



# Volunteer Impact Assessment

Third edition

# Introduction

**In Guide Dogs, there are currently over 17,000 volunteers in just over 26,000 volunteering roles who are supported by around 600 volunteer managers or key contacts.**

**The Volunteer Impact Assessment (VIA) looks at the contribution made by volunteers to Guide Dogs and assesses the views and feelings both volunteers and the staff who support them. Carrying out this research regularly helps us see change in levels of support and engagement.**

The findings contained in this summary present a top-level view of the key themes, challenges and the progress being made across the organisation in further developing the volunteering experience. It contains volunteer and key contacts insight, including volunteer perceptions of Guide Dogs — useful insights that can be used to improve our efficiencies, policies, practices and processes in how Guide Dogs works with volunteers.

Our volunteering strategy 'Inspiring Connections', which sets the future direction of how we'll transform our volunteering function and offer commits us to making improvements across five strategic areas:

- 1. Strengthening our infrastructure**
- 2. Building a volunteer positive culture**
- 3. Enhancing the volunteer experience**
- 4. New ways to get involved**
- 5. Grow our Lead Volunteer programme**

Throughout this report, we've highlighted some of our key activities for 2020, which have been informed by VIA feedback from volunteers and staff. These activities support the five strategic areas from our volunteering strategy (see above) and the dates next to each activity represent the expected start date. This list is not exhaustive. For the purpose of this summary, we're focusing on national activities although there are numerous regional activities planned, which support our overall goals. We'll keep you updated on our progress for both.

This is the third edition of the VIA. Research was based on workshops, conversations and questionnaires which captured the views of 2,931 volunteers and 302 staff. Research was conducted by the Volunteering Team in partnership with the Civil Service Analytical Volunteer programme.



# When it comes to volunteering at Guide Dogs, there are many reasons for signing up and staying with us

Whatever your reason for volunteering with us, Guide Dogs' volunteers remain committed to supporting our cause – often getting more involved if supported and valued.

- **Motivation:** the number one motivation for volunteering with us is 'giving something back', followed by 'supporting people who are blind or partially sighted' – interestingly 'gaining skills' has climbed to third place, overtaking 'access to dogs' which drops to fourth position.
- **Engagement:** overall engagement of volunteers has increased slightly but there are some areas to address. Key drivers include the sense of making a difference, mental and physical health improvements, feeling recognised by the organisation, sufficient training and the ability to develop. Engagement is not markedly affected by age, gender or service length.
- **Increased support:** more engaged volunteers are significantly more likely to undertake ad hoc tasks outside their role than less engaged, including promoting Guide Dogs and supporting collections. Additionally, more engaged volunteers are less likely to pursue alternate regular volunteering opportunities in the organisation.

## What's happening in 2020

Improvement area	Desired change	2020 activities
Volunteer recruitment	Embed an easier process to become a registered volunteer.	Streamline and simplify the volunteer recruitment process – <b>Summer onwards</b> .
Volunteering opportunities	Develop opportunities for families to volunteer at Guide Dogs.	Registration process in place, develop toolkit, launch of family volunteering pilot – <b>Spring</b> . Develop process and create opportunities for families to volunteer – <b>Spring</b> .
	Develop volunteering offer for young people.	Scope potential for developing Youth Volunteering Panel, review existing policies/procedures for young volunteers, develop process for management of young volunteers – <b>Summer</b> .

## We're doing well on key organisational touchpoints, but we could do better

Every interaction our volunteers have with Guide Dogs — from their initial induction, through a training session, through our newsletter or direct contact with a Volunteer Manager or key contact — is an organisational touchpoint. Generally, these key interactions scored highly but with the caveat that they were not consistently delivered across the board.

A lack of consistency has been a key theme throughout this research, in particular how some volunteer roles feel less well-trained, less likely to feel they're making a difference, and less recognised by us. This is an area in which we'll improve through a combination of mainstream and specific activities.

- **Training:** more and more volunteers are feeling sufficiently trained (82%), although this varies from role-to-role. The most common reason for training gaps is still simply not being offered training. There's a 5% drop in puppy walkers feeling well trained; and a large increase in the proportion and confidence of speakers feeling trained (75%).
- **Supervision:** 91% of volunteers rate their key contact as good or excellent. Staff and volunteers report time pressures mean that interactions may be carried out at a minimum level with no time for anything out of the ordinary, particularly in Puppy Walking.
- **Communication:** 83% of volunteers rate their communication from Guide Dogs as good or excellent, but would like it to be more joined up. 19% of staff feel there are volunteers who have not been contacted in the last year. 6% of volunteers report no contact.



## What's happening in 2020

Improvement area	Desired change	2020 activities
Volunteer training	Increase the confidence and skills of volunteers providing information to the public.	Deliver a volunteer training day for tour guides at the national Breeding Centre so they are informed and supported — <b>Spring</b> .
	Volunteers feel more supported, well-trained and confident in their roles.	The Puppy Raising for Excellent Partnerships (PREP) project to review the volunteer operating model, including lead volunteer roles such as the Puppy Walking Mentor to ensure support to Puppy Walkers in a growing Guide Dogs Service — <b>March onwards</b> .
Communications	Volunteers know where to find general volunteering information, which leaves their volunteer managers or key contacts with more time for role specific support.	Redesign and promote the Volunteer Information Point website as a more accessible online destination for volunteering information (e.g. guidance, policies, FAQs), which helps to alleviate time pressures of volunteer managers or key contacts from dealing with general enquiries — <b>Spring onwards</b> .
	Increase the percentage of volunteers who rate communication from Guide Dogs as Good or Excellent: clarity, timeliness, frequency, sufficiency.	Develop and implement an integrated communications strategy for volunteers and their key contacts to establish a standardised and improved approach to how we stay in touch with volunteers — <b>March</b> .
Resources	Improve volunteer Information System (IS) resources.	Moving our IT to the cloud and updating to Windows 10 will improve systems access for volunteers working from home. Volunteer Equipment Available — <b>Spring</b> .

## Lead Volunteers sound like a good idea, but clarity on this role is needed

There is broad support for having an experienced Lead Volunteer who can provide peer-to-peer help and support. For volunteers wanting more responsibility, this would be an ideal role. However, respondents felt that Lead Volunteers shouldn't replace their supervisor or be responsible for handling difficult conversations or expenses.

- **Lead Volunteer role welcomed:** around two-thirds of volunteers are comfortable with the idea of being linked to an experienced volunteer, and half of staff see a benefit in volunteers leading a group of their volunteers.
- **Preference for peer-to-peer support:** staff and volunteers are comfortable with experienced volunteers being someone else for a volunteer to talk to, particularly about volunteer opportunities.
- **Other tasks not so well-received:** support from volunteers is based on the assumption that Lead Volunteers won't replace their current supervisor as most do not see a support gap in this area. In addition, many felt that they shouldn't be responsible for approving expenses, handling difficult conversations or interviewing new volunteers.

**"It would be highly advantageous and progressive for anyone to learn from those with more and less experience as we all have diverse experiences."**

– Fundraising Group Coordinator, Speaker Trainer, Speaker.

### What's happening in 2020

Improvement area	Desired change	2020 activities
Strategic development of Lead Volunteers	Lead Volunteers benefit from a standardised approach to their role, including support.	Project board and working group established — <b>Spring</b> .  Development plan for the volunteer journey, from start to finish agreed — <b>Spring</b> .
	Volunteers in lead roles feel supported and confident to carry out their role.	Development and roll out of new training to support volunteers in lead roles — <b>Spring</b> .
	Increase the percentage of Lead Volunteers who would strongly recommend Guide Dogs.	Develop and implement the volunteer journey for volunteers in lead roles, from start to finish, to enhance the volunteer experience. This will include: attraction, recruitment, induction, training, support and supervision, ongoing development and exit — <b>Autumn</b> .



## How we support volunteers doesn't fully meet their expectations

Despite our volunteers continued support, a growing number feel that we could do more to meet their expectations. Although volunteers appreciate our training, communications and interactions with their volunteer managers — there are still elements within these areas which limit volunteers from fully carrying out their roles, and becoming more knowledgeable Guide Dogs ambassadors.

- **Clear instructions:** volunteers valued staff interpersonal skills but although a key expectation (for both staff and volunteers) is receiving clear instructions, volunteers are less likely to state they feel their supervisor sets clear priorities and gives constructive feedback.
- **Organisational information:** the sufficiency of information about other departments and local team information shows a strong downturn from 2017. This is a result of the fact that volunteers' desire for information has increased (fewer volunteers not wanting this information) whilst communications output from Guide Dogs has decreased.
- **Confidence in skills:** while training is positive but confidence in skills is not always high. 93% of My Guide volunteers feel trained but only 46% are confident in safeguarding for example, and only 30% of Partnership Support volunteers feel confident in leading groups of volunteers.



## What's happening in 2020

Improvement area	Desired change	2020 activities
Volunteer and staff training	Key contacts and volunteer managers are confident in how they support and manage volunteers, including providing clear instructions.	Review and identification of needs taking place this year. New training will be introduced in 2021 — <b>Spring onwards</b> .
	Volunteer managers and key contacts feel confident to manage diverse teams.	Development and launch of an 'Unconscious Bias' e-learning module — <b>Autumn/Winter</b> .  Develop staff and volunteers to ensure support is in place to manage diverse teams — <b>Winter</b> .  Scope the development of a new Volunteer Diversity Champion role — <b>Winter</b> .
	Key contacts have all the skills they need to update volunteer records.	Develop an approach to storing and managing volunteer data in a Central Record Management system — <b>Autumn</b> .
	Key contacts have all the skills they need to update volunteer records.	Review multiple databases with volunteer records for consistency and accuracy to prepare for a move to a new system of storing volunteering data, where volunteering data can all be viewed in one place in 2021 — <b>Summer onwards</b> .
Communications	Volunteers receive timely communications on organisational information at both local and national level.	Introduce a new national monthly volunteer e-newsletter, which complements the bi-monthly local community team newsletters — <b>January</b> .  Explore other forms of communications channels to support the wider dissemination of information — <b>May</b> .



## What's happening in 2020

Improvement area	Desired change	2020 activities
Volunteer training	Volunteers feel more supported, well-trained and confident in their roles.	<p>Complete programme of visits to all 21 community teams by Head of Volunteer Led Services and Customer Experience Lead for Volunteer Led Services to increase awareness of best practice standards to ensure our My Guide volunteers have an exceptional volunteer experience — <b>Spring</b>.</p> <p>Establish working group with My Guide staff to ensure volunteers entering their My Guide partnership have all the information they need, including a named contact for support and how to claim expenses — <b>February</b>.</p> <p>Building the oversight for identifying and closing gaps in volunteer training packages and refresher training. Our current focus is to work with and support Legal and Compliance as they develop and pilot the use of Cognito (an online learning tool) with My Guide volunteers, which will aim to refresh training gaps primarily around Safeguarding, My Guide, Wellbeing and Behaviours — <b>March onwards</b>. Review pilot results — <b>Summer</b>.</p> <p>Launch a new Community Fundraising Strategy, which focuses on a person-centred approach — <b>January</b>.</p> <p>Introduce a new dedicated customer care team to support fundraising volunteers and improve our response times when receiving enquiries about fundraising or speaker roles — <b>January</b>.</p> <p>Develop a new suite of training resources for both new and existing fundraising volunteers to ensure that everyone has the confidence to inspire the public in the different ways to fundraise — <b>Spring onwards</b>.</p>

## The volunteer experience isn't consistent across the organisation

When it comes to feeling genuinely involved and valued — the positive experience volunteers have locally isn't replicated with "Guide Dogs", the national association.

Since 2017, there's been a slight drop in volunteers who feel they have less of an understanding of their role in relation to the bigger picture. They also feel that at a national level, the organisation pays lip service to their feedback and doesn't value their contribution.

- **Ability to influence:** nationally 53% of volunteers feel they are encouraged to share their views with key contacts and senior leadership, but only 29% feel their feedback influences decisions. This is static since 2017.
- **Feeling disconnected:** there's a decrease in the proportion of volunteers who feel that they're making a useful contribution and seeing the connection between their volunteering and Guide Dogs' aims.
- **Drop in organisational recognition:** 87% of volunteers feel their supervisor values their contribution (up 5%) compared to 62% who feel the organisation values their contribution (down 5%).

### What's happening in 2020

Improvement area	Desired change	2020 activities
Influence	Volunteers feel encouraged to share their ideas to senior leadership - currently 54% in 2019.	Review Volunteer Voices groups and implement improvements — <b>January onwards.</b>
Communications	Volunteers know how their individual roles support Guide Dogs aims.	Develop a plan for creating and volunteer role-specific information and materials, including the impact of their contribution — <b>June onwards.</b>
Recognition	Greater focus on staff and volunteer recognition.	A Recognition Coordinator is now in post with a dedicated remit to support volunteering and employee recognition, including reviewing how we recognise our volunteers and identify improvements — <b>January onwards.</b>

## Future actions

Every year, we'll develop a new set of actions, which will take us closer to achieving our goals as outlined in our volunteering strategy, 'Inspiring Connections'. Before doing so, we'll conduct an annual review of our progress and outcomes at the end of the current reporting cycle/period. This will help inform our focus and direct resources against progress on each of the five key strategic areas.

### Reporting on progress

We'll share quarterly updates on our activities and progress with:

- Volunteer Voices groups who will work with their teams to achieve change.
- A strategy summary document on Volunteer Information Point, which will be disseminated to the wider volunteer base through The Guide e-newsletter and other channels.
- An annual review of the year.





## How to get in touch with us

If you have any thoughts about how we can improve your volunteering experience, please get in touch with your Volunteer Manager or local Community Team. The Volunteering Coordinator in each team will be able to provide your local VIA report.

Contact details available from:

**[www.guidedogs.org.uk/contact-us/local-mobility-teams](http://www.guidedogs.org.uk/contact-us/local-mobility-teams)**

Alternatively, feel free to email our team directly:

**[volunteer@guidedogs.org.uk](mailto:volunteer@guidedogs.org.uk)** and we can provide the full Volunteer Impact Assessment national report (third edition)