



Volunteering Strategy engagement

We want volunteering with the MS Society to be the best it can be, and the best experience money can't buy.

To achieve this ambition, during 2016 we are developing the MS Society's Volunteering Strategy for the next four years. Our aim is to improve volunteering at the MS Society. The following themes and recommendations respond to research from within the MS Society and external trends in volunteering. They will be the key focus of our Volunteering Strategy.

Your views and feedback on these areas are important in helping us to shape the Volunteering Strategy. You can find out how to contribute your views at the end of this document.

Involving volunteers in our work

Our staff and volunteers are our greatest assets. We will empower them to achieve our goals by making sure they've got the resources and skills they need, and can clearly see the difference their work makes.

The involvement of volunteers is a fundamental principle of the MS Society for a number of key reasons:

- Volunteers bring direct insight and expertise from the perspective of someone living with or affected by MS.
- The development of local networks is vital to creating a strong MS community and enabling independent lives.
- There is a personal benefit to members of the MS community by being involved in volunteering.
- People with MS value the involvement of volunteers.
- Volunteers add to the MS Society's capacity to achieve the aspirations of people affected by MS.

Central to the delivery of the 2015-2019 MS Society Strategy, departmental strategies and business plans, is the ambition to increase the support and involvement of volunteers over the next four years. The Volunteering Strategy needs to provide the volunteering expertise required to ensure we recruit and retain the best volunteers available.

Developing the Volunteering Strategy

During February and March 2016, a report was produced which pulled together information from staff and volunteers across the MS Society on what works in volunteering and what areas are in need of improvement.

The report compared this information with what similar organisations are doing, and what external trends in volunteering tell us.

A group of staff and volunteers reviewed these findings and helped develop our Volunteering Strategy recommendations.

Findings and themes

A number of key themes came out of this work - some we know and are already addressing, some we have plans for, and some new elements. These very broad themes concern:

1. Embedding volunteering across the MS Society
2. Developing and offering appropriate volunteering opportunities focused on the aspirations of target groups, which are flexible and responsive to both the needs of the MS Society and volunteers
3. Improving support for our volunteers
4. Measuring the growth and impact of our volunteering

To achieve this, our volunteering offer needs to be responsive to external trends in volunteering, and take advantage of advancements in digital technologies. The way we attract, engage and communicate with volunteers needs to fit in with the ways they live the rest of their lives, and how they want to interact with us.

1. Embedding volunteering across the MS Society

We propose to focus on:

- Clarifying the roles of volunteers across the MS Society, ensuring they are appropriate and attractive to potential volunteers, to support the MS Society to achieve the needs and aspirations of people with and affected by MS.
- Embedding volunteering across the organisation so that volunteers are involved in supporting the work of all departments, and the contribution of volunteers is identified and supported through team business plans.
- Improving communications; connecting volunteers across different areas of volunteering, enabling everyone to see the whole picture and the contribution that volunteers make.
- Achieving best practice in volunteering by gaining Investors in Volunteering recognition; building on current good practice and implementing change where improvement is needed.

- Raising the profile of volunteering across the MS Society and externally, and recognising and rewarding the contribution that volunteers make.
- Developing and sharing a cultural understanding of the critical contribution of volunteers.

2. Developing appropriate volunteering opportunities focused on the aspirations of target groups of volunteers

Trends in volunteering appear to be changing and anecdotal evidence suggests that volunteers are interested in flexible volunteering experiences, ranging across a spectrum from short term opportunities to longer volunteering commitments. People also want to be flexible in where on the spectrum they want to be at any given time in their lives.

- Younger people want meaningful, tangible experiences which provide personal and professional development.
- Generally people are fitter in older age groups than ever before, better educated, and retired professional people are looking to use their expertise. However there is increased competition for this age group which has higher expectations of quality and personalisation.
- We also know that health professionals, researchers and other professionals have particular skills and experience which we currently do not utilise in a volunteering role.

We propose to focus on:

- Clearly understanding our volunteers motivations for volunteering including:
 - What do they want to get out of volunteering?
 - What are their time commitment preferences?
 - What are the skills they want to share/use?
 - How do they want to volunteer?
- Attracting volunteers who have not previously considered volunteering for the MS Society; providing a variety of opportunities which fulfill volunteers' motivations.
- Developing new models of volunteering which are flexible to meet the time and commitment volunteers can offer. This includes developing models which offer flexibility and are responsive to volunteers preferred way of engaging in volunteering.
- Increasing internal and external channels for recruiting volunteers including:
 - people with and affected by MS and wider family connections
 - people who are newly diagnosed with MS

- people learning to live with MS
- people looking for experience for a particular career/CV
- Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives
- health professionals

3. Providing specific support to enable the stronger development of volunteering across the UK

To ensure that our volunteering develops we need to ensure that staff and volunteers are supported in their roles.

To develop our volunteering offer we need to ensure that we have the range and variety of roles to attract volunteers in the way they would like to engage with the MS Society.

We propose to focus on:

- Getting the basics in volunteering right; ensuring that our volunteering is safe, legal and meets best practice requirements.
- Ensuring that policies and procedures that affect volunteers are relevant and supportive.
- Collecting and utilising knowledge from volunteers and staff to improve support for volunteers, including empowering frontline staff to improve responses to volunteers.
- Providing specific support for developing different types of local groups (including innovative ways of being a group, e.g. online groups).
- Reviewing how we support volunteers and developing roles and tools to deliver this.
- Offering clearly defined volunteer roles which articulate what a volunteer can expect from the MS Society and what the MS Society expects from a volunteer.
- Offering a range of learning and development opportunities, providing volunteers with the skills and knowledge to carry out their roles.
- Developing a variety of methods for delivering volunteer learning and development, including face to face training, webinars, e-learning and written resources and support.
- Providing ongoing learning, development and support to staff who support volunteers to ensure that volunteers receive the best support available.

- Building on and developing our existing volunteer networks to encourage other people to get involved in volunteering.

4. Measuring the growth and impact of our volunteering

To ensure that our volunteering delivers its intended impact we need to be measuring growth and impact.

We propose to focus on:

- Understanding the volunteering contribution to the achievement of each the of the MS Society goals.
- The purpose and intended impact of new volunteer roles.
- The Social Return on Investment of our volunteering versus staffed services.
- Measuring the growth of volunteering.
- Measuring the financial impact of volunteering and the cost efficiencies that volunteering provides for the MS Society.
- Having a clear record of the number of individual volunteers.

Your feedback

One of the keys to the success of our volunteering and the new Strategy will be your feedback.

We believe that by achieving in these four key areas we will improve the experience of our volunteers and increase the support we can offer people with MS.

We want to hear your views, particularly in relation to the following questions:

- Do the key themes and general approach feel right?
- Is there anything missing?
- Do you have any suggestions which you feel will help us to write and deliver the Volunteering Strategy?

We would love to hear from you

Email us at ssadminhelpdesk@mssociety.org.uk, call us on **0203 828 6861** or write to us at Volunteering Team, MS National Centre, 372 Edgware Road, London NW2 6ND.