

VOLUNTEER HUB NEWS

Report for the National Lottery Community Fund

Year 3: May 2024 - April 2025

What we've been up to, what we've learned,
what's next?



Reaching Communities and Partnerships

End of Year progress update form

Progress Update

It is time for you to complete a progress update for your Reaching Communities funded project for the last 12 months.

It's up to you how you wish to send the information - you can send us a report that you've already created for another funder or for internal use within your organisation, or you may want to get creative and produce a video or audio update. Alternatively, you can complete this form or a monitoring form you have created and send it in to us.

However you choose to tell us about your project, the review should cover the following topics:

- **Spend** - using the budget spreadsheet agreed at application stage, you will confirm what you have actually spent over this period, detailing any budget header changes and any under or over spends. Additionally, please provide a progress update on securing any additional funds included within your project budget from other funders.
- **Impact** - tell us how you have made progress towards the intended impact for the project (this can be found in your offer letter) - you can include testimonials, case studies, evaluation reports and other examples that show the difference your project has made since it launched, as well as any specific impact measurement tools used to track the changes.
- **Learning** - tell us more about what you have learnt, what changes you have made, and how you share that with local stakeholders - you can find more about ways to do that at [Learning from our projects](#).
- **Partnerships** - tell us more about your connection to stakeholders locally - what is working well or not, and if the project has joined or created any networks.
- Tell us about any **issues, challenges or risks** identified during the delivery of your activities.
- Confirm any **changes** to your organisation or project contacts that have taken place since the grant was awarded.

More detailed guidance can be found on our website at [Reaching Communities](#)

Well done on the progress so far! If you have any questions or would prefer to share this update in a discussion, please get in touch.

Project Overview

- What has the funding helped you to do? Tell us in your own words, or the words of the people you support.

In year three of the Volunteer Hub programme, the National Lottery Community Fund helped Rother Voluntary Action to continue to promote, advocate for, diversify and celebrate volunteering across Rother. It helped RVA nurture sustainable expertise and collaborative energy around volunteering. Supporting the development of training and resources, systems and networks.

Promotion

During 2024-5 RVA's Volunteer Hub Team continued to promote volunteering and advocate for volunteering's role in creating resilient communities, including

- Volunteers Week promotions and activities
- Volunteer Awards ceremony
- [Ten Volunteer films](#)
- New marketing banners, promotional materials and activities
- Attendance at multiple community events to promote volunteering

Networking

In 2024-25, Rother Voluntary Action continued to collaborate in a range of strategic partnerships and initiatives to champion and advocate for volunteering in the district and county: Our aim has been to ensure VCSEs and volunteering are factored into wider public health / wellbeing and employment strategies. We have focused particularly on connections around nurturing young volunteers, developing volunteering as a pathway to employment and volunteering's role in individual and community wellbeing, and in supporting diversity and inclusion.

Collaborations with local academies, colleges, the Youth Employment Service, the Rother Skills and Employability Forum, Bexhill Jobs Fair, the ICB, PCN, Adult Social Care, East Sussex Healthy Ageing Partnership, NHS 10 year planning, Active Rother, the Rother Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Forum and NAVA's Allyship programme.

Brokerage

In 2024-25 RVA highlighted and promoted specific volunteer opportunities to build Rother's accessible 'marketplace' for volunteer roles, including:

- Over 70 volunteering roles on RVA's website. These were also shared on Tribe, East Sussex County Council's new online volunteering platform, in RVA's monthly e-newsletter and on our social media platforms.
- Roles promoted in person at events and jobs fairs
- Corporate Social Responsibility roles from Rother's volunteering organisations shared with local businesses.

Training and support for Volunteers and Trustees

In 2024-5 we continued to develop our training offer to support Rother's Volunteers and VIOs, including:

- Hosted basic training for volunteers and volunteering organisations
- Developed a more comprehensive training plan, improved signposting to existing training and improved online resources
- Continued to build our 'expert volunteer' training resource
- Developed a pilot training programme for boards and trustees, informed by research with local organisations
- Developed and delivered new in-house training in collaboration with Hastings Voluntary Action 'Recruiting, managing and retaining volunteers.'

Intended Impact

What progress have you made towards your intended impact? As a reminder, there is a detailed paragraph within your offer letter confirming what your intended impact for this project is.

Promotion:

Our intention is to raise the profile of volunteering in Rother, publicly celebrate the achievements of volunteers and support organisations to do likewise.

Volunteering Network Event 3 June 2024



RVA hosted a sector Network event focused on recruiting, managing and retaining volunteers.: The event featured presentations, workshops and new resources. 25 VCSE organisations represented along with statutory service colleagues.

Volunteer visits 4-6 June 2024

Annette and Naomi visited around 60 volunteers in 30 charity shops, museums, heritage centres, and historic buildings in Battle, Rye, and Bexhill handing out 'thank you' cards and chatting about their experiences of volunteering. Volunteers revealed how volunteering had improved and even transformed their lives. Photos and quotes were gathered and shared on social media to publicly acknowledge the volunteers and organisations and to promote volunteering.

Why do you like volunteering?

'Giving back to the community' Francesca

'Lived in the area for 30 years. Felt it is time to give something back - better than sitting in front of the TV' Andrew

'Achieving something for myself whilst contributing to society' Anne



RVA Team Volunteering at Rye Community Garden 4 June 2024



This was a real team event with children and grandchildren and nieces of the team also joining in with digging, planting, hedges, weeding and filling planters.

'Thank you for the wonderful volunteering session! It was a pleasure to have you guys around! I am very much learning how to do all of this, so it was nice to be able to dip my foot into it with you guys! It also made me realise that these sorts of sessions would be a real asset for our garden! So thinking how we can make this happen more regularly with different groups!

Also super super happy to receive feedback from you around how we can welcome different groups of people and make sure they feel welcome! A big thank you!

Alizé', Rye Community Garden

Volunteer Awards

In October 2018, RVA held its Volunteer Awards and AGM at Tilling Green Community Centre, Rye, attended by around 80 groups and public sector partners.

220 volunteers were nominated, with 30 receiving certificates in person from the High Sheriff of East Sussex, Lucinda Frazer DL.

Awards were given to a wide range of local organisations, 10 featured volunteers were highlighted in [professional short films](#), now used to promote volunteering across social media. A booklet summarising the 30 nominations was shared at the event.



Thank you for making Fi's day x I was just so proud and delighted she accepted the award ...' (Jacky, Running Space)



and

that

Improved Marketing Materials

5 x new tabletop banners and a large banner were developed with public input to communicate the most motivating reasons to volunteer across age groups.



Improvements have been made to the resources RVA's volunteering team takes to events as a direct result of our collaboration with HVA, this has worked two ways, with HVA also learning from us. It makes us able to engage more effectively with VCSE and members of the community. EG tear off strips from posters, new promotional banners and fun ways and games to engage young people with volunteering

Volunteer Coordinator Forum Conversations



Since 2022, RVA's Volunteer Hub has supported organisations with volunteer recruitment, management, and retention. Recognising the value of peer learning, RVA partnered with Hastings Voluntary Action in autumn 2024 to launch the Rother and Hastings Volunteer Coordinator Conversations—quarterly networking forums shaped by participants.

The first two sessions, held in December 2024 and March 2025, welcomed 44 participants from 35 organisations,

focusing on session structure and the volunteer journey. The next session in June 2025 will include volunteers and explore wellbeing.

These informal forums offer a space for coordinators to share experiences and challenges, with RVA acting as a facilitator. Uptake and feedback have been very positive, highlighting the value of and appetite for connection and shared learning.



The Marketplace · Follow

Excellent meeting. So useful. Thank you RVA for organising it

'Loved the session, informative, structured, friendly home feel atmosphere which helped to tune in from the first instant. Venue is perfect as well, for this number of participants.'

'Thank you for having me at your meeting. I learnt a lot and met some nice people and had some lovely soup too.'

'I thought you put on an excellent event this afternoon and garnered much useful feedback. Well done.'

'Lovely venue, the session was productive and a great chance to chat with other volunteer coordinators.'

Bexhill Job and Apprenticeships Fair



RVA's Volunteer Hub returned to the Bexhill Jobs Fair for the third year, this time with a dedicated 'Volunteering Zone'—a larger, more visible space shared with seven local voluntary organisations. The zone attracted significant interest, with RVA recording 70 conversations and distributing 150 flyers and 109 printed role descriptions.

Popular roles included admin support, foodbank volunteers, and charity shop positions. RVA also connected with four corporate contacts to promote CSR opportunities.

This year's presence was more focused and impactful, raising the profile of volunteering as a pathway to employment, skill-building, and wellbeing. Eye-catching banners and printed materials—now reusable assets—helped engage a diverse range of attendees and encouraged them to explore volunteering opportunities.

Role promotion

There has been an increase in volunteer opportunities advertised on RVA's website from 32 listings in the year 2023/2024 to 70 this year, from 33 different organisations.

Some of these organisations have come to RVA after building a rapport from attending the networks or vice versa. Unfortunately, unless organisations come back to RVA with information about subsequent recruitment, (which they are asked to do) we are unsure how many people apply for the positions.

Hi, I just wanted to let you know that we have filled the Secretary position that we had advertised with you. It was filled through somebody seeing your advert, so thank you. It's a lovely lady who works within the NHS, loves crafting and also has experience with mental health issues, so matches the brief perfectly.' Sabrina, Crafty Collective

We have continued support for the development of Tribe, East Sussex County Council's online platform, working with HVA, 3VA and ESCC, plus Bronze Labs to support the promotion and encourage VCSE and volunteer use, identifying opportunities to encourage trial and increase relevance, plus showcasing the benefits of Tribe. We continue to offer support to organisations that may be struggling with learning how to use Tribe

CSR

More CSR volunteering time is now available from organisations like Balfour Beatty, Hastings Direct and Gaby Hardwicke, with staff and resources, however challenges arise in making it work for organisations with limited capacity to cater for large groups. It is also admin heavy to co-ordinate.

We have added a tag on volunteer role listings to state if the role/project is suitable for group / CSR opportunities.

1:1 Support



The Volunteer Hub has worked with two organisations this year on a 1:1 basis, providing a 'listening ear' as members think through their own challenges, helping them come up with their own solutions and offering support and resources in setting up policies and procedures.

'I came away energised and inspired to move forward with this this morning, it's absolutely vital to the growth of RunningSpace so that we can keep #championinglife and #beatingsuicide.'

- In addition to this ongoing support, we have provided

one-off in person guidance sessions around recruiting volunteers to Men Walk Talk, Holding Space, St Michael's Hospice. Hastings Citadel, Bramley Farm, Bexhill Dementia Action Alliance, the Clean up Campaign, East Sussex Hearing, De La Warr Pavilion, Family Support Workers and Care for the Carers and email support to others.

This year we developed a **trustee / board peer-to-peer development programme**, which we will be trialling in 2025-6. This was developed following response to our [online Trustee questionnaire](#), which was completed by 15 organisations during trustees week 2024.

RVA acknowledges we are not experts and our role is to facilitate co-learning between organisations. This happens via our network and conversation events.

A complete 1:1 was extremely useful. It was also followed up with comments and suggestions on my spreadsheet design. Attendee from Simple Spreadsheets

Excellent session, thank you. I think a longer and more in-depth session would be beneficial, but it was great as it was! Attendee from recruiting and retaining volunteers

Learning

- What's gone well? What's not gone well or been challenging? What's been unexpected or interesting? What have you learned that would be useful to others?
- **Venues:** There are challenges in finding suitable, affordable venues which are accessible. Via our Volunteer Coordinator Network, we have now been offered venues by VIOs themselves (eg their meeting rooms or other spaces). We are being more creative with meeting formats, for example having our next Summer meeting outdoors.
- **Sourcing trainers** with the necessary knowledge and expertise for the course and its participants as well as the time commitment from organisations to attend. We are improving signposting to quality external training and online training via our website to make this more efficient.
- There have been several requests for deeper, more sustained 1:1 support having limited team capacity has meant our ability to provide focused 1:1 support across a large geographical, rural area has been restricted, however the Volunteer Co-ordinators Conversations go part of the way to filling the gaps, as do our online resources and one-off teams meetings with a follow up advisory email.
- **CSR:** It can be challenging for small volunteering organisations to host / find the capacity to administer CSR group volunteering. We are considering a fee model where businesses are asked to cover the costs incurred by the organisation, however this may be off-putting. We are also building our 'expert volunteer' offer as a more manageable, ad hoc way for VIOs to benefit from corporate input.
- **Young people:** We now have an increasing number of organisations willing to offer volunteering roles to young people. Whilst we have promoted volunteering extensively to young people this year and have found a high level of interest, we are still challenged by how to facilitate a first experience of volunteering. It does seem to mainly depend on access via home life, parents and guardians or family friends. A first experience of volunteering via school would be brilliant, but most schools don't have the capacity to organise this. We will continue to investigate ways forward.
- **Engagement of volunteers** - All of the above impacts our ability to engage with volunteers. We have found that the best way to engage with volunteers is to attend events and visit places where they are, rather than expect them to come to us. However, this takes time and resource to achieve. Perhaps we need a volunteer of our own to help with outreach?

Partnerships / Local Connections

- How have you joined up with what others are doing locally? How are you making the most of the strengths of your community?

Networks

In 2024-25, Rother Voluntary Action continued to champion volunteering and create meaningful connections in the district through a range of strategic partnerships and initiatives:

- Partnered with Hastings Voluntary Action to establish the quarterly Rother and Hastings Volunteer Coordinators' Forum.
- Collaborated with local academies, colleges, and the Youth Employment Service to promote volunteering to young people and develop pathways into volunteering.
- Took part in the Rother Skills and Employability Forum and Bexhill Jobs Fair and worked with Job Centre Plus to highlight Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) volunteering and volunteering as a route into employment.
- Worked with the ICB, Adult Social Care, East Sussex Healthy Ageing Partnership, and Active Rother to advocate for volunteering as a vital element in preventative health and community wellbeing.
- Promoted inclusive volunteering through the Rother Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Forum and by joining NAVA's Allyship programme. In the case of the De La Warr Pavilion, engaging diverse volunteers was a requirement of their Heritage Lottery funding. RVA took part in a research interview to explore ways they could do this in Rother.



VA Collaboration

- RVA's volunteer team's evolving collaboration with Hastings Voluntary Action's team has demonstrated the economies of scale that come from VA collaboration.
- Our shared attendance at events, co-developed training modules, and co-delivered Volunteer Coordinator's Forums have increased the VA's presence, reach and impact across two closely connected geographical areas, reduced workloads and duplication, sparked innovative approaches and created a stronger, more cohesive VA offer around volunteering.
- Co-working with HVA enables us to Support those living and working on district borders and orgs who's services cross both areas.
- Shared venues, resources, contacts. Expanding our teams (for both organisations)
- There is a need for this collaborative approach to be embraced at senior level across VA teams fostering a non-adversarial, mutually supportive working relationship.

Any issues, challenges or risks?

- How have you dealt with these? Do any of the issues, challenges or risks that you've identified have an impact on delivery in the coming years(s)?

The challenges faced this year are varied:

- **Size of Rother** - Rother is 511.8km² surrounding the borough of Hastings, with 94,200 residents, many of whom access services, support and advice from both Hastings and Rother. However, the size, rural geography and transport links of the district mean that it can be difficult to find suitable locations for meetings etc.
- **Digital engagement - An ever-increasing opportunity gap between those who are digitally connected and those who aren't.** Our experience at Bexhill Jobs Fair and other events demonstrates the importance of face to face contact and paper copies of volunteering roles for those considering volunteering. Most volunteering roles are listed online via our own website, e newsletter, social media or on Tribe. Does this mean that potential volunteers are missing out? In addition, small organisations that are less digitally engaged may not be listing their opportunities online and thus struggling to connect with potential volunteers.
- **Time constraints** - Many of the organisations RVA liaise with are small, often with part time staff and are restricted by the time they can allocate to attend meetings.
- **Stress and cost of living:** With finances more stretched than ever and people taking on additional work, time for volunteering is (perceive as) increasingly limited.
- **Venues** - Due to geography of Rother and the transport links finding suitable venues that are accessible and affordable can be a challenge
- **Skills gaps (esp around funding)** The voluntary sector in Rother faces significant skills and knowledge gaps that impact its ability to operate effectively and sustainably. Many organisations struggle with financial planning, lacking the necessary expertise to manage budgets, plan for the future, or navigate financial crises, particularly in response to funding losses. Additionally, there is widespread uncertainty and lack of confidence in preparing funding bids, with many organisations finding the application process overwhelming and complex.
- **Diversity, inclusion and accessibility in volunteering** - It is clear from conversations with organisations that there is a will to diversify volunteers to include less engaged communities, young people and people with additional needs. Working with diverse volunteers requires additional capacity for outreach and support that many organisations lack. Organisations have expressed a need for a collaborative approach that makes it easier for them to make volunteering inclusive and accessible inc:
 - Simple ways for to create opportunities for young people to try volunteering. Resources for working with young volunteers, including 'youth' friendly language around volunteering
 - Peer-led comms in which diverse groups promote the benefits of volunteering and break down barriers to participation
 - Accessible resources and support around working with volunteers with additional needs
- **Trustee recruitment** - ongoing gaps in skilled and knowledgeable boards threaten the sustainability and efficacy of many VCSE groups.
- **Devolution:** We are watching closely to assess how East Sussex's approaching devolution to centralised administration will impact on the voluntary sector

Has anything changed?

- From the experience you have gained during delivery to date, what have you / will you be changing for the next delivery period, if anything?
- As the project moves into its last two years, we will continue to promote volunteering, provide training, resources and networking for Rother's volunteering community.
 - There will be no major changes to our delivery plan, however our focus will shift towards ensuring sustainability. This includes a legacy of comprehensive resources, signposting and online access, sustainable systems for listing and recruiting volunteers and an enduring peer network of volunteer coordinators.
 - We will focus on those areas which will have the most impact on improving capacity and efficacy for stretched volunteering organisations, in particular:
 - Delivery of trustee and board support, with the role out of our trustee pilot programme.
 - Funding training, specifically encouraging volunteering costs and management to be built into funding bids.
 - Evaluating the volunteering landscape in Rother. How it is evolving and where future RVA projects could add the most value.
 - Due to internal restructure at RVA, there has been a shift in how training is planned. A new training schedule is in development, and we will be increasing emphasis on improved training signposting, where better expertise is available. In addition, a funding training programme is being developed in house by RVA's GI team with volunteer hub supporting.
 - We plan to develop ideas for a more accurate system for monitoring RVA's volunteer brokerage's effectiveness (beyond click rate analytics) and how many volunteers are finding roles through it.