



# **VOLUNTEER SURVEYS**

**GUIDANCE TO HELP YOU GET THEM RIGHT**

JANUARY 2018



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# INTRODUCTION

Volunteers play a vital role in helping organisations make sport and physical activity happen.

Really understanding your volunteers can reap huge rewards and ensure you’re giving them the best experience possible.

This guidance is designed for sports and physical activity organisations to develop your own volunteer survey, so you can:

- Find out more about your volunteers and their experience of volunteering
- Help understand what motivates your volunteers and what they get out of volunteering
- Gather insight to inform your approach to recruiting, managing and supporting your volunteers.

We know volunteer surveys can be valuable to national governing bodies and other sport and physical activity organisations.

The ultimate aim of a survey is to help you take an insight-based approach to improve the experience volunteers have by giving them the right support, so they’re encouraged to keep giving their time and provide a great experience for people taking part.

Completing volunteer surveys is part of the [Code for Sports Governance](#) for Tier 3 sport organisations. This guidance will help organisations meet requirement 3.5 of the Code, which was developed to help organisations better understand their workforce, of which volunteers play an important part.

The Code also requires organisations to act on the results by communicating clearly to their employees and volunteers what the survey has shown and actions they plan to take.

Top-line data (anonymised and summarised) from your volunteer survey should also be made available to Sport England, to meet with the Code. Sharing this data will help us further our understanding of volunteers and inform the development of the support we offer to help you create an excellent environment for volunteering.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDANCE

> This guidance is a mix of recommendations and tips to help you run a good survey (i.e. how to get a better response rate) and some things you must do, such as meeting the legal requirements for storing data

> It’s not a comprehensive ‘how to’ guide, but will suggest things to consider and signpost you to other resources

> Alongside this guide is a [bank of sample questions](#) that you can use. This document outlines the seven topic areas covered in the volunteer survey bank

> You should also read the [Sport England Guide to Research](#), which gives more detailed guidance on good practice and the principles of high quality research which should underpin your approach.



# PLANNING YOUR SURVEY

## GET THINGS RIGHT FROM THE VERY START

It's important to be clear why you're doing your research. As a starting point, we'd encourage you to read the [Sport England Guide to Research](#), which contains useful tips and recommendations.

Page 9 of the research guide can help you decide when research is needed, while page 14 has information on defining your research objectives and writing a brief.

**WHEN YOU'RE THINKING ABOUT WHY YOU'RE DOING YOUR RESEARCH, CONSIDER:**

- 1. What is the aim of your research and its objectives? This will affect what questions you choose to ask.
- 2. What data is already available to you? Could you answer some of your research objectives from data you've already collected?
- 3. How you will use the findings?

### TIME AND EXPERTISE

Your approach to the survey needs to be based on your research objectives, but also on the time, skills and expertise you have available.

Think about your organisation's ability to analyse the results – only ask questions that you can do something with. For example, getting a lot of responses to an open question can be very

time-consuming to analyse – see page 24 of our Guide to Research.

Smaller, simpler surveys are still very valuable if you don't have the option to do a larger, more complex one. Similarly, detailed statistical analysis of results can be useful but more basic, descriptive figures can still provide valuable insights.

### DECIDING THE BEST APPROACH

Think carefully about the best methodology to use. Chapter 2 of our Guide to Research gives a useful description of the pros and cons of different methodologies, while page 29 looks at how to choose the best approach.

For example, your volunteer survey could sit alongside and complement existing registration forms, or volunteer feedback following particular events.

Alternatively, a dedicated volunteering survey which you send directly to your volunteers will allow you to ask the right questions for your organisation about volunteering, rather than adding on to another survey where scope to add more questions may be limited.

To do this, you'll need to have, or create, a database of up-to-date and accurate contact details for your volunteers. If you are using an online survey, you will need active email addresses for your volunteers. In terms of which volunteers and how many to survey, engaging with as many

as possible can help you to ensure you have enough data to give you useful and robust insight into the volunteer experience.

However, there may be volunteers who support your organisation or programmes indirectly, or for whom you don't have a direct contact with. In this instance, you may wish to consider sampling a small number from across your programmes.

You can find more information on sampling and ensuring your sample is

representative on page 11. You may also be able to survey volunteers via the third party they are engaged through, or it could be that other qualitative approaches like focus groups or phone conversations would be more appropriate.

The important thing is that you have a good understanding of the overall experience of volunteers who support your work and that the insight you gather will be useful to inform your work.

HOW VOLUNTEER SURVEYS CAN HELP YOU AND YOUR VOLUNTEERS

> Demonstrate the benefits and impact of volunteering so you can better attract new volunteers

> Identify who you might need to target in recruitment – anonymised data on the demographics of your volunteers will tell you if certain groups of people are under-represented

> Provide evidence to other organisations about the difference volunteers make

> Use evidence for funding bids and work with partners – for example, how many hours your volunteers contribute every year

> Raise the profile of volunteering – key statistics will help ensure people listen

> Improve the volunteer experience – you'll have data on what volunteers like (what you should build on) and what they don't (what you might need to change)

> Increase people's involvement – you'll understand more about the barriers that stop people from getting more involved

> Understand trends and changes over time, and make comparisons with other national or sport organisation datasets

> Provide feedback to your volunteers and improve communication

> Develop an insight-based approach to the strategic development of your volunteering.



# SAMPLE SURVEY QUESTIONS

USE OUR BANK OF SAMPLE QUESTIONS TO DEVELOP YOUR SURVEY

We've developed a [bank of sample questions](#) to help you create your volunteer survey. It includes seven separate sections and is designed to be used flexibly.

You can pick and choose from the list and you should select questions which will help meet the objectives of your research or meet other reporting and evaluation requirements from funders. You can also add in extra questions of your own.

This is an opportunity to collect data which will allow you to compare aspects of your volunteering to other national datasets, and with other sports and activities. To do this, you'll need you to include all those sample questions which are marked with asterisks in the bank of survey questions, in every volunteer survey you do.

The questions marked with asterisks link to the [Active Lives Adult Survey](#). To compare your data with Active Lives, you need to keep the wording and order of these questions as they are.

We've compiled some guidance over the next three pages on what topics you might want to ask questions about and how you could apply this insight.

## SECTION 1: VOLUNTEERING BEHAVIOUR

- It's useful to ask some questions about what your volunteers do and how often they're involved to update your organisation's understanding of your volunteers

- If your volunteers have more than one role, you can ask questions that refer to their 'main' role, but you can also ask what additional roles they may do and ask some questions about these
- You'll be able to tell more about how volunteering patterns vary between different groups of people and between different types of activity
- It can also help you create powerful high-level statistics such as the total number of hours your volunteers contribute each year to demonstrate to others.

## SECTION 2: MOTIVATIONS AND ROUTES INTO VOLUNTEERING

- Learning why your volunteers got involved in the first place can help you understand the skills and experience they bring, as well as their interests and what they want to get out of it
- This can help you match volunteers to the right activities, which can in turn help improve volunteer satisfaction and keep them volunteering
- It can also help ensure that volunteers benefit from some of the outcomes associated with volunteering, whether it's through opportunities to help them develop their skills, or meeting other aspirations such as making a difference in their community or improving their wellbeing.





# SAMPLE SURVEY QUESTIONS (CONT)

## SECTION 3: THE BENEFITS AND DRAWBACKS OF VOLUNTEERING

- Knowing what difference volunteering makes to your volunteers can help you promote volunteering to others, as well as better communicate the impact of volunteering in funding bids and your communications
- Understanding any downsides to volunteering or negative experiences can be crucial in helping to address concerns, improve the volunteer experience, and help volunteers feel they're being listened to.

## SECTION 4: SUPPORT FOR VOLUNTEERING

- How volunteers are managed and supported is a hugely important element of their experience and has a big effect on how happy they will be
- Knowing more about what elements are working can tell you which parts you should build on, and understanding what is less popular can help you address gaps in support or make improvements to the volunteer experience
- Using this data and insight well can help to improve levels of satisfaction, ensure you keep your volunteers, and ultimately the impact they can have on participants, clubs, the community and your organisation.

England Athletics used their volunteer survey to inform the content of their volunteering training, especially in identifying the barriers to volunteering and how to recruit new people. Using real-life examples and case studies, backed up by their volunteer survey data, they were able to communicate back out and share their volunteers' views and opinions.

## SECTION 5: REWARD AND RECOGNITION

- Understanding how volunteers would like to be thanked and recognised for their volunteering can help you improve their experience.

British Cycling has run volunteer surveys which informed their work and programmes at a national and regional level. It helped them to develop the support and structure they provide around volunteering, particularly how volunteers are consistently rewarded and recognised. The data they collected also informed the content of their volunteering strategy.

## SECTION 6: FUTURE BEHAVIOUR

- While a lot of attention is often given to the recruitment of new volunteers, doing your best to ensure existing volunteers stay involved can be a very effective use of your resources
- Knowing what might limit someone's volunteering in the future can also help you address some of the barriers to getting involved
- Understanding if people would recommend volunteering can be a good way to tell if they're happy with their experience.

## SECTION 7: PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

- It's really important to treat this data properly, especially in terms of how you securely store it and ensure that it's anonymous (see our section on good practice and legal requirements for more information)
- It's also important to tell volunteers why you're collecting personal data (see our section on good practice and legal requirements for more information)
- Knowing whether a particular group of people are under-represented can help show that you need to think about making your volunteering group more diverse
- It's also useful to understand how volunteering patterns might vary between different groups and backgrounds of people.

You can see our bank of sample survey questions by visiting: [www.sportengland/volunteersurveys](http://www.sportengland/volunteersurveys).



# RUNNING A GOOD SURVEY: PRACTICAL TIPS

## GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR SURVEY

Online surveys can be run through a variety of free or standard software packages, such as Google Forms or Office Forms.

There are other platforms with a variety of subscription rates which allow you to do different things with the design of your surveys, such as directing people to particular sections depending on their answers.

They have some analysis built in, but downloading the data into a spreadsheet will allow you to clean the data properly and have more control over the analysis.

If you're running postal surveys, you can use a programme such as Excel to collate and analyse the data, but the data entry will be manual or scanned and therefore time-consuming.

## USING THE RIGHT LANGUAGE AND TONE

Page 24 of the [Sport England Guide to Research](#) gives some useful tips on doing good quantitative research, including keeping it concise, wording things clearly, and keeping it interesting.

It's also important to make sure people understand the survey is relevant to them. Some people who meet the definitions of a volunteer might not always see themselves, or call themselves, a volunteer.

In your survey introduction, you should make it clear who you're trying to reach with the survey and who should complete it – you may need to offer some clarity about what the relevant definition of a volunteer is.

You should also be clear about any distinctions between volunteers and people who do sport or physical activity.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD COMMUNICATION

When you send the survey out to your volunteers, be clear about:

- When you'll close the survey – three weeks from when volunteers receive the survey should normally be enough
- Why you're undertaking the survey, how you will use the data, and how the volunteers and volunteering will benefit – this is your chance to sell the survey and convince people to take part
- How you'll store the data gathered (see our section on good practice and legal requirements for more information)
- That it's anonymous
- That their participation is voluntary but will be greatly valued – thanking volunteers is also important
- Whether you'll share the findings with them and if so, when and how.

## SAMPLES AND BEING REPRESENTATIVE

You can send the survey to all of your volunteers, or you can send it to a smaller sample of these volunteers.

How to develop samples and what to consider is explained on page 20 of the [Sport England Guide to Research](#).

You'll need to be confident that your results represent the views of your volunteers. Try to get as high a response rate as possible – a 1 in 10 response is quite normal.

To work out the response rate, you'll need to know the total number of volunteers you sent the survey to. A survey is still useful if you don't know exactly how many volunteers you have, but you won't be able to work out an accurate response rate.

Page 25 of our Guide to Research provides some useful tips on how to do effective quantitative research.

## GETTING A GOOD RESPONSE RATE TO YOUR SURVEY – TOP TIPS:

- > **Test it first.** Testing a pilot of your survey with a group of people can help you understand what works and what needs to be revised. Developing the survey with input from volunteers is also useful
- > **Design it well.** Surveys should be easy to complete, make sense to follow, have clear questions, and be as short as possible (maximum 10-15 minutes)
- > **Make it accessible.** Surveys should be made available in different formats if required (i.e. different languages, large print)
- > **Remind people.** Sending one or two reminders is very helpful as well as promoting it through social media, newsletters, websites, and meetings
- > **Get your timing right.** Avoid the Christmas period and summer holidays when people are more likely to be away
- > **Offer an incentive.** Things like prizes can help increase response rates.



# PRACTICAL TIPS (CONT)

## CLEANING AND ANALYSING YOUR DATA

Once you've closed your survey, you'll need to 'clean' the data before you start analysing it.

This means deleting any responses which are duplicated (i.e. when the same volunteer has completed it more than once, which may not always be obvious), and identifying incomplete responses (i.e. respondents who have only answered the first one or two questions).

## SHARING YOUR FINDINGS AND LEARNING

We'd encourage you to always thank your volunteers for taking part. Be open and honest when sharing your findings, telling them about anything negative as well as positive feedback, and what actions you'll be taking.

Share the written-up results, not just the raw data, with:

- Your volunteers (including those who did not take part). This is very important as they're likely to be interested in the results, but this kind of feedback will also help get them on board for future surveys
- Your staff
- Your board of trustees or committee members
- Sport England – please email [volunteering@sportengland.org](mailto:volunteering@sportengland.org).

It's also very useful to share how you have used the data and insight gathered through the survey. This might be examples of what you've changed or improved as a result. See England Athletics and British Cycling's comments on pages 8 and 9 on how they have used their survey results.

Don't forget, completing a volunteer survey is part of the [Code for Sports Governance](#) for Tier 3 sport organisations. Requirement 3.5 was developed to help funded organisations better understand their volunteers and workforce.

### REQUIREMENT 3.5

Each organisation shall be expected to carry out a regular staff survey (including their volunteers) at least once a year and:

(A) act on the results internally, communicating clearly to their employees and volunteers how such actions are to be taken;

(B) make topline data available to Sport England to collate the results for the purpose of developing a greater understanding of the sport workforce.





# GOOD PRACTICE AND LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

## YOUR SURVEY MUST COMPLY WITH THE LAW

Always make sure you're being ethical: good ethics is a key part of all research.

We strongly recommend that you read the [Social Research Association's Ethical Guidelines](#) before you start your survey.

Good ethics in surveys means:

- Only gathering data that you need and will use
- Being open, honest, and transparent with your respondents at all times – they should be informed and be able to give their consent to take part
- Being impartial in the collection and analysis of data
- Adhering to the law at all times
- Having concern for the safety and security of people doing the research
- Allowing research respondents to participate voluntarily, not being harmed as a result of being involved, and no group being disadvantaged by being routinely excluded from consideration.

## SENDING SURVEYS TO UNDER-16S

If you involve teenagers and children as volunteers – or want to in the future – it's a good idea to include them in the survey to get their views. But for people under the age of 16, you'll legally need to get the consent of parents, guardians

or carers for them to take part in a survey. Before you send a survey to anyone below 16, it's worth reading guidance from the [National Children's Bureau](#) and the [Market Research Society](#) on undertaking research with children and young people.

## WHAT TO DO WITH PERSONAL DATA

Reporting from surveys should be anonymous and should not name individual volunteers directly or allow them to be identified from something else (i.e. specific locations or role descriptions). All quotes taken from open questions should be anonymous. You can report on personal data, such as ethnicity of volunteers, at a summary level rather than a personal, individual level.

You can still gather some personal data (i.e. if you are doing follow-up work, tracking individuals between surveys, or giving prizes to respondents and need to get in touch with them), but only gather as much as you need. Tell respondents that you're gathering their personal data, how you plan to use it, and how you'll store it and reassure them that their personal data is being kept safe.

## HOW TO LOOK AFTER AND STORE PERSONAL DATA

All data must be stored in accordance with the 1998 Data Protection Act (see [www.ico.org.uk/for-the-public](http://www.ico.org.uk/for-the-public) for details and guidance) and the 2018 General Data Protection Regulation (see the [EU regulations](#) and some [guidance from the Information Commissioner's Office](#)). Failure to comply with these legal requirements can have serious consequences for your organisation.

Personal details of respondents should not be linked directly to the rest of the survey questions when stored. For

example, you can delete or save the personal details section somewhere else, securely. All personal details should be deleted when they're no longer needed and all original ('raw') survey data should be deleted after a set period of time (i.e. six months after project completion).

All survey data should be kept securely. If paper copies, store in a locked cupboard and if online, save in a password-protected folder. Only the team or person doing the research should have access to these keys/passwords.





# USEFUL RESOURCES

[Sport England sample survey questions](#)

[Sport England Guide to Research](#)

[Sport England Volunteering Insight Guide](#)

[Active Lives Adult Survey](#)

[Code for Sports Governance](#)

[Social Research Association's Ethical Guidelines](#)

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## GOOD LUCK WITH YOUR SURVEY.

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Please stay in touch, do ask any questions and share your results with us via:  
[volunteering@sportengland.org](mailto:volunteering@sportengland.org)

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January 2018