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**Institute for  
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# Volunteering in community business: a digest of recent research

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# Foreword

## Vidhya Alakeson Chief Executive of Power to Change

Volunteers are critical to community businesses. They can help to root community businesses in their local communities, whilst also enabling the sustainability of their business models. In fact, some community businesses would not exist at all were it not for volunteers.

That's why I welcome this digest of findings from three recent studies funded by Power to Change on volunteering in community business. Research has been at the heart of Power to Change since our inception, where we committed to building the evidence base around community business. We use this wealth of research, coupled with our experiences supporting community businesses every day, to develop how we work with community businesses to build the infrastructure to support the sector. In addition, the three research projects have all spanned pre-pandemic and pandemic experiences, giving us a unique opportunity to understand the effects of the pandemic on this critical element of community business.

In September 2021, we held a roundtable event to hear from the authors of the research studies, as well as a panel of experts including Joy Johnston (DCMS), Karl Murray (Ubele Initiative), Paul Reddish (Volunteering Matters) and Richard Wilson (OSCA). This was our first joint event with the Institute for Community Studies (ICS) since we announced our strategic partnership. Amongst other things, this partnership involves transferring the evidence base Power to Change has accumulated about the sector into ICS's Repository, to integrate it with the wider evidence base around communities and community-led action.

The research and our panel members raise a number of issues. Of these, I have been particularly struck by three things:

1. The importance of the language we use to talk about volunteering. Perhaps we should be talking about communities rather than volunteers – and shifting emphasis towards motivations rather than talking about benefits. We know people's intrinsic motivations can be far more important than the extrinsic benefits that volunteers are often presented with (such as building skills on their CVs).
2. The call for younger people and more diverse communities in volunteering – and in community business in general. This echoes one of the key aims of Power to Change's new strategy to 2025 which is to reach new and diverse audiences. We want all communities to feel that community business is a tool for them to create social change.
3. Flexibility and time. Linked to reaching diverse communities, the research raises the question of how we can make volunteering more flexible and adaptable to people's lives, in order to leverage its potential.

I hope this digest provides you with a good overview of the research and I encourage you to visit [icstudies.org.uk/repository](https://icstudies.org.uk/repository) to read all three reports in full.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alakeson".

**Vidhya Alakeson**  
CEO  
Power to Change

# Introduction

## Richard Harries, Institute for Community Studies

Community businesses help make places better – from saving local shops and creating leisure facilities to providing training opportunities for local people and helping to build affordable housing. Yet none of this would be possible without the contribution of volunteers; their time is not only central to financial viability, but it also keeps these businesses firmly rooted in the communities they serve.

This digest summarises three research reports recently published by Power to Change that explore the role and changing profile of volunteers in community businesses.

The first and third reports were funded through the Power to Change’s Open Call for Research – which ran until 2020 – and address questions about volunteering posed by the research teams themselves. The second report was funded through Power to Change’s Research Associate Framework and has a specific focus on the role of volunteers in asset-based community businesses supported through its flagship Community Business Fund (CBF). All three reports include in-depth case studies of community businesses and adopt mixed method approaches with volunteers and community business representatives (see Appendix for more detail).

<b>Report 1: Volunteering in community business: meaning, practice and management</b> by Angela Ellis Paine, Chris Damm, Jon Dean, Cathy Harris and Rob Macmillan	
Research Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How is volunteering conceptualised and managed, and how does this affect the experience and outcomes of volunteering?</li> <li>• What influence do volunteers have in the formation, strategic direction and operation of community businesses?</li> <li>• What is the relationship between volunteering and the commercial orientation of community business?</li> </ul>
<b>Report 2: Valuing the contribution of volunteers to community businesses supported by the Community Business Fund</b> by Amanda Norrlander, Waseem Meghjee, Kandy Sisya, Annabel Litchfield, Rosy Jones, Sarah Thelwall and Alice Thornton	
Research Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What types of roles do volunteers fulfil? How prevalent are those roles? Are there any trends across different types of businesses?</li> <li>• Can we identify the ‘hidden’ value and costs of the volunteer workforce?</li> <li>• What advice and guidance can we offer community businesses to help them best utilise their volunteer resource?</li> <li>• What is the impact of Covid-19 on the value of volunteers, the types of roles they fulfil and the cost of supporting them?</li> </ul>
<b>Report 3: The role of volunteers in community businesses</b> by John Higton, Rachael Archer, David Merrett, Michelle Hansel and Sophie Spong	
Research Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who are volunteers?</li> <li>• What roles are they doing?</li> <li>• How long do they volunteer?</li> <li>• What skills are they using?</li> <li>• What skills gaps exist?</li> <li>• What benefits do community businesses get?</li> <li>• What benefits do volunteers get?</li> </ul>

## Background on community business volunteers

Volunteer labour is critical to the success of most community businesses and can be the key differentiator compared to previously unviable public and private sector endeavours. According to Power to Change's latest annual *Community Business Market Report*, the volunteer-to-paid-staff ratio before the Covid-19 pandemic was 2.9 to 1. This has made the impact of Covid-19 particularly challenging, with over half (57%) of community businesses reporting a decrease in volunteer numbers, falling from an average of 25 volunteers before the pandemic to 14 during it (Higton *et al.*, 2021a).

This drop reflects the skewed demographics of community businesses, with many older volunteers caught in the vulnerable shielding group. In its new strategy for 2021-2025, Power to Change has set itself the ambition to attract more diverse leaders and younger people into the community business market. This is expected to increase reach and social impact within local communities, but it may also help to make the market more resilient to future economic shocks.

## Themes emerging from the research

Each of the three reports explores different aspects of the volunteering experience in detail and are worth reading in full. However, the following five cross-cutting themes emerge.

### Theme 1: Role and type of volunteers

Community businesses often emerge out of community development or regeneration projects involving local activists with relevant expertise. There was consensus across the reports about the value ascribed to community members in these businesses, who see themselves not as *"businesses that decided to involve the community, but rather community members who decided to set up a business"* (Buckley *et al.*, 2017). Being located in and run by the local community, these businesses profoundly value the contribution of community members. In the words of one respondent quoted in Report 1 (Ellis Paine *et al.*, 2021): *"You're the shareholders; you're our family; you're the people who benefit from it; you're the people who run it."* The involvement of local volunteers is seen as a key difference from other local businesses.

This distinction emphasises the rootedness of community businesses and the attitudes towards volunteers who are considered part of the community and thus the greatest asset for these businesses. The positive and reciprocal impact of volunteering on community businesses and on the volunteers themselves is a common feature of all three reports, with volunteers seen as vital to the business model – a core part of the business' ethos, vision and values that also allows them to be competitive in service delivery.

This latter point is emphasised in Report 1, where the authors discuss how the involvement of volunteers can impact the profitability and sustainability of different types of business. Drawing on earlier work on the role of 'hybrid organisations' in the third sector (Billis, 2010), they note there is relatively little evidence on how volunteering may be affected in such environments, which flourish by balancing community needs and business needs but where the precise mix often changes over time, driven by internal dynamics or changes in the external operating environment.

## Theme 2: Volunteer demographics and levels of engagement

Prefiguring Power to Change's new strategy, Report 2 (Norrlander *et al*, 2021) notes that CBF-funded community businesses have not been successful in attracting a diverse volunteer base. This finding is supported by the other two reports, within which research participants said that their businesses were less representative of their local community. This applies across all aspects of diversity, age was particularly highlighted, and acts as a spur to greater inclusivity. In the words of one respondent, "[We have also been] working on access, inclusion, diversity of our volunteers. We have had a lot of conversations about inclusion. We've always been a welcoming organisation, but we have to look at taking things a step further and to break down barriers for the community."

One notable difference between the reports – on ethnic diversity – appears to be an artefact of the geographical scale of analysis. In Report 3 (Higton *et al*, 2021b), the authors find that the volunteers surveyed were less diverse than average for England as a whole (90% were White British compared with 81% in the 2011 census). By contrast, the authors of Report 2 tentatively suggest that the ethnicity of CBF volunteers broadly reflects the diversity of the local community.<sup>1,2</sup>

There is general agreement across the three reports on the broad contribution of volunteers to a multiplicity of roles, including but not limited to governance, management and delivery responsibilities. This is consistent with the *Community Business Market Report*, which notes that the proportion of volunteers in roles classified as 'Other' was more than twice that of those in paid roles – indicating that such roles are more likely to be varied and non-specific (Higton *et al.*, 2020a). Report 1 draws particular attention to the contribution of the 'super volunteer', whose support for their community business extends beyond peripheral and periodic, and instead makes a significant and sustained contribution to the organization and forms a core part of their identity.

## Theme 3: Benefits and motivations

All three studies discuss the mutual benefits shared by volunteers and community businesses from the volunteering experience. For the businesses, these benefits are wide-ranging and include:

- (a) the support volunteers offer at the start-up phase before the business is constituted and/or when it is unable to afford paid staff;
- (b) the role volunteers play in improving engagement and quality of service delivery;
- (c) the ongoing value added by volunteers not only to the culture and creativity of the businesses but also to their financial sustainability.

Report 1 draws attention to some of the subtle tensions that need to be managed, however, particularly around levels of autonomy and freedom. The authors conclude that "*while the experiences of volunteering were not always unproblematic ... the consensus was that the benefits of volunteering far outweighed the costs, and that the challenges could be mitigated through investing in volunteer support and coordination.*"

For the volunteers, benefits are tightly linked to intrinsic motivations: enjoyment, conviviality, belonging, wellbeing, expression, experience and connection are all cited. However, volunteers also talked about getting involved in a community business as a way to help out, to serve their community or a particular group within it. In addition, the authors of Report 2 note the broader impact community businesses have on people and place, including reducing social isolation, improving health and wellbeing, increasing employability and creating better access to services. Not all the motivations are intrinsic, however, and the authors of Report 3 delve into the significance of voluntary work in creating pathways into employment, training or education.

<sup>1</sup> Note that the two reports drew their samples from different community business populations. Higton's volunteer sample was drawn from a non-random extension of the 2020 Community Business Market survey, whereas Norrlander's was drawn solely from CBF grant recipients.

<sup>2</sup> Note also that Report 3 found community businesses were nearly four times more likely to be led by people from minoritised ethnicities (19%) compared to the UK's small and medium enterprises (5%), and that more than two in five community businesses have representation of minoritised ethnicities and/or people aged 35 or younger in senior positions.

#### Theme 4: Training, development and sustainability

A recurring theme across all the reports was the appreciation shown by volunteers for training and skills development. Report 3 reveals that a quarter of volunteers had received training from their community business and that nine out of ten agreed they had gained new skills or knowledge. The range of learning opportunities available are as broad as the community business marketplace itself and include amongst other things:

- technical skills such as woodworking through to more general topics such as safeguarding (Report 2);
- project planning and costing for community-led housing (Report 3);
- gardening skills at a community farm (Report 3); and
- event organisation, marketing, front of house, money management at a community arts centre (Report 3).

Much of this training is informal and done ‘on the job’. Interestingly, the authors of Report 1 note that some businesses appear to use training as a form of probation: *“Basically what we do is when we recruit a volunteer, we give them a half-day training session where we can assess them, and they can decide whether it’s for them, basically. And we have some who say afterwards, ‘No, I don’t think it’s for me’, basically. And we’ve had, you know, one or two cases where we’ve said, you know, ‘We don’t feel you’re perhaps suitable’ - in a nice way”.*

Report 2 highlights the important difference between training offered to volunteers (and paid staff) to be more effective in the job, and training offered to volunteers as a social outcome in itself. These two reasons can coincide, of course, particularly for younger people looking for development opportunities. As the authors of Report 3 note, this could *“strengthen their CVs in preparation for returning to education, entering employment or changing career paths”*, which in turn could help community businesses attract and retain more younger volunteers, improving their long-term sustainability.

#### Theme 5: Impact of Covid-19

The Covid-19 pandemic prompted a period of deep reflection in the community business marketplace, reinforcing prior concerns about the precarity of the basic business model and its over-reliance on older volunteers. Consistent with the *Community Business Market Report*, both Reports 2 and 3 agree that the number of hours volunteers were able to contribute dropped in the majority of cases.

Typical hours per week spent volunteering	Before March 2020	June-October 2020
< 5	60%	71%
5-9	25%	17%
10+	16%	13%

Source: Report 3 (p. 20)

Note: Totals do not add up to 100% due to rounding.

On the other hand, Report 1 finds evidence of changes in the practices and priorities of individual businesses, resulting in stronger relationships between volunteers and staff, and with volunteers being involved more actively in decision-making processes. In addition, the authors of Report 2 note that, as many community businesses moved to online delivery, there was a modest but measurable shift in the volunteer profile towards younger people.



# Questions for policy and practice

Community businesses are a relatively small sub-sector of a much wider third sector and must compete for volunteers against traditional charities and social enterprises. On the other hand, the rootedness of these 'hybrid organisations' ought to be a particular attraction for local people and should help to ensure services are targeted to local needs. This could put them in a strong position to work with central and local government to tackle long-standing socioeconomic disparities, regenerate left-behind neighbourhoods and revive local high streets.

- **To what extent could volunteer-based community businesses support the government's ambitions to level up the country?**
- **What would volunteers themselves think of supporting this sort of endeavour?**

Community businesses represent a radically different way of doing things. They come in many forms – shops, pubs, solar energy farms, even leisure centres – yet they are all accountable to their community and use their profits to improve lives and places. The sheer variety of activities undertaken by community businesses ought to be a key strength and yet most struggle to reflect the diversity of communities they serve. Moreover, their reliance on older volunteers and/or 'super volunteers' pose succession problems for some and represent an existential risk for others.

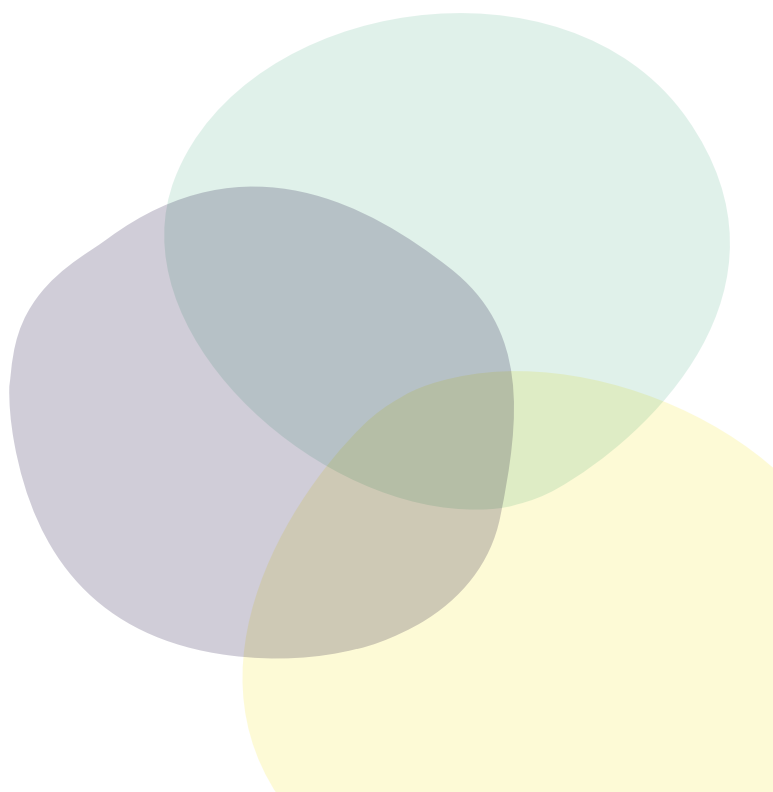
- **How could infrastructure and organisations help community businesses to change their volunteer profiles in ways that (a) better reflect the diversity of their local populations, and (b) increase resilience and sustainability?**

In particular:

- **Could a better, more coordinated training and skills development offer make community businesses more attractive to younger/more ethnically diverse volunteers?**
- **How can community businesses influence and benefit from current policy initiatives such as volunteer passporting?**

As with so much else in society, Covid-19 has shone a harsh spotlight on the community business marketplace and thrown long-standing issues into sharp relief. Yet many are optimistic about the opportunities presented by the pandemic to seize the 'community moment' and some community businesses predict growth in their involvement of volunteers.

- **Has Covid-19 led to a fundamental shift in the way that community action is seen, or will things return to 'business as usual' in 2022?**
- **What lessons should community businesses take from the pandemic and what role can Power to Change play in making the case for community businesses at the heart of a fairer society?**





# 1: Volunteering in community business – meaning, practice and management

**Angela Ellis Paine,  
Third Sector Research Centre**

## 1.1 Introduction

Volunteers make a significant contribution across the whole range of community businesses – on boards or committees, delivering services, providing administrative and back-office support, and engaging with their communities. It is estimated that there are four times as many volunteers as paid staff involved in UK community businesses – approximately 148,700 people giving their time to help run a community business, and many wouldn't be able to operate without them (Higton *et al.*, 2021a). Although we can appreciate the scale of volunteering in community business, a clearer picture of what volunteering looks like in practice is harder to come by.

Overall, we know little about the roles volunteers play and how central they are to the successful operation of community businesses. We do not know very much about how volunteers come to be involved in community businesses and why, how they are thought about as part of the purpose and strategy of community businesses, how volunteers are managed and organised, and how their work relates to that of paid staff. More broadly, there is a gap in understanding how volunteering plays out in a more commercially oriented context.

Our research attempted to fill in some of these gaps. The aim was to conduct a wide-ranging, qualitative study of the organisation and conceptualisation of volunteering in community business, to address the questions 'How is volunteering understood and enacted in community business and what are the implications of this

for volunteering experiences and outcomes?' Within this, we were particularly interested in how volunteering is conceptualised and managed, the role and influence of volunteers, and the relationship between volunteering and the commercial orientation of community business.

The study involved online qualitative research with eight different community businesses, including a community pub, a credit union, a community library, a cooperative bookshop and a community hub. These case studies were selected to ensure diversity in terms of volunteering in a range of different settings and trading contexts. Interviews and focus groups were carried out with 66 people across the community businesses – with volunteers, board members and paid staff, including volunteer managers and coordinators. Analysis of these interviews and focus groups has helped to generate a clearer sense of both the varied ways community businesses involve volunteers, but also the main aspects of what a community business context might mean for volunteering.

The remainder of this chapter focuses on the key findings from the study, structured into four sections, before the final part of the chapter draws some brief conclusions and highlights the implications of the findings for community business policy and practice.

## 1.2 The nature of volunteering in community businesses

Community businesses in the study varied in how the 'business' and 'community' faces of their work were balanced and related to each other, and also in the significance of volunteering. As existing survey data suggests, levels of volunteering vary considerably across community businesses as do ratios of paid staff to volunteers (Byrne et al., 2020; Higton et al., 2021a).

Numbers, however, only tell part of the story. For some community businesses, volunteering was fundamental to their operations, even when the absolute number of volunteers was relatively small. Volunteers could be 'fundamental' to either/both the resources or ethos of community businesses. Several, for example, said that they couldn't operate without volunteers. This included one community business that had no paid staff at all: it was entirely dependent on volunteers for all aspects of running the organisation. Others said they would not want to operate without volunteers. For some community businesses, volunteering was far more marginal: they could operate without volunteers, even if they were 'all the richer' for having them.

The extent of volunteering also varied considerably on an individual level. We identified three groups of volunteers, based on the extent to which they engaged with the organisation: super volunteers, giving a great deal of time over many years to the organisation; regular volunteers, providing a bedrock of frequent commitment for the organisation over time; and episodic volunteers, involved for specific activities and relatively short periods of time. We also observed three main areas within which volunteer roles were concentrated: governance, management and delivery. While in some community businesses, volunteers undertook roles in all these areas, in some they were concentrated in just one or two.

Underlying these different roles and contributions, are different meanings and positions ascribed to volunteers within the community businesses. We identified four different ways of thinking about volunteers: as workers/employees; members; service users; or co-owners of the organisations. These different understandings of volunteering are neither fixed nor mutually exclusive. They reflect the different positions that volunteers occupy within community businesses, the different stakes that they hold, and the different levels of influence they can exert over the organisation.

## 1.3 The reasons for volunteering in community businesses

There are contrasting individual motivations and organisational drivers for volunteering in community business, which may not always coincide. Volunteers were drawn to the community businesses in the study as a way of expressing passion or commitment to the organisation's activities or values, as a service to their community ('giving back' or 'helping out'), as experience, to develop skills, and to connect with others.

Community businesses can see volunteers variously as a resource (capacity to get things done), as part of the organisation's ethos and values (such as engaging with the community), as a source of legitimacy (connecting with service users and community members) and as a point of distinction (differentiated themselves from other forms of business, through their involvement of volunteers).

Whereas traditional studies of volunteering have tended to focus on individual motivations for getting involved, this research has highlighted the importance of understanding, not just the reasons why people volunteer but also why organisations involve them, and how these two sets of drivers interact.

## 1.4 The experience and outcomes of volunteering in the community businesses

There was a consensus that the benefits of volunteering far outweighed the costs, and that the challenges could be mitigated through investing in volunteer support and coordination. For community businesses, volunteering supports financial viability and sustainability, community embeddedness, and creativity and vibrancy.

*"It's so much better when the volunteers are around and you know, you are sharing all the tasks and obviously it means that everything's done quicker, but you also have like a bit more banter and a little bit more kind of you know, more of an atmosphere and like a sense of community"*

### Staff member

Most volunteers were content with the way they were managed and supported within community businesses. For individual volunteers it brings enjoyment (many talked about 'loving' their volunteering at the community business), conviviality, belonging and wellbeing.

*"I do honestly, genuinely feel so much better when I've been there for the morning or the afternoon or whatever and I come home, from just being outside really and doing something useful, you know."*

### Volunteer

However, four challenges associated with volunteer involvement were highlighted: diversity, succession, burnout and autonomy. Some community businesses noted that they lacked diversity and were less representative of their local community than they would like, particularly amongst younger people. This contributed to a problem of succession as some community businesses had become quite reliant on a small number of older volunteers, particularly in governance and leadership roles. Individual volunteers, and indeed staff, were at risk of burning out, given how much some people take on in support of the community business. Conversely, some of the participants in the study were exercised by managing people who had more autonomy over how much, when and how they engaged in the organisation.





## 1.5 The particularities of volunteering in community businesses

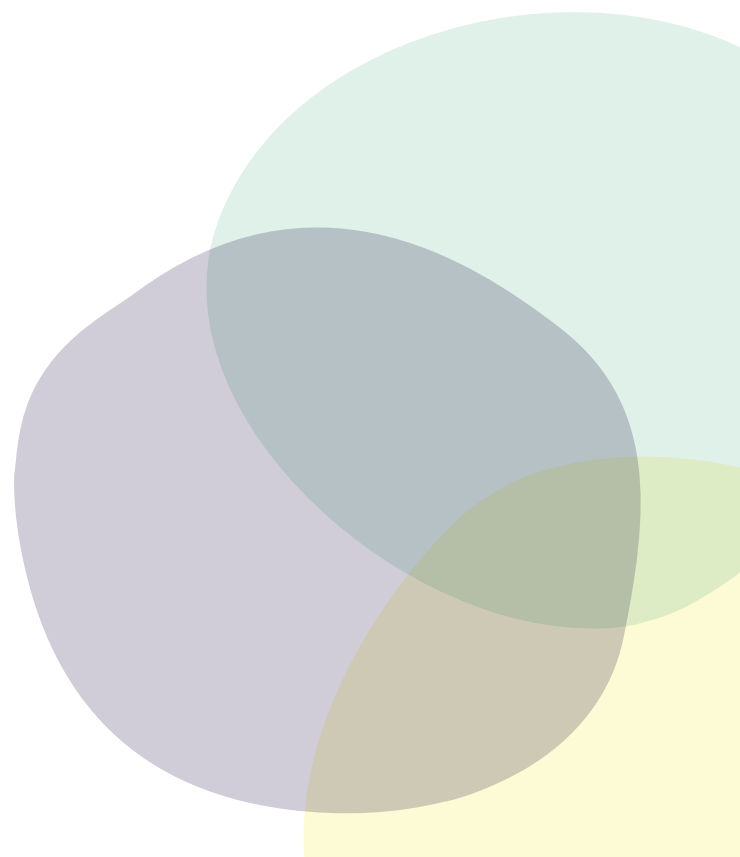
While volunteering helps realise the 'community' side of the business, it is not simply the case that the more commercial the operation of the community business the less space there is for volunteering (as may have been assumed from existing evidence and theory). Volunteering can be both constrained and enabled by the 'business' face of community business and can be vital to it. The regulation of specific kinds of services (e.g. transport), or the responsibilities of running the business under commercial pressure, are felt deeply and may limit the involvement of volunteers or put people off taking up governance and leadership positions. This was an issue for some longstanding volunteers when organisations changed in ways that saw a greater emphasis on commercial imperatives, contributing to dilemmas about whether or not they should or could remain involved.

But the business dimension of community businesses could also be a facilitating factor for volunteering, attracting people wanting to use or develop business skills to do good in their community, or in the model of community business itself. For some volunteers, it was the very idea of 'community business' that motivated them to volunteer: *"I'm less motivated by the volunteering by the local kind of community type thing, whereas actually I'm more interested in volunteering because of what [this community business] stands for, the model it's trying to create"*. Whereas this volunteer was directly motivated by the business model which underpinned their community business, others were more generally motivated by a desire to use their business skills to "do good" in the community, in what was often seen as a pioneering way.

Taken together, we found that the space for volunteering in community business is shaped by five interrelated dimensions:

1. The policy, funding and regulatory environment in which a community business operates.
2. The purpose, ethos and values of the community business.
3. The pressure to sustain a viable organisation.
4. The relative roles, responsibilities, relationships and positions between people in the community business.
5. The power structures within community businesses, such as how they are governed and how leadership is distributed.

Together, these five different dimensions interact to influence how volunteering was organised, managed and experienced. At times, inattention to volunteering can mean these wider organisational dynamics have unintended consequences for volunteering. Overall, it was the mix and balance of 'community' and 'business', as reflected through these five dimensions, which was important. Where they are successfully combined, with few tensions, the organisation and volunteering within it has the space to flourish; when kept separate and held in tension it is harder for the organisation and for volunteering to flourish within it.



## 1.6 Conclusions and implications

Volunteering is extensive within community businesses. Many businesses are entirely dependent on it. Others rely on it for their financial viability and/or their legitimacy as a *community* business. Volunteers provide a much-needed resource for community businesses, they help to embed organisations within their local community, and they help to ensure community businesses are dynamic, innovative organisations. From the volunteers' perspective, getting involved in community businesses is often an enjoyable and deeply connective experience, uniting people and place through shared interests and a common commitment to the community. Volunteering means more than getting the job done.

Yet the ways in which volunteering is thought about, resourced and practised vary considerably across community businesses. For some, volunteering was central to both the organisation's resource base and purpose. For others, it was far more marginal. While for most community businesses and individual volunteers volunteering was a positive experience, for some it created its own challenges for the organisation and represented a considerable burden of responsibility for the volunteer.

Within all the variations and differences, there are some patterns. The practices and outcomes of volunteering are shaped by the configuration of policy, purpose, profit, people and power within community business. How the 'business' and the 'community' parts combine is important. Tension in the combination of community and business, or a lack of balance between the two, can affect the understanding of what the organisation is about, which in turn affects the organisation, experience and outcomes of volunteering. And this is of course in flux, changing over time in response to various external and internal dimensions.

The study points towards eight particular implications of the research findings. Policymakers and practitioners interested in the role, meaning and possibilities of volunteering in community businesses need to:

1. **Recognise the potential** of volunteering in community business.
2. **Invest more** time, support and resources to help realise the potential of volunteers.
3. **Ask why** organisations want to involve volunteers, as well as why individuals volunteer, in order to adopt sensitive and context-specific approaches to volunteer involvement and management.
4. **Distribute leadership** across community businesses to volunteers and for volunteering.
5. **Take care** of volunteers and share responsibilities to avoid burnout.
6. **Look for balance** in responsibility, autonomy, power and burden in engaging volunteers.
7. **Enable pathways** of participation to allow flexible movement between different roles and responsibilities at different times.
8. **Acknowledge the risk** that volunteering is seen narrowly as, and becomes, just a contribution to the financial viability of community businesses.

## Case study: A 'super volunteer'

The chair of the board of one case study organisation, who also acts as the de facto chief executive officer, is central to the successful operation of the community business and has been involved since it was founded. This individual performs a variety of roles, including managing the paid staff and volunteers, but also getting involved with frontline activities. One interviewee described them as "the kingpin, they do practically everything ... we'd be lost without them".

This 'super volunteer' was described as working nearly full-time on the community business, combining the role with part-time paid work within a local statutory organisation. The arrangement meant that the community business avoided having to pay for a manager, but also ensured that it remained aware of developments within the local area. The individual also brought significant management experience from other roles.

It was acknowledged by several interviewees, however, that this level of reliance upon an individual and their skills brought challenges relating to succession planning. Finding a replacement volunteer with the same skills, ability and commitment would be extremely difficult and it was unclear whether a community business of this size would be able to remain viable if they had to pay a chief executive officer. Even if recruiting a suitable replacement proved possible, it seemed likely that the part-time staff would have to take on more responsibility and that it would take a long time for a successor to be able to 'bed in'.

One interviewee, however, reflected that many of the smaller community businesses of the same type were entirely volunteer run. They provided an example of another 'super volunteer' from their past experience with similar community businesses, which suggests that this scenario is far from unusual.



# 2: Valuing the contribution of volunteers to community businesses supported by the Community Business Fund

**Waseem Meghjee,  
Renaishi**

There is extensive literature on the role and value of volunteers in the charity sector and the value of volunteering to the volunteers themselves. However, less is known about the value of volunteers to community businesses. To add to existing knowledge, Renaishi was commissioned by Power to Change to understand the value of volunteers to community businesses supported by its flagship Community Business Fund (CBF) programme. This was done by exploring the following questions:

1. What types of roles do volunteers fulfil in Community Business Fund grantees? How prevalent are those roles? Are there any trends across different types of businesses?
2. Why do community businesses decide to engage with volunteers and what determines if a role is fulfilled by a volunteer or a staff member?
3. Can we identify the types of value brought to community businesses by their volunteer workforce?
4. What investments do community businesses make in order to sustain a volunteer offer? What are the costs of engaging volunteers?

Between December 2020 and February 2021, a total of 28 community businesses across England took part in this study which included an online survey and a follow up semi-structured telephone interview, as well as a review of community businesses' financial accounts. Our findings from this study are presented below.



## 2.1 The role of volunteers in community businesses

Community businesses funded by the Community Business Fund often engaged with volunteers for a combination of reasons:

- **To support the running and maintenance of an asset:** Community businesses with large assets were likely to engage volunteers in the running and maintenance of the asset as they can be resource and time intensive.
- **To provide core business operations and service delivery:** Volunteers provided community businesses with capacity in situations they were experiencing underfunding. Therefore, maintaining a volunteer offer functions as an investment towards increasing income from trading and can underpin the viability of the business.
- **Because volunteering is part of the community business' ethos, vision and values:** Volunteering provided the local community with an opportunity to gain experience and enabled community businesses to be an embedded part of the community.
- **Volunteers help the community businesses contribute to social impact:** Volunteering was part of some community businesses' social impact through reducing social isolation and providing volunteers with experience.
- **To increase capacity when needed:** Community businesses engaged volunteers to increase capacity outside of the day to day running of the businesses and to support one-off or special events.
- **Volunteers help to improve the quality of service:** Volunteers brought an added value and positive impact on the quality of service.

*"[Why we have volunteers is] two-fold. [Number one: it is one of our main social roles, helping with routes to work, removal of things like isolation, being able to participate [in the community]. So, it is 50% social impact on the person ... [the other] 50% is [that the] activities we do that are public facing. [We can reach an] awful lot more people [with] volunteers. We wouldn't be able to open to the public with [only] paid staff"*

Survey respondent

## 2.2 Types of volunteers

Volunteers fulfilled their various functions through several different types of roles. Our research drew on the Twine typology, which categorises volunteers into 11 different role types (e.g. outdoor and practical work, café/catering, fundraising and office support)<sup>3</sup>. Using this typology highlighted that the largest number of volunteers work in an outdoor and practical work setting, whereas the lowest number engaged in a professional and pro bono context. Further to this, community businesses emphasized that six other volunteer types arise contextually:

1. **Founder volunteers:** people who are heavily involved in establishing the community business and continue to be involved in the running of the organisation, for example, trustees.
2. **Essential to supporting the service:** volunteers who are brought in to support with specific business needs, such as those with responsibility for community businesses' finances.
3. **Regular but not required:** people who volunteer regularly, providing a skill or labour that is useful but not essential to the community business, such as gardening.
4. **Ad hoc support:** volunteers who step up to support the community business as and when a need arises, such as for one-off events.
5. **Therapeutic:** volunteer roles that are not essential to the success of the business but are beneficial to the individual volunteer, such as those experiencing poor mental health.
6. **Staff who also volunteer:** part-time or full-time staff who work additional hours outside of their contracted hours in a voluntary capacity, because of their personal commitment and investment in the community business.

The different roles fulfilled by volunteers within community businesses revealed that, in many cases, the function they serve is similar to that of paid staff. Community businesses highlighted many factors that play a role in deciding which roles can be offered to volunteers and how many volunteers. Consideration on which roles can be offered to volunteers included financial factors, policy and procedure around health and safety and finally, the need for consistency and stability in certain roles.

<sup>3</sup> Twine' is a set of bespoke tools developed by Power to Change to gather, track and analyse data - including volunteer and visitor information - to paint a clearer picture of community business' productivity and impact. More information about Twine can be found here: <https://www.twine-together.com>.

## 2.3 Number of volunteers and volunteer hours

Accurately assessing the number of volunteers engaged by community businesses was difficult because the definition of volunteers varied between businesses, as did the way they recorded their volunteer engagement. However, all community businesses that took part in the research had at least seven volunteers each and all had trustees or board members.

In terms of roles, community businesses that were community hubs indicated a greater variation in the positions filled by their volunteers. Community businesses that had a 'shop front' component, such as community pubs, had the highest proportion of volunteers in sales roles. Health, care or wellbeing businesses, on the other hand, had the highest proportion of volunteers in community outreach roles. Fundraising roles were concentrated in sports and leisure, and employment and training-focused community businesses.

This showed that the number of volunteers and the various roles that they fulfil is dependent on the sector and structure of the community business. Similarly, the number of volunteer hours per volunteer varied significantly between community businesses and two key factors played an influencing role. The first factor is the nature of the role, as some volunteer roles are based within services that require schedules such as cafés and this ultimately influences the number of hours volunteered. The second factor is the demographics of the volunteers, for example, if an individual volunteer works a full-time job, that will influence the number of hours they can volunteer.

## 2.4 Volunteer demographics

Understanding the demographics of the volunteers in community businesses funded by the CBF programme was difficult, primarily because not all had formal mechanisms to record the demographics of their volunteers. However, the community businesses that took part in the research indicated that their volunteers often tended to be white, female, not limited in their day-to-day activities and aged over 45. They also reported that before the Covid-19 pandemic, younger volunteers were more likely to take frontline roles.

Having said this, an initial analysis of the diversity of community businesses volunteers and diversity at ward level tentatively showed that for some community businesses, the diversity of their community was reflected in the diversity of their volunteers. However, the limitations in the data do not allow for a robust conclusion on this and highlight the need for further research into the demographics of volunteers. Despite this finding, all community businesses in the study indicated a desire to diversify their volunteer base. Yet they saw challenges to accomplishing this, acknowledging that there might be barriers to volunteering for people who are financially strained or reliant on income.

***"But basically, our volunteers, [the] majority of them are middle class. Right? So, they have an education that means that they understand already the value of volunteering and that they need to contribute ... And it's easy to volunteer if you're a retired person on a pension, and you've had a professional career. And it's really hard to volunteer if you're at home with three kids, and you've got no childcare and you're hungry. And we haven't overcome that."***

**Survey respondent**

## 2.5 Value and benefit of volunteers

Community businesses highlighted that they assessed how essential volunteers are based on multiple factors, including the role of each volunteer, the structure and business model of the community business (i.e. to what extent the organisation is structured around volunteering) and the mission and values of the community business (i.e. whether volunteering is a central part of the organisation's social impact). Volunteer roles identified as essential included trustees, income-generating roles and service delivery-focused roles.

All community businesses highlighted at least one volunteer role as essential and highlighted several benefits of volunteers to the community business. Ultimately, volunteers tend to be involved for a combination of reasons rather than one particular purpose. Benefits brought by volunteers included:

- **Start-up and early-stage capacity:** Community businesses are often established by individuals and groups in the local community. These volunteers provide community businesses with vital capacity at the start-up and early stages of business development.
- **Ongoing additional capacity:** A significant value of volunteers is that they provide community businesses of all sizes with additional capacity to carry out both trading activities as well as activities to benefit the local community.
- **Improved community engagement and quality of service delivery:** Community businesses credit volunteers with supporting and improving community engagement, service delivery and the experience of service users when accessing support.
- **Added value to the culture of community businesses:** Community businesses often feel the benefit of volunteering within their own structure and workplace environments.
- **Financial viability and sustainability:** Volunteers provide significant capacity and support to community businesses in delivering activities.

*"It makes us happier [to have volunteers]. They bring a different culture to the place ... It brings people from lots of different walks of life together, breaking down cultural barriers for people resistant to change and who reinforce their own beliefs. They bring a much wider [sense of] community"*

Survey respondent

## 2.6 Cost of volunteering

Contrary to the narrative that volunteering is free, community businesses identified several costs associated with engaging a volunteer workforce. These included the recruitment process, managing volunteers on a one-off or ongoing basis, meeting training and development needs, ensuring wellbeing, and upholding a duty of care. The costs associated with ensuring volunteer safety and wellbeing were a particular concern in the context of Covid-19.

Despite these costs, 68% of community businesses taking part in this study thought that the value of volunteers will increase and 76% indicated that they want to increase volunteer engagement in the future.

## 2.7 Impact of Covid-19 and looking ahead

Covid-19 has had an impact on the way community businesses engage with volunteers on many fronts. It has impacted the roles that volunteers do, the number of volunteers and their hours, the value of volunteering and the cost of engaging volunteers.

In terms of roles, there was an increase in frontline volunteers who responded to needs developed directly as a result of the pandemic. This included food shopping and deliveries, telephone and online befriending services to reduce the impact of social isolation and support to community initiatives such as supporting the administration of vaccination programmes.

Most community businesses reported a decrease in the number of volunteers they engage with as a result of Covid-19. This was due to concerns about the health and safety of the volunteers and staff. However, many community businesses also reported an increase in the number of people coming forward to volunteer. Similarly, the majority of community businesses reported a decrease in the number of hours that volunteers did, with people facing roles such as sales experiencing the greatest decline.

The majority of community businesses felt that the number of volunteers in essential or valuable roles had either not changed or had decreased because volunteers had not been able to volunteer to the same degree they did previously. However, in many cases community businesses highlighted that the value of volunteers increased because of their role in the response to Covid-19, the increased leadership of trustees during a difficult period and the additional capacity volunteers provided to staff.

Having said this, some community businesses experienced an increase in the cost of engaging volunteers due to a higher duty of care. For example, ensuring that volunteers can carry out their roles in a socially distant and safe manner.

## 2.8 Conclusions and policy challenges

Our study highlighted the essential role that volunteers play in community business, shedding light on the value that they add and receive from their role. Yet, there remains a gap in evidence about the demographics, skills, motivations, and impact of volunteers. Community businesses are already often under-resourced, and they may not see the benefit in collecting quality information about their volunteers. Even if they do, they may not have the time or tools to do this well.

*“Yeah, this stuff is challenging ... nobody pays us to measure this stuff. And, measuring stuff properly like this really takes a lot of investment of time.”*

### Survey respondent

Additionally, there are varying definitions of volunteering, which may change what and how community business representatives are measuring. There may also be cases where perception and data deviate, as we see in the case of perception of diversity vs. demographic data of volunteers. Despite these challenges, it is essential to gather quality data about volunteers in community businesses to understand how and when to support both community businesses and their volunteers to continue this mutually beneficial relationship.

This study highlighted three key policy challenges that need to be addressed:

1. **Support for businesses to deploy volunteers** as an investment (for example, by providing guidance on how to build the volunteer workforce as part of the wider business strategy).
2. **Collect quality data** on volunteers and how they are deployed in community businesses (and the wider sector).
3. **Focus on diversity data** to support community businesses' ambitions to diversify their volunteer base. (Tentative findings suggest that community businesses in more diverse areas were less likely to collect and report this data.)



## Case study: Balancing community and business, and growing volunteering

The Hall is a community business situated in a large city. It is a Grade II listed building that has been managed by a board of trustees on behalf of the local community since the 1990s, although the hall itself is much older. For many years, the hall was maintained by this group of volunteers and utilised for regular room hire by a small number of groups, from which the organisation derived most of its income.

Five years ago, however, the trustees felt the model was becoming untenable, and moved to employ their first paid staff members to support the organisation. These staff members include a charity development manager and an artistic director. Their employment represented a move towards a more professional and strategic focus for The Hall, including a growing emphasis on more commercial activities.

While the purpose of the organisation has always been “to serve the community”, relatively little attention was historically paid to actively building the business. The move to a more professional, strategic model and expansion in fundraising and trading activities has not come at the ‘cost’ of community but has instead included a greater focus on community engagement, through providing accessible activities and opportunities for local people with a focus on wellbeing. Developing community projects has become part of the business model for The Hall.

As a result of this expansion, the trustees expect that volunteering (beyond the board) will become more central to the organisation and they will seek to involve local volunteers in specific volunteering roles. For example, they will likely need to recruit a volunteer receptionist to manage the different groups using The Hall and any enquiries.



# 3: The role of volunteers in community businesses

**John Higton,  
CFE Research**

Voluntary labour is essential for many community businesses, yet a detailed understanding of their contribution to this sector is limited. To help address this gap in the evidence base, a survey was conducted between September and October 2020 (between the first two Covid-19 lockdowns) of 286 volunteers working for 26 community businesses. The volunteers survey followed an earlier survey of 195 community businesses who discussed their experiences of volunteering as an extra module in the 2020 Community Business Market Survey. In-depth follow-up interviews with 15 volunteers and 10 community businesses with which they worked were also undertaken.

## **3.1 Volunteers, in a variety of roles, made essential contributions to community businesses**

Three in ten (29%) community businesses said volunteers were essential to the business or that they had no paid staff: volunteering was part of their ethos. More than half (55%) of community business representatives agreed that their business would become increasingly reliant on volunteers in the future to meet increased demand for services and increased interest in volunteering. Two-thirds (65%) of representatives said their community business was considering recruiting more volunteers to increase the pool of skills within the volunteer workforce.

Volunteers played a variety of important roles in community businesses. Community business representatives identified delivering services and products to customers as the most important contribution of volunteers to the business: three-quarters (75%) rated this contribution as very important. More than half (54%) of community business representatives said volunteers made a very important contribution to the business's financial and accountancy functions.

Volunteers also filled senior positions within community businesses. Four in five (79%) community businesses had volunteers in chief executive officer or senior management positions. Director-level volunteers made important contributions to financial and strategic decision-making, applying skills used in professional, leadership and business roles.

*"To put it bluntly, if it were not for the time that the volunteers put in, there wouldn't be a shop. It is the thing that makes the shop sustainable, because of the number of hours they put in."*

**Community shop representative**

## 3.2 Volunteers were typically proficient in their roles

Community business representatives typically felt volunteers were proficient in the skills they had.<sup>4</sup> The lowest level of proficiency recorded was social media skills. Even here, three-quarters (74%) of business representatives requiring social media skills said their volunteers were proficient. Two-thirds (66%) of community business representatives agreed with the statement that the roles undertaken by volunteers were different from those undertaken by paid staff; a quarter (25%) disagreed.

The table below compares volunteers' views on their proficiency for certain skills against the frequency with which they said they used those

skills. The skills used most by volunteers were generalist, people-centred skills rather than specialist or higher-level management skills. However, those volunteers that did deploy specialist and management skills were already proficient at them.

Further analysis identified a core set of interrelated business administrative skills used by volunteers. These skills were used in combination to fulfil operational functions within community businesses. Statistical relationships existed between the use of skills such as business marketing and communications, fundraising and financial skills.

### Categorising skills by volunteers' rating of their own proficiency and use

	Used often	Used less often
Proficient (self-identified)	Volunteers said they were proficient in six skills they used often. For example, communication – oral or written was used by nearly all (92%) participants who said they were at least fairly skilled communicators. Generally, this category comprised softer skills such as problem-solving and customer handling.	Volunteers were proficient in four skills they used less. These were mentoring or teaching others, managing others, administrative and secretarial skills and skills in mathematics.
Less proficient (self-identified)	Skills associated with a trade were the only ones used by more than a third of volunteers but most displayed low proficiency. Trade skills are relatively specialist with specific applications.	Volunteers identified 10 skills in which they were less proficient and used less. These were typically specialist or management skills. Community business representatives sought four of these skills amongst some of their volunteers: fundraising, business marketing and communications, social media administration skills and financial (accountancy, financial planning, etc.).

<sup>4</sup> Where community businesses gave a rating of either 'fairly' or 'very' proficient.



### 3.3 Volunteers who received training viewed it as a significant benefit

Three in five (61%) of community businesses offered or planned to offer training or professional development to volunteers. A quarter (25%) of volunteers received training from their community business. Views of training from this small cohort were positive. Nine in ten agreed that they had gained new skills or knowledge valuable to the community business and that the training helped them carry out their voluntary work to the best of their abilities.

Two-thirds (64%) of the 120 volunteers in paid employment agreed their volunteering 'developed new skills and/or knowledge valuable in the workplace'. The main skills which developed through volunteering were fundraising and mentoring or teaching others. For some, the skills developed at a community business played an important role in entering a new workplace. Other community businesses were mostly utilising existing skills, which may help explain why most other volunteers did not think their skills had developed through volunteering.

*" ... Lots of people who helped with Steps To Work ... came to volunteer because they were looking to change their career, and this was going to be a good way to help them refocus their CV."*

**Community hub representative**

### 3.4 Volunteering benefits businesses and volunteers alike

Community businesses benefited from volunteers in many ways. There was an emphasis on community value when businesses talked about volunteering: one in five (22%) saw wider benefits to the community through engaging local volunteers. Such benefits included opportunities for people to socialise, increasing people's skills and experience to make them more employable, and improving the local environment. One in six (16%) representatives valued the local knowledge and community belonging drawn from volunteers.

Volunteers gained many benefits too. Helping the local community was a strong driver for many in their decision to volunteer. Three in five (58%) wanted to improve things and help people in the local community. This was also the strongest motivator identified by two in five (42%) participants in the National Council for Voluntary Organisations [NCVO] survey of volunteering in the wider community and voluntary sector (NCVO, 2019). Personal reasons also featured heavily in decisions to volunteer with community businesses. Volunteers cited having spare time (38%), that the business' work was important to them (35%), and a wish to meet new people and make new friends (27%). The same types of personal motivations were reflected in the wider sector within NCVO's volunteers' survey.

Around half (48%) of volunteers recognised mixing with new people as a benefit of volunteering and 47 per cent drew satisfaction from seeing the difference the business made to the community. When asked specifically about the personal impacts of volunteering, nine in ten (89%) said working with the community business gave them a sense of personal achievement and three-quarters (77%) recognised an improvement in their mental wellbeing. Similar benefits were reported in NCVO's survey.

### 3.5 Volunteers were older, whiter and more likely to be women compared to the population at large

A third (34%) of surveyed volunteers were aged 65 years or older compared to a quarter of all adults in England and more than half (57%) were women. Nine in ten (90%) identified their ethnicity as White British compared to four in five (81%) English and Welsh people in the 2011 Census. The age of volunteers helps explain why two in five (42%) said they were retired. The same proportion said they worked which is 22 percentage points fewer than the adult population of England (64%) as reported by the Office for National Statistics (ONS, 2020).

In contrast, four in five (82%) community business representatives said their volunteer workforce reflected the profile of people living in their area. This may point to a disparity between demographic data and the perception of community business representatives of the diversity of their communities or volunteers. Further research is needed to capture the diversity of the volunteer workforce and the causes of the overrepresentation of certain groups.

*"It's quite balanced in gender terms I would say, but not balanced in terms of diversity for people with disabilities and other Black and ethnic minority groups. That is, yes, definitely an area that we, you know, really would like to expand."*

Community hub representative

### 3.6 People volunteered fewer hours during the pandemic

More than half (54%) volunteered in the week before the survey and did so for an average of 6.2 hours. This time did not vary significantly by age, employment status or gender. Two-thirds (64%) said this represented the same amount of time as usual. One in five (21%) spent fewer hours and one in eight (12%) spent more hours volunteering than usual in the prior week.

People volunteered less during the pandemic. The proportion volunteering fewer than five hours per week during the pandemic increased by 11 percentage points to 71 per cent. When asked, volunteers explained reductions in hours were caused by either a fall in business activity due to the pandemic or reluctance or inability to volunteer due to shielding guidance. This may be linked to the age of volunteers, considering that a third (34%) of surveyed volunteers were aged 65 years or older, putting them at risk of developing serious illness from Covid-19. When community business representatives saw increases in hours from volunteers during the pandemic, they put this down to increased interest from furloughed workers.



### 3.7 Recruiting and retaining volunteers

Retaining volunteers was not found to be an issue for community business representatives, with more than four in five (82%) disagreeing that their community business struggled to retain volunteers. Yet almost half of community business representatives (45%) agreed that they face barriers when recruiting volunteers. These barriers include sourcing specialist skills in areas like computing and higher-level managerial skills.

*“... Sometimes we get really skilled people who [have] been working twenty years as a carpenter ... Short induction, and away they go. Whereas other people have never touched the tool, and they might need to go on the building skills course to build up their skills ...”*

**Environmental community business representative**

### 3.8 Conclusions and implications

Volunteers are an essential part of community businesses, playing a variety of important roles and bringing a range of skills. Their participation is highly valued by community businesses and volunteers alike, with both groups perceiving significant benefits. Their role may become even more valued in the future, with community business representatives predicting that they will become increasingly reliant on volunteers to face future challenges.

Despite their contributions, the current spread of volunteers could benefit from increased diversity, both in terms of skills and demographic characteristics. Community businesses face challenges finding volunteers with all the skills they need, especially specialist skills, and recruiting demographically diverse volunteers, which may hinder resilience. An over-representation of older volunteers, for instance, caused a significant dip in volunteering during the pandemic, adding difficulty to an already difficult time for community businesses.

The challenge for community businesses is to recruit a diverse volunteer workforce to help them overcome present and future obstacles. Community business volunteers highly valued the variety of experiences that people from different walks of life could bring to their organisation. As agricultural monocultures have taught us, diversity breeds resilience.

This study highlighted two key challenges for consideration:

1. **Support community businesses** in recruiting and retaining a more diverse volunteer workforce (in terms of skills, age and other demographic factors).
2. **Investigate the potential role of community businesses in upskilling** members of their local community, and the support they would need to play this role.







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# Appendix:

## A summary of the three reports

<b>Report title</b>	<b>Volunteering in community business: meaning, practice and management (CRESR, Sheffield Hallam University and The Third Sector Research Centre, University of Birmingham)</b>	
Authors	Angela Ellis Paine, Chris Damm, Jon Dean, Cathy Harris and Rob Macmillan	
Research Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How is volunteering conceptualised and managed, and how does this affect the experience and outcomes of volunteering?</li> <li>• What influence do volunteers have in the formation, strategic direction and operation of community businesses?</li> <li>• What is the relationship between volunteering and the commercial orientation of community business?</li> </ul>	
Methods	In-depth case studies with eight community businesses. Within each case study, trustees, staff, and volunteers were involved through a mix of interviews (55) and focus groups (4, with a total of 11 participants).	
Findings	Community businesses vary in how the 'business' and 'community' faces of their work balance and relate to each other. Individual motivations and organisational drivers for volunteering do not always coincide. The benefits of volunteering far outweigh the costs. Volunteering helps realise the 'community' side of the business. It can be both constrained and enabled by the 'business' side.	
<b>Report title</b>	<b>Valuing the contribution of volunteers to community businesses supported by the Community Business Fund (Renaisi and MyCake)</b>	
Authors	Amanda Norrlander, Waseem Meghjee, Kandy Sisya, Annabel Litchfield, Rosy Jones, Sarah Thelwall and Alice Thornton	
Research Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What types of roles do volunteers fulfil? How prevalent are those roles? Are there any trends across different types of businesses?</li> <li>• What value do volunteers in different roles contribute to the business model, and what is the cost of supporting those volunteers?</li> <li>• Can we identify the 'hidden' value and costs of the volunteer workforce?</li> <li>• What advice and guidance can we offer community businesses to help them best utilise their volunteer resource?</li> <li>• What is the impact of Covid-19 on the value of volunteers, the types of roles they fulfil and the cost of supporting them?</li> </ul>	
Methods	Rapid literature review. Engagement with 28 community businesses funded through the Community Business Fund, which included an online survey and a follow-up semi-structured telephone interview with a key member of the team. Review of community businesses' financial accounts.	
Findings	Community businesses engage volunteers for a variety of reasons, some ideological, some related to quality, and some about business viability. The number engaged tends to be in the region of 30-50 although the pandemic has impacted volunteer numbers and demographics. Improving diversity is a key ambition for many. Many also predict that volunteers will become more important as the pandemic starts to come to an end.	
<b>Report title</b>	<b>The role of volunteers in community businesses (CFE Research)</b>	
Authors	John Higton, Rachael Archer, David Merrett, Michelle Hansel and Sophie Spong	
Research Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who are volunteers?</li> <li>• What roles are they doing?</li> <li>• How long do they volunteer?</li> <li>• What skills are they using?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What skills gaps exist?</li> <li>• What benefits do community businesses get?</li> <li>• What benefits do volunteers get?</li> </ul>
Methods	Two surveys of community businesses and volunteers and follow up interviews. Fieldwork took place during the pandemic and so some questions reflect on changes due to this. Logistic regression was applied to model behaviours of employed and retired volunteers.	
Findings	There are two categories of community business volunteers operational and managerial/specialist. Some community businesses are unviable without volunteer labour. Volunteers' characteristics dictate whether and how they engage with community businesses.	



## December 2021

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