

Volunteer Strategy

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i Document Information

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1. Context

- 1.1. Although nationally there has been a downward trend in volunteering, especially since the pandemic, volunteering within the Lee Valley Regional Park (Regional Park) has recovered well and is on the rise. Volunteering continues to add value to the delivery of services by many private and public sector organisations. Volunteering as an act demonstrates a strong sense of community and empathy towards others and the environment through commitment to a cause that an individual feels passionate about. In return, volunteering provides unique opportunities for individuals to develop or utilise skills resulting in an increased sense of purpose and achievement, having a positive effect on both mental and physical wellbeing. From a practical perspective volunteering can help to ensure that tasks are completed in a more effective way due the additional resource they provide.
- 1.2. Volunteering plays a key part of the continued transformation of the Regional Park. The vision for the Lee Valley Regional Park Authority (the Authority) is to be a world class leisure destination for nature, sport and discovery. The Authority's adopted strategic objectives are at the heart of this strategy.
- 1.3. The strategy outlines how the aims of the Volunteer Policy are to be delivered.

2. Background

- 2.1. During 2023-24 1,272 volunteers contributed 41,417 hours of their time across the Authority's parklands and venues, a 242% increase on the figures recorded in the previous year financial year. This significant increase is due to targeted data collection aimed at partners organisations across our open spaces and venues to gain a better picture of volunteering. Around 318 of these volunteers were part of the Authority's programme and dedicated 14,911 hours to supporting Rangers service (Rye House Gatehouse, Wildlife Discovery Centre, livestock checking, litter picking, conservation, honorary wardens and events), Biodiversity (wildlife surveys), Myddelton House Gardens (gardening, cataloguing and events), Holyfield Hall Farm (general assistance and cattle checks), Learning & Engagement, Volunteers (admin, volunteers committee and guided walks), Geographical Information Systems (admin and fieldwork) and Sport and Active Recreation (events, Life walks and Sensory walks). Our LSC managed venues had 33 volunteers who contributed 3,398 hours across Lee Valley Riding Centre (vet student placements and "Have a Go" lesson assistants) and Lee Valley White Water Centre (centre maintenance and activity instructors). The remaining contribution is accounted for through a variety of programmes run by various partners ranging from Major Event organisers or National Governing Bodies to smaller voluntary groups or charities who facilitate volunteer involvement.

3. Strategy Vision, Aims and Objectives

- 3.1. This Strategy outlines how the Authority will seek to improve its volunteer programme.
- 3.2. The strategy requires a clear vision to drive forward the strategy and to ensure that we can grow and develop our volunteer network.

The Authority aims to be an exemplar of how it attracts, involves and supports its volunteers in the delivery of its vision.

The successful delivery of this requires integration of a range of service areas to ensure a clear and consistent approach.

3.3. The service areas include the following:

- (i) Human resources – there are two elements to this.
 - a) Firstly, although not employed by the Authority the use of volunteers raises many of the same issues that the employment of staff raises in terms of their ‘recruitment’, training, support and problem solving. We will ensure that the appointment of volunteers is delivered to the same standards to those which underpin our directly employed staff.
 - b) Secondly, the Authority’s human resources policies allow ‘flexible’ working which allows all staff the freedom to become volunteers themselves.
- (ii) The Authority owns just under 43% of the area of the Regional Park. Only through working with partners such as the Canal and River Trust and event providers working with volunteers can this vision be realised. In working with its partners we will ensure that our high standards of support and interest can be maintained through the negotiation of ‘local’ agreements with partners.

3.4. The Volunteer Strategy has six aims which are in turn supported by a series of objectives which will:

1) Develop our volunteer programme at venues and the Authority’s parklands for all by:

- (i) Improving awareness and increased access to volunteering opportunities to raise the current ratio of volunteers to staff.
- (ii) Working with Authority departments to continuously identify new opportunities as our business plan directs.
- (iii) Maintain the Investing in Volunteers accreditation at successive renewals.

2) Match the Authority’s business needs with volunteer support through:

- (i) Continually reviewing the organisations capacity gaps and matching these with existing volunteer skill set.
- (ii) Regularly reviewing our recruitment processes to ensure new volunteers have the right skill set where possible to serve our business needs.

3) Develop specific opportunities to promote diversity involving Global Majority and Hard-to-Reach community and voluntary sector groups:

- (i) Actively promote volunteering and programmes to specific ‘target groups’, through new and established links with local authorities, external partnerships, volunteer centres, action groups and community groups.

4) Attract additional support for volunteers by:

- (i) Actively promoting engagement of companies through presentations and visits. 'Corporates' represent a good opportunity for partnerships linked to volunteering as part of their corporate 'social responsibility'.
- (ii) Rewarding dedication, endeavour and contribution.
- (iii) Supporting with routes into employment within the Authority and beyond.

5) Encourage staff to pursue volunteering opportunities to support communities across the Region.

The Authority recognises the importance of volunteering as a means for personal 'enrichment' and the achievement of new skills. These skills should not be denied to our staff.

This will be achieved through:

- (i) The Volunteer team working closely with Human Resources to find a system to actively encourage opportunities for staff either within the park or in other areas across the region to volunteer as part of a Corporate Social Responsibility activity for the Authority or external organisations.

6) Actively seek opportunities for joint partner programmes

- (i) The delivery of joint programmes and the shared use of a 'dedicated' pool of volunteers across the range of opportunities. The Regional Park represents a major extension to our current activity which is consistent with our corporate vision.

This will be sought through:

Identifying partners where jointly agreed volunteer or corporate programmes can be delivered.

4. Responsibilities

The Head of Human Resources is responsible for the delivery of the Volunteer Strategy.

The Volunteers Officer is responsible for the overview, monitoring and evaluation of the of the Volunteer Strategy.

5. Legal Considerations

There is no legislation in relation to working with volunteers (although there is case law which provides guidance). As an organisation using volunteers we have a duty to keep abreast of changes in good practice and ensure that these are conveyed appropriately. Working with organisations such as National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), local volunteer centres and holder of the Investing in Volunteers Award (liV) the Authority is seen as maintaining the highest standards of Volunteer Management.

6. Relevant Policy & Procedures

There is a Volunteer Policy that is directly linked to this strategy and a Volunteer Handbook that supports the overall volunteer programme.

7. Strategy Implementation

This strategy will be implemented through the series of objectives identified above in section 3 and forms the day to day running of the volunteer programme, the responsibility of which is down to the Volunteer team and Authority staff.

8. Monitoring & Evaluation

The effectiveness of this strategy will be measured against the volunteer programme targets and Performance Indicators detailed on the Authority Scorecard.

Stretch Targets set until 2027

Current position in 2024	Targets by 2027
Total volunteer hours 41,417* Authority programme: 14,911 LSE programmes: 3,398 Partner orgs (venues): 18,939 Partner orgs (open spaces): 4,139	Total volunteer hours 45,560 Authority programme: 16,400 Retain the same level of volunteering hours at LSE venues and throughout our partner organisations at our venues and open spaces as achieved in 2024
1,272* total number of active volunteers recorded on Authority database (includes LSE and partnerships) 318** Authority volunteers	1,500 total number of active volunteers recorded on Authority database (includes LSE and partnerships) 350 Authority volunteers
Non-riparian / national volunteers 90**	Non-riparian / national volunteers 100
Global majority volunteers 41**	Global majority volunteers 48
Ratio of Authority volunteers to Authority FTE 2.5:1**	Ratio of Authority volunteers to Authority FTEs 2.8:1
5 employment events attended a year*	10 employment events attended a year
No staff volunteering experiences on record*	Each staff member to have experienced at least one day of volunteering

*end of financial year 2024, **August 2024 estimates

These figures will be monitored annually by the Volunteers department.

9. Review

The strategy will be reviewed every 3 years in line with Investing in Volunteers and rolled out internally to staff via our QMS and publicly via our website. This includes updating the wording within our Volunteers Handbook which is also available on our website.

10. Glossary of Terms

10.1. Some of the terminology used in this document may be unfamiliar so this glossary has been attached to clarify a number of new terminologies.

- **Private and Commercial Sector Groups (Corporate Tasks)** – Groups of volunteers who are attached to a company or organisation undertaking a single day of volunteering activity. Normally funded by the company and undertaken on a normal working day. Used also as team building days or also called community days.
- **Diversity** – In this context means the variety of people within your volunteering force and will include ethnic diversity, age diversity, gender diversity, disability diversity and community diversity. The essence is not to discriminate against any level of diversity within an organisation.
- **Global Majority** – NCVO defines this term as “...a shortened version of the term ‘people of the global majority’. It is used to refer to all ethnic groups except white British and other white groups, including white minorities. This includes people from black, Asian, mixed, and other ethnic groups who are often racialised as ‘ethnic minorities’”.
- **Hard-to-Reach** - terminology used by the government and volunteering organisations to describe any person or group who may not have access to general information due to language or technical barriers. This includes many Global Majority communities, people with disabilities or young or old sections of the community.

11. Appendices

There are three companion documents to this strategy:

- Volunteer Policy
- Volunteer Handbook
- Staff guide to working with volunteers