The value of giving a little time
Understanding the potential of micro-volunteering

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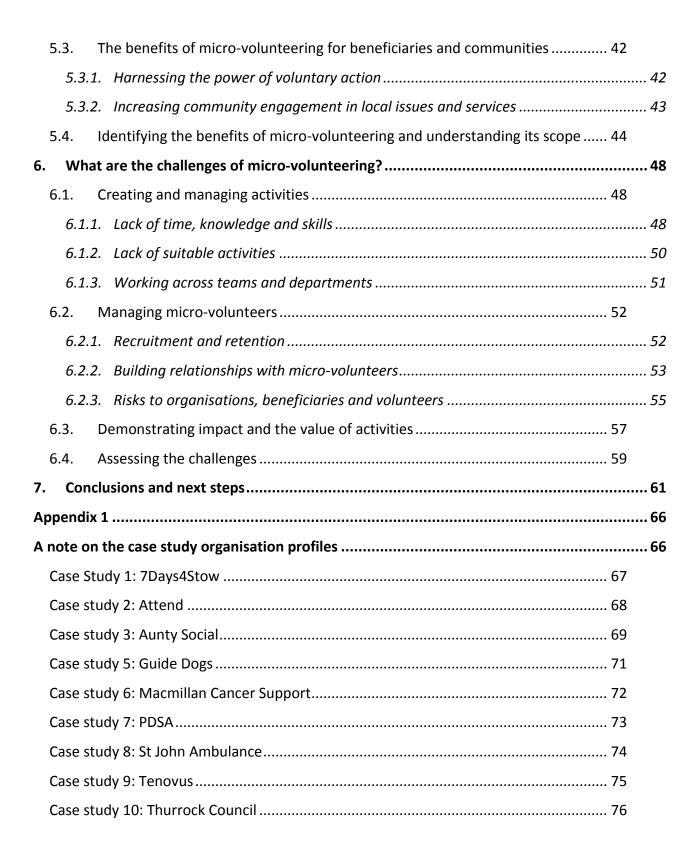
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1. Introduction

This section explains the background, purpose and methodology of the research project.

Nesta supports innovations that have the potential to deliver a significant uplift in the giving and exchange of time, assets, skills, resources and money to achieve social goals and public benefit. In 2012, with project funding from the Cabinet Office it funded IVR and NCVO to carry out research exploring the opportunities and challenges that micro-volunteering presents for individuals and organisations.

This report presents the findings of the research and has seven main sections:

- **Section 1** outlines the background, objectives and methodology of the project.
- **Section 2** examines what is understood by „micro-volunteering", including its definition and the types of opportunities it encompasses.
- **Section 3** explores how micro-volunteering relates to other forms of volunteering, including online volunteering, episodic volunteering and long-term regular volunteering.
- **Section 4** looks at the demand for micro-volunteering and whether it appeals to an increasing number of people. It also explores the supply-side of the story to understand whether and how organisations are meeting the demand for micro-volunteering.
- **Section 5** examines the benefits and impact of micro-volunteering for volunteers, the organisation and wider society.
- **Section 6** describes the challenges of micro-volunteering and indicates some of the ways in which these have been addressed by organisations.
- **Section 7** concludes the report by summarising the research findings and the next steps based on these.

Some of the evidence we have gathered challenges commonly held beliefs about „micro-volunteering". Throughout the report we draw attention to some of these „myths".

1.1.   Setting the scene

There have been important changes to the landscape of volunteering in recent years. Despite a recent increase in the proportion of people volunteering, the average number of hours spent volunteering per volunteer is declining[1], and there is evidence of a trend towards short-term or one-off volunteering[2]. New technology has also contributed to and amplified the changing landscape. The internet gives organisations the ability to advertise volunteering opportunities quickly to a wide audience through their own websites and social media, and has led to the development of initiatives that enable people to participate in online volunteering activities immediately and irrespective of time and place.

The harnessing of such technological advancements can be seen as a key driving force behind the recent developments in micro-volunteering - a type of volunteering which in many ways personifies the key changes to the volunteering landscape. Illustrative of this, there has been a growth of online platforms specifically for micro-volunteering such as Help From Home[3] in the UK, Skills For Change/Sparked[4] in the USA and Collavol[5] in Japan.

The rise in such platforms has been coupled with a growing interest in micro-volunteering. Use of the term „micro-volunteering" itself and discussion (and much debate) around the concept have increased year-on-year. For example, on Google in 2003 there were 15 new websites added using the term „micro-volunteering" versus 4,220 in 2012. Not only has micro-volunteering attracted attention from organisations and commentators, but the Government has also responded positively to this way of giving. For instance, in its 2011 Giving White Paper[6], the Government expressed a

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[1] IVR, 2007: Helping Out: A national survey of volunteering and charitable giving, http://www.ivr.org.uk/component/ivr/helping-out-a-national-survey-of-volunteering-and-charitable-giving

[2] Cabinet Office, Giving of time and money: Findings from the 2012-13 Community Life Survey http://communitylife.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/assets/topic-reports/2012-2013-giving-time-and-money-report.pdf

[3] Help From Home, http://helpfromhome.org/

[4] Skills For Change, http://www.skillsforchange.com/

[5] Collavol, http://collavol.com/

[6] Cabinet Office, 23 May 2011:Giving White Paper, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/78915/giving-white-paper2.pdf

keen interest in the role of technology and innovation in bringing about social change, suggesting that online volunteering and micro-volunteering platforms provide *"…great opportunities to get new volunteers involved in social action"*.

Those who have been enthused by the potential of micro-volunteering consider that it presents four main advantages[7]:

- It provides convenient and flexible opportunities that fit into people"s lives;
- It engages with a wide range of people;
- It involves a large number of people;
- It provides a gateway to more sustained and long-term volunteering.

Despite high levels of interest in micro-volunteering, there has been little research to understand its current scope, who participates and why, its potential value and impact, and its relationship to other forms of volunteering. One of the few pieces of research in this area was published by IVR in 2012, exploring the experiences of people volunteering through Orange"s „Do Some Good" mobile app[8]. However, this research only explored the volunteer perspective and it only examined one type of micro-volunteering. Further research was therefore required to address the evidence gap and to inform the development of effective policy and organisational practice.

1.2.   Our objectives

The aim of this research was to explore the opportunities and challenges that micro-volunteering presents for individuals and organisations in order to inform and improve policy and practice. Specifically it sought to find out:

The nature and scope of micro-volunteering

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[7] IVR, 2013: New ways of giving time: opportunities and challenges in micro-volunteering. A literature review,
http://www.ivr.org.uk/component/ivr/new-ways-of-giving-time-opportunities-and-challenges-in-micro-volunteering
[8] IVR, 2012: Micro-volunteering: Doing some good through smartphones?
http://www.ivr.org.uk/component/ivr/micro-volunteering-%20doing%20some%20good%20throuhg%20smartphones

To define micro-volunteering and describe the current micro-volunteering opportunities on offer.

The demand for micro-volunteering

To understand whether people want to micro-volunteer, who is micro-volunteering, the types of opportunities they are seeking, the potential to recruit new volunteers and whether any groups are excluded.

The supply, opportunities and challenges of micro-volunteering

To examine opportunities and challenges in the development and management of micro-volunteering, including whether certain types of organisation or activity are better suited to micro-volunteering than others.

The impact of micro-volunteering

To examine the impact of micro-volunteering on organisations, communities and volunteers, including whether and how it can lead to participation in other forms of volunteering.

The project did not set out to quantitatively assess the extent to which micro-volunteering was being used or measure its impact.

1.3. Our methodology

This was a qualitative research project in which we used a variety of methods to gain a fuller understanding of micro-volunteering from a range of perspectives. The fieldwork was conducted between August 2012 and June 2013 and involved:

- A review of the literature[9] and other data sources (organisational websites and documents, blogs etc.).

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[9] IVR, 2013: New ways of giving time: opportunities and challenges in micro-volunteering. A literature review,

- Mapping of existing micro-volunteering opportunities using internet searches to understand the types of activities available and the types of organisations offering them.

- A short online survey of Volunteering England and NCVO members[10] (113 responses) to gather examples of existing micro-volunteering opportunities and identify potential case study organisations.

- A call for evidence posted on the ivo website[11] for information on the impact of micro-volunteering.

- Expert interviews with 11 volunteering infrastructure bodies, policy makers and volunteering researchers to explore their views on the opportunities and challenges facing micro-volunteering.

- Three focus groups with non-volunteers to investigate their perceptions of micro-volunteering, interest in participating, and potential barriers and challenges.

- Two half-day foresight workshops with volunteer-involving organisations to map the strategic trends and drivers in the external environment that may impact on the future of volunteering and micro-volunteering, and to explore the implications for their organisation.

- Ten organisational case studies, based on in-depth interviews and focus groups with staff and volunteers, profiling the work, experiences and perceptions of volunteer-involving organisations. The organisations involved were either currently providing micro-volunteering opportunities or exploring the possibility of developing them in the future. The case studies included small grassroots, volunteer-led groups, medium-sized organisations and large national charities. Please see the Appendix for further details on the organisations.

- Participatory workshops with the case study organisations to draw out, explore and share good practice.

We explored a range of perspectives; however, the primary focus of this research was on organisations who directly offer or might offer micro-volunteering opportunities rather

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http://www.ivr.org.uk/component/ivr/new-ways-of-giving-time-opportunities-and-challenges-in-micro-volunteering

[10] Volunteering England and NCVO merged in January 2013.

[11] ivo, http://ivo.org/

than on those who broker such opportunities, whether face-to-face or through the use of online platforms or apps (though in section 4 we do provide a brief overview of brokering activity for context).

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Section 1 in a nutshell

- The volunteering landscape is changing. Technology is amplifying changing patterns of volunteering by enabling new ways for organisations and volunteers to engage with each other quickly and flexibly.

- Despite high levels of interest in micro-volunteering, there has been little research to understand its current scope.

- This research seeks to understand what is meant by „micro-volunteering", the supply and demand for it and the opportunities and challenges it presents.

- We explored a range of perspectives using a mixed methods approach in order to gain a fuller understanding of the scope and potential of micro-volunteering.

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2. What is micro-volunteering?

This section focuses on the definition and the key features of micro-volunteering drawn from examples of micro-volunteering activities.

2.1. Examples and classification of micro-volunteering opportunities

We begin this section by looking at different examples of micro-volunteering to better understand the type of activities it covers. A search on the internet quickly revealed that there was a huge diversity of micro-volunteering opportunities available. A wide range of examples were found, including counting birds in your garden, knitting a hat for a premature baby, signing a petition and reporting graffiti. Our research participants also gave varied examples. Table 1 (overleaf) attempts to categorise the examples we found, according to their function and whether they could be completed online or offline, or both.

Table 1: Examples of micro-volunteering opportunities on offer

	Campaigning and communication	Fundraising	Research and data	Practical help
Completed offline	• Signing a petition • Taking part in a flashmob • Giving a talk to raise awareness • Preparing a video • Sending cards • Manning a stall at a fair	• Taking part in a street collection • Running at a sponsored race • Taking up a charity branded credit card • Placing a collection box in a local shop	• Completing a questionnaire • Providing a case study	• Sorting out recycling • Helping with stage make-up • Taking part in a tree planting event • Painting a pop-up shop • Baking a cake for a community event • Collecting goods from people"s homes • Knitting a hat for a premature baby
Completed online	• Signing a petition • Liking a Facebook page • Providing feedback on marketing materials • Writing a blog post • Taking part in a webinar or online discussion • Retweeting a message	• Crowdfunding • Online sponsorship • Signing up to Everyclick[12] search engine • Shopping online via TheGivingMachine[13]	• Completing a questionnaire • Reporting an issue (e.g. graffiti) • Counting birds in your garden • Providing a case study • Contributing content to Wikipedia • Crowdsourcing recommendations • Donating photos	• Donating computer capacity • Setting up a Facebook event • Graphic design of a logo or webpage

These examples show that micro-volunteering opportunities reflect the diversity of volunteering as a whole, although volunteering activities in the area of personal care, which involve interpersonal relationships, are less represented. Perhaps more than with other forms of volunteering there are many examples of fundraising and campaigning activities, which some people may not necessarily define as volunteering. Indeed, there was some discussion amongst our research participants about which of these activities should or should not be listed as micro-volunteering. Some considered that a number of

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[12] Everyclick, http://www.everyclick.com/
[13] The Giving Machine, http://www.thegivingmachine.co.uk/

activities (e.g. liking a Facebook page) fell outside of the scope of traditional understandings of volunteering.

To gain a better understanding of the diversity of micro-volunteering it is useful to look at how opportunities are made available to people; and where they take place and what medium is used to complete them. Micro-volunteering opportunities can be promoted online and offline; can take place onsite or offsite, with or without face-to-face interactions; and can be completed via the use of technology or not (see table 2 for examples).

Table 2: The different dimensions of micro-volunteering opportunities

Opportunity from the research	Where is it promoted?	Where does it take place?	How is it completed?
Baking a cake for a community event	Offline (word of mouth)	Offsite (at home; no face-to-face interaction)	Offline
Painting a pop-up shop	Online (via Facebook event)	Onsite (with face-to-face interaction)	Offline
Writing a blog post	Online (via an organisation"s website)	Offsite (at home; no face-to-face interaction)	Online
Reporting an issue	Online (via an online platform)	Offsite (on the move; no face-to-face interaction)	Online

2.2.   The defining features of micro-volunteering

From the outset of this project, it was apparent that the term „micro-volunteering" was used in many different ways and was contested. It was often conflated with the terms „online volunteering" or „virtual volunteering", probably because much of the recent

development of micro-volunteering has been based on internet-based and mobile technologies.

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Myth # 1: You need a smartphone or a computer to micro-volunteer

Our research shows that micro-volunteering does not always involve the use of technology and can be done face-to-face. Many organisations which offer micro-volunteering offer both online and offline opportunities. Almost all of the organisations providing micro-volunteering activities which took part in our survey said they offered offline opportunities, whilst over half provided online opportunities.

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Our literature review and fieldwork confirmed that the term „micro-volunteering" is contested, with multiple meanings and interpretations. However, there seemed to be a general consensus that micro-volunteering refers to actions that can be completed in short, discrete periods of time even though there were differing views as to how short activities needed to be to qualify.

Whilst the examples given were varied, we were nevertheless able to draw out some key common features that are characteristic of micro-volunteering (figure 1).

Figure 1: Key features of micro-volunteering

Eight key features of micro-volunteering

1. Duration - it involves small increments of time
For some, micro-volunteering seemed restricted to very small, almost tiny actions that could be completed in minutes or even seconds. However, in most cases people included examples that required longer, perhaps a couple of hours or half a day, but rarely more than a full day.

2. Access – it is easy to get started and do
An individual should be able to identify the micro-volunteering opportunity and start without having to go through a complicated recruitment process or initial training.

3. Immediacy – it is quick to start and complete, and requires minimal planning
Because micro-volunteering is accessible, if an individual wants to micro-volunteer they can begin straightaway or almost immediately.

4. Convenience – you decide when and where
With micro-volunteering the volunteer has control over their participation. An individual can choose the action that suits them best and decide when it is most convenient for them to do it. In some cases this might mean micro-volunteering while commuting to work, or from home.

5. Level of formality – no formal agreement between the organisation and the volunteer is needed
Micro-volunteering generally does not require a formal agreement between the organisation and the volunteer specifying the role and time commitment expected of the volunteer.

6. Frequency – it can be a one-off or repeated
There is no commitment on behalf of the volunteer to complete the action more than once, so their involvement can be just a one-off. However, that is not necessarily the case and some micro-volunteering opportunities can be repeated. If it is repeated it does not need to be at regular intervals, so people are able dip in and out.

7. Activity – it involves discrete actions
Micro-volunteering generally involves very specific and well-defined actions that have a beginning and an end. The focus is on individual tasks rather than roles.

8. Location – it can be online or offline
Micro-volunteering involves actions that can be completed online or offline, onsite or offsite. Very short actions are more likely to be online.

A shared theme among these features is that micro-volunteering is flexible and puts the volunteer in control of how, when, where and for how long they participate. In light of these features we have formulated the following definition of micro-volunteering:

> Micro-volunteering is bite-size volunteering with no commitment to repeat and with minimum formality, involving short and specific actions that are quick to start and complete.

The low-formality, flexible and accessible nature of micro-volunteering is echoed in the way organisations offering these opportunities promote them to volunteers. For instance, the organisation „Help from Home", which has played a key role in promoting micro-volunteering in the UK, talks about *"changing the world in just your pyjamas"*[14] to emphasise how easy, convenient and quick it is for volunteers to engage and participate.

2.3. Awareness and perceptions of the term „micro-volunteering"

The level of awareness of the term „micro-volunteering" was very low among non-volunteers and volunteers, including those who were engaged in micro-volunteering activities. Most research participants did not feel positively towards the term. Some of the volunteering professionals and experts we talked to perceived it to be a buzzword, highlighting that micro-volunteering - if not the term - has always existed. Many organisations and volunteers felt that the „micro" prefix belittles people"s participation and the value of their contribution, and could potentially lead to a two-tier system of volunteers.

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[14] Help From Home is an online broker providing micro-volunteering opportunities, http://helpfromhome.org/campaigns/pyjama-power

"If someone volunteers an hour, 100 hours or 1000 hours they should be branded as a volunteer. You can call somebody a short-term volunteer, a serious volunteer; you can call them all sorts but the bottom line is that they're a volunteer."
(Staff, case study organisation)

There were also questions related to the on-going debate about what constitutes „volunteering". There were mixed views about whether or not very small, one-off actions could or should be considered to be volunteering. Underlying this issue was a belief among some that volunteering requires a minimum level of commitment. Some research participants questioned whether very quick actions, such as liking a Facebook post, are acts of volunteering or are just acts of support, drawing a distinction between the two.

"Is it really volunteering? Or is it micro-supporting?"
(Staff, case study organisation)

However, it is worth noting that the term „volunteering" was actively avoided by some organisations because they felt it is associated with negative connotations of heavy commitment and obligation to an organisation, and stereotypes of „do-gooders".

The low level of awareness of the term and its negative connotations might help to explain why our survey showed that the majority of organisations offering micro-volunteering opportunities did not actually use this term. Although the term was unpopular, our research participants felt that it is valuable to have a separate name for short, low-commitment, one-off actions. A specific term could help attend to and represent volunteering in all its diversity; lead to a greater recognition of the importance of bite-size actions for organisations and volunteers; and act as a useful label to help organisations categorise, think about and promote these opportunities. Organisations adopted terms which they felt would appeal to their volunteers, such as „micro-actions" and „taster sessions".

Preferred terms for 'micro-volunteering'

Our research participants suggested other terms which they thought sounded more positive than „micro-volunteering":

- micro-actions
- taster
- ad-hoc
- spontaneous
- mini-help

Section 2 in a nutshell

- Micro-volunteering covers a wide range of online and offline activities which can take place offsite and onsite, with or without face-to-face interaction.

- We identified eight defining features of micro-volunteering: it involves small increments of time (duration); it is easy to get start and do (access); it is quick to start and complete, and requires minimal planning (immediacy); you decide when and where (convenience); no formal agreement between the organisation and the volunteer is needed (level of formality); it can be a one-off or repeated (frequency); it involves discrete actions (activity); and it can be online or offline (location).

- Through these we formulated the following definition:
  „Micro-volunteering is bite-size volunteering with no commitment to repeat and with minimum formality, involving short and specific actions that are quick to start and complete".

- „Micro-volunteering" as a term was generally unpopular as it was felt to belittle people"s contributions and it raised questions about what constitutes „volunteering".

3. How does micro-volunteering relate to other forms of volunteering?

This section focuses on the relationship between micro-volunteering and other forms of volunteering.

3.1. The relationship with online volunteering

Although the term „micro-volunteering" is relatively new[15] and not commonly used by volunteer-involving organisations and volunteers, the idea of providing short-term, flexible volunteering opportunities is not new. There have always been small actions that people could get involved in, such as signing a petition. However, until recently they were rarely designated separately or actively promoted by organisations as a distinct offer. While micro-volunteering may not be new, recent technological changes are leading to new avenues that are encouraging its development and generating further interest.

Myth # 2: Micro-volunteering is new

Some volunteer-involving organisations have been offering micro-volunteering opportunities for a long time. One example in campaigning is an organisation asking people to send messages to places where they had identified human rights abuses. Another example includes the well-established tradition of baking cakes for fundraising events. Furthermore, informal micro-volunteering as a means of mutual aid has always existed.

However, there are some new developments:
- In the past micro-volunteering activities were not often designated or promoted as a separate offer by volunteer-involving organisations. Now they are, hence some organisations adopting a new label - „micro-volunteering" - for these activities;
- Technological changes (the internet, smartphone apps, social media etc.) are leading to new ways in which volunteers can engage with organisations and causes.

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[15] It can reportedly be traced back to the Spanish organisation Microvoluntarios, which in 2008 set up an online platform that enabled charities to post requests for help with small tasks for volunteers to complete: www.microvoluntarios.org

Many micro-volunteering opportunities can now be completed through the use of technology and are in effect online volunteering opportunities. There are also a number of online brokers and platforms using technology and social media to provide and aggregate micro-volunteering opportunities. Many, but not all, of the micro-volunteering opportunities they offer are online volunteering opportunities. In this context, people have linked micro-volunteering to crowdsourcing[16]. However, not all online volunteering is micro-volunteering, and not all micro-volunteering is online, as figure 2 seeks to demonstrate.

Figure 2: The overlap between online volunteering and micro-volunteering

Online volunteering

Online + micro-volunteering

Offline micro-volunteering

Being a moderator for an online forum
Cyber-mentoring
Online counselling

Signing an ePetition
Liking a Facebook page
Providing feedback on marketing materials
Writing a blog post
Retweeting a message
Updating a website
Completing an online survey

Manning a street collection
Sorting recycling
Planting trees
Baking a cake
Knitting a hat for a premature baby
Distributing leaflets
Cleaning-up a park

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[16] Crowdsourcing describes the processes for sourcing a task or challenge to a broad, distributed set of contributors using the web and social collaboration techniques. Source: Gartner IT glossary, http://www.gartner.com/it-glossary/crowdsourcing

3.2.   The relationship with episodic volunteering

The existing literature on volunteering refers to episodic volunteering and short-term volunteering, which are broader and less specific than micro-volunteering. Both episodic volunteering and short-term volunteering are limited in time like micro-volunteering, however they do not necessarily share all of its other defining features (see figure 1). With episodic volunteering, as with micro-volunteering, volunteers can be involved on a one-off basis[17]. However, episodic volunteering is not, for instance, always quick to start (e.g. the chair of a committee may volunteer only episodically but is likely to go through a fairly lengthy recruitment and induction process before being able to start). Like micro-volunteering, short-term volunteering only lasts a brief period of time but unlike micro-volunteering it may, for instance, involve a formal agreement between the volunteer and the organisation (e.g. somebody volunteering at a two-day music festival may need a formal agreement that specifies their role and responsibilities).

3.3.   The relationship with long-term, regular volunteering

Micro-volunteering, like episodic volunteering, is often contrasted with long-term, regular volunteering that can sometimes be referred to as „traditional" volunteering. The volunteering literature has highlighted that the difference between episodic and „traditional" volunteering is not always as clear cut as one would think. For example, some episodic volunteering can involve volunteers on a regular basis for a limited period of time. Our research findings suggest that contrasting the features of micro-volunteering to those of „traditional" volunteering fails to capture the realities of volunteering on the ground. So for example, while in some instances micro-volunteering might involve completing a short one-off action with minimum engagement with the

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[17] Macduff's classification makes the distinction between temporary episodic volunteers, who are involved on a one-off basis for a few hours or, at most, a day; interim volunteers, who are involved on a regular basis but for a limited period of time; and occasional episodic volunteers, who are involved at regular intervals for short periods of time. See Rochester, C. (2006) Making sense of volunteering: A literature review, The Commission on the Future of Volunteering.

cause or the organisation, it can also involve repeated actions that help progressively strengthen the relationship between the organisation and the volunteer over time.

Whatever the form of volunteering, the intensity of people‟s involvement can be explored through the following three questions - how much? (amount), how often? (frequency), and how long for? (length)[18]. Rather than consider participation in micro-volunteering and volunteering more generally in black and white binary terms, it is more helpful to think of it in terms of a spectrum (see figure 3).

Figure 3: The intensity of involvement[19]

How much?

Second	minute	hour	day	week	month

How often?

One-off	daily	weekly	monthly	yearly

How long for?

Second	minute	hour	day	week	month	year	decade

While it can be useful to clarify how micro-volunteering relates to other forms of volunteering so that organisations can think strategically about their volunteering offer, we should be wary of artificially drawing boundaries between activities. A closer look at the way people volunteer shows how blurred those lines can be. Our research indicates

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[18] IVR, 2010: A rose by any other name: revisiting the „what exactly is volunteering‟ question, http://www.ivr.org.uk/images/stories/IVR20What20is20Volunteering20-20FINAL.pdf
[19] Adapted from the above publication

that an individual can volunteer in more than one way, that different types of volunteering are not mutually exclusive and that not all ways of giving time suit every volunteer or organisation. Rather than opposing forms of volunteering, it is perhaps more appropriate to look at the purpose they serve at a particular moment in time for the organisation and the individual.

Myth # 3: Micro-volunteering could lead to a decrease in other forms of volunteering

Micro-volunteering is in no position to replace long-term volunteering as it does not suit every organisation, activity or volunteer. Instead micro-volunteering diversifies and complements an organisation‟s volunteering offer by explicitly acknowledging that there is a multitude of ways people may be able to support them. Volunteers do not always choose one type of volunteering over another but frequently participate in more than one activity or with multiple organisations.

Section 3 in a nutshell

- Many, but not all, micro-volunteering opportunities can be completed through the use of technology and are in effect online volunteering opportunities. New technology and social media are also used to help provide access to and aggregate micro-volunteering opportunities.

- Both episodic volunteering and short-term volunteering are limited in time like micro-volunteering, however they do not necessarily share all the other defining features of micro-volunteering.

- Micro-volunteering is often contrasted with long term, regular volunteering (what some might call „traditional‟ volunteering) but the boundaries between the two are blurred.

- Whatever the form of volunteering, the intensity of people‟s involvement can be explored through the following three questions - how much? (amount), how often? (frequency), and how long for? (length).

4. Is the supply and demand for micro-volunteering growing?

This section focuses on understanding the current demand for and supply of micro-volunteering opportunities and examines the potential for growth.

4.1. The demand for micro-volunteering

Our research indicates that there is increasing demand for short-term, flexible volunteering. The majority of the volunteer-involving organisations who responded to our survey felt that demand has increased in the last five years. This was supported by the findings from our desk research, workshops and case studies.

4.1.1. The drivers of demand

From our research, particularly through the foresight workshops, we identified several trends and drivers which can help to explain why demand for micro-volunteering appears to be growing. These are: people"s busy and unpredictable lifestyles, changing perceptions and expectations of participation; and technological developments.

Busy and unpredictable lifestyles

It was widely held among the different groups we interviewed that lifestyles are increasingly busy and unpredictable, with many people highlighting societal changes (for example, longer working hours) which might affect people"s ability to commit to long-term, regular activities such as volunteering.

"I think in this day and age it"s the pace of life. Thinking about years ago… you"d have the time when you could [volunteer]… I think in this day and age it"s the time factor. There"s always something else pressing at your time no matter how old you are"
(Non-volunteer, focus group)

"What I've seen quite a bit of is people's hesitancy to commit upfront. In the past, for example people would have been happy to be the chair of the fundraising group particularly when retiring. Now people, whatever age, are not interested in making that kind of commitment because they don't know what's coming the next minute."
(Staff, case study organisation)

Our research participants also identified that there are many people who are juggling competing work and family commitments and consider themselves as time-poor. Unpredictable lifestyles (for example, moving in and out of employment) can make it difficult for people to plan ahead, with some groups, such as vulnerable young people, having particularly chaotic or changeable lifestyles. Research participants thought that micro-volunteering would attract people who feel they are too busy to volunteer regularly or those who are not always able to plan ahead.

Because of these time pressures many people are more likely to be drawn towards opportunities that require only a small time commitment and are quick and easy to start and complete. Many of those we spoke to commented that it can take a while for suitable volunteer placements to be found and that some opportunities can involve a lot of time and red-tape before volunteers can start. It was felt that micro-volunteering could help overcome such issues, as in most cases processes such as training and vetting are not required. People are also frequently looking for opportunities that can be completed in the time they have available, and want a clear understanding of how long a task will take and when it will end.

Changing perceptions and expectations of participation

Over the past few decades people's perceptions and expectations of participation have changed. Many factors have contributed to these changes and we focus here on a limited number that seem especially relevant to micro-volunteering. One of these factors is the policy push towards participative democracy, particularly at the local level to encourage people to get involved in their communities and shape local services. This has contributed to people having greater expectations of participation – with people expecting to have a say. In addition, in an increasingly consumerist and individualist

society, people increasingly expect choice and personalised services. The notion of having a voice and exercising this choice is also present in the way people volunteer. Volunteering increasingly tends to reflect personal preferences and needs at a given moment, and volunteers are now perhaps more inclined to change activity or affiliation to an organisation than in the past. Micro-volunteering was seen to offer flexibility and allow people to participate and contribute to an organisation or a cause in a way which gives them control over when, where and how they participate. It can allow people to support a range of different organisations and causes, moving fluidly from one to another according to circumstances in their wider lives and over time.

The volunteers and non-volunteers we spoke to often associated long-term, regular forms of volunteering with responsibility and obligation which deterred some people from participating. Micro-volunteering seems appealing to those who want to volunteer but do not want to feel obligated to participate in the long-term. Non-volunteers were also concerned that if they agreed to volunteer, they may feel pressured to take on more responsibility than they had initially assumed, as to refuse would feel contrary to the spirit of volunteering. For some people then, micro-volunteering was a way to contribute without the concerns that they had overpromised an organisation.

"For me it was perfect because there wasn't that much responsibility… At this stage in my life I want to be involved in volunteering but I don't want to take on too much… I want to give as much as I can but the practicalities of life mean working for this way really works for me and I can carry on doing it whereas if I tried to do more, I think I'd probably end up giving up." (Volunteer, case study organisation)
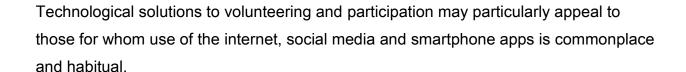
Myth # 4: Micro-volunteers are not committed

Some critics of micro-volunteering - particularly online micro-volunteering - have argued that it only engages people superficially, with terms such as „clicktivism" and „slacktivism" used to "belittle" these forms of participation[20]. However, our findings indicate that micro-volunteering does not mean that participants are not committed to or engaged with an organisation or cause. Indeed, it allows committed people (including long-term, regular volunteers) to show their continued support for an organisation or cause and remain involved, for example, if they have a busy lifestyle or if their personal circumstances change. Some research participants suggested that micro-volunteers (especially online participants) could be regarded as particularly committed and altruistic because they find time to donate their existing skills without expecting some of the benefits associated with „traditional" volunteering, such as training and work experience. It should also be noted that it might not always be the case that micro-volunteers give less time overall than „traditional" volunteers as some may repeat activities or participate in several different opportunities.

The development of micro-volunteering could be hindered by perceptions of micro-volunteers as uncommitted. Getting buy-in from staff and existing volunteers and helping them to understand the potential benefits that micro-volunteering could offer will increase the likelihood of success and help avoid a two-tier hierarchy of volunteers.

Technological developments

Research participants identified technology as being an important factor in the demand for micro-volunteering. The internet and social media allow people to find information and join together quickly, easily and unrestricted by time and place. As such, they offer new ways for people and organisations to communicate, share ideas and promote causes, as well as fundraise (e.g. through online advertising). Technology also provides a new way for a large number of people to come together, respond to open calls for help, and participate across geographical borders, with virtual/remote volunteering and activism now an option. Consequently, technological changes have allowed for flexibility and freedom, and led to new and often more informal ways of mobilising people.

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[20] Christensen, H.S, 2011: Political activities on the Internet: Slacktivism or political participation by other means? First Monday, Vol. 16, No. 2.,
http://firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/3336/2767

Technological solutions to volunteering and participation may particularly appeal to those for whom use of the internet, social media and smartphone apps is commonplace and habitual.

4.1.2. A word of caution

The demand for micro-volunteering appears to be on the increase, but there are reasons to be somewhat cautious in predicting future growth.

Firstly, not everyone wants to micro-volunteer. Micro-volunteering does not appeal to every volunteer and cannot fulfill every volunteer‟s needs and expectations. Most people we spoke to felt that micro-volunteering is unlikely to produce some of the benefits associated with „traditional‟ volunteering, including practical skills, increased confidence, friendships, relationships and a sense of belonging. On this last point, some research participants felt that for some volunteers, regular, sustained participation can be crucial for their identification and relationship with the beneficiaries and organisation.

We identified two groups of people who were particularly likely to favour long-term, regular, offline volunteering: those seeking to improve their employability (including those looking for a career change), and those who were retired from paid work. One recent university graduate we spoke to was volunteering three days a week in order to improve their job prospects by developing new skills and demonstrating their reliability to future employers. Some volunteers who were retired from work also told us that they wanted a regular commitment because it kept them stimulated and active, giving structure to their week.

Secondly, while technological advances might favour the development of micro-volunteering we should bear in mind that online micro-volunteering excludes those who do not have access to, or knowledge of digital technology, the internet and social media. Recent figures[21] from the Office for National Statistics suggest that internet use is linked to socio-economic and demographic characteristics, with some people (older

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[21] ONS, Internet Access Quarterly Update, Q2 2013, http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778_323333.pdf

people, and those with a disability, for example) less likely to be online; therefore they would be excluded from online activities.

Lastly and perhaps more fundamentally, despite long-term and non-volunteers appearing to like the idea of micro-volunteering, this does not necessarily mean they will move on to participate in these opportunities. We need to recognise that there are tacit and embedded reasons and barriers that stop people volunteering which micro-volunteering alone cannot break down. Research on participation shows that many people still lack the confidence and resources to feel they can participate[22]. Disparities in the practice of participation reflect deeper issues around who in society has a voice, influence and power[23].

4.2. The supply of micro-volunteering

In 2010, a discussion provocatively entitled „*Can micro-volunteering make a difference?*" was one of the liveliest debates on the NCVO website. At the time there seemed to be a general consensus among contributors that while micro-volunteering may appeal to busy people with little time, opportunities to „micro-volunteer" were lacking; that is, the supply was not keeping pace with the demand.

4.2.1. The rise of micro-volunteering?

Three years later, a simple search on the internet produces a wealth of examples of available micro-volunteering opportunities. The „Help From Home" micro-volunteering website alone now offers over 800 UK and international micro-volunteering opportunities. Our recent online survey of NCVO and Volunteering England members indicated that most of the respondents offered micro-volunteering opportunities. The majority of these had only started providing these opportunities within the last five years, which might suggest that supply is increasing. However, these indicators of

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[22] IVR, 2004: Volunteering for all? Exploring the link between volunteering and social exclusion, http://www.ivr.org.uk/component/ivr/volunteering-for-all-volunteering-and-social-exclusion
[23] Brodie, E. et al, 2011: Pathways through Participation: what creates and sustains active citizenship, http://www.pathwaysthroughparticipation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2011/09/Pathways-Through-Participation-final-report_Final_20110913.pdf

growth are imperfect and it remains difficult to know for certain the extent to which the supply has actually changed, especially since, as we have described, many organisations do not use the term „micro-volunteering" either because of negative connotations or because they might not recognise that some of their existing opportunities fit this definition.

It is clear from our research that the volunteering offer of many organisations still tends to focus on forms of volunteering based on roles that usually require a longer-term and regular commitment. Much volunteer management practice appears to have been written with "traditional" volunteering in mind, and may therefore not necessarily be applicable to micro-volunteering, particularly those which are online. Lighter touch volunteering has always existed, but the research participants highlighted that it has rarely been considered a priority or promoted in any systematic way. However, some organisations are rethinking how they relate to these opportunities, appreciating micro-volunteering as part of their existing volunteering offer and subsequently communicating it more explicitly. For example, one of our case study organisations stated that they are re-branding their short-term, one-off opportunities as „micro-volunteering". Other organisations we spoke to have recognised that micro-volunteering could improve and diversify their existing offer, and are actively creating or seeking to create micro-volunteering opportunities.

If organisations respond to people"s changing lifestyles and attitudes towards participation, the supply of micro-volunteering opportunities is likely to increase further. Availability and use of the internet and smartphones is increasing; 53% of adults now access the internet through their phone compared to only 24% in 2010[24]. This suggests that online micro-volunteering also has the potential to grow if organisations engage with these technological developments.

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[24] ONS, 2013: Summary of Internet Access Households and Individuals, 2013, http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/rdit2/internet-access---households-and-individuals/2013/sty-ia-2013.html

4.2.2. Providers of micro-volunteering opportunities

The results from our online survey and desk research showed the micro-volunteering was being offered by local community initiatives and groups (e.g. 7days4stow[25]), large national charities (e.g. Marie Curie[26]), national or local infrastructure bodies and other second-tier organisations, as well as universities (e.g. the University of Nottingham[27]) and local authorities (e.g. Bedford[28]). Respondents operated in a range of different fields, and in the voluntary and community sector and public sector. Our desk research highlighted that corporates could also be involved, particularly in a brokerage capacity (e.g. Barclays[29] and Orange[30]).

While frontline organisations and initiatives (including some of our case study organisations) provide and directly benefit from micro-volunteering opportunities that contribute to the advancement of their mission, brokers act as intermediaries and are a gateway to third party micro-volunteering opportunities. Local volunteer centres fit under this category of broker as do online platforms such as Help From Home[31], Here to Islington[32], Slivers of Time[33] and GoodPeople[34]. The opportunities promoted by brokers are usually open to anybody wishing to volunteer, but they can be organisation-specific; for example, Barclays Skillsbank[35] is only available to its employees.

This brief overview of the brokerage landscape would be incomplete without mentioning micro-volunteering apps. These apps have the potential to allow people to find and filter opportunities, volunteer through their smartphone and even record their participation as is the case for the free vInspired[36] app. However, it is important to note that although

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[25] 7days4stow, http://7days4stow.org/
[26] Marie Curie, http://www.mariecurie.org.uk/en-gb/fundraising-volunteering/volunteer/ways-to-volunteer/mirco-volunteering/
[27] Nottingham University, http://www.su.nottingham.ac.uk/activities/volunteering/microvolunteering/
[28] Pride in Bedford, http://www.bedford.gov.uk/community_and_living/community_services/community_volunteering.aspx
[29] Barclays Skillsbank, http://www.barclaysskillsbank.com/
[30] Orange, http://dosomegood.orange.co.uk/
[31] Help From Home, http://helpfromhome.org/
[32] Here To Islington, http://islington.hereto.org/
[33] Slivers of Time, http://www.slivers.com/
[34] GoodPeople, https://goodpeople.co.uk/
[35] Barclays Skillsbank, http://www.barclaysskillsbank.com/
[36] vInspired, http://vinspired.com/

they have generated considerable interest and attention, Orange‟s Do Some Good[37] app is now closed and both the BrightWorks and Sony +U apps (announced in 2011 and 2012 respectively) are not currently available. This suggests that there is still a significant way to go in harnessing the potential of apps as a means of brokering micro-volunteering.

Brokers play an important role in providing access to opportunities. Their success is partly reliant on how effective they are at pairing people with opportunities and promoting activities, but they are clearly also very dependent on organisations and initiatives providing them with opportunities with which the public can engage.

Section 4 in a nutshell

- Our evidence suggests that demand for micro-volunteering opportunities may have increased in recent years.

- The main drivers of the demand for micro-volunteering opportunities are: busy and unpredictable lifestyles; changing perceptions and expectations of participation; and technological developments.

- Although our survey of volunteer-involving organisations indicates that supply of micro-volunteering is increasing, it is difficult to assess the extent to which supply has changed because of the contested nature of term „micro-volunteering‟.

- Many organisations have always offered micro-volunteering opportunities but have rarely referred to them as such or promoted them in any systematic way.

- More organisations are now considering micro-volunteering opportunities as part of their volunteering offer and are communicating about them more explicitly.

- Micro-volunteering opportunities are provided by local community initiatives; large national charities; national or local infrastructure bodies and other second tier organisations (including online platforms); universities; local authorities and corporates.

- The success of brokers in providing access to micro-volunteering opportunities is partly reliant on how effective they are at pairing people with opportunities, but they are clearly also very dependent on organisations providing them with opportunities with which the public can engage.

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[37] Orange, http://dosomegood.orange.co.uk/

5. What are the benefits and impact of micro-volunteering?

This section looks at the benefits and impact of micro-volunteering on volunteer-involving organisations, volunteers and the wider community.

5.1. The benefits of micro-volunteering for organisations

5.1.1. Diversifying the volunteer offer

As discussed in section 4, the demand from individuals for short-term, episodic volunteering appears to be growing. Some of our case study organisations were well-established national charities that said that they could not meet the current level of demand, and felt that offering micro-volunteering opportunities could help address this issue. The range of online and offline activities that micro-volunteering involves also allows some organisations to broaden their offer and meet the varied interests and availability of new and current volunteers.

We found that micro-volunteering can co-exist with other forms of volunteering, and does not only appeal to new volunteers. Existing volunteers who are already heavily involved can decide to micro-volunteer as well. This was already happening in several of our case study organisations (although the actions in which people had been involved were usually not labelled „micro-volunteering"). Many of the existing volunteers we spoke to felt that micro-volunteering was appropriate for them too, and would be a good way to supplement and complement their longer term involvement. For instance, we spoke to a volunteer who is a dog boarder (a role requiring a regular, long-term commitment) but also tweets about the charity's campaigns (something that can be done as a micro-volunteering opportunity).

The variety of opportunities offered by micro-volunteering may equally help retain people who thrive on diversity and change, and would like the chance to get involved in different activities. At one of our case study organisations, staff and volunteers said that

having 'taster sessions' kept people interested and avoided potential boredom. Micro-volunteering can be a useful way of capitalising on people's existing commitment and providing them with different ways to participate, which can meet and maintain their interests.

5.1.2. Broadening the volunteer base

Micro-volunteering can increase the volunteer base and the range of volunteers by drawing in people who may not otherwise have volunteered or who may have traditionally been excluded from volunteering. People can experience a range of practical, psychological and institutional barriers to getting involved, which include lack of financial resources; perceptions of time and their availability; low self-confidence and self-esteem; and bureaucracy[38]. Micro-volunteering can go some way to addressing these barriers.

Just as micro-volunteering may appeal to the time-poor (such as people in full-time employment) and to those with unpredictable lifestyles, it can also be well suited to those who are ill or with a disability who cannot commit to a long-term, regular activity or carry out time-intensive tasks. We were given examples by one of our case studies of people affected by cancer who were able to complete small actions for short periods of time through their online forum. These actions included reviewing cancer information materials, filling in a questionnaire, and campaigning to change cancer policies.

Myth # 5: Micro-volunteering is only for new volunteers

We found three types of people interested in micro-volunteering:

- People who had never volunteered before;
- Existing volunteers who want to supplement their existing volunteering activities;
- Existing volunteers who want to change their existing volunteering.

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[38] Brodie, E. et al, 2009: Understanding participation: a literature review, http://www.pathwaysthroughparticipation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2009/09/Pathways-literature-review-final-version.pdf

As there are many opportunities that involve technology or that are promoted via a technological device, micro-volunteering can potentially appeal to younger people (often called the „digital natives" because they were born or brought up during the age of digital technology) and in doing so help to capture a new generation of volunteers. In addition, young people are perhaps more familiar with some of the online and social media tools that help people self-organise and crowdsource. This was very much the case for one of our case study organisations that primarily involved young people and often recruited micro-volunteers by creating a Facebook event page to promote their activities or a doodle poll [39] to plan tasks and schedule meetings.

Myth # 6: Everyone can micro-volunteer

On one hand, micro-volunteering can draw in people who could otherwise not volunteer, such as those prevented by health and mobility reasons, geographical location, family and caring commitments, working long hours or other life circumstances. Some opportunities are also accessible to a broad range of people because they do not require specialist skills or experience.

On the other hand, certain groups can be excluded from participation depending on the activity itself. For example, one of our case study organisations involves micro-volunteers with expert business skills to help clients practice their interview skills – an activity which requires a certain level of knowledge and experience. Additionally, online micro-volunteering excludes those who do not have access to, or knowledge of digital technology, the internet and social media.

5.1.3. Providing pathways into and through participation

Micro-volunteering was seen as a way of providing a route into volunteering and of establishing a relationship between an individual and an organisation at the start of their volunteer journey. Some of our research participants anticipated or hoped that if a person"s experience of micro-volunteering was a positive one, they would come back for more and get involved in other activities and other forms of volunteering. For example, a volunteer manager we spoke to described micro-volunteering as "a good hook" that could "lead to something else".

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[39] Doodle, http://doodle.com /

There is a view that micro-volunteering is something provisional, and positioned at the bottom of a ladder of volunteering, symbolising the different depths of involvement. The idea here is that somebody might begin their volunteer journey by micro-volunteering and then progressively do more and move up the volunteering ladder. While this is possible, we found no evidence that this happens systematically. This is backed up by findings from the Pathways through Participation[40] project, which looked at people"s experience of participation over the course of their lives and highlighted that *"participation can develop and grow but it is unpredictable; it is not necessarily linear".* While it is possible that some micro-volunteers" involvement will grow over time this is by no means a certainty.

While micro-volunteering does not necessarily lead to increased involvement it can help maintain people"s initial motivation and enthusiasm. It is not unusual for an individual to contact an organisation and want to start volunteering almost straightaway. This is unlikely to be possible with some long-term, regular roles – for example, those which require a more formal application process, vetting checks and references; however, micro-volunteering has the potential to be immediate or almost immediate. Micro-volunteering can also help to retain people who are waiting for a long-term, regular volunteering opportunity, as it can quickly get them involved with and connected to the organisation while a suitable opportunity is sought or while the formal application process is being conducted.

In terms of retention, micro-volunteering opportunities can also be targeted at existing volunteers who are no longer able to give a regular, long-term commitment because their availability or life circumstances have changed. The Pathways through Participation project showed that people's participation is dynamic and shifts over time: it is *"characterised by ebbs and flows, starts and stops, a mix of one-offs, short- and long-term commitments, and experiences that ranged from the undemanding to the*

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[40] Brodie, E. et al, 2011: Pathways through Participation: what creates and sustains active citizenship, http://www.pathwaysthroughparticipation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2011/09/Pathways-Through-Participation-final-report_Final_20110913.pdf

intense and all-consuming"[41]. The way people participate over the course of their life varies for a range of reasons, often mirroring life stages and critical moments in their lives. Some people, for instance, stop participating when they move to a different geographical location, become ill or have new family commitments.

In this context, micro-volunteering can provide an effective way of maintaining a connection between an individual and an organisation or a cause. One of our interviewees, for example, became a full-time student and was not able to continue to participate on a regular basis, but through micro-volunteering they were still able to contribute irregularly when they were available. Another volunteer started micro-volunteering when they moved into full-time employment and could no longer commit regular hours to the organisation. For them, micro-volunteering through short and flexible online activities was one way to stay involved in the work of the organisation and show her continued support.

5.1.4. Improving organisational reach and capacity

Micro-volunteering can improve an organisation"s reach by drawing in more volunteers. This is particularly the case for online activities which can be completed by participants with internet access, wherever they are based in the world – an organisation can have an instant and global reach. Campaigning, awareness-raising and fundraising are areas where micro-volunteering can potentially play a significant role because they can include activities where a greater number of participants can in turn lead to greater impact.

Micro-volunteering can also improve or increase the capacity of an organisation by allowing people to contribute their skills, expertise and experience. One of our case studies felt that recruiting young people could help their organisation tap into their particular (especially technological) skills. Another of our case study organisations found it valuable to involve highly skilled professionals in an advisory capacity for

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[41] Brodie, E. et al, 2011: Pathways through Participation: what creates and sustains active citizenship, http://www.pathwaysthroughparticipation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2011/09/Pathways-Through-Participation-final-report_Final_20110913.pdf

specific issues. Some of our research participants suggested that one way to increase the pool of skills and expertise available to an organisation could be to promote micro-volunteering to businesses and encourage them to include micro-volunteering in their employee-supported volunteering schemes.

Micro-volunteering has the potential to help organisations work differently by adopting a more holistic and joined-up approach to engagement and participation across departments and teams. To operate effectively micro-volunteering requires more collaboration and communication, which could have a positive effect on organisational capacity far beyond volunteering. If, for instance, the volunteering team of an organisation is able to work more closely with the fundraising team then it may be easier to bring together and capitalise on the links between giving time and giving money. Research shows that the two activities are positively associated with each other[42], yet often organisations fail to bring together their volunteering and fundraising strategies. Likewise, if the volunteering and campaigning teams can bring together some of their actions through the development of micro-volunteering opportunities, it could enhance their chances of leading successful and effective campaigns, and strengthen key organisational messages as well as organisational values and beliefs, which we know matter to people when choosing a cause to support.

5.2. The benefits of micro-volunteering for volunteers

There is some overlap between the motivations of people to micro-volunteer and the benefits they may gain from micro-volunteering.

5.2.1. Empowering volunteers

As outlined in section 4, people thought that micro-volunteering provided opportunities that were varied, flexible and better suited to their lifestyles. As people have greater control over their involvement, micro-volunteering can be an empowering experience

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[42] Hill, M., 2012: The relationship between volunteering and charitable giving: review of evidence, CGAP working paper, http://www.cgap.org.uk/uploads/Working%20Papers/WP%20volunteering%20and%20charitable%20giving%20MH.pdf

and give people a greater sense of ownership of the action they have chosen to complete: they decide when, how and where they will start and complete a task, depending on their availability, their aspirations and motivations.

Feedback from the volunteers we spoke to who had been involved in micro-volunteering suggested that their involvement had given them a sense of satisfaction and achievement through directly helping the beneficiaries of an organisation or contributing to its core mission. A volunteer, for instance, who occasionally contributed to an online user forum, felt that her input helped other people with similar health issues. Another volunteer providing someone with employment advice felt a sense of satisfaction at being able to share their skills to help someone. With some micro-volunteering opportunities, people considered their actions, when added to those of others, had made a difference or had contributed to a collective effort. This was, for example, the case with fundraising and campaigning actions.

5.2.2. Expressing values and beliefs

Micro-volunteering can provide a way for some people to express their personal values and beliefs, and to make statements about the kind of society they want to live in. This particularly appears to be the case for online campaigning activities on social or environmental issues which can bring together large groups of people and allow them to have their say.

"There are a lot of things that seem too big to change, too intractable – I feel that you can't give as much as you'd want to; to actually make a difference you'd have to commit yourself, you can't do it half way and then you'd have to pull out; I can't commit to that but I might be able to micro-volunteer and feed in, I'm part of that bigger picture. So instead of turning a blind eye, I can engage and feel that I'm making a difference through my limited time." (Volunteer, case study organisation)

For some of the volunteers we spoke to, the internet provided a space that allowed them to spontaneously join like-minded people, share their views and take action on

issues and interests that mattered to them. Through completing micro-volunteering online, people were able to access communities of interest as well as communities of locality.

If an organisation values people's contribution regardless of the type and depth of the involvement, then people can still feel positive about being part of an organisation or cause even if their engagement is very short. Some people who had previously considered that only long-term involvement counted as a meaningful form of volunteering, could see that micro-volunteering was not only 'better than nothing', but was valuable in its own right. Consequently micro-volunteering made people feel less guilty about not been able to do more or not doing as much as they had done in the past, and empowered that they could make a difference and perhaps even be inspired to do more.

5.2.3. Providing new and different experiences

Micro-volunteering can provide people with experience of different, varied activities. For example, at one of our case study organisations, micro-volunteers could be cleaning-up a park one day, packing kits for homeless people another, and baking cakes the next. Although generally micro-volunteers are involved in activities to which they are applying existing skills, by doing so in a new context, they can still learn and develop. For example, one staff member at a volunteer-involving organisation stated that business professionals who volunteer with their clients are exposed to a new environment which can help them to gain some perspective on their own lives. Micro-volunteering also allows people to gain experience with different organisations.

The social benefits of micro-volunteering for the individual might be more difficult to demonstrate than with long-term, regular volunteering. While it might be difficult to develop new friendships and social connections through online micro-volunteering, some of our research participants suggested that face-to-face micro-volunteering opportunities might help people to create bonds and networks with each other and also potentially beneficiaries. This will partly depend on whether there is an ongoing relationship between the micro-volunteer and the organisation. At one of our case

studies, for instance, there is a strong sense of belonging among the micro-volunteers and many of the group"s initiatives heavily rely on people"s social networks.

5.3. The benefits of micro-volunteering for beneficiaries and communities

5.3.1. Harnessing the power of voluntary action

The research participants were quick to provide examples of where they had seen and experienced a positive impact on beneficiaries and the community. These examples – which tend to focus on outputs rather than longer-term and wider outcomes – included:

- Spending two hours reviewing a publication for the charity"s information centres across the UK;
- Signing an e-petition that contributed to a policy change;
- Giving an hour-length talk which raised awareness and donations amounting to a sizeable donation.

One of the key principles behind micro-volunteering is that „every little action counts" which is very much at the root of all collective action. Small actions, even tiny actions are often considered powerful because of their combined and cumulative impact, which is why crowdsourcing and crowdfunding have recently become so popular. Cancer Research UK"s ClicktoCure[43] website demonstrates the importance of numbers and mass participation.

The cumulative impact of micro-volunteering is often presented by organisations offering micro-volunteering opportunities as one of its key selling points. On the Marie Curie website micro-volunteering is described as "*small, quick actions that make a big difference when many people combine their efforts*"[44]. The RSPB has a blog post on micro-volunteering entitled "*Mini moments make mountains out of mole hills!*" which

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[43] Click to Cure, http://www.clicktocure.net/
[44] Marie Curie Cancer Care, http://www.mariecurie.org.uk/en-gb/fundraising-volunteering/volunteer/ways-to-volunteer/mirco-volunteering/

goes on to say "*Each small action that a person takes can make a momentous difference when combined with a massive amount of people also doing that activity*"[45].

Despite the importance of the cumulative impact of micro-volunteering, a small and individual action such as shopping for an elderly neighbour[46] can nonetheless be impactful in itself. Some micro-volunteering actions are similar to what people might call random or informal acts of kindness, which have value both for the person receiving and the person giving. As one of our interviewees put it "*sometimes if you're having an awful day something small can have a huge impact*".

5.3.2. Increasing community engagement in local issues and services

Micro-volunteering seems particularly well suited to volunteer-led initiatives and self-organising which respond to local needs within the community. One of our case studies, for example, was set up to address a local gap in the provision of cultural activities and has developed by offering opportunities for people to contribute their skills around specific events and interests. In this instance, the boundaries between the micro-volunteer (helping out) and the beneficiary (taking part) in the events are blurred.

"For us it works and hopefully it's a sustainable way of working because the more people we get doing smaller bits hopefully the further the word spreads – it has a snowball effect" (Volunteer, case study organisation)

"We all pulled together and made one volunteer between us - we were able to split things up and made it less stressful" (Volunteer, case study organisation)

Micro-volunteering can potentially improve awareness of local issues and services, particularly since people can gain experience of a number of different activities for a range of organisations and causes. It also has the potential to enhance and shape existing local services. In particular this appears to be the case for research and data

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[45] RSPB, http://www.rspb.org.uk/community/getinvolved/volunteering/b/volunteering-blog/archive/2011/07/18/mini-moments-make-mountains-out-of-mole-hills.aspx
[46] As part of a Good Neighbour scheme

activities, which allow micro-volunteers to feed back their views and suggestions or to report incidents[47].

The volunteer-led initiatives we spoke to felt strongly that micro-volunteering had helped to create a more positive image of the local area and strengthened the community. For one of them, the volunteers also cited that micro-volunteering had led to the community working together in a more joined-up way (for example, the food bank was now working with the school) by facilitating a network between existing services.

5.4. Identifying the benefits of micro-volunteering and understanding its scope

Formally demonstrating the impact of micro-volunteering and whether it is successfully achieving these desired outcomes remains a key challenge for organisations. None of our case studies had in place an evaluation framework to assess the impact of their micro-volunteering opportunities. Similarly, our call for information posted on the ivo[48] website asking volunteer-involving organisations for evidence on the impact of micro-volunteering was unsuccessful.

Generalisations and conclusions cannot be easily drawn about impact since this is intrinsically linked to the type of micro-volunteering opportunity involved, including, among other things, the nature of the activity; its duration and frequency; whether it is online or offline, onsite or offsite; the type of organisation providing the opportunity and whether there is an existing relationship between the micro-volunteer and the organisation. The question of impact also depends on whether looking at the impact of an isolated micro-volunteering action or the cumulative impact of a large number.

Despite these caveats, the research suggests that organisations are experiencing some of the benefits we have described above to various degrees. Table 3 summarises the evidence in relation to the key benefits for different stakeholders.

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[47] Dog Watch, http://www.bedford.gov.uk/dogwatch
[48] ivo, http://ivo.org/

Table 3: Are organisations experiencing the benefits of micro-volunteering?

Benefit	Is this happening?
Diversifying the volunteer offer	• Some organisations have created micro-volunteering opportunities, both online and offline. • Other organisations have simply repackaged existing opportunities under the label „micro-volunteering" or are finding ways to promote them in a more explicit way than in the past.
Broadening the volunteer base	• Micro-volunteering has drawn in people who might not otherwise be able to participate – e.g. full-time professionals, people with mobility and health problems. • Online micro-volunteering opportunities and taster sessions have attracted younger people. • Micro-volunteering has helped organisations to retain existing volunteers whose lifestyles and availability have changed.
Providing pathways into and through participation	• Micro-volunteering has in some instances provided people with their first experience of volunteering. • There was no conclusive evidence to support the idea that people would start their volunteering journey by micro-volunteering then go on to regular, long-term volunteering. • Some existing volunteers complemented their regular, long-term volunteering with micro-volunteering. • Through micro-volunteering, some existing volunteers were able to stay connected with the organisation when they could no longer commit to regular hours.

Improving organisational reach and capacity	• Some organisations have drawn in new volunteers and some have broadened their skill base. • Online micro-volunteering has enabled organisations to engage large numbers in a relatively short space of time and increased geographical reach. • Cross-team working is a desired outcome. However, the evidence highlighted that while cross-team discussions were taking place, adopting a more joined-up approach to involvement remains a key challenge for many.
Empowering volunteers	• Volunteers valued the diversity and flexibility of micro-volunteering which gave them more control and autonomy over their involvement. • Volunteers felt their actions, either in isolation or added to those of others, had made a difference or had contributed to a collective effort.
Expressing values and beliefs	• The criteria for choosing a particular micro-volunteering opportunity varied. In some instances, convenience and time were deciding factors. • However, some volunteers were keen to emphasise that they chose to get involved because the cause and organisation mattered to them. This was clearly the case for people who wanted to supplement their current volunteering or to stay connected with an organisation/cause.
Providing new and different experiences	• Volunteers were able to choose from a range of opportunities. • The often fleeting nature of micro-volunteering meant that volunteers were less likely to develop new skills or build social capital. However, this depended on whether an action was repeated or not, and whether there was an on-going relationship between the volunteer and the organisation.

Harnessing the power of voluntary action	• The examples given most frequently were campaigning and fundraising actions that were based on engaging a large number of people. • Technology, particularly the web and social media, were found to amplify these actions because they enabled the mobilisation of people quickly regardless of where they were located.
Increasing community engagement in local issues and services	• The community initiatives we looked at have used micro-volunteering to bring on board a wide range of people putting in practice an asset-based approach to engagement. • They found that using micro-volunteering has helped them enhance local service provision and create a more positive image of their local area.

Section 5 in a nutshell

- There are different ways that organisations can benefit from micro-volunteering. These include:
  - Diversifying the volunteering offer
  - Recruiting new volunteers and diversifying the volunteer base
  - Retaining volunteers and providing pathways through participation
  - Improving organisational reach and capacity

- There are different ways that volunteers can benefit from micro-volunteering. These include:
  - Empowering volunteers and giving them control over their participation, and the opportunity to join together, have their say and feel they are making a difference
  - Providing new and different experiences

- There are different ways that beneficiaries and communities can benefit from micro-volunteering. These include:
  - Harnessing the power of collective action
  - Increasing community engagement in local issues and services

- Although there is no existing evaluation framework to assess the overall impact of micro-volunteering, the evidence we have gathered highlights that organisations providing micro-volunteering are benefiting from the experience.

6. What are the challenges of micro-volunteering?

This section explores the challenges of micro-volunteering and how some organisations have tried to resolve them.

6.1. Creating and managing activities

6.1.1. Lack of time, knowledge and skills

Around a third of respondents to our online survey who did not offer micro-volunteering opportunities said they lacked the time to develop them. This was echoed in our discussions with some research participants who felt that it would take a considerable amount of time, money and resources to create, co-ordinate and promote a range of offline and online activities requiring different levels of management and monitoring. Some organisations felt that such an investment might not always be justifiable for very short activities. This raised further questions among organisations about how they could assess the potential impact of an activity and whether it was worth the time and resources required.

In practice, organisations offering micro-volunteering did spend time and resources creating, promoting and running activities; however, the amount of investment required to do so was dependent on the specific activity. For example, online actions, such as organising e-petitions require minimal management and expense, whereas it requires more time and effort to co-ordinate micro-volunteers helping out at an event. Generally-speaking, longer, face-to-face micro-volunteering activities required more resources.

Staff at one of our smaller case study organisations (which was not currently offering micro-volunteering) considered micro-volunteering to be a collaborative effort with volunteers and the community, and felt that their role should be about facilitating and supporting those involved in micro-volunteering rather than prescribing and co-ordinating a set of activities. For instance, they were considering putting up a noticeboard where people in the community could join together to post their needs and

offers for help. Ultimately, the staff anticipated that volunteers and communities would be empowered to sustain micro-volunteering themselves with minimal input, time and investment from the organisation. This organisation considered that a challenge for them would be how to facilitate, manage and support micro-volunteering while not stifling creativity and spontaneity.

"It shouldn't be managed in any way… people can just do things with as little infrastructure or influence around it as possible then that gives scope for things to just happen and that way the creativity drives it. It has its own management… people can create their own culture around volunteering that is organic."
(Staff, case study organisation)

Although our case study organisations that were grassroots organisations demonstrated that micro-volunteering opportunities can be generated and led by micro-volunteers, they were only sustained with the commitment of a core group of dedicated volunteers. As one interviewee highlighted, this core group of volunteers often gave a lot of time to the cause and were arguably „traditional" rather than „micro" volunteers. Relying on a group of volunteers to create and manage activities may make them feel obligated to participate; therefore contingency planning to ensure people could dip in and out freely was a key challenge. At one of our case study organisations, micro-volunteers were responsible for reviewing project ideas, developing micro-actions, and setting-up and promoting projects. However, the large number of people who had to be involved in these tasks also meant that the development of new projects could be slow and cumbersome.

Many of our survey respondents who were not offering micro-volunteering also cited lack of knowledge and understanding of micro-volunteering as a barrier. Our interviewees and workshop participants considered knowledge and skills to be particularly vital to the successful development of online micro-volunteering as organisations would need to have internet access, and to be proficient in social media, and confident and up to date with new forms of technology and their potential. Some large organisations are well-equipped to develop micro-volunteering since they may have staff specifically responsible for, and knowledgeable about new technologies and

social media. Small, grassroots initiatives can often use technology and social media very successfully, particularly in joining large audiences together quickly for campaigning activities. The looser, less rigid structure of smaller organisations and initiatives means they can generally respond more rapidly to opportunities (depending on how they are organised and their technological skills and expertise) than larger organisations.

Many of our case study organisations had not found easy ways to create and manage micro-volunteering activities, but those offering them had some suggestions as to what may help the process. The first was for organisations to invite, and be open to volunteers" suggestions about ways in which they could micro-volunteer, and pursue these volunteer-generated ideas. Secondly, organisations could examine their existing volunteering opportunities and assess whether and how these could be broken down into smaller, bite-size tasks – „chunking". For example, a team of people could be responsible for writing blog posts rather than just one person. Some of our case study organisations were already creating opportunities by „chunking"; however they felt it still requires time and money, and there is the risk that tasks will be broken down into too many small actions and so become over-complicated and cumbersome.

"It takes three hours to think about and come up with a one hour micro-action"
(Volunteer, case study organisation)

6.1.2. Lack of suitable activities

Creating useful, meaningful activities which can be delivered through micro-volunteering can also be difficult for organisations. A minority of the survey respondents that did not offer micro-volunteering opportunities said their work was not suitable for micro-volunteering because it required sustained involvement over time. Most of our interviewees recognised that micro-volunteering is not appropriate for all organisations and circumstances as some activities require a long-term commitment, safeguarding checks or in-depth training, or cannot be broken down into smaller chunks (see myth #7).

> **Myth # 7: Micro-volunteering is relevant for all organisations and activities**
>
> Micro-volunteering is not appropriate for all activities, such as those requiring long-term commitment (e.g. mentoring) or which have a higher degree of risk (e.g. those requiring disclosure and barring procedures) or a need for in-depth training (e.g. being a first aider). Importantly, the lack of vetting, training and supervision associated with micro-volunteering means it is unsuitable for activities involving contact with vulnerable people (unless the participant is an existing volunteer who has already been vetted).

There was also a concern that organisations might artificially develop opportunities which were not necessary for their cause or beneficiaries, and consequently might not support their mission. While this can be true of other forms of volunteering, some people considered this a particular risk of micro-volunteering because the perceived growth of micro-volunteering might mean some organisations would feel pressured to offer it even though it might not be appropriate for them. Although we did not see any evidence of this, it was a real concern among some people who felt that volunteers might be deterred from participating again in the future if they felt their actions had no impact. Organisations therefore need to carefully consider the relevance, meaning and appropriateness of activities and how micro-volunteering fits in strategically with their overall volunteer offer.

6.1.3. Working across teams and departments

While cross-team working is a potential benefit of micro-volunteering, it was seen as a challenge by some of our research participants. Our research suggests that there can be a tendency among some organisations - particularly the larger charities – to work "in silos". Because micro-volunteering spans a range of different activities, some of the staff we interviewed were unsure as to who in their organisation would be responsible for developing and managing it. Micro-volunteering would benefit from a joined-up approach, buy-in among staff and strong communication. It was thought that this could partly be achieved by putting in place comprehensive information systems (such as customer relationship management systems) so that departments and teams can easily

share information about volunteers and supporters in order to promote opportunities for involvement more effectively. The large charities we spoke to highlighted that micro-volunteering requires a cohesive engagement and volunteering strategy that encourages close collaboration across teams and departments. Whatever the organisation, it was considered important to examine how micro-volunteering might contribute to an organisation"s overall mission.

"I actually think it"s not just the volunteering function that needs to think differently it"s about other functions in the organisation thinking differently as well…We"re at a time where we"re beginning to work more effectively across teams for a whole range of projects, so the time is right for us to be looking at micro-volunteering and questioning what we"ve done in the past." (Staff, case study organisation)

6.2.   Managing micro-volunteers

6.2.1. Recruitment and retention

As well as the challenges associated with managing activities, there are also issues related to the management of volunteers. Many people felt that recruitment would not be an issue as demand existed and micro-volunteering would in fact help solve their dilemma of having more enquiries than they could satisfy. Some - albeit a minority - felt that recruitment of participants (especially those who have never volunteered) would, however, be a challenge. Recruiting micro-volunteers might be particularly problematic given low awareness of this form of participation and because different terms are still being used to promote it.

Participants from our foresight workshops identified that online micro-volunteering could reinforce the digital divide, and potentially exclude groups of people (such as older people, people living in rural areas) from this type of giving. These groups may be more likely to be excluded from participating in face-to-face opportunities, for example, because they have reduced mobility or live remotely. Consequently, they may be a potential market for online micro-volunteering if the digital divide could be overcome. Our interviewees suggested some ways this challenge could be addressed, such as
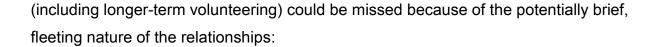
organisations investing time to support those less familiar or confident with digital technology or even micro-volunteers offering this support. Organisations could also ensure that volunteers are not excluded from micro-volunteering by offering offline opportunities and advertising these offline.

Our research participants felt that recruitment could be unpredictable, particularly for online micro-volunteering activities such as crowdsourcing, which could lead to spikes and dips in volunteer numbers. Retaining micro-volunteers and keeping them engaged with the organisation and cause is a challenge because it can be difficult to build a relationship with people who might only dip in and out of activities.

Some of our interviewees (but particularly those in smaller, grassroots organisations) stated that micro-volunteers can self-manage to some degree since they do not require training or disclosure and barring checks or - in the case of online micro-volunteers - office space and travel expenses. However, it was strongly felt that guidance and support is still needed for most micro-volunteers, especially those engaged in offline activities. Most research participants felt that formal structures such as inductions and supervision, could help micro-volunteers to feel part of, and valued by the organisation. To these organisations, a challenge of micro-volunteering is developing recruitment and management practices which meet the needs of micro-volunteers without formalising their involvement to the point where it deters them from participating.

6.2.2. Building relationships with micro-volunteers

One of the challenges of managing micro-volunteers is that for online activities, organisations may not know who their micro-volunteers are (their demographics and motivations) or how to contact them. Organisations may have little or no face-to-face contact with micro-volunteers, making it difficult to build relationships and develop a strong rapport. Some online and offline micro-volunteers may not know much about the cause, organisation or activities, and may have fewer opportunities to learn about these because of the lack of formal recruitment processes (such as face-to-face interviews, induction and supervision). Opportunities to recruit micro-volunteers to other activities

(including longer-term volunteering) could be missed because of the potentially brief, fleeting nature of the relationships:

> *"[We want to] move from a transactional relationship where they help you once, to a transformational relationship where they feel part of the organisation."*
> *(Staff, case study organisation)*

Even if organisations are able to identify their micro-volunteers and contact them, it is difficult to involve people (for example, by updating them with news) without the risk of overloading them with information or making them feel obligated to participate in other ways. For instance, one case study we spoke to had started to put together a database or „pool‟ or volunteers they could contact by email about activities; however, they were concerned about when and how often they should contact them so as to avoid these challenges.

How organisations can give recognition to participants is another challenge facing micro-volunteering. With longer-term forms of volunteering, recognition such as a certificate might be given for length of service, for example. However, this appears more complex with micro-volunteering since organisations do not always know who the participants are, whether they want recognition and what this would look like, and when and how to thank them for very short, one-off activities.

The matter of whether and how to build a relationship with micro-volunteers is a complex one. Some of the micro-volunteers in our study wanted feedback, whereas others did not feel this was necessary. This supports IVR‟s research findings on the „Do Some Good‟ app which showed that over one-third of app volunteers did not want follow-up information and only a minority wanted feedback on the difference they had made[49]. Indeed, some volunteers are attracted to micro-volunteering because they can participate without any obligation, and therefore may not want information about the cause or wider organisation. Individuals‟ different motivations for micro-volunteering, the

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[49] IVR, 2012: Micro-volunteering: doing some good through smartphones.
http://www.ivr.org.uk/component/ivr/micro-volunteering-%20doing%20some%20good%20throuhg%20smartphones

actions they involve themselves in, and the mode of participation (offline or online) may all be factors to explain why some people are more likely to want contact with the organisation after the action has been completed. Understanding and acting on the range of different motivations, expectations and needs of micro-volunteers, and how to meet these is a significant challenge for volunteer-involving organisations.

In addition to concerns over the perceived distance between organisations and micro-volunteers, some staff anticipated that there are circumstances in which the relationship between micro-volunteer and beneficiary could be limited. It was suggested that while some individuals may want to micro-volunteer because it suits their availability and circumstances, some beneficiaries might prefer longer-term, regular volunteers for certain activities in order to build a relationship with them. For example, a beneficiary might prefer to have the same person deliver their shopping to them each time rather than lots of different people.

6.2.3. Risks to organisations, beneficiaries and volunteers

Organisations mentioned that micro-volunteering could potentially pose new risks if micro-volunteers are not adequately supported and managed. Firstly, there may be risks to the organisation surrounding reputation and image associated with a reduction in direct control over volunteers (including how the organisation is being portrayed, what is being said about them and how people are talking about them, and the activities and people with which they might be associated). This is especially the case for online micro-volunteering and social media activities which can be difficult to monitor, prevent and control because they are instant and fast-moving, they can reach large audiences quickly and the organisation may be unaware that they are happening. The organisation may not know or ever meet the people involved in online activities. Secondly, there are possible risks to beneficiaries in terms of privacy and data security (again, particularly for online activities) as well as safeguarding issues. On this latter point, although micro-volunteers generally do not engage in activities which require disclosure and barring checks, in practice this might not always be the case and it might not always be possible to monitor. For example, a micro-volunteer might be authorised by an organisation to deliver a medicine prescription through a patient"s letterbox; however, while doing this activity they might also do other tasks for which they are not authorised

(or qualified) at the request of that beneficiary - e.g. going into their home and providing informal counselling / advice. Finally, there are potential risks to volunteers if they do not have the support mechanisms, training and supervision they need - for example, if they need support in new and challenging environments, such as young people volunteering in a night shelter.

Underlying the concerns about risk was a view among some organisations that they should be responsible for their volunteers, and therefore should be able to exert some „control" over them. As one research participant pointed out, this concept of control is an important one because there can be a risk-averse culture among many volunteer-involving organisations. Although other forms of volunteering are not without their risks, micro-volunteering was felt to be riskier because organisations have less control over participants. Organisations also have less control over activities - particularly those online which can span time and place, and can reach a number of people quickly. They might also have less control over the quality of the actions executed. Consequently, some organisations might only offer micro-volunteering opportunities where they perceive the risk and chance of error to be minimal.

"This feels like an inherently more risky process because you"ve got people who are just having a very brief engagement in your organisation."
(Staff, case study organisation)

"It"s quite a lot of work to do the recruitment especially if there"s a serious risk attached to quality failure. For some types of micro-volunteering it won"t matter so much, but a lot of the work we do is public facing. A lot of the obvious places where we could get value from micro-volunteering happen to be in areas where there are risks attached if we get it wrong."
(Staff, case study organisation)

6.3.   Demonstrating impact and the value of activities

Most of our research participants felt that there are challenges in demonstrating the impact of micro-volunteering. With longer-term, regular volunteering, organisations can, for instance, calculate the economic value of volunteer hours and assess what the outcomes have been for beneficiaries and volunteers. This is not so easy to do for micro-volunteering given that organisations do not always have access to the relevant data. The ease of capturing data depends on the activity itself and whether there are quantifiable outputs of participants" involvement. For example, the impact of fundraising activities can be relatively straightforward to measure as it is easy to see how much money has been donated via a webpage or collection bucket. For campaigning activities, it is easy to see how many people have liked a Facebook status but more difficult to understand whether that has directly increased awareness. Micro-volunteers might not always inform the organisation that they have participated because they may not consider that their actions are volunteering - for example, those forwarding on an email. Where activity is not fed back to organisations (either by participants or captured online), they might be unaware that people have micro-volunteered for them.

Additionally, it can be difficult for organisations to calculate volunteer hours since the length of time micro-volunteers have spent on an activity is not always known or easy to measure - for instance, some activities may take only seconds (such as sharing a tweet). As with long-term volunteering, the impact of some micro-volunteering opportunities can be gradual, which also makes it difficult to measure.

Organisations we spoke to felt it was important to understand the impact and value of these activities in order to make a judgement on whether they are worth the investment in terms of development and management.

"We're more likely to engage with a bigger number of people, but the challenge is knowing whether it's worth investing in. Is it the best model for us? You might be delivering what you want to deliver but at what cost? Is it financially viable? Would be better to invest the same sort of money in staff doing the same job? But you need to take on board that is not just about the money." (Staff, case study organisation)

There were other practical reasons for being able to demonstrate the impact of their opportunities, such as including this information in funding applications. Staff also mentioned that it is important for some (albeit not all) volunteers to know that their contribution has had a positive impact as this may give their actions a sense of purpose and achievement which could help to retain their participation. However, it should be noted that some interviewees expressed uncertainty over whether traditional ways of thinking about volunteering and impact, can or should really be applied to micro-volunteering.

"Who collects that data? Who analyses the data? It's the nitty-gritty of it all so you can measure that impact. It's not impossible but it's another chunk of work and is it worth it?" (Staff, case study organisation)

Some people also felt that volunteers could be deterred from participating if there was an obligation to record and submit information about their participation. If micro-volunteering suits people because it short and quick to complete, it may be unlikely that they would want to spend time completing paperwork to provide feedback.

"You can't get an enormous amount of feedback for micro-volunteering, otherwise it would defeat the object really." (Staff, case study organisation)

The majority of organisations we spoke to did not have systems in place to capture data about participants, which activities they have completed and how long they spent on each. The Help From Home[50] website has one partial solution to this: a *„Did it? Click it!"*

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[50] Help From Home, http://helpfromhome.org/

button that people click once they have completed an action. At the time of writing there were over 4,000 completed actions on the website, although it is possible that this is an underestimate since some people will not have recorded their participation[51]. Technological solutions were also suggested to capture data quickly and conveniently for the organisation, such as volunteers recording their participation via a mobile phone app.

Some participants in our foresight workshops and in our case study organisations identified that there might be some ways to demonstrate the value of micro-volunteering to volunteers for fundraising events, such as donation meters (to show the cumulative effect), reviewing achievements at meetings and blogging about the impact.

6.4. Assessing the challenges

While we have identified several challenges of micro-volunteering, they are not all associated with every activity – the digital divide is only really an issue for online opportunities for example. All forms of volunteering have some inherent complexities. Indeed, some of the challenges of micro-volunteering are not entirely new – longer, regular forms of volunteering require investment and infrastructure to develop and manage, for example.

However, the challenges should not be underestimated. Although not all of them are new, they are certainly heightened, concentrated and more complex than with other forms of participation because of the less stable nature of micro-volunteering. The diversity of activities, the potentially brief, remote relationships with organisations, and the recruitment spikes and troughs as volunteers dip in and out make this form of participation a moving picture and, consequently, as one interviewee stated "*a logistical nightmare*" for organisations. Such instability makes it challenging for all organisations to manage activities and volunteers, and gather the information they need to demonstrate impact. The unstable, fluid nature of micro-volunteering also requires a

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[51] Information provided by Mike Bright, http://helpfromhome.org/

culture shift for organisations which may be accustomed to control over activities and volunteers, since this is not always possible with micro-volunteering.

Although micro-volunteering is associated with some real practical and cultural challenges, organisations should not be deterred automatically from offering it because, as we have seen, it can provide some very significant benefits. Organisations should carefully weigh-up the potential impact of each activity with the possible challenges to understand if it is appropriate and right for them, the participants and beneficiaries.

Section 6 in a nutshell

- Creating and managing micro-volunteering activities raises challenges regarding:
  - How opportunities can be created, including a lack of time, money and skills required to develop them
  - How opportunities should be co-ordinated and managed, especially given the diverse nature of online and offline activities
  - A lack of suitable activities as micro-volunteering is not suitable for every opportunity and organisation
  - How teams and departments work across the organisation to offer micro-volunteering opportunities.

- There are challenges associated with the management of micro-volunteers:
  - How to recruit new volunteers (including those who are not conversant in new forms of technology)
  - Whether and how to build relationships with micro-volunteers given the different needs and motivations of each party
  - How to retain micro-volunteers and keep them engaged in the organisation
  - How organisations can identify, assess and manage potential risks.

- Measuring, monitoring and demonstrating impact can be difficult for some micro-volunteering activities, particularly when actions are one-offs and there is no on-going relationship between the volunteer and the organisation.

- It is important for organisations to consider whether and how micro-volunteering fits into their wider engagement and volunteering strategy.

7. Conclusions and next steps

The last section of our report draws out the key conclusions from the research and outlines the next steps.

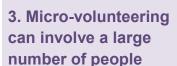From our research findings we can draw the following key emergent conclusions:

- There is a wide variety of micro-volunteering opportunities offered by a range of different organisations and initiatives. These can be online via computers and smartphone devices or offline involving face-to-face interaction. They have in common the fact they are small, specific, discrete actions with no commitment to repeat and with minimum formality.

- Micro-volunteering is not new; many organisations have in the past offered bite-size opportunities for people to do without necessarily using the term „micro-volunteering". However, micro-volunteering opportunities have now become more visible with more organisations promoting them more explicitly. Some are choosing to brand these opportunities under the label „micro-volunteering", while others have adopted different terms to brand these small actions.

- The demand for micro-volunteering from individuals is likely to grow because it meets people"s desire to be in control of their time and engagement, and suits their increasingly busy and unpredictable lives. Micro-volunteering is also likely to grow because of technological changes. New technology, particularly the use of the web and social media, can support the development of micro-volunteering; however its success will mostly depend on whether people are able to access and engage with meaningful opportunities that they can relate to and are motivated to carry out.

- The research suggests that the depth and breadth of the impact of micro-volunteering opportunities depends on several factors, such as the nature,

frequency and duration of the activity, whether it is online or offline and whether looking at an isolated action or the cumulative impact of a large number.

- Despite the difficulty of assessing the overall impact of micro-volunteering, the evidence highlights that organisations offering micro-volunteering have benefited considerably from the experience. At the beginning of the report we identified a number of claims associated with micro-volunteering. Table 4 pulls together the evidence we have gathered to see whether these claims are substantiated or not.

Table 4: Are the claims about micro-volunteering substantiated?

Claim	Evidence
1. Micro-volunteering provides convenient and flexible opportunities that fit into people's lives	- There is a huge diversity of micro-volunteering opportunities available from which people choose to complete according to when, where and how they want to participate. - People easily start micro-volunteering and dip in and out according to their availability. - Micro-volunteering opportunities which are done remotely and online are found to be particularly flexible and convenient.
2. Micro-volunteering can engage with a wide range of people	- Micro-volunteering can appeal to people who think „traditional" volunteering is not for them because they consider themselves too busy or unable to make an open-ended commitment to an organisation. - Online micro-volunteering opportunities tend to be attractive to younger people. - Micro-volunteering opportunities can be particularly appropriate for people with a disability or an illness, who are housebound or who cannot commit to a long-term, regular activity or carry out time-intensive tasks.

3. Micro-volunteering can involve a large number of people	• Micro-volunteering draws in people who might not otherwise volunteer (see claims 1 and 2) but also helps retain existing volunteers (see claim 4). • Micro-volunteering opportunities that are based online and are promoted through social media can involve large numbers in a relatively short space of time, if people think they are easy to complete and meaningful.
4. Micro-volunteering can provide a gateway to more sustained and long-term volunteering	• We found no conclusive evidence to back the idea that people would start their volunteering journey by micro-volunteering then go on to regular, long-term volunteering. • However, there were plenty of examples to show that micro-volunteering allowed existing volunteers, who could no longer be as active as they had been, to stay involved.

- There is currently considerable interest in micro-volunteering and it presents numerous opportunities. In some cases micro-volunteering has a distinctive value but this is not always the case. The research suggest that there are more overlaps between micro-volunteering and other forms of volunteering than we initially envisaged at the start of this project.

- Our research also suggests that micro-volunteering is not without its challenges, partly because it implies more flexibility and less formality that existing good practice for volunteer management may find difficult to address. It presents some practical and cultural challenges – again some of which are not entirely unique to this form of participation, but most of which are heightened and concentrated due to its unpredictable and moving nature. In order to create and manage effective opportunities, organisations will need to carefully consider the features of micro-volunteering, whether it is appropriate for their organisation and activity, and how it fits into their overall engagement volunteering strategy and wider mission. Table 5 overleaf presents some of the questions that organisations will need to ask

themselves if they are considering developing micro-volunteering opportunities in the future.

Table 5: When is micro-volunteering appropriate?

Does your organisation…	Is micro-volunteering appropriate for your organisation?
…want to involve volunteers across a wide geographic area?	**Yes** – micro-volunteering has the potential to involve volunteers in any area, even internationally
…have opportunities that can be delivered in shorter periods of time?	**Yes** – this is a defining feature of micro-volunteering
…need volunteers in face-to-face roles that take place at a set regular time?	**No** – some micro-volunteering opportunities happen face-to-face but they tend to be delivered remotely and are often one-off
…have opportunities that can be broken down in to smaller tasks?	**Yes** – the cumulative impact of lots of smaller tasks can be significant
...need to have volunteers working directly and on their own with vulnerable people and children?	**No** – although existing volunteers who have been vetted could micro-volunteer
…want to increase the range of opportunities for volunteers?	**Yes** – micro-volunteering can increase the volunteering offer for organisations and give people more choice when getting involved
… not have the time or money to invest in this?	**No** – micro-volunteering is given freely but like other forms of volunteering needs support and coordination from paid staff or other volunteers

On the basis of our research we would see the future for micro-volunteering as potentially one of expansion and one with exciting possibilities. When micro-volunteering is appropriate, and if the challenges identified in our research can be overcome, the benefits for the individual volunteer and the organisation can be significant. Offering micro-volunteering is a way of recognising the value of giving a little time, and appreciating that people can contribute in different ways.

Our research has found that there is a growing interest in this way of engaging volunteers but also that there is a need for organisations interested in micro-volunteering to have more guidance and practical support to help make it happen. We hope that some of the issues we have touched on in our report will prove a helpful starting point in understanding what micro-volunteering is and could be, and the circumstances in which it can bring positive outcomes for organisations and causes, for individuals and communities, and for volunteers themselves.

For those who are interested in exploring these issues further, and are perhaps at the stage of actively considering developing micro-volunteering opportunities, we have built on our research findings to develop practical guidance. This new guidance[52] is intended to help organisations decide if micro-volunteering is for them, and if so, how to deal with some of the potential challenges it poses. It gives advice and ideas on how to create opportunities and manage them; how to recruit and manage micro-volunteers; and how to monitor and demonstrate impact. Much of this advice and guidance has come directly from the ideas and experiences of those who participated in our research and so we close here with an acknowledgement of a debt of gratitude to them for sharing their time and their views so generously with us.

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[52] IVR, http://www.ivr.org.uk/component/ivr/new-ways-of-giving-time-opportunities-and-challenges-in-micro-volunteering

Appendix 1

A note on the case study organisation profiles

Included in the Appendix are profiles of the ten case study organisations that participated in our research. Some of these organisations were identified through our online survey, while others had attended our foresight workshops. Five of these self-identified as offering micro-volunteering, five self-identified as being interested in developing it in the future. In these profiles we have briefly outlined the background of each organisation and some of the key findings which emerged from each.

Case Study 1: 7Days4Stow

Background

7Days4Stow is an initiative set up at the start of 2013 by Stella Creasy, MP for Walthamstow in North-East London. The initiative was set up to encourage local residents to volunteer in order to tackle issues stemming from cuts and austerity measures. Local residents volunteer seven days during the course of a year through a series of micro- actions.

At the time of fieldwork, 200 people had signed up with around 90 of them being active; however the project was in its early stages and they were continuing to get more interest.

http://7days4stow.org/

Micro-volunteering within 7Days4Stow

In our survey 7Days4Stow self-identified as offering micro-volunteering. Some research participants questioned whether their activities would fit the definition of „micro-volunteering" as it required a commitment of seven days. The term „micro-actions" was used because „volunteering" connotes the idea of lengthy application procedures and high levels of commitment, and because participants did not necessarily see themselves as volunteers.

The initiative was organised by volunteers who created, managed, promoted and participated in micro-actions. Although the structure of the initiative was horizontal, participants recognised that there was a reliance on a core group of people who invested a lot of time, and who have volunteering and community action experience.

A number of projects and one off events had been set up and developed. These included new and emerging projects such a housing costs project to collect data relating to rising housing costs. The initiative also worked with existing organisations and projects to build on and enhance their work. These include:
- Eat or Heat - local food bank
- E17 Kitchen - community kitchen that aims to train people how to cook on a budget.
- Night Shelter - local shelter for homeless people.

The initiative successfully used social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to promote the project to a large number of people. Participants felt that those without internet access might possibly be excluded because they cannot access these platforms.

The loose and flexible approach of micro-volunteering was considered a real benefit, allowing people to fit participation into their everyday lives. Tackling problems stemming from austerity is big challenge but it seemed more manageable when broken into smaller tasks and involving large numbers of people. The micro-actions at 7Days4Stow brought people together to make their community a better place in which to live.

Case study 2: Attend

Background

Attend is a national charity that supports volunteering to make a positive impact in health and social care. The organisation supports people who are volunteering, runs projects that enable volunteering, and runs training for those managing and working with volunteers, and for volunteers themselves. An example of one of their projects is Friends of Attend ABI (Acquired Brain Injury) which runs social activities, fitness and sports and educational courses.

The organisation is more than 60 years old. It has 650 member groups, 30,000 active volunteers who regularly give time and 200,000 supporters who are involved in one-off events.

www.attend.org.uk

Micro-volunteering within Attend

In our survey, Attend self-identified as being interested in developing micro-volunteering in the future; however, they offered some short, one-off volunteering roles such as taking part in fundraising events. Attend also contacted organisations that have supported them in the past, to invite them to participate in an annual swimming event to raise funds for their Acquired Brain Injury project. These activities were not just fundraising events but were also about developing and nurturing Attend‟s relationship with participating organisations, and encouraging new people within the supporter organisation to give a little time.

In addition to fundraising activities, Attend used employee volunteers with specific skills and expertise for short-term or one-off events such as conducting mock interviews with clients seeking jobs. These opportunities offered a number of benefits. Businesses benefited as they could demonstrate social and corporate responsibility. Volunteers benefited because they could get a different perspective by applying their existing skills in a new environment. Attend also benefited because bringing in new volunteers meant increased capacity, expert skills and „fresh eyes‟ to bring in new and different perspectives and help identify opportunities for improvement. The beneficiaries of the charity benefited from the expert skills and Attend‟s increased capacity to offer services.

Micro-volunteering - and particularly online micro-volunteering - might not suit every volunteer at Attend as it was important for some long-term, regular volunteers to be able to build relationships, make friends, learn new skills, and improve their employability. However, micro-volunteering could help to retain these volunteers when their lifestyles change – e.g. finding a new job.

Case study 3: Aunty Social

Background

Aunty Social is a local initiative in Blackpool that was founded by a group of friends in 2011. It was set up in response to a lack of cultural activities in the area, particularly for young people. Aunty Social offers a programme of activities including a monthly knitting group (Knittaz with Attitude), craft workshops (Crafternoons) and film screenings (Pop-up Picture House). In 2013, it registered as a Community Interest Company (CIC) and opened Charabanc, a shop selling products made by local artists and designers.

http://www.auntysocial.co.uk/
https://www.facebook.com/loveAuntySocial

Micro-volunteering within Aunty Social

In our survey Aunty Social self-identified as offering micro-volunteering opportunities. Aunty Social is completely volunteer-led and has no paid staff. It has drawn in a growing number of participants and has been able to offer an increasingly wide range of activities. The people we interviewed attributed its success to a range of factors: a very strong brand that appeals to younger people, a small cohesive group of dedicated and passionate organisers and a flexible model of engagement that allows people to contribute what they can, when they can. Although Aunty Social do not use the term „micro-volunteering" their model of engagement provides micro-volunteering opportunities that people can dip in and out of. It is a very fluid and informal structure that means people can „give a hand" when they see fit, depending on what else is happening in their lives. For instance, a few people who were quite heavily involved at one stage, decided it was impossible to maintain that level of involvement and now help, from time to time, with short, specific tasks.

Aunty Social extensively uses social media and web-based tools (such as Facebook, Twitter, Doodle and Eventbrite) to promote its work, recruit participants and helpers, and self-organise. Social networks, whether online or not, have played an important role in establishing links with like-minded people, capitalising on their common interests and making the most of what they are able to offer, be it time, ideas or skills. Because of Aunty Social"s asset-based approach people feel they can „share and gain" from being involved. The boundaries between participants and volunteers are very blurred – people who participate in the activities also often help out, and vice versa. Enjoyment and having fun are definitely part of the attraction.

The group has been flexible and pragmatic, working around people"s other commitments where possible. The model so far has relied on a lot of people involved in a „light touch, low commitment" way, and a small group of very committed organisers who spend a great deal of their spare time making things happen. Having many supporters and helpers means more can be achieved. However, without the organisers providing some direction and coordinating people"s efforts, many of the activities would simply not exist. With growth, the organisers are now exploring ways they can continue to offer micro-volunteering opportunities while also developing more formal and long-term volunteering opportunities around specific roles.

Case study 4: Greater Manchester Youth Network (GMYN)

Background

Greater Manchester Youth Network (GMYN) was founded in 2007 with the purpose of supporting young people to learn about volunteering and take part in voluntary activities.

GMYN delivers projects and brokerage for young people, as well as undertaking consultation, strategic work and supporting other organisations to improve their skills. GMYN delivers a diverse range of projects for young people including;

- Boom – a project supporting looked after children to engage in one-off tasks for specific charities, e.g. a day helping Incredible Edible to clear a plot of land ready for planting.
- Who wants to be an Entrepreneur? - a programme supporting young people to set-up and run a one-day business that has a social angle, e.g. a deaf comedy event to raise money for Manchester Deaf Centre.

GMYN offers opportunities for young people to volunteer within Greater Manchester but also in Europe and further afield.

On average, GMYN have 30 active volunteers involved in their work, plus they support several hundred young people annually to volunteer with other organisations.

http://www.gmyn.co.uk/

Micro-volunteering within GMYN

In our survey GMYN self-identified as offering micro-volunteering opportunities. They used the term „taster" sessions to promote it to young people to connote the idea of low-commitment, and trying out new experiences.

They offered a mix of online and offline opportunities for their own organisations. Online micro-volunteering opportunities included liking a Facebook page and re-tweeting. They offered activities which are a little more involved but still relatively short such as proof-reading documents, creating spreadsheet for contacts, sorting recycling in the office. They also offered a variety of activities on behalf of other organisations and causes, such as bucket collections, a Christmas present wrapping service to raise funds, making greeting cards to send to unwell children, making packs for homeless charities, and making cakes. They used the internet to find opportunities such as the Help From Home and the Post Pals websites.

Micro-volunteering was seen as a good way of engaging young people to participate despite the fact they can sometimes have chaotic lives. GMYN was looking to create additional micro-volunteering activities by examining their existing offer to understand which opportunities can be „chunked" into smaller tasks. They also advocated listening to what micro-volunteers feel they can offer and their suggestions for participation. GMYN was actively looking to recruit micro-volunteers; on their website they invited people to contact them in order to be added to their "pool of „micro" volunteers" who would be sent suggested actions they can do.

Case study 5: Guide Dogs

Background

Guide Dogs provides guide dogs and other mobility and rehabilitation services for adults and children who are blind or partially sighted. It also campaigns for the rights of people who are blind or partially sighted, and undertakes ophthalmic and canine research. Founded in 1930s, Guide Dogs is now the world's largest breeder and trainer of working guide dogs.

http://www.guidedogs.org.uk

Micro-volunteering within Guide Dogs

Guides Dogs attended one of our foresight workshops.

Guide Dogs provides three main types of volunteering opportunities: roles related to their services (including sighted guide volunteers, dog boarders and puppy walkers) administrative roles (including receptionists and tour guides); and fundraising roles (including collection-box coordinators and fundraisers in supporter groups.). A lot of these opportunities are available at a local level and are organised via local supporter groups. In total, there are approximately 12,000 volunteers. The current volunteering offer of Guide Dogs appeals to a range of people. A significant proportion is attracted to the dog related roles which often require people to be home-based. As a result the typical volunteer tends to be a dog lover who is female and retired.

The new volunteering strategy of the organisation aims to diversify the volunteer offer and attract new audiences. People often perceive volunteering at Guide Dogs to be a lifelong commitment or very time-consuming. The organisation wants to change this perception by providing new opportunities including micro-volunteering opportunities that people can dip in and out of. More and more frequently people are contacting Guide Dogs to offer specific skills in a time-limited way. The organisation wants to make the most of these offers of help. However, to do so it needs to think beyond the existing volunteering roles that they have until now promoted.

The volunteering team is looking to work more closely with the fundraising and campaigning teams to see what sort of opportunities could be developed together. Buy-in from the different teams is likely to be greater if micro-volunteering is confirmed as a route to longer term involvement. While there is a realisation that not all micro-volunteers will support the organisation in the long term, Guide Dogs want to find a way of communicating what options exist, so that people who are interested in doing more, have access to the relevant information. Promoting different types of opportunities is important for new volunteers, but also for existing volunteers who may want to supplement their current involvement. At the local level, there is already a lot of informal micro-volunteering happening and it could be further developed. In both cases the organisation needs to consider carefully how and when it chooses to communicate with its volunteers and supporters, so as to not make people feel overwhelmed by demands.

Case study 6: Macmillan Cancer Support

Background

Macmillan Cancer Support is one of the largest health charities in the UK. Founded in 1911, it provides practical, medical, emotional, and financial support to improve the lives of people affected by cancer. It operates cancer care units and runs educational programmes to train doctors, nurses and students about cancer care.

http://www.macmillan.org.uk/

Micro-volunteering within Macmillan Cancer Support

Macmillan Cancer Support attended one of our foresight workshops.

The organisation offers a number of ways for people to get involved, ranging from donating money and fundraising to campaigning and volunteering. It provides some micro-volunteering opportunities but does not use the term „micro-volunteering" to refer to them. Micro-volunteering opportunities include some fundraising opportunities, especially those linked to events. In 2012, for instance 115,000 people hosted a World"s Biggest Coffee Morning raising a total of £15 million. Other examples of micro-volunteering are e-campaigns, such as the „Give hospital car parking charges the boot" campaign.

One of the areas where micro-volunteering is particularly relevant is Cancer Voices, an online network through which people affected by cancer (including friends and family of people living with cancer) can complete small actions to support each other by sharing experiences, but also to influence the shape of cancer services and improve cancer care. These actions include taking part in a focus group; reviewing a publication; and talking at an event to raise awareness. People are able to take part when they want, and more importantly for cancer patients, when they feel up to it. It is a powerful way for people living with cancer to stay connected and engaged.

Macmillan Cancer Support currently offers direct volunteering opportunities at the local level to provide practical and emotional support to people affected by cancer. Examples include accompanying someone to use local community services, regularly visiting someone who lives alone, and helping someone with day to day activities such as shopping, housework or gardening etc. These opportunities require vetting, induction and training so are not considered micro-volunteering opportunities. The organisation is currently piloting a scheme with short, light touch, practical actions, the majority of which do not require prior vetting or training. The feeling is that with micro-volunteering the ask should be small so that the risks in terms of quality and safety are small too.

Another important consideration for Macmillan Cancer Support is the level of investment that the development of micro-volunteering requires and its potential return on investment. If people micro-volunteering are more likely to engage on a one-off basis, micro-volunteering opportunities need to be low in investment. If they require a lot of staff time in support and management, they are unlikely to be financially viable unless people do lots of micro-actions.

Case study 7: PDSA

Background

PDSA provides free veterinary services to sick and injured animals of people in need and promotes responsible pet ownership. Founded in 1917, PDSA now operates a network of over 50 veterinary hospitals and 380 veterinary practices throughout the UK, and also runs 180 charity shops.

http://www.pdsa.org.uk/

Micro-volunteering within PDSA

PDSA attended one of our foresight workshops.

PDSA has approximately 5,000 volunteers, the great majority of which (90%) volunteer in the organisation"s charity shops. The rest are involved in fundraising, office and veterinary roles. On average, people tend to volunteer for three years, but the longest serving retail volunteer has volunteered for thirty years. The average age of volunteers is 45, however recently there has been a rise in the number of young people volunteering.

PDSA is very professional in their approach to volunteering and has in place well tested volunteer management policies and procedures. In 2007, PSDA became the first UK-wide organisation to be awarded the Investing in Volunteers (IiV) quality standard. Because of its very nature micro-volunteering raises challenges in terms of good practice and PDSA is thinking through what the implications of this might be. The organisation wants to take into consideration changing patterns of participation and be more flexible, but without compromising the quality of their approach which would have a negative impact on the organisation and the individual involved. The key imperative is that people"s involvement is beneficial, for both the organisation and the individual. There needs to be a way of assessing the impact of micro-volunteering. How this might be done remains an unresolved issue.

One of the key questions for the organisation is whether micro-volunteering is the right term to refer to the bite-size opportunities it is thinking of developing. If some of the volunteering good practice is not applicable – for instance, having a face-to-face interview at the recruitment stage or an induction – then maybe it would be better to use another term that doesn"t contain the word „volunteering". The current volunteering roles are not considered suited to micro-volunteering because of the level of investment (in terms of training and support) they require. However, there could be opportunities in the work that PDSA is developing around public awareness of pet health, including research. Two other areas identified are fundraising and campaigning, particularly activities that can be done online that don"t require much support. Online opportunities might attract more young people or people who are technology savvy. Some opportunities could also allow volunteers (especially the retail volunteers) who can no longer sustain their level of involvement to stay involved in a different and less intensive capacity.

Case study 8: St John Ambulance

Background

St John Ambulance provides first aid at events, support to ambulance services, community and schools first aid training and first aid and health and safety supplies. Founded in 1877 in the UK, St John Ambulance has 300,000 volunteers in over 40 countries. In the UK, there are over 23,000 adult volunteers and nearly 20,000 young people involved in youth programmes. Each year St John Ambulance teaches first aid to more than 800,000 people including in schools and businesses.

http://www.sja.org.uk

Micro-volunteering within St John Ambulance

St John Ambulance attended one of our foresight workshops.

The organisation recently completed a major restructure and in the context of this restructure, it is currently reviewing its volunteering strategy that includes examining whether micro-volunteering opportunities should be developed or not.

People can volunteer for St John Ambulance in a number of ways. There are clinical delivery roles (providing first aid at community, music and sport events, and supporting local emergency services); training roles and administration and support roles (including fundraising). Most of the opportunities are geared towards long-term volunteering and many of the volunteers have been involved in the organisation for years. The involvement of some started decades ago, when they joined the St John Badgers as young children.

The clinical delivery roles are generally not considered appropriate for micro-volunteering as they require a rigorous training programme, vetting and a regular commitment on behalf of the volunteer. Any of the roles with young people have safeguarding restrictions, so are unlikely to be suitable either. The current opportunities the most adapted to micro-volunteering are thought to be some of the existing administration and support tasks. However, St John Ambulance is keen to explore other avenues, beyond its current volunteering offer. It is looking to identify tasks that could be done remotely and with little or no supervision. One of the areas they are exploring is employee volunteering and skills based volunteering from professionals more generally. They have benefited in the past from the contribution of advisory groups and are looking to draw in specialist expertise on a micro-volunteering basis. Fundraising is another other potential area of development.

One of the key challenges for St John Ambulance is to ensure that the contribution of people who micro-volunteer is recognised and valued. They want to avoid at all cost, creating a two tier system with on the one hand, long-term volunteers and on the other, micro-volunteers. Getting buy-in from current volunteers will be important, because they will usually have a very different understanding of what volunteering looks like. The organisation will need to find a way of developing micro-volunteering opportunities that doesn't alienate their existing cohort of volunteers.

Case study 9: Tenovus

Background

Tenovus is Wales" leading cancer charity, bringing treatment, support and research to the heart of communities. Their innovative services ensure equal access to care, advice and support, whenever and wherever it's needed most. They also fund vital research to improve the outcomes and experiences for people living with cancer.

There are around 250 members of staff and they have around 1,700 volunteers on their database.

http://www.tenovus.org.uk/about-us.aspx

Micro-volunteering within Tenovus

In our survey Tenovus self-identified as offering micro-volunteering opportunities. These opportunities had existed for a while but they have not been designated as micro-volunteering. Staff are now looking to build on and formalise their micro-volunteering activity with the aim of offering a greater range of volunteering opportunities. While there appeared a greater desire to formalise the opportunities and conceive and promote them as distinct from their regular volunteering, staff were less certain and clear about the branding and there were mixed feelings about the term „micro-volunteering".

The micro-volunteering opportunities Tenovus offer tend to be events (fundraising) or discrete projects or light touch support such as filling in a survey or sharing photos on social media sites to support campaigns.

In terms of recruitment and the creation of activities, staff had similar processes in place for micro-volunteering as for their other volunteer roles. For setting up and developing roles, a staff member would make a request for new a volunteer role by filling in a form and passing to the Volunteer Development Co-ordinator in the volunteering team. The Volunteer Development Co-ordinator would then develop the role description and advertise the role. To recruit participants, they tailored the approach to the specific role. Avenues that they might consider using in the future included volunteer centres, corporate volunteer schemes, and the web. It was recognised that social media may play more of key role in promoting micro-volunteering opportunities, especially if they are online activities.

Case study 10: Thurrock Council

Background

Thurrock Council actively helps to join together those involved in volunteering:

- They have a Volunteers" Manager Forum which brings together Volunteer Managers in different services across Thurrock to discuss ideas, and share problems and good practice.
- They have set up a Volunteers" Network so volunteers" across services can meet each other to have a chat and give feedback.

There are 252 active volunteers across a number of services for Thurrock Council. There are several services in Thurrock which use volunteers. For example, the library uses volunteers to deliver a computer training course for people aged over 50. They also run a Home Link service in which volunteers deliver library items to people who are housebound.

http://www.thurrock.gov.uk/volunteering/#c05

Micro-volunteering within Thurrock Council

In our survey, Thurrock Council said they were not currently offering micro-volunteering but were considering doing so. An example of an opportunity they had been considering is a „language buddies" system within the community so that people can learn and practice a language with each other. They are currently thinking about other opportunities that they could have.

Rather than manage activities, staff felt that their role should be to facilitate and support micro-volunteers and the community to set-up and sustain activities themselves. It was felt that the organisation"s role should be light-touch rather than prescriptive as micro-volunteering should reflect the community"s vision for moving itself forward. It was considered important for micro-volunteering to be open with minimal formal management so that creativity and innovative ideas would not be stifled.

Although staff envisaged that micro-volunteering would be informal and open, they recognised that they might be required to monitor and evaluate projects and their outcomes. It was felt that formal management or monitoring of micro-volunteering would take time and resources. How to measure and monitor impact was considered one of the challenges of micro-volunteering.

Next steps which Thurrock was considering included building a database of people interested in micro-volunteering, and recruiting „champions" to set up opportunities in an area where there is demand, this would be done through the Volunteer Managers" Forum and the Volunteers" Network.