



National Trust

The Management of Volunteers in the National Trust

This research project, carried out by De Montfort University between 2013-2015, provides a detailed, evidenced-based understanding of: (a) what it means to manage volunteers in the National Trust; and (b) the similarities and differences between the management of volunteers and paid staff. This visual representation of the findings demonstrates that in practice, the management of volunteers within the National Trust is, and should be, significantly different to the management of paid staff. It identifies five areas of difference leading to five key recommendations for building resilient and effective volunteer - staff property teams.



Recommendations for Property Practice

Volunteers = informal performance management
Paid staff = formal performance management
Managers feel inhibited in challenging poor volunteer performance

'An evolutionary re-telling of your property's story': recognise the on-going requirement for change'

'Speak about your love of the property'

'Identify assumptions and justifications for operational differences in volunteer tasks and responsibilities'

'Offer support and opportunities for volunteer managers to share how they are feeling'

'Do not fear volunteers, harness their passion, persistence and power'

reluctance to give volunteers repetitive, mundane tasks, from fear that they will not want to do these tasks and therefore not come back. However, such tasks are undertaken by volunteers in some departments by volunteers in properties without much complaint.

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All images used here are generic and not representative of any specific National Trust property
Themes and recommendations are linked by following the same coloured pins.

There is a distinct difference between the way volunteers and paid staff are communicated with and this has an impact on operational issues at the property and on the way volunteers perceive their volunteer experience.

wherever possible, volunteers were generally engaged in project-based tasks meaning the day-to-day operations were not reliant on volunteers per se.

it is quite important because the garden is a well-known garden and impressions are important' (Volunteer).

... a significant amount of time every day opening and closing the shutters of the house and further time collecting rubbish, hoovering and cleaning the visitor route whilst still holding managerial responsibility for rotas, planning and volunteer care.

'So I've just done a really quick scribble, which I didn't finish, of me in Victorian costume at the Victorian ... Christmas festival ... because I think it helps me sort of ... step into the sense of the history of the place and to kind of ... communicate that to other people and I've also done myself you know ... smiling because I like that it makes me feel happy when I come here volunteering and the sense of ... the spirit of the place and the history and the fact that erm ... I love meeting the other volunteers and all the visitors and putting a smile on their faces and trying to give them a bit of an experience to treasure'. (Volunteer)

'I think it's that recognition that you know ... these are intelligent people who are giving up their time and its then about how do we build on the good things that happen and the good things they enjoy. I mean it's a great question to ask isn't it because I think a lot of our volunteers don't like the word managing'. (Manager).

'We cannot afford any mistakes ... you prune those very old orchard trees incorrectly you could wipe them out for the next season or damage them irreparably. You use the wrong weed killer or use the weed killer incorrectly, you can wipe out the ancient wild life ...'. (Manager).

'there's a lot of untapped potential in the volunteers ... so they do the skills audit but it doesn't mean that anyone's going to come along and say I've looked at that ...'. (Volunteer)

'What do you do? We've got nothing to kind of, and I don't think discipline's the right word, but it's kind of like as a volunteer you're signed up to the service promise if you like, our customer care, our values and behaviours, this is who we are, you're coming to the Trust and this is the organisation that you're a part of and this is what we expect to be projected and yes people have got a voice and yes they're empowered to do an awful lot of things, but within the parameters of the National Trust ... I think what ... does happen here is people go 'oh the volunteers, I can't upset the volunteers' and actually, you know what, sometimes maybe we need to and just say ... just challenge, not so much discipline, it's challenge I think'. (Manager).

'There is a way of telling somebody to go to hell in such a way as they look forward to the trip!'. (Volunteer)

'don't treat me like a mushroom: don't leave me in the dark and feed me!'. Here, the volunteer is referring to the frequent use of tea, biscuits and cake briefings used to communicate changes to the property.

Department	Volunteer	Paid Staff
House	Room Guide Conservation cataloguing	Conservation handling Opening and Locking Up Work Rota
Garden	Weeding/Deheading Digging, clearing, preparing beds Pricking out Supervised planting out	Specialist technical jobs Chemical application Greenhouse work Garden Design Work Rota
Estate	Digging Clearing Supervised construction	Regulatory monitoring Use of heavy machinery e.g. chain saw Work Rota
Retail	Cash handling Supervised display duties	Cashing Up Stock ordering Design of displays Work Rota
Catering	Washing and cleaning Serving Food	Menu design Stock ordering Direct Food Handling/Preparation Cash handling and cashing up Work Rota
Welcome Team	Information giving Tour guides	Ticket sales Work Rota

'we are very grateful that they're [volunteers are] here doing what they're doing, but we need them to buy into what we are ultimately trying to achieve and if they're not doing that it ... you have those robust conversations to deal with it and erm ... I think it's hard'. (Paid Staff)

... there was consensus amongst most managers that volunteers could not, or should not, be performance managed in the same way as paid staff ...

The pursuit of universal infrastructures for communication and management is inappropriate

'We do have volunteers in ... not so much on the day to day routine things ... it's better for them to work with us on specific projects really ... because they won't come once a week to vacuum the floors where the visitors walk ... they want something a bit more exciting and interesting than that'. (Manager)

'We launched this project in a really short period of time and I think in a couple of months our research volunteers, there are about 40 of them, they did 2000 hours of research and they produced 100 research documents ... there's no way we could have launched this project without them'. (Manager)

'Volunteers should be kept on tap not on top, so there's only going to be so far you're going to be allowed to be in charge'. (Volunteer)

'I feel a bigger sense of responsibility in the shop, particularly when I'm on my own and there's a big queue of people because ... there's only one till and you can only go so fast ...'. (Volunteer)

'We're planting trees that will be there for three hundred years ... there isn't another garden like [this one], ... I always wanted to work here'. (Manager)

'I look at property, the story of the property which is the story of the people who lived there and worked there and I love helping visitors to come and enjoy the property'. (Volunteer)

unregulated emotional landscape

affective commitment

Differences between the management of Volunteers and Paid Staff

Performance Management

Communication

Task Differentiation

Trust and Fear versus Autonomy and Creativity

Emotional Labour