

# Giving volunteers the space to make a difference

A guide to improving your  
volunteer management processes,  
compiled by Supporters Direct  
Scotland



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She walked how you imagine the largest Russian Doll in a set would walk. Rolling, almost. There was a tender sway to her movements, tilting smoothly from side to side. From each tree-bark hand hung a tea urn. Scottish football runs on tea. Tea in the Referee's Room, tea for the half-time player. Tea in foam cups, tea when you drop into a ground on a weekday afternoon. Tea to warm the winter, tea to show mistrust of fleeting summer and flighty warmth.

The Russian Doll heaved her urns up onto a table covered with a thick plastic tablecloth, its floral pattern wattle and daubed with empty sugar sachets and spilt milk. She wore a blue tabard with redundant pockets and sported a gently wise smile. "There you are, boys. That'll warm ye' up before the second-half. Take a biscuit too." She waddled away with that satisfied look women of her generation often display after they've fed and watered everyone else in the room ("Och, I'll get something for myself later").

I see them at almost every ground I visit in Scotland, this quiet battalion. They are making and issuing tea as did the Russian Doll. They are rolling the pitch with feudal-era equipment and Sisyphean determination. They are shuffling tidy a pile of matchday programmes like a television newsreader as the lights fade. They are straightening their tie clips in the board room and removing cellophane from foil serving plates of tiny white sandwiches stuffed with grated luminous cheese. I see them from border to island, from Junior to Highland. The amateur photographer with more camera gear than Latvian state TV, filing his pictures to be captioned with elaborations in a local newspaper. The PA announcer, folded sheet with names of sponsors and names of forwards in one hand, the intermittent and spluttering remote microphone in the other. The club historian ready to share the obscure, the every-game-fan with his nods from the players and the lotto seller jangling and cajoling. They are the home front stoics that make every club.

These hardy thousands make football tick in Scotland, their hearts and their heads and their hands gone and given to the game. Every home match, they are there. Through the week, some keep the club ticking over, nightwatchmen and women, ensuring that our Saturdays have purpose, comfort and melancholy. No penny is frittered, no paper plate discarded unused. The football they nurture and prune is played in all sorts of homes: scraggy but loveable grounds with one-grandstand; regal and bustling stadiums of noble vintage; characterful nook-and-cranny habitats with pillars blocking the view. Such places possess an altogether different kind of beauty, like disused rural limestone railway stations or fleetingly revealed ghost signs above mid-renovation shops.

"The Home Front Stoics" by Daniel Gray, from the Nutmeg book "[Snapshot](#)"

**“Volunteering is the ultimate exercise in democracy... when you volunteer you vote every day about the kind of community you want to live in.”**

Marjorie Moore in the Scottish Government’s **Volunteering For All** national framework



Football occupies a vital place in Scottish society. With clubs large and small in every town and city, and in many of our smallest villages and remotest communities, the sport gives people a sense of place and local identity. Scotland’s professional leagues enjoy the highest per capita levels of attendance of any European country, and the United Kingdom has the highest level of football participation in Europe.

Clubs at every level of the game are reliant on volunteers to function, thrive, and support their communities. In all but the very largest clubs, most or all non-football roles are performed by volunteers; and in the professional game most clubs have established charitable trusts to deliver community football programmes, as well as projects focussed on broader social impacts, all heavily dependent on the work of volunteers.

The scale of volunteering has been measured across Scotland: 28% of adults and 52% of young people aged 11-16 volunteer ([Volunteering For All](#)), and 75% of adults that volunteer do so for up to 10 hours per month ([Scottish Household Survey 2016](#)). Volunteering contributes £2.26bn to the Scottish economy ([Volunteering For All](#)), and the value of volunteering in Scottish football has been estimated at €334.4 million ([UEFA GROW](#)).

This report will examine Scottish football’s approach to volunteering and identify the aspects of volunteer management that can enable the clubs, volunteers and communities to all benefit from this work.

## The Scope, Scale and Value of Volunteering in Scottish Football

Volunteering across all areas of Scottish society has been extensively studied. The Scottish Government's "[Volunteering For All](#)" framework reports that more than a quarter of adults and more than half of young people between the ages of 11 and 16 volunteer, with the majority (65%) of volunteering hours being provided by 19% of the volunteers.

In adults, the volunteering rate rises to 42% for those people with professional qualifications, compared with 11% of adults with no qualifications; and those who earn more than £40,000 per year have almost double (39%) the volunteering rate of those in the lowest income range (20%).

In 2016, the [Scottish Household Survey](#) found that 18% of adults that provide unpaid help do so several times a week, and 25% provide unpaid help once a week; 75% of adults that volunteered did so for up to 10 hours per month.

Most volunteering takes place within communities of place or communities of interest and among those who have similar backgrounds. A football club represents both a community of place and of interest; the popularity of the sport and number of clubs means that most players and volunteers are local to their club.

In adult football Scotland has 42 professional clubs competing in the four national divisions of the Scottish Professional Football League; below this there are a further 235 'semi-professional' clubs competing in regional leagues; an amateur game with 67 local league competitions and over 2000 clubs; and an estimated 630,000 more people playing recreational football (e.g. 5-a-side, futsal, and walking football) on a regular basis. In youth football, the Scottish Football Association has implemented a Quality Mark system of accreditation for the country's 528 youth football clubs.

The [SPFL Trust](#) was established in 2009 to work with community trusts and associated SPFL clubs across the country, helping them to deliver change that improves people's lives. 31 of the 42 SPFL clubs now have associated charities delivering community football development programmes.

Particularly in challenging times such as the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 many of these charities have turned their attention towards expanding their non-football activities, which has attracted a broader cohort of volunteers – in many places these activities have established the football clubs as community hubs, places where social change happens, rather than merely places where football is played.

The Scottish Football Association's "[One National Plan for non-professional football in Scotland 2017-2020](#)" aims to increase involvement in football to 10% of Scotland's population by 2026. It summarises participation levels in 2017 as follows:

- 140,000 registered players
- 8% of adults in Scotland regularly play football
- 10,000 registered female players
- 6,000 disabled players
- 50,000 community football players

Scotland also has 950 licences active coaches (almost all volunteers) and 2,400 qualified referees (who are paid for match duties, but not for their training and development activity).

In 2019, UEFA's "[GROW](#)" report on the social return on investment of football in Scotland measured the value of football participation at €1.35 billion. This figure was broken down into three parts:

**\$242.3m**

direct contributions to  
the economy

**\$762.6m**

healthcare savings from  
football participation

**\$352m**

economic impact of social benefits  
(\$334.4m due to the value of volunteers'  
activity in supporting  
registered players)

Two studies of the volunteering landscape across all activities in Scotland place this figure in context. These two reports suggest that football may be one of the most significant sources of volunteering activity, representing between 10% and 15% of total volunteering activity in Scotland:

- [Volunteer Development Scotland](#) found in 2006 that volunteering is worth £2.52 billion to the Scottish economy, with most volunteers giving at least five hours of their time each month
- "[Volunteering For All](#)" Framework (2018) estimated that volunteering contributes £2.26bn to the Scottish economy

The non-economic impacts of football demonstrate the importance of supporting the development of the game. The New Economics Foundation's 2016 report, "[Leadership and Cultural Change to Enable Social Action](#)", observed that places which have enabled social action at scale have seen reductions in the need for acute services such as domiciliary care and in-patient mental health services. Scotland's ageing population puts these services under increasing pressure, and football can play a part in easing this pressure.

## Individual Motivations for Volunteering

“Volunteering is a choice. A choice to give time or energy, a choice undertaken of one’s own free will and a choice not motivated for financial gain or for a wage or salary.”

- Volunteering For All national framework

Turning from the value of football to Scottish society, to its value to individual volunteers, we can draw clear distinctions between two particular types of volunteer.

**Philanthropic volunteering** is where the volunteer wants little more than to contribute to society or to their community, to have an enjoyable experience as part of a social network, and feel a sense of personal achievement or improved self-worth. Many volunteer for many years, and devote many hours every week in doing so. They volunteer because they have a personal or emotional attachment to the organisation – in football clubs, this can simply be because they are a fan, or because a family member has been involved in the past as a fan or as a player.

**Transactional volunteering** is where the volunteer is interesting in gaining experience, a qualification, developing their network of contacts, or some other material or non-material benefit. Transactional volunteers typically volunteer for a relatively short period of time, and are generally (but not exclusively) younger than philanthropic volunteers.

The [Sport & Recreation Alliance](#) report that “On average, sport volunteers

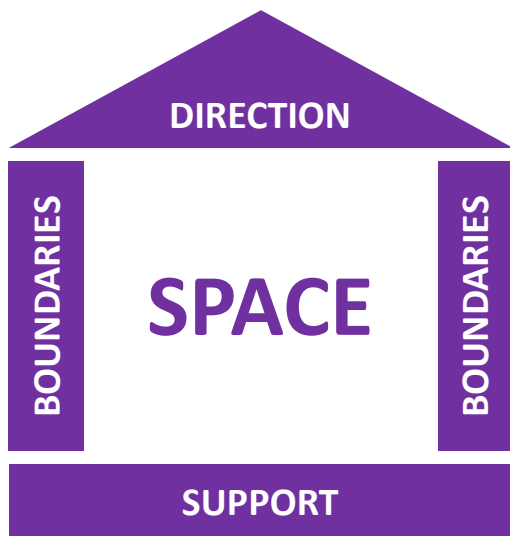
spend more time volunteering, and they have done so for more years. People who volunteer (both sport and general volunteering) do so because they enjoy it and they have time to do so. Some also felt that they could improve their physical health, spend time with their children, and reduce stress levels. General volunteers, however, mainly do it for their own personal self-improvement and to contribute to societal causes. There are also differences in motivations between the generations: younger people feel they can broaden their life experiences while older volunteers feel a sense of personal achievement.”

These two archetypal descriptions of volunteers share one characteristic: that volunteers are individuals, and each is motivated differently. Warren Hawke, interim Chief Executive of the SPFL Trust, attests that “you get 18 months to find out what the volunteer is in it for, and enhance that – if not you lose them, but if you do this you can keep them engaged for longer.”

The [Scottish Sport Association](#), in “Why Volunteering Matters” summarise the myriad of personal motivations into six themes – this is an excellent starting point for any conversation with a volunteer:

- Mental health
- Physical health
- Life skills
- Sense of belonging
- Job skills
- Employability

## Volunteer Management



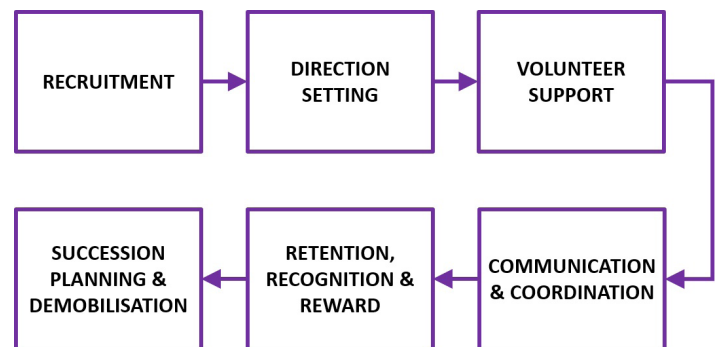
There is no “one size fits all” approach to volunteer management. Each club, activity and volunteer will need a different mix of direction, support and boundaries; and these requirements will change over time as the club develops and evolves. By adopting simple and robust processes, a club can establish good practices at its heart.

This document provides an overview of six processes that represent a volunteer’s journey with the club, some of them overlapping but all of them vital.

In order to create a positive environment where volunteers can make a difference – to the participants in the club, to the club’s community, or to their own lives – a club has three priorities:

1. To set the **direction** for all activity at the club, and ensure that the club’s vision aligns with that of its community
2. To provide **support** to the individuals who are volunteering – for example through providing training, development, and exposure to expert guidance and knowledge, or by taking care of statutory and administrative responsibilities
3. To set and maintain clear **boundaries**, ensuring that the volunteers act appropriately, and maintaining the positive profile and reputation of the club.

By managing these three things, clubs can give volunteers the **space** to make a difference.



## Investing in Volunteers

[Investing in Volunteers](#) is the UK quality standard for all organisations which involve volunteers in their work. Over 1,000 organisations have achieved this quality award throughout the UK, ranging from small community groups that are totally volunteer-led to large national multi branch charities that have thousands of volunteers.

The Investing in Volunteers quality standard is made up of nine indicators which are designed to cover all aspects of volunteer management.

### 1. The basis for volunteer involvement

There is an expressed commitment to the involvement of volunteers, and recognition throughout the organisation that volunteering is a two-way process which benefits volunteers and the organisation.

### 2. How the organisation resources volunteering

The organisation commits appropriate resources to working with all volunteers, such as money, management, staff time and materials.

### 3. Diversity in volunteering

The organisation is open to involving volunteers who reflect the diversity of the local community and actively seeks to do this in accordance with its stated aims.

### 4. The development of volunteer roles

The organisation develops appropriate roles for volunteers in line with its aims and objectives, which are of value to the volunteers.



### 5. Steps taken to protect volunteers

The organisation is committed to ensuring that, as far as possible, volunteers are protected from physical, financial and emotional harm arising from volunteering.

### 6. Fair recruitment procedures

The organisation is committed to using fair, efficient and consistent recruitment procedures for all potential volunteers.

### 7. Volunteer induction

Clear procedures are put into action for introducing new volunteers to their role, the organisation, its work, policies, practices and relevant personnel.

### 8. Volunteer support and supervision needs

The organisation takes account of the varying support and supervision needs of volunteers.

### 9. Recognition of volunteer contributions

The whole organisation is aware of the need to give volunteers recognition.

Each indicator has a number of recommended practices, which can be found [here](#).





**Recruitment**

“There are considerable barriers to volunteering. When considering how to increase the number of volunteers, we found that it is important to make it easy for volunteers to get started. In sport, and in general volunteering, people are more likely to volunteer if they have a friend with them. There are also prejudices which keep people from volunteering, such as the perceived need to be fit to volunteer – particularly in sport – or to have specific skills.”

- Sport & Recreation Alliance’s [GIVERS](#) report

Recruitment of volunteers is often a very informal process, initiated by potential volunteers or through the organic growth of volunteer groups, rather than being driven by the club. This leads to the club being reliant on existing volunteers, to potential volunteers being unsure of the opportunities open to them, and the process of beginning a volunteer role can be very daunting.

By defining and advertising volunteer roles, either directly or through an external agency like Volunteer Scotland who have local offices throughout the country, these difficulties can be easily overcome.

[Volunteer Scotland](#) offer a role description template, and they recommend being explicit about:

- The role title – make it appealing and relevant to the role
- Outline of the role – introduce the organisation and the main tasks you’re looking for a volunteer to do
- Skills, attitudes and experience needed – outline what’s needed to do this role
- Benefits to the volunteer – let potential volunteers know what they could get out of doing this role, e.g. training, experience, or just fresh air and exercise!
- Where the role will be based
- When the volunteer will be needed, how often, and if it’s ongoing or a short term role
- Support – who the point of contact and support will be for the volunteer
- How to apply / what happens next – if the volunteer wants to apply, what they should do next and then what will happen
- Who the volunteer can get in touch with if they still have questions





## Case Study: Aberdeen FC Community Trust A conversation with Steven Sweeney, Chief Operating Officer

The relationship between the [Aberdeen FC Community Trust](#) and the Scottish Football Association is a model of best practice nationally – an attribute which earned Aberdeen FC the Best Professional Football Club prize in the 2019 UEFA Grassroots Awards. The award recognises the Scottish Premiership club's engagement with over 20,200 people in projects covering a large geographical area that accounts for around 25% of the entire land mass of Scotland and roughly 10% of the population.

Each town within this area has a distinct identity, and AFCCT work closely in partnerships with local clubs, helping them to build their capacity, rather than competing with them. In many of these towns, sports facilities and football clubs are the most prominent community assets, and AFCCT use their scale and expertise to improve the sustainability of the facilities, clubs, and people.

AFCCT have 29 full-time staff, working across 60 projects with 80 volunteers. Their activity centres on three pillars of activity:

- Football for life – football participation, supporting grassroots clubs, running and developing local leagues, and educating coaches
- Education (in primary, secondary, further education) delivering health and wellbeing interventions, closing the attainment gap, providing alternative education offerings, positive destinations for young people, and building partnerships with colleges and universities

- Healthy communities – working with the “easy to ignore” under-represented groups, and tackling inequalities – their active aging and dementia-friendly initiative won the European Club Association best CSR project award in 2017

AFCCT were inspired by Werder Bremen's approach to recruitment, and purposefully look to provide community interventions with individuals first. Beyond the initial time-limited intervention they maintain a relationship with them, support them to understand what they want to achieve and get them to a point where they're contributing to another project and supporting others through their journey. This a sustainability cycle, where the participants take over leadership and delivery of the activity, and all it needs from AFCCT is a bit of coordination.

Once somebody has been through an intervention, they're invited to take part in a project led by a full-time member of staff who looks after them from start to finish. The staff have an overview on marketing, communications, planning, delivery, and evaluation, but also importantly on the integration of volunteers to project support.

In their football programmes, volunteers might lead or assist in football participation delivery, club development activity, running local leagues, peer-to-peer or coach mentoring. In education, a lot of the practitioners are quite specialised, so volunteers would go in there as a second pair of hands or to mentor young people one-to-one.

In public health projects, the aim is to make this volunteer-led and this is where volunteers are given the most responsibility and autonomy – staff need to empower the volunteers to lead, and support them so they know how to plan and deliver the work well. Staff also encourage them to get some of the people they've supported to get involved as volunteers themselves.

Most football clubs in Scotland have their own academy, and often their own grassroots club as part of their charity. Aberdeen FC view this differently – they believe this would starve other clubs of coaches, players and resources, and it would be detrimental for the game locally if Aberdeen FC were to dominate the market. Instead, the club acts as an overarching community anchor, helping clubs in other leagues become bigger and stronger, with better governance and greater participation rates. The clubs are all working towards the same objectives of helping people, and there are huge societal, economic and public health benefits from working together.

Through their community focus and presence, AFCCT have been able to do a lot during COVID-19, particularly on food poverty and food delivery, and did this in partnership with four other football clubs. These clubs had knowledge and local connections, but AFCCT provided them with the skills, tools and resources to support their community.

On average, volunteers stay involved for around three years, but a few stay around forever. It's down to each staff member to support people properly, listen and understand them better, so they stay around for longer. There isn't one single person responsible for this, and AFCCT make it a priority to help their staff, particularly junior ones who are ambitious, improve their line management skills. The biggest challenge going forward is to recruit, onboard and support volunteers consistently, which will improve the experience of all our volunteers and ensure their work has the greatest possible impact on the community.



# Direction Setting



“Trustees sit above a dense forest. Volunteers and staff can go into the forest, but if they look up they should always see the trustees.”

- Warren Hawke, Interim Chief Executive, SPFL Trust

The club’s leadership team, directors, committee members or trustees are responsible for setting the strategic direction of the club, developing a plan, and ensuring everyone within the organisation understands the direction and is able to implement their part of the plan. In most community or semi-professional clubs, and also at the majority of professional football clubs in Scotland, these directors and committee members are also volunteers themselves – they are bringing their experience and skills into the boardroom of the club they love.

Their own passion and commitment for the club can often lead them to take a lot for granted, and make assumptions about volunteers’ knowledge and understanding of the club’s aspirations and priorities. For many volunteers, as well as having a clearly defined role it is particularly important to set direction explicitly – if they misunderstand this, it is harder to intervene with volunteers than it is with staff members where hierarchical structures exist to line-manage people.

Direction setting is essentially about aligning everyone around a common goal and identity, enthusing and motivating them to make a difference, and having everyone taking pride in something bigger than themselves. In setting a direction for the club, past achievements are recognised and celebrated, and aspirations for the future can become a magnet that draws everyone forward together.

This is a ‘higher level’ conversation than simply giving instructions about individual tasks – it’s about the **why** rather than the **what** or **how**.

For everyone at the club to work effectively together, and instinctively understand what is required of them, a shared sense of the club’s purpose is needed:

- What values does the club aspire to?
- What is the club’s highest intention?
- How does each part of the club contribute to these aspirations?
- What difference can the club make to its fans, to its community, and to its players and staff?



## Case Study: Stenhousemuir Football Club A conversation with Iain McMenemy, Club Chairman

For a club to be really effective in the community it needs a driver – one or two people who have it in their mind to do something for the community. The club has to reach out wider to find people that want to be involved in more than just football – community doesn't need to be in conflict with football aspirations, but you need a structure to manage this.

[Stenhousemuir FC](#) currently play in SPFL League Two, Scotland's fourth division, and are incorporated as a Community Interest Company to ensure the community focus is permanent, and the two sides of the club (football and community) are separate but interconnected. Club chairman Iain McMenemy says, "you've won the lottery if you have a football person who really gets the community side", and credits vice-chair David Reid as the driving force behind creating the CIC. The club has an aspiration to do more for the community and are always challenging themselves to go further.

Football is the magnet that attracts new supporters, players, volunteers, and directors. Once they have come to the club, they look to get them involved more – to understand what they're interested in, what their skills are, and encourage them to get involved further. This has to be done intentionally, and if you don't work at it, you'll lose them – they'll just drop their kids off at the gate and disappear.

Club officials attend regular meetings with community parents, prizegiving events, etc – they don't just leave this to the coaches. It's important that silos

don't form, you need to be intentional about keeping the football club and community programmes connected. The club has relationships with more than 20 other sports through the Tryst Community Sports Hub, based at the local high school. This connects two facilities for mutual benefit – Schools Of Football can be held at Ochilview during the day when it would otherwise be unused, and the club's community teams can use Larbert High School in the evening when it would be empty.

At the very beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic people took personal action, and the club's role was to connect and coordinate this, and offer help to the whole community. Within days the club set up a Community Help Initiative, setting up a telephone helpline and distributing leaflets locally to offer help with simple things – dog walking, food deliveries, shopping, lending books, etc. The first phone calls were from people wanting to volunteer, rather than from people looking for help. More than 200 volunteers came on board in total, half of whom had no prior connection to the club, and half who had some connection but had never volunteered before. This added to the volunteers the club already had for the community programmes.

The club showed its commitment to supporting the initiative properly by keeping three full-time staff available to resource it properly. The club didn't know if it could even survive financially, but the community purpose was so strongly established in the club that it didn't do the easy thing and just look after itself.

When bringing volunteers into the initiative, the club emphasised its principles and commitment to the community. The importance of listening to what the community needed, responding quickly, making personal connections (by pairing volunteers up with people in the community), and always living up to their promises. By showing their commitment, the club's trust in people was returned – when helping with food deliveries, for example, the club would pay for groceries themselves rather than asking for money in advance. This smoothed the process and allowed them to respond quickly, and although the club recognised and prepared for the risk of non-payment, in reality everybody paid because they were treated with trust and respect.

The club were able to use their existing connections with schools (working with 28 different schools in the area), local businesses, charities and the council

to extend the service they delivered, and this led to the club being given “community anchor organisation” status, which made them eligible for lottery funding to cover some core costs, which would have been almost impossible to get grant funding for otherwise.

Stenhousemuir's Community Help Initiative got a lot of media attention, locally, nationally and beyond Scotland. Feedback from volunteers and from the community was that they felt the club genuinely meant it when they said they wanted to help the community and was making some hard choices in order to do the right thing. It was clear that the club was authentic, and not doing any of this for attention and PR – volunteers were front and centre, the club didn't hog the limelight, they were just one of the many organisations working together.

# warriors in the community







**Volunteer Support**

“Volunteers who are well supported from the start are happy volunteers and happy volunteers are more likely to make a difference.”

- Volunteer Scotland

Volunteer support is about building a positive relationship with volunteers from the start – giving them a great welcome and induction, and the best possible early experiences with your club. By making them feel valued and part of something special you will enhance both their experience with you, and the impact they have on your goals.

For many, volunteering is a social activity as well as something they do to help the club they love. Create opportunities for your volunteers to get to know each other, and to help each other. This reduces the burden on the club’s leadership – the support you give should be a solid foundation that sits beneath all of your volunteers’ efforts.

[Volunteer Scotland](#) suggest that the support you give to volunteers is documented in a Volunteer Policy, and established as something that everyone can refer to throughout their work with the club.

Their guidance on areas to cover in a policy includes:

- Introduction to the organisation and why volunteers are involved
- The role of key staff in relation to volunteering
- Matching the right volunteers to the right role
- Performance management and review procedures
- Equality, diversity and inclusion
- Induction and training arrangements
- Health and safety policies, insurance coverage for volunteer activities, etc
- Financial issues, e.g. payment of expenses, particularly for volunteers claiming unemployment benefits etc
- Complaints handling and dispute resolution policies
- Confidentiality, photography and social media policies



## Case Study: Bo'ness United Community Football Club A conversation with Peter Hay and William Waugh, Club Chair and Compliance Officer

[Bo'ness United Community Football Club](#) deliver a football pathway for more than 300 children from under 6s to under 19s, and then into adult football with their partner club Bo'ness United FC, who compete in the Scottish Lowland League (one of two regional leagues operating as the fifth tier of the Scottish football pyramid). Bo'ness is a town of 15,000 people 16 miles from Edinburgh – although many in the town commute into the city, it has a strong local identity and a close community.

The club has a strong community focus and is registered as a charity. Its charitable activities are given as much prominence in the club as its football programme – local charities are given free sponsorship of the club's football strip, and proceeds from the club's fundraising activities are split between local charities (recent recipients have been a food bank and a local playgroup) and club funds. Unlike many clubs, this fundraising is done collectively by the whole club, rather than by each age group team, and used to benefit the whole club (for example, by funding away kit for every age group). The shared involvement in this activity, and the shared benefit in its proceeds, creates a strong club identity, and connects kids from different age groups. Similarly, club committee members are involved across the club rather than just representing a single age group team, and are selected with the club's community role in mind.

Club chair Peter Hay describes the family feel that exists at the club... everybody knows each other and looks out for each other away from the club. When kids from different primary schools begin high school they already know teammates from other schools, and players from older age groups who look out for them and help them with this transition in their lives.

The family feel extends to older generations, as the club actively involves grandparents in club activities, and through working with Alzheimer Scotland's "Football Memories" reminiscence project. The club is investing in benches and shelters around their pitch – this lets older neighbours sit and watch the games, and is popular throughout the week.

Bo'ness United are also unusual in that they have a club mascot. Normally only seen on matchdays in the professional leagues, Leo The Lion gave the club the identity to set up Little Leos for its youngest age group. Older age group players volunteer to dress up as Leo at club events and community/fundraising events, and during COVID-19 the club used Leo to promote important messages to their players – from instruction videos on hand hygiene and handwashing, reinforcing social distancing guidelines, raising awareness of social isolation in the community, and warning against panic buying through Leo's "don't hog the bog roll!" campaign!

This sense of fun combined with social responsibility establishes an interest in volunteering from an early age. The club's volunteers in their football programme work closely together, and have established a coaching pathway that ensures young coaches are well supported and can play an important role for their team as part of a 'family unit' of three. The lead coach and secretary are supported by a young assistant coach, most of whom are 15-18 years old and have come through the club's structure. The assistant coach is the eyes and ears of the secretary and lead coach, acting as a role model for the younger players and using this experience to begin their own coaching journey.

This age group is also encouraged to volunteer as part of the Duke of Edinburgh Award, and every player at the club is invited to take part in the club's fundraising and charity programme – a community ethos is instilled at a young age in Bo'ness. At the end of each season, as part of the Player Of The Year awards event, there is also a Community Award to recognise this activity and give it the same status as on-field achievements.





**Communication and  
Coordination**

“Poor communication leaves your organisation at risk for increased misunderstandings, unhappy volunteers, and volunteer attrition. It might even deter some volunteers from getting involved at all!”

- VolunteerMatch blog

Having recruited a volunteer, engaged them in understanding the direction your club is heading in and the importance of their role, and set clear expectations of how the club will work, it is easy to turn our attention to the next challenge ahead of us.

The importance of volunteers' contributions to the club needs to be reflected in our efforts to ensure they are well looked after. Some clubs have a person dedicated as their Volunteer Coordinator, ensuring that any availability issues can be managed smoothly, and that volunteers are getting as much out of their experience as the club is.

For clubs without a dedicated Volunteer Coordinator, the same results can be achieved through effective communication between all parts of the club.

The [VolunteerMatch blog](#) presents five tips to ensure effective communication with volunteers:

- 1. Get to know your volunteers:** This will help you gauge their interests and find out what drives them, so you can figure out how they'll best fit into your club. While face-to-face interaction is preferable, you can always have volunteers answer these questions in a survey. This is particularly helpful if you work with large groups or remote volunteers.
- 2. Avoid jargon and be specific:** Simplify whenever possible! Spell

out the volunteers' responsibilities clearly, so they know exactly what they're getting into. Clear, specific communication will prepare your volunteers for anything they may face.

- 3. Host group meetings and get-togethers:** Periodically organising group activities can do wonders for volunteer engagement. In-person interaction gives volunteers and staff the chance to bond with each other and develop a sense of community and purpose. This feeling of oneness with the club will help encourage volunteers to continue contributing.
- 4. Give volunteers opportunities to voice opinions:** Effective communication also means giving volunteers a chance to voice their opinions or concerns, ask questions, and share suggestions. Whether a volunteer needs advice or feels displeased with how a particular activity is being managed, they should know how to contact you and should have multiple opportunities to do so.
- 5. Use different methods of communication:** Text messaging, emails, phone calls and social media are just some of the many different platforms that you can use to communicate with your volunteers. Figure out what your needs are and then use an appropriate medium to communicate. With all these tools at your disposal, you can build a community of contributors who are all connected and dedicated to your club's mission.



## Case Study: Raith Rovers Football Club A conversation with Martin Christie, Volunteer

[Raith Rovers FC](#) are a full-time professional club currently playing in the SPFL Championship (Scotland's second division), with a small team of full-time non-football staff. This small team is augmented with around 80 volunteers (assisting with activities such as the club's Raith TV streaming service, social media, the matchday experience and Roary Club for primary school age fans, and assisting with hospitality, programme distribution, lottery ticket sales, etc). The club's community foundation is also expanding, running community football programmes and two parallel football community pathways in women's and men's football, and developing plans to build a community hub facility at their stadium.

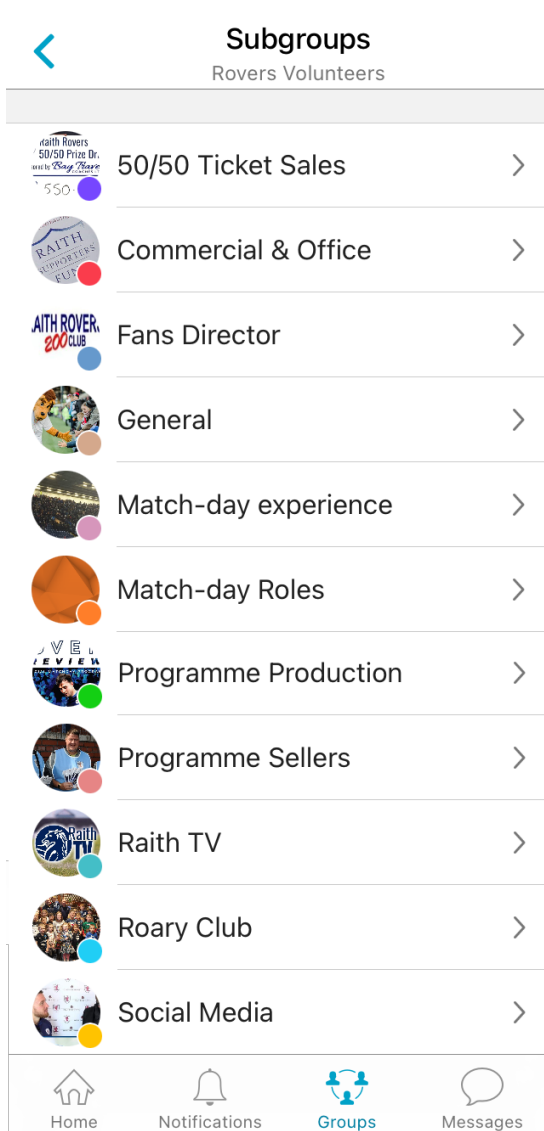
Many of the club's matchday volunteers have been involved for many years, but until recently there was no central coordination of their activity. In a regular meeting of the fans' groups it was identified that the supporters could help the club more, but that it was difficult to find areas where volunteers were needed. Potential volunteers did not know what the club needed from them, and the club wasn't able to look across all of the existing activity to identify gaps or improvement areas.

Martin Christie, a member of one of the fans' groups, offered to help address this. Using his experience from a career in workforce planning and organisational development, in a brainstorming session the main streams of activity were identified, and then followed up with an exercise of documenting roles and an organisation structure. This

brought greater clarity, making it easier for club staff to know who was involved, but ultimately did not fit well with the dynamics of the club – rather than simplifying things it felt more complex and overly bureaucratic.

Having completed this first step, though, it became clear that the most important missing piece was a method of communicating quickly across the whole of the volunteer community, rather than relying on a small group of people each time. A smartphone app, [Spond](#), was identified as a way to do this quickly and easily, without creating an administrative burden. More often used by sports teams as a membership management system, Raith Rovers set up groups on the app for each of the volunteering areas, inviting the individual volunteers to use the app to keep in touch with each other and coordinate their activities. Particularly on matchdays, the club often need to quickly find people to stand in for regular volunteers who are temporarily available, and Spond has transformed the way the club deals with this.

Each Spond group has one or two administrators, and can coordinate and communicate with their group of volunteers. There are also ways to cut across the groups, so it's not just a top-down structure – it's organic and works more like the real world. There is still a structure, but it's invisible most of the time – if you want to see who is in each group you can, but most people just use the app to reach out to each other.



The app also acts as a social network for the volunteer community, connecting the 80 people and allowing them to start conversations with each other on any topic to do with the club. Before, people only knew the volunteers they worked closely with. Having the app has also helped the various volunteer groups to better understand each other's skills – previously they only knew a small part of what people could do and how they might be able to help the club. As a club they have a passionate, committed and highly qualified volunteer base, and this is only now being fully appreciated as a result of putting this tool in place.

After COVID-19 there are likely to be restrictions on what football clubs can and can't do on matchdays, and it will be important that fans feel their safety is being prioritised. Being able to communicate with all of the volunteers who have a matchday role will help the club to protect everyone, and to get key messages out to the whole of the support. These volunteers are critical – matches can't take place without their input – but the risks have changed, and this communication tool will allow the club to coordinate their efforts, listen to their feedback, and keep improving the matchday experience.

To manage volunteers effectively you have to think of them as an unpaid workforce. All of the disciplines of running an organisation with a paid workforce should apply equally to volunteers, you have to treat them and respect them the same way as the employees who work on the things that are most critical to your business.

Having a better understanding of your volunteer structure and the roles within it allows you to bring new people in, with no previous connection to the club, to take on roles that will give them experience and development opportunities. Doing this responsibly, providing training and mentoring, is a lot of work but has huge benefit for the club, the community, and the individuals involved. At the moment, Raith Rovers don't have very many of these 'transactional' volunteers, but understanding the community of 'philanthropic' volunteers then allows you to identify gaps and then go out and bring new people in – you have to be well organised before you can do this effectively.



# Retention, Recognition and Reward



“Apart from lack of time, negative experiences with the internal organisation of sport clubs, bureaucracy, and lack of recognition are clear reasons why people stop volunteering in sport. More generally, old age and health issues commonly lead to the decision to stop volunteering.”

- Sport & Recreation Alliance’s GIVERS report

The Sport & Recreation Alliance identify six aspects of creating a fulfilling environment for volunteers in their “[GIVERS](#)” report:

**G**rowth reflects the wish people have to grow as a person, build their skills and widen their horizons

**I**mpact reflects the wish of volunteers to see the difference they have made to people’s lives

**V**oice recognises the fact that people react to how messages they receive are framed and presented

**E**xperience recognises that people’s time is scarce and that their need for easy enrolment and flexibility are recognised

**R**ecognition acknowledges the extrinsic motivators and the wish to be rewarded, even if it’s just by a simple thank you

**S**ocial takes into consideration that people are social beings who enjoy being with friends

Developing personal relationships with your volunteers – understanding who they are, what they can do and want to achieve – can help you to keep them engaged with your club for longer. The key to this is to recognise each volunteer as an individual and respond to their needs appropriately, rather than just seeing the activity they carry out for your club.

This can be a time-consuming process, but turns out to be less time-consuming than bringing new volunteers on board after losing an experienced volunteer from your team! It turns out that recognition is also a much more effective tool than reward – giving someone a small token of your appreciation can have unintended consequences, if your volunteers equate the financial value of the reward with the value of their time, experience and commitment. It’s okay to reward your volunteers, particularly if they indicate that this is important to them (and this is often the case for ‘transactional volunteers’) – but this should be in addition to recognition rather than in place of it.

By acknowledging them, highlighting their contribution, and celebrating the impact that you have made together, you will build much stronger connections in your club. People will keep a certificate or a photo from an awards ceremony on their wall for years – well past the point when the gift voucher has been spent, the coffee mug accidentally dropped, or the t-shirt has faded and torn! A positive experience during and at the end of volunteering, which makes people feel good about themselves, plays an important role in whether they come back to volunteer.



## Case Study: Spartans Community Football Academy A conversation with Dougie Samuel, Chief Executive

[Spartans FC](#) are based in Edinburgh, and play in the Scottish Lowland League (the fifth tier of Scotland's league structure). They also have two women's teams, with the first team successfully competing in the top level of women's football.

"The Spartans Family" is made up of three distinct organisations – the adult section (men's, women's and para football teams), the youth section (running teams up to under 19s), and the Academy (the charitable arm of the football club). The club has 40-50 volunteers in the adult section, 90-100 in the youth section, and 30-40 regular volunteers in the Academy, and many more who are involved in one-off events and projects.

There is a clearly defined pathway of participation in a community programme, into volunteering, and into part-time and/or full-time paid roles at the Academy. The Academy runs a £4m sports facility at Ainslie Park, where it hosts youth work, education, physical activity and wellbeing programmes. The Academy is recognised as a key community anchor organisation – word of mouth from the people engaged in these programmes is a powerful force in terms of promoting and marketing the Academy's services.

During COVID-19 the Academy pivoted to become a food distribution hub. Due to the club's geographical location, in between an affluent area and an area with a lot of deprivation, the club has a unique opportunity to make this social diversity an advantage. The Academy's

chief executive (and the men's first team manager) Dougie Samuel describes the club as "a neutral organisation that creates opportunities for human connection and cultivates quality, meaningful relationships between people where they respect each other on the same level. That's when the magic happens."

The secret to Spartans' enduring success is its authenticity – it does things just because they are the right thing to do, it is never about attracting sponsorship or to get people's praise or attention. Everyone at the club recognises their opportunity to play an active part in the community, in lots of different ways, and that is what gives them fulfilment.

Dougie Samuel believes that the club was always committed to this, but that moving to Ainslie Park made it possible to do more within its local community. The club has worked hard to remove the unseen barriers that can hold people back, and have created an inclusive environment where everybody is given a warm welcome.

At Ainslie Park there is no receptionist – people find their own way in, there's no-one to stop you and ask you who you are and where you're going. Spartans do not want your first interaction with them to be one that stops you, they want you to look around and notice what the club is about. The first thing most people see when they come through the door is a sign saying "donate your boots here" – it gives a subliminal but powerful message that this place is about giving.

When young people walk in, they're greeted with "nice to see you" not "what are you doing here?" They can come in and play for free each and every day. The club want everyone to feel like they are at home when they are at Spartans.

The sports facility can act as a 'social home' for many people. This community asset has never been more important than in the last year when libraries, community centres, and schools were all closed. Spartans has a community of interest (people who love football) but also a community of place – the charity was set up to improve the lives of people living in North Edinburgh.

"Here For Good" allows the club to unify everybody behind a common purpose. The football club is embedded within the community, and the club retains this focus regardless of league tables and changes in the football landscape. They are proud of their roots and traditions, and that they are held up by others as an exemplar project for 'changing lives through sport', despite sitting outside the professional leagues. "Our values sit at the heart of what we do – they drive our actions".

Spartans give their volunteers regular feedback, and their mentors talk to them if they sense something is not right – one of the club's core values is to "be non-judgemental", so the conversation is about finding out through coaching and questioning what happened and why, and what the consequence of that action was. The clear focus is on working together to help the volunteers learn from their experiences, to develop and grow.

The club also celebrates the contribution of volunteers in different ways – arranging training, giving them training equipment, gift vouchers, involvement in social/CPD evenings and annual awards – and this is always directed to the things that the volunteers need, want and value.



**Here for good.**

# Succession Planning and Demobilisation



“One of the concerns people have before they even agree to volunteer, is that they won’t be able to leave the role due to a lack of willing and able volunteers available to take over. If your organisation has a succession plan, this will be avoided as you’ll be prepared, and have excellent people and processes in place to support the transition of people between roles.”

- Aktive’s Succession Planning Toolkit

Well-established clubs are often inextricably linked to the people working within them – the lifelong volunteers who seem to have been around forever, who know everyone and everything about the club. Unfortunately none of us will actually be around forever, and it’s a hard task to replace key people when they do – there is a steep learning curve, and the risk of getting things wrong can deter new people from trying to climb it. Volunteers need to feel that they can leave, or step back temporarily, if their circumstances or priorities change. Clubs need to know that their objectives won’t be put at risk by sharing the workload with new people. And supporters, members, players and their families, the club’s community, and its sponsors and funders all need to know that the club can be trusted to live up to its high standards regardless of who is involved.

Jude Reid of [Senscot’s Sport Network](#) developed a volunteer toolkit in her previous role for [Aktive](#), a charitable trust based in New Zealand. This included tools for succession planning, a process which involves identifying and developing individuals with the potential to fill key positions when existing post holders vacate the role. This ensures that the club will continue to operate efficiently when people who were previously holding key positions move on.

Aktive’s succession planning process has the following steps:

- Identify key positions in your club – current roles, and any new positions that would add value
- Establish role descriptions for each current role
- Identify and define role descriptions for current vacancies and anticipated vacancies
- Identify skills gaps in currently filled positions
- Create a succession plan for each position
- Is there someone in the club who is able and willing to take on the role?
- Could someone shadow the current post holder?
- Could an inexperienced volunteer be mentored?
- Identify training needs for potential future post holders
- Ensure business processes relating to the management and operation of the club are documented and clear

Sharing workloads between several volunteers is a great way to ensure your club is resilient and that it can smoothly handle transitions between post holders. Also consider rotating roles regularly, giving a number of different people experience of the most important roles in your club – this reduces the dependence on any one person, and gives people a richer experience of being part of your club.



## Case Study: Berwick Rangers Football Club A conversation with Dave Buglass, Director

[Berwick Rangers FC](#) occupy a unique place in Scottish football, being based 2 miles over the border in England – but closer to Scotland’s capital city than to the nearest city south of the border. Joining the Scottish national leagues after World War Two, they remained part of the SPFL until 2019 when they were relegated to the Scottish Lowland League.

The team’s performances had been in decline for a number of years, and found itself disconnected not only from the league it had been a part of for more than 70 years, but also from the town it represented. The club decided to re-launch itself as a club the town could be proud of with the mission “New Decade, New Goals, New Berwick Rangers”. The club’s existence was under threat – with ambitious rivals in the Lowland League and the Highland League, its northern counterpart, a quick return to the SPFL would not be an easy task to achieve. New board members and volunteers were brought in to replace those standing down, through an active recruitment process – seeking young,

innovative and creative people with specific skills and experience, and an ambitious mindset. Local people with expertise to help around the stadium, and some from further afield with a connection to the club, combined to form a dynamic new board.

An important part of the revival was to engage with the local community and rally them to back the club once again. One of the new volunteers was a communications expert, and a campaign to introduce greater transparency and build trust began. After every board meeting, the fans receive an update of what has been discussed, and a short video is released every month to respond to hot topics – this gives a face to the club, and invites others to get involved.

The new board have been on a steep learning curve, discovering how much work is required to get a game on. Once 3pm on a Saturday afternoon arrives they can all relax and enjoy the journey back to the heart of their town.

This project was conducted by Supporters Direct Scotland, with support and funding from SD Europe.

The SD Europe Fund enables members of the SD Europe network to establish their own projects that further develop supporter involvement. Each project chosen is constructed with SD Europe's four principles in mind:

- Democracy
- Cooperation
- Solidarity
- Sustainability



More information about the SD Europe Fund can be found on [their website](#).

We would like to thank each of the clubs featured in the project's case studies, and congratulate them on their community impact:

- [Aberdeen FC Community Trust](#)
- [Berwick Rangers FC](#)
- [Bo'ness United Community FC](#)
- [Raith Rovers FC](#)
- [Spartans Community Football Academy](#)
- [Stenhousemuir FC](#)

We would also like to thank each of the organisations that have contributed vital work in this area of research. We have referenced each organisation throughout this document, and have included links to each piece of work. Please make use of these resources to deepen your knowledge.

As Daniel Gray wrote in the introduction, volunteers make football tick in Scotland – our national game could not function without them – and football also provides them with an opportunity to enrich their own lives and those of their fellow fans.

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