

THREEHANDS

EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEERING

IS IT WORKING FOR CHARITIES?

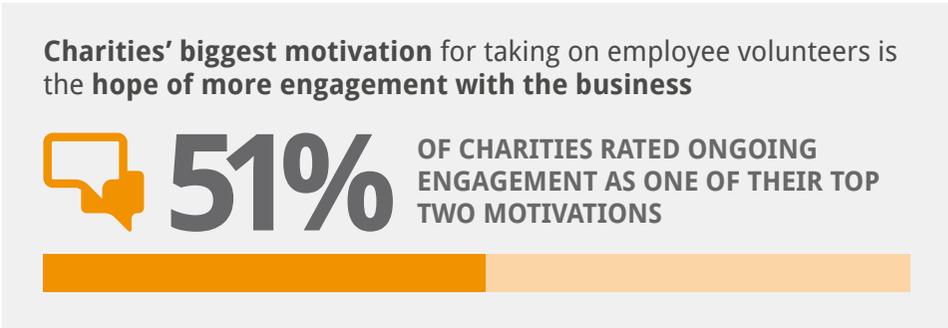
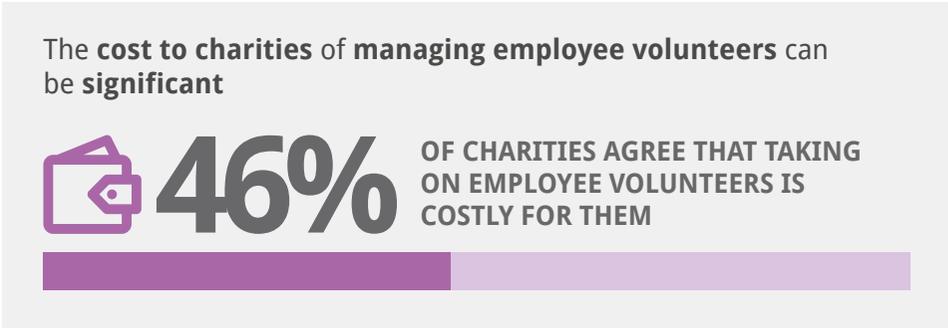
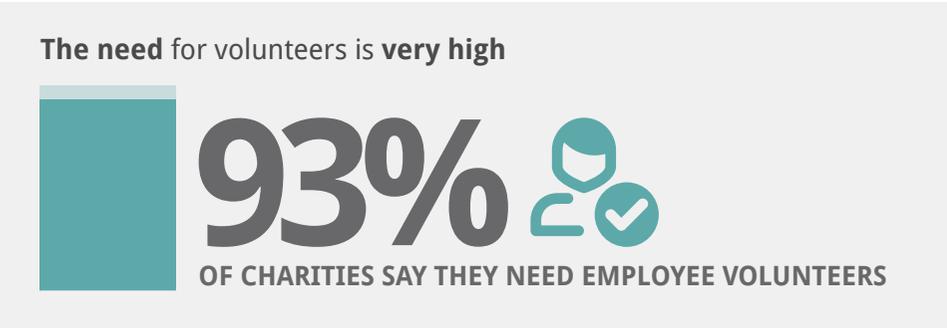


RESEARCH BY THREE HANDS

Published February 2018

HIGHLIGHTS

KEY FINDINGS INCLUDE:



INTRODUCTION

In 2015, in the wake of a government pledge to increase employee volunteering, we conducted our inaugural research into charities' true experiences of employee volunteering.

We found that:

- Over 80% of charities had a genuine need for employee volunteers
- More than 2/3 charities wanted more employee volunteers
- 1 in 3 of these didn't have the capacity to manage more
- 42% of charities sometimes felt obliged to take on employee volunteers

There was also a mismatch between the support which charities really wanted from employee volunteers, and what they were being offered by businesses; in particular charities wanted ongoing, skilled volunteering whereas businesses were mainly offering one-off unskilled team projects.

Two years on, charities are operating in an ever-more challenging environment – with almost [one in five charity chief executives](#)¹ fearing for the future of their organisation at the start of 2017 – funding continues to decline, while at the same time many organisations are seeing growing demand for their services.

In late 2017, we set out to understand if anything had changed in the employee volunteering landscape, and to explore some of the issues raised by our first survey in more detail. We conducted another survey which was completed by 181 charities from across the UK, followed by in-depth interviews with 14 of them.

For the purposes of this research we have used the term **'employee volunteering'** to include all types of involvement from people in business with charities; whether it is true volunteering, 'mandated' volunteering or other initiatives which people have not necessarily opted-in to, such as a charity project that forms part of a leadership development programme.

¹ **Social Landscape 2017:** The state of charities and social enterprises going into 2017, Charities Aid Foundation (<https://www.cafonline.org/docs/default-source/about-us-publications/social-landscape-2017.pdf>)

CONTENTS

HIGHLIGHTS	2
INTRODUCTION	3
CONTEXT	5
SURVEY FINDINGS:	
i. Do charities need employee volunteers, and are businesses offering them?	6
ii. Why do charities want employee volunteers?	7
iii. Why do charities sometimes not want employee volunteers?	8
iv. Are businesses offering the right types of support?	9
v. How do charities want to work with employee volunteers?	10
vi. What does it take for charities to host employee volunteers?	11
vii. Should businesses pay charities for volunteering?	12
viii. How do charities find working with businesses?	13
RECOMMENDATIONS	14
CONCLUSION	15
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	16
ABOUT THREE HANDS	17

CONTEXT

181

CHARITIES
COMPLETED THE
SURVEY

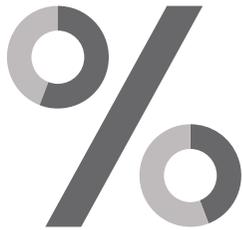


14

IN-DEPTH
INTERVIEWS



56%
WERE SMALL
TO MEDIUM
CHARITIES
(less than £500k
annual income)



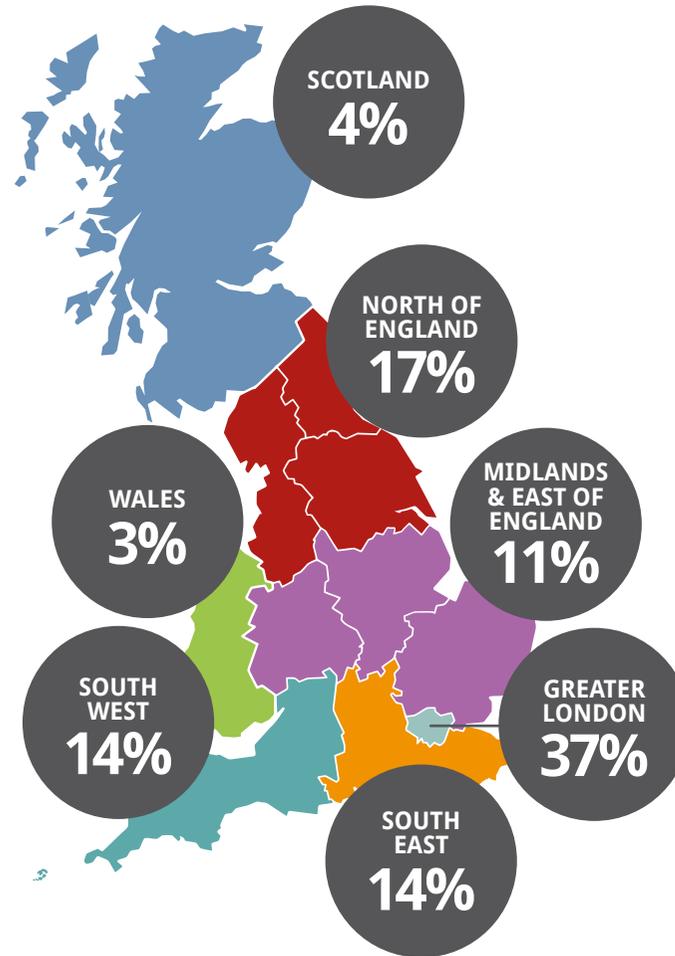
44%
WERE LARGE
CHARITIES
(over £500k
income)



75%
OF RESPONDENTS RECEIVE
EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEERS

25%
DO
NOT

Respondents represented charities from across the UK ...

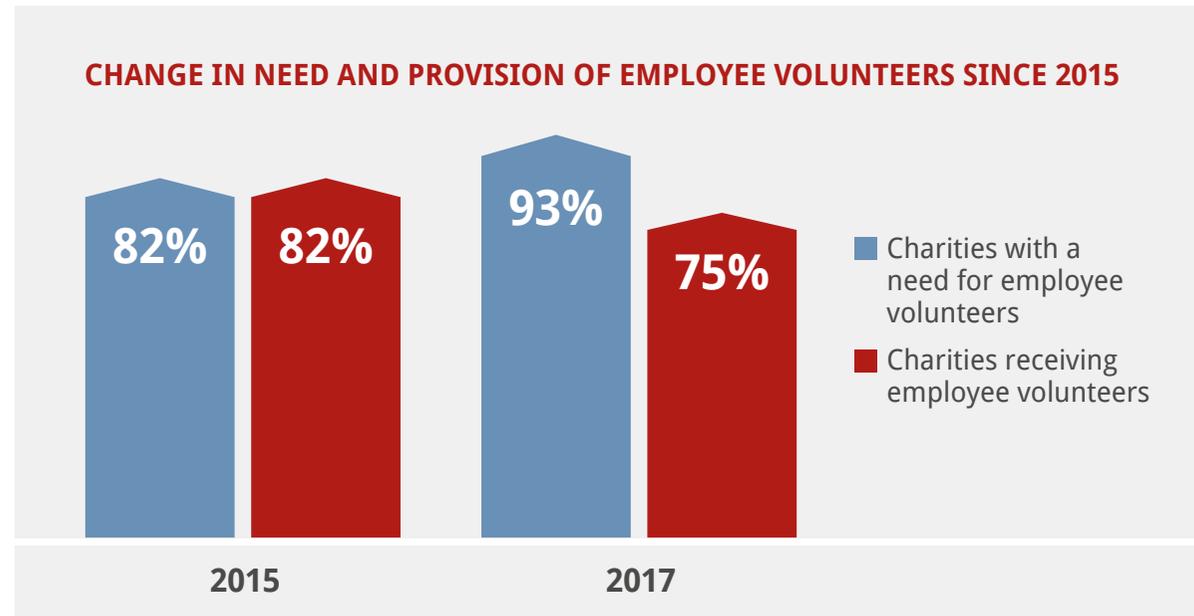


... working on a wide range of issues ...

 Children & young people	 Health & mental health
 Economic & community development	 Older people
 Disability	 Education & training
 Environment, conservation or heritage	 Housing or homelessness

I. DO CHARITIES NEED EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEERS, AND ARE BUSINESSES OFFERING THEM?

The supply of employee volunteers from businesses isn't keeping up with growing demand from charities.



- An **overwhelming majority** of charities (93% of respondents) say they **need employee volunteers**; this is **11% more** than in 2015
- During the same period the **proportion of charities receiving employee volunteers fell by 8%**

1 in 5 

CHARITIES THAT NEED EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEERS ARE NOT BEING OFFERED THEM

“Third sector organisations and charities could not survive as well without employee volunteers!” Survey respondent

WHERE ARE THE BIGGEST OPPORTUNITIES?

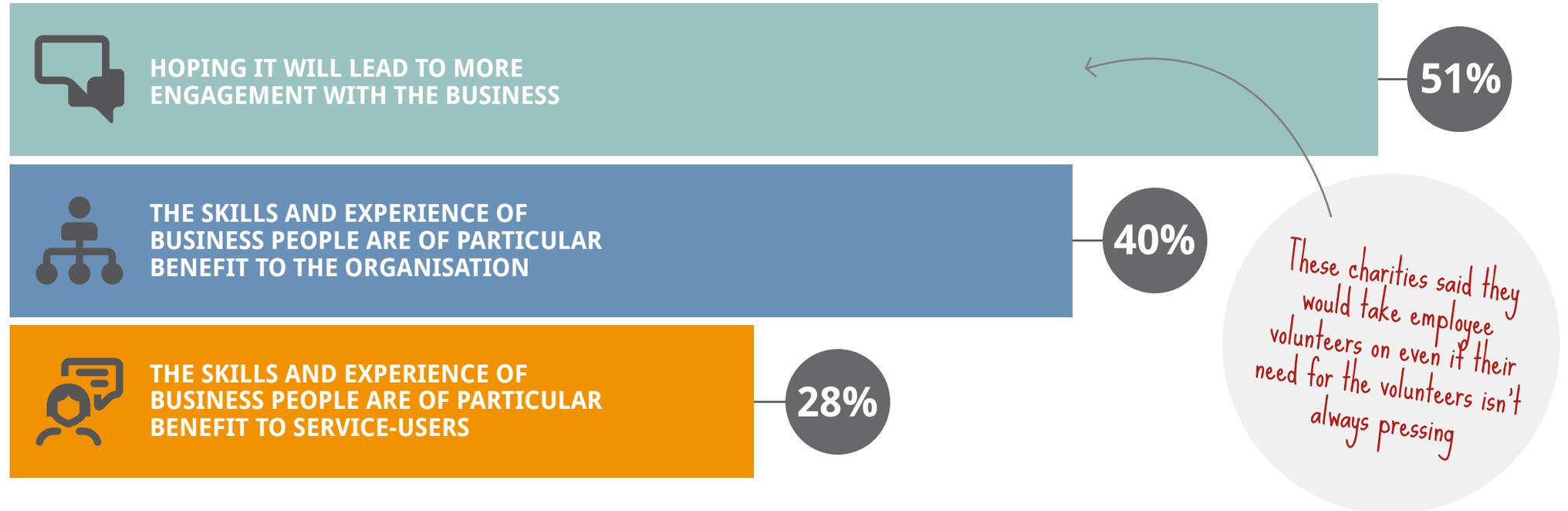
- **Smaller charities** are **3x more likely** to **lack** the employee volunteers they need
- Charities operating in mainly **rural** areas are **half as likely** to be offered employee volunteers

2/3 OF CHARITIES TOLD US THEY WOULD LIKE TO RECEIVE **MORE EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEERS** THAN THEY CURRENTLY DO

II. WHY DO CHARITIES WANT EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEERS?

Charities have many motivations for taking on employee volunteers; in particular they want to build long term relationships with businesses.

CHARITIES' TOP THREE MOTIVATIONS FOR TAKING ON EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEERS ARE:



WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF TAKING ON EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEERS?

Charities told us that employee volunteers enable them to:

- Carry out work they otherwise wouldn't be able to
- Run projects at a larger scale
- Build relationships with other stakeholders
- Save money

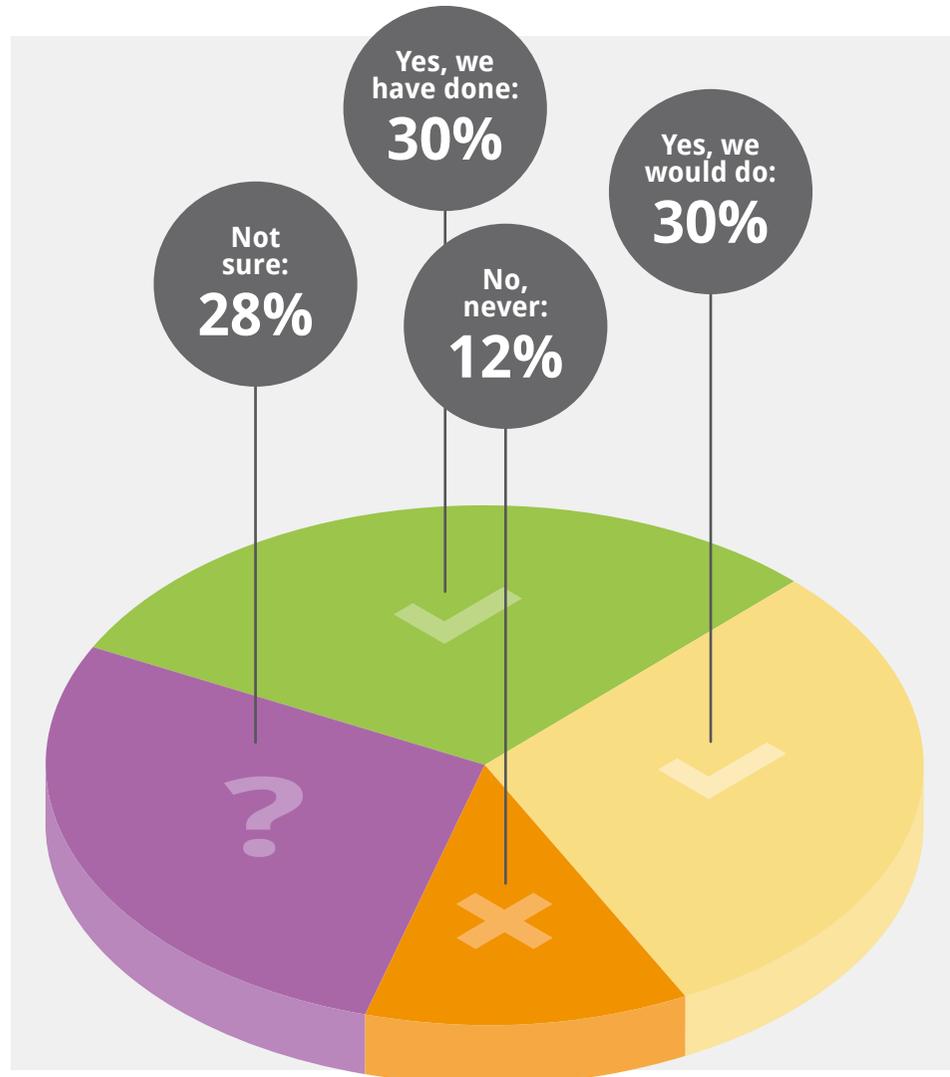
“Charities are often very focused on delivery and will be stretched to the limit of resources and personnel; they may have little time to consider new ideas, or changes to process – that’s where employee volunteers can provide invaluable help.”

Survey respondent

III. WHY DO CHARITIES SOMETIMES NOT WANT EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEERS?

Although there is a big appetite to take employee volunteers on, they are not always needed.

WOULD YOU EVER REFUSE EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEERS?



“There are so many opportunities within our organisation, we can always find something for them to help us with.” Survey respondent

WHY DO CHARITIES SOMETIMES REFUSE EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEERS?

The most common reasons charities gave included:

- Not needing the additional resource
- Not having suitable activities for them
- Mismatch between what the business wants to do and what the charity needs
- Lacking the capacity to manage them (especially for larger groups of volunteers)
- If the business is not prepared to cover costs

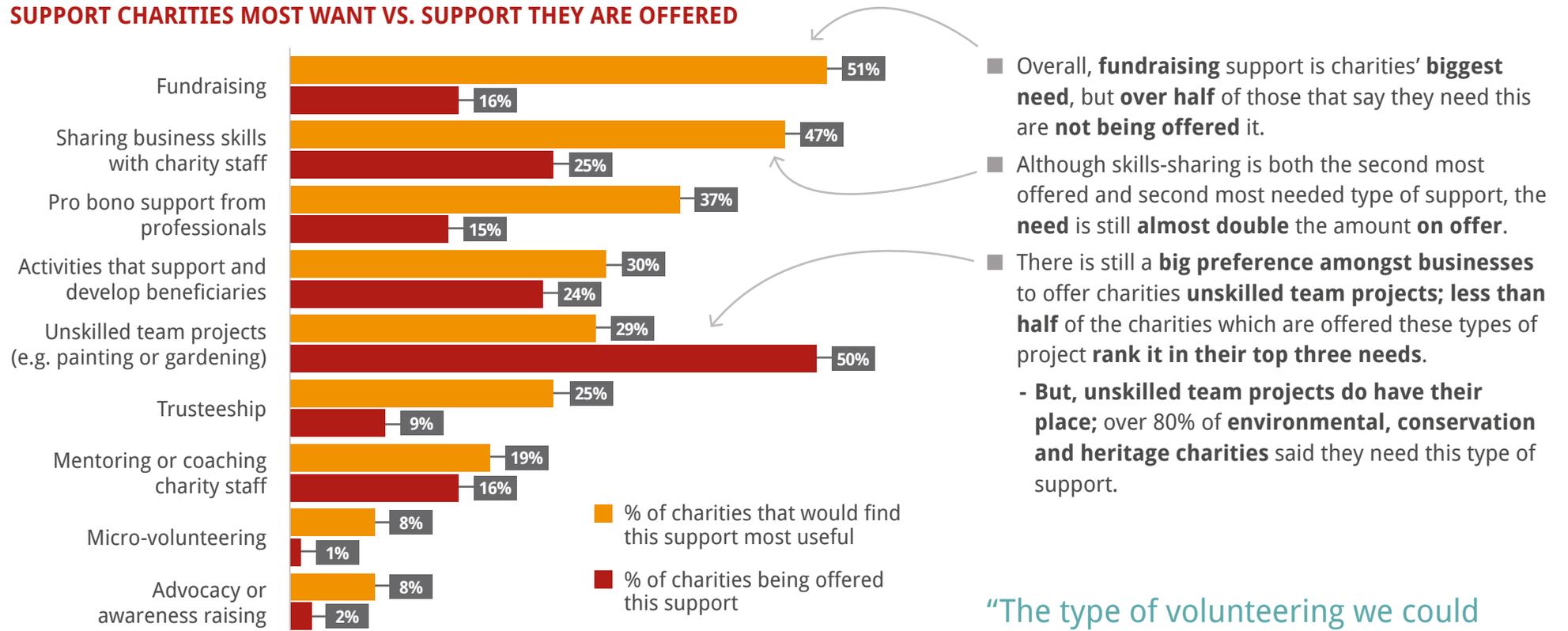
“Sometimes we refuse employee volunteers when we do not have activities, or if what the volunteers want to do doesn’t fit with our aims.”

Survey respondent

IV. ARE BUSINESSES OFFERING THE RIGHT TYPES OF SUPPORT?

In 2015, we revealed a mismatch between the most useful types of support for charities, and what they were being offered by businesses; this mismatch still exists.

SUPPORT CHARITIES MOST WANT VS. SUPPORT THEY ARE OFFERED



- Overall, **fundraising** support is charities' **biggest need**, but **over half** of those that say they need this are **not being offered** it.
- Although skills-sharing is both the second most offered and second most needed type of support, the **need** is still **almost double** the amount **on offer**.
- There is still a **big preference amongst businesses** to offer charities **unskilled team projects**; **less than half** of the charities which are offered these types of project **rank it in their top three needs**.
 - **But, unskilled team projects do have their place**; over 80% of **environmental, conservation and heritage charities** said they need this type of support.

WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST OPPORTUNITIES?

There is big unmet potential for employee volunteers to support charities with:

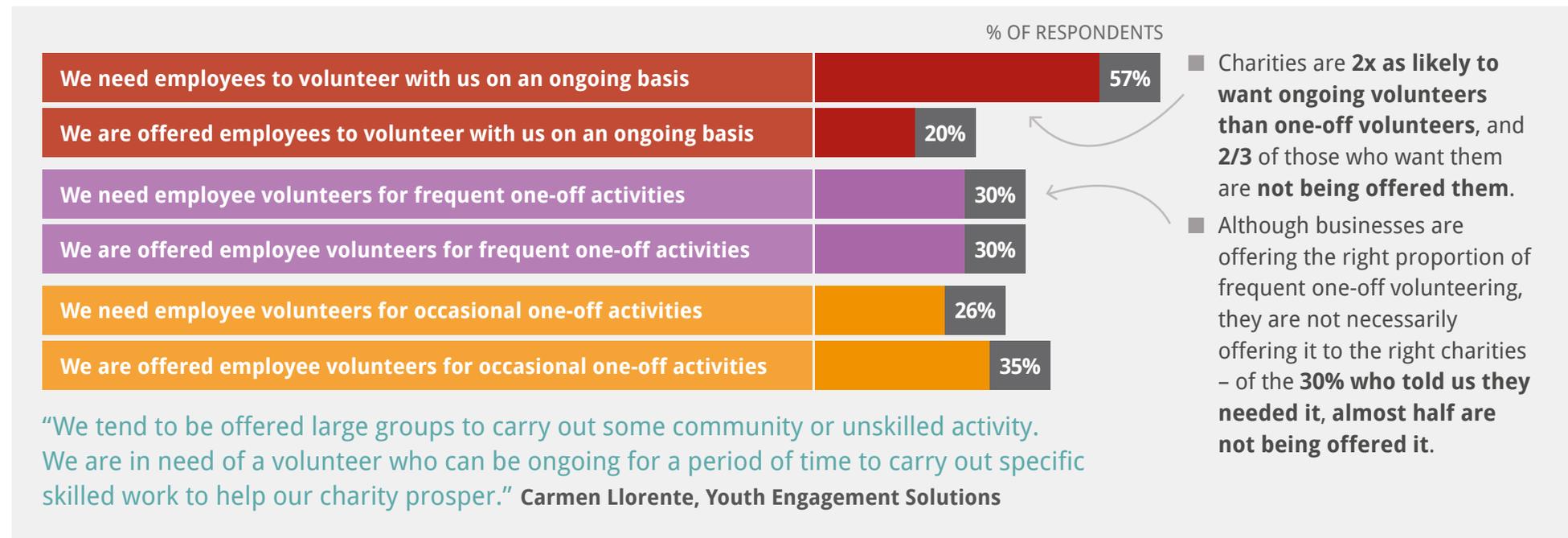
- Fundraising
- Skills-sharing with staff
- Professional pro bono
- Trusteeship

“The type of volunteering we could utilise well is not the type that is generally offered. Employees seem to prefer to spend their volunteering days doing something *different* rather than using their professional skills.”

Survey respondent

V. HOW DO CHARITIES WANT TO WORK WITH EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEERS?

As in 2015, our 2017 survey showed that charities have a clear preference for ongoing support over one-off employee volunteering.



WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST OPPORTUNITIES?

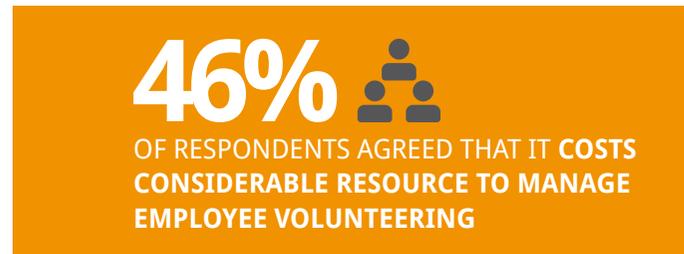
- There is even higher unmet need **outside London**, where less than 1 in 5 charities that want ongoing employee volunteers are getting them
- 73% of charities that told us they want employee volunteers to **support service-users** would like ongoing volunteers
- Charities supporting people with **disabilities** and **learning disabilities** are the most likely to want ongoing support at **over 90%**

“Please can we have you in dribs and drabs so we can form a longer term relationship with you rather than just the special volunteering day? We appreciate these but need a chance to grow a more complex relationship if we are to get maximum benefits for the people we support.”

Jessica Pickard, Paddington Development Trust

VI. WHAT DOES IT TAKE FOR CHARITIES TO HOST EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEERS?

Employee volunteering takes time and resource for charities to manage, which is increasingly a struggle for them.



Of the charities who completed our survey:



“At this charity, most of the volunteering and corporate volunteering only happens because the charity has a volunteer willing to act as Volunteer Coordinator.” Survey respondent



“Charities are thin on resource in what is an incredibly difficult environment for the sector.” Survey respondent



SPOTLIGHT ON SMALLER CHARITIES

86% of charities registered in England and Wales **have an annual income of less than £500,000**. Charities in this bracket that completed our survey are **4x less likely** to have **specific staff resource** for managing employee volunteering.

Although smaller charities are **more likely to struggle to manage employee volunteers**, they are **less likely to feel that hosting them is costly** – this could be because employee volunteers have a bigger impact on smaller organisations.

The **biggest unmet needs** of smaller charities are for **trustees and pro bono**, support which can be less resource-intensive for charities to manage; a brilliant opportunity for volunteers from business to apply their professional skills to make a difference.

VII. SHOULD BUSINESSES PAY CHARITIES FOR VOLUNTEERING?

Charities are increasingly asking businesses to pay for employee volunteering.



- Even more charities are **considering charging** for employee volunteering in the future, so we expect to see this trend grow.
- Charities are **most likely to charge** for **unskilled team projects**.

“Our challenge to businesses is to think about how useful it would be to have a dozen people from the voluntary sector helping them do their jobs for the day, and to work out what resources they would need to support that, and to make it a meaningful experience.” **Survey respondent**

“Companies should be aware that volunteers need supervision, and preparation and equipment are often needed for projects – this is why we make a charge.” **Survey respondent**

SHOULD A BUSINESS PAY FOR EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEERING?

We believe that charities should take on employee volunteers only when the benefits are highly likely to outweigh the costs, which sounds obvious but is a useful reality check. When volunteers address a real need and create positive impact, there is little case for a charity to charge.

It’s worth remembering, however, that many charities lack resource to manage volunteers, so they can’t be blamed for seeking funding (or at least a donation), especially if the activities are akin to something a business might usually pay for, such as teambuilding.

SHOULD PAY

To cover any costs directly associated with your employee volunteers, which might include:

- Meals or refreshments
- Materials e.g. painting equipment
- Training e.g. mentoring skills

CONSIDER PAYING OR DONATING

If you are asking a charity to invest time in an event which you have specific objectives for, and would otherwise expect to pay for, for example:

- Team building projects
- Away days or social get-togethers
- Skills development initiatives

SHOULDN'T HAVE TO PAY

If a charity is benefiting from specialist business skills or expertise at minimal cost to them:

- Pro bono
- Trusteeship
- Mentoring staff or strategic support

VIII. HOW DO CHARITIES FIND WORKING WITH BUSINESSES?

3/4

CHARITIES TOLD US THEY FEEL CONFIDENT AT MANAGING RELATIONSHIPS WITH BUSINESSES



58%

OF CHARITIES HAVE A CLEAR UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT BUSINESSES CAN OFFER THEIR ORGANISATION



ONLY 34%

OF RESPONDENTS FEEL THAT BUSINESSES PUT CHARITIES' NEEDS BEFORE THEIR OWN WHEN IT COMES TO EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEERING



13%

OF CHARITIES WHO RESPONDED DISAGREE THAT BUSINESSES ARE GENUINELY INTERESTED IN THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF THEIR EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEERING



TOP CHARITY BUGBEARS WITH EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEERING

- 1 Businesses dictating what they want to do
- 2 Short notice, particularly for large team events
- 3 Reliability; cancelling or sending fewer volunteers



TOP KEYS TO SUCCESS FOR EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEERING

- 1 Open and honest conversations
- 2 Listening and being flexible to what the charity needs
- 3 Taking a strategic approach; planning what your employees can give and how the business can also benefit

“We get the usual unsolicited phone calls from companies asking for a team of 20 to come and volunteer next Tuesday – they want classic paint and fix, which just isn’t helpful. These employee volunteers aren’t genuinely interested or engaged and it feels like a CSR tickbox exercise.”

“Team opportunities can work, when there is a long lead time to plan and when we’ve had an open discussion about the charity’s needs and the volunteers’ skills, interests and experience.”

Survey respondent

“A corporate hosted fantastic training sessions for our staff. They initially wanted to run sessions for beneficiaries, which wasn’t possible at that time, but they listened and understood our needs.”

Sarah Walsh, Carers Trust

RECOMMENDATIONS



1. TAKE TIME TO LISTEN AND LEARN FROM CHARITY PARTNERS

They know best what they need, what is possible, and what it will take to organise.



3. STICK TO WHAT YOU'RE GOOD AT

In the words of one survey respondent: "A company did some painting for us, the end result wasn't very good and we had to get someone else to repaint the areas." Enough said!



2. CHALLENGE YOUR PERCEPTIONS OR CULTURE OF EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEERING

It doesn't have to take place one day at a time – it might involve regular bite-sized activities. Similarly, a practical activity is not the only way to bring a team together for the day; other activities are often more beneficial.



4. FOCUS ON IMPACT NOT INPUTS

Rather than what you'd like to do, prioritise what you can achieve – this starts with listening to what the charity needs, and identifying the skills and resources which your employees can bring.



5. MANAGE EXPECTATIONS

Be aware that charities want ongoing strategic partnerships with business, and be honest about the prospects of involvement beyond the employee volunteering. Be sure to stick to any commitments you make to partners.

"It's all about relationships and finding out how organisations can help each other. Good communication, transparency and shared goals all help. Don't go in with a fixed plan, have a discussion about the skills you have and the skills they need and take it from there – you will surprise each other and come up with better ideas together."

Alison Braybrooks, ReachOut (youth mentoring charity)

CONCLUSION

There is a real and growing need for employee volunteering to enable charities to continue delivering important work in an increasingly difficult environment.

Charities truly appreciate the efforts of the businesses that support them, but too often they don't feel valued or listened to.

The finding that businesses continue to offer volunteering which is not needed, and are failing to offer the kinds of support that would be most valuable to charities, suggests that businesses do not have a good enough understanding of what the sector needs, and are sometimes driven more by their own needs than their charity partners'.

As the charities we heard from highlighted, managing volunteers can take considerable resources, making it all the more important that any employee volunteering has a genuine impact.

Many charities see particular value in the skills that people from business bring, and what their staff and service-users can gain from working with employee volunteers – offering a fantastic opportunity for employees to make a meaningful difference.

We hope that the recommendations put forward in this report can help to push businesses' partnerships with charities in the right direction. Prioritising the impact which they can have, over and above the activities which volunteers wish to do, and the input targets (e.g. number of volunteering hours) which many businesses strive to meet, offers an excellent starting point.

Author: Natalie Tucker, Three Hands

“It's the opportunity to use the employees' professional skills rather than just their time that means the most to us and has the most impact.”

Tracey Franklin, InSpire (community development charity)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the 181 charities who took the time to complete our survey, and especially to the following 14 people who participated in interviews:

Alison Braybrooks, ReachOut

Andy Brown, Oasis Hub Hobmoor

Bob Kimmerling, The Vineyard Community Centre

Carmen Llorente, Youth Engagement Solutions

Clare Carty, Hestia

Hayley Hughes, Citizens Advice Manchester

James Kearns, The BUILD Charity

Julie Dowie, MHA Swindon Live at Home Scheme

Kate Culverhouse, Groundwork North East and Cumbria

Luke Hamilton, Hospice UK

Mike Storey, The North East Enterprise Trust

Paul Hetherington, Buglife

Sam Butler, Tibet Relief Fund

Steven Bobasch, Keats Community Library



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GivingForce

GivingForce kindly hosted and helped promote our survey among their network. GivingForce provides enterprise software to help organisations around the world manage their charitable giving, including modules for volunteering, matched fundraising, Payroll Giving and more.

<https://www.givingforce.com/>

ABOUT THREE HANDS

We work with business to develop leaders, engage employees and benefit customers – in ways that create positive social impact.

Our work is focused on three big overlapping business agendas:



PEOPLE

Leadership and talent development, from graduates to senior leaders, with an experiential, social impact focus.



CITIZENSHIP

High impact community investment initiatives, from bespoke volunteering to strategic community programmes.



SOCIAL INSIGHT

Innovation in products, services, customer experience and employee wellbeing, with insight from charities.

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