hoc or one-off opportunities which arose in line with demand and in some cases reflected seasonal variations, such as helping at an annual sports event. The NHS Volunteer Responder programme launched during the pandemic was also an example of occasional volunteering, with volunteers downloading an app that enabled them to indicate when they were on or off duty.

Notably some roles, especially those that involved regular commitment, required several 'onboarding' activities, such as training or DBS checks. Some stakeholders believed that these onboarding activities acted as a barrier to formal volunteering for some prospective volunteers. This was particularly for new volunteers who expected to be able to deliver services immediately. As one manager of a brokerage service, working to connect volunteers with opportunities, put it:

*"People want to get in and they want to help straightaway; which is great. Then when you tell them that there's a process they have to go through, some of them aren't as great. Then going through this process, it's difficult to manage some people's expectations. When they really, really want to help now, but you're waiting for their DBS check to come back, which can take a couple of weeks." (Stakeholder, VCSE)*

However, in some cases, there was a mismatch between the level and intensity of requirements and training imposed by organisations, and the eventual role that volunteers were given, which was a barrier to retention. For instance, a participant from an organisation whose volunteers completed an intensive training course said that dissatisfaction arose among volunteers when the opportunities they were subsequently provided did not reflect this level of training:

*"There's a barrier in recruitment and there's a barrier in retention. There's a barrier in recruitment, in terms of people are put off by the time commitment and formality of the approach. However, that doesn't stop us getting people in. What stops us getting people in is that people go through a huge amount of training and then don't feel like the opportunities they do meet their needs in terms of that training." (Stakeholder, VIO)*

### 3.1.2 Making volunteer roles more accessible and inclusive

A key message from both volunteers and stakeholders was that volunteering should be made more accessible and inclusive to a wider range of demographic groups. As already mentioned, participants noted that volunteers tended to be people who were retired or studying, and rarely included people with intensive commitments such as caring responsibilities. The following strategies were reported to be helpful in this way:

- **Building a bank or network of volunteers:** this involved offering volunteers the opportunity to join a network with lower levels of initial time commitments, and without necessarily being matched to a specific role. Their offer of time and skills were then matched with demands and required services at a later date. This was a strategy that was employed by mutual aid groups whose delivery model involved asking volunteers to sign up and then contacting them when they had a suitable task available.



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*“...not making people think that you're signed up for the rest of your life, just making sure that there's a wide range of opportunities and that, actually, you could come and volunteer for a weekend helping with a project, or you can commit on the longer term.” (Stakeholder, VCSE)*

- **Advanced warning of when volunteering would be needed:** flexible volunteering was considered an important way of managing volunteering alongside work or other commitments (e.g. childcare responsibilities). It was therefore vital for planning in relation to these other commitments that volunteers were given as much prior notice of volunteering activities as possible:

*“It can be quite difficult if there is a volunteering event or a fundraiser on a Saturday or Sunday, because most people get the weekend off, so it's choosing the balance... if you've got odd jobs to do around the house, catch up with family and friends.. [If] you're trying to cram everything into your two days off, so I like to plan in advance. If I'm doing any fundraising at the weekend or volunteering, I book it in advance.” (Volunteer, Group 1, regular, pre-COVID)*

- **Providing more opportunities for online or remote volunteering:** this was accelerated due to the restrictions in place during the COVID-19 pandemic. Offering online or remote opportunities to volunteers was thought to be a way of removing barriers to volunteering and making it more accessible to people who had busy lives or difficulties travelling to a specific place. This view was expressed by volunteers who had only started volunteering in March 2020:

*“... more accessible for just the average person, even for families... I think a lot of people find that they can do that with young children from home and they can take part. I think organisations will find that these people are going to be of use as well. Those who are at home, who can't be out and about as much, can be really productive as well.” (Volunteer, Group 3, occasional, post-COVID)*

## 3.2 Visibility of volunteer roles

Another factor affecting the supply of volunteers across activities was the visibility or public awareness of volunteering per se, and of particular activities and roles.

### 3.2.1 Varying visibility of volunteer roles

Participants discussed the extent to which volunteering was prominent in public consciousness. Stakeholders reported high levels of supply in frontline delivery roles, such as food banks and public space maintenance. In one example, this manifested itself in having to turn volunteers away from food banks:

*“It's manageable with the people that we have though. It's a really interesting question and it's a tricky one, because we do have people contacting my office who will be like, 'I read in the paper that food banks are seeing this real increase in demand. I went to my food bank and they said they didn't have any space for me. How does that make sense?’” (Stakeholder, VIO)*

In contrast, it was challenging to recruit volunteers for administrative tasks that received less publicity, roles that required high levels of commitment, or to retain volunteers where opportunities did not match expectations. The food bank charity quoted above, stated that they received less interest from volunteers to take on management roles in comparison with frontline delivery roles in food bank centres or warehouses.

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## 3.2.2 Promoting and publicising volunteer roles

Promoting and publicising of roles was thought to be crucially important to increase supply of volunteers for less visible, public facing roles. A suggested strategy for improving reach was to use targeted social media advertising using information related to peoples' personal interests. However, the ability of organisations to promote roles that needed volunteers relied on having sufficient resources and funding. VCSEs and local authorities said they were often constrained in these respects, especially where volunteer managers worked part-time and/or their organisation was working to a very tight budget. This not only affected their ability to advertise for roles, but also influenced their ability to manage appropriate and timely recruitment for the anticipated response.

The volunteer discussions also highlighted the role of organisational 'nudges' in advertising or publicising roles, and for determining patterns in the supply for different volunteer roles. Volunteers reported receiving online communications from charities or volunteering brokers, such as emails, as well as seeing advertisements on television. For one group of volunteers these nudges were helpful, as they informed them about available opportunities. They also served as 'calls to action' and a reminder of those in need:

*"I'll get emails often from various societies, and when I get the email it's often to ask if I would be prepared to do some volunteer work, so that's like a little reminder to me that they need help. That spurs me into motion." (Volunteer, Group 1, regular, pre-COVID)*

For those who preferred to commit to a few select activities, however, these 'nudges' were less effective and led to volunteers feeling overwhelmed by the number of requests for help:

*"To be honest, I don't find that those prompts do motivate me very much, because there are so many of them. It's like a sea of emails sometimes that I'm like, I can't deal with any of that right now. It's almost like I just have to pick, right, I'm going to focus on that. That's why I've just got the one thing I do regularly that's kind of my focus." (Volunteer, Group 1, regular, pre-COVID)*

## 3.2.3 Reframing volunteering

There were also calls for volunteering to be conceptually reframed when volunteering roles were advertised or publicised. Stakeholders said that consideration should be given to changing the language of volunteering to capture the *mutual benefits* and the way in which volunteering can *empower* volunteers by giving them greater knowledge, confidence and skills. One suggestion was that volunteering should be framed more as being about 'connecting communities', rather than as a resource of unpaid work.

*"That's very much the way that I think I'm starting to see volunteering is that, yes, there are traditional volunteering roles that are about unpaid work, but so much of the community-based volunteering work is not about that. It's about just being out in the community, understanding your community, connecting in your community with people and places more effectively, and just helping each other out. That's the way that I see it and I think that's, if we talk about it in that way, it actually helps to empower people." (Stakeholder, VIO)*

## 3.3 Personal interest and experiences

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The supply of volunteers was also affected by individuals' motivations. The findings from the stakeholder interviews and volunteer discussions identified two broad types of motivations:

**Intrinsic motivations:** these were where individuals were driven by their personal interests, values and connections, and where they hoped to receive personal benefits, such as enjoyment, connections with others and physical and mental wellbeing. These motivations sometimes reflected a previous connection with a sector (e.g. teaching English as a second language, coaching children's rugby). But previous experience of an issue could also motivate volunteers to help and support others in a similar position (e.g. volunteering for a cancer charity because of experience of cancer or supporting someone with cancer). Some volunteers said they felt a sense of personal duty, which was based upon individual moral or religious beliefs. In this context they sought out opportunities that reflected their values and beliefs (such as volunteering at a faith-based charity or a local school).

**Extrinsic motivations:** these were external to the individual, driven by wider factors, such as the needs of others, and perceptions of how their work would contribute to the wider community or society. There were different ways through which they became aware of these needs, such as through calls for help from organisations or from friends already involved in a cause. Being able to see the impact of their work, and feeling they were making a difference was therefore vitally important to volunteers driven by extrinsic concerns. This can partly explain the lack of supply of volunteers for certain activities, such as administrative tasks which involved less exposure to frontline work.

Nevertheless, intrinsic and extrinsic motivators also interacted to reinforce the desire to volunteer, such as where volunteers recognised that they would be helping others alongside receiving personal benefit.

*"Helping people is a big part of it. I think there's a double benefit that I kind of get something out of it as well." (Volunteer, Group 1, regular, pre-COVID)*

Consequently, intrinsic and extrinsic motivations were not necessarily exclusive, and also supports the idea of reframing volunteering to emphasise mutual benefits of participants voluntary activities, rather than benefits by one party in the relationship.

## 3.4 Seasonality and time of year

Stakeholders reported trends in supply which occurred over the course of the calendar year. The winter months of December and January saw the greatest interest in volunteering. This was attributed to the following reasons:

- People were interested in helping those who were struggling during the colder weather, such as the homeless and the elderly (see section 2.2 for the demand side of this same seasonal trend);
- 'Christmas spirit' encouraged more people to support those in need and to be more charitable with their time during the holiday season;
- New Year's resolutions continue the trend of increased interest in volunteering as people decided they wanted to do more to help others, to develop a new focus in their lives, or to gain new skills.

Stakeholders said that while retired volunteers offered a consistent source of support throughout the year, they saw peaks in interest from student volunteers at the beginning of the academic year in September. This trend was more noticeable in sectors which appealed to students, such as medicine, health and, more recently, in

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environmentalism and climate change. The increase in interest in the latter was attributed by stakeholders to what they termed as ‘the Greta Thunberg effect’<sup>10</sup>.

These trends in supply often matched up with seasonal peaks in demand for volunteers discussed in Chapter 2. Indeed, running recruitment campaigns at the times of year mentioned above helped organisations to take advantage of these seasonal changes in supply

*“...we always encourage organisations to look towards September and January as being times when there will be more interest in volunteering, and to prepare for that.” (Stakeholder, Community group)*

In contrast, other stakeholders reported a drop in volunteer interest during the summer months of July and August, when people wanted to enjoy the warm weather and their time off from school and work to pursue other activities or to go on holiday. Here, continuous recruitment was perceived to be important for ensuring access to a pool of volunteers all year round and meant that seasonal fluctuations in sign-ups did not affect their ability to deliver services. Organisations also filled vacancies that arose at the same time every year (e.g. event volunteers at annual sports events) by deploying existing volunteers. Retention was thus important for coping with seasonal changes in supply, as stakeholders acknowledged the value of having a strong base of long-term volunteers.

These variations in supply do not reflect the full picture as this research was limited in its ability to reach a diverse range of volunteers from different ethnic minority groups and faiths in particular. Conducting research with these groups should be a priority in order to fully understand how different cultural and religious events during a typical calendar year affects volunteering behaviour.

## 3.5 Impact of COVID-19 on volunteer supply

Much like a typical year, supply during the COVID-19 pandemic was influenced by peoples’ commitments, the visibility of volunteering and roles in the public consciousness, and personal interests and motivations. Seasonal variation in the supply of volunteers was not as overtly discussed, although this may not have been as evident or at the forefront of the minds of participants at time of the fieldwork.

Whilst overall levels of volunteer supply had been high over the last year, it was clear that the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns affected patterns of supply of volunteering for different people in different ways. For example, where volunteers had pre-COVID-19 volunteering experience, some reported that they had volunteered less than before or had not been able to volunteer at all, while others had more frequently due to COVID-19. These patterns in supply are explored in turn.

### 3.5.1 Decreased availability of volunteers

Alongside lockdown restrictions, the fear of infection among older people and people with long-term health issues (or their family members) meant a substantial reduction in the supply of some groups of volunteers. Stakeholders reported that the ability of these groups to volunteer had been particularly affected by shielding measures. Since older people formed the core of volunteers in many cases, this provoked concerns about the potential impact of their loss to the overall supply of volunteers in the long term. Organisations questioned whether volunteers who had been shielding would come back to volunteering, either due to concerns about safety or because their lifestyles had

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<sup>10</sup>Greta Thunberg is a climate change youth activist who has mobilised young people worldwide on issues surrounding environmentalism and the global climate crisis. See: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-49918719>

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changed. There was also the view that going forward, the pandemic might mean that organisations continue to see older volunteers as risks rather than as an opportunity to enhance their service delivery.

*“We’ve got a lot of volunteers who have gone home and stayed home, and I think there’s a big question mark at the moment over how many, even when restrictions are lifted, will come back again.” (Stakeholder, VIO)*

This was expressed by a VCSE whose local volunteer demographic mainly consisted of retired people:

*“Because we are in an area with a high population of retired people, a lot of them will not come back and I am expecting for organisations to be desperate for volunteers.” (Stakeholder, VCSE)*

Capacity to volunteer was also reduced due to an increase in caring responsibilities during lockdowns (e.g. for children due to school closures or for vulnerable family members who were shielding). Despite feeling more motivated to volunteer, this made it difficult for volunteers with these additional responsibilities to do so:

*“My motivation to volunteer definitely increased because I had fewer social commitments and stuff. Obviously with everything going on I wanted to be able to get involved in community things that were going on, food drop-offs and things like that, but I didn’t feel comfortable doing it because of caring responsibilities and shielding.” (Volunteer, Group 1, regular, pre-COVID)*

In this sense, it was the case that the supply of volunteers was reduced by the fear of infection with COVID-19 and/ or the fact that lockdown and shielding significantly changed people’s ability to volunteer.

### 3.5.2 Increased availability of volunteers

Some stakeholders reported high levels of supply during the pandemic, with many new volunteers entering the system, particularly through newly formed community mutual aid groups. As one mutual aid group noted: *“the least of our worries was finding volunteers” (Stakeholder, Community group)*. In particular, the disruption to many employment sectors and the government’s Job Retention Scheme meant that many people of working age experienced an increase in personal capacity to offer help and support to others. Some organisations had, therefore, taken advantage of furloughing to meet increased demand. For example, a participating VCSE had recruited furloughed volunteers to deliver COVID-19 testing, which helped them to run testing centres alongside paid staff. One organisation looked specifically to recruit furloughed staff who already had some clinical training and DBS checks, such as from airlines. They formed the foundation of the organisation’s volunteer vaccination programme.

### 3.5.3 Increased visibility of volunteering during the pandemic

The intense media coverage of the pandemic, and a sense that people had a common cause, meant volunteers reported experiencing a strong sense of duty to respond to the increasing demands of those in need during the pandemic. Stakeholders also reported seeing a strong community response, with the public keen to get involved in supporting their neighbours and the wider community. This was additionally facilitated by community organisations such as mutual aid groups who reached out to new volunteers.

*“People, for the most part, and especially in terms of the need that there’s been over the last 12 months, people relate to their neighbourhood, their community*



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*of interest, their locality. The local voluntary and community sector was on this so quickly, partly because they could see the need, but partly also because people were just finding those and saying, 'We want to help, what can we do?'* (Stakeholder, VCSE)

The increased visibility of the importance of volunteers in meeting the needs of the public was felt to be an important opportunity for organisations who required volunteers going forward.

### 3.5.4 Personal interests and motivations

Both volunteers and stakeholders noted a shift in public consciousness towards being more selfless and aware of the needs of others. One perspective was that this momentum would continue to impact supply in the future with an increase in community spirit driving people to volunteer.

*"I don't know whether people are almost feeling liberated after being stuck at home for a year, whether people will be more motivated to do more and feel more part of their community than they did before."* (Volunteer, Group 1, regular, pre-COVID)

Further to this, people who had first-hand experience of isolation and loneliness, whether or not due to lockdown restrictions, saw new ways in which to strengthen connections between themselves and others. People were thought to have become more aware of these types of needs in society and sought to strengthen connections with others as well as gaining positive feelings that they were contributing to society themselves. For example, one of the participants in a volunteer focus group said:

*"I get involved because I like to be a part of something bigger, especially during lockdown – it leaves me feeling like I've done something worthwhile, and it connects me with my community."* (Volunteer, Group 2, occasional, pre-COVID)

Another view was that the pandemic had negatively affected personal interests and motivations to volunteer. This was especially attributed to stay at home orders and social distancing rules that disrupted many face-to-face services that previously provided fulfilment and a sense of connection for some volunteers.

## 3.6 Harnessing and managing new volunteers from the pandemic

Volunteers and stakeholders provided insights into how the sector might best harness this upsurge to meet demand. They also commented on the future of volunteering more generally, including how it might be made more accessible and inclusive.

One of the main challenges experienced by established volunteering organisations was not having the systems or platforms in place to process and manage large numbers of new volunteers. This was particularly the case where they lacked the means to send out automated communications, for example:

*"We didn't have that platform and that communication line in place. All of our work is done through manual communications if you like, and the demand was so big that we just didn't have it, we couldn't do it."* (Stakeholder, VIO)

A key part of managing supply during the pandemic also related to onboarding. A VCSE who supported voluntary organisations and delivered frontline services said that they had found it difficult to adapt to going through these processes remotely with limited lead in time:

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*“Actually, in practice, numerically, we were more than able to offset the loss of existing volunteers who were shielding with new volunteers, but just with the challenge of how to onboard them very quickly. We had to fast-track a lot of our existing procedures; we had to modify some of our existing procedures.”*  
(Stakeholder, VCSE)

For newly formed mutual aid groups, the volume of people registering their interest was also unexpected. An important challenge was around managing expectations, as volunteers signed up expecting to be assigned a task immediately. Due to high levels of supply, this was rarely possible. However, the mutual aid groups we interviewed had been able to match up demand and supply effectively with database systems and by drawing on community partnerships (see section 2.4.3).

However, issues around new supplies of volunteers were created by organisations less versed in the management, coordination and quality control of volunteers. Here, existing organisations - particularly VCSEs - had to adapt to a changing volunteering landscape to find ways to support new mutual aid groups. This was due to concerns about safety and security of volunteers and beneficiaries in the absence of experience and processes such as safeguarding measures.

*“There was a further interesting development early days with COVID, which was these mutual aid groups springing up, mainly via, using Facebook or whatever as a platform to create a group and then do jobs. We were a little bit flummoxed by that early on because it's a bit like the Wild West, that was all happening, lots of really well-intentioned people wanting to do good stuff, and doing good stuff, but not, without the checks and balances and procedures that recognised organisations would have in place. We decided in the end just to work with these, those groups where we could.”* (Stakeholder, VCSE)

### 3.7 The future of volunteering

Organisations who engaged volunteers as part of their work to respond to unmet welfare needs hoped that they would no longer be needed in the future. However, unfortunately, there was the expectation that there would be a ‘tidal wave’ of demand and need for services as society emerged from the latest national lockdown, and its long-term economic and social consequences.

To respond to these consequences the organisations working with volunteers thought it was especially important to capitalise on the increased prominence of volunteering during the pandemic, and to address declines in volunteering associated with lockdowns, shielding and social distancing. They emphasised the importance of the following:

- **Building an agile bank or network of volunteers** – as also discussed in section 2.4.3, organisations reported using databases to recruit and match up volunteers, based on location, availability and skills. This was also sometimes reinforced by providing basic training and safeguarding checks at the point of recruitment, so that volunteers could be drawn from the bank and network without delays.
- **Offering more flexible online and remote opportunities for volunteering** -as discussed in more detail in section 3.1.3, it was felt to be important, where possible, for organisations to continue offering the more flexible and remote volunteering opportunities that had arisen during the pandemic as a way of addressing barriers to entering volunteering for some groups.
- **Funding to recruit and organise volunteers** – reflecting the discussion in Chapter 2, organisations who engaged volunteers to fulfil unmet needs felt they had

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an important role to play in the provision of services going forward, especially in light of cuts to services, such as youth centres. Organisations did, however, think that funding was essential to enable them to continue to play this role. As one participant put it:

*“I think we have to recognise that we're best when we deliver those things together and we're all funded properly to do it.” (Stakeholder, VCSE)*

In particular, funding may be needed going forward to develop better local community and voluntary networks, to fund the advertising of volunteering opportunities (especially for less publicly prominent or visible roles), to coordinate and manage recruitment of volunteers, to migrate some opportunities to volunteer online or remotely, and develop databases to match supply against demand in more efficient and agile ways.



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## 4 Conclusions

This exploratory qualitative research study was commissioned by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to gather evidence to better understand trends in volunteering, to inform both ongoing responses to COVID-19 and future volunteering policy. The study aimed to develop an understanding of the key drivers in demand for support from volunteers and how these vary across the year. It also investigated how COVID-19 has changed these drivers in demand.

This concluding section summarises the key findings in relation to these aims, highlights the implications for volunteering policy and suggests how this research might be used and built upon to enable improved understanding of trends in volunteering.

### **What drives demand for support from volunteers and how does this vary across the calendar year?**

This research with stakeholders and volunteers has illustrated the wide-ranging nature of support provided by volunteers through formal organisations and identified three key factors driving demand for these types of support.

Firstly, the support needs of individuals and the wider community underpinned demand for volunteers to deliver a range of activities, from meeting the welfare needs of those experiencing financial hardship to easing pressures on the health service. Volunteers were thus playing a vital role in delivering services or helping those who were not receiving the support they needed from statutory sources. The study identified a further driver in demand at the level of organisations themselves, in terms of the value that they attached to volunteering. This in turn determined the level and type of involvement of volunteers. Whilst these drivers were discussed separately in the report, the needs of individuals, of the wider community, and the value placed on volunteers by organisations are best seen as working together to influence the type and level of demand for volunteers.

Where variations in demand across the calendar year were reported, these reflected seasonal fluctuations in needs, related to the weather as well as annual holiday periods. However, the organisations who contributed to this study told us they had the level of volunteers they needed to cope with these fluctuations and could not always comment on seasonality. As outlined further below, we think there is scope to further explore the relationship between demand and seasonality by conducting research with a wider range of faith and cultural organisations.

Whilst the study's core focus was on drivers in demand, it was also important to consider the supply of volunteers to generate a full and rounded picture of trends in volunteering. Overall, there was evidence that levels of supply were high, but there were variations across different types of roles, with those that do not involve frontline delivery and/or require more commitment experiencing shortages. We also identified that availability, personal interests and visibility of volunteering determined when and how people choose to volunteer.

### **How has COVID-19 affected these drivers?**

The research found that the COVID-19 pandemic had affected demand for volunteers in various ways. On the one hand, there was high demand for volunteers to provide support to help communities respond to the challenges of the pandemic, as existing needs, such as loneliness and isolation became more prominent and new needs emerged. The latter was directly associated with shielding and self-isolation regulations which created a need for volunteers to provide direct, practical support to those affected. This led organisations to mobilise volunteers to provide 'emergency' support

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during the pandemic, both at a local and national level. Meanwhile, in-person volunteering which was not focused on COVID-19 emergency response declined during the pandemic. This was due to both a lack of opportunities as a result of restrictions, as well as the challenges faced in working with volunteers and the public safely.

The perceived impact of the pandemic on the supply of volunteers mirrored these patterns in demand. Volunteering was paused for many due to the closure of services/activities, shielding and caring responsibilities. But for others volunteering had become more frequent and there was an influx of new volunteers mobilised by local organisations, such as mutual aid groups, and national initiatives, such as the NHS responder scheme. In terms of supply, there was uncertainty about the future. Stakeholders commented on the prospect of a resource gap as a result of volunteers being unable or unwilling to return to their roles. Yet demand for volunteers was expected to remain high due to the anticipated longer term social and economic impacts of the pandemic. This indicates a key challenge in terms of meeting rising demand and the potential to capitalise on the surge in volunteering seen during the pandemic.

### **Implications for volunteering policy**

Organisations who took part in the research said that they found it challenging to recruit volunteers for certain roles, notably those that were administrative and/or time intensive. Addressing this will require changes in how volunteering is presented in the public consciousness. As the report has discussed, roles that involve frontline work with beneficiaries tend to be well-resourced as they are by nature more visible and often connect directly with volunteers' motivations. Thus, it is important to raise awareness and convey the importance of administrative (office based work) or behind the scenes roles (for example, working in a warehouse as opposed to food bank centres, or volunteer coordinator roles) to delivery and actively promote these roles to people with relevant interests or skills.

Attracting volunteers to roles that require more commitment is a further challenge. This needs to be balanced with the need to break down the barriers to volunteering associated with the requirements of many volunteering roles, which can risk excluding those with competing priorities, such as employment and caring responsibilities. This is particularly relevant considering changes in volunteering that have arisen as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has accelerated the move towards different models of volunteering which can help to address these issues of accessibility. As was discussed in Chapter 3, this has happened in various ways including more remote/online volunteering opportunities and models of volunteering which allow people to sign up with no commitment and accept or decline tasks according to availability and preferences.

It is important to ensure this trend towards more accessible and inclusive volunteering is continued. This can happen if organisations can, where possible, continue to offer more flexibility in terms of when and where duties are carried out (remote volunteering) and allowing people to sign up and then choose when they want to do something. Furthermore, the increase in new volunteers who were furloughed indicates the role for employer-supported volunteering in enabling people to continue volunteering when they have returned to work.

Furthermore, organisations need to be adequately equipped to manage volunteers. As we discussed in the report, organisations struggled to cope with the influx of new volunteers and were not always prepared for this, which led in some cases to new volunteers who had expressed an interest being left without a role. This is an important area for policy to address in order to avert the risk of new volunteers being deterred from volunteering in the future.

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As we have touched upon in this report, volunteering played a vital role in communities overcoming challenges presented by COVID-19. A key message from local stakeholders was that local partnership working had been vital in enabling their response to the pandemic and mobilisation of volunteers. They were also keen to convey that it was the mobilisation of volunteers at a local level that enabled them to meet the needs of their community at a time of crisis and expressed that this highlighted the need to value and utilise existing local infrastructure.

### **Future research**

This study has generated evidence on drivers in demand for volunteers and provided insight into trends in volunteering, including but not limited to the context of COVID-19. However, due to its size, scope and timeframes the study was limited in its ability to capture the full range and diversity of experiences of demand and supply among different stakeholders and volunteers. Further exploration of the following areas through future research will build on this study to help DCMS develop a fuller picture of trends in volunteering:

- Involvement of diverse stakeholders, including different types of community groups, such as faith groups and a wider range of local authorities representing different areas will ensure a more rounded understanding of how demand and supply varies across different cultural groups and locations. Indeed, the research highlighted that drivers in demand vary geographically, so further research in different areas would help to build on this understanding. This could include speaking to organisations working in places that are prone to environmental issues, such as flooding, in order to understand the impact of seasonality on volunteering in the context of a changing climate.
- Research with volunteers on what influences volunteering should focus on talking with people from different ethnic minorities and religions, to capture their experiences and the variations in demand and supply from different perspectives. In addition, further research with people with competing priorities who face more barriers to volunteering would be timely and help to inform the move towards more inclusive and accessible volunteering.
- To complement this study which has touched on the role of seasonality in volunteering, there is a need for further research on how demand varies within a typical calendar year. Evidence on less predictable variations, such as those linked to weekly variations in individuals' income and level of need, is important to fully understand variations in demand to help support stakeholders to be able to cope with, and respond to, these fluctuations.

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# Appendix A. Topic Guides

## Stakeholder interview topic guide

### Introduction

- Introduction to researcher. Thank you for agreeing to take part
- Introduction to NatCen - independent research organisation, commissioned by DCMS to carry out this study
- **About the study:** DCMS want to better understand trends in volunteering to help inform their current responses to COVID-19 and future volunteering strategies.
  - Carrying out interviews with a range of statutory and community and voluntary organisations. These include local authorities, local voluntary, community and social enterprises (VCSEs); volunteer-involving organisations; and community groups
  - We will also be talking to volunteers to understand why they volunteer and when they choose to do so
- **About the discussion:**
  - The interview will last up to 45 minutes
  - Interviews explore your organisations role in meeting demand for volunteers, views on the key drivers of demand in your sector and how these vary across the year, and the impact of COVID-19 on demand for volunteers.
  - Participation is voluntary - there are no right or wrong answers, you can choose not to discuss any issue and can stop the interview at any time. You are able to withdraw from the study, including after the interview has taken place, until the 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2021, after which point the findings will be anonymised, summarised and written up.
  - What you say is confidential and your participation is anonymous. We will write a report of our findings but no names or personal details will be included. However, due to the small number of organisations taking part in this study, it's possible that you may be identifiable.
  - We would like their permission to record the interview, so we have an accurate record of what is said. Recorder is encrypted and files stored securely on NatCen's computer system in line with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018. Only the research team will have access to the recordings
- Data will be deleted at the end of the project (April 2021)
- At the end of the interview we will confirm some details to allow us to pay £50 to your organization as a thank you payment
- Questions?

- 
- Ask for permission to start recording

## START RECORDING

### Contextual information (5 mins)

*Section aim: to gain contextual information about the participant's role and responsibilities and the organisation*

- **Brief overview of role and responsibilities**
  - Whether strategic/operational
  - Length of time in current role
- **Organisation details - interviewer – cover lightly, drawing on sampling information where appropriate**
  - Type, sector, size
  - Staffing/management structure
    - Number of employed staff
    - Whether have a specific volunteer management team
  - Where they are based/work
    - Whether local/regional/national
    - How they work e.g. local branches, remotely
- **Brief overview of what the organisation does**
  - Main ethos/aims of their work
  - Range of activities/services to meet these aims
    - Settings they work in
  - Main groups they represent/beneficiaries
  - Delivery model e.g. whether they work in partnership

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## Volunteering in the organisation (15 mins)

*Section aim: to gain an overview of volunteering in the organisation, including demand for support from volunteers and how organisations understand and plan for changes in demand.*

- **Overview of volunteering in the organisation**
  - Characteristics of their volunteering base
    - Size
    - Demographic characteristics e.g. age, gender, ethnicity
  - Services/support volunteers provide
    - Types of volunteering roles and opportunities
- Overview of demand and supply for volunteers **at present** – interviewer, return to impact of COVID in more detail later on in the interview
  - Compared to demand in a typical year
  - Services that are in demand
  - Ability to meet these demands
    - Supply e.g. types of volunteers required
- Demand and supply during a **typical calendar year** [interviewer: get a sense of whether there are noticeable patterns in demand during a typical year, and if so, what this looks like]
  - Differences to present demand
  - Ability to meet these demands
    - Supply e.g. types of volunteers required
  - Extent to which demand/supply is stable/fluctuates during the year
    - *If fluctuates*: when is demand highest and lowest
- **Understanding of demand**
  - *If able to comment on patterns in demand* – what their understanding is based on/how they monitor demand

- 
- Planning/modelling they undertake
  - How easy/difficult it is to predict cycles of demand
  - *If not aware of patterns/unable to comment on patterns* – reasons why
    - Lack of data

## Drivers in demand (20 mins)

*Section aim: to explore in detail the key factors driving demand for support from volunteers, including the impact of COVID-19, and barriers and enablers to meeting this demand.*

**Interviewer note: explore the range of factors (seasonal and non-seasonal) driving demand for support from volunteers for their organisation/sector. Ask openly, using prompts selectively for anything not raised spontaneously.**

For each driver discussed, explore:

- Whether short, medium or longer term
  - How and why the factor affects demand for support from volunteers
  - Response/how they meet demand
- **Seasonal drivers** in demand for volunteers
    - Weather related
      - Hot and cold weather
      - Extreme weather events
    - Academic year – school/university holidays
    - Religious festivals
    - Sports seasons
  - **Non-seasonal drivers** in demand for volunteers
    - Population characteristics
      - Ageing population
      - Mental health

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- Physical health
  - Economic factors
    - Socio-economic deprivation
    - Poverty and financial hardship
    - Unemployment
  - Social factors
    - Housing crisis/homelessness
    - Discrimination
  - Environmental factors
    - Climate change
  - Provision of public services
  - **Impact of COVID-19** (e.g. job support/furlough schemes, lockdown restrictions, shielding advice) on:
    - Demand for services
    - Demand for volunteers
    - Volunteer engagement
      - Recruitment of new volunteers
      - Engagement with current or lapsed volunteers
    - Models of volunteering
      - Adaptation to volunteering roles and opportunities
    - Key challenges and lessons learned from COVID-19
  - **Barriers and facilitators** to meeting demand for volunteers
    - Organisational/sectoral e.g.
      - Resources e.g. funding, staffing
      - Delivery model e.g. partnership working/collaboration



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- Supply issues e.g.
    - Recruitment
    - Onboarding volunteers (running training, security checks)
    - Retention

## Reflections and suggestions (5 mins)

*Section aim: to conclude the interview by summarising views on the key drivers (at present and in the future), and identify suggestions for support required to help organisations plan/meet demand.*

- **Summary of key drivers** in demand for volunteers
  - Most important driver for their organisation/sector
- **Future predictions and expectations** in relation to demand for volunteers
- Overall feelings towards **meeting demand** for volunteers
  - Confidence in meeting demand
  - Support required in planning/meeting demand
    - Suggestions for DCMS

### **Check if anything else to add, thank and close**

- Questions
- Reminder about limits to anonymity/confidentiality
- Thank you payment of £50 – explain process for bank transfer

## Volunteer focus group topic guide

### Introduction

- 
- **Introduction to researcher.** Thank you for agreeing to take part
  - **Introduction to NatCen** - independent research organisation, commissioned by DCMS to carry out this study
  - **About the study:** DCMS want to better understand how people volunteer to help inform their current responses to COVID-19 and future volunteering strategies. We are conducting focus groups with volunteers to understand why they volunteer and when they choose to do so
  - **About the discussion -**
    - Duration - The group discussion will last up to 60 minutes
    - Group discussion – This will be a discussion among the group. We are interested in hearing everyone’s views.
    - No wrong or right answers – Explain that we may ask obvious questions but it’s important for us to understand issues from their perspective
    - Ground rules
      - There are likely to be different views in the group and we do not expect people to share each others views, but respect differences
      - Speak one at a time
      - Switch mobiles off/put on silent
      - Leave your mics on if not too noisy
      - If feel comfortable, leave their videos on
      - Using chat
    - Incentive – As a thank you for your time we would like to send you a £30 voucher (sent to you via email after the group).
  - **Reassurances:**
    - Participation is voluntary – You can choose not to discuss any issue and can withdraw from the group discussion at any point.
    - Confidentiality – What you say is confidential and your participation is anonymous. We will write a report of our findings but no names or personal details will be included.
    - Recording - We would like their permission to record the interview, so we have an accurate record of what is said. Recorder is encrypted and files stored securely on NatCen's computer system in line with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018. Only the research team will have access to the recordings. Data will be deleted at the end of the project
  - **Questions?**
  - **Ask for permission to start recording**

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START RECORDING

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## Introductions and background information

*Section aim: To 'warm up' participants and provide an overview of their current volunteering experiences and motivations to volunteer*

- **Introductions** – Go around and ask each participant to briefly introduce themselves:
  - Name
  - Where they live
  - Their current/most recent voluntary experience (*cover this briefly*)
    - Organisation
    - Role and activities involved in
    - Length of time in current role
- **Motivations for volunteering** (ice breaker) – briefly explore key reasons for volunteering (*moderator note: use prompts below to aid the discussion where appropriate*)
  - Specific roles/activities/areas of interest
  - Sense of moral duty/responsibility to help or improve things
  - Having the time to spare
  - Social motivations, e.g. making friends/be a part of the community
  - To develop skills or gain work and/or life experience
  - External factors/drivers e.g. to meet needs

## Volunteering patterns and drivers (25 minutes)

*Section aim: To understand seasonal and non-seasonal variations in when participants volunteer and the key factors (drivers) influencing this*

- **Mapping volunteering patterns**
  - When in the week/month/year they volunteer
  - How often they volunteer (regular, occasional, one-off)
  - Seasonal variations
- **Understanding drivers in volunteering** – exploring the range of factors driving these patterns, and views on the most/least important drivers

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Use prompts below where factors are not raised spontaneously. Moderator to keep a record of the key drivers discussed by participants – as the discussion progresses share screen to invite participants to comment on the range of drivers (check covered everything) and prioritise the most/least important drivers.

#### Seasonal drivers

- Weather related
- Religious festivals
- School/university holidays
- Sports seasons

#### Other external factors

- Local or national events
- Unexpected events or emergencies e.g. COVID-19 (*discuss here if arises naturally, and then pick up on any outstanding points in the next section*)

#### Personal/individual factors

- Family circumstances
- Time
- Existing commitments
- Work, education/training
- Cultural and religious background

#### Wider volunteering related factors

- The sector in which they volunteer
- The organisation through which they volunteer
- Demand for volunteers
- Activities/services they deliver

## COVID-19 and volunteering (15 mins)

*Section aim: to explore how COVID-19 has affected volunteering, including demand for support from volunteers and volunteering roles.*

*Moderator note: elements of COVID-19 that may have affected volunteering include lockdown restrictions, social distancing requirements, shielding advice and job support/furlough schemes.*

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- **Group 3 only: If started volunteering since the start of the pandemic**
    - Reasons why got involved/motivations
      - To help others
      - Spare time – furloughed, lockdown restrictions
    - How got involved
      - Word of mouth
      - Internet/social media
      - Role of employer e.g. employer support volunteering scheme, encouragement from employer
  
  - **Whether COVID-19 has affected how they volunteer over the past year**
    - Differences and similarities in the following (compared to pre-COVID or since start of pandemic)
      - What volunteering means/perceptions of volunteering
      - Type of volunteering they do
      - Frequency of volunteering
      - How they volunteer/roles
    - Which changes they think are short and long term
      - Whether and how COVID has changed their relationship with volunteering
    - Key opportunities and challenges faced
  
  - **Feelings towards volunteering during COVID-19**
    - What they like and dislike
    - Anything they would change – what and reasons why

## Reflections and closing (10 mins)

- **Reflections on volunteering patterns**
  - Key drivers in their decision about when to volunteer
  - What they like and dislike about current patterns

- 
- **Future of volunteering post-COVID**
    - Thoughts on what volunteering will be like post-COVID
    - Impact of this on how they volunteer
      - Future volunteering plans
  - **Check if anything else to add, thank and close**

### STOP RECORDING

- Any questions?
- **Thank you payment details** – explain that we will send them a thank you email which will contain an £30 online shopping voucher and a leaflet listing sources of further advice and support. This is something we send to everyone who we have discussions with, in case the discussion raises any issues they would like to discuss further – as researchers this is not something we can offer ourselves.