



Age-friendly and
inclusive volunteering

Volunteering in later life

We need to ensure people in later life have the opportunity to contribute to their communities

By the time people reach later life, the majority have some experience of contributing to their community – either in a formal volunteering role, or by helping out friends and neighbours.

However, looking to the future, there is no room for complacency. The older population is changing – it is already becoming more ethnically diverse, and more people are living for longer, often with long-term conditions and caring responsibilities.

Our communities currently rely on a 'civic core' of highly engaged

individuals, who are mainly healthier, wealthier and white. But this group may not be able to sustain its contributions in future, as more people work longer and care for longer.

Without action to attract and retain a more diverse pool of volunteers, organisations working with volunteers may find their capacity is depleted.

If we don't act now to engage a more diverse group of people in later life, communities will continue to miss out on the talents they bring.

Community contributions

Organisations that work with volunteers need to do more to support people in later life

The Centre for Ageing Better, in partnership with the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, recently published a review of community contributions in later life, focusing on how to increase participation among under-represented groups.

The review was informed by existing evidence from research and practice; expert roundtables; qualitative community research in four local areas; and focus groups with volunteers and people in later life.

This booklet, taking findings from the review, makes practical recommendations for organisations that work with volunteers. The review also includes recommendations for other sectors.

Between 2001 and 2015, the total amount of time retired people spent volunteering fell by a quarter.
(Payne, 2017)

Barriers to getting involved

As people move through life, they can face a number of barriers to taking part in community activity

Almost everyone in later life makes a contribution of some kind. However, some people encounter barriers to getting involved in ways that work for them, especially as their circumstances change.

Poorer and less healthy people in later life face barriers to contributing within formal organisations, as do people from some Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities.

Our individual circumstances, in terms of our health, financial status and other responsibilities also inform what kinds of

contribution are most suitable for us – and these can change over the course of our lives.

People in later life can find that changes, such as the onset of ill-health or disability, cause them to withdraw from making contributions.

The review identified three broad categories of barriers to volunteering and community contribution:



Practical barriers

- ⊕ Costs
- ⊕ Transport needs
- ⊕ Physical access
- ⊕ Language



Structural barriers

- ⊕ Inflexible offers
- ⊕ Lack of neutral spaces
- ⊕ Bureaucracy
- ⊕ Lack of resources
- ⊕ Digital divide



Emotional barriers

- ⊕ Lack of confidence
- ⊕ Stigma/stereotype
- ⊕ Lack of welcome
- ⊕ Fear of overcommitment
- ⊕ Not feeling valued

People in later life do not want special “older people’s” programmes. In fact these can exacerbate barriers around ageism. Instead, we need to ensure that all opportunities for volunteering and community contributions are age-friendly.

Alongside this we need to make sure that volunteering

opportunities are more broadly inclusive and remove barriers associated with race and ethnicity, disability, poverty and disadvantage.

To futureproof the contributions that enrich and sustain our communities, we need to address these barriers to inclusion and widen participation.

Age-friendly and inclusive volunteering

Six principles to making volunteering opportunities age-friendly and inclusive



1 Flexible and responsive



2 Enabled and supported



3 Sociable and connected



4 Valued and appreciated



5 Meaningful and purposeful



6 Makes good use of my strengths



“

Almost everyone in later life makes a contribution of some kind. However, some people encounter barriers to getting involved in all the ways they might want to, especially as their circumstances change.

—

”



Flexible and responsive:

- It fits around my life.
- When life changes, I can adjust my commitment without feeling I've let anyone down.
- I know how to get involved, what I'm being asked to do, and how to stop.

For example:

- More opportunities that are flexible in terms of time and location.
- Regular opportunities to review roles and commitments.



Enabled and supported:

- I receive practical help with access, expenses, and any training that I want and need.
- I feel supported – I know who I can turn to with any questions.

For example:

- Clear expenses policies – with upfront payment options.
- Buddying/mentoring programmes for new volunteers.



Sociable and connected:

- I have opportunities to meet and spend time with other people, including people from different backgrounds and age groups.
- It makes me feel a part of something.

For example:

- Regular opportunities to get together with other participants.
- Events, newsletters or other opportunities to 'belong' even when circumstances mean you can't actively participate.



Valued and appreciated:

- The value of my effort is recognised, and people regularly let me know I'm valued – through what they say and do.
- I feel like people appreciate what I do.

For example:

- Saying 'thank you' and offering small tokens of appreciation – such as invitation to an event or meal.
- Valuing and investing in voluntary time and input as a strategic organisational asset.



Meaningful and purposeful:

- The work I do means something to me and feels purposeful.
- I feel that what I do is worthwhile.

For example:

- Giving participants the opportunity to shape the work being done.
- Regular opportunities to give and receive feedback.



Makes good use of my strengths:

- It allows me to use the skills and experiences I've built up during my life, and gives me opportunities to try out and learn new things.
- I feel like my experience is respected and valued.

For example:

- Creating opportunities to review roles so people can take on new things as confidence builds.
- Asking people about their experiences and skills and how they want to use them.

Making volunteering practices age-friendly and inclusive

Recommendations for organisations working with volunteers

- ✓ Sign up to these principles, and review existing volunteering roles, processes and practice against them.
- ✓ Provide a range of flexible options for contributing, and make sure volunteers and potential volunteers know how they can review their commitments as life changes.
- ✓ Reduce emotional barriers to participation, by ensuring volunteers feel invited, welcomed, connected and valued.
- ✓ Reduce practical barriers to access, including upfront costs of participation, travel requirements and digital exclusion.
- ✓ Keep processes proportionate and recognise the strengths that older volunteers already bring.
- ✓ Ensure volunteer policies and practice promote inclusion, and address gaps in representation among older volunteers.
- ✓ Larger and more formal organisations that work with volunteers need to build links with groups and places where people contribute their time more informally. This makes it easier for people to move between different types of contribution as their circumstances change.



“

Looking to the future, there is no room for complacency around the participation of people in later life.

—

”

Age-friendly and inclusive volunteering

Organisations working with volunteers need to do more to support and sustain the good will and effort of older volunteers

By the time people reach later life, the majority already have some experience of contributing to their communities.

Relying on a narrow civic core to sustain our communities is highly risky. Without action to attract and retain a more diverse pool of volunteers, organisations working with volunteers may find their capacity is depleted.

We need to make volunteering opportunities age-friendly and inclusive to widen the pool of volunteers and enable people to continue to contribute, even when their circumstances change.

This guide sets out six principles that should act as a guide to organisations thinking about how to involve people in later life. It is an abridged version of our report, 'Age-friendly and inclusive volunteering: Review of community contributions in later life'.

The Centre for Ageing Better is a charity, funded by an endowment from The National Lottery Community Fund, working to create a society where everyone enjoys a good later life.

To read the full report, visit ageing-better.org.uk/communities



The Centre for Ageing Better received £50 million from The National Lottery Community Fund in January 2015 in the form of an endowment to enable it to identify what works in the ageing sector by bridging the gap between research, evidence and practice.