

VOLUNTEERING IN ENGLAND DURING COVID-19

THE POLICY RESPONSE AND ITS IMPACT

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Introduction

This briefing presents findings from the final stage of our research capturing the experiences of those working with volunteers within organisations and communities in England during the covid-19 pandemic. This forms part of the [‘Mobilising Voluntary Action in the four UK jurisdictions: Learning from today, prepared for tomorrow’ study](#). The study is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), as part of UK Research and Innovation’s rapid response to covid-19. This four-nation comparative study looks to evaluate volunteering responses to the pandemic, to support national recovery, and preparedness for the future. This briefing focuses on findings from England.

This builds on the first stage of our research, [published in July 2021](#), which looked at the challenges during the initial stage of the pandemic. This final stage takes a more focused approach, with two broad aims:

- to understand the policy response during Covid-19 in relation to volunteering and its impact, including lessons learned
- to explore the ways in which policy making can support voluntary action in the future, and how the voluntary sector can work in collaboration with government to shape recovery and prepare for future crises.

These findings are drawn from different strands of data, including:

- desk research, a survey, interviews, and a workshop conducted as part of the first stage of the research in spring/summer 2021
- five interviews with key stakeholders, a workshop with wider stakeholders, and a briefing event in autumn 2021.

For more details on the methodology, see Appendix 1.

This briefing considers volunteering and voluntary action more broadly. We recognise that there are many ways people give their time and engage with their communities, beyond formal volunteering activities. Often this is within voluntary organisations and community groups, but also with public services, social enterprises, and private companies. Many volunteer informally within their neighbourhoods and communities.

This briefing has been written to help those working with volunteers, as well as policy makers, funders, and commissioners.

Policy context and landscape

Our research explored the background, context and landscape of volunteering policy in England. Volunteering policy making and its implementation in England differs in significant ways from that in the other UK jurisdictions. These differences are likely to have had an impact on policy development relating to voluntary action in response to the pandemic, and the perceived impact this had.

In this instance we use the term ‘policy’ to mean the actions that government takes to meet the needs and aspirations of people, and to solve public problems. We distinguish between national policy created by the UK government and local policy from local or devolved authorities. Local volunteering policy differs significantly across the country, based on the history, structures and relationships in each area. It was beyond the scope of this project to explore these differences and their perceived impact.

How national volunteering policy is made in England

National volunteering policy in England is primarily developed within the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), with thematic-specific policy created in other departments, such as the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC).

Volunteering is a devolved matter, with Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland setting their own policies. England does not have the same additional mechanisms to create, adapt and implement volunteering policy, which appear across the UK nation.¹ England has no devolved assembly, and as a result, when UK wide volunteering policy is developed by central government, it is usually taken to apply to England by default. This differs from the other jurisdictions. As an example, the Scottish government can choose to adapt UK policy or create their own.

Differences exist across the UK in the ways volunteering policy is developed, implemented, and resourced. This includes differing relationships between government, infrastructure, and voluntary organisations. For example, in Wales, the Third Sector Scheme is a partnership between Welsh government, WCVA, and the voluntary sector. The Scheme is mandated by the Government of Wales Act 2006, which requires Welsh Ministers to support and promote the interests of relevant voluntary organisations in their work.² The Scheme sets out shared values and purpose between government and voluntary organisations.

How volunteering is positioned in English policymaking

In England, the [Civil Society Strategy 2018](#) positions volunteering within a wider concept of ‘civil society’. Framing volunteering in this broader and less explicit way differs from the other jurisdictions, where volunteering is clearly and distinctly considered within national policy, which is then linked to clear action plans. A detailed action plan for the 2018 strategy has yet to be developed.

More recently, volunteering is conceptualised as sitting outside of the sphere of central government. The government see its role as creating the conditions for voluntary action to flourish and, at least prior to the pandemic, has not taken a directive approach to delivering or supporting volunteering. This can be observed in the mechanisms for funding and commissioning volunteering, which tend to be coordinated through the public, social and private sectors.

There are likely to be a range of reasons and factors which have led to the differences seen across UK volunteering policy, including the number of people resident in each of the jurisdictions, the processes and structures, and historic and current relationships between respective governments and the voluntary sector.

Key factors affecting the policy response to the covid-19 pandemic

The resourcing of the voluntary sector in England has reduced significantly over the recent decade. As a proportion of the sector's total income, income from government has fallen continuously since 2008/9.³ Public sector cuts have weakened the sector and dismantled partnership in some areas.⁴ Over this period, government and other funding for voluntary sector infrastructure was reduced or withdrawn, leading to closures of organisations and a more fragmented landscape.⁵

Government engagement on, and investment in, volunteering within and across departments has differed and changed over time. There are variable relationships between government and the voluntary sector, as well as between voluntary organisations themselves. The relationship between the state and voluntary organisations over the last decade has been described as 'strained', characterised by 'antagonistic collaboration'.⁶ Partnership arrangements between government and voluntary organisations have been 'scaled back'.⁷

There are local and regional differences in resourcing and infrastructure for volunteering, which in many ways mirror other inequalities between areas. Funding choices resulting from austerity policies led to a decline in local government funding⁸, which has affected the quality of relationships between local government and the voluntary sector. In some areas this has led to disconnection and distancing.⁹

Local authority interest in voluntary action and encouragement of volunteering in public service delivery is variable across England. Similarly, commissioning and procurement practices are not uniform, and can have a direct impact on local voluntary action. The competitive environment these practices can create is seen to discourage collaboration and partnership working.¹⁰ There is 'a patchwork of different environments', affecting how much place-based community development has been invested in at the local level.¹¹ To address these issues, some local authorities have been investing in new operating models and new ways of working with their communities.¹²

In some local areas, responding to an emergency like covid-19 was not a first. There are clear and established mechanisms, legislative duties, processes, and procedures which govern how local areas should respond to emergencies. This includes the [Civil Contingencies Act 2004](#), the [Community Resilience Development Framework](#), and [guidance for local authorities in preparing for civil emergencies](#). Much of this guidance considers the vital role that voluntary action plays in responding to emergencies and sets out how volunteers and voluntary organisations should be engaged.

Areas which had experienced recent emergencies such as localised flooding, often had better integration or communication and more established relationships between Local Emergency Forums or Resilience Partnerships, and wider stakeholders. However, evidence suggests that engagement and collaboration between Local Emergency Forums and the voluntary sector was variable during the pandemic.¹³

Volunteering policy response to covid-19

The nature, scale and urgency of the pandemic required a significant and ongoing government response to support volunteering whilst keeping people as safe as possible. There was considerable uncertainty throughout the pandemic, with policy making happening at pace, often with limited or inconsistent emerging evidence.

There were five major policy responses.

1. Guidance to support volunteering during the pandemic

Central government issued guidance on volunteering during the pandemic, starting in March 2020. Guidance for England, now titled [Enabling safe and effective volunteering during coronavirus](#), outlined where volunteering was still possible, within the restrictions of national lockdowns, and how to manage the risks of volunteering and the virus itself. Given the nature of the crisis, much of this guidance focused on preserving public health and safety, and initially recommended that volunteering which could not be done at home should be paused or adapted to limit the risks of transmission and illness.

The government aimed to limit placing any additional restrictions on volunteers during covid-19, beyond those imposed by broader public health guidance or legal requirements. In England volunteers were not required to demonstrate their status while volunteering. This differed from other nations where certification or evidence of activities was required when leaving home during periods of lockdown.

2. The NHS Volunteer Responders Programme

Recognising the huge demand placed on the health service by the emerging pandemic, NHS England and Improvement (NHSE/I) commissioned the NHS [Volunteer Responders Programme](#) in March 2020. The programme, a partnership between NHSE/I, GoodSAM and Royal Voluntary Service (RVS) was originally established to support people who were asked to shield due to underlying health conditions. It was designed as an 'additional service provided by the NHS' and 'not intended to replace local groups'.¹⁴ The programme aimed to match local volunteers with individuals or organisations such as pharmacies through the GoodSAM app.

The call to volunteer was widely communicated, with 750,000 people coming forward to volunteer in six days.¹⁵ Between April 2020 and April 2021, the programme supported around 165,000 people and more than 1.8 million volunteering tasks were completed.¹⁶

3. Distributing funding

Funding for the voluntary and community sector was a key part of the government response to covid-19. This included the distribution of emergency funding with a package announced in April 2020 to allocate £360m directly through government departments, and £370m to smaller charities to help ensure organisations 'can meet increased demand as a result of the

virus as well as continuing their day-to-day activities supporting those in need'.¹⁷ DCMS was responsible for distributing £513m of the £750m total. By April 2021, £475m had been distributed to charities, with a further £14m awarded, and £19m attributed to administrative fees.¹⁸

The Coronavirus Support Fund was a key part of this funding package with £187m distributed through The National Lottery Community Fund to small and medium sized organisations, many of which involve volunteers¹⁹.

Local authorities were allocated additional funding, with £7.9 billion provided to councils to support their communities during the pandemic, including to mobilise and support volunteers.²⁰

4. Coordinating engagement and partnerships with the voluntary sector

The government engaged with voluntary organisations in a range of ways during the pandemic. This included drawing on relationships and partnerships which existed prior to the crisis, as well as establishing new ones.

This included £4.8 million grant funding for the [Voluntary and Community Sector Emergencies Partnership](#) (VCSEP) in July 2020. This partnership brings together local and national organisations to help deliver a more co-ordinated response to emergencies and was established in 2018 following the Grenfell Tower fire. The grant enabled their work to expand considerably during 2020 and 2021²¹ and the network grew to 30 national organisations and 200 local partners.²²

DCMS provided grant funding to local infrastructure organisations and established the National Volunteering Coordination Cell in March 2020 to respond to large scale requests for volunteers.²³

5. Supporting covid-19 testing and vaccination volunteering

The engagement of volunteers in covid-19 mass testing and vaccination programmes has been extensive, from testing in schools, to volunteer community champions reducing vaccine hesitancy in communities. The government took a partnership approach in their delivery plans, working 'with local authorities, the voluntary and community sector, local resilience forum, communities, staff and patients'²⁴.

The [House of Commons Coronavirus Lessons Learned report](#) identified that collaborative working has been key to the success of the vaccination programme:

the successful roll-out of vaccines to the whole of the UK population reflected a collaborative approach between many different groups, national and local, embracing GPs and the NHS locally, pharmacies and community volunteers, as well as the Armed Forces.²⁵

Perspectives on the policy response

Participants in our research were asked to reflect on the policy responses to the pandemic in relation to volunteering, drawing on their individual and organisational experiences. Reflections on events and their impact were collected in 2021, as the pandemic had progressed significantly, and benefit from hindsight.

There were mixed experiences of the policy response and its impact, with some positive areas identified. However, more often, views were negative. Many factors shaped these views.

- Differences across geographical areas, in part driven by pre-pandemic conditions.
- Varied levels of resource and investment in different areas.
- The existing partnerships in place.
- The level of experience, such as having previously coordinated an emergency response.

These factors meant that some were in a much stronger 'starting position' than others. More broadly, participants highlighted that the pandemic had amplified and exposed inequalities of different kinds, including in relation to volunteers themselves.

Participants focused on certain aspects of the policy response:

- communication
- collaboration and relationships
- national and local connections
- leadership.

Reflections focused more on the implementation of the policy response rather than policy choices made.

Communication

Participants shared views on the communication of the policy response, relating primarily to three main areas:

Firstly, the national 'call to action' to volunteer. This was broadly seen positively, in helping to bring volunteering into the 'consciousness of the public' and raising its profile. We know that in six days, 750,000 volunteers came forward in response to the launch of the NHS Volunteer Responders Programme.²⁶

Policymakers recognised that while issuing communications that encouraged volunteering and trying to minimise restrictions on volunteers, the strength of the 'stay at home' message (particularly in the initial lockdowns) may have impacted on some volunteers' confidence to leave home and get involved.

Some organisations felt that while the overall intention to encourage volunteering was successful, the implementation was not:

A call to action from the government and funding for charities was really positive in raising awareness, the profile. But this was a national call which was not well connected to local areas or directing people to pre-existing networks.
(Workshop participant)

Secondly, communication relating to public health guidance. Perceptions of this were broadly negative. Criticisms included that messaging was inconsistent, which created confusion. Communication was perceived to be characterised by last minute information and changes, such as confirming clinically vulnerable lists and the announcement of pilot areas.

National guidance on what changes meant to charity and voluntary sector activities always came later than other guidance. (Workshop participant)

Organisations spoke of needing to ‘translate’ general guidance for volunteers and wider voluntary organisations, which caused further delays in implementing guidance locally. The impact for organisations ‘on the ground’ was that it put a strain on their ability to manage and coordinate volunteers. Examples of issues relevant to volunteering not being addressed from the outset included safeguarding and handling money.

Finally, communication relating to collaborative working and relationships. Overall, the need for more effective communication between national and local levels was highlighted.

Collaboration and Relationships

Many examples of positive collaboration during the pandemic were cited. This included different types of organisations and agencies working together on the response:

The local authority worked very closely with the volunteer centre, helping to identify the best way of supporting volunteering, particularly for people that were Clinically Extremely Vulnerable. (Local authority)

Other examples included new and strengthened relationships between mutual aid groups, local authorities, and local infrastructure.

Where it worked well, collaboration led to the effective mobilisation of volunteers and innovative ways of working, with examples of local solutions which will be useful beyond the pandemic.

Participants felt that collaborative working needed to continue and that relationships developed and strengthened through covid-19 should be built upon through the recovery stage. Wider research highlights the appetite for this, including among public sector leaders.²⁷

There were, however, **examples of a lack of collaboration and joined-up working**. These tended to centre on national-local relationships. They included disconnection between public agencies responsible for different elements of the pandemic response, poor co-ordination between local authorities and the voluntary sector in some areas, and less positive relationships between mutual aid groups and local authorities and/or local infrastructure. Wider research points to instances where local authorities were seen as ‘getting in the way’, with the relationship characterised as ‘micro-management’.²⁸

The impact in some of these examples included a slower or more fragmented response and duplication of effort:

There was a distinct lack of communication between statutory and local organisations leading to (in many cases) duplication. Also, this was mainly a top-down response without considering the grassroots organisations who are in contact with many individuals and groups who were not reached by the other initiatives. Again, a lack of joined up working (local infrastructure organisation).

Several factors were identified as enablers or barriers to collaboration:

Having effective lines of communication, mutual understanding and trust in place were important for collaborative working. Established relationships pre-pandemic were seen as a key advantage, as it enabled organisations to come together and act quickly:

The overnight support wouldn't have happened without the previous relationships built prior to covid. (Workshop participant)

Two years before covid we had already agreed to get involved in the command-and-control structure for an emergency response... so when we got to covid we were very embedded in it all because of those arrangements we had around emergency response. (Local infrastructure organisation)

Funding was identified as an enabler to collaboration, allowing for innovative local authority and voluntary sector collaboration. Wider research points to how funding through the VCSEP supported dialogue and collaboration between organisations and ‘brought together a diverse range of organisations working in different areas of the country to be able to learn from each other’.²⁹ Organisations were particularly concerned, however, about a lack of future funding and the impact this could have.

National and local connections

Participants characterised the relationship between national and local organisations and infrastructure as a challenge one. Several organisations perceived that the significant activity and achievements at the local level happened ‘despite’ the national government response, rather than ‘because’ of it. Many of these tensions were attributed to factors pre-covid, described by one participant as a historical ‘thinning out’ of the relationship between national government and the voluntary sector. This led to a lack of interest in building relationships with those at a local level.

Other issues relating to national-local relationships were raised.

Firstly, a perceived disconnect between the ‘top down’ response being driven nationally and what was happening at a local level with the recruitment, mobilisation, and management of volunteers. Local infrastructure organisations highlighted that even within a local area, a ‘one size fits all’ approach was not suitable. The NHS Volunteer Responders Programme was cited as an example.

*Nationally, local infrastructure was overlooked and national programmes such as NHS responders showed the lack of understanding of local networks.
(Local authority)*

To some, the national scheme was disruptive of or distracting from local arrangements. Participants suggested that the programme could have linked better with local arrangements and focused more on the communities with higher levels of demand.

Other research notes how national volunteer platforms failed to ‘link in with local infrastructure and capacity’ and the ‘inherent challenge of creating centralised solutions to local challenges’.³⁰ The programme set high expectations about the numbers of volunteers that could be accommodated by the NHS and left some volunteers disappointed when they were not matched to tasks or there were delays in being matched. Analysis of data from two large scale volunteer matching apps shows that ‘the demand for volunteers (or at least the demand that could be operationalised by organisations) was not well-matched to the peaks in the supply of volunteers.’³¹

The NHS Volunteer Responders Scheme was perceived more positively in some areas, particularly those with fewer resources and less infrastructure. One workshop participant noted that in their local area the programme had been essential, as they had very little local volunteering infrastructure to support the coordination of support. Furthermore, the broader impacts of the programme are an important part of the picture of how community needs were met during covid. Research shows the majority of patients supported by the Scheme felt that their basic needs had been met and enabled them to stay at home and stay

safe during the early stages of the pandemic.³² Positive effects on the wellbeing of active volunteers involved in the programme have also been reported.³³

Secondly, a **perceived lack of understanding of volunteering and volunteer management** at the national level:

There was a lack of understanding within government of the complexity of volunteer management – it was seen by many as a free resource. We know it isn't! (Workshop participant)

Policymakers recognised the value of bringing in external expertise on volunteering through partnerships with the voluntary sector, such as the VCSEP, as well as through individual experts, to provide information and advice

Thirdly, the perception from some that funding and support went to national programmes and organisations rather than local organisations that had local knowledge and networks but lacked support. However, we know that funding was distributed through different channels at both national and local levels.

The need for better communication was highlighted as a priority and some felt this would have helped to generate a more cohesive response to the pandemic. Wider research points to an 'absence of mechanisms through which local knowledge could inform the national response'³⁴ as well as the negative impacts in delaying the sharing of data between national and local government.³⁵

"At policy level, there should have been better communication between the national level volunteering campaigns and the ones being directed at local authority level" (Local infrastructure)

Partnerships such as the VCSEP were seen by some to support the communication and coordination between national and local levels, and there was a desire to take learnings from this group and develop it further for the future.

It was recognised that the response to the pandemic was developed at speed with less time and capacity for ensuring ways of working were fully joined up. It was felt that some of the rhetoric of what was perceived as the 'local' being pinned against the 'national' was unhelpful during the pandemic, creating a duality which discouraged collaboration.

Leadership

Leadership and strategic direction were perceived to be lacking, both at a policy level and within the voluntary sector. In part, this may reflect the absence of discrete and specific strategy for volunteering pre-covid-19.

There were questions about **individual roles as well as the relationship between volunteer involving organisations, infrastructure (including NCVO), volunteers and the government.**

“We’ve got to be better organised. And, I’ll follow whoever is leading... we’ve got to be organised and we’ve got to understand who is leading and where does the sector sit in parallel to the state?” (Volunteer-involving organisation)

Such comments re-ignite debates about the relationship between the state and volunteering. As highlighted by wider research, the boundaries between the state and volunteering are contested and covid-19 brings this into sharper focus, highlighting the tensions in these relationships. This raises questions about who does what and how these relationships should work.³⁶

The role of voluntary sector infrastructure in providing leadership was raised in our research. Some participants considered that ‘leadership’ on volunteering is the responsibility of the voluntary sector (including NCVO), alongside government. More clarity is needed about leadership on volunteering issues in the sector and how this relates to government and wider policy making.

Lessons learned and considerations for the future

Research participants were asked to reflect on lessons learned during the pandemic, as well as looking ahead to upcoming challenges and opportunities, and considerations for the future. Participants highlighted that post-pandemic recovery will be an opportune moment to take and apply learnings for the future, sustain positive changes, and avoid returning to less effective ways of working.

We identify four key areas of focus.

1. Planning ahead and thinking longer term

The pandemic exposed and amplified what was already there. Local areas and organisations which were better prepared, whether through having other experiences of emergencies, pre-existing relationships or by being better resourced, tended to respond better to the crisis.

These experiences highlight the need to address inequalities and put sufficient investment, resources and coordination in place in preparation for emergencies and other challenges. This could be through investment in community building and development, and by establishing and maintaining relationships, partnerships and more collaborative funding processes outside of an emergency context.

Key questions:

- *What structures and processes could be developed and put in place that would support an effective and sustainable volunteer response to any future crises, taking into account local and regional inequality?*
- *How can we best use the learning from covid-19 to develop effective volunteering policy in England?*

2. Collaborating and relationship-building

Our research showed the important role of collaboration and relationships, and the conducive or adverse conditions which can impact on its success.

Where there were examples of effective partnership working, the policy response was seen more positively. However, there was variation and the need for better collaborative working between local and national levels was highlighted.

Looking ahead, participants sought to capitalise on opportunities to build on networks and relationships developed and strengthened during the pandemic. This included strengthening the VCSEP, collaboration within the sector, and partnership between government (both central and local) and the sector. They emphasised the importance of coordinated development and implementation of national policy on a regional and local level. The need to create a collaborative rather than competitive environment for partnerships to develop was also emphasised. The recent launch of the Civil Society Group (an informal collaboration

of organisations representing members and groups across the charity sector and civil society) in November 2021, may present a good opportunity for collaborative working going forward.³⁷

Key questions:

- *How do we create a conducive (collaborative not competitive) environment for partnership working?*
- *How do we best recognise and utilise our strengths and resources, and those of others (at a local, regional and national level), to build and maintain effective collaborative relationships?*

3. Setting a strategic direction

Respondents want leadership and a strategic direction for volunteering in England, which was experienced by some as being absent.

Additionally, wider questions raised about the role of the state in relation to volunteering point to a need for further discussion and debate. Looking ahead, participants shared concerns about the government's approach and priorities – this related to funding and whether they would incentivise collaboration and recognise volunteers in a way which would support voluntary action, especially at a local level.

The role of national infrastructure was discussed in the context of leadership; including the important role of the voluntary sector in helping to set a strategic direction for volunteering in England. The [Vision for Volunteering](#) is a good opportunity to influence government and set a strategic direction for volunteering, as well as the [Shaping the Future With Volunteering](#) group and the [Together Coalition](#).

Key questions:

- *How can a strategic direction and leadership for volunteering be realised?*
- *What should the role of government (both local and national) be and what leadership do we want to see from others, including voluntary infrastructure?*

4. (Re)thinking the volunteering ecosystem

Many factors intersected during the pandemic to create different conditions for volunteering, and points to an opportunity to think (and perhaps re-think) the volunteering 'ecosystem' and how it can best thrive. Local authorities, infrastructure and volunteer-involving organisations expressed concerns about future funding. There are fears about the impact of 'covid money' running out and what it might mean for resourcing, infrastructure, and capacity.

Participants emphasised the importance of robust social infrastructure (defined in wider literature as 'the places and structures and buildings or clubs that enable people to get

together, meet, socialise, volunteer and co-operate'³⁸) and the chance to invest in it. They discussed our role as a sector to represent what the strength of communities looks like and how best to support them. The importance of community empowerment, resilience and collaboration was also highlighted as an important part of the government's 'levelling up' agenda, in its attempt to address local and regional inequality.

Some of the positive impacts on volunteering brought about by the pandemic, such as creating opportunities for new and different volunteers and use of digital technologies, were recognised. The need to continue to make volunteering accessible and inclusive was emphasised. Many felt that more needed to be done to understand and support volunteering, recognising its value and importance and ensuring local volunteering knowledge and expertise was brought into decision making.

Key questions:

- *How can we create the right environment for volunteering – to better understand volunteering, and to resource and invest in it?*
- *How can the voluntary sector, government and others work together to ensure volunteering is able to thrive in the long term?*

Our research: next steps

This research briefing forms part of a UK wide project – findings from the other nations can be found on the [project website](#).

These findings from England will feed into a final report which includes learning from across the UK and will be published in early 2022.

Acknowledgements

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This briefing is informed by research carried out by the authors, together with Laura Crawford, Jurgen Grotz, Irene Hardill, Eddy Hogg and Ewen Speed.

Appendix 1 - Methodology

ACTIVITY	Description	Purpose/Focus
Survey, interviews, and first workshop	<p>As part of the first phase of the research, NCVO and the University of Kent developed an online survey for volunteer-involving organisations, infrastructure organisations such as volunteer centres and those working within local authorities in England. During spring 2021, 127 organisations responded. The majority operated in England, with 17 operating across the UK or internationally.</p> <p>A virtual workshop for 45 participants was held in early July 2021 to discuss the research findings.</p>	<p>The survey and follow-up interviews provided opportunity for people to share their views and experiences on volunteering during covid-19, and to highlight interesting or innovative practice in engagement with communities, organisations or volunteers.</p> <p>Some participants reflected on the policy response, but this was not a prime focus.</p>
Desk-based research	<p>Existing research on volunteering in England during covid-19 and relevant policy documents were identified, collated and reviewed to inform the research and this briefing. In total, 65 policy documents from 2016 to 2021 were reviewed, including policy papers, briefing documents, scrutiny committee papers and parliamentary debates. Press releases, relevant webpages and government guidance on covid-19 were included.</p>	<p>The project brought together relevant research reports on volunteering during Covid-19, some of which explore the wider policy context in England. A summary of key themes from volunteering research across the four nations is available here.</p>
In-depth interviews	<p>Five one-to-one interviews (conducted virtually) of 30-60 minutes were carried out in September 2021. Interviewees were selected on the basis that they were likely to have played an active role or have expertise/knowledge of the policy response in relation to volunteering in England.,</p>	<p>The research sought to understand different perspectives on the response in relation to volunteering. It is recognised that these interviews provide a snapshot of these perspectives.</p>
Second workshop	<p>In September 2021 an online workshop was held with 18 participants, including volunteer-involving organisations, local authorities, and infrastructure organisations.</p>	<p>This workshop aimed to gain additional insight and understanding on the policy response. It focused more on the impact ‘on the ground’.</p>
National event	<p>Insights were gathered at an event held in October 2021 as part of NCVO’s regular National Volunteering Forum series. 86 participants attended, primarily volunteer-involving organisations as well as other stakeholders with an interest in volunteering.</p>	<p>The purpose of the event was to present our emerging findings from the research as a prompt for reflection and debate. Breakout groups generated discussion on emerging themes and helped to inform this briefing.</p>

References and links

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- ²² See [VCS Emergencies Partnership](#)

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