Digital Volunteering Platform

Briefing materials for charity leaders and volunteering leads

Foreword

by Catherine Johnstone CBE, CEO of Royal Voluntary Service

Volunteers play a vital role in our society and play an essential part in enabling charities to deliver the crucial work they do.

There is a huge appetite for volunteering – and many people are eager to help where they can. But despite this, Britain has seen a steady decline in volunteer participation, and many charities are struggling to recruit the support they need. The reasons for this decline are complex, based largely on changing demographics.

> **Huge potential could be unlocked if we can find a way to provide access to volunteering roles which are suited to modern lifestyles and enabled by digital technology.**

But we also know the way we live our lives has changed and expectations of would-be volunteers are now different. People can struggle to find volunteering roles which fit around their other responsibilities or which align to the causes they care about. They may be keen to support a range of charities and causes but lack the time to apply and register multiple times.

Even when offered volunteering time through work, currently just a third of volunteering days are used.

In partnership with the charity sector, Royal Voluntary Service is developing a new digital volunteering platform, supported by players of the People's Postcode Lottery. The platform will support charities to recruit the volunteers they need, whilst providing the next generation with an easier route into volunteering.

By harnessing the power of digital technology, we aim to make access to volunteering easier and overcome many of the obstacles faced by potential volunteers and charities. We hope that charities will find the platform a useful tool which helps to build a pipeline of volunteers for the future and builds upon and amplifies the vital work which happens in our local communities every day.

Catherine Johnstone CBE
Chief Executive
Royal Voluntary Service

Contents

The following pack provides the information charities need to understand the key features and practicalities of signing up for the platform. It includes:

We hope this pack will be useful to inform internal discussions you may need to have in advance of coming on board the platform.

If you need additional information to make your decision, please contact us at: **help@govo.org.uk**. Once you have reviewed this pack, to go ahead, <u>you can register online</u>.

We very much hope that you will join us.

Key platform features

1

The platform will act as a matching service – connecting prospective volunteers with suitable volunteering opportunities hosted by charities. It is not a VMS system and will not look to replace existing platforms used to manage volunteers.

2

The platform will offer a simple and innovative 'on board once' process. From October 2025, volunteers will be invited to sign up to register with the platform.

3

Once registered, an identity check will be delivered through the platform, and prospective volunteers will then be able to choose to give their time to a range of charities and causes, without having to re-register and repeat basic assurances every time.

4

The platform will have a simple and intuitive interface to ensure the user experience is inspiring, simple, and enjoyable.

5

It will adhere to AA accessibility standards and will aim for AAA where possible.

It will deliver a range of benefits for charities:

✔ Reduced costs

The platform is free for charities to use, including the cost of performing identity checks on prospective volunteers.

✔ Quick and easy volunteer recruitment and mobilisation

Helping charities recruit new task-ready volunteers and build their volunteer pipeline.

✔ Appealing to a more diverse group of volunteers

By offering roles that fit in with people's lifestyles and life stages including one-off, team-based, skilled, remote and flexible 'micro' volunteering, alongside traditional regular volunteering roles.

✔ Less admin

The platform will be easy to use and in time will integrate with the main volunteer management systems and tools charities use.

✔ Easy outcome measurement

Charities will be able to quickly and easily demonstrate impact through access to data on volunteer outcomes.

✔ Supporter engagement

Charities can use the platform to attract supporters connected to their cause and can define, promote and monetise their corporate volunteering offer.

Proposed Volunteer Experience

- The design of the platform will put control in the hands of volunteers, enabling them to search for opportunities and 'click and connect' quickly to volunteering opportunities linked to the causes and charities they care about.

- Once a volunteer registers with the platform, they will not 'belong' to any single organisation. Rather, they are registered to the platform and potentially available to take up roles listed by any of the participating charities.

- Volunteers can opt to complete their identity check through the platform straight away on joining the platform or can wait to complete this once they have found a suitable role. None of the platform registration and onboarding processes should be undertaken again by the host charity.

- When volunteers have registered and completed the onboarding process, any relevant data or information will be stored within the platform.

- Once a volunteer has chosen to connect with a particular cause, their data will then be provided to the host charity who will store this within their own systems. At this point, they become the responsibility of the host charity to ensure any additional or required onboarding, training or support is given to the volunteer. This includes any other onboarding or compliance requirements that are not covered within the platform.

- During this period, Royal Voluntary Service is not responsible for or in control of any communications, requirements or queries between the volunteer and host charity in relation to the agreed activity.

- The host charity is responsible for managing any data appropriately in line with legislation and relevant guidelines.

Indicative roadmap

Charities are invited to **register** to use the platform now.

Selected charities will be **invited** to upload roles from June onwards and see the growing platform functionality.

Registered charities **signed up** to use the platform will be invited to upload their roles from the end of July onwards in advance of the full public launch.

The platform will **go live** with access to volunteers in October 2025. There will be a phased rollout of the platform functionality in accordance with the product roadmap.

From launch, the platform will be made available to registered charities big and small.

We are **actively engaging** with the VCS sector to explore how the platform can add value to local infrastructure provision. Once our work to consult and co-produce with these groups has been completed in 2026, we will invite grassroots community groups and local infrastructure organisations to join the platform.

Features available at launch (October 2025)

- A website-based platform will be made available
- Volunteer onboarding and identity checking process in place
- Volunteers can search for suitable opportunities and connect to a range of charities and causes
- Charities can review matches and volunteers
- Charities can access basic reporting data
- An open API with developer documentation will be made available
- Some API integrations with existing Volunteer Management Systems will be available with developer documentation
- Bulk uploads will be enabled for charities who do not use a VMS.

Features available post-launch (Q4 2025)

- Additional charity VMS integrations made available
- Welsh language option
- Enhanced spreadsheet upload and bulk edit opportunities
- iOS and Android native applications made available

Features available in 2026 and beyond

- Criminal records checks made available through the platform
- Small grassroots organisations and local infrastructure bodies invited to join
- Charities will have access to more detailed impact reporting
- Social sharing and user-generated content enabled
- Live tasking enabled

Please note that the platform is currently being designed by a team of specialist developers. We aim to launch with the basic functionality in place (the minimal viable product) and then continually add features over time. As such, exact timings for the addition of functionality are not set in stone and are subject to change.

Data Protection and Storage

- Royal Voluntary Service will host data securely on Microsoft's Azure Cloud solution, in the UK and Europe.

- To use the platform, participating charities will need to provide us with:
  - The name and email of a nominated administrator (we need only one administrator for the initial setup, but charities can add or remove additional administrators later)
  - The charity's website URL

- We will source charity data from the Charity Commission or the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) directly. This will ensure that the address as shown on the platform will be the same as on the Charity Commission site.

- After charities have accessed the platform securely using email and setting a password, details of volunteering opportunities can be added by uploading a spreadsheet. Later, it will be possible to add images. For charities using volunteer management systems, API connectivity is coming soon.

- Royal Voluntary Service uses its own trained AI to handle data, all of which we host on Azure.

Accessibility

- Accessibility has been a key consideration at every stage of the platform design.

- We have and will continue to consult with people with lived experience through user testing to ensure we are getting this crucial aspect of the platform right. We have worked with a range of specialist charities and people with a range of disabilities and access needs, including people with sight loss and neurodivergent people.

- The platform will adhere to AA accessibility standards and will aim for AAA where possible. We are reviewing WCAG 3.0 and its outcome based model and cognitive accessibility, which encourages simpler, more intuitive interfaces.

- We are committed to showcasing a wide range of roles that support diversity, equity, and inclusion. We will encourage charities to offer opportunities that meet different access needs, helping more volunteers engage confidently and meaningfully.:

  - Charities will be prompted to specify any potential barriers to accessibility that might impact people with accessibility needs

  - The platform will prioritise access needs rather than focusing on disability labels. For example, it may specify that a role requires the use of stairs or involves standing for long periods, rather than stating it is unsuitable for people with mobility impairments. This approach allows charities to be transparent about any potential barriers while enabling volunteers to assess whether a role aligns with their individual access requirements.

  - It will use concise and plain language.

  - Volunteers will be able to note their accessibility needs on their profiles and list any adjustments they require from charities.

  - Charities will receive guidance on how to develop accessible volunteering role descriptions that cater to a diverse range of individuals and their unique needs.

Safeguarding and responsibility for vulnerable groups

From a platform perspective, the following processes and interventions will be carried out on charities' behalf:

- Ensuring that the platform uses sector-wide, trusted identity-check providers to confirm identities.

- To collect and provide any relevant details and information in relation to volunteers who accept opportunities, in line with relevant data and sharing agreements

- Ensuring that only appropriate volunteer opportunities will be made available to those who have submitted and/or provided the required information to the platform.

- Ensuring that volunteers have agreed to follow all relevant guidance, processes and procedures when volunteering

In relation to charity accountabilities and requirements in relation to safeguarding and/or support, charities must ensure:

- Volunteers are provided with any and all information, guidance or specific training before being deployed

- Volunteers know who to contact, and how, if they have any queries or concerns

- Volunteers are not asked to undertake or fulfil duties outside of that which they have accepted and is recorded within the platform

- If any issues, concerns or support is required during volunteering, any applicable volunteers are supported in line with your charity's policies and procedures

If opportunities involve children or vulnerable adults, charities must also:

- Ensure relevant staff and volunteers have current, appropriate criminal records checks and risk assessments, where applicable

- Ensure that only roles that legally require a criminal records check are listed as such

- Follow all applicable laws, guidance and codes of practice. This responsibility sits fully with your organisation. Royal Voluntary Service does not vet listings or check safeguarding compliance.

While standard sector processes will be used to verify a volunteer's identity and background– such as criminal record checks when available– this does **not** constitute an endorsement by Royal Voluntary Service or the Platform of a person's character, behaviour, or suitability.

If concerns arise before, during, or after someone volunteers, **it is the charity's responsibility** to investigate and resolve them through its own internal procedures.

Getting ready to join the platform

There are a few simple steps your charity can take now to prepare:

- Sign up on the **Royal Voluntary Service website** to stay up to date with platform developments.

- Get your opportunities ready — you'll be able to upload roles in bulk, so start gathering the details now to make things quicker later.

- Get involved early by joining our user testing group or signing up as a pilot charity. You can do both on the website.

- Spread the word to colleagues, partners and networks who might also want to take part.

Onboarding approach

We are building a multi-layered support model to ensure charities have the guidance, tools and confidence they need to use the new platform successfully, from onboarding to ongoing use.

Guided Onboarding Support

- From June onwards, a small group of selected charities are being invited to upload roles to the platform. Each charity will have access to a dedicated Customer Success Manager to walk them through the process, from account setup to uploading volunteer roles.

- From late July onwards, a self-serve flow will be supported by clear playbooks and a structured help centre.

Knowledge Base and Help Content

A dedicated Help Centre will offer:

- 'How to' articles for uploading volunteering opportunities

- Troubleshooting guides for common errors

- Tips on how to describe volunteering opportunities impactfully

- List of FAQs to answer any ongoing questions

Live Support

- Following the completion of the pilot stage, charities will be able to raise questions through a selection of support channels. This will include a trained chatbot capable of handling common questions, enabling 24/7 access to essential help.

- A triage model will be used to prioritise urgent onboarding or technical issues, with more complex queries escalated to the Customer Success Managers as needed.

Feedback Loops

All support interactions and charity feedback will be monitored to improve both the platform and help content. Common issues will be flagged into the product and content roadmap.

Shaping the Future charities helping us to pilot the platform

R N I B

See differently

RSPCA

citizens advice

Stroke Association

Canal & River Trust

Girlguiding

RAMBLERS

Trussell Ending hunger together

National Trust

The Questors THEATRE

MAGGIE'S Everyone's home of cancer care

woodgreen

Alzheimer's Society

LiTTLE ViLLaGe

Brandon Live free the learning disability charity

WILDERNESS FOUNDATION UK

EUAN'S GUIDE

FORTH RIVERS TRUST

CANCER card
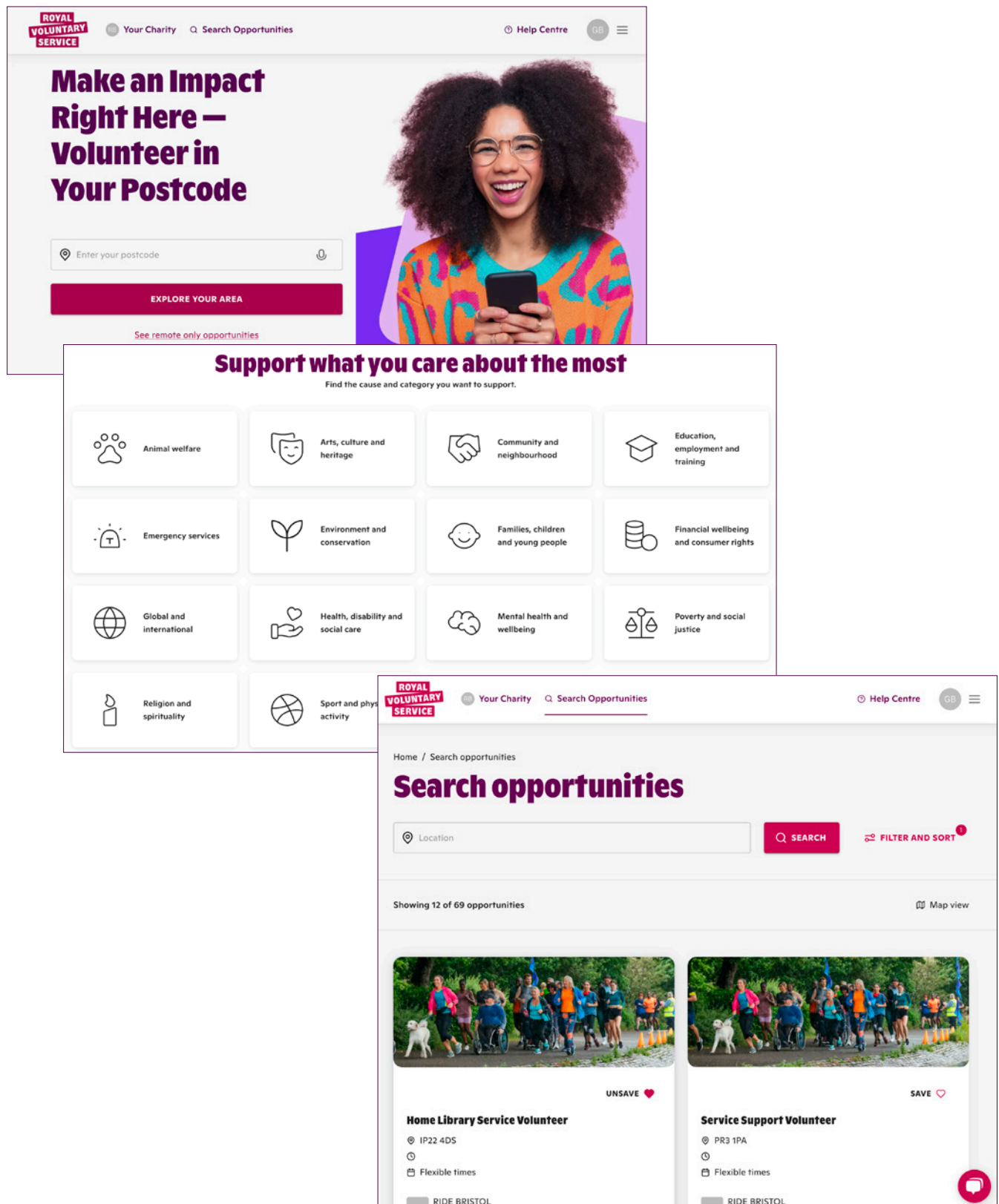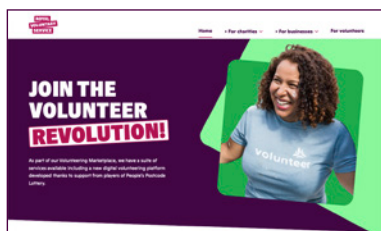
Example platform visuals

Example visuals of the platform interface are available and will be shared during the onboarding process.

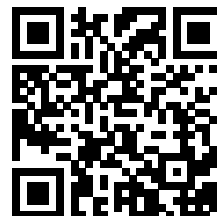# Further information
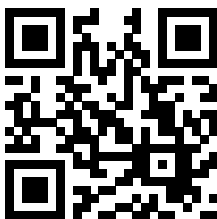
Scan the QR codes below to find out more.

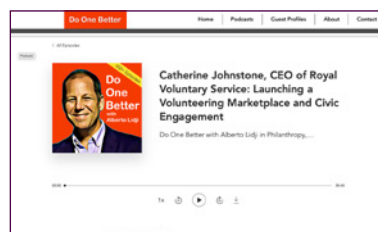### Charity Microsite

Art of the Possible film

Catherine's Third Sector presentation

Do One Better podcast

Appendix: Summary of key terms and conditions

By using the platform, charities are entering into a binding agreement with Royal Voluntary Service. The platform is still in pilot phase, and the terms may evolve. It is your organisation's responsibility to check the latest terms each time you use the platform.

Account Creation and Management

- At launch, only charities registered with the Charity Commission or OSCR are eligible to create an account

- Account creation is subject to Royal Voluntary Service approval, which may be refused or revoked at their discretion

- Multiple team members can use the account via Linked Accounts, but the charity is responsible for all activity

- Royal Voluntary Service has the right to suspend or disable accounts for breaches of the terms

Data Use, Identity Checks and Risk Allocation

- The platform may share identity-verification data about volunteers, referred to as "Attributes" or digital volunteer passports

- Royal Voluntary Service disclaims all liability for the accuracy or completeness of this information

- Charities use this data entirely at their own risk

- If the data is wrong or incomplete, Royal Voluntary Service is not liable for any resulting harm, loss, or failed placements

- Maximum liability of Royal Voluntary Service is £2,000, regardless of the nature of the claim

Safeguarding and Responsibility for Vulnerable Groups

If your volunteer opportunities involve children or vulnerable adults, your charity must:

- Ensure relevant staff and volunteers have current, appropriate criminal records checks and risk assessments, where applicable

- Ensure that only roles that legally require a criminal records check are listed as such

- Follow all applicable laws, guidance and codes of practice

- This responsibility sits fully with your organisation. Royal Voluntary Service does not vet listings or check safeguarding compliance.

Content, Listings and Communication

Your organisation is responsible for the content it posts, including opportunity descriptions, images, and documents. Listings must be:

- Accurate, up-to-date, and legally compliant

- Free from discriminatory language, false claims, or misleading requirements

Please note:

- Royal Voluntary Service may edit, reject or remove listings at any time, with or without explanation

- No guarantee is made that volunteers will apply or be suitable for your roles

- The platform does not host messaging – charities must contact volunteers directly outside the platform

Intellectual Property and Brand Use

Your organisation retains ownership of any content you post, but by using the platform, you grant Royal Voluntary Service a royalty-free, global licence to:

- Use and share your content across the platform and its communications

- Use your charity's name and logo to promote your participation in the platform while your account is active

- The platform branding and trademarks may only be used in line with Royal Voluntary Service's written approval.

Acceptable Use and Prohibited Activity

Users must not:

- Post harmful, obscene, harassing, or misleading content

- Promote illegal activity, or infringe copyright, privacy or reputation

- Use automated tools (such as bots, scrapers, or AI training models) to extract or analyse data from the platform

- The platform must not be used in connection with terrorism, trafficking, abuse, or other serious crimes (detailed in the terms).

Data Protection and Privacy

- Royal Voluntary Service is the data controller for all personal data processed via the platform

- Charities must ensure they comply with UK GDPR and data protection obligations when handling volunteer data received through the platform

- More detail is available in the separate platform Privacy Policy.

Legal Framework

- Use of the platform is provided as-is, with no warranties or service guarantees

- Royal Voluntary Service is offering the platform for free but has included limitations of liability.

- If your team relies on the platform's ID or volunteer data, this is not guaranteed, and you use it at your own risk.

Charities remain fully responsible for:

- Vetting volunteers

- Safeguarding vulnerable individuals

- Ensuring listings are appropriate and accurate

- Complying with relevant and local laws and data protection rules

The platform will be open to many organisations throughout England, Scotland and Wales. This means that a consistent territory is needed if a dispute about the platform's use needs to be enforced. The agreement therefore provides for the Courts of England and Wales to be used.

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